

THE BEGETTING OF AMERICA'S JEWS

Seeds of American Jewish Identity in the Representations of American Jewish Women

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It is through the images of the family in popular culture and literature that American Jews give form to the stresses, strains, and anxieties produced by their assimilation into American culture. This "counter-memory" is in sharp contrast to the official picture of a love affair between American Jews and American society. The cultural representations of the Ghetto Girl and the Jewish American Princess are examined in detail for what they tell us about American Jews' feelings about living in middle-class American society.

We Jews understand ourselves to be a people who remembers. Our texts, our festivals, and our rituals all, in part, describe our history. Our moral lessons, celebrations, and marking of the cycles of weeks, months, and seasons are consistently embedded in a story of becoming a nation and a unique culture. Remembering is the cultural platform on which we construct our peoplehood.

As American Jews, however, we have few occasions for remembering ourselves as a people with a shared history. There are no sacred texts or celebrations of American Jewish experience. We move from the well-developed realm of memory within text and holiday to one far more complicated to describe. Institutions fix our memories into slogans often directed at fund raising for community organizations. Historians and social scientists document our experience as immigrants, our rise to the middle class, our "love affair" with America. Most attempts to record American Jewish experience or write its history underscore not only the triumph and success of immigrants and their descendants but also America's safe harbor for millions of Jews who, had they remained behind, would have perished in

Europe. Although scholars claim that Jewish life has changed and that religious commitment is therefore far more tenuous, the triumphs of individual Jews overshadow any anxiety about Jewish life in America. Jews remember their history as American Jews through this lens of economic success in a religiously and culturally pluralistic American society. They may debate over how much American Jewish life has or has not changed from European Jewish life, but the fact of successful acculturation is not open to discussion.

In this article I suggest that we American Jews are also heirs to a "counter-memory," less self-conscious than one formalized in official stories of our community(ies). We have preserved the story of our Americanization in forms rarely discussed by official organizations, and which less often find their way into scholarly studies. These memories grow out of a different soil than the one nurtured by success and upward mobility. This fertile ground is enriched by ambivalence, conflict, anger, and uncertainty about life as an American Jew, even a life made far easier by the success of previous generations. This soil is the American Jewish family. The way that family is represented and talked about in ordinary life, in humor, in stereotypes, and in common wisdom is a map to that less well-charted land. This family exists most accessibly in popular culture and literature,

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in films from the 1920s and from the 1970s, in music from the 1920s, and novels from the 1960s. It is in the widely circulating images of the Jewish family that we have found a way to give form to our counter-memory and to retell our feelings about American culture as Jews who remain both within and outside of this culture.

Scholars and Jewish professionals often describe a smooth path from immigrant to American Jew. They tell a story of rapid acculturation through public education, rational choices made by Jewish families who struggled to place their sons into businesses and professions. Jews married late, had small families, and rapidly assured their children of still more affluence, opportunity, and success. Suburban synagogues made it possible for Jews to remain committed to Judaism in an appropriately wholesome American context. Acculturation without assimilation was complete. Intermarriage may loom as a threat to the continuity of the American Jewish community. Nevertheless, even with the evidence of a rapid rise in intermarriage, Jews seem to want their children to remain Jewish, and Jews remain conscious of their unique identities while achieving a comfortable spot in the economic hierarchy.

Many scholars have speculated that the Jewish family has been crucial to this success; others have argued that conditions beyond the family and the individual, such as the nature of the American economy in 1900, may provide a far more accurate explanation for economic success. Yet, what is particularly striking is how few historians, sociologists, or anthropologists have really paid much attention to the importance of the Jewish family to understanding American Jewish experience. In fact, the family has largely disappeared into the pockets of the Jewish man — the father who was, until very recently, the primary breadwinner who determined the relevant features of the family. Measuring income, neighborhood, occupation, or even membership in Jewish communal organizations required information about men as hus-

bands and fathers, but above all as workers or professionals or employers. What was worth knowing about families could be learned from this information gathered from individuals responding to surveys. Rabbis may have told us for a century that the Jewish family was the center of Jewish life, but scholars have not felt the need to learn much about that family or how or why it provided such a center.

It is important to explore this world of official and hidden memories because the tensions between them reveal concerns and anxieties that plague American Jews. Our official institutions and leaders point to intermarriage statistics, for example, as an unhappy consequence of successful Americanization. Yet, if we understand that Americanization required tensions in the family and between men and women from the start, we can begin to understand why Jews so frequently express anger at the family in general, and at their families in particular.

I present hidden memories as a way to bring into the open some of the conflicts that surround Jewish families in order to understand why our families struggle with American culture, despite our general affluence and apparent acculturation. Therefore, I want to examine why Jews have "used" the family to tell our own stories and why gender has been central to those family tales of terror.

In every nook and cranny of American Jewish expression — directed to ourselves or a mass audience — the Jewish family has loomed large. The tellers of these tales are not writing official history; they are simply telling stories about their lives. Often, they are not attempting to "represent" American Jewish experience; rather, they are writing a novel or a play about their own life experience. Popular songs of the 1920s about "mother", such plays as Israel Zangwill's "The Melting Pot" from 1914, classic and contemporary films from "The Jazz Singer" to "The Heartbreak Kid," novels from the 1930s and those immediately after World War II beginning with

Marjorie Morningstar and *Goodbye Columbus*, Borscht Belt jokes and nightclub routines—all turn around the Jewish family. Families are left, made, and remade; they are the source of nostalgia and rage, but the family is the arena of creative life. Sometimes, these works feature the “Jewish mother” and at other times the father. Some periods find one figure dominant who will then inexplicably disappear from another. Yet, as wives, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, children, or parents — families are what Jews write, sing, and talk about. More often than not, these family stories describe conflict and pain, disappointment, anguish, even rage. Sentimental songs about mother in the 1920s were, within two decades, replaced by portraits of mothers as scheming monsters. Even as early as the first decades of the 20th century, popular culture portrayed fathers as looking back toward Europe and religious observance, unable to enter American life in the 20th century. Young Jewish women were absent from most mainstream portrayals of Jews, and the Yiddish film industry usually associated them with rapid Americanization. Men as fathers or as powerful figures disappear from films after the 1920s. Families were often sentimentalized, but they were almost never portrayed without intense conflict and disappointment. Marriages fared no better. Husbands and wives were very often imagined in conflict over money and ideas about American culture.

We cannot understand these artistic or journalistic works as accurate reflections of the family; they rarely pretend to be that. Rather, the Jewish family is better understood as the medium through which American Jews have chosen to describe and reflect on their lives as Americans and as Jews. And recognizing that American Jews tell these stories so often and so consistently can help us understand that we have inherited and passed on a culture of our own. This unique mix of religious/ethnic/middle-class/American experience helps us

understand the world around us in unique and particular ways. It is not just an affection for bagels or chicken soup, or lighting candles on holidays that make us American Jews. Rather, it is a way of seeing the world. Lacking formal rituals of American Jewishness, we have stories to tell. These are not the private stories of families or oral history. They are cultural stories told to a larger audience in a variety of media for no purpose beyond the need and desire of American Jewish men and women to represent what makes our lives unique, what makes us feel that we are not like everyone else.

Precisely because our culture or subculture (American Jewish) is not very well developed or elaborated, we rely on what we have done most and best — popular culture and the arts — to tell these stories. To learn about how the American Jewish family appears in these forms is to gain helpful insights into what our culture is concerned with and how it affects us. These concerns are more often than not hidden from view. The public histories take form as they do because of groups who dominate American Jewish life. Yet, memory and counter-memory may act upon us even without the sanction of leadership. We may recognize, feel, and acknowledge things somewhere below the surface and not always self-consciously.

Throughout this article, I refer to these stories, images, and memories as **cultural representations**, or simply representations. I do so to underline two points. First, I am not describing *real people*, or providing accurate historical or psychological descriptions of Jewish men and women. Instead, I am focusing on ways Jews (and to some extent non-Jews) describe or represent one another. I introduce “Ghetto Girls,” “Jewish American Princesses,” and “Jewish families,” not as real people one could meet or interview but rather as images requiring decoding. I ask why American Jews in a particular period created those images and what it says about

our position in the United States.

The second reason that I use the term "representation" is to draw attention to what is represented. Our language and images are powerful because they reflect our sense of isolation in American culture. The notion of a cultural representation presumes that we see reality through the lens of our social position, whether it is our gender, our social class, our religion, our minority status, or a combination of them all. More than a simple reflection of reality, the way we Jews talk through our experience is by representing our anxiety, anger, or pleasure through an image (mother, father, wife) that reveals our experience of America. Like all people, we are constantly representing reality, and it is a crucial task not to simply falsify or support the representation, but to understand it.

In this article I focus on two representations of women. Because I am especially interested in how Jews represent themselves to one another, and not in "flat" descriptions of Jewish life, then one of the most important questions to consider is whether one gender tends to be used for representing more than another. My contention is that women are far more frequently and elaborately used as symbols of American Jewish experience than are men. At the same time, anti-Semitic stereotypes are far more preoccupied with men than women. In the two periods I describe in this article, the 1910s and the 1980s, Jewish popular culture far more often used women than men. Why women make good cultural images is an issue addressed in my examples.

Why should the family and its members act as such a powerful channel for tuning in an alternative or counter-memory? And why does this image of Jewish American life differ from other "official" or scholarly renditions of success and easy accommodation to America?

- We Jews establish our relationship to American society through the way we describe Jewish families. We present Jewish families in relationship to

American culture, even when we seem to be merely describing personal experiences.

- The family usually involves a focus on gender (the way we describe men and women and relationships to one another) and generation (older, ours, younger). Both aspects of the family are especially important ways of talking about our relationship to the larger and dominant culture.
- The family is usually presented as **both** making its members Jews and Americans. These elements are often portrayed as the source of conflict in the family.

In the next sections are examples of popular images or cultural representations of Jewish family members at various points in American Jewish history. In each case I explain why this image took the form it did in a particular period and how to read or interpret the image in light of the three points raised above.

THE GHETTO GIRL — CREATING AMERICAN JEWS

I begin with a figure long forgotten by American Jews, and one who was not primarily portrayed as a family member. I take this somewhat peculiar route to underline the importance of understanding the difference between "description" and "cultural image" or interpretation and how gender operates in creating this cultural image.

In the early decades of this century when newly arrived Eastern and Southern European immigrants dominated the labor force and the concerns of Americans, everyone knew about Ghetto Girls, though the image no longer evokes a particular type of young woman. They were discussed in the *New York Tribune* and in the pages of English-language Jewish newspapers. The founder of New York's Henry Street Settlement House, Lillian Wald, devoted pages to these Girls in her memoirs. They appeared in immigrant novels as well.

Occasionally, an Italian young woman was lumped into the category. However, the Ghetto Girl was primarily a young Jewish working woman, an immigrant bent on Americanizing rapidly. She was always associated with excess. Her desire to shed her past was evident to those who saw her as overdressed, overpainted, and lacking a developed sense of what "true" Americanization required. The written record of the Ghetto Girl was left largely by those who disapproved of her. Some sympathized, but all who named her believed her to be on the wrong path.

One commentator in 1900 who was interested in the appearance of new immigrants compared those who lived on the Lower East Side to those who lived in fashionable upper New York.

Does Broadway (upper New York) wear a feather? Grand Street (Lower East Side) dons two, without loss of time. Are trailing skirts seen in Fifth Avenue? Grand St. trails its yards with a dignity all its own. Are daring color effects sent over from Paris? The rainbow hides its diminished head before Grand St. on a Sunday afternoon.

If my lady wears a velvet gown, put together for her in an East Side sweat shop, may not the girl whose tired fingers fashioned it rejoice her soul by astonishing Grand St. with a copy of it on the next Sunday? My lady's is in velvet, and the East Side girl's is in the cheapest of cloth, but it's the style that counts! (East Side Fashions, 1989).

His description of young Jewish working women focuses on their desire to imitate affluent American women and their failure. Their attire is loud and garish, what today we describe as tacky. Yet, the consequence of this "tackiness" is that these women seemed unable to live up to their desire to imitate American success. It is unclear if this writer is Jewish. Most who commented on these young women were.

For example, 16 years later, in 1916, another commentator on life on New York's Lower East Side, Mrs. Marion Golde,

seemed to suggest that Ghetto Girls had not yet disappeared.

I do not know whether a hardened New Yorker will notice it, but plant a stranger from out-of-town on Avenue A, 116th street to Pitkin avenue, on a Friday and Saturday night, and if he is of a sensitive turn of mind he will be first astonished and then disgusted at the appearance of the girls who pass by. If he is a Jew he will also be angered and hurt, for the girls he sees are all of his own race. It is lovely to dress in fashion, charming to wear your hair in a graceful little dip; and a touch of powder and a little familiarity with rouge-stick does bring out nicely that atmosphere of elegance and coquetry so dear to the hearts of girls and so enticing to the minds of men; but the fashionable dress of the East-Side girls shrieks its cheapness and mimicry of the real thing....Her exaggerated coiffure, with its imitation curls and soaped curves that stick out at the side of the head like fantastic gargoyles, is an offense to the eye. Her plated gold jewelry with paste stones, bought from the Grand Street peddlers on pay-day reveals its cheapness by its very extravagance.

What is the matter with this girl? Is this bad taste acquired? Is it inherent in her character? Or is it simply a transient mood of the immigrant? Or perhaps is the East-Side girl quite normal in taste and all this talk just prejudice? These questions I have heard wrangled and argued so often (Golde, 1916, p. 11).

Mrs. Golde, writing for a New York Jewish newspaper, took those very questions to women she identified as distinguished commentators on this distressing scene. Descriptions of the Ghetto Girl were never idle musings. They were usually followed by suggestions for improving immigrant women's bad taste in fashion and illogical use of money.

Sophie Irene Loeb, a newspaper writer for the *Evening World*, saw the Ghetto Girl's appearance as a step in her evolution toward Americanization. She told Mrs.

Golde her opinion of the Ghetto Girl:

Naturally, you will find a certain amount of crude-dressing on the East-Side, but this is not an inherited trait. Good taste in dressing is acquired like any other of education, and what showiness these girls exhibit is but the elementary stage in the acquirement of this education.... There is another side to the question. Many of the girls come from a miserably paid position in the old country to a well-paid position in New York, and the change may have made them a little reckless. They may have spent too much money with too little judgment, but this failing is transitory and the girls emerge from it with a refinement equalling the best.

A somewhat more sympathetic writer for an American Jewish newspaper, Shomer Zunsner, suggested that the picture of the Ghetto Girl was overdrawn and exaggerated. She entitles her 1918 column "The Ghetto Girl Once More," and offers to add her own "two cents." She explains, "Notwithstanding the fact that many excellent folks have already discussed this creature, and have already doomed her to eternal glory or disgrace; (most likely disgrace, if prevalence of opinion counts), the 'Ghetto Girl' is in fact like the girls in any other community except that she bears within her heart the sorrow she borrowed from her race." She simply pleads for understanding and tolerance of the great variety of young women who live in the ghetto.

Reform-minded social workers and journalists were not the only commentators on Ghetto Girls. Fanny Hurst, a Jew and one of the most popular and financially successful writers of the period, expressed quite a different view of the Ghetto Girl. In an interview given to the *American Weekly Jewish News* for its 1916 article on "The Modern Ghetto Girl," Miss Hurst responded to a question about her impression of the East-Side girl.

When I go down to the East-Side and look upon those pasty, white faces and the hopelessly vulgar, stupid dresses, I am filled with wonder and admiration that these girls with all their vulgarity, should rise to the heights that some of them do and be so great in achievement.

The journalist Marion Golde asked Hurst what was the cause of "this extravagance in dress and taste." She characterized Fanny Hurst's response as "striking."

It is due to the vivid, aggressive temperament and imagination of the Jew. The girl walks down Fifth Avenue. She sees a latest model dress or hat, or the latest modes in coiffures, and immediately her aggressive imagination fastens upon these modes. She goes home and models her own style on them, but not possessing the good taste that prompted the original mode, a contorted exaggeration results. It is the reaction to a vivid imagination and temperament that lacks the restraining force of instinctive good taste.

Hurst's response resonated with the opinions of a social worker, Viola Paradise, writing in 1913 about Jewish immigrant girls in Chicago for *Survey*, the first professional journal of social work. She characterizes the "Jewish Girl" as more eager for Americanization than any other immigrant. She attributes this urgent desire to the "ingrained...passion for conformity. She is quick to accept the conventional." She draws her evidence, in part, from her desire to "look stylish."

In most cases this conviction leads merely to the establishing of false standards, which quite frequently express themselves in vulgarity of dress, in extreme and ugly styles, an unfortunate result but not necessarily dangerous. The danger comes later when the girl realizes that she will never be able to afford as many and as nice clothes as she wants. Then she is in danger of taking a wrong way to get the luxuries which America

has taught her to crave (Paradise, 1913, p. 30).

No matter how outlandish Ghetto Girls may have appeared, why did they inspire such intense disdain, muckraking advocacy, or sheer wonderment? What types of "stories" were American Jews telling as they commented upon the Ghetto Girl?

This image, attempting to describe a young Jewish immigrant woman in transition, reflected far more about the viewer than the viewed, the namer than the named. The representation of the Ghetto Girl constituted a distorted mirror into which establishment Jews gazed. They saw what they feared American culture saw whenever they looked at Jews — the incivil and acquisitive newcomer who did not fit in — rather than Jews who had succeeded in entering American society through education, wealth, or business. To journalists describing their conditions, Ghetto Girls worked hard, sometimes too hard, at Americanizing. Yet, to Jewish writers, moralizers, social workers, and others, these young women, apparently happily prom- enading in the dense, public life of the streets of the Lower East Side, were a type to analyze and scrutinize, to understand or to reform, to change and to improve.

The descriptions of Ghetto Girls are reminiscent of the very unflattering and often anti-Jewish portraits of more established Jewish women that appeared in the press in the 19th century. In 1880, for example, a *Harper's Bazaar* article on "Women Jews" described them as "conspicuous chiefly for their fondness for cheap jewelry." The article continues to explain that these are the same women who "habitually ask and expect a dealer to come down a few cents on every article they purchase." Historian Rudolph Glanz (1976) notes that these images, however, did not dominate the Gentile press and that the barrage of Jewish male criticism of Jewish women's dress habits, above all, preoccupied Jewish men who were apparently expressing their anxiety about the

opinions of non-Jews. Glanz includes among his examples an etiquette note concerning summer resort dress from the Anglo-Jewish newspaper, the *Jewish Messenger*, published in 1883: "The more richly you dress, the more rightly you can claim to be refined. Hang out a diamond from every finger. Nothing is daintier than to see diamonds flashing amid griddle cakes and syrup."

The working-class Ghetto Girl in the 20th century was criticized exactly as were her affluent German-Jewish sisters in the late 19th century. Lacking their wealth, marriage, or leisure, the Ghetto Girl nevertheless seemed to manifest the same desire for excess and display. The very women who read and heard these criticisms and accusations turned them on new immigrants, rushing to transform them into Americans who were above reproach.

When more affluent American Jews saw "common," "vulgar," "excessive" Jews on the streets of New York City, they saw Jews whom the popular press and "good society" delighted in ridiculing as Jews, not merely as immigrants or specifically Russian Jews. Many of these Jewish commentators, whether they found extravagance a moral failing or an inevitable stage in the evolution of a new American, were themselves obviously not far removed from the immigrant past of their parents. Others might well doubt their authority on the style and Americanization that they believed the Ghetto Girl should emulate. Whether crusading Progressives, wealthy philanthropists, or Jews firmly committed to the maintenance of a moral American Judaism, these commentators saw in the Ghetto Girls a reflection of a vulgar Jew. If the larger American society could not tell the difference, then it was obvious that those of privilege must transform these young Jewish women.

Coarse Jewish Women

The English-language Jewish press was a crucial vehicle for maintaining Jewish

identity within an upwardly mobile Jewish population committed to rapid Americanization. Women's pages were particularly fond of intertwining advice about style, fashion, and beauty with lessons in Jewish womanhood and the responsibilities of Jewish women to maintain Judaism. These pages were devoted to the improvement of firmly established and affluent Jews of both German and Eastern European descent far more often than they were to discussions of Ghetto Girls requiring reform. And the very same charges of excessiveness in Jewish women in the 19th century and in the young immigrant women found their way into columns read by and devoted to these affluent women. In the 1918 *American Jewish News* column on "Woman and Her Home," Julia Weber asked "Have You a Pleasing Voice?" She recounts standing at a railroad station where a Jewish girl greeted her companions "each boisterously and in a loud voice, arousing criticism all about her." She recounts that her companion said about "this type of Jewish girl,"

She knew how to buy good clothes and how to wear them, but this type of girl, with such a manner and voice, will never be accepted in good society, no matter how many redeeming qualities she may have. While there are thousands of splendid Jewish girls who are ladies in every sense of the word, yet there are others who, like this girl, help bring severe criticism upon all Jewish girls. Her voice is either loud and harsh or shrill. She does not realize that this stamps her as uncultured and vulgar (Weber, 1918, p. 368).

This "friend's" expertise was clear because she was a "professional reader," an actress who read and recited on social occasions. Her solution was the following.

A girl should speak in low and well-modulated tones and for the benefit of her listeners only. She should be careful not to speak in the throat, or she will swallow her words. If she talks through her nose in that

shrill tone, she produces the same disagreeable sound as is produced by speaking with the nostrils pinched together....She should speak so that every word is heard yet is modulated with a view to a pleasing, clear, and forceful expression of thought and feeling. Just a simple exercise on the vowels a-e-i-o-u will produce excellent results (Weber, 1918, p. 368).

Sandwiched between advice about how to equip a bathroom, the value of fish in the diet, and an explanation of the symbolism of the Jewish ritual object, the mezzuzah, the "Woman and Her Home" column revealed that good taste in clothing was insufficient proof of the acceptability of a Jewish woman. She was betrayed by her voice, her nasal tones, and her volume, all of which were tell-tale signs of coarseness keeping her from "good society"; in other words, acceptability to the non-Jewish world.

From these brief examples, it is evident that the very problems that beset the Ghetto Girl did not simply disappear with growing affluence or even "good taste." The social class standing that allowed a woman to purchase fur and diamonds did not assure her access to "the right people," because she persisted in using a vulgar voice, excessive taste, and poor grooming. Something was wrong with Jewish women.

Like women's columns in general, Jewish women's columns in both the Yiddish press and the English-language Jewish press did offer a constant stream of advice about proper food, homes, etiquette, decorum, and families. Yet, the improvement of Jewish women by means of the transformation of their every feature went farther than that. The very body of the Jewish woman provided the content of Jewish stories about Americanization. A vulgar speaking voice, excessive adornment, and tacky clothing were statements about Jews' failure to Americanize that frightened other Jews, whether their "otherness" was social class, gender, or

age. And Americanization was a process that extended well beyond the world of immigrants. The native-born, native speaker still was in danger of revealing her vulgarity, a vulgarity that seemed to affect her in a different way than it affected men. These same newspapers criticized the business orientation of men and their failure to attend synagogue, but no column took men to task for their speech or dress. Ghetto Girls were in urgent need of Americanizing properly, and the entrenched, affluent Jews were in constant danger of failing to fully enter the society to which their class position entitled them because of their unshakable difference. There was something stubbornly crass about Jewish women that kept disrupting and overriding their efforts to become acceptable to the larger society. Jewish women's most personal features — voice, style, and comportment — seemed constantly to be on the verge of dooming Jews to failure in American society.

What rediscovering the Ghetto Girl has taught me is that, in the early decades of the 20th century, Jews' encounter with America was anything but smooth and easy. Like all outsiders, Jews were very uncertain if they would ever be acceptable to American culture. Generational conflict often revolved around how different or like American mass culture it was appropriate for a Jew to be. Conflict between newcomers and more established Jews centered on a tremendous fear of how "others" would perceive Jews, and how vulnerable people who had lived in the United States for decades might feel when faced with Jews whose dress, language, or manners were different than the mainstream. Jews seemed as concerned about people who did not Americanize as they did about those who were too eager to Americanize. We can feel their anxiety in the articles about Ghetto Girls as much as we can in worries over money, employment, and disregard for religious observance.

What Ghetto Girls also reveal is what

Jews did with the anxiety. Clearly, a great many of them turned that anxiety on other Jews, especially Jewish women. Women and men both participated in this campaign to tame young working-class women, but women in general seemed a source of this deep anxiety about difference. These examples demonstrate that wives and young women were most open to accusations of excess and materialism. The young were made symbols of crass Americanization, as were affluent bosses interested only in money, and women whose pursuit of beauty was consistently portrayed as a danger to Jewish life. Although the Ghetto Girl is the portrait of a young woman, she represents the experience of Jewish women and men. The Ghetto Girl is as much about wealthy Jews as poor ones, older Jews as young men and women.

The anxiety felt and projected was not imagined by Jews. Before World I, and in the years following it, America was swept by a nativist intolerance for foreigners and those who were different. Congress passed law after law to prohibit further immigrations, particularly from the areas of Europe where Jews lived. Various social workers and journalists were convinced that Jews were undesirable Americans and mustered ample proof in crime records and school failures. Many of these accusations have been erased from our memory of a past we thought of as fairly congenial. This difficult period, however, seemed to set the model for how Jews faced their anxieties. They formed anti-defamation leagues, but they also turned on younger, poorer, and most often female Jews to criticize and attempt to transform. It was as though vast numbers of Jews said to each other, "I'm fine and you are the problem." An intolerant society taught Jews, as well as most other minorities, to be dissatisfied with one another.

At the same time many Jews were critical of American values. Affluent Jewish women, Jewish Socialists, parents of American-born children, many rabbis, and a host of others worried constantly about too

rapid Americanization. Some of the problems that concerned them were the terrible rift between the generations, a complete focus on business and wealth by men who were becoming financially successful, lack of synagogue attendance by men, and the ever-present worry about diminishing participation in Judaism.

Ironically, women were again represented as among the chief causes for these problems. Women may have been insufficiently American because of their dress, voice, or style, but they were at the same time represented as too preoccupied with Americanization. For more established and financially secure Jews, the "problematic Jews" discussed in newspapers, books, and sermons were business-driven husbands and wives who were often held up to ridicule for their preoccupation with Americanizing and their failure to maintain a proper Jewish home. For more recently arrived Jewish immigrants, the "Alrightnik" who became wealthy and indifferent to others, and the fashion-conscious consuming women, had a parallel place as sources of criticism. The desire to Americanize and become less Jewish was as problematic as the failure to Americanize successfully. They were simply mirror images. Jews represented their "failures" to one another as a way of assessing and commenting on Americanization.

Americanization meant more than finding a job or having American-born children. It even meant more than having the right clothing and style. It signaled an entire transformation of where and how one went about being Jewish. American Jewish history describes the first ring of immigrant Jewish settlement, particularly after 1880, as thickly populated Jewish neighborhoods where Yiddish reigned, community life teemed, and one found a small shul on every street corner. Jews remained in these settings for a relatively brief period. By the 1920s, few Jews remained on the Lower East Side, preferring new housing and the rural atmosphere of Brooklyn in New York,

and other nonurban areas in other cities.

Leaving the city meant new forms of association and new types of work. Jewish organizational life grew to include new types of synagogues and new fraternal groups. Increasing affluence allowed women to focus more energy on their children and their homes. Most importantly, Jewishness became increasingly and singularly associated with the home. Memoirs by Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin describe the 1930s as a time when the family gathered for a Shabbat meal, but there was little evidence of other forms of Jewish observance. Historians have described this period as a low point in Jewish education. Fewer children were given a Jewish education of any sort than at any other time in 20th-century American Jewish life. Jewish neighborhoods did not produce what is often called a "public life." Yiddish theater was waning in popularity, and the synagogue was no longer the center of an active communal life for men. Rather, a vibrant Jewish life was subsumed by the Democratic party and other mainstream American institutions. Jewishness increasingly became an "identity" conferred by the home, and the family rooted its members in that unique identity.

In this transformation from Jewishness as community to Jewishness as family, we can see why the family continued to be a way to describe Jewish life. Even when immigration stopped and the number of native-born Jews rose, gender and generation were still powerful ways of describing Jews' relationship to the larger culture. The stage was set for the collapse of Judaism into family, and supporting or rejection of Judaism was played out in relationship to the family one might form, as well as the family of birth.

What these early tales of wives and Ghetto Girls, of affluence and failure, of desire to Americanize and discomfort about America tell us is that Jews found in their intimates, particularly women, a way to represent a powerful anxiety about America

and themselves. Jews did not peacefully acculturate to America in the early decades of this century. It was a process fraught with conflict, uncertainty, and profound self-doubt. We seem to have publicly forgotten this period and that forgetting itself is useful information about what it means to be a Jew in the latter part of this century.

POSTWAR JEWISH LIFE: ASSIMILATING AFFLUENCE

My second example moves us ahead 30 years to the dawn of suburbanization and a dramatic transformation in American Jewish life. In this section I discuss a second and more contemporary representation — the Jewish American Princess — a figure more familiar and yet strikingly similar to the Ghetto Girl. The Ghetto Girl revealed how Jews coped with their newcomer status in a culture hostile to difference. The Jewish American Princess reveals how Jews have coped with their rapid ascent to affluence in a society whose continuing anxiety about difference makes clear that even the grandchildren of the native-born must struggle with the meaning of Americanization. This consistent and widespread representation of Jewish women developed shortly after World War II and is often attributed to such Jewish comics as Alan King, Shecky Green, and Milton Berle and to such novelists as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow. Yet, the image circulates throughout American Jewish life, not only in the media but in ordinary conversations as well.

The Jewish woman (and perhaps all Jews) is represented through her body, which is at once exceptionally passive and highly adorned. She simultaneously lacks sexual desire and abundantly lavishes attention on her desire to beautify herself. She attends to the needs of no one else, exerting no labor for others and expending great energy on herself instead. This popularly constructed Jewish woman

performs no domestic labor and gives no sexual pleasure. Rather, her body is a surface to decorate, financed by the sweat of others.

The representation of the Jewish woman is preceded in time by the “Jewish mother” and the “Jewish wife.” Wives were a dominant subject of Jewish humor for both Europeans and immigrant Americans. Mothers appeared later in American-Jewish humor, dominating it until the 1970s. All of these Jewish women types can be found in Jewish humor today. However, each representation emerged in different periods and remained dominant until she was replaced by another. Jewish Princesses do not grow into Jewish Mothers necessarily, and Jewish Mothers in no sense began their lives as Princesses. This new construction of the Jewish woman is crucial to understanding why the image emerged at the beginning of the postwar era.

According to contemporary humor, the Jewish wife and daughter are infamous for their indifference to domestic caretaking and nurturance of their husbands. For example, a recently circulating joke asks, “What is a JAP pornography film? *Debbie Does Dishes*.” A variant of the joke asks, “Did you hear about the new JAP horror movie? It’s called *Debbie Does Dishes*.” The joke plays on the title of a pornographic film of the 1980s, *Debbie Does Dallas*, substituting the male fantasy of a woman’s sexual availability to a city of men with a Jewish woman’s disgust at the thought of laboring over dishes.

This, and a host of jokes concerning a Jewish woman’s refusal to clean or cook — “What does a Jewish American Princess make best for dinner? Reservations” — casts her as an unwilling participant in any form of domestic labor. Domesticity in all forms is repulsive. An unusually long joke on the subject underlines her refusal of domestic life.

To her family’s delight, the JAP landed a prize husband, the son of an English duke.

After the honeymoon, the couple came to the United States to live. The JAP began to instruct her husband, who had grown up on a huge country estate, on more informal ways of life in the USA. On the second day back she took her husband to a supermarket.

"Darling," she said, "I'll push this cart. You walk along and put all your favorites into the cart." He trotted off ahead of her, then returned with an armful of packages.

She inspected them, pointing. "Drop this in the cart. And this. And this." Suddenly, she spied a large steak. Her face formed an expression of deep disgust, and she said "No. You must never buy anything like that." "But why?" her husband asked. "It needs to be cooked."

The punch line underlines *the* crucial quality of this young Jewish woman; she does not engage in any domestic labor. Groceries are to be bought that require no preparation. If the domestic realm belongs to women, then this Jewish woman defies her gender because she cannot be domesticated. Whether the jokes concern food, dishes, or cleaning, the humor rests on the JAP's rejection of any work.

Another related series of jokes represents women refusing another activity parallel to domestic labor. They do not participate actively in sex. Jewish women are portrayed as either indifferent to sex or inactive when they participate.

- "How do you get a JAP to stop having sex? Marry her."
- "What's the definition of a Jewish nymphomaniac? A woman who makes love once a year."
- "What is the difference between a JAP and jello? Jello moves when you touch it."

The Jewish woman's profound reluctance to participate in sex or to be an animated partner who experiences or gives pleasure is central to her cultural representation. She is inactive in the domestic

realm — both in the kitchen and the bedroom. Domestic and sexual "labor" are parallel because each ties women to reciprocal relationships with men. If men support women, then women provide for men through a range of domestic services. In the JAP image, women withhold their part in the contract generated by postwar American middle-class life. The Jewish woman's refusal of the relationship is made even clearer in her lack of activity in another form of labor — active participation in childbirth. Joan Rivers, an American Jewish comedienne, describes a Jewish labor as follows: "I had a Jewish delivery. They knock you out with the first pain and wake you up when the hairdresser shows." The Jewish woman is so inactive that she will not even participate in the one form of labor unique to her sex: she avoids the labor required for the production of life itself. According to these caricatures and stereotypes, the Jewish woman neither labors to produce nor reproduce. As a result, all of the characterizations rest on an inactive body, fundamentally defined as nonproductive or nonreproductive.

These representations are not peculiar to jokes alone. A similar portrait of a Jewish woman appeared in the 1974 film, *The Heartbreak Kid*, based on the Bruce Jay Friedman 1962 short story, "A Change of Plans." In this film, although not in the original short story, it is the classically passive Jewish woman's body that brings her disaster. The film concerns the brief marriage of Lila Kolodny and Lenny Cantrow and his subsequent pursuit of another woman, whom he meets on his honeymoon. Neither Lenny nor Lila is affluent, nor is their Judaism portrayed through elaborate Jewish rituals or symbols. They are physically typed as Jews (dark hair), they live in New York, and their wedding includes the words "Mazel Tov" as a glass is broken at its conclusion. These minimal clues seem sufficient to alert the viewer to the film's backdrop of middle-class Jewish life.

The new groom grows increasingly unhappy and even repulsed by his wife during their first few days together. She talks during sex. She eats sloppily and disgusts him. Yet, it is her inactivity that allows his distaste to blossom into passionate pursuit of another woman. Lila cannot swim, and she is so badly burned by her first day in the sun that she must spend her subsequent honeymoon days lying immobile in their hotel room. It is on the very beach where Lila's pale and inactive body was burned that Lenny, now free of ailing Lila, meets Kelly Corcoran, a beautiful WASP woman who is physically active, competent, and graceful. Her class and culture are in every way opposed to Lila's. Kelly's athletic body is especially desirable in contrast to Lila's inactive body and its other associated unattractive qualities. By the third day of the honeymoon Lenny has abandoned Lila to begin his pursuit of Kelly, which will take him to the WASP heartland of Minnesota, as he leaves behind his ethnicity, religion, and class in pursuit of the embodiment of its opposite.

The inactive body of Jewish women is only one side of her representation, however. Her passive and sweatless body exists to be adorned. The Jewish woman's body is presented as a surface for self-display of wealth and style. Her lack of reciprocation with men whom she will not serve or please is most apparent in her self-adornment. She depends upon men in order to adorn herself. Because she is nonproductive, she requires the sweat of others who labor for her. Her excessive adornment is not portrayed as reflecting male success, but only the Jewish woman's self-directed pleasure. Paradoxically, the Jewish woman is entirely dependent upon and indifferent to her male partner.

The Jewish woman is represented more frequently through her adorned body than through her passive one. Stereotypes multiply upon the foundational image of the adorned body. Wealth, bargains, self-indulgence, designer clothes, and many

forms of consumer excess are all associated with the Jewish woman.

A series of jokes emphasize that the Jewish woman is capable of erotic feelings, but they are inseparable from shopping and consumption. A widely circulated joke asks, "How do you give a JAP an orgasm? Scream 'Charge it to Daddy'." Or from Joan River's album, a related joke: "Jews get orgasmic in department stores. They scream 'Charge it, charge it,' and they start to shake."

A sexualized image of consumption in the person of a Jewish young woman was also offered in the early days of the *Saturday Night Live* television program in the 1970s. Gilda Radner, one of the original members of the company, frequently portrayed a newly married, suburban Jewish woman. She also performed a mock commercial for a product called "Jewess Jeans," a send-up of French designer jeans. She is dressed for the commercial in tight jeans with the star of David embroidered on the rear pocket. She is covered with many gold chains, a gold star of David, chews gum, and wears dark glasses. She sings, backed up by a multiracial chorus of women wearing identical tight jeans, through glossy red lips that appear on the screen before her entire body is revealed.

Jewess jeans.

They're skin tight, they're out of sight.

Jewess jeans.

She's got a lifestyle uniquely hers,

Europe, Nassau, wholesale furs....

She shops the sales for designer clothes

She's got designer nails and a designer nose.

She's an American princess and a disco queen

She's the Jewess in Jewish jeans.

If the viewer has any doubts about the meaning of the commercial, the narrator's voice announces, "You don't have to be Jewish to wear Jewess Jeans," and Radner responds "But it doesn't hurt."

In humor above all, but also in film and fiction, the Jewish woman is a consumer, not a producer. When the Jewish woman of popular culture might be expected to be productive — in the domestic sphere, for example — her body exerts no labor. She passively resists the desires of others. When her body is presented as a site for adornment, her desire is voracious. She must have it all. The passive body is one of consuming desire with no object of desire other than the self.

This humor and representations are easily placed in an historical context. They are not the jokes of immigrants. Jewish women appeared in literature written by Jewish men and women as greedy, bourgeois, and even uncouth as early as the 1920s. These women were, however, always contrasted to an idealized mother capable not only of perfect love but also of inhuman, slavish labor. These Jewish mother representations are predicated upon an exceptionally active woman's body. Her subsequent, no longer idealized role as suffocater/nurturer also depends on her activity and power. For example, in the English version of the song, "My Yiddishe Momme," introduced by Sophie Tucker in 1925 and an international success, the lyrics describe the *momme* in the following way:

I see her at her daily task in the morning's
early light
Her willing hands forever toiling far into
the night.

Her labor and activity are central to her representation in the work of songwriters, film makers, and novelists of the period.

Women's Bodies

Why is the woman's passive body such a powerful feature of contemporary American Jewish humor and popular culture, as was the decorated woman's body in the early part of this century? The passive body is a surprising representation of women in Western culture, where portrayals of

women's unbridled sexuality and their intimate link to the natural world are far more common. Western culture's deeply Christian roots are evident in the dualist representations of women as virgins and whores. Women are frequently portrayed as either without desire and sexuality, or they are nothing other than their sexuality. A passive body that is still an object of sexual desire is unusual, and a representation full of contradictions. The Jewish woman is passive but voracious, (sometimes) sexual, but unavailable, dependent upon men but inaccessible to them, and capable of great pleasure, but incapable of it in the "natural" world of mutual sexuality. I suggest that the story American Jews are telling through the popular image of the JAP is a reflection of the close link between being Jewish and middle class, and the traditional dependence on male producers. Just as the overly adorned woman's body of early 20th-century American Jews demonstrated the strong link between Americanization and the desire for Jews to succeed economically, so this body links Jews to wealth, passively and perhaps unfairly acquired.

Pleasure, however, in the case of Jewish women is a complex matter because they are neither portrayed as lusty nor are they dominated by sexual desire. They are portrayed in the more purely aesthetic terms of seeking beauty — the point of their consumption. Beauty, however, is typically associated with subordination. The images of the perfectly coiffed woman wearing very expensive, stylish clothing are both a critique of excess and praise for beauty and success. Ironically, these representations of Jewish women do not symbolize subordination or control, but precisely their opposite. Their passive bodies cannot be regulated. They resist by their passivity because they produce and create nothing.

These representations of women can be pinpointed to the entry of American Jews, particularly descendents of Eastern European Jews, into the consumer culture at the very same time that the consumer culture

came to dominate the American economy. The representation took on particular force after World War II. The desire embodied by the Jewish woman's representation is linked then to the consumer society, which depends on insatiable desires for its future, just as the always wrong Jewish woman of the 1910s and 1920s desired an Americanization that seemed unobtainable.

The centrality of consumption to the American economy began before 1935; that is, before the time American Jewish humor and literature began portraying wives as voracious leeches. Jews played important roles in the consumer culture's development by pioneering the film industry, retail clothing, and other forms of mass entertainment. More than economy is at work here however. The JAP image is best understood in the social relationships that surround our consuming — family, work, and ethnic ties — that developed after World War II.

The representation of the Jewish woman as young, demanding, and withholding seems to be particularly associated with the period of unprecedented affluence for white Americans, including their mass migration to the suburbs. Jews shared in these middle-class developments, participating in both the economic opportunities and the move into single-family homes beyond the city and urban ethnic communities. Suburban parents produced children whose life experiences differed dramatically from their own. A psychiatrist writing at the time, Joseph Adelsen, carefully spelled out the causes of and dreams for suburban life.

We had as a nation emerged from a great war, itself following upon a long and protracted Depression. We thought, all of us, men and women alike, to replenish ourselves in goods and spirit, to undo, by exercise of collective will, the psychic disruptions of the immediate past. We would achieve the serenity that had eluded the lives of our parents. The men would be secure in stable careers, the women in comfortable homes, and together they would raise perfect

children. It was the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times.

The vast majority of Jews realized this very dream. What they probably did not anticipate was how dramatically their own children's lives would differ from theirs. Both the experience of this suburban dream and the way its children differentiated themselves from their parents created the social relationships that generated the popular culture that depended on the Jewish woman's passive body.

Through the 1950s, for example, Jewish men were far more likely to be in business than professions. The children of the suburbs differ markedly from their parents, although they continued to have a small number of occupations, as Jews have had since their arrival in the United States. Its members held different occupations than the older cohort, had more education than they had, and were less likely to be self-employed or in business than they were. The daughters of these families also came of age during the second wave of feminism in the United States and anticipated staying in the workforce even when they had children, a pattern that differed dramatically from their mothers.

These demographic changes suggest that the uniqueness of the humor and other forms of popular culture of the 1970s arises from the experiences of the generation that first expressed it. Men and women are both more likely to be employed. Wage earners probably have less autonomy than did their fathers or parents, and they are more firmly entrenched as white-collar professionals whose success depends on education and formal training. At the same time these American Jewish children were the products of unprecedented suburban affluence. Their childhoods must have been somewhat paradoxical, as they were simultaneously expected to enjoy life and their parents' indulgences, and to be self-disciplined, hard working, and capable of the deferred gratification that produces middle-class

success.

In short, these children fell prey to a common problem in the life of the American middle-class, which was exacerbated by an economy that began to weaken in the 1970s. Barbara Ehrenreich (1989) argues in *Fear of Falling*, that the middle-class keeps its children in the same class position not by passing on land and capital, but primarily by instilling self-denial and self-discipline in them. Its capital, in contrast to the upper-class' real capital, is skill and knowledge earned at a high price that demands quite systematically forswearing the rewards of a consumer society. The American Jewish middle-class then entered the affluent society with a vengeance, enjoying the fruits of postwar affluence and working to keep their children firmly entrenched in it by investing in their education and encouraging success and consumption. These children were provided a narrow path to travel. Their achievements were predicated on denial, but their indulgence was proof of their mothers' and fathers' success. They were urged to have both and to reward their parents by creating a duplicate middle-class life predicated on endogamous Jewish marriage, affluence, and children to be further indulged by grandparents.

There is no question that these children followed suit, but not as clones of their parents. With the hindsight of the 1990s, we now know that the economic success that awaited them required two incomes to their parents' one and a diminished sense of independence and autonomy that came from entering the corporate world and following the corporate models of medicine, law, and accounting, rather than self-employment. Even consumption items became impossible to control, and the clear sense of what was appropriate to own in the 1950s and 1960s was supplanted by an infinite variety of possibilities. After 1960 Jews began to intermarry until, by the late 1980s, the percentage of intermarriage has been placed at about 45% of all Jews. The suburban

family hardly exists any longer given the widespread employment of women and the advent not only of American feminism but also of a specific Jewish feminism that began in the 1970s. From the 1970s on, this young adult generation began to enter different professions, different marriages, and different forms of consumption than their parents. With these differences came the new, very antagonistic, and deadly representations of Jewish women's bodies and the somewhat more persistent Jewish men's self-portraits as weak and dominated.

The period's representation of the Jewish woman as inactive and unproductive, as an impermeable consumer, bears an uncanny similarity to the role of the entire middle class in the consumer economy. Jews' close association with the middle class, not surprisingly, is central to this representation. The middle class increasingly found itself anxious, passive, and preyed upon as postwar affluence began to decline in the 1970s. Unlike the producers or "self-made men" of earlier days, the middle class is now professional and technocratic. Its members must work to produce affluence, but the nature of the work, dependent on denial and abstraction, is difficult to measure other than by what can be bought by the income it produces. Encoded in the Jewish woman's passive and adorned body is the very paradox of middle-class work. The highly decorated surface rests upon an unproductive foundation. Indeed, the woman's body absorbs labor and investment without, in the parodied image, production or reproduction. The suburbs promised happiness, ease, companionate marriage, and loving families. The children of that era, the male ones in particular, assumed a nurturing environment that placed their needs first as males and children. Not only did the nature of middle-class life change by the 1970s, but its promises of pleasure did not include women singlemindedly devoted to the needs of husbands who provided them support.

Jews have negotiated their passage into

the mainstream of American culture through the middle-class. The woman's body, freed from labor, but depicted as requiring others to work, certainly reveals the anxiety that is the patrimony of the middle-class. The passive body and the bitterness that creates the representation incorporate this anxiety. Driving its "keepers" to continue to work, the "bodies" cannot, however, be controlled. The humor casts men as victimized by women and their insatiable wants. But what drives men is only symbolized by Jewish women. "Embodied" in that passive female body is a consumption-driven economic system in which men are rendered unproductive as surely as are women. Work is abstract, its products difficult to identify. Consumption is almost infinitely variegated and, as such, inevitably disappointing. Women's sexuality is, in the humor, subsumed by her consumerism because she embodies the economic system, which depends on manipulation rather than manufacture, consumption rather than production. In the popular culture the Jewish man is portrayed as shackled to a ferocious taskmaster who drives him toward financing what he cannot enjoy as he continually works to satisfy her. Work cannot seem to satisfy or succeed as it once did, and it results in a sense of loss.

Therefore, it is their relationship to women and within the family that best came to symbolize for fathers, and particularly sons, the disappointment with middle-class suburban life. The life that promised pleasure, leisure, security, and satisfaction is inverted in a popular culture of withholding women. Americanization was virtually indistinguishable from suburban affluence. As Jews successfully entered the mainstream, abandoning much of their unique ethnic culture by the 1930s, their spending habits and consumption patterns, as well as their types of employment, all hastened their Americanization. The tension between men and women symbolized through their family division of labor is further proof of this complete Americaniza-

tion and, with it, the benefits and disappointments of middle-class life embodied in affluent women, a sign of poisoned success. Work, family relations, and rampant Americanization are each expressed in the Jewish woman's passive and adorned body. The humor of the 1950s comics was to escalate, with American Jewish affluence, into the 1970s humor of the Jewish American Princess.

I have described a popular culture that envisions women as symbols of men's economic and cultural experiences and that may tell us more about men than women. As such, women appear largely as a representation of male experience. Women are, nevertheless, actors in this drama of middle-class life. In particular, Jewish women created a Jewish feminism that addressed quite specifically their rejection of the narrow range of roles idealized by their community. Jewish mothers came in for considerable discussion in the 1970s. The Jewish American Princess humor developed in precisely this period. Many Jewish women rejected male dominance of every aspect of Jewish life — prayer, ritual, higher Jewish education, secular boards, the rabbinate, and cantorate — and the unabashed cultural preference for male children. As Jewish women, supported by the larger feminist movement, abandoned their role as "Jewish mothers," fundamentally defined as self-sacrificing, they were portrayed more frequently as "princesses." Jewish women's widespread entry into the paid labor force, at a much younger age than their mothers, was translated as continuing symbiosis and the denial of men's desires.

What form a Jewish American popular culture of young Jewish comedienues, film makers, novelists, and writers will take remains to be seen because this work is only now being produced. Film maker and humorist Elaine May and comedienne Joan Rivers, who gained attention and popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, have echoed many of the views of Jewish women and con-

sumption of their male age-mates. There is little question that different voices and images will soon emerge that will address the issues that remain central to middle-class American Jewish life.

The consumer culture, the middle-class path to Americanization, the economic and cultural upheavals that developed in the 1970s, and second-wave American feminism can all be traced to the body of the Jewish woman. The convoluted desire that locates pleasure in consumption but not mutual sexuality is the product of postwar America's pains and disappointments dulled by the devouring pleasures of the consumer society.

JEWIS AND AMERICAN CULTURE

In the early decades of the century, Jews were highly self-conscious about how they appeared to others because the dominant culture was hostile to its immigrants and new citizens. After World War II, Jews find themselves equally self-conscious about their affluence and success. Jewish humor directed at women, though often told by them, focuses on the Jewish woman as the embodiment of that ambivalence and frustration. What is awkward or embarrassing about American life, what is easily ridiculed becomes what many American Jews experience as Jewish. So much of American Jewish fiction, for example, attacks middle-class complacency as Jewish rather than as middle-class. The humor and popular culture described here focuses on the Jewishness of women not on their social class *per se*. Sexual inadequacy, failure, and passivity are similarly associated with the JAP, not just any woman interested in consuming.

These pictures and stories of American Jewish life, like those earlier in the century, seem again filled with shame and anger. They suggest a continuing frustration at how to be an American directed again at other Jews. Both of these American Jewish images — Ghetto Girl and JAP — are of single women. In literal terms, they

represent the future of the Jewish people. Are these women desirable? Will they be loved by Jewish men who will create families to whom they can transmit a Jewish culture? The JAP stereotype underlines a failed sexuality, which spells the lack of a future. In the end, the reproduction of families is the most powerful image of a sense of a vibrant future. But what is most distressing about the JAP is that the stereotype is formulated by her peers to whom she spells doom and a lack of a shared future. Ghetto Girls were found shameful by older and more established Jews. The anger directed toward representations of young Jewish women by all types of Jews, including other women, suggests that Americanization and alienation from other Jews are inevitably linked.

The counter-memory of American Jewish life embodied in these images suggests the stresses, strains, and anxieties that underlie the "love affair" between American Jews and American society. Jews are beset by the same difficulties that seem to be facing the middle-class at the end of the 20th century. Yet, because family, Jewish identity, and Judaism are so closely linked, this popular culture tells us that Jews experience these troubles and anxieties as closely associated with being Jews in general, and being Jewish women and men in particular, and little else.

The Ghetto Girl and the JAP are simply two examples from this century. We could also excavate and compare Jewish fathers, or the Jewish father and mother as well as many others. Though these images tend to be far more elaborated for women, both genders are turned into representations of American Jewish experience because all of them are intimates with some links to producing and reproducing families.

If my reading is correct, we are in a moment in which it is crucial to bring this counter-memory to the surface of American Jewish life, acknowledging the prices and demands American culture has put on Jews for assimilation, which have produced an

internal rage that is increasingly directed against intimates. We need to know our history and to tell a new one that will create a loving self-respect that will allow us to value those closest to us. We need to understand that the stories we tell are not descriptions of real people, though there certainly were garish workers and affluent women who loved to shop. The power of these cultural representations does not lie in their accurate descriptions, but in their ability to synthesize the feelings and anxieties about living in American society. Without that discomfort, these representations would not have developed. To change them is to change our relationship to American culture.

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