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**Gender Variations in Jewish Identity:
Practices and Attitudes in Conservative Congregations**

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Abstract

Although generally women are more religious than men, most research on American Jews has detected few gender-related gaps. This study focuses upon the Conservative movement in American Judaism, intriguing in part because of the relative recency of officially sponsored changes toward gender-egalitarianism.

We analyze data from a mail-back survey of 1617 congregants in 27 North American congregations. Jewish men were *more* engaged than women in liturgical and congregational leadership, while Conservative women were more active in most social and educational activities. Women, more than men, expressed religious motivations that were connected with family and community.

These complex findings led us to suggest that instances of men outperforming women can be explained by the historical residue of male leadership, and by persisting differences in education and in liturgical competence. The areas where women led men can be explained, we believe, by a greater orientation of women to relational and care-giving activities.

Introduction

During the last thirty years and more, religiously committed feminists have challenged prevailing norms and assumptions that lie at the heart of monotheistic religions. They contributed new conceptions of "woman" in both private and public life, and questioned conventional gender roles, institutional values, and social arrangements. They challenged the academy, places of worship, sacred texts, sacred places, religious language and holy leaders, and called upon their traditions to take the religious aspirations of women more seriously (Gross 1996: 29). Religious feminists influenced the intellectual life of their respective groups' elites. (For some examples, see Adler 1998; Boyarin 1993; Day 1968; Fiorenze 1992; Gross 1996; Hampson 1990; Heschel 1983; and Trible 1978). They demanded equal access both to religious learning and to positions of influence and leadership in their religious communities.

With all the ferment surrounding the place of men and women in religious life, the pace of change in religious institutions has been uneven, to say the least. Certainly, in American Christianity, the more traditional denominations and churches, while opening access for women to religious learning, have produced only limited changes in

women's participation in ritual practice and functioning as clerics. Most of the more liberal Protestant denominations have made significant moves toward greater religious equality of men and women in all aspects of participation in leadership. The Roman Catholic Church has evolved to the point where women are not only studying in religious seminaries, but they are even teaching men to be priests.

Within Judaism, the timing and extent of changes have varied by traditionalism of denomination. Following the feminist challenges in the early 1970s (see below), the Reform movement acted quickly to institute formal gender equality. Orthodoxy, though resisting change, has taken small steps toward expanded roles for women. In contrast with Orthodoxy, the Conservative movement (one that, historically, has been situated ideologically between the more traditional Orthodox and the more liberal Reform movements) moved decisively in the direction of gender equality. Since the 1970s, Conservative Judaism has extended to women roles once the exclusive preserve of men.

In the early 1970s, coming quickly upon the heels of a renewed and revitalized women's movement in American society, the first groups of Jewish women began focusing upon issues of gender in American Jewish life. (See, for example, Baum, Hyman, and Michel 1975; Cohen 1980; Elazar and Geffen 2000; Heschel 1983; Koltun 1976; Lerner 1977; and *Response* 1972.) Their advocacy, together with major developments occurring in the larger society, eventually brought about numerous far-reaching changes in American Judaism (Fishman 1993). Among the most widely cited are: expanded public roles for Jewish women as rabbis, cantors, and community leaders, both volunteer and professional (Horowitz, Beck, and Kadushin 1997); more gender-sensitive liturgy and prayers, both in Hebrew and in translation (e.g., Falk 1993); the application of feminist perspectives to the study of Bible and other ancient religious texts (e.g., to cite just a few—Biale 1984; Boyarin 1993; Frankel 1996; Halpern and Safrai 1998; Hauptman 1999; Pardes 1992; Plaskow 1990; and Rosen 1996); and broader interest in the lives of women in Jewish history and tradition (Adler 1998; Davidman 1991; Greenberg 1981; Hyman and Moore 1997; Kaufman 1991; Prell 1999; and Weissler 1998).

Undoubtedly, over at least the last three decades, feminism, gender issues, and women's studies have come to figure prominently in the intellectual life not only of academia generally, but of Jewish Studies in particular. Against this background, it may be somewhat surprising that relatively little attention has been given to gender in the social scientific study of contemporary American Jewry (Davidman and Tenenbaum 1994). The few monographs that do explore gender issues among American Jews (Fishman 1993; Hartman and Hartman 1996; and Prell 1999), by their very exceptionalism, make this point vividly.

With respect to the specific question of how the Jewish identities of men and women differ, just a handful of quantitative studies have specifically examined such issues. For example, Brodbar-Nemzer (1987) demonstrated that Jewish women held more hawkish views on the Israel-Arab conflict, contrasting with the more dovish attitudes of nearly contemporary American women on the Vietnam War.

Cohen (1988) examined the impact of childhood Jewish schooling upon adult Jewish identity. This research unveiled different statistical relationships between education and identity among men and among women. These findings underscored the need to be alert to the more subtle gender-related differences in Jewish identity. Variations may not relate so much to the sheer levels of certain indicators, but to the underlying processes that shape them. In other words, men and women may arrive in equal number at certain Jewish identity destinations, but they may get there by different routes.

In another realm, Sklare & Greenblum (1967), and then Goldstein and Goldstein (1996), demonstrated that Jewish women, more than Jewish men, belong to Jewish organizations and undertake volunteer activities under Jewish sponsorship. The differences expand among older individuals, and narrow considerably among younger adults. This pattern points to what may be another important theme in the study of gender variations in American Jewish identity: egalitarianism in American society and Jewish life may have narrowed the differences that obtained more prominently some decades ago.

Most recently, Keysar and Kosmin (1997), in their study of Conservative boys and girls who recently underwent *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremonies, focused on attitudes toward antisemitism, intermarriage, and God. They concluded, "the consensus between boys and girls on the three issues...is prominent." Although among their parents the one item relating to belief in God differed among men and women, "there was no significant difference between the mothers and fathers on the other two issues" (Keysar and Kosmin 1997: 17).

The Keysar-Kosmin findings (or "non-finding"), in fact, typify the experiences of the small group of highly active, quantitatively oriented social scientists of American Jewry. A sampling of their better-known work reveals little if any attention to gender variation in Jewish identity indicators. (See, for example, Cohen 1983, 1988, 1991, 1997; Goldscheider 1986; Goldstein and Goldscheider 1968; Heilman and Cohen 1989; Horowitz 1993; Israel 1997; Lazerwitz et al. 1998; and Sklare and Greenblum 1967.) Significantly, this lacuna in the literature emerges alongside considerable attention paid to variations in Jewish identity measures by other major axes of social differentiation such as age, family life stage, generation, American-born, social class, region, and geographic mobility. All contain relatively few, if any, entries in their indices concerning gender, men and women, and related topics.

(In sharp contrast, though, see Goldstein and Goldstein 1996, as noted above.) One may reason that this circumstance inheres is that these researchers have shared a collective blind spot toward issues of gender (Gilligan 1982). Another consideration, however, may be simply that their surveys failed to uncover significant differences between men and women in Jewish identity indicators. The absence of scholarly attention reflects, in part, an absence of observable differences in Jewishness between the sexes, particularly using the more conventional items and measures of Jewish involvement.

A related probable reason for the paucity of quantitative research in this area is the lack of both theoretical propositions and empirical predictions against which to test one's data. Even in their impassioned and eloquent plea for more sociological research on gender variations, two specialists in feminist sociology (Davidman and Tenenbaum 1994) could offer only a single usable hypothesis. It can be succinctly stated as follows: women are more Jewishly involved than men. Valid or not, this proposition demands to be unpacked.

Indeed, some scattered pieces of evidence point to the greater involvement of women. Adolescent girls outnumber boys in Jewish youth groups and Israel Experience programs (E. Cohen 1996). More women participate in Jewish organizational life (Goldstein and Goldstein 1996, as cited earlier). Moreover, women participate more frequently and extensively in adult Jewish education programs (Cohen and Davidson, 2000).

In contrast with the quantitative literature on Jewish identity, qualitative researchers have been more successful in locating gender-related differences in Jewish identity. Generally, these differences are not of magnitude (one gender leads the other), but of quality, where men and women exhibit different styles or areas of Jewish involvement. Thus, writing decades before heightened sensitivity to gender issues, Herbert Gans noted how Jewish women in a new post-World War II suburb urged first building Jewish schools for their children, while their husbands pushed for the early construction of a synagogue (Gans 1958). Riv-Ellen Prell's socio-cultural history of American Jews in the twentieth century (1999) demonstrates sharp differences in the lives of women and men in every period. Since the massive migration from Eastern Europe, these variations have been tied to work, economic mobility, courtship, and family life, to name just a few of the more prominent arenas of gender variation. Focus groups and long personal interviews with "moderately affiliated" American Jews (Cohen and Eisen, 2000) suggested differences in the *locus of Jewish identity*, that is, where men and women tend to give expression to their being Jewish. Women emerged as more engaged in the home, in holiday preparation, and in raising Jewish children, echoing a historic pattern wherein European Jewish men assimilated more quickly than their

wives, owing in part to the home-centeredness of women (Hyman 1995).

This literature suggests that variation inheres not so often (or, maybe, not only) in the frequencies with which women and men undertake certain Jewishly oriented activities. Rather, men's and women's motivations for involvement may be more tied to interpersonal relations, especially those they maintain with their children, and, to a lesser extent, with friends, spouses, and community. "Because traditionally Jewish women have not been bound religiously to the performance of the same *mitvoth* [ritual behaviors] as men, we might expect women to express their Jewishness by being involved in other aspects of Jewish life. Interpersonal relationships are usually more important to women than to men, so we would expect women to be more involved in social and collective aspects of Jewish life, especially on a familial basis" (Hartman and Hartman 1996: 208). More pointedly, in line with a long literature on gender variation in personality and adult development, we anticipate (and propose to demonstrate) that Jewish women's Jewishness is more firmly tied and more deeply embedded in social relationships, particularly those with parents, children, friends, and community.

We contend that Conservative Jewry constitutes a particularly strategic research site for investigating gender variations in Jewish identity. Unlike Orthodoxy, Conservative Judaism has, for the most part, officially legislated change in policy and practice to encourage the full participation of women in congregational life. In instituting its changes, the Conservative movement applied the tenets of liberal feminism, which advocated equalization of access and opportunities to men and women (see, for example, Donovan 1992, or Whelehan 1995). As contrasted with Orthodoxy, traditional and rabbinic norms and mores largely no longer constrain female participation in Conservative religious life (Wertheimer 1997). Given their adherence to traditional roles, finding gender variations among the Orthodox would be totally expected. Given their proclaimed commitment to egalitarianism, finding them among Conservative Jews today would be more intriguing.

In contrast with Reform Judaism, the Conservative Movement normatively and explicitly encourages a variety of identifiable conventional Jewish activities that are easily surveyed and quantifiable. Aside from the affiliated Orthodox (who comprise less than 10% of American Jewry), congregationally affiliated Conservative Jews are the population segment that is most active in conventional Jewish terms (Cohen 2000).

In this context, it is noteworthy that the contemporary American Jewish feminist movement first took root among those in and around the Conservative denomination of American Judaism. The Jewish

feminist movement's intellectual and organizational pioneers in the 1970s were heavily Conservative (Cohen 1980). Over the last three decades, Jewish feminism has exerted significant impact on Conservative practice, liturgy, and leadership (Lerner 1977; Elazar and Geffen 2000; Nadell 1998). Officially endorsed changes in gender-related norms and practice have only recently been instituted, in the last twenty years or so, albeit earlier in some congregations, later in others, and in some synagogues (particularly in Canada) almost not at all.

Dramatic changes in Conservative Judaism's elite rhetoric and official policies took place only in the 1980's. Presumably, they produced changes in gender-based practices and attitudes in the 1990's. Accordingly, this research seeks to understand whether and to what extent the newly emergent formal commitment to gender equality has in fact influenced the practices and identity of Conservative men and women. It locates the specific areas of equal and unequal participation of men and women in Conservative Judaism. It explores how this more recent emergence of legal near-equality (not every Conservative congregation is thoroughly egalitarian) has changed the expectations, needs and desires of women in the synagogue. What have been the manifestations of the new institutional structures on women's synagogue participation? Does legal equality erase other differences, and if not, what differences persist in spite of the victory of liberal feminism in the Conservative congregation? (See Wenger 1997).

Answers to these questions, we believe, lend insight not only to Conservative Judaism or even American Judaism more generally. Rather, they may also suggest a theoretical framework for understanding the persistence of gender-based variations in religious identity for other religious groups as well.

For, as so many observers have noted, "Gender differences have long been recognized in American religious life, with rates of participation in religious activities and personal religiosity higher for women than for men" (Roof 1993: 221). Moving beyond this nearly ubiquitous finding, the research literature on gender variations in religiosity generally, largely focusing on Christianity in Europe and North America, contains several explanations (for reviews of this literature, see Francis 1997; Thompson 1991). To take but a few examples, researchers have held that women's greater religiosity can be attributed to such considerations as personality traits (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi 1975), employment patterns and related issues (Yinger 1970), family roles (specifically child-rearing; Nelsen and Nelsen 1975; Roof 1978); gender role socialization (McCready and McCready 1973; Nelsen and Potvin 1981; Suziedelis and Potvin 1981); and gender orientation, that is, the distribution of masculine and feminine personality traits (Thompson 1991; Francis 1998).

While helpful in suggesting several possible explanations for gender variations in Jewish identity, the extant research literature is of only limited value in explaining the phenomena at hand for several reasons. One is that, in Judaism, contrary to the pattern in Christianity, men have been more active than women in several critical spheres of religious engagement. With respect to Jewish identity, the social scientific theories need to contend with alternative patterns of gender variation, and not simply the greater religiosity of women.

Another limitation of the prior literature on gender and religiosity derives from the different meaning of the term, "religious" in Jewish and Christian (especially Protestant) contexts. "Religious" in Judaism strongly embraces sanctioned behavior (or the absence of mis-behavior), and not only (or not particularly) attitudes and beliefs. In fact, within the culture of Orthodox and Conservative Jews (if not others), the term "religious" applies to people who are observant, with only a passing reference to the depth of their faith and conviction. In these Jewish circles, the "more religious" are those who practice more rituals, pray more often, and study sacred texts more extensively. In these respects, Jewish men have been (and, as we show, sometimes continue to be) "more religious" than Jewish women, limiting the applicability of prior research on gender variations in (predominantly Christian) religiosity.

To explain the variations (and "non-variations") we may encounter in our analysis of Conservative men and women below, we have developed five non-exclusive hypotheses.

The first relates to the *residual impact of historical patterns of male leadership*. The move toward more egalitarian patterns of socialization and participation in Jewish life cannot immediately erase generations of gender-related variation, where men have out-performed women. Historical residue influences both the mechanisms of recruitment and the readiness to volunteer for public leadership or honorific roles. Indeed, with all the changes in Conservative Judaism, its congregations are still not uniformly egalitarian. Wertheimer reports (1996: 16) that in 78% of North American congregations, women may lead the services, and in 82% they may read Torah in the synagogue. Evidence in support of this hypothesis would consist of higher rates of male performance of liturgical roles that have long been restricted to men.

A second explanation focuses on *differences in competencies* (again, explaining male leadership). This factor may explain men's ongoing lead over women in liturgical leadership or governance. These differences heavily derive from variations in Jewish education and socialization, and from gender-based variations in patterns of work and choice of occupation. This explanation may especially apply to persisting male-female gaps in liturgical roles that demand specialized skills, often acquired in childhood or adolescent years. In addition to

persisting male-female gaps in the performance of liturgical roles demanding special skills, we would also expect to find significant variations in extent and intensity of formal and informal Jewish education.

Third, we may anticipate the *compensatory behavior of Jewish women*. Women may be responding to years of exclusion from certain aspects of congregational life. They may especially seek out opportunities for liturgical participation previously denied them or their female predecessors, as well as educational opportunities to prepare them for recently opened roles in congregational life. Thus, in some areas holding great symbolic value or where women may acquire skills previously unavailable to them, women may participate more than men participate.

Our fourth explanation relies upon the presumed more *relational orientation of women*. This consideration may apply to the frequency and nature of participation in congregational life, motivations for participation, and the meaning derived from it. Obviously, this explanation is totally consistent with much of the research on women's greater religiosity cited above. Evidence here might be found in motivations for joining congregations or attending services. Women may be expected to more often cite reasons related to family, friends, social life, and community.

The fifth explanation entails gender-related norms regarding *attachment to the home*. These influence the readiness and willingness of women (and men) to participate in community life outside the home. Men may more readily participate in community life outside the home; women may gravitate to those activities that are particularly acceptable for women. Thus, men may more often participate in committees and boards, while women may more often attend classes and lectures, activities consistent with their roles as Jewishly educated mothers and homemakers.

Clearly, the first three explanations may be distinctive to Judaism, or, more generally, to religious cultures where contemporary women are expanding their participation in leadership roles formerly the near-exclusive preserve of men. The latter two explanations are, of course, consistent with the literature on gender variations in Christian religiosity.

These proposed explanations, if all operating, lead to three sorts of expected empirical patterns regarding male-female patterns of Jewish involvement. First, consistent with much of the prior experience of survey researchers of American Jewry, we can anticipate near-equality among men and women in certain conventional indicators of Jewish involvement. Second, in part owing to the recentness of the egalitarian innovations in Conservative congregational life, we may also expect men to outscore women in several measures of congregational

involvement. Their lead over women should be widest in those areas that reflect men's historic predominance, and in those that reflect differences persisting in the larger society. Third, we might anticipate higher levels of involvement on the part of women in some areas.

Since all three possible empirical patterns (gender-equality, men-higher, women-higher) are plausible, if not likely, the outstanding question is to learn which measures follow which pattern, to explore possible explanations for these findings. In so doing, we hope ultimately to contribute to a theory of gender variations in Jewish identity with possible implications for other religions as well.

Data and Methods

To explore these issues, we performed a "secondary analysis" of a pre-existing data set collected for other purposes (Hyman 1972). The data derive from a survey of Conservative synagogue members in North America conducted in 1995 (Wertheimer 1996, 1997). A total of 1617 members of 27 Conservative congregations in the United States and Canada participated in the mail-back survey. The congregations were selected so as to represent different congregation-size strata in both the United States and Canada. The survey addressed concerns pertinent to the study of Conservative Jews, their identity, and their relationship to their congregations.

When compared with a subset of data from similarly defined respondents in the authoritative 1990 National Jewish Population Study (Kosmin et al. 1991), three sorts of statistical biases in this sample emerge. One is that, owing to random chance selection by region, these data under-represent New York area Conservative Jews. Another is that the survey respondents are somewhat more socio-economically upscale than the Conservative population at large, probably owing to the greater readiness of more educated and more affluent potential respondents to complete mail-back questionnaires. A third bias lies in the under-representation of congregants younger than thirty-five.

Aside from these apparent discrepancies, the survey data seem to adequately represent congregationally affiliated Conservative Jews in North America. Their levels of ritual observance, Jewish education, communal affiliation, and informal ties to other Jews highly resemble those found among Conservative congregants within the 1990 NJPS, used here as a benchmark against which to compare the survey sample's characteristics (Cohen 2000).

Our analytic strategy below is to present simple frequencies for Conservative men and women on a variety of Jewish identity indicators. In all instances where we uncovered substantially significant gender-linked variations, these variations remained even when controlling for employment status. In other words, the differences we

report are not primarily due to men's higher rates of full-time employment or, conversely, the greater frequency with which women reported part-time employment outside the home or homemaker status.

In focusing on gender differences – examining to what to ascribe them and how best to make sense of them, we are of course joining a research tradition on these variations that has contended with certain conceptual and methodological difficulties. The social scientific literature on gender differences recognizes the problematic nature of this approach. For example,

[when] psychologists measure sex-related differences, they typically find statistical frequencies rather than rigid dichotomies. Yet this work often ends up reinforcing oppositional categories. Such comparative frameworks inevitably, if inadvertently, flatten analysis. They deflect focus from gender as a social relation and obscure the processes that amplify or mute its significance (Rhode 1990: 6).

Or as Josselson frames the methodological problem:

Whether boys and girls, men and women are different from each other will be a subject of ongoing debate. But in phrasing our question this way, we are forced to assume that women as a group and men as a group are internally coherent (1987: 5).

Accordingly, we are not presupposing a vast difference between the women and the men in our study. We acknowledge the similarities between them. However, while we are aware of the limitations in the nature of bipolar comparisons, gender clearly remains a critical social dimension to investigation. We agree with Rhode that the solution to the methodological problem of gender theory is not to ignore difference. Rather, "How to acknowledge without amplifying difference remains a dilemma of central importance" (Rhode 1990: 2).

Any discussion of gender differences immediately raises the question of their origins and draws upon the by now familiar and evolved debate between "essentialists" and "constructionists." The former contend that some version of innate or in-born characteristics predispose men and women in one direction or the other. Essentialist models, "thus portray gender in terms of fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the ongoing experience of interactions with the daily sociopolitical contexts of one's life" (Bohan 1997: 32-33). These attributes can be seen as an almost biological, deterministic characteristic (e.g., Dupre 1990). Constructionists, in contrast, trace observed differences between men and women to socio-cultural factors, albeit sometimes of long historical

standing. "Gender related behaviors are a process of individual and social construction" (Deaux and Major 1990: 89-90). They further claim that essentialist models fail to acknowledge the deep "situatedness" of the experience that creates the "female identity." Some see this dichotomy as over-drawn, and recent scholarship has sought to bridge the putative distinctions between the two camps.

However one views differences between the sexes, we learned (and will demonstrate) that gender variations in Jewish identity are undeniable, albeit for reasons we cannot fully fathom. We certainly do not contend that the differences we found in this study are either biologically or essentially determined. Where we do attempt to understand continuing differences in the Jewish identity of today's men and women, we tend to rely on historical, cultural, and sociological explanations, in line with social constructionist thinking.

At this stage of research on gender variations in Jewish identity, the principal tasks are to discern, document, and develop areas of gender-related differences. We place them in the context of the research literature on gender variations in social life; and we advance hypotheses specifically appropriate to the particular population under investigation, in this case, men and women in Conservative Jewish congregations.

The Findings

With respect to many conventional indicators of Jewish behavior, Conservative men and women report almost identical scores (see Table 1 below). These include Jewish friendship, Yom Kippur fasting, lighting Shabbat candles in the house, kosher dishes, kosher eating outside the house, having a Sukkah, studying text, and visits to Israel. In this sense, this data set resembles those encountered by social scientists of the American Jewish experience numerous times before. Of course, one reason for the similarity in these frequencies is that they refer to home-based activities performed by some or all members of the household. These are actions that couples undertake (or fail to undertake) together. Moreover, even if independent action of household members is conceivable, the actions of one influences the actions of the other. A wife with many Jewish friends, for example, raises the chances that her husband will form Jewish friendships, and vice versa.

For whatever reason, then, with respect to many of the indicators most commonly used to measure Jewish involvement in numerous prior studies, we too find that men's and women's scores hardly differ. In a heavily married population situated within a narrow ideological segment of American Jewry, it is not surprising that men and women share many ways of being Jewish. With that said, numerous gender-related differences remain to be uncovered, as we shall see.

Table 1
Selected Jewish Identity Indicators By Sex
 (in percentages)

	Men	Women
Fast on Yom Kippur	82	77
All or most closest friends are Jewish	69	74
Have visited Israel at least once	63	64
Household lights Shabbat candles	56	57
Have separate dishes for meat and dairy	31	30
Refrain from eating meat in non-kosher restaurants	15	16
Study Jewish texts at least monthly	13	12
Usually have a Sukkah	13	12

Despite all the changes in gender participation and behavior, there continue many significant variations in the level of participation in the public areas of worship and learning. Men continue to be more active in worship services than women (Table 2). They attend services with greater frequency, contrary to the gender-related pattern among American Christians. (From our informal observation of Conservative congregations over the years, we suspect that, in addition, men attend for longer periods of time. The first hour or so of worship services, at least in Conservative and Orthodox congregations, are predominantly male.) Beyond coming to services more often (or for longer periods), men more often take leadership roles and *aliyot* (honors related to reading the Torah). They more frequently function as Torah readers (a function demanding a specific sophisticated liturgical skill), *shlichei tzibur* (lay cantors), and givers of *divrei Torah* (public comments on the Torah reading).

Men apparently more often come to services schooled (often in their childhoods) in the basic skills needed in order to function in that arena. The lower levels of women's participation in liturgical leadership may also derive from differences in recruitment. As women, they may no longer universally suffer from overt discrimination in the

Table 2
Service Attendance and
Liturgical Activities By Sex
 (in percentages)

	Men	Women
Attended Jewish religious services monthly or more	49	39
Accepted an aliyah to the Torah	71*	36
Chanted the Haftarah?	12	6
Chanted the Torah reading	10	6
Gave the dvar torah or sermon	8	5
Led services (as the cantor)	10	3

(Note: In this and all subsequent tables, figures are in boldface where the entries for one sex lead those of the other by six or more percentage points. Those marked by an asterisk refer to differences of twelve percentage points or more.)

distribution of liturgical honors. Wertheimer (1996: 16) reports that egalitarian practices in any particular area characterized about 80% of North American congregations. Historically inbred patterns are difficult to change. We suspect that congregants who distribute liturgical honors in those congregations permitting women's participation may more readily turn to men to fulfill those functions. Even liturgically competent women, for their part, may express less interest in being chosen for roles for which they have been trained only relatively recently and which, in any event, have not been familiar to them from childhood, as they have been to their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Few of today's Jewish women have memories of these sorts of roles being important in their own lives or the lives of other women. Finally, we cannot ignore the possible impact of recent or incomplete adjustment in the normative value assigned to male and female participation in worship services.

The male penchant for assuming publicly recognized leadership roles extends beyond religious services to the synagogue boards, the highest governing bodies of Conservative congregations. We learn that just 26% of the women report recent board experience as contrasted

with 37% of the men (see Table 3). This finding is particularly noteworthy, insofar as women are as active, or (in some areas) more active, than men in all other aspects of congregational activity. What is clear is that men in Conservative congregations are still found more often than women in places of managerial and public power. (That is, men lead women in non-liturgical congregational activities only with respect to serving on the boards.) This pattern may of course reflect the fact that men more frequently possess managerial skills developed in their business life, and synagogue management is a natural continuation for them.

Gender variation in Jewish education as children provide some of the explanation for the discrepant participation of today's men and women in worship services. In broad terms, as boys and teenagers, today's men had better formal Jewish education than women, and far more experience in synagogue services (Table 4). As children, they also went to services more often. Both point to greater investments by the parents of these congregants in the institutionally linked Jewish upbringing of sons rather than daughters.

One explanation for this phenomenon is that these adults were educated and socialized as children in a cultural environment that defined Jewish manhood and womanhood very differently. Traditionally, and probably through the years when these respondents were children and teenagers, formal Jewish education and knowledge of religious texts was connected to gender identity. Each culture embeds the gender distinction by means of positing masteries and "ideal types." The Jewish (male) hero traditionally was not known for his physical strengths, but rather for his knowledge and intellectual strengths (see Halbertal and Hartman Halbertal 1998). As opposed to boys, girls' "Jewishness" in mid-twentieth century America was not as directly connected to their formal Judaic knowledge. One could be a good Jewish girl without knowing, one could not be a good Jewish boy and be seemingly ignorant of Jewish matters.

Against this background, the question arises of how then to make sense of the differences today in male and female attendance at Jewish educational and social activities connected to the congregation, as reported back in Table 3. Women lead with respect to frequent participation in lectures, classes, social action and men's club/sisterhood. In these areas, women's attendance surpasses that of their male counterparts. Though less Jewishly educated (a predictor of congregational involvement) women are generally more active in a wide range of areas including adult Jewish education.

Table 3
Synagogue Activities By Sex
 (in percentages)

	Men	Women
Served on the board of current congregation	37	26
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a Jewish life-cycle celebration	26	27
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a family Shabbat service	19	19
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a Men's Club or Sisterhood Activity	10 (9)	17 (10)
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a social activity	14	17
Participated 6+ times/yr. in lecture or cultural activity	10	15
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a Jewish studies class	6 (6)	12 (9)
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a family program	9	12
All of closest friends are members of the congregation	6	8
Participated 6+ times/yr. in a social action program	3	6

(Entries in parentheses refer to those who are employed full-time. They are given where their gender variations differ substantially from those of the total sample.)

Table 4**Jewish Educational Experiences In Childhood**

(in percentages)

	Men	Women
Learned to read a prayer book in Hebrew	85*	64
Attended a Jewish day school or Hebrew school	75*	48
Attended Sabbath services 2+ times/month (age 11-12)	43*	26
Participated in USY or LTF (Conservative youth groups)	20	20
Visited Israel before age 22	20	20
Attended Camp Ramah (Conservative sponsored)	6	6

We can only speculate as to the reasons underlying these patterns. One possibility is that they result from the recent blurring of gender related domains. Referring to the "compensatory hypothesis" suggested earlier, as more and more women find themselves in other formerly male preserves, they may especially want to make up for their lack of formal education. Notably, the adult bar/bat *mitzvah*, undertaken by older people who never experienced the life cycle transition as children, is largely a female phenomenon. Women may feel that they must do more than to simply proclaim their equality in order to be full members of a community that values learning and liturgical competence. As leadership roles open to women, they may especially want to master the requisite material, learn about their heritage, and become their own agents in religious matters.

Women's higher rates of attendance at classes and congregational activities outside the home could also be understood in light of the restrictions on the sorts of public places where women may move freely about, a matter related to the home-centeredness hypothesis advanced earlier. Of course, no formal restrictions inhibit women's movement outside the home, but some places are more socially acceptable for women to appear than others. To take a simple example, in middle-

class American society, married women less frequently than men go out to a bar and drink with their friends. On the other hand, a woman can legitimately leave her traditional domains, specifically the home, if she is going to a religious class taught by the local rabbi or respected Jewish educator, or to a volunteer activity in the synagogue. Such activities are expressions of her roles as Jewish wife and mother, in accord with the relational hypothesis advanced earlier.

The survey instrument asked respondents to assess the importance of a host of reasons that prompted them to join their respective congregations (Table 5). To be sure, women outscored the men in terms of all the indicators; more women than men claimed these reasons were important motivations for joining. This finding may suggest that women are slightly more attached overall to their congregations than are men. We do note, however, some meaningful variations in the variations. The gender-related discrepancies are smaller for those reasons that hardly bore upon interpersonal relationships (e.g., "It is Conservative," or "I liked the style of worship"); in contrast, they were larger for reasons touching upon family members and friends.

Significantly, women mentioned relationally oriented or socially oriented reasons for joining more often than men. The larger gender-related differences, where women outscored the men, entail the following: their parents were members, friends were members, they liked the synagogue community, and they joined for all the instruments related to their children's Jewish upbringing (pre-school, school, youth program, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*).

Apparently, a crucial aspect of women seeking out synagogue membership pertains to their motherhood more than it does for the men's fatherhood. Congregational affiliation takes on more significance for the women-as-mothers, that is, in relation to their children, than it does for men-as-fathers. Bringing up children in a Jewish environment, such as that provided by pre-schools, schools, youth programs, and *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs*, served for women more than men as catalyst for women to join a congregation.

A similar pattern emerged with respect to reasons for attending services (Table 6). Men and women provide similar responses with respect to many of the reasons that are not relational or socially oriented in character, such as expressing relationship to God or their spiritual life. However, women clearly led men with respect to socially related reasons, such as for their children, to prepare their children for *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvahs*, and to be involved in the community. In fact, the desire to be "involved with the community" exhibited the largest gender-related difference in the table. Women's relationships with others and their desire for relationships with others were more significant factors in the women's motivations for attending services. As we saw earlier, women more frequently interact with other congregants (albeit outside

Table 5

Reasons For Joining The Congregation By Sex
 (% answering, "very important")
 (in percentages)

	Men	Women
It is Conservative	68	73
So my child could have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah	52	60
I liked the style of worship	53	58
For the religious school	43	57*
Spouse wanted me to join	46	51
I liked the rabbi	46	51
I liked the community, congregants	41	50
Geographically close	43	49
I liked the policy on women	38	47
I liked the cantor	30	37
For the youth program	22	35*
My friends were members	25	32
My parents were members	18	28
For the pre-school	21	28
Very affordable	21	27

of services). That interaction may reflect their greater desire for community connection, and it may deepen their appreciation of the congregation as a provider of community.

These findings coincide with much of the writings on women's identity produced by feminist theorists over the last twenty five years (such as Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982; and Miller 1976). Their research highlighted that much of women's development was a "growth in connection" to others. Women's identity is, to a large

Table 6
Reasons For Attending Services, By Sex
 (% answering, "very important")
 (in percentages)

	Men	Women
For spiritual reasons	50	54
I like the rabbi	40	47
For my children	37	44
To be involved with the community	23	39*
To express my relationship with God	42	39
I like the cantor's singing	25	34
I like the congregation's singing	24	34
To prepare child for Bar/Bat Mitzvah	25	32
I like the sermons, discussions	23	31
Spouse wants me to attend	12	12
To play a leadership role in the service	5	3

extent, a relational identity; their self understanding was a "self in relation."

The women interviewed answered questions that reflected in a deep way what Miller writes:

Women have traditionally built a sense of self-worth on activities that they can manage to define as taking care of and giving to others.... Women, more easily than men, can believe that any activity is more satisfying when it takes place in the context of relationships to other human beings—and even more so when it leads to the enhancement of others (1976: 54).

Women "give great weight to affiliations" (Miller 1976: 86). That observation, we believe, is crucial to understanding the gender variations found in this study. The relational realm consistently appears as the main focus of women's psychology. "In all of the women's

descriptions, identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care" (Gilligan 1982: 160).

The relational aspects of women's personalities shed light upon the numerous gender variations evident in this study. For women, more than men, synagogues may serve to enhance that relational self. In particular, congregations provide arenas where women function as agents of religious socialization for their children and for others, serving as paid or volunteer teachers, youth group advisors, or junior congregation leaders. It is particularly in those settings, where women can act out their care-giving functions, that they feel more powerful. "Religion may provide women with a space where they may engage in women-centered activities" (Berkta 1998: xi). For women, perhaps more than for men, families and friends enhance their sense of self and growth, and bring meaning to their involvement in congregations and, by extension, to Jewish life generally.

Conclusions and Implications

The patterns of gender variation reported here and the explanation adduced for them contrast with those reported in prior social scientific research on religiosity in North America and Europe, and on American Jews. In contrast with Western Christianity, Conservative Jews (and, surely Orthodox Jews as well) exhibit patterns of greater male than female religiosity, owing in part to historical residue and differences in competencies.

In contrast with the small number of verified gender-based variations in Jewish identity reported in much research on American Jews, this study of Conservative congregations documented a wide variety and a large number of such differences. One reason for the emergence of such findings here is that we were able to go beyond the items and measures that most typically appear in quantitative studies of American Jewish identity. In particular, we were able to demonstrate that findings express the "relational" orientation of women.

We focused our analysis upon a particular segment of American Jewry (synagogue affiliated Conservative Jewry), and in so doing drew upon some measures that are particularly applicable to that movement. Many of the measures used here are peculiarly suited to the specific Conservative Jewish sub-culture, and are more likely to exhibit variations by gender, if not other axes of social differentiation. We can well imagine that investigations centered upon Orthodox or Reform Jews would require a different mix of measures of Jewish identity and congregational involvement. Indeed, we suspect that the failure to use contextually appropriate measures has hindered the search for gender-related variations in the past.

Another reason for the revelation of gender gaps in this study is our focus on interpersonal relationships and connections—those tied to

family, friends, and community—as motivations for Jewish involvement. The literature on personality differences between men and women drew our attention to interpersonal relationships, as well as to the socially oriented motivations for undertaking religious behaviors, rather than solely upon the frequency with which certain behaviors are undertaken.

Moreover, despite the dramatic changes in officially sanctioned Conservative Jewish policy and practice regarding women's participation, historic variations persist. Men still out-perform women in assuming leadership or honorific roles in liturgy and in congregational governance. We ascribe these gaps to historical residue, particularly socialization, education, and long-standing patterns of recruitment and their psychological ramifications. The precise reasons for persisting gender-based variation remain to be explored and understood. To what extent (and in what instances) are women reluctant to assume leadership or positions of prominence? To what extent do recruiters and gatekeepers instinctively (or intentionally) overlook women? The applicability of these and other explanations for gender variations in Jewish identity needs to be further assessed.

We expect that, with appropriate sensitivity to inter-religious variations, the lessons we drew here can be helpful in the study and the wider discussion of gender differences in other religious groups. Certainly, we anticipate continued differences in the ways men and women in other traditions participate in religious life. We foresee that historical residue, differences in socialization, attachment to the home, the relational orientation of women, and their eagerness to utilize still-recently opened opportunities for participation will affect other religious groups. The specific ways in which these processes play out, and their relative importance, remain to be examined. However, we believe we have contributed a widely applicable set of explanations of gender-based variations in religious participation, as well as the empirical evidence supporting their validity.

NOTES

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