VOICES FOR CHANGE:

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR

AMERICAN JEWISH

WOMEN

The

National

Commission

on American

Jewish Women

Sponsored by:

HADASSAH
THE WOMEN'S
ZIONIST
ORGANIZATION
OF AMERICA, INC.

MAURICE AND MARILYN COHEN
CENTER FOR MODERN JEWISH STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY
AND RELIGION
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
Voices for Change: Future Directions for American Jewish Women

The National Commission on American Jewish Women

1995

Sponsored by:

Hadassah The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies Institute for Community and Religion Brandeis University
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In October 1994, in a New York City hotel, the 23 members of the National Commission on American Jewish Women met for the first of three in-depth sessions. Also with us in the room were researchers from the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and professionals from Hadassah. Each of us had received two packets containing startling information about the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of American Jewish women. We were to meet for two days to make sense of what was in those packets, and to find out if we could work together fruitfully.

We came from many walks of life, and had experienced Jewish life in many different ways. We all, at the back of our minds, wondered: Would it be possible to forge a whole from such different parts?

A Commission is a select group of people who review existing research, request new research, and receive expert testimony about a given topic for the purpose of answering a set of pressing questions. The National Commission on American Jewish Women examined the current research, analyzed the findings of a new study, and listened to what experts in the field told us. Our pressing questions were:

- What concerns American Jewish women today?
- Do they feel part of an American Jewish community?
- Is their Jewish identity, Judaism, or Israel meaningful to them?
- How can we address their concerns, strengthen their connections to community, and bring greater Jewish meaning to women's lives?

I described the information the Commissioners initially received as "startling," in part because most of it was new. Research on American Jewish women is sparse, yet here we had a synthesis of nearly every study produced in the last 10 years. The information in that first packet appears in Chapter 2, and we welcome all readers to examine it carefully. The information shows how removed American Jewish women have become from the Jewish world, and how intensely they are involved in their work lives. It shows that our strength is in our high educational achievements, and that in many cases our commitments lie outside the Jewish community.
The second packet (see Chapter 3) contained the results of a unique study based on 14 focus groups held throughout the United States. The focus groups were conducted for the Commission by researchers from the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. The women who participated ranged from the unaffiliated to the highly involved, from 20-year-olds to 40-year-olds. The groups included women with different lifestyles, countries of origin, and sexual orientations. The focus group participants mirrored the diversity within the Commission. We, too, came from all over the country, had various degrees of affiliation (or nonaffiliation) with the Jewish world, were single or in Jewish marriages or intermarried, and worked in a variety of arenas—law, medicine, the arts, academics, politics, business and industry, nonprofits and philanthropy. Indeed, the Commission members’ key lessons would be to appreciate the remarkable differences among American Jewish women and to forgo any preconceived notions about them.

The focus group study is not a large-scale, representative survey. Rather, it provides us with information from a range of groups, each focused on a particular set of issues. Data from these groups give voice to women’s words, thoughts and concerns. The focus group report thus substantiates, challenges and deepens the thin, but provocative, existing research on American Jewish women.

The contents of the packets of information gave the Commissioners a sense of purpose and urgency. We realized early on that we wanted to enable Jewish women to be proud of their heritage and to be meaningfully connected to the Jewish community. How could we help make this possible?

Our response was not to concentrate on the disinterested and disconnected, but rather to begin with those who already have some caring and commitment—women who are standing at the doorway, ready to hear what we have to say. Although we acknowledge that ultimately we must reach out to all Jewish women, we believe there is a greater likelihood of reaching the hard-core unaffiliated later if today we build a stronger, more vital community by enhancing the Jewish lives of the women who care about Judaism. Thus, readers will note that the Commission’s Call to Action (Chapter 1) deals less with women who have limited interest in Jewish life and more with women who are open to strengthening their Jewish identities and involvement. The Call to Action offers forceful, substantive suggestions for giving Jewish women more opportunities for experiencing and committing to their Jewishness.

Chapter 10 describes the process that many of the members went through as they became even more engaged in exploring the future of American Jewish women. Our spirited debates and our hope to reach others led us to become more committed and vocal ourselves. When we began, some of us were confused about our mission, even distrustful of others in the room. As we listened to one another carefully and sought to express ourselves clearly, we developed a collective vision for American Jewish women: It is a vision of women taking on leadership roles and responsibility within Jewish institutions, developing stronger connections with one another based on meaningful objectives, and seeking and enjoying Jewish religious experiences.

The Commission’s report, Voices for Change, is organized into three sections. Section I, The Call to Action, presents our recommendations in four
arenas: building community, achieving equality, nurturing the soul, and connecting with Israel. In each arena, the Commission offers a vision of the future and a rich variety of action proposals to translate our hopes and dreams into reality. Section II presents the findings of the research conducted under the aegis of the Commission: the survey of current research and the original focus group study. Section III contains essays written by women who were resources to the Commission, providing valuable input into our deliberations. The section concludes with a description of the Commission's deliberations. I believe that together the ten chapters of Voices for Change present a complex and compelling picture of the current status of American Jewish women and myriad opportunities for renewal and change.

I want to extend a special thank you to Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, which is concerned about the future of American Jewish women just as it continues to be devoted to promoting health and human services in Israel. As an organization it has bravely confronted today's unique challenges by sponsoring this Commission, asking hard questions, seeking serious recommendations, and looking for ways to make a difference in the lives of American Jewish women. I feel privileged to have served as chair of the National Commission on American Jewish Women, and I look forward to working with all those interested in implementing the Commission's Call to Action.
CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO ACTION:
Recommendations of the National Commission on American Jewish Women

OVERVIEW

“You are not expected to complete the work; yet you are not free to ignore it.”
(Pirkei Avot 2:16)

The Call to Action is based on a vision of a future in which Jewish women feel proud of their Jewish heritage and meaningfully connected to the Jewish community, Judaism and Israel. The National Commission on American Jewish Women worked for a year—examining research, deliberating a variety of issues, and appreciating and struggling with the multiple perspectives at the table. The result is a set of recommendations directed toward the diverse population of American Jewish women—young and old, single and married, religious and secular. American Jewish women have much to contribute toward creating a strong community, a vital Judaism, and a better world. The Call to Action, therefore, offers an action agenda in four arenas: building community, achieving equality, nurturing the soul, connecting to Israel.

An overview of the Call to Action follows. Each of the four arenas is introduced with a vision statement—a summary of the Commission’s hopes for American Jewish women—followed by goals and practical steps for translating hope into reality.
BUILDING COMMUNITY

A Vision of Building Community: Jewish organizations will be welcoming to all Jewish women. Women of diverse backgrounds, orientations, abilities and lifestyles will find a place in Jewish communal and religious organizations. They will be attracted to these organizations and find meaning, relevance and opportunity there.

Goal #1: Increase unaffiliated women’s participation in Jewish life and engage Jewish women who were raised with little Jewish education or identity. Bring women into an accepting Jewish environment where they can partake of creative programs based on issues of interest. Provide them opportunities to build friendships within the framework of Jewish community.

Goal #2: Offer meaningful Jewish connections and a sense of community to young Jewish college women who are living away from home.

Goal #3: Create Jewish pathways to social and political action that will be exciting and relevant to diverse women.

Goal #4: Make Jewish organizations, including synagogues and women’s groups, attractive places. Help these groups reflect on their organizational culture—how they welcome outsiders and the ways in which they close the door on the newcomer.

Goal #5: Make Jewish communal programs and services responsive to women’s everyday needs.

Goal #6: Build bridges among Jewish women’s organizations—local, regional, and national—so that they can more readily exchange information and ideas, learn from one another, and publicize more widely the rich opportunities for women’s involvement.

Goal #7: Design and conduct studies to support community-building efforts. Examine why diverse women are attracted to or repelled from different kinds of organizations. Study successful models of community-building projects and evaluate future initiatives.
**Achiving Equality**

A Vision of Achieving Equality: Jewish women will sit at the table as full partners with men, sharing in leadership, decision making and all endeavors that support the Jewish community. They will assume equal responsibility and be rewarded as equals. They will enjoy positive regard in the community and in the media.

Goal #1: Achieve greater balance in the leadership of Jewish organizations by enhancing opportunities for Jewish women and increasing the number of Jewish women ready to assume positions of responsibility.

Goal #2: Assure fair and equal treatment of women within professional positions in the Jewish community. Promote women to executive positions in synagogues and agencies where they are underrepresented at the top.

Goal #3: Involve Jewish women deeply in philanthropic activities on behalf of the Jewish community and give them a greater voice in the allocation of funds.

Goal #4: Enhance the public image of Jewish women.

Goal #5: Support research to uncover sources of inequality and point to directions for change. Explore how men and women view the Jewish community and the forces that facilitate or impede women's advancement to positions of responsibility and influence.

**Nurturing the Soul**

A Vision of Nurturing the Soul: Jewish women and those with whom they share their lives will involve themselves in the cherished traditions of study (talmud Torah), prayer (t'fillah) and acts of kindness (chesed). Jewish women will explore their sacred relationship to God, ever growing, searching for pathways to meaning, and striving for inclusiveness and the perpetuation of a vibrant Judaism.

Goal #1: Stimulate Jewish women to learn about Judaism and about themselves as Jews. Motivate them to incorporate Jewish religious practices into their lives and open themselves to spiritual experiences. Lead them to appreciate Jewish text study as a vehicle for spirituality and religious expression.

Goal #2: Include women in Jewish religious institutions. Provide the teachers and materials needed to make Judaism relevant and exciting to contemporary women.

Goal #3: Make the enrichment of Jewish life a family enterprise.

Goal #4: Provide the support and energy necessary to dramatically improve Jewish education so that it can contribute as much as possible to our children's Jewish identity and appreciation of Judaism.

Goal #5: Conduct research on what attracts women to or alienates them from Judaism. Use evaluation studies to discover which programs elevate women's understanding and help bring the sacred into women's lives.
CONNECTING WITH ISRAEL

A Vision of Connecting with Israel: American and Israeli women will have a deep understanding of each other and enjoy many opportunities for sharing and exchange. Strong relationships will be forged by focusing on women's issues and common interests. Israel will take on renewed relevance and importance to American Jewish women as woman-to-woman ties enhance the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

Goal #1: Provide opportunities for Israeli and American Jewish women to create bonds of friendship and community as they learn about one another, explore their mutual personal, professional, and religious interests, and join together for artistic, professional, and educational ventures.

Goal #2: Reach out to young women, especially those with limited Jewish education. Enhance their awareness of Israel and plant seeds for a continuing connection with the land and the people.

Goal #3: Reach out to Israeli Americans.

Goal #4: Design and conduct research to support the vision of connecting American Jewish women with Israel. Study American and Israeli women's perceptions of one another, their hopes for mutual relationships, and reactions to interventions designed to create bonds of friendship and community between them.

This completes the overview. The remainder of the chapter provides the detailed recommendations for each of the four sets of goals.
BUILDING COMMUNITY

"Receive every person with joy." (Pirkei Avot, 3:12)

A Vision of Building Community: Jewish organizations will be welcoming to all Jewish women. Women of diverse backgrounds, orientations, abilities and lifestyles will find a place in Jewish communal and religious organizations. They will be attracted to these organizations and find meaning, relevance and opportunity there.

WHERE WE STAND NOW

The imperative to build community derives from the reality that many American Jewish women are not meaningfully connected to the Jewish community in relevant ways. Myriad factors compete for Jewish women's time and attention. The pull of secular interests is great and the push away from Jewish institutions, in many cases, is equally strong. Following are selected research findings that support the vision for building community. (See Chapters 2 and 3 for full discussion and references.)

- The demographics of American Jewish women are changing. Some live in "traditional" Jewish families, though increasing numbers are single, divorced, single parents, remarried with stepchildren, lesbian or living in other nontraditional households. More than a fourth of young Jewish women today are intermarried, a significant and growing increase over the intermarriage rate in past generations. Remaining single, intermarriage and nontraditional lifestyles are all associated with minimal or no formal Jewish affiliation.

- Women increasingly are leading complex lives that blend familial and professional obligations. Forty-six percent of adult Jewish women work full-time outside the home and this number is increasing. The majority hold professional, semiprofessional, or managerial positions. Time is a precious commodity for these women.

- Data suggest that domestic violence is as prevalent in Jewish homes as it is in other homes, and that, if anything, it is underreported in the Jewish community.

- Jewish women often feel disaffected from the organized Jewish community. These feelings have various sources. Some believe that Jewish organizations do not welcome newcomers or "outsiders." Others believe the community is not supportive of their lifestyle. Still others perceive Jewish organizations as overly preoccupied with fund-raising and inadequately concerned with community-building.

- Non-Jewish organizations have a far greater pull on the volunteer energy of Jewish women than do Jewish organizations. While 45% of young Jewish women who work full time volunteer for non-Jewish causes, less than half as many (18%) give their time to Jewish causes.

- Women who volunteer for Jewish organizations are most likely to be married to
a Jewish man, to have predominantly Jewish friendship circles, and to be affiliated with a congregation. The association between Jewish social ties and Jewish communal behaviors appears consistently in the research—as one intensifies so does the other; as one weakens the other does too.

- There is a place in the Jewish communal landscape for women's groups. Most women enjoy being involved in mixed-gender groups, but many of them also enjoy being involved in women's-only groups which are viewed as serious, purposeful and effective as men's-only or mixed-gender groups.

**CALL TO ACTION**

**Goal #1:** Increase unaffiliated women's participation in Jewish life and engage Jewish women who were raised with little Jewish education or identity. Bring women into an accepting Jewish environment where they can partake of creative programs based on issues of interest. Provide them opportunities to build friendships within the framework of Jewish community.

**Action Proposals**

**Outreach and Education**

Establish a foundation to support Jewish renewal and outreach and to engage in sustained efforts to reach unaffiliated and secular women. Generate resources and create curricula to help these women feel more comfortable with their Jewish heritage and learn the fundamentals of Judaism.

**Conversation Groups**

Sponsor informal conversation groups led by trained peer facilitators. Hold these groups in workplaces, neighborhood gathering spots, or private homes—wherever women can be reached. Ask women who are connected to the Jewish community to reach out to their less involved friends so that each conversation group will include Jewish women of different involvement levels and backgrounds. Conversation topics might include Jewish concerns, feminist issues, and personal identity. The conversations will bring women together and open up communication—first steps toward building friendships. Successful groups might expand into ongoing study and action-oriented groups.

**Goal #2:** Offer meaningful Jewish connections and a sense of community to young Jewish college women who are living away from home.

**Action Proposals**

**Mentoring Program**

Establish a mentoring program for Jewish women on campuses throughout the country. Match each mentor with three students. Use various mechanisms and venues to reach out to Jewish women on campuses and encourage them to join the mentoring program. Set the expectation that mentors and students have ongoing contact with each other and a monthly Shabbat dinner or other regular Jewish experience. Hold a regional meeting each semester for all mentors and students to share thoughts and experiences, discuss relevant topics (e.g., campus social life,
status of Jews on campus, or issues surrounding interfaith dating), and further reinforce mentor/student relationships. Relationships created between students and mentors can potentially last beyond the mentoring program, into adulthood.

**Jewish Women’s Studies**
Reach Jewish women on campus through increased funding of formal Jewish women’s studies and informal discussion groups. Support instructors and generate the necessary materials for this work by underwriting research and publications on Jewish women.

**Network of Student Groups**
Create a national network of Jewish women’s student groups. Promote initial groups at several prominent universities. Create curricula and experiences that will appeal to college-aged women. Make the groups’ activities attractive and free. Appoint an advisory board of outstanding Jewish women from the entertainment industry, politics, business and other fields. Arrange campus visits for board members to meet personally with groups.

**Action Proposals**

**Social Action**
Provide opportunities for uninvolved women to participate in Jewish-sponsored social and political action. Conduct focus groups to identify the issues of concern to Jewish women in the community. Organize groups for tikkun olam (“repairing the world,” social action) based on these issues. The groups can then take action through various means—raising funds, organizing local events, advocating for specific legislation, voicing opinions via electronic networks, and so on. Introduce Jewish teachings and values as appropriate.

**Women’s Philanthropy**
Where appropriate, encourage Jewish philanthropies to respond to the preference of many women to support local, hands-on projects. Help them establish local boards, local decision making, and a local focus to their giving. Create community women’s tzedakah groups for collective giving to social causes and people in need. Establish a Jewish women’s foundation that represents a true cross-section of all Jewish women in a community. Set a socially significant agenda for this foundation that is relevant to Jewish women.

**Goal #4: Make Jewish organizations, including synagogues and women’s groups, attractive places. Help these groups reflect on their organizational culture—how they welcome outsiders and the ways in which they close the door on the newcomer.**

**Action Proposals**

**Transforming Organizations**
Spearhead a project to encourage national, regional and local organizations—religious and nonsectarian—to transform themselves into more welcoming places. Help local groups take a hard look at themselves and devise their own means to a welcoming stance. Link these efforts to core Jewish values, to the deeper purpose that brings
meaning and satisfaction to organization members.

Opening Synagogue Doors
Offer synagogues incentives to open their doors without charge to any Jew who wants to attend high holiday services. Ensure that congregations meet criteria for being warm and welcoming. Entering the right place—with an engaging rabbi, a sensitive board, a greeting committee—can be an important first step for the unaffiliated Jew. Require participating synagogues to plan how to seek out these newcomers, invite them to join in a community event (a holiday kiddush or lunch at the synagogue), and for following up with them appropriately.

Program Inventory
From across the country, gather innovative program ideas for welcoming people into synagogues and other Jewish organizations. Disseminate an inventory of these programs. Ideas might include programs for matching people who have no place to go on the holidays with families who have extra room at their tables; “buddy” programs that link newcomers with seasoned organization members; or diversity programs to help those who do not fit the “mold” to feel more comfortable.

Goal #5: Make Jewish communal programs and services responsive to women’s everyday needs.

Action Proposals

Relevant Social Services
Help the Jewish community design and implement services that immediately and directly affect the quality of life for Jewish women. For example, offer a career clearinghouse for Jewish women who are entering the work force for the first time, and for Jewish women re-entering the work force after raising their families. Support working mothers by organizing transportation to Hebrew schools, by providing child care at adult meetings and classes, and by other services that make it easier for Jewish women to work full time, give proper care to their families, and attend to their own needs.

Life Transition Support
For women facing life crises and life transitions, provide support that is appropriate, useful and based in a Jewish perspective. Pay special attention to events and transitions (e.g., separations, divorces, miscarriages) which, unlike other lifecycle events, have no ritual in Judaism.

Health Programming
Support women’s health initiatives for the prevention and treatment of disabilities and illnesses prevalent in the Jewish community (osteoporosis, breast cancer, infertility, diabetes). Incorporate education and screening programs into evening programs at synagogues and Jewish organizations.

Family Abuse Services
Raise awareness about violence and abuse in Jewish homes. Design quality social services that offer confidentiality and are sensitive to people’s concerns and improve public understanding so that Jewish men, women and children will be more inclined to turn to Jewish services for help.

Catalog of materials
Compile an annotated catalog of material relevant to Jewish women, including films, videotapes,
audiotapes, books, journals, magazines, and electronic bulletin boards. Disseminate the catalog through national Jewish organizations to local chapters. Encourage them to become better informed about women's issues and to use the materials creatively.

**Goal 6: Build bridges among Jewish women's organizations—local, regional and national—to share information and ideas, learn from one another, and publicize more widely the rich opportunities for women's involvement.**

**Action Proposal**

**Interorganizational Cooperation**
Convene the leaders of organizations, synagogues, federations, women's studies programs and other agencies concerned with Jewish women's issues. Develop ways these groups can share information about their programs and services for women.

**Goal 7: Design and conduct studies to support community building efforts. Examine why diverse women are attracted to or discouraged by different kinds of organizations. Study successful models of community building projects and evaluate future initiatives.**

**Action Research Proposals**

**Models of Success**
By focusing on successful models, research can provide useful inventories. What is working in different communities in terms of fostering Jewish education for women, developing relevant organizations and reaching out to the unaffiliated? What is helping Jewish women become involved in Jewish social action and philanthropic efforts? Such research can stimulate innovation in other communities and can substantiate proposals for seed money to replicate effective models.

**Needs Assessment**
Marketing and needs assessment research should be conducted locally, regionally and nationally. Results must be analyzed by age, Jewish background and lifestyle. What do diverse women want from Jewish organizations? What kinds of contributions do they want to make to their community? What organizational roles and structures would be most conducive to their involvement? What missions, programs and activities do they find most appealing? The results of such research can inform outreach programs, membership services, organizational development and strategic planning in existing Jewish organizations.

**Jewish Women's Issues**
Research can sensitize Jewish organizations to women's issues. Especially needed is broad-based, longitudinal research on relationships within Jewish homes, with a focus on physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The data from this study can be used to educate the Jewish public and support people in getting the help they need.

**College-Age Women**
The "black hole" of Jewish life occurs during the college years when young people leave home and their parents. Research is needed to examine how Jewish organizations can reach young women at this age and involve them in Jewish activities. The research might ask, for example: How do they feel...
about being Jewish? What role do Jewish sororities play in their social life and in their self-image? How troubled are they by stereotypes of Jewish women? Such research would aid our understanding of college-age Jewish women. Results could have direct implications for the development of outreach programs—to identify and attract young Jewish women to meaningful engagement in Jewish life on campus.

Women 25 to 35
The next age group is also an important target for research. Young women tend to be unaffiliated and have minimal involvement in the Jewish community. There is a need to thoroughly research their Jewish backgrounds and the sources of their affiliation decisions. Do they have any desire to be part of the Jewish community or to lead a more Jewish life? Would they be willing to experiment with Jewish education, community building, or an organized activity? How can we make them part of the community? Such research would provide insights into the reality of today’s young adults and suggest programmatic responses to their issues, concerns and needs. It would help us ascertain the potential for an intensified, richer Jewish life for these women.

The Insiders
There is much to learn from women who are inside the fold—volunteers who are active in national, regional and local organizations. Research should examine the personal and Jewish identities of these women, their Jewish backgrounds, and their motivations for becoming and remaining involved. The research also should examine their reactions to the work of their organizations: How do they feel about the organization’s mission? To what extent do they respond to particular types of programming? To what extent are these active volunteers attracted to local, hands-on projects? To what extent are they attracted to activities that offer opportunities for intellectual and spiritual community-building? How much of their involvement is purely social? The research also might explore reactions to suggestions for new directions and initiatives. Deeper understanding of the views and values of active volunteers can provide Jewish organizations with insight into how to attract and retain a motivated and committed cadre of lay leaders. Such understanding will also contribute to knowledge about how women form their priorities and how they manage to find a place for communal obligations in the complex picture of their lives.

Evaluation
Innovations in community building must be evaluated and the findings fed back to all organizations working toward change. Projects to make Jewish organizations more welcoming, to establish informal conversation or social action groups, to develop a mentoring program for Jewish women college students, or to waive synagogue dues requirements—all need to be evaluated. What outcomes, intended and unintended, did a project achieve? How many women were touched by it? What reactions did they have? How did it affect participants as women and as Jews? What challenges or opportunities did the project face? What lessons were learned from the project? Evaluation results are essential to the development of ever more effective vehicles for drawing Jewish women into the community.
ACHIEVING EQUALITY

"Neither man without woman, nor woman without man and neither without the Divine spirit."
(Genesis Rabbah, 8:9)

A Vision of Achieving Equality: Jewish women will sit at the table as full partners with men, sharing in leadership, decision making and all endeavors that support the Jewish community. They will assume equal responsibility and be rewarded as equals. They will enjoy positive regard in the community and in the media.

WHERE WE STAND NOW

The vision for achieving equality arises from the recognition that women do not have an equal share in decision making and influence in the Jewish community. Studies draw a consistent picture in which women’s contributions are devalued and their opportunities for advancement are limited. Negative stereotypes of Jewish women abound. The following are selected research findings that support the call to achieve equality. (See Chapters 2 and 3 for full discussion and references.)

• Lay and professional leadership positions in Jewish federations and other mixed-gender organizations are predominantly held by men. For example, 61% of federation staff are women, but only 18% of executive directors are women. No large city federation (with 45,000 or more Jews) is headed by a woman. Of all the national mixed-gender organizations, there is only one with a woman at the helm. Women are also seriously under-represented in the national denominational organizations.

• Women disproportionately appear at the low end of the salary range in Jewish communal organizations. Even when men and women are matched by job category, salary discrepancies remain.

• By any number of measurements, including gains in wage-earning status, emerging leadership and increased education, women are positioned to play a dominant role in Jewish philanthropy.

• Women’s divisions contribute significantly to federations. In small and intermediate cities (Jewish populations less than 15,000), women’s divisions account for about 20% of campaign totals. Women’s divisions, however, have little say in the allocation of funds and are limited in their ability to direct federation funds into projects important to women.

• Less than 5% of foundation and corporate grant monies nationwide is awarded to projects specifically serving women and girls.

• There are indications that Jewish identity may produce conflict, avoidance and/or humiliation for women. The issues are equally complex and difficult for those who eschew their religious tradition, those who had left but now seek to reclaim their Jewishness, and those who are openly Jewish and confronted by negative images and hurtful stereotypes of Jewish women.
THE CALL TO ACTION

Goal #1: Achieve greater balance in the leadership of Jewish organizations by enhancing opportunities for Jewish women and increasing the number of Jewish women ready to assume positions of responsibility.

Action Proposals

New Leadership Development
Devise new leadership programs and strengthen the capacity of existing ones to attract, educate and promote women leaders in the Jewish community. Expand foundation-supported fellowship programs to target potential women leaders. Employ more women teachers and facilitators for these programs. Teach leadership skills, the ins-and-outs of organizational structure, and strategies for advancing through the system. Include Jewish text study as a component of the training so that Jewish learning will infuse the efforts of future Jewish women leaders. Encourage program graduates to serve the Jewish community.

Drawing Talent from the Nonsectarian World
Select women of high achievement in business, industry, social services, academe and the arts to participate in discussions about the Jewish community power structure and how to improve it. Educate these women about traditional and contemporary Jewish needs. Encourage them to seek leadership positions in the Jewish community.

Planning for Gender Equity
Document the male/female ratio of board members, committee chairs and officers of local and national Jewish organizations. Analyze the Jewish philanthropic donations of men and women and the extent to which women are accorded power and position commensurate with the dollars they contribute. Use results to plan a program for achieving gender equity in the leadership of Jewish organizations.

Leveraging Positions for Women
Encourage agencies that receive Jewish philanthropic funds to appoint women to leadership positions.

Goal #2: Assure fair and equal treatment of women within professional positions in the Jewish community. Promote women to executive positions in synagogues and agencies where they are underrepresented at the top.

Action Proposals

Employment Statistics
Create a clearinghouse of information on women’s employment in Jewish organizations and agencies. Compare position, pay, tenure, rates of hire and rates of promotion for men and women. Use results to advocate for gender equity in Jewish organizations.

Promotion of Women
Advance the appointment of women as directors of large-city federations and national mixed-gender organizations. Work with executive search firms and communities to develop lists of potential candidates. Provide these women with training and education, mentoring and career guidance.
Gender Roles in Synagogues
Reconsider gender roles and the distribution of responsibility in synagogues. Support the promotion of women rabbis to the senior position in large congregations, and encourage more men to take on education positions in these settings.

Action Proposals

Changing Philanthropies from the Top
Educate the leaders of Jewish philanthropies on the importance of involving women in the allocations process.

Training Programs
Create step-by-step training programs that Jewish women's organizations can use to educate their members about the importance of philanthropy, and facilitate discussion on the impact women can have in Jewish philanthropy and the forces that help and hinder their influence. Train women in solicitation approaches that are respectful of women donors, including soliciting donations of an appropriate size so that women of all means can feel good about their ability to give. Give women good role models. Create video profiles on contemporary Jewish women philanthropists, explore their reasons for giving, the causes they support, and the outcomes of their philanthropic efforts. Use these videos to educate and inspire.

Funding Services for Women and Girls
Take note of women's issues that have been underfunded or ignored by Jewish philanthropies.

New Philanthropies for Women
Create new avenues for philanthropy from young entrepreneurial women and those who inherit large assets. Many of these women are not drawn to existing institutions in the Jewish community, but they would want to put their money into a Jewish philanthropy that directly benefits women.

Goal #3: Involve Jewish women deeply in philanthropic activities on behalf of the Jewish community and give them a greater voice in the allocation of funds.

Goal #4: Enhance the public image of Jewish women. Create diversified, complex, vibrant images and role models that Jewish women can identify with and feel proud of.

New Images of Jewish Women
Convey diversified and positive images of Jewish women through the arts and the media. Prepare profiles of prominent Jewish women for publication in the popular press. Create exhibits on American Jewish women and Jewish life that can be displayed in galleries, libraries and other public venues. Commission a photographic essay on "A Day in the Life of American Jewish Women" or a Jewish women's calendar with photographs of Jewish women—ordinary and famous—engaged in study, ritual, work, caring for a Jewish family, and making a Jewish home. Commission artists to create paintings and posters with compelling images of Jewish women. Make these available through synagogues, Jewish Community Centers and other Jewish organizations.
Public Awareness
Bring greater awareness of Jewish women to the public. Provide grants to both Jewish and nonsectarian museums for exhibits on Jewish women. Get radio and television talk shows to do programs on the image of Jewish women. Use the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women rabbis as an opportunity to place Jewish women on the "media circuit."

Support for Artists
Create a national endowment for Jewish arts to fund films, television programs, visual arts, performances and literature that go beyond glib stereotypes of Jewish women and pursue in-depth explorations of Jewish women's complex realities. Make the competition for funds include all ages so that young people, emerging artists and experienced artists can turn their talents to this objective.

Jewish Education for Artists
Offer fellowships for artists and writers to deepen their knowledge of Judaism so that they will be better prepared to incorporate Jewish subjects, including Jewish women, into their work accurately and sensitively.

Prominent Women as a Resource
Discuss issues of public identity with Jewish women prominent in journalism, fashion, entertainment and the arts, advertising, business and public service. Encourage them to make their Jewish background part of their public persona. Urge them to make presentations on college campuses so they can offer strong Jewish role models to young Jewish women.

Studying and Changing Images
Commission an analysis of the images of Jewish women in film, television, print media and art. Convene a think tank of public relations and media specialists, Jewish-identified stars, and leaders and power brokers in the entertainment industry to develop strategies for transforming the current treatment of Jewish women in the media and encouraging more realistic and differentiated portrayals of Jewish women and Jewish families.

Goal #5: Support research to uncover sources of inequality and point to directions for change. Explore how men and women view the Jewish community and the forces that facilitate or impede women's advancement to positions of responsibility and influence.

Action Research Proposals
Factors in Gender Inequities
The few studies on women's employment in Jewish communal organizations all show a gender gap in position and salary. Research is needed to understand the factors that create and sustain women's relative disadvantage. For instance, to what extent is the underrepresentation of women in top positions attributable to structural obstacles such as low turnover at the top, social dynamics (the "old boy's network"), and/or personal factors such as women's work preferences? A better understanding of causal factors is required to address the gender inequities in Jewish communal organizations.
Women and Philanthropy

Jewish women increasingly have the resources to make charitable gifts to the Jewish community. It cannot be assumed that women will approach philanthropy in the same manner as men. Research should address questions of gender differences in donor style and motivation. Do Jewish women make their philanthropic decisions based on different criteria than men? Do they respond to solicitations, rewards and displays of appreciation in the same way as men? Findings from such research would be of use not only to existing philanthropic organizations, but also to develop new structures and techniques for including and empowering women in Jewish philanthropies.

Women at the Top

Much can be learned from women who have achieved leadership positions in the Jewish community. What path did they follow to the top? What obstacles and opportunities did they encounter along the way? What role did others play in their becoming leaders? What personal attitudes or talents helped them advance? How does their Jewish identity, education and observance affect their understanding of themselves as leaders? Findings from such research will uncover the personal and organizational dynamics that facilitate or obstruct women’s rise to the top. The images of success produced by this research may validate, guide and inspire other women coming up through the ranks.

Differing Perspectives of Men and Women

Social psychological research often shows that men and women have markedly different perceptions of the world. Community-based research should examine whether Jewish men and women view their community in similar ways. Do men and women believe there is shared leadership in the Jewish community? Do they believe they have equal access to influence and decision making? Are there issues that are of greater or lesser concern to women than to men? What percentage of Jewish philanthropic funds currently support programs specifically targeted to women and girls? Answers to such questions would help communities gauge the extent to which they have separate realities and separate sets of opportunities for men and women. Change depends on the ability to see these differing perspectives clearly and accurately.

Evaluation

Research must examine efforts to achieve equality between men and women in the Jewish community and to enhance the public image of Jewish women. Findings should be disseminated to everyone working toward change in the Jewish community. Systematic, objective evaluation is required of new leadership development programs, initiatives to educate women in philanthropy, the creation of new avenues for Jewish women’s philanthropy, advocacy for gender equity within Jewish organizations, or for more varied and realistic portrayals of Jewish women in the arts and the media. Research can assess the effectiveness of these innovations in effecting change and provide a yardstick by which to measure our progress toward equality.
NURTURING THE SOUL

"Delve into the tradition and delve into it again, for everything is there." (Pirkei Avot, 5:22)

A Vision of Nurturing the Soul: Jewish women and those with whom they share their lives will involve themselves in the cherished traditions of study (talmud Torah), prayer (t’fillah) and acts of kindness (chesed). Jewish women will explore their sacred relationship to God, ever growing, searching for pathways to meaning, and striving for inclusiveness and the perpetuation of a vibrant Judaism.

WHERE WE STAND NOW

Now is an important time to be concerned with women’s commitment to Judaism. This is a time of significant changes in women’s level of Jewish education and in their access to religious practice. Jewish women are seeking meaning in their lives and a connection to something greater than themselves, but they often do not seek and/or find these in Judaism. The following are selected research findings that support the call to nurture Jewish learning and spirituality. (See Chapters 2 and 3 for full discussion and references.)

• Only 28% of Jewish women—versus 56% of non-Jewish women—say that religion is very important in their lives. Also, Jewish women do not attend religious services as regularly as non-Jewish women.

• Jewish women are selective in their practice of Jewish traditions and rituals. Research shows that most women light Hannukah candles and fast on Yom Kippur, but few celebrate Purim and even fewer regularly light Shabbat candles. About 30% of married Jewish women and 16% of single Jewish women have a Christmas tree in their household during many Christmas seasons. Few single women are affiliated with a synagogue.

• There is a flowering of Jewish learning among women. Young American Jewish women today are far more likely to receive some formal Jewish education than their grandmothers were.

• Jewish women have demanded and generally received equal access to previously Inaccessible areas of religious practice, including participation in public prayer and ritual. Since 1972, more than 300 women in Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative denominations have been ordained as rabbis. Women rabbis have inspired changes in liturgy and ritual, added a new perspective to Jewish scholarship, served as role models for other Jewish women, and brought a more egalitarian and inclusive quality to Jewish life.
THE CALL TO ACTION

**Goal #1: Stimulate Jewish women to learn about Judaism and about themselves as Jews. Motivate them to incorporate Jewish religious practices into their lives and open themselves to spiritual experiences. Lead them to appreciate Jewish text study as a vehicle for spirituality and religious expression.**

**Action Proposals**

**Retreats**

Institute a national program of *kallot*, weekend retreats that provide women with an intense and intimate Shabbat experience. Require participants to attend several workshops prior to the retreat to prepare them for the experience. Employ innovative curriculum developers to design the *kallot* and workshops to assure consistency and quality across sites. Design a creative marketing campaign to appeal to even the most secular women. See to it that the program is perceived as important and prestigious. Plan the retreats to incorporate a multitude of approaches to the Shabbat experience including art, music, dance and story-telling.

**Rosh Chodesh Experiences**

Develop a sophisticated and detailed curriculum for an ongoing cycle of experiences for Rosh Chodesh (a monthly holiday associated with women and women's study and prayer groups). Get these materials to synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, women's organizations, and small informal groups of women so that they can establish regular Rosh Chodesh groups. Make certain that the curriculum can be used by lay groups, that it offers varied and creative activities, and that it is well-designed and attractive.

**Text Study**

Develop user-friendly programs for women to create local study groups, reading groups, Torah study groups, and retreats for women who seek meaning and direction through the critical study of Torah. Provide structured reading lists with questions and discussion topics. Encourage groups to reach out to women in their teens and twenties to expose them to this rich and relevant aspect of Judaism at an early age.

**Support for Learning**

Underwrite women's learning by offering scholarships for Jewish studies courses and grants for release time from work so that women can engage in intensive study and service.

**On-Site Study**

Offer study opportunities to women where they are—near their workplaces or other convenient locations. Base curricula on Jewish texts related to the issues women face in their personal and professional lives.

**Dissemination**

Through fax service (similar to Torah fax), disseminate successful program ideas and materials from women's retreats, Rosh Chodesh experiences and study groups.

**Hebrew Naming**

Create curriculum and materials for women to select meaningful Hebrew names for themselves. Design an adult naming ceremony as the culmination of this process.
**Tzedakah**

Teach women about the obligation and holiness of *tzedakah* and educate them in Jewish philanthropic values. Awaken their collective spirit by sponsoring campaigns to collect small donations from large numbers of Jewish women. Use the funds raised to seed and support programs for strengthening Jewish identity, enriching Jewish life and maintaining the vitality of Judaism.

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**Presentation of Woman-Oriented Judaism**

Give grants to Jewish women's studies faculty and students to present current thinking and scholarship to Jewish women's organizations around the country. Urge sponsors of Jewish lecture series to include women speakers; use these presentations to expose Jewish women to a relevant, woman-oriented spirit of Judaism.

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**Woman Educators**

Offer high-quality college and university programs of study to train Jewish women educators who can effectively inspire and teach other women.

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**Goal #2: Include women in Jewish religious institutions.** Provide the teachers and materials needed to make Judaism relevant and exciting to contemporary women.

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**Action Proposals**

**Feminist and Egalitarian Materials**

Sponsor the creation of gender-neutral prayer books and *haggadot*, and feminist *midrashim* and interpretations of Torah. Award grants to synagogues to purchase these materials. Sponsor learning centers for the study and interpretation of Jewish texts from a feminist perspective.

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**Inclusiveness in the Synagogue**

Provide training programs on diversity in the synagogue for rabbis, cantors, educators and synagogue boards. Encourage congregation officials to appoint different types of people to synagogue committees. Emphasize that including both men and women is critical to the future of the community.

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**Goal #3: Make the enrichment of Jewish life a family enterprise.**

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**Action Proposals**

**Family Education**

To engage all generations in Jewish learning, encourage family education in synagogues. Make certain the programs address the personal, communal and societal needs of individuals of all ages and in various stages of life. Using a community-wide approach, establish family learning centers to be collaboratively run by Jewish Community Centers, synagogues and family service agencies. Offer Jewish families activities and services (classes, workshops, support groups) from a Jewish perspective and with Jewish content.
**Educational Materials for the Home**
Engage a network of curriculum writers to generate Jewish educational materials to be accessed in the home through CD-ROM, e-mail, personal computers, tapes, VCRs, and print media. Pilot test these materials in small interactive groups. Be certain the materials encourage the active participation of girls and women. Assemble an inventory of successful materials for Jewish family celebrations. Convene a panel of experts to review, revise and expand materials.

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**Action Proposal**

**Support for Teachers**
Create a national institute with the goal to augment the basic skills of Hebrew and day school teachers—their knowledge of Jewish studies as well as their knowledge of modern educational methods—so they are better able to impart a love of Judaism to their students. Hire outstanding faculty to develop curricula and teach at the institute. Offer scholarships for teachers to participate in the institute’s programs. Publicize successful models created by institute graduates. Raise salaries of Jewish educators (most of whom are Jewish women) to retain them and to demonstrate—to the community at large and to Jewish youth—the value of the work they are performing for the Jewish people. Remind the community that, in some cases, the educator is the adult most knowledgeable about Judaism to whom our children are exposed.

**Access to Day Schools**
Make Jewish day schools accessible to all Jewish children; subsidize most of the cost of tuition if necessary. Small classes, excellent teachers, community closeness, and putting both a secular and Jewish education under one roof will help weave Judaism more tightly into personal and family life.

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**Goal #4: Provide the support and energy necessary to dramatically improve Jewish education so that it can contribute as much as possible to our children’s Jewish identity and appreciation of Judaism.**

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**Goal #5: Conduct research on what attracts women to or alienates them from Judaism.**

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**Use evaluation studies to discover which programs elevate women’s understanding and help bring the sacred into women’s lives.**

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**Action Research Proposals**

**Models of Success**
Research should produce examples of programs that have enriched women’s experience of Judaism—programs that have promoted Jewish education for women, brought women into synagogue life, fostered Jewish ritual in the home, and brought women together in spiritual community. Such research can inspire program developers and hasten the discovery of new paths to religious involvement for Jewish women.

**Needs Assessment**
Research can uncover what different groups of women are looking for in their religious lives and what might draw them into a more meaningful practice of Judaism. What would make Jewish study, prayer and observance more accessible,
relevant, exciting and meaningful for Jewish women of diverse backgrounds? Which aspects of Jewish learning and practice do they find most appealing? In which forums are they most comfortable studying and worshiping? Such research would benefit program planning for women's religious and spiritual growth.

The Disaffected
Jewish sociological research and the experience of rabbis and other religious leaders tell us that many Jews are disaffected, "turned off" from Judaism, and disinterested in their Jewish heritage. Research should study the disaffected. What happened that drove individual women from Judaism? What were their negative experiences and how did they interpret them? Do any Jewish religious or cultural longings remain? Answers to such questions may help Jewish leaders design initiatives to draw women back to Judaism, and they may help Jewish organizations find ways to prevent others from dropping out.

Rabbis Who Are Women
Women rabbis are a recent phenomenon in Jewish history. As the 25th anniversary of women in the rabbinate approaches, the experience and accomplishments of this group of women should be systematically researched. The research could first take an individual focus: How did these women come to choose the rabbinate? What effect has their profession had on their personal lives and on their Jewish beliefs and practices? How do their career paths compare with male rabbis? The second focus could be organizational: How have they affected their congregations? How have education, governance, services and liturgy changed under women's rabbinic leadership? Findings from such research would help acknowledge the accomplishments of women in modern Jewish religious life, and could provide a backdrop to any media events that might attend the anniversary of the ordination of women. Understanding women who have been leaders in religious life may help us understand those who follow.

Evaluation
Innovations to enrich women's practice of Judaism should be evaluated to find out what works, under what conditions, and for whom. The research should look carefully at reactions to women's *kallot*, Rosh Chodesh experiences, and study groups. How did participants feel about their experience? Which aspects were most important to them as women and which as Jews? What did they learn? What did the experience make them think about? What did they take with them from the experience? Evaluation research also could examine gender-neutral prayer books and *haggadot* and those designed from a feminist perspective. Do men react differently to these new forms of Jewish expression? Do the new materials affect their sense of belonging and participation in the service? Do they affect how they view Judaism and themselves as part of the Jewish people?
CONNECTING WITH ISRAEL

“And I will give them one heart and one way.” (Jeremiah 32:39)

A Vision of Connecting with Israel: American and Israeli women will have a deep understanding of each other and enjoy many opportunities for sharing and exchange. Strong relationships will be forged by focusing on women’s issues and common interests. Israel will take on renewed relevance and importance to American Jewish women as woman-to-woman ties enhance the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

WHERE WE STAND NOW

The call to intensify connections between American Jewish women and the land and women of Israel comes from those who have experienced the joy of these relationships and feel committed to strengthen them. There is little research on American Jewish women and Israel, but the following findings underline the importance of the vision of connecting with Israel. (See Chapters 2 and 3 for full discussion and references.)

- Israel remains a source of pride and a prime motivation for American Jews to give to Jewish philanthropies. The emotional ties, however, are weakening, especially among the younger generations.

- Forty-four percent of American Jewish women and 50% of American Jewish men list helping the state of Israel as very important for Jewish organizations.

- At least 300,000 Israelis live in the United States. Many Israeli American women did not come to the United States by choice but often unwillingly followed their husbands here.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Goal #1: Provide opportunities for Israeli and American Jewish women to create bonds of friendship and community as they learn about one another, explore their mutual personal, professional and religious interests, and join together for artistic, professional and educational ventures.

Action Proposals

Collaborative Projects
Seek opportunities for Israeli and American women to collaborate. For example, create mutual family history projects for women whose families came from the same Jewish communities before migrating to Israel or America. Organize Israeli and American Jewish women writers and historians to assemble a Jewish woman’s guide to Israel that includes details about the women who helped create Israel, the towns named after them, the places of importance in Jewish women’s history, and the places where Jewish women writers live and about which they write.
Connecting Through Women's Issues
Encourage American Jewish women to apply their interest in women's issues to Israel. Help them become better informed about Israeli feminism and more active in supporting feminist organizations in Israel. Facilitate dialogues between groups of Israeli and American Jewish women, help them express and understand the complex feelings, attitudes and opinions held by Jewish women. Include issues relevant to both sides (e.g., health, reproductive rights, domestic violence, leadership, women's studies, religion). The mutual search for direction and meaning by peer groups in the two most important contemporary centers of Judaism will be a fascinating and strengthening experience for Jewish women.

Professional Connections
Seek ways for Israeli and American Jewish women to learn about and support each other's work. Plan a series of conferences and other exchanges—both in person and via electronic media—for Israeli and American Jewish women with common interests such as business, law, medicine, education, social work, psychology, and politics. Provide a forum for Israeli and American Jewish women academics to discuss the intellectual and political issues entailed in integrating gender studies into university curricula. Bring together Jewish feminist writers, editors and publishers in the United States and Israel to explore various ways of working with one another—to enrich their sources of opinion and information, diversify their audiences, and maximize their impact.

Connecting Through the Arts
Establish an American/Israeli program for women's performing and visual arts. Have juries select works in an open process. Then widely circulate winning performances and exhibits around the United States and Israel.

Sharing Environmental Concerns
Engage women in environmentalism in Israel and the United States. Develop materials to teach women about environmental innovations and give them the tools they need for advocacy and action in support of these. Design trips to Israel for women and their families to see environmental projects, such as solar ponds or agricultural recycling. Engage Israeli and American women in developing collaborative proposals for future environmental efforts.

Expanding Existing Missions and Trips
Expand existing structures to include opportunities for American and Israeli women to become acquainted. Incorporate women-to-women meetings into existing American missions to Israel. Add home visits as an integral part of American trips to Israel or Israeli visits to the United States.
Goal #2: Reach out to young women, especially those with limited Jewish education. Enhance their awareness of Israel and plant seeds for a continued connection with the land and the people.

Action Proposal

**Outreach**
Engage Israeli Americans in dialogue, bring them into Jewish organizations, and help them find a comfortable place in the American Jewish community. Provide recognition for Israeli American women and their contributions in the United States. Engage them in American Jewish women's issues and activities and acknowledge them as a valuable resource in attempts to highlight Jewish women's global concerns and to strengthen ties between Israeli and American Jewish women.

Goal #3: Reach out to Israeli Americans.

Action Proposals

**Personal Contacts**
Pair college women in Israel and the United States with counterparts who share their academic major or career interests. Organize continuous, personal contacts between young Israeli and American Jewish women via Internet e-mail, bulletin boards, and "chat lines"; pen pal matches; home hospitality/exchange programs; and Israel/American camps, travel programs and other summer experiences.

**Learning about Israel**
Devise formats to teach large numbers of young American Jewish women about Israel, even if they are unable to travel there. For example, organize peer meetings of young Israeli and American Jewish women in the United States. Create an "experiential travelogue," a simulated Israeli environment that can be set up at workshops around the United States. Make a film of the everyday life of young Israeli and American Jewish women and distribute it in Israel and the United States.

**Internships**
Support significant numbers of paying and nonpaying internships for American students in organizations dedicated to Israel and Zionism. Likewise, sponsor internships in American Jewish organizations for young Israelis in high school or awaiting military service.

**Dealing with Anti-Zionism**
Institute formal and informal educational programs to prepare young Jewish women to understand and effectively respond to antisemitism couched in anti-Israel rhetoric. Provide forums in which Jewish women college students can examine Israeli-Palestinian relations and at the same time explore and deepen their own connections to Israel.
Goal 4: Design and conduct research to support the vision of connecting American Jewish women with Israel. Study American and Israeli women's perceptions of one another, their hopes for mutual relationships, and reactions to interventions designed to create bonds of friendship and community between them.

Action Research Proposals

The Perspective of American Jewish Women
Little is known about American Jewish women's relationship to Israel. What does Israel mean to American Jewish women today? How interested are they in learning about Israel, visiting the land and becoming acquainted with Israeli women? What are their stereotypes of Israelis? What experiences do they have when they visit Israel? Such information is critical to women's Zionist organizations' planning and to the development of meaningful programs for young American Jewish women.

The Perspective of Israeli Jewish Women
Equally important are Israeli women's views of their American counterparts. What do Israeli women know about American women, their lives, values and concerns? How close do they feel to American Jewish women? To what extent do they recognize a common agenda for Jewish women in both countries? How interested are they in creating bonds of friendship and community with American Jewish women? Effective action plans require a full understanding of the perspectives of both Israeli and American Jewish women.

Evaluation
New connections to Israel and the renewal of existing ones must be evaluated and findings shared widely both in the United States and Israel. Research is needed to examine the effects of each of these interventions—dialogues between American and Israeli Jewish women; professional, educational and cultural exchanges; collaborative projects; and outreach to Israeli Americans and to young women and college students. What outcomes, intended and unintended, did initiatives achieve? How many women did they reach? How did participants react? How did the interventions affect relationships between American Jewish women and Israel and Israeli women? Complete and accurate evaluation information is invaluable to efforts to build strong and enduring connections between Jewish women in Israel and America.
Chapter 2

Surveying the Landscape: Current Research on American Jewish Women

Amy L. Sales

How much actually is known about American Jewish women? What are the facts about their characteristics, status, attitudes and behavior? A review of recent research reveals a paucity of hard data. For all the fascination they hold for writers, Jewish women are largely ignored by demographers and social scientists. At the same time, numerous articles and reports, published and unpublished, offer a potpourri of studies that touch on the lives and experiences of Jewish women.

The Need for Systematic Research on American Jewish Women

Research on American Jewry is abundant, yet rarely do findings represent the experience of both men and women equally. Aggregated data mask information peculiar to Jewish women. If results are not analyzed by gender, we cannot discern whether women differ from men in the quality or intensity of their answers. For example, when data on organizational affiliation were analyzed by gender (Cohen & Rosen, 1992), men and women were found to have similar views, hopes and experiences with regard to Jewish organizations. Results also showed, however, that men were twice as likely as women to think about how membership in these organizations can enhance their professional networks.

Studies often are designed from a male perspective or are generic so that the very questions they ask fail to probe issues of particular concern to women. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey asked interviewees how many Jewish organizations they belong to, how much money they contribute, and so on. In contrast, a 1992 study commissioned by the Women's Division of the Baltimore Federation was specifically interested in women's reactions to Jewish organizations. This survey included questions about perceptions of women's groups versus men's groups and about women's ability to achieve top positions in the community. Such questions about the distribution of power or the desirability of women's associations usually are not included in studies sponsored by federations or Jewish organizations, other than women's groups.

A rich literature by and about women has developed since the mid-1970s. Topics include female emotional disorders, communication patterns, leadership and organization styles, job equity, sexual harassment and institutional discrimination. Much of this work was motivated by the women's movement and the attendant founding of women's studies programs, professional associations, and social science journals dedicated to women's scholarship and advocacy. Research studies on women generally
have not included separate analyses of Jewish women. The underlying assumption is that Jewish women are basically similar to other white women and that class and race are more powerful predictors of outcomes than religion.

Nonetheless, existing research indicates that Jewish women in America differ in significant ways from the general white female population. Jewish women are more highly educated and tend to hold higher positions in the work world. Patterns of childbearing and employment also differ for Jewish women. Differences in core demographic characteristics and early-childhood socialization, along with the particular expectations and requirements that come from membership in the Jewish community, can be expected to produce a number of distinct attitudes, values and experiences for Jewish females. The one study that looked for such differences (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985) found, for example, that Jewish women's views on many social issues are significantly more liberal than those of their non-Jewish counterparts. There is some suggestion that exposure to the workplace—more common for Jewish women—has a liberalizing effect on some socio-political attitudes such as support for the Equal Rights Amendment and for a woman's right to choose abortion. The assumption that Jewish women are indistinguishable from other American women is challenged by current research, scant though it is.

In this chapter, recent research on American Jewish women is organized around two questions:

• Who are today's American Jewish women?
• What is their attachment to Judaism and the Jewish community?

This literature review reveals the gaps in our knowledge and understanding and points to directions for future research. It also serves to ground women's conversations, action plans and interventions in objective data rather than anecdotes, untested assumptions, myths or stereotypes. The research provides a common knowledge base from which action plans can arise.

**Sources**

Information in this chapter comes from three sources: (1) journal and magazine articles, (2) unpublished research papers, and (3) documents from federations, Jewish women's organizations and other agencies in the Jewish community. This material was gathered by searching library databases, contacting researchers in the field, and working through the national offices of Jewish organizations. The focus of this literature review is on quantitative and qualitative studies produced between 1984 and 1994.

**Methods**

The studies presented in this chapter employ various research methods: national population surveys, surveys based on local populations, surveys of Jewish organizations, interviews with selected individuals.

**National Population Surveys**

Some researchers used data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (e.g., Fishman, 1991; Geffen, 1991). Given the scope of this database, they were able to break out results according to various demographic characteristics such as work status, family composition, volunteerism and philanthropy among younger...
and older women. Others (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985; Cohen & Rosen, 1992) created their own national sample. Cohen & Rosen's study was based on 543 men and 570 women selected to reflect the overall American Jewish population with regard to age, income, marital status, geographic region and Jewish heads of household.

**Surveys Based on Defined Populations**

Other studies are based on local samples. The 1992 Baltimore Women's Division study was comprised of 229 telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of women on the Jewish federation's list of active participants and contributors. In another study, views of domestic violence were tested with a survey of 3,000 randomly selected households in Philadelphia's Jewish community (Silverstein, 1994).

Occasionally, studies use samples developed from the membership list of a single organization. The Hadassah National Membership study (Kosmin, 1994) consisted of telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,502 women, all dues-paying members of the organization.

**Surveys of Organizations**

Surveys of organizations generally are conducted by national agencies that gather data from their member organizations. Often the topic—domestic abuse, sexual harassment on the job, or women in the work force—is relevant to women. The Association of Jewish Family & Children Service Agencies conducted two surveys of their member agencies—one on single-parent family caseloads (1987), the other on the incidence and treatment of abuse cases (1988). The Council of Jewish Federations (1993) conducts periodic surveys on the representation of women in the governance of local Jewish federations. The JCC/N.A. has gathered data on female employment and salaries in Jewish Community Centers nationwide (Pine & Kagen, 1992).

**Interviews with Select Individuals**

Other material presented here derives from a qualitative, journalistic approach in which individuals were selected to be interviewed in depth. Schneider's 1993 exploration of Jewish women's philanthropy, for one, is based on interviews with more than 100 women donors to Jewish causes, professional fundraisers, money managers and psychologists.

Each of these methods has serious limitations. When existing databases are used (e.g., the National Jewish Population Survey), the investigation is constrained by the questions contained in the original research. Many valuable hypotheses go untested and fruitful avenues of inquiry are left unexplored. When local samples are used, it is questionable whether findings can be generalized to other situations. It cannot be assumed, for example, that findings from Baltimore Women's Division would hold for other federations or that the experience of women in Philadelphia would be similar to that of women in smaller communities or elsewhere in the country. When purposive sampling is used, such as in more journalistic pieces or studies that rely on samples of convenience, it is not entirely clear whether the sample represents a larger population and, therefore, whether results can be generalized.

These limitations must be acknowledged and redressed in future research. Nonetheless, findings from what research there is cannot be dismissed. Together, these diverse studies present a picture of the current status of American Jewish women,
their personal lives and communal attachments. The data answer some questions and invariably raise others. As we examine what is known today, the course for future research becomes clear.

**WHAT CHARACTERIZES TODAY'S AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN?**

**High Achievement**

Jewish women are achievers. They are the most highly educated women in the United States and their level of education has been increasing markedly. More than half of all Jewish women are college graduates, compared with only 19% of non-Jewish white women (Chiswick, 1993; Geffen, 1991). Consequently, Jewish women are highly employable in many occupations. Forty-six percent of adult Jewish women work full-time outside the home and this percentage is increasing. The majority hold professional, semiprofessional, or managerial positions; they earn enough to be self-sufficient and/or a significant economic partner in the family (Fishman, 1991; Geffen, 1991; Greenberg, 1991). The paycheck undoubtedly keeps many women in the work force; quitting would entail a loss of independence or a major cost to the family. Education, position, and income all help maintain high employment rates among Jewish women.

**High Achievement and Parents**

High achievement appears to be a legacy from Jewish females' parents. Although Jewish and non-Jewish women share many of the same desires for their daughters, Jewish women rank higher such qualities as ambition, intelligence and strength, which would help their daughters to become successful. Jewish women also are significantly more likely to maintain that parents have an obligation to pay for their children's college education (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985). These data suggest that Jewish women are more likely to encourage their daughters to seek higher education and to support them in this endeavor. Thus, their daughters are likely to become another generation of well-educated women who, in turn, will similarly encourage their own daughters.

Jewish fathers, too, contribute to the high achievement of their daughters. A study in Boston found that 81% of Jewish fathers who are professionals have daughters who also became professionals. That is about the same level as for Jewish sons, but is significantly higher than for non-Jews (Goldscheider, 1986).

**High Achievement and Marriage**

Close to two-thirds of American Jewish women are married, down from 20 years ago when more Jewish women married and fewer divorced.

Women increasingly are leading complex lives that blend familial and professional obligations. To Jewish women, such a mix is defensible. A majority of Jewish women believe that working women make more interesting marriage partners than nonworking women, and that they are equally good as mothers. Non-Jewish women are significantly less likely to hold such views (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985).

Jewish men apparently agree. They tend to marry women who are their "equals" (Schneider, 1993) and they encourage their wives' endeavors; 90% of married Jewish women say their husbands are supportive of their career aspirations (Monson, 1987a).
High Achievement and Children

Jewish families are relatively small and are likely to remain so. Jewish women on average have fewer children than do non-Jewish white women and the fertility rates of Jewish women are declining (Goldstein, 1992). Many Jewish women (59%) do not feel that children are essential to their adult family life and maintain that a child-free marriage can be as complete and satisfying as a marriage with children (B’nai B’rith Women, 1985). These childbearing attitudes and behavior, however, cannot be blamed on increases in Jewish women’s employment. Research indicates that employment and occupational status are unrelated to the number of children women have or expect to have (Geffen, 1991; Monson, 1987a).

Jewish women with children adjust their work schedules when their children are young. Particularly when preschool children are in the home, Jewish women are less likely to work than non-Jewish women; if they do work, it is for fewer hours (Chiswick, 1993).

Friends

Friendship networks forge an important link between individuals and community. The sociological theory of “plausibility structure” posits that the network of people with whom we interact regularly helps make certain beliefs and thoughts more or less plausible to us. The conversations we have with our friends confirm or strengthen our beliefs and direct our behavior. The majority of American Jewish women (65%) report that most of their closest friends are Jewish (B’nai B’rith Women, 1985). Given the plausibility structure of a Jewish social network, it is not surprising that the women who are in primarily Jewish social networks are also the ones most connected to the Jewish community. These women are more likely to be affiliated with a congregation, volunteer time to Jewish organizations, and donate money to Jewish causes than are women with fewer Jewish friends (Fishman, 1991).

Interrmarriage

More than a fourth of young Jewish women today are intermarried, a significant and growing increase over the intermarriage rate in past generations (Clamar, 1991). Intermarriage is particularly acceptable to divorced and widowed Jewish women as they consider marrying again. About half of these women say that intermarriage is definitely an option for them (Monson, 1987a).

Friendship networks may be implicated in the choice of marriage partners. Single women in large Jewish friendship circles view Jewish men more positively than women with close non-Jewish friends (Monson, 1987a). Thus they may be more inclined to consider a relationship with a Jewish man and less inclined to look outside the group for a partner.

Interrmarriage touches many dimensions of a Jewish woman’s connection to the Jewish community. For example, Jewish women married to non-Jewish men are significantly less likely to belong to a synagogue or to volunteer for Jewish causes than are women who marry Jewish men. They are more likely than other Jewish women to put their time, money, and energy into non-Jewish causes (Fishman, 1991). Intermarried women can face difficulties in the organized Jewish community—they may not feel welcomed by
congregations and other groups, and they may have trouble finding a niche that suits them and their family.

It is not possible to determine whether communal involvement creates Jewish friendships and Jewish marriage or vice versa. It is quite likely that each influences the other. Regardless, the connection between Jewish social ties and Jewish communal behaviors appears consistently in the research—as one intensifies so does the other; as one weakens, the other does too.

WHAT IS THE JEWISH WOMAN’S ATTACHMENT TO JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

Community Support for Jewish Women

Many women (55%) experience the Jewish community as either neutral or unsupportive in its attitude toward women combining marriage, childbearing and careers (Monson, 1987b). This perception is not likely to draw working Jewish women closer to the community.

Jewish communal institutions and congregations are designed around marriage and traditional family life. It is often difficult for single, divorced and widowed women to find a comfortable niche in these organizations and to have their lifestyles accepted and validated. Unmarried women are the most negative in their evaluations of the organized Jewish community (Monson, 1987b). They complain that the community wants their talent but does not make them feel comfortable as singles or help them find mates.

The Jewish community may not be supportive of working women, single women, or women in “nontraditional” households. It also is not always supportive of its own female professionals—working within Jewish communal agencies. The Jewish community is not immune to the institutional discrimination noted in the general literature on women in the workplace. This discrimination may not be readily acknowledged. When participants in studies are shown information about an individual’s outcomes (e.g., a person denied a promotion at work), they fail to see discrimination. Only when aggregate data are presented do patterns of discrimination emerge and are people able to recognize the existence of institutional sexism (Crosby, et al., 1989). In the same way, research shows that most Jewish professionals do not believe there are obstacles that keep women from attaining the highest level positions in their organizations (Isserman & Hostein, 1994). Regardless of the perception, aggregated data paint a consistent picture of institutional discrimination in which women’s work is devalued and the “glass ceiling” is impenetrable.

At the entry level in Jewish communal organizations, there are no gender differences with regard to salary, assignment, responsibility and power. Once women move toward mid-management, discrepancies and inequities become more apparent. An estimated 60% of the 12,000 to 15,000 Jewish communal professionals in the United States are women (Isserman & Hostein, 1994). However, the majority work down in the ranks. For example, 61% of federation staff are women; however, only 18% of executive directors are women, and none of these is in a large city (with 45,000 Jews or more) (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993). Likewise, 66% of JCC professionals (not including nursery school directors and teachers) are women, yet only 16%
of Center executive directors are women (Pine & Kagen, 1991). Of the New York UJA/Federation agencies, only 20% are headed by a female executive. Of all the national Jewish organizations (excluding all-women's organizations such as Hadassah), only one has a woman at the helm (Isserman & Hostein, 1994).

Lower positions necessarily mean lower salaries. In Philadelphia, for example, the fourth largest Jewish community in the country, women are more often found in the second and third tier of the city's organizations and agencies, and they are commensurately clustered at the lower ends of the salary range: 11% of the female employees earn more than $55,000; 76% of the male employees earn more than that (Isserman & Hostein, 1994). Even when men and women are matched by job category, discrepancies can be noted. Male executive directors in JCCs average $84,346 in annual salary; female executive directors average $68,032. Male Jewish education specialists in the Center movement average $44,241 while their female counterparts average $26,079 (Pine & Kagen, 1991).

There undoubtedly are a number of explanations for these findings: the enduring power of the “old boys’ network,” stereotypes about women held by predominantly older, male lay leaders who do the hiring, or low turnover at the top creating few openings for women (Isserman & Hostein, 1994). Full understanding of the gender gap will require careful, objective study of these and other institutional factors that create and sustain gender differences in the Jewish community.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Research also has documented women's involvement as lay leaders in the community. Findings show that volunteerism in the Jewish community is not threatened by Jewish women's educational achievement, career aspirations, or professional success. Rather, it is weak Jewish life in all other domains—social, cultural and religious—that jeopardizes community participation (Fishman, 1991). Women who volunteer for Jewish organizations are most likely to be married to a Jewish man, to have predominantly Jewish friendship circles, and to be affiliated with a congregation. They are also most likely to be younger than 44 and well-educated.

Here is what the research shows about Jewish women's community involvement:

- **Jewish women are doers.** They are somewhat more likely than Jewish men to volunteer time to both Jewish and nonsectarian organizations, and compared with non-Jewish women they are much more likely to belong to business, professional, ethnic/national, civic and public affairs organizations (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985; Cohen & Rosen, 1992).

- **Non-Jewish organizations have a far greater pull on the volunteer energy of Jewish women than do Jewish organizations.** While 45% of young Jewish women who work full time volunteer for non-Jewish causes, less than half that number (18%) give their time to Jewish causes (Fishman, 1991). The reason is simple;
Women contribute where their interests lie (Baltimore Women’s Division, 1992; 1993). Those who feel committed to Judaism and Jewish causes put their time and energy into Jewish organizations; others are attracted elsewhere.

- There are structural blockages to involvement in Jewish organizations. About one in three Jewish women say they are less involved in Jewish organizations than they would like to be (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). This finding suggests that the personal desire or motivation to participate is there, so it must be contextual or institutional obstacles that are preventing full expression of the desire. One possibility is that Jewish organizations’ outreach efforts are insufficient—many women simply are not invited to join in. Almost a third of the women interviewed for the Baltimore Women’s Division study said they became actively involved because someone asked them to. Other research corroborates the notion that people often do not participate or contribute merely because they are not asked (Berger, 1991; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1990).

- Women are increasingly able to move through the hierarchy in Jewish organizations. In the last two decades, women have gained notably in their participation in federations and in the level of leadership they attain. Twenty years ago, only 17% of the officers and board members of federations were women; today, 32% of federation leaders are women (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993).

- Some old notions of the appropriate roles for women in Jewish organizations remain. Women on federation boards, for example, are much more likely to be the secretary than the treasurer. Women’s Division remains an important route into power for female leaders. More than 4 in 10 (42%) of Women Division chairs have gone on to become officers in their federations; a few (10%) have become presidents (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993).

- Jewish men and women have similar involvement profiles. They are equally likely to belong to Jewish organizations, attend meetings and functions, pay dues, hold office and give money or gifts. They generally agree that the most important goals for these organizations are transmitting Jewish traditions and values and helping other Jews (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). The fundamental views and behaviors that support the organized Jewish community are not differentiated by gender.

- Women are motivated to become involved with Jewish organizations for somewhat different reasons than men. When men join Jewish organizations, they are more likely than women to consider the organization’s potential to enhance their professional networks (20% men vs. 10% women). Women are more likely to think about helping others or a cause they believe in (76% women vs.
69% men) (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). Although neither entirely characterizes one group or the other, men are more likely to have self-serving motivations and women to have other-serving motivations.

• Most women enjoy being involved in co-ed groups. Many of these same women, however, also enjoy being involved in women’s-only groups. It generally is not the case that women prefer one type of organization over the other. Research further shows that women do not disdain women’s-only groups but feel they are as serious, purposeful and efficacious as men’s-only or co-ed groups. The majority of women (57%) see the need for a separate Women’s Division in federation. They feel it gives a woman a way to be involved in federation and to receive recognition in her own right. Only 19% feel that Women’s Division is unnecessary (Baltimore Women’s Division, 1992).

• Jewish women believe Jewish organizations should be inclusive. Asked to rate guidelines considered most important for a Jewish organization other than a synagogue or temple, the majority said the organization should include men and women, Jews and non-Jews. Most said the organization should offer cultural experiences that appeal to non-Jews as well as Jews. Few felt it was important for the organization to focus on Jewish issues or to include Jewish education at functions (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). In the long-standing tension between universalism and particularism, Jewish women in the 1990s appear inclined toward the former with an emphasis on inclusion, liberalism and assimilation.

PHILANTHROPY

Women also contribute to the community through charitable donations. Giving time and money appear to complement rather than substitute for one another. Those who participate as volunteers give more money than those who do not volunteer (Monson, 1987a; 1991). Contributions to Jewish causes are associated with Jewish identity and practices. Denominational affiliation, synagogue membership and Jewish friendship circles relate significantly to giving patterns to federations and other Jewish organizations. Traditional Jewish women contribute more often to Jewish causes than do women in the liberal denominations or those who characterize themselves as “just Jewish.” Women who are synagogue members are significantly more likely to contribute than are nonmembers. And those who report that all of their close friends are Jewish are more likely to contribute to Jewish causes than those who report predominantly non-Jewish friendship circles. Other results show that women who believe their Jewishness has played a positive role in their career advancement are more likely to give to their local Jewish federation than those who see no effect or a negative one (Monson, 1991).

Many women choose to make their Jewish contributions specifically through women’s channels. Women’s Divisions, particularly in smaller communities, contribute significantly to
federations. In small and intermediate cities, with Jewish populations of less than 15,000, Women's Division accounts for about 20% of the total campaign. In parts of South Florida where elderly retired women comprise a large part of the Jewish population, the Women's Division raises more than 30% of the local total (Kosmin, 1989).

Jewish women also support women's causes in the general community, but the secular women are most likely to do so. Nearly 47% of Orthodox Jewish women make financial contributions to women's causes, compared with 80% of the secular Jewish women who make contributions (Monson, 1991).

RELIGION

Jewish identity is a mixture of religious and ethnic or cultural identity. It has been suggested that American Jews have moved from being a religious group, a community of belief governed by an all-encompassing system of laws and practices, to a community of shared identity in which feelings of ethnic belonging are dominant (Medding, 1987). Jewish women reflect this move; only 28% of Jewish women—versus 56% of non-Jewish women—say that religion is very important in their lives. Jewish women also attend religious services less regularly than do non-Jewish women. Only 10% of Jewish women say they attend regularly compared with 44% of their non-Jewish counterparts (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985).

Some writers maintain that Jewish identity has clinical implications (Beck, 1990; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1990; Saper, 1991; R. Siegel, 1986). Jewish observance may or may not promote physical, psychological, or social well-being but there are indications that Jewish identity may produce conflict, avoidance and/or humiliation. The issues are equally complex and difficult for those who eschew their religious tradition (the assimilationists), those who had left but now seek to reclaim their Jewishness, and those who are openly Jewish and confronted by negative images and hurtful stereotypes of Jewish women.

Jewish Education

While Jewish identity may be shifting, there has been a significant increase in the Jewish education of women. Young American Jewish women today are far more likely than their grandmothers were to receive some formal Jewish education. In Metro West, New Jersey, for example, 56% of women over age 65 have received some formal Jewish education, compared with 80% of high school-aged girls (Fishman, 1987). Not surprisingly, there are substantial differences among women with traditional Jewish, liberal Jewish, and secular backgrounds. Orthodox women are the most likely to have had substantial Jewish education; secular Jews the most likely to have had none. Despite these differences, it should be noted that 30% of young Orthodox women (ages 25-44) have had no Jewish education and an equal percentage of young secular women have had a substantial amount (Fishman & Goldstein, 1993).

Religious Observance

Jewish women are selective in their practice of Jewish traditions and rituals. Research shows that most women light Hannukah candles and fast on Yom Kippur; few celebrate Purim and even fewer regularly light Shabbat candles (Geffen, 1991). It is interesting that Hannukah and Yom Kippur are the two ritual observances that capture women's
attention as these represent very different aspects of Judaism: Hannukah is a historical commemoration, Yom Kippur a holy day. Hannukah is a time of joy; Yom Kippur a time of reflection, awe and atonement. Hannukah, some would say, has been re-created for modern youth as the “Jewish Christmas”; Yom Kippur remains a day of serious Jewish intent. It may be that each holiday is maintained precisely for the qualities listed here.

The observance of home ritual is more the province of married than single women. For example, 79% of married women usually or always light Hannukah candles compared with 61% of single women. Sometimes ritual is in the service of creating a Jewish home; other times it is not. Thus, 30% of married Jewish women frequently have a Christmas tree in their household compared with 16% of single Jewish women (Geffen, 1991).

Home ritual is also maintained more consistently by working women. Employed Jewish women who are well-educated, working in high-status occupations, and juggling career and family are those who most often incorporate Jewish rituals and synagogue affiliation into their lives (Geffen, 1991). Some Jewish women (23%) find that religious observance enriches their lives and thus relieves some career stress; some (37%) find that Jewish communal involvement provides networking valuable for their careers (Monson, 1987a). For many Jewish women there is a connection between their Jewish identity and their business or professional lives. This connection is often advantageous and satisfying.

Women and Traditional Judaism
Modern Orthodox women are much more likely than traditional Orthodox women (73% vs. 9%) to voice feelings of conflict related to the sex roles articulated in Jewish law rather than those of secular society. Modern Orthodox women also are less likely to be fully satisfied with their religious community than are traditional Orthodox women (10% vs. 50%) (Schwartz, 1991). There thus appear to be trade-offs for traditional women who decide to move toward more liberal practices of Judaism—what they gain as women they may lose as members of a religious community.

The aspects of life in traditional Jewish communities that provide women with strength has been well-researched. Results suggest that separate but equal roles for men and women, control of sexuality, help in finding marriage partners, and guidelines for nuclear family life offer women clarity and security in their lives (Fishman, 1989; Umansky, 1992). The research, however, is equivocal on the suggestion that Orthodoxy and religiosity are associated with higher incidence of depressive symptoms among women. One study finds a positive correlation between traditional Judaism and women's depression, another finds the opposite (Lowenthal & Goldblatt, 1993; Schwartz, 1991).

Traditional practices may be linked to psychological and social benefits for women, but there is little evidence that they affect physical health. Research on this topic has focused on the practices of mikvah (the ritual bath) and niddah (abstinence from sexual intercourse during...
menstruation). Findings indicate that conceptions of, attitudes toward, and experiences of menstruation are no different for women who observe these practices than for those who do not. Mikvah does not affect the physical event of menstruation (frequency or type of symptoms surrounding the menstrual period or the degree to which these are experienced). Indeed, the vast majority of women who observe the ritual practice of mikvah do so for reasons of Jewish law and tradition; 92% say they do it because it is commanded by God; about 70% say they do it because it links them with tradition and offers a spiritual experience (S. Siegel, 1986).

Shalom Bayit and Women's Safety
The Jewish concept of shalom bayit (peace in the home) is intended to protect women and family life. This concept, however, inadvertently works against Jewish women when the myth develops that peace in the home is what they have rather than what they must strive for. Data suggest that domestic violence is as prevalent in Jewish homes as it is in other homes, and that, if anything, it is underreported in the Jewish community (Jacobs & Dimarsky, 1991-92; Silverstein, 1994).

Men embrace the myth created by shalom bayit more often than do women. About 40% of Jewish men but only 19% of Jewish women say that domestic abuse is not at all a serious problem within the Jewish community (NCJW, 1988). Abuse thus becomes a “women’s issue” for it is women who are most likely to see or acknowledge its existence, and it is women who are most likely to be victimized.

Religious Leadership
The role of women in religious leadership has changed dramatically in recent years. Since the first woman rabbi was ordained in 1972, more than 300 women have been ordained. In 1983, the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary decided to admit women into the rabbinical school as candidates for ordination. Now half of the doctoral candidates in Talmud, rabbinics and midrash are women (Musleah, 1994). Women who were not even considered members of the congregation in many Conservative synagogues during the 1940s and 1950s are now leaders in local synagogues and in regional and national synagogue organizations (Monson, 1992). Close to 30% of UAHC (Reform) congregational presidents are women, nearly double the percentage in 1978 (Kaye, 1992).

Women are still underrepresented in the national denominational bodies. The low numbers of women in the Reform movement, where we would most expect to see women, indicates there is still a long road to travel to arrive at equality of the sexes. Of the more than 50 full-time tenured HUC-JIR staff members at the three campuses in the United States, only five are women. Of the 30 standing committees of CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis, the association of Reform rabbis) only three are chaired by women. Of the 14 regional directors of the UAHC, only one is a woman (Kaye, 1992).

Women Who Are Rabbis
Women rabbis have faced discrimination in their education at the seminary, in applying for jobs, in their salaries, and on the job:
• 43% of women rabbis feel that being a woman put them at a disadvantage during rabbinical school.

• 48% of women rabbis say they were asked inappropriate questions about being a woman during job interviews.

• Half of women rabbis believe they have not been offered a job because they are female. 48% say they are paid less than male rabbis with similar positions (Commission for Women’s Equality of the American Jewish Congress, 1993).

• Only 5% of women rabbis feel that women have equality within the rabbinical organizations.

• Slightly over half of Reform women rabbis have experienced some harassment (Musleah, 1994).

Nonetheless, as women gain position, voice and power in the religious institutions, change has followed. A majority of women rabbis (66%) say their congregation or institution gives them the same respect it gives male rabbis. Women rabbis have inspired changes in liturgy, added a new perspective to Jewish scholarship, and brought a more egalitarian and inclusive quality to Jewish life. Most women rabbis (71%), for example, hold events about feminism or women and Judaism at their jobs even though many get criticized for doing so (Commission for Women’s Equality of the American Jewish Congress, 1993; Schneider, 1992).

Women rabbis sometimes find that being female is an advantage when doing pastoral counseling or performing life cycle ceremonies. Women who are rabbis bring unique qualities to these tasks and congregants often seek them out precisely because they are female.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The demographic characteristics of American Jewish women described in this chapter offer insight into their attachment to Judaism and the Jewish community. Yet, the research has limitations; though it answers some questions, it raises many more. This literature review makes clear the need for further research, based on a more realistic view of American Jewish women.

Research on American Jewish women can be very valuable. It informs us about the quality of women’s lives, their aspirations, interests and concerns. Such information reveals patterns and trends in American Jewish women’s characteristics, behaviors and attitudes. The research enriches our understanding; it is a mirror into which we gaze to see ourselves more clearly.

Research on American Jewish women also can have useful applications. It can be an evaluation device, assessing, for example, the Jewish community’s success in reaching and serving diverse women. It can be a needs assessment tool, indicating where there are unmet needs and where there is interest in specific programs and services. And it can serve as an early warning device, pointing to issues on the community’s horizon.

Research on American Jewish women must be both quantitative and qualitative. Many questions concerning demographic characteristics—age, education, employment, income, fertility rates,
neighborhood, residential mobility, patterns of volunteerism, philanthropy and congregational affiliation; frequency of personal Jewish practices; and political, social and religious attitudes—are best answered through the analysis of survey statistics.

Other questions require the in-depth, richly textured data produced by qualitative research (e.g., personal interviews and focus groups). Such research can reveal Jewish women’s feelings and motivations. For example, although statistical data on women’s personal and work lives are useful, mere numbers are superficial and lack human sensibility. Research should delve beneath the surface: Why do Jewish women pursue educational achievement? What leads them to their occupational choices? How do the women who experience work/family overload feel about this situation? Pursuing such questions will move the research enterprise from description to explanation.

Exploration of Differences

Current research shows that American Jewish women are best characterized by their diversity. They differ in terms of their Jewish backgrounds and experiences, their lifestyles, family compositions and occupations. They live in different parts of the country. They are young and old; rich and poor; single, divorced, married and widowed. They are homosexual and heterosexual. They are religiously observant, liberal and secular. And on and on. When we focus on the various groups that comprise the population of American Jewish women, the possibilities for research expand exponentially. Studies need to be refined in this way, without losing sight of the essential bonds among all Jewish women.

The demographic data remind us that there is no “average” or “typical” American Jewish woman. Each time we notice a trend, we are compelled to inquire about those who are not in the bulge of the distribution curve. For example, 90% of Jewish women under age 45 have graduated high school and completed at least some college. Although the overall trend shows a high level of educational achievement, we need to remember the 10% of young Jewish women who are less well educated and thus potentially face limitations in their personal and work lives.

The data on personal and family life disabuse us of stereotypes of Jewish women and their lives. For example, over the last two decades, the percentage of Jewish women who are married has declined from 72% to 64% while the percentage of those who are divorced, widowed, and/or single (never married) has increased. Research shows that Jewish women generally have more liberal views of divorce than their non-Jewish counterparts. Furthermore, a notable proportion of unmarried Jewish women feel that marriage is unnecessary or unimportant (45% of the never married and 60% of the divorced and widowed). Such research draws our attention to the fact that women increasingly are living in households that do not fit the traditional Jewish norm of first-time married Jewish husband and Jewish wife with two children.
It is thus important to develop a demographic profile of Jewish women today—the distribution by age, education, marital status, family composition and social class—because these characteristics affect most aspects of a woman's life. Significant differences often emerge when research data are analyzed according to demographic variables. For instance, women 45 and older have been shown to have life experiences and attitudes quite distinct from those of younger women. Research results regarding women's community participation, philanthropy, Jewish education or ritual observance should always be analyzed by demographic variables to uncover the differences among diverse groups of American Jewish women.

Results should also be analyzed by geographic region. Jews from urban centers have slowly but steadily been forming Jewish "outposts" in small cities, suburbs, and exurban areas across the country. Research must take into account the experiences of Jewish women living outside New York City, Baltimore and other major centers of Jewish life. Our studies need to ask: How do the experiences of Jewish women in small towns compare with those of women in urban areas that have large Jewish populations? Are the values and interests of Jewish women in the Northeast shared by Jewish women in the South, Midwest, Northwest and West?

**Use of Comparison Groups**

Research on American Jewish women also must be considered in light of two comparison groups, Jewish men and groups of non-Jewish women. Such examinations will reveal what is unique in the experience, perceptions, values and needs of American Jewish women and what is shared with other Jews and with other women. For example, focus groups can be designed for Jewish men and women to discuss questions concerning the complexities of everyday life, Jewish communal involvement, and Jewish experiences. Findings would indicate which issues are gender-related and which are not. Similarly, research that compares Jewish women with other women will clarify which views and experiences are related to being female and Jewish in America, and which are not.

Research on American Jewish women will never be complete. Continuous social and cultural changes mean that contextual factors are constantly shifting. The experiences of one generation can differ markedly from those of the next. Since the onset of the women's movement, for example, the quality of women's lives and the expression of their interests and concerns have been changing. Now there are Jewish feminist literature and publications, women's rituals, prayer groups and study sessions. More Jewish women are entering the work force than ever before, and notable changes are occurring in the Jewish family, such as increases in divorce, blended families and intermarried families. Social discrimination based on antisemitism is on the decline and the movement for peace in Israel is on the ascendency. Across religions and denominations in the United States, women are calling for a greater voice in their religious institutions and congregations. Research from 10 years ago may no longer accurately describe...
today's realities. Even from one year to the next, shifts in the economy, politics, technology, law, medical research, and so on can mean substantial shifts in the lives, views and needs of American Jewish women.

The research on American Jewish women must be continually updated and upgraded. There is no end to what we can learn, and no end to our need to know.

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CHAPTER 3

IN MANY VOICES:
DIVERSITY AND COMMONALITY AMONG AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN

SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN

INTRODUCTION

To understand the personal values and communal goals of today’s American Jewish women, we undertook a unique qualitative study of Jewish women across the United States who differed in terms of their marital status and religious background and identification. During the summer of 1994, we met with groups of women in the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West; with unmarried women, women in dual-career families, and full-time mothers; with Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular women; and with women who were born Jewish and those who had converted to Judaism.

The findings from this study show that American Jewish women are not a monolithic population. Rather, the configuration of their religious orientation, family status and lifestyles comprise distinct groups. Each particular group constructs its own common understanding of significant issues and priorities. Within each group, women generally share ideas about how people should behave, what their feelings and motives are likely to be, and how family and personal relationships ought to be pursued. They also often share common feelings and notions about Judaism, Jewish tradition, the Jewish people, and Jewish organizations. These group differences transcend individual preferences and priorities. They are the basis on which we can understand the diversity and similarities that define American Jewish women. And they point to the directions Jewish organizations need to take to turn themselves into responsive agencies attractive to Jewish women of all backgrounds and lifestyles.

This chapter briefly reviews previous research, then presents an analysis of the commonalities and differences in attitudes and behaviors of Jewish women within specific groups in the American Jewish community. The analysis is divided into seven sections, each presenting findings from a different group of American Jewish women:

• Single career women
• Secular or unaffiliated Jewish women
• Jews by choice
• Dual-career families and stay-at-home mothers
• Conservative women
• Reform women
• Orthodox women
• Foreign-born American Jewish women

The final section discusses the implications of this research for Jewish organizations.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

For many years, sociological studies rarely focused on American Jewish women. General studies of
the sociology of American Jews and ethnographies of particular groups of Jews either ignored gender issues (and sometimes virtually ignored women), or gave them only the most fleeting attention.

Recently, several significant studies of particular populations of Jewish women have been published. Steven M. Cohen (1980) looked at the conflicts Jewish women experience as a result of feminism. Although Riv-Ellen Prell's study of the Havurah movement does not focus on women per se, it includes a great deal of information about gender (Prell, 1989). Rela Geffen pioneered discussions of the intersection between work and personal factors in American Jewish women's lives (Geffen Monson, 1984; 1987). Lynn Davidman's and Renee Kaufman's ground-breaking studies on newly Orthodox Jewish women explored the lives of a fascinating population (Davidman, 1991; Kaufman, 1991). Although their numbers are small (far less than 1% of the American Jewish population), newly Orthodox women represent an important and perhaps unexpected trend toward increased traditionalism in American Jewish life. My own study on the impact of feminism on the Jewish community used both statistical and interview data to explore a range of demographic, religious and communal trends in the lives of a broad spectrum of American Jewish women (Fishman, 1993).

The present study addresses the absence of systematic, in-depth data on American Jewish women's identities, life experiences and communal attachments. The information presented in this chapter details the existence of distinct groups of Jewish women, explores the personal and Jewish identities of women in these groups, examines their involvement in Jewish life and Jewish institutions, and suggests the opportunities and challenges each group presents to Jewish organizations.

**METHOD**

The research entailed 14 focus groups conducted across the United States during the summer of 1994. (See Figure 1 for a listing of groups.) The focus group method was chosen because of its ability to promote self-disclosure. The method brings similar participants together in small groupings where they are encouraged to explore and reveal their attitudes and perceptions.

The focus groups were designed to explore similarities and differences among women under 45 in different life cycle situations (unmarried urban professionals, young mothers, dual-career mothers, divorcees and single mothers) and among women with varying religious affiliations or lack thereof (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Jews by choice, unaffiliated or secular). Recruitment for the groups was carried out by local organizers who used networking techniques to identify, select and recruit appropriate participants for each group. A total of 152 American Jewish women in their late 20s, 30s, and early 40s took part in the study. (See Figure 2 for background information on participants.)

Focus groups were conducted by faculty from Brandeis University. Each group met for approximately two hours. Audio tapes were made of each session and subsequently transcribed in
full for the purposes of analysis. The focus group script covered the following topics:

- Personal and Jewish identity
- Work and family time
- Discretionary ("free") time
- Involvement in women's organizations
- Involvement in Jewish organizations
- Israel
- Philanthropy
- The "ideal" organization

Research Findings

Single Career Women

Background

Single (never married and divorced) urban professionals have become an increasingly significant proportion of the contemporary population of American Jewish women. In 1990, well over one-third of American Jewish women ages 25 to 34, and one-quarter of women ages 35 to 44, were single working women.¹

This large proportion of young single Jewish women employed outside the home marks a dramatic break from the recent past. Just 40 years ago, in the mid-1950s, one-half of American Jewish women were married by age 22 and three-quarters were married by age 25. Like other American women in the post-World War II years, Jewish women tended to start their families shortly after marriage and have several (2.8) children. For decades, the Jewish divorce rate was relatively low, so that patterns of marriage and family tended to be the patterns of a lifetime. More than other ethnic and religious groups, American Jewish women tended to drop out of the labor market as soon as they began their families. They also tended to affiliate with Jewish organizations and synagogues subsequent to their marrying or having children. Along with affiliation often came volunteerism as a way of life. Volunteer activities for Jewish causes were the profession of many married American Jewish women. Thus, as women passed from their parental homes and parental affiliations into college and then, for the most part, directly into marriage and new Jewish affiliations, little time was spent in a single—and Jewishly unaffiliated—state.

This pattern no longer predominates. The unmarried status of large proportions of today's Jewish women is accompanied by a paucity of formal Jewish affiliations. Sociologists consistently find that the single years are a time of minimal or no formal Jewish affiliation for most American Jews. Moreover, large numbers of American Jewish women today live and work far from their families of origin, and far from the Jewish affiliations that may have been part of their parental homes. Like most American Jews, singles are highly mobile. Statistics from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) show that many single Jewish women have received high levels of secular education and hold high-status professional jobs. As they follow employment opportunities, single Jewish women gravitate away from their home communities to metropolitan areas, which offer career advancement.

Focus group participants included unmarried urban professionals in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, all magnet cities for such women. Their discussions help us understand their perceptions of their relationship to Jewish tradition, organizations and people.

Findings
When asked about their personal identity—the characteristics which most significantly define them as individuals—single career women in our sample seldom mentioned their Jewishness. In follow-up comments, many said that they are conscious of living and working in a non-Jewish world. They noted that failure to mention their Jewish identity is part of a deliberate pattern: they are wary of mentioning their religion/ethnicity unless they are certain that the person they are speaking with does not have hostile feelings about Jews. As one woman explained: “I identify as Jewish. I don’t introduce myself that way because I feel threatened. I have to feel safe in order to say it.”

Single Jewish career women often stated that while their Jewishness is not at the forefront of their personal statements, it is at the core of their beings. At the same time, many voiced ambivalent feelings about their Jewish identity. On the one hand, almost to a woman they said they are proud of being Jewish. They also said that they are drawn to other Jewish women like themselves, and feel more “at home” and comfortable with such women than with others. On the other hand, many single Jewish women said they find some Jews embarrassing.

Some also said that they find the organized Jewish community boring or alienating.

Indeed, ambivalence toward Jews and Jewishness is a fairly common mindset among single career women. For example, an entrepreneur in Washington, D.C., said that Jewish women are “superior” to other women, immensely appealing, characterized by “brilliance and capability and confidence”; she also said that Jewish women are garishly materialistic and unappealing:

“It is weird to see a dumb Jewish woman. I’m real aware of that. …I stopped going even to High Holidays when I was in the seventh grade because it had become apparent to me that the mink coat was more important than the service—who had the biggest diamond, who had the most stuff.”

Corroborating this view, another woman said that she was “turned off” recently by the “fashion show” at Rosh Hashana services, and “people trying to see how fancy they could be.” She told a “Jewish joke”: “What did our mink say to the other on the way to the slaughterhouse? ‘See you in shul.’ ”

The ambivalence is often accompanied by a high level of self-awareness. The entrepreneur who both admires and disdains other Jewish women described her own divided attitudes:

“I took a money seminar last year. I drive a BMW. I have four mink coats, a safe deposit box full of jewelry. And most of the time I
don’t have a dime in my pocket. I don’t want anyone to think I’m a ‘JAP.’ Who am I kidding?”

One Manhattan businesswoman enjoys exaggerating the stereotype of Jewish womanhood. She said she purposely voices her opinions in a strong way and does not mind burying someone with opposing opinions in a barrage of words. She likes being the “loud Jewish woman with the mouth” and feels that she uses this caricature to her own advantage in the business world. She compared herself admiringly to Roseanne Barr.

For many of the single Jewish women, feelings of ambivalence or even outright alienation from or hostility toward the organized Jewish community began early in life. Their Jewish educational experiences were tedious and uninspiring. For example, one woman said that she does not “remember happy things about Judaism. It was boring and ‘have to.’” Another said that the Conservative services she attended as a child were all “in Hebrew, and I learned a lot of words in Hebrew, but I never understood what they meant. Just sort of reading these Hebrew words and not knowing what they meant.”

Some women stated openly that their alienation from the Jewish community derived from the ways in which their early Jewish experiences set them apart from the Christian society around them. As one woman recalled:

“My mother used to teach the history of the Jewish people in the synagogue when I was growing up. My parents did fundraising for that synagogue. I went to ‘Saturday school’—and we hated it. We wanted to be like our Christian friends. We didn’t want to be in school on Saturday. It was an embarrassment, so we quit. We never went back.”

For other single Jewish women, feelings of alienation came later as a result of experiences that were part of their single lifestyle. Several mentioned anger at perceived communal hostility to interfaith or interracial romances. As one woman explained: “For the last 12 years I have been in a relationship that was interracial, and the hostilities that I got from the Jewish community made me completely disassociate myself. So I have not been involved in any temple or Jewish activity.”

Single Jewish women reported that they are preoccupied with the many aspects of their lives that overtly have little or nothing to do with Jews or Jewishness. They are often employed in time-consuming, high-stress positions that siphon off most of their intellectual and psychic energy. As a result of the long hours and high demands of their jobs, many engage in an ongoing struggle to make time for personal life. They wake early and go to sleep late to make time for regular exercise, hobbies and friends. Reacting to what they experience as societal or cultural pressure to exercise or socialize with friends, when they cannot find the time to do so, they often feel overwhelmed, depressed or guilty.

Most of the single women who participated in the focus groups spend little time on organized Jewish activities. Yet the lack of Jewish activities is not reported as a significant source of guilt or regret; there are too many other activities that come first. At the same time, these women also reported retaining personal and familial Jewish behaviors such as participating in a Passover seder. The
persistence of these personal ties to Jewishness is a common connection for diverse single women. The diversity of backgrounds, goals and expectations among single women often translates into widely divergent responses to the same question about Jewish organizations.

For example, some women want desperately to be embraced by the Jewish organizations that they approach—and some want just as desperately to be left alone. Thus, several single Jewish women spoke bitterly about the unfriendly attitudes or behaviors of persons in Jewish institutions. One woman, for example, was “very disappointed” when she joined the Jewish Community Center. She no longer makes use of its facilities because the people were unfriendly and “horrible,” and she “didn’t feel very welcomed.”

Other women deliberately avoid personal entanglements with people in the Jewish community. This is true even of some women who have relatively high levels of personal Jewish behaviors. For example, one woman, who routinely attends services to say the Kaddish mourning prayer for her mother, says that she craves “anonymity,” and that her “biggest fear is being invited over to someone’s house for lunch, or something like that.”

Most single Jewish women—in the present study as well as in national surveys—are not affiliated with synagogues or other Jewish institutions or organizations. This is, of course, partially due to their hectic schedules and partially due to finances. There is, however, no doubt that emotional factors, feelings both internal (e.g., organized religion is irrelevant to their lives) and external (e.g., the Jewish communal world does not want them), are prime aspects of their alienation from communal involvement. Some women, who limit their Jewish connections to personal observance but avoid social or organizational ties, are quite deliberate about compartmentalizing their lives. One such woman said that she “hides from being Jewish,” and wants to keep Judaism “separate, because I don’t want it to be a whole way of life. I want it to be part of my life. I want to float in and float out when I want. ... I don’t want any attachments. I don’t want any obligations. I’m not ready to take them on.”

Childhood memories of a smothering or too-involved Jewish community are an important motivating factor for some of the women who avoid Jewish entanglements. The sensation of being smothered by Jews or Jewishness occurred to those who grew up in very large, densely Jewish cities—and also to those from small but tight-knit Jewish communities. For example, one woman reflected on small-town USA, where Jews often feel that they must identify and affiliate to survive. She noted that Jews are “excluded from country clubs,” and that Jews “may not have a choice because Christians exclude them and because the Jews very enthusiastically encourage them to participate.” For her, living in a big city gives her the opportunity to choose the level of identification—or anonymity—that suits her at any given time. She is reluctant to have this sense of privacy and individualism.
compromised. Single Jewish women, who diverged in their attitudes toward existing Jewish institutions, found it relatively easy to reach consensus on their ideal “fantasy” Jewish organization, the type of Jewish organization that they would find appealing and would want to join. Single women are concerned that by joining an organization they will open themselves to demands to take positions of responsibility, to chair events or committees. Most of them have neither the desire nor the time to do so. Therefore, one of their prime requirements from an organization is that it offer a variety of options to participants, from very active leadership roles to passive, anonymous roles—and that participants not be “hassled” to take more active roles than they wish. As one single woman explained, it is important for organizations “to have roles for people who like and want to put their energy there, but also roles for people who want to coast and let the others do the work” without making people feel guilty or inadequate if they choose more passive roles.

Single working women also agree that their ideal organization would not be designed around the conventional family and that it would not make singles feel like nonpersons because of their marital status. At the same time, many of them feel that they do not want their single status emphasized and they do not want to be defined simply as single women.

With regard to organization mission and activities, many said they would “want the organization to be diversified, educational, social, all-inclusive.” The most common interest is for social action projects, especially those that promote intergroup understanding and cooperation and provide assistance to members of the underclass. This preference for locally based social action activities benefiting disadvantaged members of society is a theme not only for singles but for every group of Jewish women in this study. Some would look for activities or organizations with a focus specifically on Jewish women, such as Jewish women’s spirituality studies. One, for example, said, “I want to know more about how to integrate women’s history. I don’t know where we got left out of the prayers. I would like to find out.” Others said that gender issues are not of particular interest to them, and they would prefer mixed-gender organizations.

Finally, several women spoke about the high cost of being Jewish. Some are offended by being asked to pay to pray. They said that they speak not only for themselves, but for “the people on the fringes who are thinking about making an inroad,” but who “are pushed away by someone with a tremendous amount of money.” Partially because of the perceived impact of big money on Jewish organization life and thinking, some single women said they shy away from conventional synagogues. They would rather attend services on a college campus or in a havurah (informal worship and study group). Some would prefer a Jewish experiential event such as a weekend retreat, provided that the sponsoring organization not attempt to enlist them as members.

To summarize, young, single Jewish women often feel ambivalent about Jews, Judaism, and the

Young, single Jewish women often feel ambivalent about Jews, Judaism and the Jewish community.
Jewish community. They are often absorbed by work and hobbies; many do not seek additional activities to fill their time. The women in this subgroup have diverging reactions to Jewish settings: the environment within one institution might alienate some single Jewish women and delight others. These differences make it difficult for Jewish organizations to respond to, attract, and involve young, single women.

Secular or Unaffiliated Jewish Women

Background
A fast-growing group of American Jews—and the subject of the greatest Jewish communal perplexity—are Jews who say they are Jewish, but not by religion. These are the secular or unaffiliated Jews, roughly one-fifth of the American Jewish population.

In the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, secular Jews displayed a profile that differed markedly from the profile of those who said they were Jewish by religion. One of the most striking differences is in geographical distribution. Nearly half of the Jews by religion live in the Northeast—compared to fewer than one-third of the secular Jews. However, 37% of the secular Jews live in the West—compared to only 20% of the Jews by religion. Secular Jews are, as expected, significantly less involved in Jewish life, less likely to join and attend synagogues, and less likely to volunteer for Jewish organizations.

However, the national data show that in other ways, secular Jews are remarkably similar to those who call themselves Jewish by religion. In terms of occupational choice, for example, there are few differences. For example, 39% of male Jews by religion are professionals and 40% of the secular men are; 35% of female Jews by religion are professionals and 40% of the secular women are. Thus, the popular stereotype of professionally accomplished Jews being primarily secular is not born out by the most recent population surveys. Secular American Jewish women are less connected to the Jewish community and Jewish tradition, and more likely to be located far from centers of Jewish population density, but they share many other characteristics with women who are Jewish by religion.

Given the disproportionate number of secular Jews living in the West, our research included a group of women living in or around Portland, Oregon, who define themselves as secular or unaffiliated Jews. This diverse group of women was located through advertisements in a local secular newspaper. The total research sample includes 23 women who define themselves as “just Jewish” or no religion. An analysis of their attitudes and behaviors reveals that the secular participants in our study are in most ways similar to the secular Jewish women in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

Findings
Many of the participants in the secular/unaffiliated focus group had deliberately moved out West into areas that are, both in perception and in reality, remote from organized Jewish life and dense Jewish populations. One woman noted, "In larger cities people are social animals. You grow up around each other, and you are expected..."
to interact. People came here to Oregon to be away from everyone. ...That's sort of my unaffiliation."

Many secular Jewish women are second- or third-generation secularists. For them, secularism is not a departure from family traditions—it is the family tradition. One woman voiced the experiences of many in the group when she reported that she had grown up in the Bronx and had moved to a rural area outside Portland, Oregon, almost 20 years ago. Her parents had raised her secular, seemingly in reaction to their Orthodox upbringing. They had rejected the Orthodoxy of their own parental households, to the extent that her parents did not celebrate any Jewish festivals but did celebrate Easter and Christmas. Thus, this woman felt very much in keeping with her family traditions when she stated: "My mother was an agnostic and I am an atheist. I've always felt Jewish, but not religious."

For the secular participants who had grown up in socialist Jewish environments, the family tradition is also a political one. Such women treasure the socialist, internationalist notion of the Jew as their own Jewish family tradition. One of the most radical women said that her political activities are the substance of her connections to her Jewish identity:

“For me, the way that I am connected to my Jewishness, I am a socialist and a feminist. The women's movement totally changed my life, still has and always will. I connected to the radical history and role that Jews have played in the United States and worldwide. ...Being Jewish is being international. I think a lot of Jewish women are internationalists. That's all part of my heritage. I belong to two organizations: Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party. To me, it is no mistake that the woman who founded the Freedom Socialist Party is a Jew. I guess that's where my pride in being Jewish comes from.”

Most secular respondents, however, are not products of intense socialism or Jewish internationalism, but are simply trying to adapt to the demands of a non-Jewish society, and sometimes a non-Jewish family as well. The mixed-marriage rate is high. Some women, despite describing themselves as secular, have sought a formal religious structure that matches their own value system. One woman with a Protestant husband described a typical progression from total lack of religious affiliation, to a Unitarian church when her children became school age, and finally into the Society for Humanistic Judaism. This participant likes the local Society for Humanistic Judaism, which has 35 members, specifically because it is “very secular.”

Many secular respondents attempt to blend Christian and Jewish observances. Typical was one woman who said she remembers very little of her Reform Sunday school training and finds herself compromising with her Christian husband. She said they “do Christmas” at her house, and that “we have a tree which drives me crazy.” She suppresses her own discomfort with the tree because she feels that it is her part of the compromise. “We have a tree because that is his thing. I know how I would feel if he said I couldn't do Passover.” Despite her compromises, this participant, like others, feels that her interfaith marriage actually makes her more mindful of her own Jewish identity: “What I discovered was that
being married to him I felt my Jewishness more. I kept explaining to him so that we could share.

...As long as you remember where you come from and what's important to you, you can still share.”

For many of the secular Jewish participants, the antisemitism of the outside world is the primary reason for continuing to identify as a Jew. As one woman put it, “As long as the world makes an issue about being Jewish, I am Jewish. It wouldn’t make any difference if I defined myself that way, the world would anyway. You’ve got to deal with it. I guess it is all the Holocaust stories that I grew up with. That really defined me in my own mind as Jewish.” Indeed, stories about the Holocaust and a consciousness of antisemitism were more frequently expressed by secular respondents than by participants in other groups. For some secular participants, antisemitism is the bottom line—even if Jews want to disappear, the world will not let them.

Several secular women have chosen to live in rural areas where they are the only Jews for many miles. One woman said that her isolation came as no surprise to her because she had inquired about a “Jewish population” from the Chamber of Commerce. The reply to her inquiry was, “Oh, yeah, Harold Solomon lives there.”

Nevertheless, she had moved into the nearly Jew-free rural setting—where she encountered attitudes toward Jews that ranged from ignorance to antisemitism. She recounted, for example, the following anecdote:

“I’m a volunteer fire-fighter in our district and had on my Jewish star. One of the fellows came up to me and said, ‘Isn’t that a six-pointed star?’ And I said, ‘Yeah.’ I was about to say, ‘Yes, it is a Jewish star,’ and he said, ‘Isn’t that a symbol of evil?’ There are many, many people in our fire department, about 30 fellows, and many of them had never met a Jew.”

Some of the women have enough knowledge of Jewish history to connect such antisemitic incidents to the history of antisemitism in the Diaspora. One woman talked about neighbors who believe that the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” is an authentic historical document, and who are utterly ignorant about the history of the persecution of the Jews. However, the response of these secular women to the antisemitism they encounter is not, as one might expect, to join or support Jewish community relations organizations that deal directly with antisemitism, such as the Anti-Defamation League. Rather, their response is to battle prejudice on other fronts, fighting for equal rights and fair treatment for other minority groups. One woman, who spoke at length about the antisemitism of her neighbors, had this observation: “One of the things I like about being Jewish is that you can connect to other groups because you are under common attack. I think our connection to the black community and to other communities is terribly important.” The secular women are thus likely to manifest an interest in issues that affect the broader community and to be motivated to act to help all people.
Indeed, the attitude of the secular women toward non-Jews appears to be a blend of protective coloration and defiance. For some of the women, the necessity to “blend in” is foremost; others often find that a defiant declaration of Jewish ethnicity is required. Some resent the automatic assumption of non-Jews that everyone is a Christian, and they confront such assumptions with statements about their Jewish identity. Meanwhile, others say that they seldom correct those who cheerily greet everyone with “Merry Christmas.”

The secular Jewish women in this study, like the secular Jews in the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, have minimal connections to Jewish organizations. Many of them pointedly express disinterest in organized Jewish life and/or formal Judaism. Some affiliated briefly when their children were between the ages of 10 and 13, but they did not affiliate before or after. One such woman said, “When our kids went to religious school, we explained to them the differences. If they wanted to give up the [Christmas] tree, we would do that. No, they wanted to do it all. We have Christian friends who come and share our Passover with us. We exchange gifts at Christmas with them.”

Secular or unaffiliated Jewish women are a difficult group to reach both logistically and programmatically. Many of them have explicitly chosen to live outside the bounds of the organized Jewish community. Their Jewish feelings and behaviors more often derive from external factors, such as perceived antisemitism, than from an attraction to the intrinsic value of Judaism. They thus represent a unique challenge to Jewish organizations.

Jews by Choice

Background

Jews by choice comprise a numerically small (about 4%) but communally significant proportion of the American Jewish population. Most of them formally converted to Judaism; some achieved their Jewish identities through less official paths. Although many Jews by choice converted to Judaism when they married a Jew, there has been a steady decline since the early 1970s in the percentage of non-Jews in interfaith marriages who choose to convert to Judaism. Jews by choice are more likely to be female than male, although this gender gap appears to be narrowing somewhat. In the 25 to 44 age group, there are 41 male Jews by choice for every 100 female Jews by choice; in the 45 to 65 age group, there are 32 male Jews by choice for every 100 female Jews by choice. Jews by choice are a more prominent proportion of the Jewish population in small towns and in areas outside the Northeast. The percentage of Jews by choice is higher than average in the South and West. Jews by choice are far more likely than born Jews to live in areas with general populations of less than 150,000, and twice as likely as born Jews to be found in areas with general populations of less than 40,000.

According to national statistics, the denominational preference of Jews by choice leans more heavily toward Reform Judaism than that of the

general core population. Thus, 8% of Jews by choice are Orthodox, 32% are Conservative, 51% are Reform or Reconstructionist, and 8% are “just Jewish” or some other designation. In terms of ritual observance, synagogue membership, and providing Jewish education for their children, Jews by choice tend to be rather similar to born Jews who are married to Jews. In terms of organizational activity and Jewish friendship circles, however, national statistics show that Jews by choice are less likely than born Jews who are married to Jews to join and volunteer time for Jewish organizations, and they are less likely to have primarily Jewish friendship circles.

Findings
The female Jews by choice who participated in the present study are at the high end of the spectrum of Jewish involvement compared to the national profile of Jews by choice. Most of them are active members of a Conservative synagogue (in New Jersey) led by an exceptionally charismatic young rabbi, highly successful in drawing congregants of all types into a more dynamic interaction with Judaism. On the one hand, their high levels of involvement are not “typical,” and the group might, therefore, be considered unrepresentative. On the other hand, their involvement is a vivid demonstration of the Jewish potential of women who convert into Judaism, given an environment that encourages Jewish education and enhances Jewish connections.

In our study, women who convert to Judaism display an overt concern with their own spiritual lives. Unlike the born Jews, who often focus primarily on ethnicity or communal issues as the key to their identification, the Jews by choice convey relatively little concern with issues of Jewish ethnicity. Each participant had her own spiritual “story,” and most participants were eager to share the details of how and why they had come into Jewish life. Several women feel that they had always had Jewish souls, but had to wait for the right time before discovering their real, Jewish selves.

The Jews by choice often describe a progressive attraction to Jewish thought systems and behaviors. One woman remembered, “As I read about Judaism, I was drawn to it on a number of levels. I was drawn to it by the tremendous history that it had, the sense of generation to generation.” These Jews by choice, who experience Judaism with fresh eyes and open hearts, read about and experiment with rituals that are actually observed by only a minority of American Jews. One remembers her strong positive response to the concept of the Sabbath:

“I was especially moved by reading about Shabbat, especially by Abraham Joshua Heschel. I was extremely drawn into that observance and fascinated by that. Not only was it very spiritually meaningful to me, but I also found it extremely physically healthy for me. I used to do so much all the time without stopping. About every six weeks I would collapse and be sick. I found that Shabbat helped me to pace myself.”
Ironically, the potential of Jewish rituals to separate the individual and the family from the mainstream of American life, historically not compelling to many born American Jews, is very appealing to some Jews by choice. In addition, some of them are very attracted to the cyclical sensibility in Jewish holidays and ceremonies. One woman said:

"I like the sense that Judaism has of marking time and that it functions on two levels, where it is like a circle of a year's holidays, but it is also a spiral upward. You sort of keep checking back each year, each Shabbat, each week, each holiday. How are you progressing? Are you on the track that you want to be on? It is a sense of thought. You are not just on this treadmill zipping around, which I am sometimes guilty of doing."

Participants who are married to Jews but have not formally converted into Judaism sometimes regard themselves as supportive fellow travelers. As one non-Jewish woman who grew up in Alaska put it, "After reading about the Holocaust, I became deeply committed to the project of raising my Jewish husband's children as Jews. It seemed—you'll excuse me—the only Christian thing to do."

The organizational profile of the Jews by choice is somewhat more modest than their ritual/spiritual activism. Many belong to the synagogue sisterhood, but they do not volunteer much time for it. Most who do volunteer work are interested in activities that benefit their children: Cub Scouts, Hebrew school, school library or other children's activities in their synagogue—all projects with which they feel personally connected. In this regard, they are very much like other working Jewish mothers, who have little time for volunteerism but who want to "pull their own weight" in enhancing the environments that affect their children.

Like other participants in this study, the Jews by choice are attracted to hands-on local projects that benefit disadvantaged individuals. One said she had recently helped a Russian family relocate and had found work for them. She said, "For me, it is more of a personal level than volunteering on an organizational level. I do whatever I can." Several had worked on telephone hot line projects for both Jewish and nonsectarian organizations, helping persons with emotional difficulties. One might speculate that the often introspective life journeys of these women has given them particular sensitivity to individuals immersed in difficult personal explorations.
Several participants spoke enthusiastically about social action programs implemented at their synagogue, such as a family support program, a “caring committee,” which responds to life crises and transitions, and a host family program for conversionary households. Some had worked at soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless. Like other women in this study, however, many mentioned that they feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of working and parenting. They are thus most likely to agree to help with “one-shot deals” — single-event requests for their time.

Jews by choice bring unique sensibilities to the Jewish community. They are often profoundly attracted to Judaism, religiously and organizationally. Because their attachments are religious rather than ethnic, the Jewish community is most likely to reach these women through religious institutions, activities, and events rather than through communal, ethnic or cultural channels.

Dual-Career Families and Stay-at-Home Mothers

Background
The vast majority of the participants in our study—in every focus group, in every city—were mothers who were employed for pay outside the home. Among the women who had decided to stay at home with their young children, the majority were either negotiating to go back to work in the near future or were planning to do so within two years.

This pattern is very much in keeping with figures from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, which show that in most cities fewer than one-third of Jewish mothers with children under six years old at home define themselves as full-time homemakers. Figures differ from city to city because employment opportunities and child care facilities differ, but the once-common pattern of American Jewish women ceasing to work outside the home when they start a family has given way to a new pattern in which most American Jewish women remain in the work force for most of their adult lives. Dual-career households are in fact the new normative American Jewish household.

Findings
Occupational/family formation profiles are remarkably similar for the women in our study who identify religiously as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, or secular. All of these women have hectic days and complicated time management schemes. Those who are married have jigsaw puzzle type arrangements with their spouses. Working mothers try hard to find quality time for all family members, wanting space for both children and husbands in their lives. The following outline by an Orthodox mother was typical of the responses of working mothers:

“I get up at 6—the baby wakes me up. I shower and get myself together and make the baby’s lunch. Around 6:30 my husband gets up and the other child gets up. I take care of the baby and he takes care of my other son. I feed him, make his lunch, make my own lunch, and get dressed. My husband takes our son to school so everyone is out of the kitchen by about 8:15. I take my son to the baby sitter...”
and go to work. I am a guidance counselor in a high school. I have 90 emotionally disturbed children on my case load. I see each one once a week for 40 minutes. ...I’ve heard it all, and a lot of it is very sad. Then I pick up my older son from school at 4:00 and bring him home and pick up my younger son right after that at 4:30. I play with them for about an hour and get supper at 5:30. Then they get baths and my husband comes home at 6:30 and everyone is happy. We run around and play for another hour. I put the one kid to bed at about 7:30 and the other one will stay up till 9:30. Then my husband and I get a chance to talk.”

A common thread among working mothers is the necessity for carving out times for specific activities and people. They are impatient and angry when others do not respect these time blocks, and come late to appointments or are otherwise unreliable. In general, the working mothers have a clear sense of being in control of their own time and their own lives. They struggle to accomplish this goal, and they indeed seem to be accomplishing it. Many convey a sense of vibrant self-actualization.

Perhaps surprisingly for women with so many demands on their time, working mothers frequently volunteer some time for Jewish organizations, but they choose their volunteer activities carefully. They demand clearly defined goals; they “can’t just come and chit chat.” One said that she “will only do things with a beginning, a middle, and an end...a specific task within a time frame.” They prefer activities that make use of their particular talents and are carefully orchestrated. The causes that attract them tend to be those that directly affect their children or disadvantaged persons within their community, Jewish causes, or feminist causes. More of them are more willing to donate money than to volunteer time.

Full-time mothers are aware that their decision to stay at home with their children is no longer the national norm. As one put it, “It seems like right now I tend to define myself in relation to others—a wife and a mother. That seems for the moment to be where my identity is.” Another said, “Identity is being the mother of a six-year-old and an eight-year-old.” For these women, staying at home with their children is a “personal choice” which should be available to any woman, although they are aware that women who do make this decision often feel isolated. As one woman said:

“I think we live in a very different world. I think it is hard to have an identity when you make the choice to stay at home. I really feel that there is much more support for the work that I have done outside the home. If I write a free-lance article, my phone doesn’t stop ringing—it was great, etc. No one ever tells me I do a good job in terms of the children. We are nurturers and it is a very important job, but there is very little support when you stay at home.”
Perhaps in response to the perceived lack of social support for their life decisions, coupled with economic pressures, many of the young mothers are already planning their re-entry into the job market. Many full-time mothers are taking classes for either personal or occupational enrichment, and/or they are devoting considerable amounts of time and energy to working for the Jewish community.

Conservative Women

Background
According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 35% of adult American Jews define themselves as Conservative. The national study further shows that a large number of Conservative Jews (40%) were raised in other denominations and were drawn into the Conservative movement from an Orthodox or Reform background. One-fourth of the participants in the present study are Conservative women. Most of these women are working mothers.

Findings
Jewishness is a significant part of the personal identities of the Conservative women in our study. They frequently see themselves as transmitters and interpreters of Judaism to their children, and it is to this role as cultural interpreters and transmitters that they feel the most passionate attachment. For some, Judaism did not become a significant aspect of their lives until their children were born. For example, one mother said, "After I had children, I had a different sense of responsibility about my Judaism. It was very important that they had a strong sense about being Jewish." Another mother stated, "I try to teach [my children] values and ethics. They know how important it is to us. They are picking up on that between tradition and teaching. They are getting it, and there is a sense of love that I see growing in them." Many Conservative women teach their children both formally and by example. As one notes,

"It really revolves around holidays and tradition. We are not a particularly observant family, but by the same token, everyone is observant in terms of holidays and traditions and things that everyone did when they were growing up...every time we get to another major holiday we explain what it is about and what is going on and why we do certain things. I think to my oldest at this point it is more story telling than anything else. I don't think he knows yet what religion is."

Another woman, who keeps a kosher home "so my grandmother can eat at my house and feel comfortable" and lights candles on Friday night "before we go out," places family, morality, and charitable giving at the cornerstones of her Jewish identity:

"...giving, charity, just the moral issues that go along with it are more what I identify with than the religious aspect. I am not very religious. I can't quite believe that there is really someone up there that's making decisions as to whether you are here next year or not."

These Conservative women often edit the Judaism that they practice, so that their children are "exposed" only to those aspects of the religion which their mothers deem attractive and appealing. One mother said:
"I only do the positive things that are fun and relate to kids and sort of build memories. The Hanukkah candles are important, Purim is important, just the things that you touch, that you do. The blessings. My kids started at a very early age, and I hope that it will stay with them. It is all the positive stuff. The fun stuff. My Judaism relates to children. My focus is always children."

The Conservative mothers want their children to experience a very positive version of Judaism, and not to be alienated by a version of Judaism that appears too rigid or demanding. In the words of one woman:

"I feel very positively about being Jewish, and that is something that I would like my children to feel. But in terms of Hebrew school, my main goal is for my children to view themselves as Jewish, not necessarily to learn that much about Judaism per se or religion per se. It really wouldn't bother me if they become nonbelievers in God, if they feel good about themselves as Jewish people."

Perhaps because they are self-consciously involved in “editing” traditional Judaism for their children, Conservative women do not speak of Judaism either as a ready-made, finished, received belief system, or as a totally optional smorgasbord of beliefs and behaviors.

Among the Conservative-affiliated, born-Jewish mothers in our study, only those who had coped with personal tragedies referred to Judaism as a personal source of spiritual strength. For some, the death of a parent catapulted them into a more intense relationship with Judaism. Just as parenting made them concerned about continuity issues, the death of a parent made women take on religious responsibilities that they used to relegate to their parents. Psychologically, in some ways when a mother dies, a woman becomes her mother:

"Since my mother got cancer about seven years ago, I have gotten more involved with the temple. It is not that I shied away from it, but I had always gone out with non-Jewish men, and even though the man that I married was Jewish, he was Reform, and never went to Hebrew school, and his parents didn’t know what ‘kosher for Passover’ really was. After that period of time, I just said I needed to come back and do my own Jewishness. When I lit the Friday night candles, he would say to me, ‘You are going to burn the house down.’ He never grew up with Friday candles being lit. ...Holidays were always at my mother’s house. When she became ill, everything changed. I realized that she wouldn’t be making the holiday dinners anymore. I would. Ever since then, holidays are all at my house."

In the focus groups, Conservative mothers occasionally brought up the topic of Israel and almost always in a positive light. Many of them have visited Israel, and they have positive associations with their trips there. Many attended Jewish camps, but almost none of them went to Jewish day schools. A few of their children attend
Solomon Schechter schools; the majority of their children are receiving supplementary school education.

Some Conservative mothers have positive feelings about their children’s supplementary school education; some have negative and angry feelings. The most common reaction, perhaps, is a kind of bemused pleasure. Many of them resented their own Hebrew school experience, but they learned something. Now their children are resenting Hebrew school but also learning something. To these women, this combination of resentment and Jewish education comprises a kind of American Jewish tradition.

“It is profoundly important to me and my children. Although my son really moans and groans about Hebrew school, there is a love that I see there developing. With the girls too. When I pass our temple, my four-year-old says, ‘Mommy, there’s my temple.’ That makes me feel so good.”

Jewish women who are mothers, and especially those in the Conservative movement, often place their children at the center of their own attachment to and practice of Judaism. When Jewish organizations cannot in other ways draw commitment from these women, they may be able to reach them either through their children or through their concerns as mothers and as transmitters of the tradition.

Reform Women

Background
Reform Jews comprise the largest denomination in contemporary American Jewish life. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 39% of adult American Jews define themselves as Reform, 35% as Conservative, and 6% as Orthodox. (The remainder define themselves as “just Jewish,” secular, or some other designation.) The present study included two focus groups of Reform Jewish women, in Atlanta, Georgia, and Portland, Oregon. One-third of the total participants in our study identified themselves as Reform or Reconstructionist Jews.

The majority of the Reform women are or have been married, and most have had children. Nearly all have received a substantial secular education and currently work outside the home for pay. The “juggling acts” these women perform in their daily lives are discussed below in the section on dual-career families and stay-at-home mothers.

Findings
Asked about their personal identity, the Reform women in our study occasionally mentioned their Jewishness as a central aspect. More often, however, their answers were similar to what one might expect to hear from any highly educated American woman in the same age group and socioeconomic bracket—a personal description without particular ethnic or religious markers.

When participants were asked how they would describe themselves to someone they met for the first time, one woman commented on both her personal life and her professional life, but not on her Jewishness:

“I guess the things that I most often share would be that I am married. I have children. I am a professional and probably commit 40 to 50 hours a week to my profession, as well as raising two adolescents. A new entrance into my life is that my husband now travels four
days out of the week. So, along with working the kind of hours that I do and taking care of two adolescents, that sort of takes up most of my emotional energy and life energy.”

Yet, when Reform participants were asked to talk directly about their Jewish identities, they did so willingly and articulately. Many spoke about the warm, supportive feeling they have when they associate with other Jews. One woman said that Judaism provided her with “a womb-like state.” Egalitarianism and feminist issues were often at the forefront of their Jewish consciousness.

Women talked about how much more receptive Jewish environments are to women now than they were years ago. One commented, “My mother never felt comfortable going to synagogue; there was no place for her.” In contrast, she said, “I feel now I can do things that were not allowed before. They now have equivalent services for girls.” Reform women feel proud and happy about the leadership role that Reform Judaism has played in promoting egalitarianism within Judaism:

“In the present moment I...belong to a group of Jewish women who get together informally to study. Initially, two years ago, our goal was to do a women’s seder. After that we spent six months planning for a weekend Shabbat, which has to be, without a doubt, the highlight of my experience as a Jewish woman. From that point on, we have embarked upon a course of study which includes meeting once a month and reading the Torah and realizing we don’t have to be

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In keeping with the Reform movement’s emphasis on social action as a religious activity, many women commented on civic activities as an important aspect of their Jewish lives. Indeed, a substantial proportion of the Reform women said they feel that many Jews work too much for Jewish causes and not enough for non-Jewish causes, for what one woman called the “whole world and global group.” Typically, these women seemed unaware that Jews today are much more likely to work for nonsectarian causes than for Jewish causes. They said they feel that the Jewish communal world is narrow and self-absorbed, and they picture themselves as rebels because of their interest in working for broader civic groups. In reality, the rejection of Jewish volunteerism in favor of nonsectarian volunteerism represents a mainstream American Jewish behavior.

Reform women often mentioned personal, spiritual explorations or communal activities as the most salient vehicles for their practice of Judaism. Some referred to God and morality; others referred to expanding their Jewish intellectual and spiritual lives. Many Reform women were positively impressed with the Reform
movement's interpretations of Judaism, with an emphasis on free choice in personal and religious behavior.

Among the Reform women, however, there are divergent views on Jewish education. Regardless of community, some Reform mothers of young children said they want their children to receive more education in the details of Jewish history, literature, law and culture than they themselves had received. The following is typical of this view:

"I went to Sunday school all those years and I put in the time and I didn't know anything. The only two Jewish words that I knew were bar mitzvah and shalom. ...I got mad at my relatives who were German Jews. ...They said Reform Judaism is great because you can choose whether you light candles or not. You can choose whether you keep kosher. They didn't realize that they were choosing for me, because when they chose no, I lost my education. If I didn't know about it, I couldn't even choose. I first had to learn what the holidays were and what the language was like. ...The rabbi talked about the philosophy of being Jewish and all the spiritual things that were good for me, but there was no ritual or substance in any respect to day-to-day life."

Others disagreed with such comments—and with their clear implication that Reform Jewish education leaves out too much of the substance. Rather, they focused on the positive value of Reform concepts of Judaism, which stress free choice:

"The best part about being a Reform Jew is that it stresses the most important part of Judaism. It stresses free choice. Free choice is the basis of Judaism. Who Maimonides was or what little rituals people choose to perform—these are just small details. You can always pick those up later."

Although the Reform women generally said they feel more comfortable with Jewish women than with non-Jewish women, many were concerned that they not sound chauvinistic. Several declared, "I don't see Judaism as superior to other religions. All religions have the same vitality." Many Reform women said they do not want to raise their children in a ghettoized or parochial environment. They want their children to have non-Jewish friends and to be able to get along with everyone. They are more worried about their children becoming too narrow than they are about their children assimilating.

Despite their universalism, the Reform women are sensitive to antisemitic behaviors among their non-Jewish acquaintances. One recalled, "working in the Bible Belt, I could also pass as a non-Jew." As a result, she often was subjected to blatantly antisemitic utterances. She remembers, "someone made the most shocking antisemitic remark," then realized belatedly that "my resumé was chock full of Jewish stuff." Unabashedly, the offending individual continued with, "Oh, I'm sorry—you know what I mean." This woman was "stunned" by the experience. Another participant noted that antisemitic remarks that she used to ignore have become "a real pain to my heart." At one time, she said, she would have walked away from ugly talk about Jews, assuming, "They are drunk. Why do you want to start a fight?" However, she said, "lately the comments bother me." Especially in light of their cosmopolitanism, many find worldwide antisemitism profoundly disturbing. One described her recent experience: "I just
traveled from Italy and I kept seeing swastikas all over.”

Reform women tend to be active both in Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. They are drawn to social action on a local level, such as feeding the homeless in their communities. One woman described a common pattern of involvement: “I’m active in Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and also Planned Parenthood. I find that most of what I like to do is local, except when it comes to the Holocaust Museum or something like that.” Reform women are particularly pleased when their synagogues and temples give them an opportunity to do civic good works within a Jewish framework, and are disappointed when such initiatives are dropped. The following exemplifies these feelings:

“I taught Sunday school, I was on the board, and I gave a great deal of time to the synagogue, too. I pulled back and believe much more in social action and humanitarian action than Jewish action. That is not to exclude Jewish action. I just think that that segregates us and insulates us rather than reaching out. One of the reasons that I joined the synagogue was because of Project Atlanta. …I came to a meeting and was new to the community and new to the synagogue and in a month I was heading up [a project]. But I found that after lip service and money was given, it was dropped. …I have a lot of problem with all the segregation of the various groups. I think if we all did a lot more secular work—I think we sometimes separate ourselves too much as Jews. I don’t volunteer very much for Jewish organizations.”

Many Reform women insist that Jews should not box themselves in and focus narrowly in their organizational lives on Jewish causes and Jewish settings. They work hard for programs for disadvantaged people and also for cultural and artistic causes.

Reform women are particularly pleased when their synagogues and temples give them an opportunity to do civic good works within a Jewish framework, and are disappointed when such initiatives are dropped. Nonetheless, many are also heavily involved in the Federation world, which they regard as part of their communal responsibility. Both those who are active in the Federation world and those who are not have sharp criticisms of the way Jewish organizations are run. They feel that Jewish organizations often evaluate people—and value them—exclusively by how much money they give. Many agree with the picture drawn by one woman:

“I’m very anti-Federation right now because of the solicitations and the phone calls. If you give X amount, you are considered in this group, and if you give an extra $500 you are considered in that group, and can go to this or that event...everyone knows how much you give.”

Angry feelings about pressure to give are exacerbated by the experience of friends soliciting money and using personal information to attempt to wrest larger contributions from people. One remembered:
"Friends said to me, well, if you didn't buy such and such, you could have given more. I have found that process to be so offensive that I've almost decided never to give again...to feel so humanly violated by the process has caused me not to want to give."

Another woman added that when she is pressured to give more money, she answers, "You can't have my money, but you can have my time. Anything you want me to work on, I will do." Only once has she gotten a positive reply to her offer to volunteer time instead of money.

Attitudes toward Israel are mixed among the Reform women. Some women find themselves embarrassed by some of Israel's political stances. One woman said, for example, "I think Israel has to behave better than most countries. I think they have to be a showcase. It is important to criticize things we don't like." Others worry that Reform Jews have too little clout in Israel, or that Israel is controlled by a fundamentalist rabbinate. Some women believe that the way to free Israel from this situation is to work hard as Reform Jews to establish a recognizable presence in Israel that will transform the culture. In the words of one woman:

"I really feel like the whole nature of our relationship with Israel is going to change. We need an active and strong Diaspora as well as an active and strong Israel. We have to educate Israeli Jews to see us as a vibrant community. A Reform presence in Israel is critical to the life blood of that state. I think that in order for Israel to remain a pluralistic democracy, it is critical that Israel not fall into the hands of the fanatic, religious right."

Women who identify as Reform Jews are proud of their movement's stance on the inclusion of women in Jewish life and on human rights and social justice in Israel and at home. While their universalism—the desire to help all people and not just members of the Jewish community—opens them to the wide world, it sometimes restricts their availability to the Jewish world. The challenge to Jewish organizations is to capitalize on these universalistic sentiments and create venues for them to be expressed Jewishly.

Orthodox Women

Background
Orthodox Jews comprise about 6% of the core Jewish population of the United States. Because of their national tendencies toward leadership and Jewish involvement, American Orthodox women are of particular importance to the present study. Two focus groups, in Westchester, New York and Silver Spring, Maryland, were organized to explore the patterns of thought and behavior of women in the Orthodox community.

Findings
Participants who identify as Orthodox display an interesting paradox: compared with other subgroups of women, they are the most likely to include relational factors in their personal identities and the least likely to include such factors in their religious identities. When asked how they would introduce themselves to someone new, they were the most likely to define themselves by relationships. On average the Orthodox women have somewhat larger families (three to five children) than women in other subgroups, and they sometimes referred to involvements with larger family units as well. Most

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1990 National Jewish Population Survey
of them also work outside the home. Those women who do not work outside the home talked about staying at home as a temporary phase, or spoke about what they do with their time, as though justifying their lifestyle choice.

"If I was meeting someone for the first time, I would describe myself first as a wife and mother. I have four young children, and I am in the process of looking to go back to work. Working had been an important part of my life until two years ago. I miss it. I see myself as a working person and full-time mother."

"I am very involved with my family and kids. I am always there for everybody. My dad lives nearby so I help him out too. My husband has a business, and I am trying to give him all the support so that he can grow. He works late almost every night. I had a career in accounting and I know what working is all about, but to me it is not an end-all. I am happy now to be at home with my family."

Generally, Orthodox mothers of young children expect to return to the work force soon if they are not already working. The work ethic is ubiquitous among participants in this study. One young Orthodox mother began to introduce herself and then began to laugh, "I guess that everything I say about myself is relational. But I’m not crazy about this change in my life. Things will get back to normal when I go back to work." Another young mother reflected:

"I have three little kids, and I have a baby also. I guess a lot of my life revolves around them right now. Although I am in a state of conflict over that because I would like to aspire to my career. I feel like I spent so many years studying for that master’s degree...just being a stay-at-home mom is not exactly enough for me right now, but it is also difficult to find a balance between family and career, so in the meantime I am still with them."

When invited to speak directly about their religious identities, the Orthodox women were less likely than Conservative women to speak about transmitting values to their children, and less likely than Reform women to speak about organizational activities. Israel repeatedly came up in discussions with Orthodox women, sometimes as a focus for spiritual energy and sometimes as a source of worry. Many expressed concern about Israel, and said that moving to Israel or at least visiting more often was an important personal goal.

With regard to Jewish identity, Orthodox women tend to focus on personal, behavior-related Jewish issues. Many struggle to upgrade their own personal levels of textual study and ritual observance.

"I would like to become disciplined enough to daven [pray] every day and to spend more time learning [studying biblical or rabbinic texts]. I see my husband and my daughter and how much their days revolve around these activities when they are not working or in school. I feel I have a lot of work to do in these areas."

The Orthodox women find great psychological sustenance within the structure provided by the Orthodox lifestyle.

"For me, Judaism gives a framework and meaning to my life. It structures the way that I
live. It has restrictive connotations to it. There are a lot of people where I work that don’t have a life, and I think that being part of the Jewish community gives me that life and it also give me guidance.”

Some attempt to reconcile their belief system with more secular lifestyles and values. Some women feel envious of the greater ease with which non-Orthodox women seem to be able to manage their lives:

“One of the negative things is like on the weekends you can’t just go to the beach like other people might do and buy food out. I just don’t have an opportunity to do that. That controls my life. …Sometimes if my husband is meeting with many, many people, it would be much easier for me to be able to invite people out to a club or whatever, but instead I always have to entertain them [at home].”

Many Orthodox women feel pulled between their belief in tolerance and interaction with non-Orthodox Jews and non-Jews, on the one hand, and the fear of seeing their values overwhelmed by the tidal wave of appealing secularism, on the other hand:

“I do not judge them. I do not care what they do as long as they respect what I do. …But I also know in certain instances in life, the stronger you become, the stronger you are. …I worry about how I can really give the feeling and the practice to my kids to make sure they grow up as Orthodox Jews. …To a certain extent, I try to teach my kids tolerance, but on the other hand I want them somewhat sheltered because I want to ensure that they are going to grow up that way. My cousin intermarried and to me I am amazed that her parents wonder why. They didn’t give them anything when they were growing up, and then they raise their hands in shock. …I feel like saying to them, ‘What do you expect? You didn’t give them any foundation.’ While I say, yes, it is nice to reach out, and it is nice to have friends that aren’t from [the Orthodox community]…I have mixed feelings.”

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“I’m very concerned about secular Judaism in Israel as well as Conservative and Reform movements in our country. I am concerned about the rate of assimilation in this country. I am astounded by the rate of intermarriage, and it frightens me because I’m worried that what the world hasn’t done to us we are doing to ourselves in terms of destroying the Jewish people. …I worry about the secular spirit in Israel too. It seems that they are willing to give the land up without even thinking twice about it. It is sort of like they are having a sale and handing out lots of land to the Arab countries around them. That is a major concern to me. I’m afraid that our little Israel will become even littler.”

Orthodox women occasionally feel that people outside their group are judging them, and they are often subjected to anti-Orthodox feelings on the
Foreign-Born American Jewish Women

Background
According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, about one in 10 American Jews were born somewhere other than in the United States. The present study, therefore, included a focus group with participants from Israel, Latin America, South Africa and the former Soviet Union, all currently living in Southern California.

Findings
These women from various countries have important characteristics in common. First, they are strongly oriented toward family and toward Israel, and they are not very oriented toward synagogues and Jewish social and philanthropic organizations. As one of them said:

“I think for a lot of Jews in America, involvement in the Jewish community from an ethnic standpoint or involvement in charitable things replaces other focuses of their Jewish identity. I think that if that is the only way in which we express who we are as Jews, then we are not going to transfer this to the next generation.”

Second, their ideas about what constitutes Judaism and the role it plays in their lives comes from a combination of their experiences in their countries of origin and their experiences in the United States. Women from Russia have clear memories of an existence in which being a Jew was an unrelieved stigma: “Having grown up in Russia, I wasn’t let to forget that I was Jewish.” Because of the repression of Jewish life, her notion of Judaism, beyond the stigma, consisted of

In summary, Orthodox women are personally drawn to a spectrum of meaningful practices of Judaism, including ritual, prayer and study. Their commitments are clear, and they are generally willing to become involved organizationally. Their priorities are clear as well: their time and energy will most often be dedicated to Israel and to Orthodox schools and communal institutions at home.
Zionism and Passover. Women like her are shocked by the difference in the status of Jews in their homelands versus in their current situations where Jews enjoy recognition and a high standard of living.

The Russian-born women find American-born Jews naive about the status of Jews around the world and careless about preserving their own traditions. Just as they are rediscovering the richness of Jewish tradition, they look around and observe American Jews neglecting these very traditions: “When I came here I discovered Judaism as a religion, which is a big joy in my life. I am learning a lot more about Judaism. What troubles me is assimilation.”

Foreign-born women are often troubled or puzzled by styles of American Judaism. One Russian participant said she admires Orthodox Jews but feels most comfortable in a Reform environment. She said she was uncomfortable with both groups, feelings with which many of the foreign-born participants agreed:

“I really like the Orthodox movement in Judaism even though I am Reform. But whenever I come in personal contact with them, I always have big problems with them. They always put down anything other than Orthodox. They have blinders. Reform Judaism, where I find myself, I am very troubled by the outwardly [sic] interest of the Reform movement. There is too little concentration on Jewish issues. I think there is some tremendous sense of guilt in the movement. There is a big problem with being the chosen people. We have to do for everyone else.”

Women who moved here from Latin America tend to be secularists, and yet very Zionist and knowledgeable about Jewish language and culture. These characteristics are produced by their system of Jewish education and their organizational structure, which differ substantially from those in the United States. They find that people who meet them are shocked when they find that they can speak Yiddish and Hebrew, and yet are not ritually observant. Many feel that they suffer from the negative feelings about Hispanics which they believe many American Jews harbor. They also indict American Jews for their “shallow knowledge” about Latin America in general: “We’re supposed to be Indians. If someone has light skin or eyes or hair, they’re shocked. We start to explain—it’s like starting from scratch because they don’t know Paraguay from Uruguay. . . . They think that we came because we’re starving.”

Some women from Latin America experienced pain growing up Jewish in an antisemitic country:

“I come from a country where being a Jew is shameful. When I said I was Jewish in grammar school in Argentina, you are afraid of rejection. I tried not to be so much. If you are a Jew you have to marry a Jew. But they don’t want you to marry a Jew. They want you to assimilate. When I come to this country, I feel more comfortable with Jewish people.”

Others from Latin America pointed out that American Jews tend to read about antisemitism in their countries, but know nothing about the very pleasant lifestyles of Latin American Jews, or about their day school systems and Jewish community centers. One woman noted: “I see that Americans believe everything that they hear even
if it doesn’t make sense. If someone has an accent, they automatically put them on a lower level.”

Israeli participants, almost without exception, introduced themselves by saying that it had not been their choice to come to the United States, but that they had unwillingly followed their husbands here. One woman spoke for many when she said: “I still think I need to apologize for leaving Israel. It is something I am trying to get over.”

The Israelis were divided into two groups—those who see themselves primarily as secular, and those who follow a variety of traditional religious practices. These two groups disagree on the prognosis for the American Jewish community. The secular Israelis are more scornful of American Jewish ways of doing things. They feel they can easily maintain the Jewish identity of their families by doing exactly what they did in Israel because, in this way, their children will identify as Israelis. They usually speak Hebrew in the home, dress in costume for Purim, and attend a celebratory seder meal with other Israelis. Some send their children to Jewish schools. But they do not see synagogue and organizational life—so important to American Jews—as holding any keys to Jewish continuity. For them, the state of Israel and the Jewish family are all-important:

“I am not into the format. I think that people who follow formats are hypocrites. They do not drive on Shabbat. They eat only kosher—and yet they don’t think twice about stealing, from taking an ashtray from a restaurant to anything else. I do think that the history and the politics of the state of Israel keep us together. I like being part of a people with the same faith. I send my son to a Jewish school. Religion is just one way—in fact I tend to disagree with extremely religious people. As far as politics in Israel, the same thing. As long as we maintain our families as Jewish, we will be safe as a people. Otherwise we will be assimilated. There are only two ways.”

Other Israelis are observant Jews, and they feel that observance is the key to Jewish continuity and survival. These Israelis hold a relatively more positive attitude toward American Jews, partially because they are involved in synagogue life or, in some cases, in other Jewish organizations. Still, they are anxious lest people identify them with the haredim, the militantly Orthodox Jews who, “went into politics,” wield great power in Israel and, as a result, “really did harm to practicing Judaism, especially in Israel.” One woman, who “really likes Judaism the way that it is in the books and the way our rabbis have studied it,” stressed her personal inclusiveness and nonjudgmental stance:

“Who are we to decide who is religious? If you are Jewish, that is good enough for me to be included in the Jewish nation or faith.”

“I was brought up not to label...Conservative, Orthodox, Reform...you are either Jewish or you’re not Jewish. Who are we to decide who is religious? If you are Jewish, that is good enough for me to be included in the Jewish nation or faith. In our family, it was very important to stress our tradition. Again, I don’t know where the division goes between tradition and religion. If I am kosher, is that religious or is that tradition? If we do light candles on Shabbat, is that tradition or
religion? I don't criticize other people for whatever they are doing. The only thing that bothers me is when people do things that are against the Jewish tradition, or Jewish religion, and still call it in the name of Jewish religion—including condemning Israel for things!"

The South African-born women appear to have the least discomfort with the American Jewish community. They are likely to join both synagogues and Jewish organizations. They are generally proud of being Jewish and strongly identified with Israel. However, even among South African Jews there is a fair amount of disdain for assimilationism among American Jews:

“When I came to America into this real melting pot, I felt that I needed to rediscover what it meant to be Jewish if I was going to identify myself as a Jew instead of just mixing with anybody and everybody that I met. For me I find Judaism to be an incredibly beautiful way of living your life. I think that it has a system of ethics and morality that if you choose to embrace it, it can enrich and make deeper and more fulfilling your experience. I have found that this is something that I want to incorporate into my life. ...I think that one of the things that is very sad to me is how many Jews in this country have assimilated or have discarded their Jewish roots and heritage or religion or identity without having explored it. I think what is both beautiful and troubling about Judaism it that it is very complicated. It takes work. ...A lot of Jews just don't give Judaism the effort that they put into various other aspects of their careers...”

Foreign-born American Jewish women have a distinct understanding of what it means to be a Jew. Their understanding derives primarily from their experiences in their homelands as these experiences complement and contrast with those of American Jewry. Jewish organizations may need to create special initiatives to reach out to these women, to help them locate their niche in the Jewish community and the places where they can find comfortable connections.

**CONCLUSION**

The rich qualitative data generated by this research confirm the existence of distinct groups within the population of American Jewish women and delineate the important role these groups play in shaping women's identities, values, and communal attachments. The research also reveals notable commonalities that unite American Jewish women of diverse backgrounds and varied lifestyles.

**Diversity Among American Jewish Women**

The identities, experiences and communal involvement of the women in our study are all strongly affected by two factors: whether or not the women are parenting children, and whether or not they are affiliated with some branch of Judaism. Thus, as the study shows, normative personal priorities are different among mothers in dual-career marriages than among single career women. The normative attitude toward Jewish traditions is very different among Conservative mothers of school-age children than it is among secular women with children of the same age. Patterns of community involvement differ
dramatically for Orthodox women and for secular or unaffiliated women. In all cases, the group is a powerful predictor of an individual's priorities, attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, within each group, certain key issues emerge as especially salient. Although members of a group may differ from each other on their views of these issues, they generally agree on the importance of the issues in question. Thus, for example, the extent to which Jewish organizations are welcoming of outsiders is a key issue for single career women; Jewish education is an important issue for Reform women; and the difference between Jewish life in their native countries and in the United States looms large in the awareness of foreign-born women.

Finally, women who are affiliated with a particular denomination often perceive that denomination's view of Judaism as the definitive word on Jewish tradition. Many American Jews pride themselves on being pluralistic, and they believe that they are, in fact, quite tolerant of belief systems that differ from their own. Nonetheless, the focus group participants illustrate the limitations of this espoused pluralism. Many of them feel that their denomination's definition of Jewish values and behaviors is authoritative and authentic, and that other definitions are inferior. This phenomenon is not limited to any one group. Orthodox women often said that non-Orthodox women are opening up their families to a sure slide into assimilation. Conservative participants expressed the idea that they stand between rigidity on the right and assimilation on the left. Reform women feel that non-Reform Jews are closing themselves off from the sacred principles of free choice and egalitarianism. Some secular participants asserted that only radical social activism truly reflects the tradition of prophetic Jewish thought.

**Similarities Among American Jewish Women**

In addition to the impact of the group on women's identities, their views of Judaism, and their connections to the Jewish community, there are a number of attitudes, beliefs and opinions that are held by many Jewish women regardless of their background or lifestyle.

- Whether secular, liberal or traditional, the women in this study are all identified as Jewish. They all have Jewish feelings and memories. They all have concerns as Jews focused around issues such as antisemitism, Israel, assimilation, or the education of their children. They all engage in Jewish behaviors. If nothing else, almost every woman, regardless of her background, regularly takes part in some kind of a Passover seder.

- These Jewish women experience joy in the multiple roles available to them today, and frustration over their limited time and energy. The vast majority of the women who participated in our study are employed outside the home. Those who are currently at home with young children intend to return to outside employment in the near future. Most of these women have complex daily lives, and they struggle to find time for all of the demands of their personal and professional lives.

- These women experience high "comfort levels" with other Jewish women, and they are
partially interested in associating with women who are in circumstances similar to their own. For example, working mothers feel most comfortable with other women who juggle home and family. When they socialize with women who work but do not have children, they feel like they are trying to communicate “from a different planet.” When they socialize with women who have children but do not work, they are self-conscious about bringing their jobs into the conversation. Only when they socialize with women like themselves do they feel perfectly comfortable sharing all aspects of their lives.

• Many women—both those who have been involved in the Jewish community and those who have not—yearn for a sense of warmth and community in Jewish organizational settings.

• They often feel disaffected from the organized Jewish community. These feelings have various sources. For example, some believe that Jewish organizations are not welcoming of newcomers or “outsiders.” Others perceive that Jewish organizations are overly preoccupied with fund-raising and insufficiently concerned with community building.

• Jewish women want to make a difference in their home communities. They want their involvement to be immediate and productive. The majority of participants, across denominational and lifestyle lines, would prefer to give their time to projects with a local focus, rather than a national or international focus. They are willing to contribute money to distant projects, but less willing to devote their time to them.

Implications for Jewish Organizations

The findings of the present study suggest that there is much that Jewish organizations can do to reach out to Jewish women, to motivate their involvement, and to provide them rich and meaningful opportunities to be part of the Jewish community and Jewish life.

• There is great diversity among American Jewish women. The Jewish community as a whole needs to work toward creating and supporting organizations and institutions that meet the religious and communal needs of many types of Jewish women—regardless of their background, Jewish identity or lifestyle. Involving a diverse population may require greater differentiation of activities and services within existing organizations or it may require seeding new organizations to appeal to specific groups of women.

• Jewish women often feel like outsiders to Jewish organizations; Orthodox women feel they do not necessarily fit in mainstream organizations; single women feel they do not belong in family-oriented organizations; secular women are not comfortable in organizations that presume everyone is Jewishly knowledgeable; and young career women are turned off by organizations that judge people by the size of their financial contributions. The Jewish community as a whole needs to become more welcoming of diverse individuals, newcomers and outsiders. Each organization needs to find ways to bring
individual women across the threshold and to help them find a place where they are comfortable and where they have a sense of belonging.

- There is strong affiliation motivation among Jewish women, which is reflected in the prevalent desire to meet and socialize with women similar to themselves in terms of religious identity, household configuration and lifestyle. Jewish organizations can do a great deal to foster Jewish social networks by creating multiple opportunities for women to meet in small groups, to support one another personally and professionally, to work on special projects together, or to study together.

- Jewish women, across groups, respond to the Jewish concept of tikkun olam, and they are drawn to social action projects that can make a difference in their local communities. Jewish organizations need to develop opportunities for women to take action. Once involved through social action, it may be possible to interest women in a more overtly Jewish social, communal, and religious agenda.

- Jewish women lead busy lives, and they constantly struggle to find sufficient time for work, family and friends. Jewish organizations must be selective in what they demand from their members and volunteers. They need to have opportunities for those who wish to be leaders and to take on major roles in the organization. But they also need to create opportunities for women who have limited time and energy to give—and they need to show appreciation for whatever is contributed to the organization.

- Given women's busy lives, a danger exists that Jewish practices and Jewish organizations may appear as another obligation or burden rather than as factors that can enhance life or make it more meaningful. The community needs to find ways to bring Jewish life to Jewish women rather than expecting the women to come to them. Programming in neighborhoods or workplaces and providing Jewish settings for everyday activities (e.g., Jewish child care, health clubs and career counseling) are two ways to accomplish this.

- Jewish women's childhood memories of Judaism often cast it as tedious, boring and irrelevant. The Jewish community needs to create programming to educate adult women toward an understanding of what is joyous and vital in their Jewish heritage.

- Women are seeking meaning in their lives and a connection to something greater than themselves. For affiliated Jewish women this often translates into a desire for more participation in ritual and prayer, for greater opportunities for text study, or for access to other transcendent experiences. The secular or unaffiliated are also seeking something beyond themselves, even though they have not yet chosen to look for it in Judaism.

The Jewish community today has a great opportunity to open Jewish doors for women, to provide rich and meaningful settings for women to learn about Judaism, to engage in Jewish practices, and to express their Jewish sentiments through a variety of modalities—art and music, social justice, Jewish mysticism, or whatever enlivens their understanding and touches their
spirit. The diversity and similarities among American Jewish women are a source of strength for the community and a great challenge for the community's synagogues, organizations and institutions. The research elucidates women's identities, interests and concerns, and it explores the potential for enhancing women's Jewish attachments. It is now time for the community to use these findings to create institutions that are open and responsive to all American Jewish women.

REFERENCES


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<tr>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Figure 2: Focus Group Participants' Background Information

*(n=152)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Residence</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Education Completed</th>
<th>Hours Work for Pay</th>
<th>Occupational Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Professional/Technical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>Managerial/Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
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<td>Just Jewish</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
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<td>Ohio</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Grades 1-11</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Married with children at home</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married, no children at home</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>Clerical, Sales, Other</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Managerial/Administrative</td>
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<td>Three or more</td>
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<td>Clerical, Sales, Other</td>
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Judaism has a rich heritage of powerful texts that speak to and about women. Although for centuries women were excluded from much of this ancient sacred literature, most of our values and traditions as a people stem from those texts. Still studied and analyzed today, the importance of these texts as the source of all Jewish thought and practice cannot be overstated. Virtually every Jewish idea that has withstood the test of time uses some reference point from the vast array of written words transmitted over more than three millennia of Jewish history.

The Talmud calls women a “people unto themselves” (Shabbat 62a). Whether that means women have their own unique outlook on life, or that they bond together to care for themselves; whether the rabbis of centuries past were describing their justified frustration at being excluded from the female inner circle or a hopeful ideal of female independence, there is truth in that portrayal of womanhood.

The National Commission on American Jewish Women began each meeting with text study. I was given the opportunity to focus the members on English translations of Jewish sources that could open pathways for exploration. The experience of learning together with American Jewish women who have attained high levels of professional and personal achievement was vibrant and enriching.

Exposure to the words of our tradition meant analysis, debate and interpretation as we processed Jewish writings spanning more than 30 centuries. We entered a framework of Torah study with excerpts from its vast reservoir, ranging from Bible, Talmud, Midrash and Maimonides to some seemingly radical rabbinic commentary, law and lore. We worked to bring relevance to the foundations of our tradition, enabling the texts to speak to us today.

**TEXTUAL SUBCONSCIOUS**

So much of the collective mentality of the Jewish people is influenced by the texts and documents recorded and transmitted over generations. At times the link to a past idea is obvious; at other times the origins of aspects of Jewish culture seem only remotely connected to a particular source. In reality, we as a people operate as a living system functioning in the present, with our antennae extended toward past and future. Regardless of modern denominational differences, for most of us textual references are not part of our daily dialogue. Yet, they have been an unacknowledged authority all around us, shaping our behaviors, psyches, families and communities. I call this pervasive force that constantly affects us our “textual subconscious.” It can be felt and lived on many levels, sometimes evident, mostly not. The challenge for women today is to trace the origins...
of much of what is positive in Judaism, identify those seemingly vague textual sources, and study them through the multiple lenses of gender, spirituality, democracy and modernity.

TEXTUAL RELEVANCE

We began our exploration with early visions of the Creation story and what Jewish texts say about being female and male. In contrast to the traditional view that grants men and women different and unequal roles since their formation in the Divine image, Judaism offers an array of possibilities. From the Talmudic interpretation that says Adam and Eve were originally one being before God separated them (Ketubot 8a) to the notion that God endowed women with greater understanding (Niddah 45b), defining women's role has been a dynamic process. The modern mind is often surprised by how the texts view male and female responsibilities. We addressed the fact that the law has required Jewish men more forcefully than Jewish women to produce and raise children, thereby providing opportunities for women to develop their talents in other areas. And it is apparent that 2,000-year-old Jewish documents still speak to us today when we read the Talmudic view that most wives would choose more sex and a husband who spends more time at home, than more money but a husband who is home less.

Descriptions of women in Jewish texts cover a broad spectrum, from the silent, modest, passive and pure “daughter of the king” whose “glory is within” (Psalms 45) to the wise “woman of valor” who plants, sews, sells, feeds the poor, manages her household, and effectively plays superwoman (Proverbs 31). Several stories for the seven prophetesses—God speaking to Sarah, Miriam singing praises with the women of Israel, Deborah leading a military campaign, and Hannah setting the pattern for all future silent prayers—have been richly embellished over the centuries. These tales of our early Jewish mothers give us hope and purpose.

Who does the Jewish community ransom first if a man and woman both are kidnapped? Whose case is accepted before the courts first if both male and female litigants are waiting to be heard? Whose word is believed in cases of impotence or infertility? In all these areas, the female takes priority. Conversely, women are very much the passive victims in the ancient laws of Jewish divorce (get) and marriage. Such issues become all the more relevant when we can trace their origin and find their core principles. Jewish texts tell stories, teach laws, transmit values, tune our sensibilities, and are still talking to us to this very day.

Following our look at references to gender in Jewish texts, we studied sources on the topic of Jewish responsibility. Judaism as a tradition has a rich history of social action, caring for the poor, helping the needy, and bringing about peace whenever possible. It also describes the highest form of care as enabling another human being to support herself or himself with dignity. Jewish sources remind us that the Hebrew word for
charity is *tzedakah*, whose root word is *tzedek*, justice. By attending to the needs of those with less, we are not giving up what is ours, but rather balancing the scales of right and wrong in the world, since what we own was never really ours anyway, but rather a gift from God for us to share. Furthermore, the Talmud tells us that women were more sensitive to the needs of others who came to their doors since they would feed the poor directly, whereas men would tend to hand out money, which did not solve the immediate problems of the hungry and homeless. Spiritual acts of generosity and kindness were considered as great as any brilliant intellectual scholarship, perhaps even greater. In studying the words of Torah and its derivatives, the compassion of a tradition that warns us to be kind to the stranger, not to charge interest on loans, to reach out to the widow and orphan, never to hurt another with our words, and to be sensitive to the feelings of animals becomes all the more apparent.

As women and American Jews, we addressed the topic of Israel. After looking at the early biblical texts describing a "promised land," we studied the literal and figurative images of "place" in our tradition and the Jewish notion of sacred space. Talmudic texts have wonderful discussions ranging from the marital crisis that exists when one spouse wants to live in Israel and the other does not, to Israel as the ultimate manifestation of one's dependency on the Divine. Israel, more than almost any other idea in Jewish sources, is inexorably tied to a view of actions and consequences for us as a nation (reward and punishment in biblical language). How are we tied to the land, country, people and the common destiny known as Israel? Do these concepts speak to women louder or softer than they do to men?

From a modern perspective, we faced questions of commitment and tackled passages that ask how much Diaspora Jews should extend themselves for the Jews of Israel. As a "people unto ourselves," do we identify with Israeli women who may have different struggles, while sharing our common sense of Jewish purpose? The wisdom of our ancient sources captures with poignancy the pleasures and pains of sisterhood. Does our "extra measure of understanding" provide us with greater tolerance? As American Jewish women, do we really welcome spiritual, familial, political and economic diversity? Our early sources have a lot to say about striving for wholeness on the personal level and even more so about achieving unity as a people. We need models of Jewish oneness. Our texts describe the majesty of ancient Jerusalem as convincingly as a tourist brochure today. As women, we long for modern ways to actualize an older, mystical vision of Israel as still the focal point and strength that nourishes the world.

**TEXTUAL INFINITY**

The Torah has been described as water, as fire, as a tree, and as life itself. In its expanded meanings, it is all of these things and more. Like water, it flows as a continuous life-giving source that nourishes our souls. Like fire, it lights up our paths and its
intensity is not diminished when kindling new flames. Like a tree, it provides shelter, beauty and fruit, while growing ever so slowly. And like life itself, Torah study is an endless sense of revelation. It means exploring the written word—the layers of interpretation already known, the tomes of meaning not yet realized, and the personalized effects on every individual who grapples with it. In the epitome of classic rabbinic imagery, all the Jews of every generation were forever included at the gathering in the sands of Mount Sinai. The desert never seems too crowded.

The words of Torah are replete with infinite potential, inviting us to ask, challenge, learn and grow. As American Jewish women today, the timeless insights and eternal values of our tradition are accessible to all who wish to study. We can discover the beauty and brilliance of ancient texts, grounding ourselves in contemporary society while serving as a link in the chain of Judaism's generational transmission. We should embrace Jewish learning with the same love that we welcome each other.

A quiet revolution has been taking place over the last several decades. At the end of the 20th century, more educational opportunities exist for Jewish women who want to delve into the meaning and sources of their heritage than existed throughout all three previous millennia of recorded Jewish history. Although study is a serious endeavor, it also requires passion and humor to translate, extrapolate and update much of the material. Connecting to Jewish texts is awe-inspiring because it brings us face to face with our ancestors before us—those who wrote and those who listened, those who commented and those who kept silent, those who questioned and those who dreamed. Now it is our turn.
What is the key issue affecting American Jewish women and their potential for participating in the American Jewish community? The essential issue that affects Jewish women is the same one that affects Jewish men: The American Jewish community lacks purpose and vision. The solid ground on which we have been standing for much of this century has shifted, and we have begun to notice the cracks on the surface and the fault lines underground. Yet we still have the opportunity to reinvent our communal self and our structure for the future.

We live in a period of communal confusion. The organized American Jewish community is facing a series of crises, the best-known of which is the rising rate of intermarriage. There also is the changing nature of Israel-Diaspora relations and the decline in giving to Jewish causes. Any of these crises would be a good place to start in examining the community’s collective concerns and anxieties. At the same time, American Jewry is experiencing a religious and cultural revival in many quarters—or, at the very least, expressing interest in seeking and reinventing. These developments suggest that the old realities upon which the American Jewish communal apparatus was constructed have shifted. Several factors help explain why:

1. Over the past 50 to 60 years, American Jews have become integrated into mainstream America. They live in an open society in which people can retain elements of their own group identity while partaking of American life in general. American Jews are not restricted from going to any university they want, working and playing where they choose, or marrying whom they wish. One consequence of being “at home” in America is that the rate of intermarriage has risen over the past 35 years, but so too has the number of members of Congress who are Jewish. We need to explore the implications of such social integration for our identity as Jews and for the collective health of the American Jewish community.

2. Secularization has increased while connection to a traditional Jewish world view has loosened, a shift that is indexed by a decline in religious practice. As a result, support for a particularly Jewish way of doing things has weakened. For instance, although philanthropic motivation still may be felt to originate in Jewish values (i.e., a sense of obligation regarding social justice, social action, tzedakah or tikkun olam—repairing the world), the mode of expression has broadened and no longer is specifically Jewish.

3. The cultural context upon which a host of American Jewish institutions was built has dissipated. Not only has the place of Jews
and Jewishness in America changed, but America itself has changed. New social realities have emerged, such as changes in expectations about women and egalitarianism, and in attitudes about the merits of large organizations versus grass-roots enterprises. Consequently, the “old guard” American Jewish organizations may be less appealing because they are seen as belonging to a different generation, much like Oldsmobile is seen as “your father’s car.”

4. The nature of Jewish identity in America has become personalized, paralleling general trends regarding ethnic identity in America. In previous generations, being Jewish was not a matter of choice; in America today it is, in part because of the decline in antisemitism. And the type of Jewishness has become pliable—a matter of self-creation, rather than of communal obligation. This factor has implications for the communal enterprise. It suggests that Jewish organizations may not be “meeting Jews where they are.” Indeed, it raises the question of what can the nature of the Jewish communal world be today when not only is the communal enterprise voluntary, but the nature of Jewish identity itself has become fundamentally voluntary, as well?

These four factors—the integration of Jews into America, the secularization of Jewishness, the changing socio-cultural realities and assumptions within American society, and the personalization of Jewish identity—appear to have played out similarly for Jewish men and women. In my recent research about New York Jews, I was surprised to find that gender made no significant difference in terms of Jewish identification, practice or affiliation (Horowitz, 1993). These findings could lessen one’s interest in gender as a factor in relation to Jewish identity. However, it is important to point out that for much of Jewish history gender has been a relevant variable in differentiating identity.

POWER IN THE JEWISH WORLD: THE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN AND MEN

Although many of the key issues facing American Jews apply equally to men and women, and though American Jewish men and women seem to express and practice their Jewishness with similar intensity (or its lack), the experiences, treatment and positions of men and women in the Jewish communal world are quite different. For instance, according to a study by the Council of Jewish Federations (1994), 61% of the professionals in Jewish federations across America are women. However, only 18% of the federation executive directors are women and the vast majority of these are in the smaller cities. Among the volunteer or lay leadership of the federations, approximately one-third of the officers and board members are women and one-fifth of the presidents are women. Clearly, fundamental institutional biases, both structural and attitudinal, have worked against women in the Jewish communal world. Why do men hold the power in the American Jewish community?

Part of the answer has to do with how anyone attains power and authority within the American
Jewish community. Unfortunately, sociological data about American Jews do not address this question. If we had a picture of the personal rather than household incomes of American Jews, the men's portrait certainly would look different from the women's, revealing a gender gap that would begin to explain the distribution of power in the Jewish community. But even lacking that evidence, we can be certain that the strength of an individual's Jewish identity does not correlate with having power in the Jewish world, either for men or for women.

While there is no serious analysis of the topic, I would suggest that today the means to power in the American Jewish communal or organizational world involves four elements: 1) wealth, preferably one's own; 2) wisdom, which involves possessing knowledge, but also involves being smart and having new ideas; 3) willingness or motivation to work; and 4) position or reputation in the outside world. Each of these elements plays out differently for men than for women.

Wealth

Because so much of the American Jewish community's business has depended on fundraising, and because women traditionally have had less money than men, women have been hindered from the start. But today, women are more likely than ever before to inherit their parents' money, they are more likely than men to inherit their spouse's money, and they are more likely than women of the past to earn their own money. Not surprisingly, the recent Council of Jewish Federations study of federations (1994), which covers the period from 1975 to 1993, revealed modest gains by women in penetrating the leadership of the local Jewish federations (although most of the gain appears to be in smaller locales, which are hungrier for warm bodies irrespective of gender).

Wisdom

Thinking is not an ability on which men would seem to have a monopoly. Yet men, more often than women, have been accorded the role of thinker, no doubt a legacy from the rabbinical model that has dominated Jewish history. Moreover, if possessing knowledge relates in part to exposure or access to the corridors of power and decision-making, then women without access are not as likely to become conversant in the issues of the day. They are likely to be seen as marginal and underskilled; however, my own experience suggests that having a technical or substantive expertise helps overcome this bias. Women may make the greatest gains in their communal power and influence by bringing specialized knowledge, skills and expertise to the table.

Willingness to Work

Women traditionally were the "foot soldiers" of the Jewish communal world. Without being paid, they volunteered their time, efforts and abilities to many Jewish communal organizations, although more often they stuffed envelopes or planned benefits than made policy (Daniels, 1988). Analysts of the philanthropic sector (Daniels, 1988; Kosmin & Tress, 1991; Odendahl, 1994) make the point that when women have been part of the philanthropic leadership, they typically have translated their roles as caretakers or enablers from the private domain of hearth and home to the communal realm.
Position

Finally, position in the world outside of the Jewish community also has bearing on one’s “aura” within the Jewish world. One’s credit goes up in the Jewish world when the world outside offers recognition. As women in general and Jewish women in particular gain recognition in society, it remains to be seen how, if at all, this will affect the recognition granted them by the Jewish communal world.

The “Community” and the “Organization”

My presentation of the way power gets distributed in the Jewish communal world is generally based on the conventional wisdom within that world. Clearly, there is room for more inquiry. Nonetheless, in considering the dynamics of power in the Jewish world, it is worthwhile to consider two competing paradigms: the “community” and the “organization.” I have been struck by the contrast between them. The distinctions are instructive. There even appears to be an implicit socio-linguistic rule about when to use each term. “Communal” is an insider term, a particularly Jewish code word, expressive of a desire for unification in a context of geographic and ideological dispersion, a means of asserting “community” in a time and place where that has become harder to grasp. In contrast, the more analytically neutral term of “organization” connotes efficiency, effectiveness, management, hierarchy and bureaucracy. Communities exist without needing a goal. Organizations have tasks or missions to accomplish; once these are accomplished, organizations need to figure out new raisons d’être or else be put to rest. Whereas organizations exist to do a job, such as fund-raising or delivery of social services, communities are concerned with expression and authority, with transmitting themselves from past to future. The notion of the “Jewish communal world,” then, is a mixture of both these frameworks.

This distinction between community and organization raises questions. Do the implications for leadership and for women as leaders vary within these two frameworks? Is the issue of women as leaders in Jewish organizations a proposition more or less problematic than the issue of women in the Jewish communal world?

The organizational leader needs management skills. The communal leader may require different skills, which are more political and more visionary. Another relevant question as we move between the communal and organizational paradigms involves the changing roles of volunteers and professionals. There may be different prospects for women lay leaders as compared to women professionals within each of these paradigms.

Defining an Agenda for American Women and Jewish Women

A different view of women and power emerges from the literature on women, work and organizations in general, rather than the literature on American Jewish women and/or the Jewish communal world in particular. The growing scholarly literature about women and organizations can be arranged into three main themes, which parallel three evolving foci of the American women’s movement: 1) equity—achieving equal status, pay, access and
opportunity; 2) balancing of work or career and family (sometimes referred to as "stress"); and 3) leadership. This latter theme, more often than not, is about women’s supposed leadership style, but it is beginning to expand to include the vision, content and direction of the rising leaders—the emerging areas of concern that women leaders ought to address as they attain position. It is by no means clear from the literature about women in organizations that there really is a women’s way of leading. The danger of asserting a specifically women’s way of leading is that it cuts both ways: while giving women a sense of pride and special expertise, it also provides the framework for a new means of stereotyping women.

How are American Jewish women and the American Jewish communal world doing compared with the general world? First, Jewish women as a group are especially accomplished among American women in general in terms of their educational and professional attainments. Thus, for American Jewish women the issue of access to power, while still pressing, is only the beginning of the story. If any women will have access to power in America, Jewish women will. Women are in the pipeline in the various work sectors in America, and mainstream institutions have begun to see the writing on the wall, even if they do not always "get it" as well as we would like. However, the Jewish communal world seems stymied, perhaps due to the confusion between organizational and communal frames of reference.

What interests me is a broader, more fundamental challenge. Once we get access, what will we do when we sit at the table? So much of the effort has been about getting women into position and getting women power, yet very little attention has been given to defining a direction or a vision. Once we get the power, what will we do with it? This question highlights the difference between having a presence and having a voice with something to say. This is a question of leadership—especially the content of leadership.

My own sense is that we should start by assuming access to communal power (i.e., I never assumed that I could not sit at the table), and to address the central issues facing Jews. We should expect to change the existing reality—to make it better not only for women, but for both women and men. We need to tackle the community’s issues, and assume that women’s issues are an integral part of the whole. One way to do this is to cultivate and build on particular insights and wisdom that women have by virtue of their situations and their social roles. These insights and wisdom would change the way that the community as a whole operates by offering a new sense of direction. This proposal is ultimately a transformative agenda.

Here are two historical examples of women and their experience as transforming agents in the larger society. First, consider the role that 19th century upper-middle-class American women
played in this regard. Their distinctive critique of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, coupled with "having their own purse," led to their attempts to create a more humane society through their philanthropic efforts (McCarthy, no date). A second example of a transformative vision is seen in the origins of Hadassah, which was founded in 1912 not only to support the building of Palestine and the Zionist enterprise, but also to strengthen and renew women's own Judaism and American Judaism generally (Sarna, 1994).

What might a contemporary agenda look like? One contribution of women to the communal world could be an insistence on getting Jewish institutions, and ultimately those of American society in general, to relate to the whole person and not merely to the worker. As a woman, mother and professional I do not leave my personal and family roles behind as I go from home to work. Yet the structure of work in America traditionally has assumed these domains are separate. I am not suggesting that women have a monopoly on this insight; rather, I bring it as an example of how we can begin to create a substantive agenda out of our own experiences, an agenda that critiques and seeks to change the status quo in the Jewish community and in American society. Such an insight must carry over to other central problems on the American Jewish communal agenda. If our communal organizations seriously redesigned themselves around the notion of a more contextualized and holistic view of individual identity and of the multiple roles that people fulfill in their lives, they would be a step further along in re-creating themselves for the coming century.

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Chapter 6

Life in the Stalled Lane:
Women in Jewish Communal Organizations

Brenda Brown Lipitz

When Mary McCarthy, author of The Group, died, her friend Elizabeth Hardwick said, "A career of candor and dissent is not an easy one for a woman." Running the risk of taking a stand, especially an unpopular or difficult one, is hard for most people. It is especially hard for women, who for the most part have been brought up to be nurturing and conciliatory, and to avoid taking risks. Yet, having the vision to know what you want—and the courage and confidence to take a stand—is fundamental to good leadership. (Cantor, Bernay, & Stoess, 1992)

There must be a drastic change in the attitudes toward women that exist today in Jewish philanthropic organizations. Because this fact is neither universally recognized nor readily acknowledged by those on the Jewish communal scene, women who have the vision to know that change is necessary—and the courage and confidence to take a stand on this issue—run the risk of earning a "reputation." Ask me—I know. Many might describe my "career" in mixed-gender organizations as one of "candor and dissent." In the 1950s, nice Jewish girls were brought up to believe that getting a "bad reputation" was the worst thing that could happen. Clearly, even today, we do not want the label of a "bad reputation," but we do have a message to deliver. We are not "radicals" or "troublemakers." We are humanists who believe in equality for all people, men and women. We believe women are capable, intelligent, organized and efficient; furthermore, we know that many possess discretionary income. Jewish organizations do not offer women enough opportunities to exercise their many abilities, to participate in the decision-making process, and to channel their donations into projects of special interest to them. Unless Jewish organizations become more egalitarian, women will take their skills and their philanthropy elsewhere.

Mixed-Gender Organizations versus Women's Organizations

Let us consider two types of national and local Jewish philanthropic organizations—mixed-gender groups and women's groups—and examine the obstacles they present to women seeking significant and meaningful involvement. Many, if not all, mixed-gender organizations can be characterized as follows:

- They are male-dominated. Most lay and professional leadership positions are held by men.
- They send the message that women either play by men's rules or not at all.
- There is a lack of respect for women's divisions. The money women raise is undervalued.
The professionals who staff women's divisions often have less training and less experience, and they are paid less than their male counterparts. United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) hold annual campaign directors' institutes from which women's division directors are excluded—even though in many communities women's division directors raise more money than do campaign directors.

Women's divisions have virtually no share in the budgeting or allocation of funds.

Women's divisions cannot designate federation funds for specific new projects, even projects of importance to women.

There is no vehicle to identify projects that women's divisions could fund.

Women's divisions pay no attention to the small percentages allocated to women's projects.

Women's divisions have smaller budgets than other units in federations even though they produce revenue.

Benefactors and beneficiaries in large umbrella organizations have little sense of connection to each other.

There is little access to power for individuals, male and female, who are not major donors.

No mechanism exists to study and act upon the myriad reports published by CJF and UJA regarding the status of women in their organizations.

Interestingly enough, even women's organizations have characteristics that can discourage the enthusiastic involvement of women. For example, the following can be said about most national Jewish women's organizations:

- They are run more like committees than businesses.

- They are not perceived as having power. Women today view these organizations as "their mothers' charities."

- There is a lack of uniformity in the quality of local chapters. Thus, there is rarely a strong and clear national presence or image.

- They do not solicit significant sums of money from individual donors.

- Most do not raise enough money to have power. They can neither pay nor train their employees well, and they lack the resources to conduct extensive public relations and marketing efforts.

Lest it appear that Jewish philanthropic organizations have only negative characteristics, let us now examine the inducements to women seeking significant involvement that are offered by both mixed-gender national Jewish organizations and single-gender women's organizations. First, the mixed-gender groups:

- They have identified and capitalized on financial resources in the community.

- They benefit from the strength of numbers, mailing lists, and strong name recognition.
• They enjoy strong national networks and are perceived to be well-connected.

• They have sufficient resources to invest in events, staff, training, marketing and outreach.

• They are connected to local and national agencies that are devoted to making a difference.

Women's organizations offer different advantages:

• They offer comfort in the sharing, networking, and feeling of connectedness.

• They provide outstanding educational programs.

• They serve as a training ground for women leaders.

• They provide services in communities that specifically appeal to women donors and volunteers.

A shared characteristic of both mixed-gender and women's organizations is important to note: Both groups are responding incrementally to the needs of women today. We must not allow this incremental response to disguise the fact that important and lasting changes for women still must occur. As noted by Felice N. Schwartz in *Breaking with Tradition*, "Despite the fact that they possess the innate capabilities, women are not being utilized as effectively as they might. Part of the reason is that they are not coached, trained and exposed to the same range of experience as men. They are not spotted and tracked and mentored as men have always been" (Schwartz, 1992). Also, they do not have female role models in high places to emulate.

The executives of mixed-gender organizations are clinging to an image of the past. They have not yet begun to recognize the fact that women as a group are important to the future of their organizations, nor do they see the urgency of radically stepping up their approach to issues pertaining to the empowerment of women. And women's organizations, for the most part, still see themselves as "ladies' organizations." They have not shifted to a new definition of power to capture the attention of large groups of today's women. They need business plans and they must execute them efficiently. However, not enough women's organizations have studied the changes affecting women today and adapted their programs to accommodate to these changes.

### Who Are Women Donors and What Do They Want?

Organizations must look toward working women to define their new market. Just who is this working woman of today, and what does she want in a philanthropic organization? Much has been written about baby boomers: that they are the best educated generation of all time, and that "the maturing of the 74 million baby boomers will result in the most generous donor generation we've seen" (Shaw & Taylor, 1991). According to a recent report, the women who will enter the workforce in great numbers during this decade will be above the age of 30 and they will be the best educated women in history, "joining the ranks of doctors, lawyers, engineers, executives, and
business owners in percentages never imagined possible" (Shaw & Taylor, 1991). Research also suggests that these women will form the financial core of social action advocacy movements in the next decade. Indeed, three in five donors to such causes are women. Almost half earn more than $50,000 a year, and three-fifths are professionals and executives. Moreover, this population of women, who on average have few children, are going to write their wills in the next decade. They will therefore be contributing large sums of money to philanthropy (Shaw & Taylor, 1991). Clearly, by any number of measurements, including gains in wage-earning status, inheritance from parents and husbands, emerging leadership, and increased education, women are positioned to play a dominant role in philanthropy.

Moreover, outside of the Jewish community, big changes are occurring. Women want to form philanthropic organizations that have new rules, goals and standards of giving, as reflected by the National Network of Women's Funds (NNWF), an umbrella organization of almost 70 funds in the United States and Canada. Most of these women's funds are less than 10 years old. Many formed in response to research in the 1980s that showed that only 5% of foundation and corporate grant dollars were being awarded to programs specifically serving women and girls. Believing that many established philanthropic organizations neglect issues important to women, this network tries to correct that imbalance. The bottom line is that, from 1985 to 1992, the network contributed $80,753,981 to programs serving women and girls (Budhu, 1992).

Governed and managed by women, NNWF's philosophy is that philanthropy is more than just giving. It offers women the opportunity to be creative and to improve society. NNWF member funds have two missions: to be grant makers and to develop women as philanthropists for women's issues. Chandra Budhu, NNWF chair in 1992, stated: “Empowerment and self-determination ...creativity and resourcefulness...a vision and passion for justice...and the desire to use our resources boldly. These are hallmarks of the women's funding movement. We make philanthropy a tool for progressive social change” (Budhu, 1992).

Women now recognize that they have unprecedented financial leverage; they are better positioned than ever before to have an impact on social change. Indeed, they are being “wooed” by many organizations and boards, and there is great competition for their talents and their dollars. Jewish philanthropic organizations still operate on the premise that was valid in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—that Jewish people give their greatest gift and most involvement to Jewish causes. Well, that era is over, especially for Jews who feel less connected to their religion than their parents did. They are not interested solely in Jewish causes and will go where they can make a difference, share a common goal, be treated with respect and equality, and have the most influence. Jewish women know they are intelligent, capable and interested in making significant financial and social contributions, but many do not want to join male-dominated groups or women's groups that operate on old principles.
Kris Torkelson, development director of the Chicago Foundation for Women, said, “We hear time and time again from our women donors of their experiences with being excluded from decision making and positions of power within established charitable institutions and traditional philanthropies. And we are seeing more women shifting their dollars to those organizations that include them in their programs, on their boards, their trustee councils, and true positions of leadership” (Torkelson, 1994). The occasional shattering of the glass ceiling is negligible compared with the numbers of women who find themselves “locked in the basement with power failure.” Too often leaders, male and female, can deal with the advancement of individual women, but feel threatened by the empowerment of an entire constituency (i.e., women’s divisions). The forward progress of an entire affinity group is seen as an intrusion into the power structure of mixed-gender organizations, which often are unwilling or unprepared to make the changes in their boards and management teams that would upset the way they do “business as usual.” Too often organizations mistakenly assume that there will always be enough affluent, interested, and high-performance men to replenish the leadership ranks. Involving women simply represents problems too complicated or too difficult to solve, particularly regarding the important question of who has the power.

Women donors today are interested in the way in which power is shared and decisions are made in an organization (Torkelson, 1994). They define power as the ability to pull together resources, both human and financial, to set agendas, and to have an impact on communities. Women want to participate in programs, understand problems, and feel an involvement with the beneficiaries. Organizations throughout the country that have begun to study closely the unique needs and responses of women donors have enjoyed astonishingly positive results. In their book, Megatrends for Women, Patricia Aburdene and John Naisbett referred to a Business Week story entitled, “Sister, Can You Spare a Dime?” Their answer was, “Hell yes, and more” (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992). In Women as Donors, Women as Philanthropists, we are told that Nikki Tanner and Peter Ramsey of Wellesley College raised a record $168 million. In explaining how they cultivated and solicited women contributors, they said: “We listened to them. We took their responses, suggestions, questions and concerns seriously. We valued them. Because such attentiveness is a rare experience for women in our society, they said thank you with great generosity” (Fisher & Schlegell, 1993). And Maddie Glazer, national chair of Duke University’s fund-raising campaign, is quoted as saying, “Old fund-raising methods are no longer successful with women who want to be involved, informed and connected to a project. Communicating with women today means understanding how women see themselves, taking them seriously and having them assume parity with their male counterparts” (Fisher & Schlegell, 1993).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

The Jewish world sorely lags behind the many secular institutions, particularly colleges and universities, which have made progress in courting their daughters. Unfortunately, Jewish professional and lay leaders have not acknowledged the extent of the problem. Jewish women, particularly those
40 and under, see themselves as intelligent, capable, achieving people. They possess confidence and know-how. They want to be seen and heard, and they do not want to be judged by their sex.

The Jewish philanthropic world has not acknowledged the following axiom set forth in Megatrends for Women: "A critical mass of women and like-minded men have embraced 'women's liberation.' It has become a self-sustaining movement that may at times experience setbacks, but its direction is unstoppable. Women are transforming the world—even though all women are not yet fully liberated" (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992).

And what about those dynamic women who have attained leadership positions but neglect to advocate for the entire women's constituency? Many women in positions of power, whether they have come up through women's divisions or not, are satisfied with the status quo and do little to promote women as a constituency. There are not yet enough powerful voices to get the message heard. When women advocates do come forward, top executive directors of national organizations as well as some directors of large city federations pay lip service to the importance of women's divisions and the need to improve their status and power in mixed-gender organizations. These leaders then continue their pattern of disregard and tokenism—a pattern that has already caused many Jewish women to take their dollars and their energies elsewhere. We women, who are so accustomed to collaboration, have not yet realized that female collective action is a superior strategy.

We have reached a critical moment: We must act as agents of change and we must speak out. We must not accept labels thrust upon us or heed those who tell us we need to understand "process," just because we will not accept the power structure. It is difficult to be proficient and visionary when there is petty jealousy over who has the power, and when every strategy for gender equity is seen as either isolationist or not feasible. We must guide our Jewish organizations to devise a radically different strategy for attracting and retaining women donors.

Which guiding principles and strategies will enable Jewish organizations to successfully recruit women today? They must move:

• from not offering power to women to empowering women;
• from depending on process to allowing women to take action;
• from not allowing women's donations to be designated for projects of specific interest to the donors to allowing them to be designated;
• from recognizing the strengths of a few individual women to recognizing the collective strength of women as a constituency;
• from being complacent about the role of women to advocating on behalf of women;
• from giving women's divisions limited responsibility to giving them full responsibility.

Based upon my experience with mixed-gender organizations, I feel strongly that, until the issue of
gender equity is a reality, the time, money and attention given by women to these organizations will never reach their full potential. UJA was probably among the first, and still may be one of the only, philanthropies to solicit wives for separate gifts. This was originally called “plus giving.” More importantly, federations’ women’s division campaigns across the country continue to increase in a period when general campaigns have fallen or remained flat. Therefore, it is difficult to understand federations’ questioning of the viability of separate women’s divisions. The study done in connection with the five-year strategic plan in Baltimore showed that if women’s divisions were eliminated, 66% of women currently contributing would give less or not at all (Baltimore Women’s Division, 1993). Despite this fact, we continue to hear about communities that merge their women’s divisions, or in some cases, just merge the most lucrative part of their women’s campaign into their general campaign. This strategy may not sound the death knell for just women’s divisions; ultimately it could eliminate women as individual donors to Jewish communities.

The journey to parity within Jewish organizations is not an easy course. Judith Shapiro, the president of Barnard College, said in her 1994 installation remarks,

"The price of gender equity is eternal vigilance. Historic struggles are not things you engage in on the assumption that they will soon be over, but rather on the more modest assumption that your actions will make things better, and your inaction will allow things to get worse. Nor do you retire from such a struggle because it is finished, but rather because it is someone else’s turn to carry it forward”.

I believe it is now our turn. Jewish women’s organizations trying to attract women today must look at strong, national secular models. They need to restructure into a network, combine causes, and become a strong umbrella group. This new network would focus on women’s issues, secular as well as Jewish, but with an emphasis on Jewish issues.

Those of us who are active in Jewish communal organizations and who wish to attract more women to our ranks need to understand and value the great diversity of Jewish women. And, truly, we are diverse. We are every woman everywhere. We are working, and not working. We are poor and rich; famous and ordinary. We dress well; we do not care how we dress. We are fat; we are thin. We are lesbians; we are heterosexual. We are married and single; highly educated and uneducated. We are assimilated; we are observant. We care about environment, ecology and humanism; we do not care about these issues. We are feminists, and not feminists. We are interested in donor activism, and we are interested in self-promotion. We care deeply about our religion; we do not care about our religion at all.

It is vital that we know ourselves and accept who we are. No one organization can appeal to all Jewish women, and some women may never be attracted to any Jewish organization. Organizations and their members must choose relevant issues and market them to like-minded women in their communities. We must recognize and accept that, for a variety of reasons, different organizations will attract different audiences. We
must overcome our collective organizational guilt about the people we do not attract. Guilt that causes many of us to feel we are doing something wrong or that we have not done enough.

The reality is that each individual must take responsibility for deciding where to help physically and financially within her own community. Caring about one’s Jewish education also rests partly with the individual. Organizations and synagogues can and must offer many options for participation in Jewish life; however, it is ultimately up to each person to decide whether to make a commitment to be a part of the Jewish community.

Prototypes for the Future

Of course, the premise of this paper is the hope and belief that many women can be attracted to Jewish organizations if changes are made. My personal vision for the path to greater involvement of women in Jewish philanthropy is contained in the following two prototypes for organizational structure and substance. One model represents “a room of one’s own,” an innovative organization for women, by women, about women. The second model offers a new opportunity within the framework of existing mixed-gender organizations.

A Network of Philanthropic Funds

The first model is a network of Jewish women’s philanthropic funds, which would operate throughout the United States, primarily in the largest cities. According to the recent Council of Jewish Federations study on the status of women in federations, the larger the city, the less likely that women will be incorporated into the top leadership. In fact, the study notes, the percentage of female presidents in the 19 largest federations has dropped from 10.5% to 7.0% since 1986, and no major city federation has a female executive director. Moreover, only three women’s division directors in these same cities sit on top professional management teams (Council of Jewish Federations, 1994).

A national network of Jewish women’s philanthropic funds would create substantial leadership positions for women in an environment that promotes women’s distinctive styles. The network would focus its grants on Jewish issues affecting women and girls. The salient fact is that this network would be formed and operated solely by women and for women. The structural components of such a network would be as follows:

- Individual affiliates would raise money in their local communities.
- All funds would be pooled in a national endowment.
- A national board would oversee investment policy, develop and promote funds, act as a clearinghouse and distributing agent for local research, and transmit expertise on how to raise funds.
Affiliates would create their own projects and make their own allocations based on the interest from the principal that their city contributed annually to the central fund. All grant proposals would be fair game, as long as they were designed to assist Jewish women and girls. Beneficiaries could be domestic or international.

Each affiliate would have a board of directors comprised of philanthropists, activists, grantees and experts.

The local boards would not be elitist in terms of contributors—women of all financial means would be welcome.

Contributors and experts, as well as grantees, would work side by side to make policy and decide the agenda for the local programs.

This format would empower women, individually and collectively, to take responsibility for their philanthropic activity. We know that the money is there to be tapped. In the secular community, such women's funds are the fastest-growing philanthropies in America. There are young entrepreneurial women in the Jewish community who are not drawn to federations, and there are women who will inherit large asset bases who have stated that they want to put their money only into Jewish philanthropies that directly benefit women. We must reach this group, yet few federations allocate monies for women's programs. While nationally foundations and corporations award only 5% of their grant monies to programs specifically serving women and girls, the Jewish Agency for Israel has perhaps the most dismal record of all—less than 1% of its allocations serve women's specific needs. This situation exists despite the clear indication that women who believe in an organization's philosophy, who value the organization and are valued by it, and who are solicited properly will give generously and will want to participate directly in the organization's programs.

**Women Programming for Women**

The second model in my personal vision is a project within the framework of existing local mixed-gender organizations. As in the all-women's philanthropic network, the program must meet these criteria to attract female activists and philanthropists. It must be of compelling interest to women and address needs not being met by the community's service network. It must have a sound business plan, utilize volunteers in meaningful roles, and have an active advisory board that sets policies and allocates funds.

An example of this prototype already exists. A project to address the problems of domestic violence has been established by the Women's Department of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, in collaboration with Jewish Family Services (an agency of The Associated), and the House of Ruth (a secular shelter and counseling program for battered women). The project's mission is to provide Jewish women who are victims of domestic violence with direct support, counseling, and assistance that will enable them to take control of their lives and create safe environments for themselves and their families.
The primary components of the three-year pilot program fall into two categories: clinical services and community awareness. Clinical services will include group therapy and individual counseling, provided by Jewish Family Services and the House of Ruth. The community awareness effort will include wide dissemination of educational materials and a help line that is to operate nine hours a day, seven days a week. The help line will be staffed by volunteers who have undergone rigorous training. Pro bono lawyers will help women with legal problems. A speaker's bureau of trained volunteers will be organized to reach out to every Jewish organization in Baltimore to inform the community about this program and to educate the public about domestic violence. An advocacy group will work with the Maryland Legislature to change laws and create new ones to protect abused women and children. An advisory board will establish policy and allocate funds. As of this writing, and strictly by word of mouth, 140 women have signed up to be trained as volunteers in this program. The Domestic Violence Program of the Women's Department will cost $90,000 per year. It will be administered by a woman who previously worked as a lobbyist for the Baltimore Jewish Council, the community relations agency of The Associated.

How is this project being funded? Not through The Associated's annual campaign, which is stretched to the limit. Support came from the private gifts of women who had already made substantial commitments to the annual campaign. Most of these women are social activists who are nurturing and compassionate and who wanted to designate funds to the community in a significant way. This sort of funding represents the wave of the future in federation life—women devising a program for women, implementing a concept for action, and supporting it financially. It is their project from A to Z. Incidentally, all the money for this project was raised in two weeks from 10 women and two men. The board has attracted some of the best and the brightest.

These two prototypes help create a new paradigm of relevance and social action for women involved in Jewish communal organizations. They meet the needs of these women in a dynamic and forthright way; most importantly, women will receive a highly gratifying return on their effort, money, and time.

I hope that soon women's philanthropic goals will be realized within the framework of Jewish organizations throughout the country. But that will be achieved only if organizations understand and agree to address the needs and desires of Jewish women today, and if they replace the intransigence of the past with the flexibility of the future.

The values that resonate deeply into the soul of women let us talk to each other across cultures about how we provide for our families, maintain our communities, replenish our environment, and strive for peace with our neighbors. These values bind us to our past and to our futures. They have spiritual and religious underpinnings that women are reclaiming. ...Centuries of religious persecution did not dry up the stream of feminine consciousness and spirituality. It has dammed up its power, and the dam is about to burst. (Mann, 1994, p. 234)

Surely, the Jewish community will respond.
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Women seldom speak about money in the context of using the power that, for men, is implicit in philanthropic giving. For women, philanthropy historically has been an alternative—actually, a subversive—path to power. Our goal now is to bring into the open the motivations for women's giving, and to encourage women to use the power of philanthropy to make creative change in society.

**Why Are American Jewish Women Talking About Women, Money and Power?**

There are profound and subtle differences between the lives of Jewish and non-Jewish women. While we Jewish women stand shoulder-to-shoulder with women of other faiths and ethnic groups on many important social and political issues, we come out of a culture that has inculcated into us certain distinctive assumptions about our roles—regardless of where along the spectrum of religious affiliation we identify ourselves.

Judaism is a religion that specializes in differences: kosher and non-kosher, holy days and regular days, milk and meat, Jew and gentile, woman and man. If we are Jewish—regardless of whether we describe ourselves as Orthodox, Reform, unaffiliated, or some other designation—the distinctions made between women and men have shaped our collective past.

Public religious life has, until the latter part of this century, been for men only. But if the *shul* and the house of study were male turf, many of our female ancestors—at least those who came from Russia and Eastern and Western Europe—did not necessarily feel that they were missing a great deal by not being counted in a *minyan*. Instead, they carved out as their sphere of influence the community as a whole.

Our foremothers did not see themselves as shrinking violets, judging from the scores of memoirs that are being uncovered and published. While their husbands and sons were studying and *davening*, these women were selling herring under an umbrella in the town square, keeping the family fed and clothed, negotiating with the surrounding gentile culture, speaking the language of the land and understanding the local customs. These were women who saw themselves as instrumental—active rather than passive, strong, not weak. They make great role models.

I assert, in fact, that we should lobby for the resurrection of the *yenta*. After all, she has gotten a bad press (much like Eve's predecessor, Lilith), and if we are going to talk about women and power we make a big mistake if we ignore her. She is the woman who, whether in the *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe or in the urban ghettos of the New World, would perch at her window sill, inspecting her domain, knowing not only everybody else's business but also how they could do it a little
better. She was the one who knew who needed extra food, a scholarship for a child, a sympathetic ear, a little communal assistance. She was the miracle worker who could make soup from a stone, serve 47 unexpected Shabbos guests with half a chicken, and—no matter how poor she was herself—was always collecting money for someone even poorer. In America, she helped found the small pro-feminist investment banks that were set up around the country in the 1920s and 1930s as Jewish women’s loan funds, lending money exclusively from women and to women for everything from dentists’ bills to venture capital for entrepreneurs.

This is a very different image from the Victorian-lady model of behavior that many non-Jewish women grew up with as their ideal. The point of this portrait is to suggest that we have strong female role models in Jewish life—in everyday Jewish life—who spur us in our endeavors and in our sense of how much is possible, even if we have not been fully aware that they have seeped into our collective unconscious.

Not only do we have activist women in our past, we also come from a tradition that prepares many of us for activism. Here are relevant statistics on Jewish women’s education culled from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey: Jewish women are the most educated women in the United States. Almost two-thirds under age 45 (64.3%) have college degrees, as compared with 11.5% of all other white American women.

This means that Jewish women have been uniquely positioned to move into the slots that have opened up for all women with affirmative action guidelines. It also means that Jewish women are likely to be earning more money per capita than non-Jewish women, which makes us attractive targets for fundraisers in the arts, medical care, social services, and many other areas.

Our distinctiveness from other American women makes us vulnerable as well as unique. For example, the ugly stereotyping of Jewish women as assertive “JAPs” or as political radicals and troublemakers is a way to blame us for pursuing what all women want. Because we are well-educated, and often care enough about issues to be outspoken about them, we—and the organizations we join—represent all American women. At the same time, a wide gulf separates Jewish women from the majority of American women. We are more privileged in our access to education and more active. As Jews and as feminists, we want to make the world a better place. We want to wield our power.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE DIFFERENCES WHEN WE TALK ABOUT WOMEN AND MONEY AND POWER?

First, visibility can equate with danger. Links between Jews and money trigger both classical antisemitism and our fears of it. And as women, we understand that success, earning power and affluence make us a threat too. We can feel that we are the targets of prejudice both as Jews and as women. One reason the persistent JAP stereotype is such a danger to our self-esteem is because of its pernicious amalgam of misogyny and antisemitism.

Because of these perceived dangers, we sometimes do not feel—or do not acknowledge—the full range of our own power, especially when it comes to philanthropy. Because of education and earning power, Jewish women have the capacity to be in
the forefront of major philanthropic giving. Couple this with the fact that Jews in general are among the most affluent citizens in America. Since daughters usually inherit equally with sons, women will inherit a fair share of the $7 trillion to $10 trillion that will pass into the hands of the baby boomers in the coming decades. Yet, until very recently, Jewish women's charitable contributions to Jewish causes have been viewed as “plus giving”—a little sidelight to the “real” campaign to raise funds from men. And, until very recently, Jewish women have been modest about asserting the power of the money they raise themselves, and the even more substantial sums they spur others (notably their husbands and sons) to give.

**WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT THAT CAN HELP US BE PRO-ACTIVE YET RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF THE MONEY WE WANT TO GIVE AWAY, NO MATTER THE SIZE OF THE POT?**

1. **Women should not be afraid of knowing too much.**

   We have learned not to believe everything people say about us. Here is an example. The common wisdom put forth by male money managers and even by some female psychologists is that women are more averse to risk than men are. Women do make certain kinds of money-related decisions differently than men—notably, we like to find out a great deal of information before acting—but studies conducted at Indiana University, University of California-Los Angeles, University of Wisconsin and Wellesley College show that when we do invest our money or give it away we are more likely than men to feel comfortable putting it into projects that further social change rather than supporting the status quo. New projects in any community—like the most successful of small entrepreneurial ventures—are likely to be funded by women, according to fundraisers and volunteer leaders interviewed across the country (Schneider, 1993a; 1993b).

2. **Women know where the money needs to go.**

   Perhaps women’s willingness to fund change comes from the fact that we do have our fingers on the pulse of each community’s real needs. Thirty-two years after the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, we are still the ones making the visits to elderly relatives in the nursing home, taking children to the local Jewish Community Center, enrolling them in a Hebrew school, attending an adult education class, creating an egalitarian Passover seder.

   Jewish women are consumers as well as funders of services, and this duality makes for a complex, but potentially transformative, engagement in the Jewish community. Women are thus heavily invested, psychologically as well as financially, in the survival of the projects their tzedakah helps make possible. Women are more likely than men to see up close how various community agencies actually function—or at least how these agencies serve the needs of their constituents.

   According to fundraisers in the Jewish community and development officers at universities, a woman’s path to writing a tax-deductible check is different from a man’s. Women first get involved with a cause or an agency, then make a financial contribution. Men first give money (in some cases only because some man they know has asked them...
to and not because they care about the cause), and later on perhaps involve themselves in the work itself.

3. **Women want to affect the causes they support.**

Women want a vote with their check. We want to be instrumental in shaping the creative survival of Jews as a people, and of Jewish women as 51% of that population. More and more, Jewish women are relearning the possibilities of collective giving, whether to support an individual project at home or in Israel (after all, that is how the Hadassah Medical Center was created), or to create a Jewish women's foundation or a Jewish women's endowment fund to change the face of a whole community's philanthropy as has already happened in several U. S. cities in the past five years. Regarding the latter possibility, some have asked, “Why another organization?” Women's funds are a form of a tzedakah collective rather than simply another organization, a mechanism for advancing a women's agenda that can encourage change in the entities they fund.

4. **Women can change a community by the questions they ask.**

One way collective giving through a joint women's fund or foundation can make a difference is as simple as a call for proposals. For better or for worse, an axiom of community life is that programs tend to follow money. If a women's fund, even one without much to disburse initially, indicates that each year it will fund projects in a certain area—women's scholarships one year, new interventions in violence against women and children another year, collaborations among Jewish women's organizations in the third year, and so on—creative thinking will be spurred in organizations and individuals that hear about the grant possibilities. The advantage to having such a tzedakah collective working as a separate entity in any community is that it can call attention to the women's issues that may need recognition and are underfunded by existing Jewish organizations. The organizations will change as we women use our charity clout.

To help bring about change or to accelerate change, women donors say that they want to support causes, “not just bricks and mortar.” Of course, every charitable organization yearns for unrestricted funds so that it can pay its rent on the bricks and mortar, but drawing in the growing number of potential women donors means linking women to causes that interest them. This will increasingly be true for male donors as well. In fact, the “named gift opportunities” (e.g., putting one's name on a library, or a center for Jewish feminist studies) that once were considered a big draw for wealthy male donors may be losing their appeal as well.

**WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

The differences that are now obvious in the giving patterns of women and men (see Schneider, 1993a; 1993b) will not necessarily persist into the next generation. In fact, the new Jewish etiquette for the fin de siècle may be that Jewish women are

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1 Because so many Jewish women go to college, alumnae giving provides a very useful control situation against which one can test hypotheses about women's giving in the Jewish community.
opening the door for Jewish men—leading the men into a new paradigm for philanthropy, one characterized by a closer connection to the funded project and by cooperation rather than competition. (A man in the future might even say to his business or professional rival: "Why not join me in helping make this new project happen?" instead of announcing to a fund-raiser: "My colleague gave $1,000? I'm going to give $1,200.")

Women's style of handling money—
informed decision-making, participation in the organizations we support financially, willingness to be singled out as a major donor—models a different kind of Jewish philanthropy for men as well. Especially for younger men, for whom high-pressure fund-raising is anathema, women's ways of giving (now being examined by fundraisers nationwide) provide clues as to how the Jewish community can successfully recast some of its tactics.

Most Jewish women grow up in families where giving is "a Jewish habit," one that is often practiced but infrequently discussed. Better communication about philanthropy and how philanthropic decisions are made in each family can provide us an opportunity to recognize and understand some of the forces that motivate women differently from men.

Still, we know that Jewish women under 45 now give less than half of their charitable contributions to Jewish causes. Partly this is because they feel shut out from the circles of power in the Jewish community, which in many places are almost exclusively male. These are women who can learn to say, "I'd be happy to support the work you do—as soon as you come back to me and let me know that you have equal representation of women on your board of directors and in your executive suite." In other cases, Jewish organizations have not made a compelling case for the very good work that is already going on—a poor job of marketing to women, if you will. When Jewish women are recognized as a voting bloc, more organizations will try to ensure that women's interests are being met. Without a doubt, Jewish women will return to Jewish giving when this happens.

One interpretation of the meaning of tzedakah (more than merely the handing over of a check or other negotiable instrument) is the observation that the money is not yours; it was given to you to support justice. The good fortune in having the means to give is in itself a gift. The classical yenta model applies here too—even poor women were accustomed to raising money for those who had less. (One Jew-by-choice confesses to feeling jealous of her born-Jewish friends because their families honor philanthropic giving, while her own parents scorn her as "an incompetent money manager" when she writes a check to charity.)

The transformative power of money is seen by thoughtful women donors as an obligation to be borne wisely. We hear this as well from Jewish
women philanthropists who say that it is a great responsibility to have the power to change the world simply through what one funds.

Part of that responsibility is in giving to support a specific cause. Part of it is in women using the voice and the vote that they get when their philanthropy provides access to the seats of power in an organization or in a community. In American Jewish life, using the voice and the vote means a chance to be political. It means making certain that American Jewish organizations put their significant numbers behind issues important to all women (such as reproductive choice, pay equity and health). It also means trying to ensure that other women have access to leadership positions as well.

As we learn—from the collective fantasies and bold plans of the National Commission on American Jewish Women and from various continuity commissions—what the real and diverse desires of Jewish women are, we will have a clearer vision of the future we Jewish women want to help create with our tzedakah. With a confidence in our own power to use the money we earn, or control, or inherit for transformative purposes, we can find the opportunities to fund that future.

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Support for Israel has long been a core commitment of American Jewry. Even in the 1990s, when issues of Jewish continuity and Jewish identity in America overshadow other concerns, 44% of American Jewish women and 50% of American Jewish men consider Israel and its survival an important goal for Jewish organizations (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). Support for Israel is in part an emotional issue. About three-fourths of American Jews say they feel an emotional attachment to Israel. Recent initiatives make Israel’s prospects for peace appear greater than ever before and threats to its survival appear smaller. The American Jewish community’s priorities and perceptions of Israel are likely to change as a result. The time is ripe, therefore, to consider how Israel at peace can be as appealing and unifying a force in Jewish life as the Israel that struggled to survive. And it is time to consider how the women’s agenda can be a part of a renewed and intensified American-Israeli connection.

The National Commission on American Jewish Women reviewed recent research (see Chapter 2) to assess American Jewish women’s current status and to establish a basis for the Commission’s call for action. We need to examine comparable data on Israeli women, to develop a comprehensive view of their personal, family and work lives, their religious views, their participation in public life, and so on. If we could assemble data on both American and Israeli women, we would be able to study the similarities and differences that characterize the women in the two most creative centers of Jewish life today. We would have a great opportunity for women in the United States and Israel to learn about each other. And there would be an important “reality check” for stereotypes and myths about Jewish women.

Unfortunately, as scant as the data are on American Jewish women, there is even less research on Israeli women. The most recent comprehensive study on women in Israel was conducted in 1978 by the Prime Minister’s Commission on the Status of Women. Despite hopes to the contrary, there has been no statistical yearbook to update findings and to indicate areas of improvement and decline. I believe in the power of objective, scientific data to change social policies and practices. The research on women, however, has limited capacity to influence since it is outdated and incomplete, and it is often biased by the special interest groups that collect and promote the data.

**Debunking Myths of Equality**

The popular image of Israelis is one of full equality between men and women. This image

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Voices for Change

Voices for Change derives from several sources: early Zionist propaganda, mandatory army service for both men and women, and the noble ideals of equality expressed in Israel's Declaration of Independence of 1948. The image, however, is a distortion of reality. Unless the myths that sustain this image are debunked, we will not be able to uncover and treat the problems of Israeli women in the 1990s. The experience of Israeli women may be unique in many ways, but the central theme—myths of equality—involves American Jewish women as well.

Myth #1. The example of Golda Meir proves that women can succeed.

Golda Meir is frequently cited as the paradigm of Israeli women and proof that their potential is limitless. The stereotype of Israeli women is that they are fighters, women like Golda Meir who fought alongside men to create the state of Israel. The resulting myth—that women can achieve everything—precludes attempts to improve the status of Israeli women.

Golda Meir may be the model, but there are only 11 women among the 120 elected members of the Knesset and, after 13 elections, the number of women representatives is the same as during the first decade of statehood. Indeed, in view of women's progress in other countries, women in Israel often have the strange sensation of moving backwards. When women do advance to top positions, their stories are rarely heard. Two ministers and one deputy minister in the Ministry of Justice are women, and Miriam Ben-Porath, former supreme court judge, now holds one of the most powerful positions in the country as the state's controller. Yet little is known about these Israeli women and their contributions. Most people hear the story of Golda Meir. The stories of other women of achievement deserve to be heard too. The success myth raises two questions: What difficulties are faced by Israeli women who wish to fulfill their career potential? What is the experience of those women who are not pursuing careers and would rather stay at home and care for their families? Most working women, I would venture, are more motivated by the need to provide their families with a second income than by a desire for self-fulfillment and a career. Regardless, these women, too, can suffer from the Golda myth.

Myth #2. Religious law is not an issue for the majority of Israelis, who are nonobservant Jews.

Although the majority of Israeli Jews are nonobservant, we cannot underestimate the negative impact of Orthodoxy on women's status in Israel. Religion in Israel, which is highly politicized, is rarely countermanded to grant greater freedom to women. Israel does not have a constitution or Bill of Rights. Regardless, the proposed Bill of Rights that was defeated would have neither challenged nor diminished the power of the rabbinical courts. Given the present political system, change is unlikely to occur soon. When it does occur, it will not be through revolution but rather through chipping away at the existing laws and power structure. For example, Israel currently allows only religious marriages, but the Jerusalem Institute is
examining the possibility of instituting civil marriage within *halacha* (Jewish law).

**Myth #2.** The relationship between Israeli and American Jewish women has a direct bearing on their relationship. On the one hand, I envy the possibilities American Jewish women have for religious life. Israelis have a great deal to learn about giving women greater access to Judaism, although certainly the establishment of Reform and Conservative movements in Israel represents a significant and positive change. On the other hand, I am concerned that American Jewish women will find it difficult to relate to the Israeli reality where significant power is in the hands of the religious parties and the rabbinical establishment.

**Myth #3.** Israeli women's equality is clearly seen in their obligation to perform military service.

The military has great influence on Israeli society, and it is true that there is universal conscription and compulsory service for both men and women. This central experience in Israeli life, however, differs significantly for men and women. Men serve three years plus reserve duty; women serve only 21 months. Military service is the road to leadership for men. Women, however, do not benefit as men do from military training in management skills or from the army's development of ability and confidence. Being in the military is believed to be an asset for a politician. Military leaders, who are men, often become cabinet or Knesset members. For women, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) is rarely a pathway to higher positions in business or politics.

Differences in the length and nature of service (women are assigned mainly to auxiliary duties) justify these realities to many Israelis.

The issues surrounding myth #3 are complex. On the one hand, feminists say women will never achieve equality if they are barred from combat roles. On the other hand, the majority in Israel do not want women to go into combat because they fear they would face particular dangers as prisoners of war. Myth #3 raises two questions: Should women advocate full equality in all aspects of military service including combat? What will be the impact of peace given that wartime experiences (mainly the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the Gulf War of 1991) have wrought the greatest changes in public perceptions of Israeli women's roles?

**Myth #4. Women are protected from sex discrimination in Israel by progressive legislation.**

Although sex discrimination is illegal, few women are found in prominent leadership positions in the professional, business and financial worlds even though 42% of Israel's labor force is female. The income gap between men and women persists; women do not receive equal pay for equal work. We need to examine the gender gap in the workplace and discover how anti-discrimination laws can have a more immediate and positive impact on women's advancement. Our attention needs to be directed not only toward women achievers but also to the many women who may or may not be employed but are living below the poverty line. We must be certain that in fighting
myth #4 we not become detached from the grassroots and lose sight of other, basic concerns of Israeli women.

**THE SHARED AGENDA**

Many of the issues of concern to women in Israel are universal—assuring equal opportunity, abolishing discrimination, juggling career and family life, achieving access to power and to decision-making positions, combating domestic violence and assuring safety and dignity for all women. These are areas in which American and Israeli women have shared interests and opportunities for concerted action:

1. Promoting equality between women and men: equal pay, equal opportunity and equal rights.

2. Supporting women in juggling the complex demands of personal and family life and career.

3. Achieving power: access to key political and community positions, to financial resources, and to the places where decisions are made.

4. Fighting violence against women: wife and child abuse, rape and sexual harassment.

5. Searching for Jewish teachings and values with special application to women and determining how women can make their voices heard when they are usually excluded from serious debates on Jewish questions (e.g., who is a Jew? what is a Jewish family?).

Despite the strength of a common agenda, the connection between Israeli and American Jewish women may be attenuated by their different problems and resources. American women may be years ahead in consciousness-raising on feminist issues but Israeli women have other priorities, life and death, and their children have to go into the army. American Jewish women must be sensitized to what is important to Israeli women, and vice versa.

Alternatively, the connection between Israeli and American Jewish women may be intensified by their differences and the great potential to learn from one another. The American contribution to Israeli life is underrated. Americans introduced feminism, volunteerism, environmentalism, safety measures, and democratic notions into Israeli society. And there is much more American women can offer us. For example, I would like to see American women involved in projects on domestic abuse or on alternatives to the rigidity of Orthodoxy in Israel. The potential for Israeli women to teach American women is also underrated. For example, Israel is developing a unique, indigenous culture that could become a viable force, the modern *Yiddishkite* for which American Jewish women yearn. Israel’s wonderful day care centers could become a model for American centers.

In my search for new bridges between Israeli and American Jewish women, I look for key elements that hold people together: mutual projects, common caring for our Jewish heritage, mutual concern about *halachic* rigidity and its toll on women, the common wish to play a more meaningful role in one's own community and the
desire to build a global community of women. Specific issues or causes may provide particularly apt bridges. For example, Israeli and American Jewish women could seek ways to strengthen the fragile peace process—knowing that its importance for women is an added value. The intent of building new bridges is to develop relationships between Israeli and American Jewish women based not on what Americans can do for Israel, but rather on what we can do for each other and on what we can do together. There are any number of building blocks that can be used to construct bridges between Israeli and American Jewish women. Here are eight:

1. An annual intellectual dialogue between leadership groups of Israeli and American Jewish women on issues such as the meaning of Jewish continuity to Israel and to the American community, or women’s perspectives on current theological or communal questions. The dialogue would be an opportunity to explore together the approaches that have increased women’s participation in Jewish life in the United States and the relevance of these approaches for Israeli women.

2. A program to empower American and Israeli women by training them for leadership positions. Women from both countries would be able to support each other by mentoring, sharing learning materials, providing financial aid to participants, and more.

3. Mutual mentoring projects based on each community’s particular strengths. For example: American women could mentor Israeli women in areas where American women have a marked advantage (e.g., women’s health or prevention of family abuse) and Israeli women could mentor American women in areas where Israeli women have an important contribution to make (e.g., quality day care for young children).

4. Consciousness-raising groups for Israeli and American Jewish women. These groups would give the women opportunities to speak and listen to each other about their lives, concerns, feelings about Judaism, and views of Jewish continuity and community.

5. A mutual study of the contemporary Jewish family in Israel and in America. The study would identify changing patterns and needs (e.g., changes in single parent households, members of the “sandwich” generation, or women in intermarried households) and would highlight common concerns for women in both countries.

6. A program to support the artistic creativity of Jewish women in both the countries. The program would include literature, poetry, visual arts, performing arts, folk art, music, and so on.

7. Annual seminars for peer groups of Israeli and American women with special interests, including business, academics, Talmud, Torah, Midrash and Jewish values.

8. Study groups of Israeli and American Jewish women to discuss literature by and about women and to delve into Jewish sources on women.
Israeli and American Jewish women need each other, as women and as Jews. We have much to teach each other and much to learn from one another. We also have the potential to effect great change in Jewish life through mutual dialogue and concerted effort. We must find bridges between Israeli and American Jewish women that will be creative, strong and influential. We need to take advantage of our differences, bond together with a sense of peoplehood, and build new relationships and understanding.

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When the history of American Jewish women is written from the perspective of future generations, the final decades of the 20th century will be universally acknowledged as a remarkable period of monumental and extremely rapid change for women in the religious sphere of Jewish life. In less than half a century, Jewish women asked for, demanded and, for the most part, have received equal access to all or most hitherto inaccessible areas of religious practice, including public participation in prayer and ritual and the ability to study and become rabbis in Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative denominations. Both the impetus for change and its occurrence were in large measure the result of the secular feminist movement. Nevertheless, any fair evaluation must give credit to the denominations that made in some cases 180-degree shifts in practice, if not yet attitude, changing their movements forever through their decisions to include women fully in religious life.

The lives of women who have participated in the change, either as activists or as recipients of its benefits, have been deeply enriched. What is less clear, at least from the vantage point of our times, is the extent to which Judaism itself has been affected by the dynamic presence of women in all aspects of religious life. Without minimizing the importance of individual transformation, it can be said that only when Judaism itself is transformed by women's inclusion can this remarkable period of Jewish women's history be understood as a revolution. This paper explores some of the ways that women have grown spiritually through their encounters with Judaism during this period and it begins to consider the effect they have had on Judaism. This work draws on the experiences of Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and secular women, but some of the material can be extrapolated for Orthodox women as well, though clearly much is quite different for them. The changes taking place within the Orthodox world cannot be minimized. In some communities, Orthodox women are now in similar learning tracks as their male counterparts, and at least one prominent Orthodox leader predicts there will be Orthodox women rabbis before the year 2000.

PRAYER

Jewish women have always prayed, despite their exemption from the responsibility of public prayer. Relegated to the private domain of their homes, their prayers (to the extent that we know of them) were of a personal petitionary nature, requesting God to guard the health of their families: Meanwhile, their husbands and sons prayed

1 Important work on women's tikkunot has been done by Chava Weissler. See Weissler, C. (1988). Images of the matriarchs in Yiddish supplicatory prayers. Bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Religions, 14(1).
in synagogues for the health of the Jewish community. Most of the prayers, then as now, were written by men. However, with the widespread inclusion of women in Jewish liturgical life, there are increasing attempts to make the language of prayer either gender neutral or attentive to the female voice and aspects of divinity. The groundbreaking work of such Jewish liturgists as Marcia Falk demonstrates how rich the language of liturgy can be when approached with a fresh perspective:

\[N'varekh \text{ et ma'yan hayyeinu/sheheyanu v'kiyy'manu v'higgianu/la-z'man ha-zeh.}\]

Let us bless the flow of life/ that revives us, sustains us,/ and brings us to this time. (Falk, in press)

By conjugating the Hebrew word “bless” from its traditional form in the second person masculine imperative (Barukh) to the first person plural (N’varekh), Falk eliminates all reference to God as male and alters the nature of the blessing from command to communal praise.

More theologically radical are liturgists’ attempts to feminize the Hebrew to reflect the female aspect of the deity. In these instances, the Hebrew, which in any case is gender specific, is conjugated in the second person feminine form, which is apparent in the Hebrew but not in the translation:

\[Berucha At Ya Elohenu Shomeret ha'olam shehecheyatnu vekiyematnu vehigiyatnu lazman hazeh.\]

You are blessed, O God, Guardian of time and space, who keeps us in life, who sustains us, and who enables us to reach this season. (Elwell, 1993, p. 5)

The full impact of these liturgical changes and the many less dramatic changes in both the Reform and Reconstructionist prayer books¹ is yet to be determined. For many Jewish women who grew up with traditional prayer language that depicted God in masculine terms, such change is viewed as both welcome and challenging. To the extent that it reflects a sense of ourselves as Jewish women and a sense of God as non-male, liturgical change can be helpful in prayer-life. Inasmuch as it can deprive women of access to their nostalgic memories of praying in a certain way in childhood, liturgical changes present difficulties for some women. At a recent Feminist Seder in New York where the Falk blessings were used, both views were expressed in the written evaluations following the highly successful evening. The ideological debate continues as to how much language can be changed within the liturgy while still remaining connected both to the past and its richness and to others in the community.

In the end, the challenges for Jewish women and prayer today may be less about exclusionary language and more about the lack of serious opportunities for spiritual and intellectual fulfillment afforded by the average synagogue service. In that way, women are not very different from men, who must also find many synagogue services enervating and spiritually deadening. Recently, I attended a liberal synagogue on a

Shabbat morning where women are counted in the *minyan* (prayer quorum) and are called to the Torah, as is the case in most non-Orthodox synagogues. The service, led exclusively by an operatic cantor-soloist with the rabbi announcing pages, was an experience in alienation. Some people slept, while others talked to their neighbors or flipped through the prayer book aimlessly. I left to take a walk and was drawn to sounds of singing and laughter coming from the synagogue's kitchen, where the women of the sisterhood were preparing for the *kiddush* following services. There was no question in my mind where the spiritual action in that synagogue was that morning.

The solution is not for women to return to the kitchen, though we at least ought to acknowledge the value of that kind of activity to the souls of some women. However, if equal access to Jewish religious life is only going to result in the right of Jewish women to experience the same spiritual boredom as men, we will not have gained much and the cost may be too high. Many women report a sense of strong spiritual fulfillment the first time they are called to the Torah, carry the scroll through the congregation, or participate in some previously unavailable way in services. But if they are to continue to grow spiritually from that moment, meaning will have to derive not only from the experience of finally participating in a certain way, but from a deep sense of what it means to be connected to the tradition, its teachings and values, and the community that sustains it.

The conduits—religious institutions and their leaders—that connect the richness of the tradition with women who need and want access to it, remain somewhat rusty in many communities and clogged with anachronistic language and structures. Congregations of all denominations will have to understand better that women (and men) struggle to find meaning in their lives, value in their activity, connection to the past, attachment to community, a sense of something larger than themselves, and hope for the future. That struggle lies at the heart of Judaism and ought to be (though rarely is) at the heart of every synagogue.

**RITUAL**

There is no important moment in the lifetime of a Jew for which there is no blessing (Geller, 1992). For Jewish women of this period, finding the blessings and the rituals for the important moments of our lives has been among the most exhilarating and satisfying experiences in our encounter with Judaism. Such rituals have not always been accessible or obvious and sometimes they have had to be created. As the novelist Monique Wittig has written:

> There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare bellied. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or failing that, invent (Wittig, 1969, p. 89).

Jewish women have been remembering our slavery in Egypt and rewriting sederim to reflect the unique experiences of women. Feminist sederim have been held in virtually every major city in the country, in living rooms and synagogues. The ritual of the seder, long experienced by women from the vantage point of the stock pot in the kitchen, is being reclaimed in order to understand slavery in all its forms and to experience liberation both personal and communal. The most observed of all
Jewish rituals, the seder has been in many ways the easiest to transform, both because it takes place at home, where women have had more control, and because it is so elastic in its form. Even in the most observant of homes, it is always possible to add to the seder, indeed additions are regarded as an advantage. Feminist sederim have not only explored alternative liturgies; they have expanded on the various rituals within the seder itself to understand ourselves as women. The four cups have been linked to four different women or groups of women in Jewish history whose actions on behalf of the Jewish people have been omitted from traditional haggadot. In the seder sponsored by Ma'yan (The Jewish Women’s Project of the Jewish Community Center of the Upper West Side in New York), before a rousing rendition of the traditional Dayenu (“It would have been enough”), in which we acknowledge God’s gifts to the Jewish people, a new form was read as a dialogue between a mother and daughter:

Mother: If I could feel good about myself and good about my children at the same time...even if I could feel good about my children...Dayenu.

Daughter: If I could feel good about myself and not worry so much about my mother feeling good about me...Dayenu.

Mother: If I could figure out how to be a good mother and a good daughter at the same time...Dayenu.

Daughter and Mother: If I could just be good to myself...Dayenu.

1 See especially Elwell, pages 3, 23, 38 and 46.
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Daughter: If I could put myself first without letting go of my plans for changing the world...Dayenu.

Mother and Daughter: If we can keep talking to each other...Dayenu. (Cohen & Levithan, 1993, p. 15)

The model of the feminist seder has provided women both with a window into the tradition through their experience as women and with a window into themselves through an encounter with the tradition. It is a communal ritual model that draws its strength from the coming together of people with a shared history and destiny. Personal rituals, old and new, also have been experienced in a powerful way by many Jewish women, helping them to move through the cycles of their lives, face difficult situations, accept the changes that naturally occur in life, and, through a connection with the tradition, understand themselves as part of something larger than themselves. Sometimes these rituals have had to be "invented," as in the case of rituals for weaning, the onset of menstruation, special birthdays, and other sacred moments celebrated by women but with no traditional rites attached to them. The need for these rituals is clearly felt by many women. As Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts have written:

It is no wonder that rituals exist in all cultures to ease our passage from one stage of life to another. Using familiar symbols, known symbolic actions, and repeated words, rituals make change manageable and safe. ...Change is enacted through rituals and not simply talked about—couples don’t change from being single to being married by talking about marriage, but rather by a ceremony. (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992, p. 32)

Mikveh—perhaps the most unlikely of traditional rituals to appeal to non-Orthodox women—has resonated deeply among an increasing number of liberal Jewish women about to be married. Usually associated with traditional women who are beginning their sexual and married life simultaneously, mikveh at the time of marriage signals the onset of sexuality, and is followed by regular visits to the mikveh one week following the end of a women’s menstrual cycle, at which time sexual relations (avoided during this period) may be resumed. Although often disdained by their mothers as sexist and archaic, many non-Orthodox young women today are finding great spiritual meaning at the mikveh before they get married, in ways the tradition (and their own mothers) could never have imagined. These women, often already sexually active, find in the mikveh a way to ritually symbolize the change in status from nonmarital sexuality to marital sexuality, from possibly several sexual partners over the course of time to one monogamous relationship. In the confusion of the so-called sexual revolution, young women are using the ritual of the mikveh and its traditional association with female sexuality to leave behind whatever was and to acknowledge their changing status.

Without a way into the tradition and its depth and without good teachers who connect that tradition with the lives of women, experiences such as have been described rarely happen. The growing number of female rabbis has contributed to this phenomenon by helping women go through the ritual and navigating the sometimes alienating mikveh itself. It is often easier in the liberal Jewish
world to persuade women of the value of ritual when it meets their individual personal needs. It remains a challenge to help women move beyond self and toward Godliness within the context of both old and new rituals. Still, the tradition has proved its elasticity in the face of contemporary issues. And once again, the experience is often only possible and positive when the conduit—in this case the rabbi—is able to make the tradition accessible and relevant to the lives of women.

STUDY

Wrestling with Torah is like making love. I get close enough to get wounded—and the texts often hurt. But I've gotten close enough to be blessed—the astonishing moment of blinding insight when the world suddenly looks forever different, when we discover wholeness is what had seemed to be disparate and unconnected. (Geller, 1992, p. 247)

Study is central to the life of the Jew; but it has been, for the most part, inaccessible to Jewish women until the latter part of this century. As the doors to seminaries, academies and community adult studies programs have opened, the lives of women and indeed the community itself are changing in significant ways. The sheer number of female rabbinical students and rabbis suggests the possibility for radical change in future rabbinic leadership, provided women are careful to avoid adopting male models of the rabbinate (which are not highly effective for most Jews anyway). It is not uncommon for female rabbis, eager to secure their place among colleagues and congregants, to ignore their own inner voices and to imitate the style of the rabbis who still dominate the synagogue landscape. Female rabbis have the potential to look at models and texts from a unique point of view, which ought to broaden the options for everyone and compel change where necessary. But numbers alone will not make this happen. Female rabbis and educators need to be self-aware as women. They need to be connected to the issues that challenge people's lives and identities and to make that understanding available to those they serve. Still, the debate about "difference feminism"—the degree to which women bring unique qualities to the table because of innate differences rather than different experiences—continues. As women's roles and experiences expand, this issue may become clearer.

Perhaps the most popular way that women have entered Jewish religious life, combining prayer, ritual and study, has been through the traditional way that Jewish boys (and now girls as well in many communities) have begun their religious lives—through the ritual of bat mitzvah. Thousands of synagogues across the country have offered adult bat mitzvah classes, which usually include a one- or two-year course of study of Hebrew, Bible, liturgy and other aspects of Jewish learning, culminating in a group ceremony. In my synagogue, following a tiny notice in our newsletter to find out whether any women were interested, 31 women signed on. The course of study was demanding. They were required to learn to read Hebrew and to learn the cantillation system for both Torah and Haftara (Prophetic texts). Everyone learned how to prepare a d'var Torah (a teaching on the Torah portion for Shabbat morning services), and small groups were formed to present each d'var Torah on Shabbat mornings throughout the year. A Shabbat lunch-and-learn program centered around six books
written by Jewish women, which were read and discussed. Each member designed a community service project that she completed during the course of the year.

What stunned me was that the more I asked them to do, the more they wanted to do, to learn, to understand. As much as this learning process accomplished for the women who participated (who now can read Hebrew, chant Torah and Haftara, participate liturgically in services, and teach Torah), what made it so important has been the way it has changed the congregation. It set a standard for achievement that many others are now emulating.

Most interesting has been its effect on men in the congregation. The rabbis of the Talmud, in explaining their rationale for exempting women from being called to the Torah, despite the statement in the Mishna that all are qualified to be called to the Torah, claimed that such an honor would in some way affect the congregation's esteem. This has been interpreted by many to indicate that calling a woman to the Torah would imply that there were no men able to accept the honor, which would be an embarrassment to the community. In our synagogue, it only encouraged everyone—men, women, and teenagers—to learn more and do more. Here was a concrete example of the positive effect women's study can have on Judaism and a Jewish community.

This paper only skims the surface of changes that have occurred for Jewish women in their religious and spiritual lives. It has not even begun to address the significant changes in prayer, ritual and study among Orthodox Jewish women. A few critical points emerge from this exploration. On the positive side, it is clear that this generation of Jewish women is the most educated in history and perhaps the most thirsty for a richer, deeper engagement with Jewish tradition. That this has occurred so rapidly is exhilarating yet also cause for some caution as we attempt to understand what women want and need in Jewish life.

Even as the community transforms itself to meet the needs of a new century, the drive, energy and desire to participate in interesting and meaningful ways continues to draw many Jewish women to religious ideas, rituals and communities. For this transformation to take hold, expand to larger numbers of women, and redefine how Judaism is experienced and practiced, great changes are needed in the way leaders are trained and religious institutions are oriented. Finally, it seems clear that Judaism, even with its patriarchal structures and tradition of excluding women from important aspects of religious life, remains able to respond in

profound and meaningful ways to the challenges, dreams and journeys of contemporary Jewish women.

REFERENCES


The National Commission on American Jewish Women met three times between October 1994 and June 1995 to discuss the status of Jewish women in America. The Commissioners—artists, writers, scientists, business people, government officials and scholars—cover the denominational, political and generational spectrums, which made for lively, wide-ranging and provocative discussions. Members did not see eye-to-eye on all issues, but there was respect for opposing perspectives. As one Commissioner put it, “There is something sacred in the opportunity to agree and disagree.”

Perceptions of the American Jewish community ranged from “we've never been in better condition” to “we're at a crisis point of assimilation.” The debates and deliberations yielded a rich combination of viewpoints, values and hopes for the Call to Action (Chapter 1).

The group wanted to develop an evolving mission:

- to change public perceptions of Jewish women and women's self-images as Jews
- to create and strengthen ties between American and Israeli women
- to make American Judaism more participatory and relevant to Jewish women
- to sensitize Jewish organizations to the needs and desires of women
- to empower women to create change in Jewish organizations and in the community at large

“But what is the real purpose of our meetings?” several Commissioners asked. “Why are we, as individuals, here?” The answers were immediate and passionate:

“I am concerned about the future of the Jewish people.”

“Something spiritual happens when women come together.”

“We want to draw women back into Judaism.”

“I care passionately about Jewish history continuing. It’s irrational, but I believe there is a Jewish purpose. I want there to be Jews to fulfill that purpose.”

“We want to communicate to women how Judaism can enrich and give meaning to their lives.”

Following are some highlights of the wide-ranging conversations that took place during the
Commission’s three meetings, focusing on four issues of particular significance to American Jewish women: their relationship to the Jewish community, images of Jewish women, their connections to Israel, and their religious and spiritual lives.

**Jewish Women and the Jewish Community**

The Commission often raised provocative questions: Does the Jewish community have the responsibility to reach out to women, or is it up to women to find their own way in the community? Should synagogues and other institutions reduce their fees, or is it simply a question of Jews reordering their personal financial priorities? Should organizations reorient themselves to serve and support women, or should women take on the responsibility of committing themselves to the causes that the organizations define as important? Ultimately, the group realized that the answer is always both—that in the proper relationship, there is obligation and responsibility on both sides. All agreed the community could be more accessible, and they, in turn, can do much more for the community.

Commissioners explored the forces that have drawn—or pushed—women away from deep involvement in organized Jewish life. They noted the frustration with Jewish organizations and institutions that have neglected, alienated or insulted women. Many Commissioners said that they have been made to feel unwelcome in Jewish organizations; others felt that many Jewish organizations are badly out of touch with changing times. They feared that these organizations are losing the opportunity to connect with an entire generation of young women whose skills and energy might be channeled into strengthening the community and the Jewish people. The group did acknowledge, however, the great value in the work done by the existing structure. They were careful to note that, while additions and modifications are needed, they were not advocating revolution.

Many younger Jewish women today are eager to lend their money and talents to causes they support, yet decreasing numbers do so through Jewish organizations. Why would a woman want to make that contribution within a Jewish context, some wondered? “Jewish women truly care and want to better their communities, however defined,” one Commissioner replied. “I feel they’re doing Jewish work whether or not they’re working in the Jewish community.” But many responded that this was not enough—that without Jewish content, social action does not fulfill the mandate of tikkun olam (repairing the world)—and suggested combining community action with Jewish learning: “to learn and do at the same time.”

Where should Jewish women’s energies be directed, given the widespread interest in social activism, volunteerism and philanthropy? And how can such activity be encouraged? Text study
on the theme of tzedakah (justice) provided some answers. The Torah begins and ends with chesed (acts of loving kindness), which encompasses more kinds of giving than donating money. Women’s role in chesed was seen as particularly important because of women’s access to food and consequent ability to provide direct intervention to the poor.

Commissioners were intrigued by these traditional distinctions between types of charity and the particular role of women in aiding the poor, but some were troubled by the injunction to help one’s neighbors (i.e., Jews) before others. “I want to help the people in my own community, Jewish or not, before helping a Jew far away.” Others agreed that Jewish organizations place undue emphasis on helping Jews, which was a turn-off for younger people with a more nondenominational outlook. Some suggested that Jewish causes could attract women’s philanthropic dollars by advocating for causes that interest younger women today:

“Jewish women give a lot of their money to non-Jewish organizations. I think that I would give more money to Jewish organizations if I knew that those Jewish organizations were giving money to issues that I felt I could have an impact on, issues that were important to me. …One thing I have gotten from our discussions is the issue of relevance. If organizations are not relevant to my life, I’m not going to participate.”

The discussion came around to a matter of emphasis. Some Commissioners felt that all social justice work, communal involvement and philanthropy is of equal value; others maintained that only action with Jewish content that benefits the Jewish community will enhance women’s Jewish connections and strengthen the community. In any case, the Commissioners wanted the community to “communicate that it is a blessing and a privilege to serve,” and they wanted to encourage young Jewish women to become involved.

Commissioners returned again and again to the composition and character of Jewish organizations. If their “sexist agendas and leadership” do not change, Commissioners said, younger women would not want to join. Many Commissioners had negative experiences to tell of going to meetings or events and seeing no one there with whom they could identify. One Commissioner asked her friends whether they would join an organization for women who were more like them, “and every one of them said yes. Every single one of them.” Commissioners also had little patience for out-of-date agendas. “How can we do these Jewish things in a way that the feminist side of me can relate to?” a Commissioner asked.

Women today want their donations and involvement to make an impact, Commissioners agreed: Women “don’t want to necessarily give to acquire power. They want to give to promote change. Either existing organizations are going to change their way of doing business or they will be competing with the new organizations which ask for money in a way that makes you feel good about yourself and about them.”

The Commission noted that significant changes are already under way. “The fastest-growing groups in the federation world are the business
and professional single women's groups. Women want a sense of belonging in the community which they do not find in the workplace. The Jewish community is responding to that need. This is an incredible time for Jewish women to get involved." This observation was affirmed by others seeking to balance the negative aspects of contemporary Jewish life with some positive developments. "There are many good things that are happening. Let's figure out how to clone the good stuff," one said.

"Cloning the good stuff" begins with identifying institutions that have successfully involved women in something relevant and exciting. Commissioners said that something is lacking in their lives and they want to connect with something larger than themselves. The synagogue seemed to be the logical starting point for such involvement, but it came under heavy criticism for being unwelcoming and lacking a spiritual atmosphere. "I went to a shul for six months and they never even asked my name," one Commissioner said. "Not one person ever came up to me." No one questioned that the synagogue serves a unique and crucial function in Jewish life, but many felt it is failing its constituents, particularly those who do not fit within traditional family paradigms, including never-married or divorced women and lesbians.

A segment of American Jewry would respond strongly to spiritual opportunities, but a growing number of Jewish women are unable to find something spiritual in their religious services. "They want to be touched," said a Commissioner, who added that it was not clear that synagogues will be able to meet this need. Will women even enter the synagogue to find out?

Not if they continue to charge admission, Commissioners agreed: "It's ridiculous to have to pay to pray." Many cited high costs of High Holiday tickets as a factor in keeping young people out. Others noted that constituencies such as divorced mothers also are excluded by the high cost of Jewish living. "Women would be more accepting of the need to pay if they really supported the things the money went for."

Besides being more responsive and welcoming to women, the Commissioners observed that Jewish organizations need to empower women to create change—within the Jewish community and without. Such opportunities would increase the likelihood that Jewish women would come to Jewish institutions when seeking a place for communal involvement or spiritual expression.

**Images of Jewish Women**

If Jewish women had a greater public voice and more power, perhaps their image in popular culture would improve. The issue of images generated more heated discussion than any other Commission meeting topic. Commissioners were angry about the negative stereotypes in which Jewish women typically are portrayed in movies, television, fiction, advertising, and elsewhere: "We are still stereotyped and denigrated by being characterized as overprotective Jewish mothers, political activists, troublemakers, manipulative,
busybodies, rich, greedy, smart. We wear bracelets and gold jewelry. We get a very bad press through all of this."

Some observed that it is still acceptable to criticize Jewish women in a way that is not tolerated for any other group. "People who would never think of themselves as antisemitic will make comments about Jewish women." In addition, many cited persistent misogyny from within the Jewish community, as well as internalized self-hatred on the part of Jewish women. The various manifestations of this problem—hostility between Jewish men and women, some women's fear of openly identifying as Jewish or of associating with other Jewish women, and the perpetuation of the notion that stereotyping Jewish women is acceptable—were identified by some Commissioners as perhaps the biggest problem facing American Jewish women, one that has affected all of them. The college-age daughter of one Commissioner decided not to join a Jewish sorority because of its negative image as a group of Jewish women. Another recalled growing up fearful of being labeled a JAP.

While a few Commissioners felt that a major source of the problem was the women who do fit the stereotypes "and drive other Jews away," others warned against internal censorship: "We need to recognize diversity and broaden our images, not reject those we see as negative." This warning was also applied to negative images in the general culture: "We have to be very, very, careful. Antisemitism is not going to be caused by something we do or do not do. I am not terribly concerned that something awful is going to happen to us because there is an offensive ad out there. I don't want to be, and I don't think you all want to be, the guardians of the acceptable. ...I am not uncomfortable when any individual behaves in an anti-social or embarrassing fashion. I do not assume for myself the responsibility to be either the social guide or the judge of that person's appearance or behavior."

If the Commission's mission is to urge the organized community to be more responsive to women and simultaneously to encourage women's participation in the Jewish community, then some healing of the wounds caused by the negative public image of Jewish women is necessary. For women to feel that Judaism can provide them with a meaningful and nurturing communal and spiritual life, Commissioners said, they need positive images for envisioning those possibilities.

**CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL**

Many on the Commission wished that Israel could play a major part in Jewish women's communal involvement. Some were startled, and others not at all surprised, to learn from the research that to American Jewish women today Israel is far less important than it once was. "Most American Jewish women today would find the notion that they had to go to Israel ridiculous. They don't feel they need synagogue, Torah, Israel, or whatever to feel Jewish." And if they are not involved with the Jewish community at all, Commissioners said, there is no reason for them to care about Israel. Younger Commissioners, while acknowledging Israel's importance in their own Jewish identities,
said that few of their Jewish peers gave it a central place in their concerns.

Many Commissioners spoke of their own profound emotional connections to Israel, and of struggling to find a way to communicate to others how fulfilling an Israeli experience can be. “There is an emotional connection to Israel similar to having children—there’s a joy in it you can’t understand until you experience it,” said a Commissioner. Some felt that American Jewish adults seem almost fearful of opening themselves up to the possibility of such an encounter.

“Teenagers have this experience,” one said, “but adults resist it—they don’t want such an emotional experience.” But one should still try: “We should see to it that other American Jewish women go, even while we choose to remain American Jewish women.”

Even if many more American Jewish women visit Israel, trips alone are not enough. The major task, Commissioners said, is to build bridges between Israeli and American women by working toward understanding and appreciation of each other’s situations and values. “I keep hearing, ‘What can we do for you?’” said a Commissioner. “I want to hear, ‘What can we do for each other?’ We haven’t had many opportunities for mutual understanding.”

This task won’t be easy, the group acknowledged. “You can’t assume American and Israeli women are on the same wave length. They have different priorities,” Commissioners cited incidents—such as the attempt by a group of American women to pray at the Wall—that have exposed deep tensions between Israeli and American women. Some Commissioners saw “increasing polarization,” and all agreed that the two communities must develop mutuality, interdependence and a common language.

**RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE**

For many participants, forming and strengthening ties to Israel is a thread, running throughout their Jewish lives, that can manifest itself in a deeply spiritual way. Commissioners sought to identify other aspects of Jewish life that can provide such experiences, and religious life is an obvious realm. Religious life, whether expressed institutionally within synagogues or in more personal or informal ways, is an arena. Commissioners felt could be a major source of sustenance for Jewish women. But it is a largely untapped source. One of the Commission’s evolving goals is for Jewish women, and those with whom they share their lives, to involve themselves in Jewish life through the cherished traditions of study, prayer and acts of kindness irrespective of denomination, affiliation status, or observance level.

At times, religion was absent from the deliberations, to the dismay of some, who maintained, “You have to at least mention the word God.” As another put it, “Why am I here? I have a deep faith in God, but I’m not sure where I stand with Judaism.” The term “spirituality” came up again and again, not always in reference to religious expression through traditional Jewish means. That many Jewish women, particularly younger women, are seeking something more in their lives was borne out repeatedly by the research. What that something is varied greatly, and Commissioners struggled to identify Jewish ways of meeting that need.
The very diversity of the membership of the Commission led to its dominant conclusion: that today the Jewish community needs to offer many points of entry for women, including traditional religious expression, new kinds of spiritual experiences, and opportunities for philanthropy, social action and learning. As the Commissioners deliberated, they moved from being a group uncertain about its mission and skeptical about how much they could accomplish, to a diverse group of women who found a way to speak in a strong, unified voice. The Commissioners all reported having been changed by their participation on the Commission, that they had learned and grown as Jews. Here's how one Commissioner put it: "The historicity of American Jewish women taking into their own hands the management of the future of Judaism is mind-boggling. It's never happened before. However it turned out, I wanted to be part of it. We can see the twenty-first century."

The members of the Commission concluded that the process had been as important to them as the product. They expressed hope that the opportunity for this kind of interaction and growth could be replicated many times over for Jewish women throughout the United States. All who participated were struck by how much can be accomplished when women come together, remove barriers to understanding, appreciate their differences, create visions, make plans and advocate for change.
Appendix A

With Respect to Jewish Women: Suggested Readings

The members of the National Commission on American Jewish Women offers this list of books, which have had special meaning for them, informed their views, and shaped their identity as Jewish women.


APPENDIX B

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN

Elka Abrahamson

Born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, Rabbi Elka Abrahamson is co-rabbi at Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul with her husband, Rabbi Martin Zinkow. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, Rabbi Abrahamson completed her rabbinic training at Hebrew Union College. She formerly served as associate rabbi of Peninsula Temple Beth El in San Mateo, California. She is active in the Women's Rabbinic Network and co-chaired its last convention. Rabbi Abrahamson serves on the Cesef Committee and the Executive Board of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the United Jewish Appeal Rabbinic Cabinet, and the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of the Jewish National Fund.

Zoë Baird

Now senior vice president and general counsel at Aetna Life & Casualty Company, Zoë Baird's prior experience includes legal work for General Electric and for a law firm in Washington, D.C., in which she was a partner. Her government and political work includes one year as associate counsel to President Jimmy Carter. She currently serves on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and on the Board of Builders for Peace, established by Vice President Al Gore to promote development in the Middle East. Baird was nominated by President Bill Clinton to be U.S. attorney general. Baird, recipient of the American Jewish Congress Louis D. Brandeis Award for Jurisprudential Excellence in 1993, won this year's National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs' "Magnificent Seven" Award.

Nancy Berman

Nancy Berman, director of the Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum in Los Angeles, is actively involved in Jewish artwork and Jewish education in Los Angeles. She is a member of the Art Council of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, on the Steering Committee of the Arts Consortium that represents multicultural arts organizations in Los Angeles, and a board member of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Los Angeles. Berman graduated in Art History from Wellesley College and earned an M.A. in Jewish Education from Hebrew Union College. She has written numerous articles about Jewish art and artists, including, "Agam in Los Angeles" and "The Evolution of Hebrew Union College's Museum: Visions, Revisions and Reverberations," both published by Hebrew Union College. Berman won the 1989 Jewish Business and Professional Women's Award presented by the Women's Division, United Jewish Fund, Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles.
**Myrna Blyth**

Now publishing director and editor-in-chief of *Ladies Home Journal*, Myrna Blyth previously was publishing director of *Metropolitan Home* and executive editor and vice president of *Family Circle*. She is the author of two novels, *For Better and For Worse* and *Cousin Suzanne*, and her short stories and nonfiction articles have appeared in numerous magazines. Blyth belongs to many organizations for writers and for women, among them the American Society of Magazine Editors and Women's Media Group. In 1992, she won the prestigious Headliner Award from Women in Communications Inc. and the American Jewish Committee's Publishing Division Human Relations Award. In 1988, she won the Matrix Award from New York Women In Communications Inc. for her outstanding career achievement in magazines.

**Shoshana Cardin**

Chair of the United Israel Appeal and of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, Shoshana Cardin is also a member of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel. She is on the Board of Directors for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. She previously served as chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. She has received honorary degrees from five institutions, among them the Jewish Theological Seminary and Bar-Ilan University. Awards include the Clal Yisrael Award, *In Concert for One People*, from CLAL in 1992, the Mathilde Schechter Award from Women's League for Conservative Judaism also in 1992, and the Defender of Jerusalem Award from the Jabotinsky Foundation in 1990.

**Devra Lee Davis**

Senior advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), Devra Lee Davis received her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in Science Studies and a master's of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. She has served as advisor to numerous public health groups. Davis is a reviewer for *American Journal of Industrial Medicine, Environmental Research, American Journal of Public Health*, and *Journal of the American Medical Association*. She writes on health issues for academic journals and the mainstream media. Davis has received numerous professional awards.

**Ruth Faden**

Ruth Faden, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Hygiene and Public Health, is chair of the federal advisory committee of experts that is assessing the history and ethics of the U.S. government's radiation experiments on humans. She has a master's of Public Health and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of California at Berkeley. Faden formerly served as a consultant and training coordinator for Planned Parenthood. She has done extensive research in family planning and medical ethics and has written numerous articles on those and other health issues. Her recent articles include "Assessing Quality of Life: Moral Implications for Clinical Practice" and "Research and Informed Consent in Africa: Another Look."
Audrey Flack

A leading photorealist and a nationally recognized painter and sculptor, Audrey Flack is also the first photorealist to have had a work purchased by New York’s Museum of Modern Art for its permanent collection. Her work is in the collections of major museums worldwide, including the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the National Museum of Art in Canberra, Australia. Her work has been featured in numerous traveling museum exhibitions as well, including “Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream,” which traveled to four museums nationwide. Many books have been written about her work, most recently Breaking the Rules by Thalia Gouma Peterson. Flack graduated from Yale University and holds a graduate degree from Cooper Union. She was awarded an honorary degree by Cooper Union and honorary professorships from Bridgeport University and George Washington University. Flack is a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She was commissioned to create a 36-foot statue that will be erected opposite the United Nations building in New York.

Sandy Freedman

Sandy Freedman, a former mayor of Tampa, Florida, graduated from the University of Miami with a degree in Government. She served on the Tampa City Council for 12 years before being elected mayor in 1986. During her tenure as Tampa’s first female mayor, Freedman increased community involvement through neighborhood groups and promoted citywide recycling and water conservation projects. Her Mayor’s Challenge Fund won recognition as one of the nation’s most creative housing programs. Mayor Freedman won the Job Training Partnership Act Presidential Award in 1993, the Florida Commission on Human Relations Housing Advocacy Award in 1993, and the Project Return Distinguished Citizen Award in 1994.

Nancy Gertner

A U.S. District Court judge for the District of Massachusetts, Nancy Gertner previously was a partner in two law firms, an instructor at Boston University School of Law, and a visiting professor at Harvard Law School. Judge Gertner received her J.D. from Yale University and undergraduate degree in Political Science from Barnard College. She has written and lectured extensively on trial practices, criminal law and procedures, and women’s rights. Among Judge Gertner’s awards are the Abigail Adams Award presented by the Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus Education Fund, and the Black Educators’ Alliance Award for Professional Service to Education.

Judith Ginsberg

Judith Ginsberg is executive director of the Covenant Foundation. She has a B.A. and M.A. from Brown University, and a Ph.D. in Spanish Literature from City University of New York. Ginsberg was a tenured professor of Spanish at Union College and later worked in education, research and philanthropy. Her publications include a book and articles on Hispanic literature, and articles on issues in foreign language and Jewish education.
**Blu Greenberg**

Blu Greenberg received her M.S. in Jewish History from Yeshiva University Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from City University, a bachelor of Religious Education from Yeshiva University Teachers Institute, and a B.A. from Brooklyn College. Greenberg has written many articles on women in Judaism and other Jewish issues. She is author of *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household* and *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*. She is on the editorial board of *Hadassah* magazine, the advisory board of *Lilith* magazine, and the Board of Directors of Covenant Foundation. Greenberg won the B’nai B’rith Distinguished Humanitarian Award in Riverdale, N.Y., the Myrtle Wreath Achievement Award from Hadassah of Nassau County, and the Bronx Woman of the Year award, among others.

**Andrea King**

A screenwriter/film producer in Hollywood, Andrea King recently sold her first screenplay, “Body Language,” to Steven Spielberg at Warner Bros. and is producing two movies for 20th Century Fox Film Corporation. She is writing a book for New American Library entitled *Breaking into the Business: How the Most Important People in Hollywood Got to the Top*. Previously, she covered the entertainment industry for *The Hollywood Reporter*. A graduate of Clark University with a master’s degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, King worked for *The Jerusalem Post* in Israel after completing her education. In the last few years, she has served as a volunteer and as a fundraiser for the Jerusalem Foundation and for the Jerusalem Film and Television Festival. King was an active member of Hadassah’s Zionist youth group, Young Judaea. In November 1994, she was featured in *McCall’s* magazine’s “Fifteen Women Who Will Brighten Your Future.”

**Zieva Konvisser**

Manager of distribution and facilities planning in the Mopar Parts Division at Chrysler Corporation, Zieva Konvisser has held numerous supervisory, management, and executive positions within Chrysler since 1977. She received her undergraduate degree in Chemistry from Douglass College and an M.S. in Pharmaceutical Chemistry from Ohio State University. Konvisser worked as a lecturer in chemistry before changing careers. She is a Life Member of Hadassah and a member of B’nai B’rith Women.

**Deborah Lipstadt**

Dorot associate professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University, Deborah Lipstadt has done extensive research on the Holocaust. Her book, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, was declared one of the Notable Books of 1993 by the *New York Times*. She is author of *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, and currently is writing a book on the impact of the American experience on the values of ethnic and religious groups. Lipstadt served as historical consultant to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. She has served on the Executive Committee of the United Jewish Appeal Young Women’s Leadership Cabinet, the United...
Jewish Appeal Faculty Cabinet, and the board of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles.

**Sue Mizrahi**

Currently National Secretary of Hadassah and Coordinator of the Education and Public Policy Division, Sue Mizrahi has held a number of positions within Hadassah since she joined in 1961. Mizrahi, who holds a B.A. in English from Adelphi College, has been a delegate to three World Zionist congresses in Jerusalem. She served as Hadassah's representative to the first and second International Conferences on Jewish Demography in Jerusalem and to the Conference on the Empowerment of Jewish Women, also in Jerusalem.

**Perri Peltz**

Co-anchor of the weekend “News 4 New York” at WNBC-TV, Perri Peltz also serves as substitute co-anchor on the station's “Today In New York” and “Live at Five” newscasts. Peltz previously was a medical and general assignment reporter for WGGB-TV in Springfield, Massachusetts. She worked as a reporter for USA Today and as an associate for the Center for Occupational Hazards. A graduate of Brown University, Peltz also holds a master's degree in Public Health from Columbia University.

**Shulamit Reinhartz**

A graduate of Barnard College who earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from Brandeis University, Shulamit Reinhartz is a professor of Sociology at Brandeis, the first woman to hold that position. She is also director of the Women's Studies Program at Brandeis. Reinhartz is the author of four books: *On Becoming a Social Scientist, Psychology and Community Change, Qualitative Gerontology, and Feminist Methods in Social Research*, which won the Distinguished Publication Award from the Association of Women in Psychology. She has done research on women in Israeli history, perceptions and experiences of miscarriage, gender and aging, and the lost contributions of women to sociology, among other topics. Reinhartz is co-editor of the journal *Qualitative Sociology* and has published over 50 articles and chapters in books.

**Anne Roiphe**


**Marcy Syms**

President and chief operating officer of Syms Corporation, Marcy Syms is also a columnist for *Family Business Magazine*. She is the author of *Mind Your Own Business: and Keep It in the Family*, a book on family business issues. Syms is on the boards of Midlantic Bank, Stern College.
and the Sy Syms School of Business at Yeshiva University. She is a member of numerous women’s organizations, including the Women’s Forum and the League of Women Voters Advisory Committee of Central New Jersey.

**Elaine Ullian**

President and chief executive officer of Boston University Medical Center Hospital, Elaine Ullian previously held that position at Faulkner Hospital. Currently a member of the faculty at the Boston University School of Public Health and the Harvard University School of Public Health, Ullian also served as vice president for clinical operations at New England Medical Center Hospital. Ullian belongs to various political groups in Massachusetts and serves on the Governor’s Council on Economic Growth and Technology. Ullian received the Abigail Adams Award from the Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus and the Maimonides Award for outstanding leadership in health care from the Anti-Defamation League.

**Jane Zolot**

A member of the executive committee of Hadassah, Jane Zolot also serves as coordinator of the Communications Division and a member of National Major Gifts Development. Zolot follows a strong family tradition of leadership in Hadassah. She initiated Hadassah’s National Young Leaders Department, chairing it for four years, and served as president of the Philadelphia Chapter of Hadassah. Zolot is a member of the Executive Committee of the American Zionist Movement and is on the board of the United Israel Appeal. She is a delegate to the Zionist General Council of the World Zionist Organization.

**Laurie Zuckerman**

President and founder of Zuckerman & Associates, a management consulting firm, Laurie Zuckerman is author of *On Your Own: A Woman’s Guide to Building a Business*. Zuckerman received her B.S. in Civil Engineering from Lafayette College and M.B.A. from the University of Akron. Zuckerman is a member of the Advisory Council to the Cleveland office of the U.S. Small Business Administration and received the 1993 Distinguished Sales and Marketing Award from *Sales and Marketing Executive*. 
APPENDIX C

CONTRIBUTORS

Ora Ahimeir

Ora Ahimeir is director of the think tank Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. Previously she was the attaché for women's affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., and coordinator for the Prime Minister's Commission on the Status of Women in Israel. Ahimeir has edited and written numerous publications on Jerusalem, the status of women, and social and cultural affairs in Israel.

Aviva Comet-Murciano

Aviva Comet-Murciano, a member of the National Association of Social Workers, is a therapist in private practice. She received her doctorate in Social Welfare from the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University. She has served on UJA-Federation task forces for the Jewish family and for Jewish women. Comet-Murciano is a frequent lecturer on gender, parenting, sexuality, divorce, medical ethics, education, and ritual, with a strong focus on Jewish texts.

Sylvia Barack Fishman

Sylvia Barack Fishman, assistant professor of contemporary American Jewish life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University, is also senior research associate of the Brandeis Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. She is the author of A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community (1993) and Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction (1992). Fishman received her Ph.D. in English literature from Washington University in St. Louis. She is a recent recipient of Yeshiva University's Samuel Belkin Memorial Award in Professional Achievement.

Bethamie Horowitz

Bethamie Horowitz is the director of planning and research for UJA-Federation of New York and senior scholar at the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Horowitz received her doctorate in social psychology from the Graduate School of the City University of New York, where her research focused on Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian views of war and peace. She was principal investigator of the 1991 UJA-Federation Jewish Population Study.

Joy D. Levitt

Joy D. Levitt is co-rabbi of the Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, in Plandome, New York. She received her rabbinic ordination from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Rabbi Levitt was the editor of Reconstructionist magazine, and is former president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. She is
on the board of Americans for Peace Now and the Jewish Continuity Commission of UJA-Federation of New York. She also wrote The Guide to Everything Jewish in New York.

**Brenda Brown Lipitz**

Brenda Brown Lipitz, president of the Women’s Division of the Council of Jewish Federations, has served on the boards of The Associated, Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore; the University of Maryland, College Park; *Lilith* magazine; and the House of Ruth. She also has held leadership roles in the Maryland Governor’s Commission on Volunteerism, the Baltimore County Commission on Women, and the United Jewish Appeal.

**Amy L. Sales**

Amy L. Sales, senior research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, received her Ph.D. in social psychology from Boston University, where her research focused on the social adjustment of Soviet Jewish emigrés. Sales has worked for many educational, cultural and community organizations, evaluating programs and consulting on program and organizational development. Her recent research and publications concern Jewish identity, Jewish teenagers and American Jewish women. She is co-editor with Gary Tobin of *Church and Synagogue Affiliation: Theory, Research and Practice* (1995).

**Susan Weidman Schneider**

Susan Weidman Schneider is a founding mother and editor-in-chief of *Lilith* magazine. An author and well-known speaker, her books include the groundbreaking *Jewish and Female: Choice and Changes in Our Lives Today*, and, most recently, *Interracial: The Challenge of Living with Differences Between Christians and Jews* and *Head and Heart: A Woman’s Guide to Financial Independence*. She has received numerous awards, including Hadassah’s Myrtle Wreath Award, the B’nai B’rith Woman of Distinction and Woman of Achievement awards, and the American Jewish Congress Eleanor Roosevelt Award. She is a frequent commentator on Jewish and feminist issues.

**Susanne A. Shavelson**

Susanne A. Shavelson is research assistant at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and faculty coordinator for continuing education for the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, both at Brandeis University. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan. Her areas of specialization are Jewish women in American culture and Jewish American history and literature. Her doctoral dissertation is on the English and Yiddish autobiographies of Jewish immigrant women.
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