Consultation

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE: A DECADE OF CHANGE 1972 - 1982

Papers and Summary of Proceedings

ajc THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

Consultation

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE:

A DECADE OF CHANGE:

1972 - 1982

Papers and Summary of Proceedings

The Jewish Communal Affairs Department
The American Jewish Committee
165 East 56 Street
New York, NY 10022

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Consultation
on

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE
A DECADE OF CHANGE 1972 - 1982

June 2, 1982

AGENDA

Session I	9:30 A.M. - 12:00 Noon
Chairperson:	Gladys Rosen, Program Specialist, Jewish Communal Affairs Department
Opening Remarks:	Yehuda Rosenman, Director, Jewish Communal Affairs Department
Keynote Address:	Francine Klagsbrun, author and lecturer
	AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE
Discussants	Rose Kiesler, President of Nanuet Hebrew Center, 1976-1978
	Joy Levitt, Rabbi, B'nai Keshet, Montclair Jewish Center
	Paula Hyman, Dean, Seminary College-Teachers Institute, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Lunch 12:00-1:00 P.M.

Session II	1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.
Chairperson	Rela Geffen Monson, Associate Professor of Sociology, Gratz College

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EIGHTIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONSULTATION ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN in JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE

June 2, 1982

SESSION I

Opening Remarks: **Yehuda Rosenman**

The long time concern of AJC with the role of women in a changing society was emphasized by Mr. Yehuda Rosenman, Director of the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee. During the past decade, the agency has sponsored conferences and consultations focusing on new directions for Jewish women's organizations in strengthening the family, the challenge of changing styles of voluntarism for women under the impact of current social trends, the portrayal of women and girls in textbooks and curricula of Jewish schools, problems of mothering and working for those who try to do both. In every case, the goal was to analyze the issues, identify the problems and recommend ways in which the situation might be improved for men and women within the Jewish communal framework.

This consultation was initiated in response to the continuing challenge which faces Jewish women and men to educate and sensitize the public, to be effective change agents and teachers and to offer appropriate models for the next generation. In matters related to new roles for women, AJC is in the forefront of those who wish to support the creative forces of our time.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the ordination by Hebrew Union College of the first woman rabbi, Sally Preisand, it seemed appropriate to take stock of the advances that have been made by women in various aspects of Jewish religious life. The Consultation brought together some of those who have succeeded in achieving the hitherto male roles of rabbi, synagogue president, cantor and professor at a theological institution to share their experiences with us.

The session, chaired by Dr. Gladys Rosen, Program Specialist of the Jewish Communal Affairs Department, featured an overview of the position of women in Jewish religious life during the decade since Rabbi Preisand's ordination.

The keynote address was delivered by Mrs. Francine Klagsbrun, well know writer, lecturer and an active Jewish feminist. Mrs. Klagsbrun has written or edited eighteen books, among them "Too Young to Die: Youth and Suicide," and "Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living," an excellent anthology of Jewish sources. She edited "Free to Be You and Me" and has contributed to Ms., Family Circle, and Seventeen. In addition, Mrs. Klagsbrun is a member of the Publications Committee of the Jewish Publication Society of America and was on the national committee appointed by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America to explore the possibility of the ordination of women by that institution. She has written and spoken widely on the changing role of women in society in general and the Jewish community in particular. Mrs. Klagsbrun's overview of "The Role of Women in Jewish Religious Life: A Decade of Change" is reproduced below.

FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN

A few weeks ago my very beloved mother-in-law died. My husband and his father sat shiva at my father-in-law's apartment. A minyan was called for evening services. The first night was a Sunday and the house was packed with people, both men and women. I looked around and as the service began, most of the women—older, traditional women—were talking to one another. They were totally excluded from the service by the men, and as the men prayed, they also excluded themselves. Angered at these older women and their traditional ways, I went into another room and kept myself apart from the service. When I emerged I realized that what I had done was just the opposite of what I should have done. What I should have done, of course, was participate in the service and by example lead the other women in participating. I became determined that that was what I would do the second night.

This time I watched the clock carefully and when it was time to begin, I took my place in a very prominent spot in the living room so that I could be seen by all. An ultra-Orthodox rabbi had come to join the minyan that night. When my husband looked around the room, he discovered that there were nine men and several women.

"Count the women in the minyan," I whispered.

"I can't," he said. "It will offend the rabbi."

"It will offend me if you don't."

The rabbi won. There was a hurried consultation and a friend of ours who was present ran down, around the corner to where he lived, and came back with his thirteen-year-old son, who had been "bar mitzvahed" two days before. He could complete the minyan; I and the other women could not. I was furious. My father-in-law, although deeply saddened by his wife's death, laughed at my fury. He thought it was cute.

The next night, as time for the minyan approached, again there were only nine men.

"Let's begin," my husband said.

"Let's wait a little," my father-in-law answered. "Maybe some more men will come." My father-in-law is not strictly observant, but he has grown up and spent his life within the traditional Orthodox settings.

"Let's begin," I said aloud.

We did begin, although my father-in-law, most of the men, and some of the women who were present shuffled uncomfortably. They kept looking around to see if somebody was going to open the door and some men were going to appear. And, in fact, some men did appear as the service went on.

Then, an interesting thing happened. On the fourth night, my husband glanced around, quickly counted the men and women in the room together and said, without hesitation, "Let's go." Everybody prayed, and nobody questioned the service. Counting women in our minyan may not have seemed natural to some of the participants, but by now it no longer seemed abnormal either. It was accepted.

I thought about this evening in preparing for my talk today. In some ways our shiva week followed a sequence not unlike that which occurred in the women's

movement. For long years many of us, certainly I and many others that I know, seemed to slip unthinkingly into traditional roles assigned to us; roles we had grown up with and roles that we did not challenge as children or even as young women. We talked while the men "davened." We didn't question things, in the fifties or early sixties, really not until the mid-sixties and the early seventies when the women's movement as a whole began to take hold in this country. Then we, as Jewish women, became conscious of the shortcomings of our religion and of our own acceptance of the way things were. And then, as I did on the second night, we demanded to be counted—and we were laughed at or ignored. Thirteen-year-old boys, we were told, counted for more than any mature women could, according to Jewish tradition. But we persisted and in 1972 Sally Priesand was ordained as a rabbi. In 1973, the law committee of the Jewish Theological Seminary permitted women to be counted in the minyan. (That made the front page news in the New York Times.) Earlier, much earlier, in 1955, the Conservative movement had permitted aliyot for women, but that ruling had been pretty much ignored until it was rediscovered in the 1970's as these other events took place.

Gradually people stopped laughing at us. Gradually, it ceased seeming unnatural to see a woman read a Haftorah, go up for an aliyah, preach to a congregation, or serve as a cantor. As my shiva group did, the Jewish community today has become somewhat used to women in active roles, more accepting than many of us might have believed ten years ago. That is not to say that our struggle has ended or even that all the major battles have been won. But a great deal has been changed and has been accomplished. Ten years is really just a blink of an eyelash in the history of Judaism, in the history of the world. Yet ten years after the first woman rabbi was ordained, we have sixty-one ordained women rabbis in the United States—forty-nine Reform rabbis and twelve Reconstructionist rabbis. Just as important, many of these women who are now becoming ordained are finding full time pulpits for themselves. Most of them, like young male rabbis, take jobs as assistant rabbis at the beginning, although a few have received small pulpits of their own right out of school. After a stint as assistant rabbis, many are now finding positions as full-time rabbis and as solo rabbis in Reform congregations. One of the major arguments that was raised in the Conservative

battle about women rabbis, and one of the arguments that has always been heard has been, "but will they find jobs and will people accept them?" They are being accepted now.

In fact, women rabbis have been so accepted that the numbers of women enrolling in rabbinical schools each year seem to be increasing while the numbers of men enrolling seem to be decreasing. There are still far more men than women in rabbinical schools, but do these changing statistics mean that women are going to displace men as rabbis eventually? I don't think so. Do the changes mean that the rabbinate is going to become a "woman's job" that everybody looks down on as people have looked down on other "women's jobs," such as teaching and social work? I don't think so. Women are entering many fields in increasing numbers--law, medicine, business, for example. Are all these fields going to become "women's jobs?" If so, we'll be running the world. I don't think that's likely to happen, and I believe that in the rabbinate, as in other professions, a balance will be established betwen men and women.

For the first time in Jewish history, today we also have women cantors. There are now nineteen women cantors in the field. We have women in executive positions within synagogues. Ten years ago fewer than ten women served as presidents of Reform congregations. Today there are 125 women presidents in the 749 Reform congregations and 68 women presidents in the 800 Conservative congregations. In addition the Havurah movement has grown and become widespread during the past ten years, and has brought with it great emphasis on egalitarianism in every aspect of synagogue services.

I have focused on Conservative and Reform Judaism because officially the Orthodox movement opposes change. Yet the winds of change are definitely blowing among the Orthodox as well. My daughter goes to an Orthodox day school. Almost every girl in her class has had a "bat mitzvah." Certainly their "bat mitzvah" rituals were not the same as their brothers' "bar mitzvahs," not the same as my daughter's "bat mitzvah" in our Conservative synagogue. She read the entire Torah portion and the Haftorah at a regular Sabbath morning service. Her

Orthodox friends are not permitted to do that. They hold "bat mitzvah" parties on Sunday mornings. The girl usually gives a brief talk about the Torah portion of the week, and then everybody eats, sings, and dances. Still, it is a celebration of a rite of passage in a girl's life, a celebration that was not nearly so acceptable a decade ago.

In the Orthodox movement, as in the Reform and Conservative, rituals are being performed when a baby girl is born, not just in honor of the birth of a boy Women's minyanim, separate from those of the men, exist in a number of Orthodox synagogues today, and in some, women are permitted to dance with the Torah during their own services on Simhat Torah.

That's some of the good news. I think it's important to keep the good news in mind when we start feeling discouraged. We have made progress. It's essential to remember that, both for our own self-respect and to counter attacks on Judaism, many of them--and I hate to say this--from other feminists. Through all the years that I worked on Voices of Wisdom--it took me four years to read, study, gather material, and write commentaries--through all those years I had a great many very close feminist friends who would say to me, "How can you do this? How can you spend your time on a tradition that is so anti-woman?" And the Jewish feminists would say, "I turned against Judaism when I was eight years old because I felt so left out, or "when I was twelve-years old because Queen Esther was a bad role model for me." I question those excuses, because there is so much more in Judaism, so much that those of us who grew up with it came to love, that it seems funny that the only thing these women picked up from the whole tradition was its anti-women bias. Those of us who love the tradition have felt that you have to change it from within, not by standing outside and attacking it. Today, I think we can feel proud of the changes we have wrought.

Of course, many battles remain to be fought. The fact that I had to struggle to be counted in a minyan, and had to give way to a thirteen-year old boy, is an indication of how much remains to be done. For me, and for many of us, the greatest disappointment of the past decade and the greatest challenge that still

faces us, was the failure of the Conservative movement to ordain women as rabbis. I would like to say that ordination is just a matter of time, but I'm not at all sure of that. I think the atmosphere at the Jewish Theological Seminary has become very conservative, very right wing. People don't seem to want to discuss the subject any more, and I don't see much happening in regard to it.

As you know, I was a member of the Women's Commission that studied the issue over the course of two years, from 1977 to 1979. Some of the meetings we held were strictly legalistic, some were highly emotional, many were terribly moving. I found it moving when people who were members of Conservative congregations throughout the country travelled to the cities where numbers of us would meet, in order to testify before us. Most of the people who came to testify were those who favored ordination of women. They went out of their way to come. The others organized meetings later. The people who came spoke about their daughters who had grown up in the Conservative movement. They spoke about their daughters who went to day schools along with their sons, who went to synagogue along with their sons, who went to the Seminary and the Ramah camps and were always treated as equal, and then when they wanted to take the last step into rabbincal school, they could not. Some who came to us were young women who wanted to be rabbis. They spoke about themselves, and they spoke about their desire to be rabbis with such dedication and love that I thought, "Oh my, what Judaism could gain from these women."

I found it moving and significant that we as a group discussed halakha. The Conservative movement is dedicated to staying within the parameters of halakha, and that was the key issue of the Commission. We all agreed that if halakchically, if legally, there were reasons found why women could not be ordained in the Conservative movement we would vote against it, no matter what our ethical feelings were. We listened very carefully for two entire days to halakhic arguments, and when all the arguments ended, we knew, without a doubt, that there were no halakhic reasons why women could not be ordained as rabbis.

We listened to passionate speakers who predicted that if the Conservative movement ordained women, the entire movement would split. I think it was that

fear, perhaps more than anything, that defeated us so completely even after our commission recommended for ordination. Yet, had the Seminary accepted women, I believe the movement would have been strengthened, not weakened. One obvious source of strength would have been the dedicated women studying for the rabbinate. Another source of strength would have been the continued discussion and reassessment aroused by such a decision. The Conservative movement was at its best during that period of debate and deliberation. People were thinking and talking and arguing in every state and every city, arguing about law and ethics, about Judaism and its meaning. Such discussions strengthen a movement. They make it vibrant and alive. But when the arguments are cut off, as they have been to a great extent, a movement becomes stagnant, lazy. Fear of change brings further fear of change, and that can be deadening.

So we still have battles to fight; battles like that one in Conservative Judaism, but other battles that may be just as hard. We have battles within ourselves. Even today, with all the progress we have made, many women still feel uncomfortable with our new religious roles. When I had my first aliya at the Park Avenue Synagogue, it was a moment of ecstasy for me. It was almost a mystical experience. I was so thrilled to look at the Torah, to be near it, to say the berachot. And yet, I have to tell you, that when I go to synagogue and I see the usher approaching, I worry about whether he is coming to ask me to go up for an aliya or to dress the Torah. A little part of me clutches and thinks, "I hope he's not coming to me. I'm not sure I know how to do this." It's still so engrained in us that we are not adequate that we feel we are not up to performing our new roles. I think we have to work very hard to get rid of those feelings.

While we put this pressure on ourselves, we have to put pressures on the outside as well. Of course that's what we have been doing, but there are areas yet to be dealt with. Change has always been a part of the Jewish tradition. Laws have never been regarded as so holy and immutable that they couldn't be changed to fit into changing times and to make them alive for people in all generations. And yet, today, so many of our rabbis insist our laws cannot be changed in any way. I can't believe that the problem of the agunah—the "chained wife"—for example,

can't be solved with a little creative thinking. I think our rabbis are fearful today. Why is it that Rabbenu Gershom in the tenth century could make a Takanah--a ruling—that said that a man could not divorce a woman without her permission, but our rabbis cannot bring themselves to make new rulings today? Do you think our rabbis and our leaders are, perhaps, each one afraid of what the others would say? There has been great timidity in the Jewish community to bring about the kind of change that is very much part of our tradition. We need to work on that.

I believe, also, that we have to bring pressure to bear within our congregations to carry out rulings that have already been sanctioned, such as having women called up for aliyot or counted in a minyan. We have to make an effort to have women placed on the ritual committees of our synagogues because it is there that such decisions are made.

I spoke earlier of my daughter Sarah's bat mitzvah. It was a very beautiful occasion, packed with emotion, but the highest point of the day came in the afternoon when my father offered a toast to Sarah. He's 86 years old, and partially paralyzed from a stroke suffered some twelve years ago. With painstaking slowness, leaning heavily on his cane, he made his way to the front of the room to face his young granddaughter. He spoke to her about his own bar mitzvah in Russia so many years ago, when he had no beautiful flowers or wonderful food as she had, and few guests except for his immediate family and two rabbis, both beloved teachers. Each rabbi said something to him that he always carried with him, he told Sarah. One rabbi said, "My son, no matter what happens to you in life, always remember that you are a Jew." The other quoted a verse from the prayerbooks, "Stay away from evil and do good," and said to my father, "I hope you will guide your life by that principle."

Then my father looked at my daughter and said, "This is my legacy to you. First, 'always remember that you're a Jew,' and second, 'stay away from evil and do good.' And when you have children and grandchildren of your own, I hope you will pass on my legacy to them."

It was the legacy of an old man, a traditional Jew. Yet it was a legacy transmitted not to a grandson but to a granddaughter, and what he was saying was that this legacy, this Jewish legacy of ours, belongs to her just as much as it belongs to him.

Since her bat mitzvah, Sarah has read from the Torah and the Haftorah several times in our synagogue. Women still do not receive such honors in my parents' synagogue in Queens, although it is Conservative. In that synagogue, every year on Yom Kippur my father chants the book of Jonah before the congregation. Recently he announced to the family that since Sarah has become so adept at Torah reading, from now on he would like to alternate chapters of his reading with her.

"You can't do that," I warned, "You'll set off a bitter battle if you take it on yourself to have a woman read before the Ark. It has never been done in your synagogue."

"Then it's about time we begin," my father answered. "Some things are worth fighting for."

We all know that. We knew when it was time to begin and we knew what was worth fighting for. We've won fine victories, but we need to continue pushing ahead now. I want to see my daughter read the book of Jonah in synagogue with my father. I want to see my granddaughter go up to the Torah without a flicker of feeling that there's anything unusual about her doing so. I want women to be part of Judaism so that we don't have to think about it any more.

I believe it's going to happen. I believe many changes will happen in the next ten years.

DISCUSSANTS

Rose Kiesler

The first response to Mrs. Klagsbrun's presentation came from Mrs. Rose Keisler, first woman president of the Nanuet Hebrew Center which she served from 1976-1978. Mrs. Keisler, for many years Professor of Geography at Hunter and later at Lehman College, explained that she had very little Judaic background. Prior to assuming the presidency of the synagogue, she had acquired her training as President of the Sisterhood and member of the Board, which is now 25% female.

Mrs. Kiesler pointed out that as President of the synagogue "she was accepted on the Congregation Board; she was accepted by the congregation but it was another thing when it came to ritual observance. While she could not sit on the Bimah, she was allowed to join the procession and follow the Torah. To effect change in that area, Mrs. Kiesler became a member of the ritual committee and influenced the Rabbi to call women to the Torah. Noting her trepidation about being given an Aliyah, Mrs. Kiesler was comforted to hear that others had similar reactions to this new responsibility.

As women move into the leadership of synagogues, Mrs. Kiesler warned that they must take care not to appoint women to all responsible positions even when they have the appropriate qualifications. She herself had made a special effort to find men who could be equally effective so as to keep the balance. In her own case, Mrs. Kiesler felt that when she assumed the presidency, she had been elected because she had more qualifications and experience than anyone else. Once in office, she was able to influence future policy to the benefit of women in the area of ritual as well as synagogual office.

Joy Levitt

The second panelist, Joy Levitt serves as Rabbi of B'nai Keshet, the Montclair Jewish Center. She was ordained in 1981 by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Seminary having earned her B.A. in American Studies at Barnard College and an M.A. in American Civilization at N.Y.U. While at rabbinical school, Rabbi Levitt served as a Hillel Advisor and Editor of the Guide to Jewish Philadelphia. She was a Summer Intern at the American Jewish Committee and for the past year has been

the Rabbi of B'nai Keshet in Montclair, N.J. There she is rabbi, cantor and education director. Her husband, Rabbi Lee Friedlander is spiritual leader of the Reconstructionist synagogue of North Shore. Rabbi Levitt's experience as a religious leader and part of a dual career family give special relevance and importance to her evaluation of her own experience and how it can serve as a guide to others.

Rabbi Levitt was initially attracted to the rabbinate because of the multiple facets of the profession. It seemed to fulfill all her professional ambitions to teach, but not full time, to serve the community without running for office, to be an administrator without drowning in bureaucracy. Like her college major, American Studies, it did not force her to narrow her focus and constrict her interests. Coming from a privileged background, she never had to worry about financial support and could concentrate on her desire to spend her life doing something worthwhile which included social and communal activisim. The rabbinate, as demonstrated by the life of her hometown rabbi seemed ideal. She was oblivious to the difficulties involved while she explored the possibility of entering the Jewish Theological Seminary of America which was close to her alma mater, Barnard College. When she encountered official refusal, she decided not to struggle to open the doors but to go to a rabbinic institution which would accept her as a student and where "my legitimacy and validity as a woman were not going to be challenged." The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College offered such an opportunity.

Although she was not challenged as a woman, there were tensions as a result of the extra attention showered on women rabbinical students and their most favored status as speakers on the synagogue circuit. This tension of being on display has abated since she has joined the ranks of ordained rabbis.

In regard to the reaction of congregrants, to a woman, Rabbi Levitt feels that if the rabbi is good he will be well received but a woman has to be excellent. She feels a certain tension in her congregation's total acceptance and pride in having a woman rabbi. Montclair is a community which sees itself as unusual and idiosyncratic and likes the idea of being different. Having a woman rabbi in a sense fulfills that need.

Relationships with the Board of Rabbis are somewhat uncomfortable because Conservative rabbis, no matter how liberal tend to ignore women in the field. She feels at home in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association which accepts her for who she is. Her strongest support, however, comes from the Women's Clergy Club in Montclair which includes fifteen congregational ministers. They share similar problems and can talk freely since they do not compete for jobs. All of the women are theologically liberal and Rabbi Levitt finds it possible to talk about theological isues more often than at rabbinical meetings.

One of the most sensitive problems facing women in the rabbinate is the lack of role models since all of them are relatively new to the position. There are few colleagues who can help with the simple issues of what to wear and the more complex issue of the underlying sexual tensions which sometimes surface. Rabbi Levitt told of her own congregation's upsetting request that she wear a robe because they thought "it would neutralize her." She saw the incident as part of the struggle to deal with old images of the rabbinate while praying with the new. Like Mrs. Klagsbrun, Rabbi Levitt looks forward to the time when women in religion will be "a normal thing." Meanwhile the day to day problems which must be faced are made easier when a four year old girl or boy in the congregation comes up and says: "I want to be a rabbi just like you."

Cantor Ellen Math

The past decade has also witnessed the expansion of another leadership role for women in synagogue ritual. "Sweet singers of Israel" are no longer the exclusive province of men. Indeed, as shown by Cantor Ellen Math, women cantors seem to be moving to a position of numerical dominance within the Reform movement. Cantor Math serves as Cantor of the Stephen Wise Synagogue in New York City and is Assistant to the Director of the American Conference of Cantors. She earned a B.A. in Music from Syracuse University and an M.A. in Music from Boston University and is a graduate of the Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music. Cantor Math's unique combination of general musical training and experience together with an extensive cantorial education made her uniquely qualified to comment on every aspect of her chosen profession.

To open the description of her musical and cantorial odyssey, Cantor Math mentioned the two questions with which she is confronted after services: "Are you

a woman cantor?" and "Did you always want to be a cantor?" Her response to the first is that her role as woman cantor should be obvious and to the second that she had never had any idea that women could be cantors. Raised in a town that had no Jews, she was very conscious of her own Jewishness. But the idea of becoming a cantor emerged while she was pursuing her personal and professional operatic goals. A fellow music student told her that she supported herself by serving as a cantor and encouraged her to join her classes at the Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music. The idea excited her; she enrolled and is now serving as a cantor at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue. Since she is the congregation's first cantor, male or female, she can deal with professional issues without the complications of being a woman cantor. This makes Cantor Math's situation much easier. In addition, her male colleagues in the American Conference of Cantors have been most supportive at every level. They refused the offer to merge with the Conservative Cantors' Assembly because the latter would not place women as cantors.

Cantor Math expressed regret that she and some colleagues had organized "Six Women Cantors," a concert which segregated themselves from their fellow male cantors and nullified their own demands for equal treatment. Future concerts will combine male and female voices.

As assistant to the Executive Director of the American Conference of Cantors, dealing with placement, Cantor Math has an inside view of congregational response to women candidates. She noted that of 37 congregations which applied, only one refused to hear women candidates. Since there are many more positions than trained people, some congregations hire people who can sing, even if they do not read Hebrew. At the same time, the dearth of cantors works in women's favor.

Cantor Math felt that women cantors are generally more acceptable to congregations than women rabbis, because the female cantor usually has a male rabbi at her side. Indeed, the Free Synagogue surprised everyone when it hired a woman assistant rabbi in addition to a woman cantor, making the pulpit 2/3 female. The only negative response to the situation has come when Rabbi Balfour Brickner is absent and the pulpit is totally female.

Cantor Math's position on the entrance committee of Hebrew Union College has made her sensitive to the dwindling number of applications by men candidates for the cantorate. The concommittant increase in female applications gives rise to concern over the future of male participation in the Reform cantorate. At present the Cantorial school is 65% female with few male applicants for the coming year. The situation led Cantor Math to say: "I am very excited about the acceptance of women in the cantorate but I would hate to see the Reform Cantorate become exclusively female."

She surmises that becoming a cantor may be less attractive to men because it is a secondary position in the synagogue ritual. The rabbi is always the top person. On the other hand the field is attractive to women because of its flexibility. She warned however that being a cantor involves far more than simply getting up and singing. A cantor must go through five years of rigorous training in Judaic studies and specialized programs in order to become a clergy person who shares responsibility with the rabbi.

Cantor Math closed with an expression of optimism regarding the capacity of women professionals in Jewish religious life to overcome obstacles, technical and conceptual, as they assume new roles.

Paula Hyman

As Dean of the Seminary College—Teacher's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Paula Hyman has attained the highest position held by a woman at any theological institution. Formerly Assistant Professor of Jewish History at Columbia University, Dr. Hyman received an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. She is a graduate of Radcliffe College and the Boston Hebrew College and has been awarded numerous prizes and awards. Dr. Hyman is the author of From Dreyfus to Vichy: Remaking of French Jewry and a co-author of The Jewish Woman in America as well as many scholarly articles.

Dr. Hyman pointed out that, strictly speaking she does not occupy a religious role, especially since the Seminary College is regarded as a non-sectarian liberal arts college of Judaica. Indeed, her religious role is more directly related to involvement in the Havurah movement which has enabled her daughters to grow up in a Jewish world where egalitarianism is the norm.

Nevertheless there are certain connections which can be made between being a scholar of Judaica and serving a quasi-religious role within the Jewish community. Because scholarship has always been given a central role of authority in Jewish life, the scholar, like the rabbi who was first and foremost a teacher, serves as a kind of religious authority. As a professor, she serves as counselor and role model for Jewish students.

Dr. Hyman noted that her problems in the academic world stemmed more from her decision to specialize in Judaica than from being a woman. The subject, although long integrated into Columbia's department of history, continued to be considered rather exotic. Now, as a whole new generation of women scholars of Judaica have entered the field, they are not suffering more than men from the tight job market. This, said Dr. Hyman, may be attributed to the fact that women may hang on despite relatively low academic salaries because "they are willing to settle for less," and are less likely to measure success in solely monetary terms. The opening of the academic world to women has advanced a great deal in the past generation even if all the problems have not been resolved. On the positive side are the equal access to fellowships, serious treatment by faculty advisers and equal rewards for good performance. Dr. Hyman's own career decision was in part influenced by parents who told her she could be anything she wanted to be and by the appreciation and rewards which accrued from academic success. Since she enjoyed studying and writing and the intellectual stimulation of the academy, college teaching seemed to be "the secret for having a completely fulfilling life." Her capacity for self-discipline enabled her to complete her dissertation after having given birth to her first child despite her academic sponsor's doubts and misgivings.

It is especially important to encourage female scholars of Judaica because scholarship has in the past been regarded as a male preserve and to act as authority role models for both women and men students. The position is often a lonely one and women must tread a very thin line in terms of the image they present. If one is not aggressive, one may be overlooked but if one is too aggressive, you are regarded as having "stepped over the line." The "old boy network" is also a problem

since people do not readily recognize the existence of women of talent in the academic world. There is a need for greater sensitivity to the presence of women in the academic world in order to make use of the resources they offer. In addition, more active and intensive affirmative action in the form of serious outreach and consideration for jobs would assure positions for women.

The flexibility and freedom of setting working hours make academe a great job for women. However, the career productivity demands coincide with the time when family needs are greatest. Some account should be taken of the possibility that women's career patterns in the academic world may differ from those of men and that women and perhaps some men might be more productive at a later stage.

At the Jewish Theological Seminary, Dr. Hyman enjoys her work as administrator and as professor. She has colleagues who share her interest in Judaica and she is called on to counsel and speak to groups as an adviser, not just as a professor. However despite the enviable role of the Seminary in hiring female administrators and faculty, Dr. Hyman has a sense of frustration and pain as a result of the Seminary's failure to act on the ordination of women. At the same time she expressed optimism about the ultimate outcome for women in the Conservative Rabbinate. The question that remains however, is: "How long should we wait? And what should we do to have the institutions we are connected with move in directions we would like to see?"

SESSION II

Chairperson : **Rela Geffen Monson**

The afternoon Session was opened by Dr. Rela Geffen Monson whose introductory remarks, reproduced below, touched on some of the themes which emerged from the mornings presentation. Dr. Monson who received her B.A. and M.A. degrees from Columbia University and her Ph.D. from the University of Florida is Associate Professor of Sociology at Gratz College. She also serves as Vice-President of the Association for the Sociological Study of Jewry and Education Coordinator for all Ramah camps. Dr. Monson also conducted an AJC study of women in Jewish communal life in Philadelphia.

I would like to begin this afternoon by reading you a very short article which appeared in the New York Times May 30, 1979. It constitutes one of my favorite shorthand descriptions of the sociology of the American Jewish community as it applies to the role of women in the last decade.

It reads: "Good News From Mother: When Lindsey Salvage became president of The First Women's Bank of New York two years ago, one of the first things she did, she recalled yesterday was to call her mother Rita Lerner, who lives in Long Beach, Long Island to tell her the good news. "There's only one thing I want to know," Miss Salvage quoted her mother as saying; "Who will want to marry a bank president?" Mrs. Lerner's fears will be allayed Saturday when Miss Salvage, who is 32 and said to be the youngest bank president in the country, marries Donald Roy Kaplan who is Jewish and 35, an international investment banker with the firm of Solomon Brothers. The wedding will take place in the memorial chapel at Harvard from which Ms. Salvage and Mr. Kaplan are graduates and the ceremony will be performed by one of the eleven ordained women rabbis in the United States."

It seems to me that this article expressed the transitional generation. It expresses or reflects much of what we also heard today. One of the things which struck a chord in me as people spoke was that we have moved beyond the decade of what I would call the sexy or romantic breakthroughs and issues into the more everyday nitty gritty, less glamourous issues of the women's and men's movement. I say women's and men's because I think of us working together in this decade.

Sometimes these issues may even sound trivial but really they're the very stuff of which working together is made. The comments indicated that even though intellectually you may know certain behavior to be right, it may prove to be uncomfortable in the ritual, the academic or the family context. We feel funny about it. In the important work of Rona and Robert Rappaport on the Dual Career Family, they refer to this discrepancy between mind and feeling as the normative dilemma of the dual career family.

Things have changed so rapidly that we are confronted with this problem of normative dilemma, a kind of cultural lag. We have it whether we are trying to neutralize the figures of female rabbis or whether we are trying to make our daughters or sons feel comfortable in certain situations. We must deal with it and we must do so openly. I therefore put before you the idea of normative dilemmas as one of the themes which has emerged today.

Rather than suggest the other themes which emerged from the presentations I would like you to respond by stating what you thought before you came and by stating how you feel about what you heard this morning.

Discussion and Comments

The discussion dealt with a variety of themes ranging from the halakhic obstacles to the personal hurt of women unable to participate in the minyan at a shiva to the communal need for women theologians and halakhic experts, from the lack of role models for women rabbis and cantors to increased emphasis on adult education in the interest of an informed laity, both male and female.

The importance of pushing out the boundaries of women's concerns for religious involvement was expressed by Inge Liderer Gebel who also urged greater concern for addressing issues of faith.

The need to take a fresh approach to women's participation in the synagogue and to go beyond the Halakhic issues were demonstrated by **Rabbi Ray Scheindlin,** Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature at JTS as well as part-time Rabbi of a Conservative Synagogue. He pointed out that once halakhic issues relating to women's ritual involvement were explained, there was little disagreement. It was the social issues which were more difficult to resolve. People were reluctant to accept styles of ritual which were unfamiliar to them. To encourage women's participation in new roles, there is a need to raise the level of ritual sophistication and familiarity. Rabbi Scheindlin's enthusiastic support for women's participation at the higest levels in Jewish religous life was reinforced by the fact that his Dean at the Seminary is a woman, Dr. Paula Hyman, and the President of his synagogue is also a woman, Professor Nancy Fink, Chairperson of the JCAC Subcommittee on Women.

The difficulty of effecting change in the area of religious life was a problem shared by professionals and laity and by Reform as well as Conservative congregations. **Linda Holtzman,** a Reconstructionist rabbi serving a Conservative congregation made a plea to stop repeating the same litany of complaints, to emphasize the positive contribution women can make to the Jewish world. It may

be time to go beyond the Conservative movement and to express women's Jewish concerns by forging ourselves into a new group, a theme repeated by many participants.

Dr. Leila Rosen Young described the slow but steady progress toward the involvement of women in her congregation, Temple Beth-El in Montgomery County. Women who were at first opposed to Aliyot became advocates as they themselves acquired synagogue skills. Women must continue to pursue changes in the Conservative movement despite the continuing objections. The importance of involving men in working toward a more egalitarian role for women was expressed by many participants. One strategy suggested was to follow the mitzvot for men recommended by Esther Ticktin (Response, Fall 1973): 1) Do not participate in a minyan which separates women behind a Mechitza, 2) Do not accept an Aliyah where women are not called up to the Torah, 3) If you have to participate in a service in which women cannot participate, do not speak of it, 4) Do not enter a circle of male dancers which excludes women.

For **Rabbi Hana Pell**, who grew up in a Reform Congregation, the Halakhic issues which she regarded as issues of choice are secondary to the emotional and psychological issues confronted by the rabbi in general and the woman rabbi in particular. To begin with, the rabbinic position is not highly regarded and the rabbi who is on duty 24 hours a day must struggle with his/her self image as a person and a leader. The special burdens of the woman rabbi, she felt, could best be addressed by a special task force to deal with specific issues.

Joan Friedman, a graduate of Hebrew Union College, has served as the only woman rabbi in a Reform pulpit in Toronto. Her experience led her to regard social issues as primary. She was subjected to a media blitz on one hand and resistance and disregard by her male colleagues on the other. She urged strategies to go beyond tokenism and to correct the skewed social structure of the synagogue. If women's participation is indeed a desideratum, day care is a sine que non; changes in the liturgy are desirable and positions of power should be awarded on the basis of merit not money. Her own decision to pursue a Ph.D. in Jewish History

resulted from her feeling that in terms of leadership, women rabbis, cantors and synagogue presidents are not enough; we need scholars knowledgeable enough to be taken seriously in making rabbinic decisions.

The crucial importance of ordination of women by the Jewish Theological Seminary lies in the field of religious studies as indicated by **Dr. Ellen Umansky**, of Princeton University. To teach Judaic studies, being a rabbi helps, because of the kind of training offered by the Seminary. In addition, the impact of the "old boy network" among those Seminary graduates who constitute the majority of tenured professors of Judaica often determines who is hired. Equality in this area is something which we must work for.

Adding the perogative of "bensching gomel" (synagogue blessing upon recovery from an accident or a serious illness) to Kaddish and other sensitive ritual matters, **Bernice Balter** of Women's League stressed the importance of an educated female laity for continued progress in raising the level of women's involvement in Jewish religious life. She felt that in today's climate we will continue to produce professionals. However, adult education is crucial to commitment to synagogual participation and volunteerism in the Jewish community. This was borne out by a recent survey of the membership of Conservative sisterhoods. As a result pilot programs of serious study with Seminary faculty are being introduced in sisterhoods in many parts of the country.

Confirming the experience of other speakers, Mrs. Balter asserted the importance of having women in the congregation who are prepared to handle full ritual participation. Although not at all optimistic regarding ordination of women in the Conservative movement, she was optimistic that congregations are moving toward full rights for women.

It was suggested that the possibility of ordination would be enhanced by urging the Rabbinical Assembly, which has a non-sexist constitution and accepts graduates of other institutions, to accept women as qualified members.

Goldie Kweller, President of the Women's League, noted that while women seem to be moving into leadership positions in their congregations including the presidency, she was bothered by the fact that in 40% of those presidencies, men did not choose to run. Her concern was that when women attain important positions, they do so on merit, not because others are abdicating their roles. In this connection, Dr. Monson agreed that we must inculcate in both our sons and daughters the value of communal service as a mitzvah.

According to **Annette Daum**, who leads two Task Forces on women for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the issue of full participation at a shiva can be problematic in Reform congregations, despite the absence of Halakhic restrictions. She attributed this and other indications of insensitivity to women's role in ritual to ignorance and lack of awareness of the need for religious equality. She referred to a survey of Conservative Jewry which she believed showed that most members were indifferent to or in favor of ordination. Dr. Monson confirmed this finding but criticized the way in which the results of the survey were distributed and interpreted.

Rabbi Helene Ferris of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, urged the group to recognize that the Reform Movement is not free of problems in relation to the role of women despite the absence of Halakhic injunctions. As others have pointed out, the problem of entrenched social attitudes must be confronted in every setting. Furthermore, as the pendulum swings back to increased emphasis on Jewish content and ritual the Reform Movement is faced with the problem of educating both professionals and lay people about what Judaism is. For this reason an effective program of adult education is crucial.

Susan Weidman Schneider was disturbed by the paucity of role models for women in Jewish religious life and the fact that most women in visible religious roles were trained in Reconstructionist or Reform environments in which Halakhic issues are a matter of choice. Under the circumstances she, too, urged the need for "some kind of Jewish women's movement that crosses chauvinistic boundaries of affiliation and organization." Francine Klagsbrun supported the need to use the

experience and knowledge of all women in the continuing struggle to effect movement for halakhic change.

In summarizing the discussion, **Dr. Monson** commented that when we compare the power of Halachah to the capacity for change in the realm of social mores, social custom is sometimes more resistant to change because there is no universally acceptable authority to turn to. Nothing is ever proved in the Jewish world to everybody's satisfaction, but we cannot afford to wait for unanimity to act when the inequities are so apparent.

Of the issues raised during the Consultation the following look ahead to the needs of the coming decade.

1. The issues of the work place and work place stability: Most Jewish women will, for part of their lives, work outside the home for pay. Since it is difficult for the least powerful group to effect change, the Jewish community and its institutions should undertake to pioneer in improving working conditions for women and thereby serve as a model for other working situations.

2. Issues which have to do with the way women perceive other women: Having made considerable progress, we must continue to contend with the "Queen Bee Syndrome" and the "Superwoman Myth" which intimidate most women. Women must be helped to realize that they need not do everything at once. Since women live longer than men, they should not feel limited to one role pattern for life but should try to do things seriatim .

3. Family issues: Dual career families, fathering, parenting in general have been affected by changes in self-perception and in relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren. Jewish religious institutions have to learn to understand and resolve the normative dilemmas that Jewish families face today. As women enter Jewish religious life, they can serve as guides to more sensitive responses on the part of religious and communal leaders.

4. The issue of counting and not counting: To actualize breakthroughs, from serving as rabbis and cantors to being counted in a "minyan" or being called for an "aliyah", we must develop appropriate structures and plan on how to utilize them.

5. The issue of the absence of women theologians: A great deal of work remains to be done. We should mobilize women like Judith Plaskow who is one of the few women in this field so as to fill the gap.

6. The issue of rabbinic ordination in the Conservative Movement: The anger and frustration of those women who have been refused access to the Seminary's rabbinical training should be taken into account as efforts to open the doors continue.

7 The issue of creating an educated laity: This is equally incumbent on men and women. The more people know about Judaism, the better able they are to deal with the other issues including those related to women's role in Jewish religious and communal life. Women who are learned in rabbinics will not only write "teshuvot" (responses to ritual questions) but will also be able to engage in productive dialogue with male colleagues.

Finally, there was a call from many participants for the creation of some kind of task force to deal in practical ways with women's issues ranging from general communal prerogatives to specific issues of ritual such as participation in the minyan during shiva and finding a suitable minyan in which women will feel comfortable and welcome when they recite kaddish.

Overall, the AJC Consultation represented a first attempt to bring together women of differing backgrounds to talk with one another and with knowledgeable Jewish men about women's roles and dilemmas. This should be the pattern for future conferences since if women are to have an equal role in leadership and scholarship in the Jewish community, men must learn to share the power which was traditionally theirs. Men and women must work together to build a vibrant Jewish community.

The Consultation was closed by Dr. Gladys Rosen who thanked the participants for contributing their ideas and recommendations for helping Jewish women to consolidate past gains and make plans for the future on the basis of joint projects which override institutional boundaries.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Consultation on the Role of Women
in Jewish Religious Life

June 2, 1982

PARTICIPANTS

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Mrs. Mimi Alperin	Chairperson, AJC's National Commission on Women's Issues
Dr. Rebecca T. Alpert	Director of Student Affairs Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Mrs. Bernice Balter	Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Rabbi Joseph Brodie	Jewish Theological Seminary of America
Dr. Janet Burstein	Professor of English, Drew University
Mrs. Helen Cytryn	Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Mrs. Annette Daum	Union of American Hebrew Cong.
Rabbi Helene Reiner Ferris	Stephen Wise Free Synagogue
Professor Nancy Fink	Chairperson, Subcommittee on Women's Issues
Rabbi Joan S. Friedman	B'nai Israel, Laconia, NH
Mrs. Sylvia Geffen	Women's League for Cons. Judaism
Rabbi Linda Holtzman	Beth Israel Congregation
Dr. Paula Hyman	Dean, Seminary College of Jewish Studies - Teachers Institute
Mrs. Rose Kiesler	President, Nanuet Hebrew Center (1976-1978)
Ms. Helen Kirshblum	Women's League for Conservative Judaism

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Rabbi Leah Kroll	Temple Emanu-El Elmhurst
Mrs. Goldie Kweller	President, Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Ms. Adele Leaf	Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Rabbi Joy Levitt	B'nai Keshet, Montclair, NJ
Rabbi Dennis Math	Village Temple, NYC
Cantor Ellen Math	American Conference of Cantors Stephen Wise Free Synagogue
Professor Rela Geffen Monson	Assoc. Prof. of Sociology, Gratz College
Rabbi Hava Pell	Brotherhood Temple-Vrith Achim King of Prussia, PA
Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz	Congregation Beth Am Teaneck, NJ
Professor Raymond Scheindlin	Jewish Theological Seminary of America
Mrs. Susan Weidman Schneider	Editor, Lilith Magazine
Ms. Helene Spring	Nat'l Fed. of Temple Sisterhoods
Professor Ellen Umansky	Emory University
Professor Chaim Waxman	Rutgers University
Ms. Selma Weintraub	Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Dr. Leila Rosen-Young	Faculty Consultant, Open University at University of Maryland
PRESS	
Judith Cohen	Jewish Telegraphic Agency
Judy Klemesrud	Reporter, New York Times
Fred Conrad	Photographer, New York Times

STAFF

NAME	DEPARTMENT
Shula Bahat	Leadership Devel. and Membership Education Coordinator, Community Services Department, AJC
Marilyn Braveman	Director of Education, Domestic Affairs Department, AJC
Inge Lederer Gibel	Program Specialist, Interreligious Affairs Department, AJC
Joyce Kaplan	Public Relations Writer, Public Relations Department, AJC
Gladys Rosen	Program Specialist, Jewish Communal Affairs Department, AJC
Yehuda Rosenman	Director, Jewish Communal Affairs Department, AJC