

concerted community response apparent in that century-old crisis, or at the times of the 1967 and 1973 wars in Israel. Yet the dangers facing the community can clearly be seen. The threat to the present and future generations of Judaism is great enough that united action in preventive and remedial measures is warranted. That effort must respond not only to the cults, however, but also to the total threat to the continuity of Jewish life.

If we are to prevent kids from joining cults, we must provide them with the best antidote we have to prevent assimilation and intermarriage: warm, lively, interesting Jewish communities with religious values, communities that care about people.<sup>45</sup>

The alienation, the narcissism, and the general breakdown of family life that characterized the late 1970's, leaving a vacuum for young people at a most critical point in their psychosocial development, must be turned around if the Jewish community is to survive for many more generations. In summarizing several studies of psychological deviance among Jews, Sanua concludes that "family solidarity and identification with one's group tend to reduce the incidence of alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide," and, it might be added, affiliation with other religions or cults.<sup>46</sup>

Recently, because of the scandal of the mass suicide-murder of Guyana of Peoples' Temple cult members, and the ensuing rash of unfavorable publicity in the press against all cults, these groups have adopted a low

profile. Consequently, the threat posed by these groups may appear to be reduced for the future, though only time will tell. The fundamental problems of proselytization, however, will continue. Other, more orthodox, groups such as the Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other evangelical movements will continue to attempt to attract Jewish youth, and even adults. The challenge to the Jewish community will remain: to adopt a more vital, religious life-style and cultural environment that will involve creative, constructive participation *and commitment* on the part of our Jewish young people.

What the Spanish failed to do in the Inquisition, what Pius IX failed to do through his edicts and actions, what the Nazis failed to do in the Holocaust, may yet occur through the apparent gentleness of the Krishnas and the "Moonies," the "Jews for Jesus," and others who speak the language of the disenfranchised. Creative involvement with Jewish institutional development such as camp, schools, families, neighborhoods, and synagogues must be encouraged. A renewed feeling of group identification must replace narcissism, and commitment, of the Jewish community to its youth and of Jewish youth to their community, must replace alienation if the Jewish people are to survive. Lewin stated the case very well: "There is one field of action to the Jew, where the results depend mainly on himself. This is the field of Jewish life."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflict*. New York: 1948, p. 163.

*Editor's Note:* In this same *Journal* issue, p. 91, Rabbi Menahem Herman discusses "Manifestations of Jewish Messianic Movements and the Cults."

<sup>45</sup> Israel, "The Kosher Revolution," *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Victor D. Sanua, "The Contemporary Jewish Family: A Review of the Social Science Literature." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, V. 50, No. 4 (1974), pp. 297-312.

## The Impact of Feminism on American Jewish Communal Institutions\*

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*... I would similarly recommend that the focus be changed from women's issues to family issues and human issues. Accordingly, when the focus is upon services... I would urge that they be presented as needs for services for family members, male and female, and for the American Jewish community at large.*

There are a variety of perspectives through which the impact of feminism upon Jewish communal organizations might be analyzed. Two such perspectives would be within the context of power and, alternatively, within the context of services. Perhaps drawing an analogy from the anti-poverty effort of the 1960s would be helpful for illustrative purposes. When the Office of Economic Opportunity was being designed and when it first became operational, there was a heated debate over what its major focus should be. On the one hand, there were those who argued that what the poor lacked most was power, that is, the power to have a say in those policies, programs and institutions which affected their lives. Those who made this argument, therefore, advocated measures designed to increase the power of the poor, such as assuring the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in both the planning and operation of the various projects of a given Community Action Program. Those who adopted the power perspective insisted that there must be explicit and determined efforts to involve the poor, not only in the operation of the projects, but also to have them serve on the policy-making boards of the local anti-poverty agencies. On the other hand, there were those who argued that what the poor needed most were

increased and improved services and programs which would enhance their economic and social well-being. For those who adopted the services perspective, the major focus of the national and local anti-poverty agencies was to be on the coordination of existing programs and services, improving them, and designing new programs and services which would meet needs not presently served.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, with the subject of this article, the analysis might proceed from a power perspective or from a service perspective. Accordingly, the impact of feminism can be measured in terms of the power of women within Jewish communal organizations or, alternately, it can be measured in terms of the availability of services for women within Jewish communal organizations. One method of examining the impact of feminism from the power perspective would be to determine the changes over time in the proportion of women in decision-making positions within American Jewish organizations. Historically, these positions have been virtually exclusively dominated by men. As Daniel J. Elazar observed "at the threshold of change," in 1973:

<sup>1</sup> Expressions of each of these perspectives are found in Louis A. Ferman, (ed.), "Evaluating the War on Poverty," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 385, Sept. 1969; Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*. New York: The Free Press, 1969; Chaim I. Waxman, (ed.), *Poverty: Power and Politics*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1968.

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With some exceptions, women function in environments segregated from male decision-makers within the Jewish community. The exceptions are significant for what they reveal. Very wealthy women who have a record of activity in their own right, often in conjunction with their husbands but sometimes even without them, are admitted to the governing councils of major Jewish institutions and organizations. So, too, are the top leaders of the women's groups in an *ex officio* capacity which is sometimes translated into meaningful participation but frequently remains *ex officio*.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to determine the extent to which this pattern has changed over the past six years and, thus, have one index by which the impact of feminism might be measured, the listings of "National Jewish Organizations" in the 1979 *American Jewish Year Book*<sup>3</sup> were examined, specifically with respect to the proportion of women to men among the chief executive officers of six categories of organizations: community relations, cultural, overseas aid, religious and educational, social/mutual benefit, and social welfare. In each category, specifically women's organizations were excluded, not because they are insignificant, but because it was assumed that their chief executive officers would be women. Actually, however, it was surprising to note that even among women's organizations, there is a number whose executive directors are men. Be that as it may, the findings were that seven of the twenty-four chief executive officers of community relations organizations, or 29.1 percent, are women,<sup>4</sup> five of the presidents of thirty-two cultural organi-

zations, or 15.63 percent, are women;<sup>5</sup> two out of sixteen chief executive officers of overseas aid organizations, or 12.5 percent, are women; ten out of 137 executive officers of religious and cultural organizations, or seven percent, are women; one of the chief executive officers of sixteen social/mutual benefit organizations, or six percent, are women; and three of the twenty-five executive officers of social welfare organizations, or 12.0 percent, are women. The only category in which there is any substantial difference between the 1979 percentages and those of 1969, is in community relations organizations, where there were virtually no female chief executive officers in 1969.<sup>6</sup> However, even with this category, we find that there was a greater increase in the percentage of women chief executive officers between 1969 and 1973, before the feminist movement could have had any great impact, than 1973 and 1979.<sup>7</sup> In 1973, the percentage of women among the chief executive officers of community relations organizations was slightly more than 20 percent. Thus, the increase even in the category of greatest increase, has been less than 10 percent.

Undoubtedly, there are those who will argue that the gross underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions within American Jewish organizations is not the result of sexism but, rather, is due to the lack of professionally-trained women to fill these positions. Others will argue that the underrepresentation is due to the fact that women are much less career-oriented than men, and women are much less willing than men to move to other communities when their careers so demand. However, these

<sup>5</sup> Here, too, the number may be lower since I was elected President of the Association for the Sociological Study of Jewry following the term of the listed President, Professor Celia S. Heller.

<sup>6</sup> *American Jewish Year Book*, V. 70 (1969), pp. 469-490.

<sup>7</sup> *American Jewish Year Book*, V. 74 (1973), pp. 565-587.

allegations do not hold up under closer scrutiny. First of all, many, if not most, of the men who occupy the key decision-making positions in Jewish organizational life did not have specific professional training for their present positions. Rather, they came up through the ranks, and gained most of their "expertise" on the job. Secondly, the results of a majority of women who responded are very interested in career advancement and are willing to relocate when necessary.<sup>8</sup> The available evidence strongly supports the conclusion that it is the pattern of moving up the ranks into key positions, which has been the typical pattern for males, that has been closed to women and, to a great extent, remains so even in organizations which publicly support equal rights, including career advancement, for women. Thus, when viewed from the power perspective, it appears that the impact of feminism upon Jewish communal organizations has been negligible to virtually nil.

When examining the impact of feminism within the services perspective, the focus is upon the extent to which the agencies and organizations of the American Jewish community provide services in which women have a vested interest because they meet needs which affect women more than men. For example, services to single-parent families would be those in which women have a greater vested interest because the vast majority of heads of American Jewish single-parent families are women. In the course of research on Jewish family policy,<sup>9</sup> I found that, with the possible exception of the Jewish Center movement, the communal organizations of American Jewry

<sup>8</sup> Sophie B. Engel and Jane Rogul, "Career Mobility: Perceptions and Observations (A Survey of Women in Jewish Communal Service)," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Fall 1979), pp. 101-102.

<sup>9</sup> Chaim I. Waxman, *Sustaining the Jewish Single-Parent Family: A Task Force Report on Jewish Family Policy*. New York: American Jewish Committee, Jewish Communal Affairs Department, 1979.

have not faced up to the magnitude of the issue of single-parent families, its significance for American Jewish community, as a whole.<sup>10</sup> While there are, clearly, a number of complex reasons why the community has not begun to seriously deal with the issue, it may be that the perception of many of the leaders of the communal organizations of American Jewry, who are, as was indicated previously, males, is that this is "only" a women's issue, rather than a communal one. Were the extent to which it is a communal issue made crystal clear, there would be a much more urgent sense of the need to provide services for members of single-parent families. In terms of the impact of feminism on services, then, it again appears that it has been very minimal.

One area in which there is a fairly widespread perception that feminism has had impact upon Jewish communal organizations is that of voluntarism. However, even with respect to this area there are grounds for arguing that the impact is not really as directly significant as it initially appears. Those who do see impact in this area maintain that there has been a significant decline in voluntarism in American Jewish organizational life and it is the direct result of feminism, in that women are now asserting their rights and their value, and they are no longer willing to accept being exploited by male-dominated organizations and kept in the capacity of unpaid volunteers. This is a status which few males in American society would accept, nor would they be expected to, and, therefore, women cannot be, nor should they be expected to, either.

While I strongly disagree with the implicit, if not explicit, characterization of voluntarism as exploitation, and while I don't have any empirical data on the subject, it is my impression that there has, in fact,

<sup>10</sup> Also see, Chaim I. Waxman, "American Jewish Single-Parent Families: Individual and Communal Concerns," *Pertinent Papers*, American Jewish Committee, New York, 1979.

been a decline in voluntarism in American Jewish organizational life. However, it also appears that the decline is much more the result of simple but serious economic pressures rather than the impact of feminism. That is, particularly during the last several years, Americans have been experiencing a rampant inflation which has required many men to take second jobs and many women, who had not previously been employed full time, to seek full time employment in the struggle to make ends meet. In other words, there is much more of the pragmatic, the economic, at play than the ideological, in the trend of declining voluntarism. Moreover, even when the economic element is not the primary cause of women's seeking employment, and the motivation is based on the search for self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction, this does not necessarily imply an ideological rejection of voluntarism. There are many employed women who do see value in voluntarism, who do not find it demeaning, but who, for one reason or another, want a full-time paying job for themselves. The issue of declining voluntarism, therefore, does not appear to be directly related to the impact of feminism.

Having drawn from the experience of the anti-poverty efforts of the 1960s two perspectives from which the impact of feminism upon American Jewish institutions and organizations might be ascertained, the analogy might be drawn even further for the purpose of deriving a strategy of intervention, that is, for developing directions for policies and programs in which feminism should and can have significant impact. For those who are concerned with social change and social policy within an organized society of community, it is important to be aware that policy must be examined and evaluated both in terms of its own merits and in terms of the possibilities and probabilities of its being adopted and implemented. One can produce the most laudable and rational policy proposal in theory, but if it will not, or cannot, be

implemented, it is worthless to those actively involved in legislating and carrying out social welfare policies. In a critique of poverty theories and policies, I recommended moving away from the emphasis on policies and programs explicitly designed for the poor because, as I analyzed it, they are perceived by the dominant non-poor as ones from which they themselves do not benefit, but for which they pay dearly. Such policies and programs, therefore, ultimately contribute to the hostilities and antipathies which the non-poor have toward the poor and exacerbate "the stigma of poverty." Rather than designing policies and programs specifically for the poor, I recommended concentrating on those types of policies and programs which serve the needs of both the poor and the non-poor, or, if they don't serve the needs of the non-poor as they now define them, at least they are services with which the non-poor can identify. By emphasizing that policies, programs and services are, "not for the poor alone," to borrow the title of a book by Alfred Kahn and Sheila B. Kamerman of Columbia University, there would be a much greater receptivity to those services on the part of the non-poor, there would be a much stronger base for empathy toward the poor, and there would be much greater potential for integrating the poor into the institutions of American society.<sup>11</sup>

Adapting this approach to the issue at hand, I would similarly recommend that the focus be changed from women's issues to family issues and human issues. Accordingly, when the focus is upon services, and frankly that is the area with which I am more familiar, I would urge that they be presented as needs for services for family members, male and female, and for the American Jewish community at large. For

<sup>11</sup> Chaim I. Waxman, *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Policies*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1977, Ch. 5. Also see, Alfred J. Kahn and Sheila B. Kamerman, *Not For the Poor Alone*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975.

example, to cite the case of single-parent families mentioned earlier, while it is undoubtedly true that women have a more immediate vested interest in the issues, since the majority of such families are headed by females, the point must be made that there are growing numbers of single male heads of families, and that whether the head of the family is male or female, the fact that it is a single-parent family means that it has certain needs which, if not provided, may estrange that family from the organized American Jewish community. The issue of American Jewish single-parent families, therefore, is not solely a women's issue and concern, but a Jewish communal issue which must be a matter of concern and for which services must be provided. The less the focus is placed upon the specifically female aspect of the issue and the more it is presented as an issue which has implications for the community as a whole, the greater are the probabilities that the issue will be seriously addressed.

Another issue which has become obfuscated, because it is so frequently perceived and argued from an either pro or anti-feminist perspective, rather than a communal perspective, is that of the American Jewish fertility rate. While that rate has, at least since the nineteenth century, been lower than the general American fertility rate, it has only within the last decade-and-a-half or so become a Jewish communal issue, primarily because of the decline of a significant Jewish immigration and, even more, because zero population growth has been "surpassed" and has reached negative population growth. The American Jewish community, which at its height during the 1930s, was almost four percent of the American population, is now decreasing both in relation to the general American population and in absolute numbers. It is now estimated to be little more than 2½ percent of the American population, with a birth rate of approximately 1.6 or 1.7 children per couple.

While the issue of fertility is a very complex one, and the experience of pro-fertility policies in other countries raises serious questions as to whether anything can be done to impact significantly upon the American Jewish fertility rate, there is a tendency for many to oversimplify the issue and focus upon the feminism element as the dominant one in the whole issue. On the one hand, there are those who portray feminism as the arch-villain responsible for the declining birth rate and many other ills affecting the American Jewish community. If not for feminism, they argue, American Jewish wives would be home, where they belong, having and raising good Jewish children. To them, "Women's Lib" is the curse of our day. On the other hand, it has been argued that the only reason American Jewish men are concerned with the issue of fertility is that they are male chauvinists, and they are trying to use the issue of fertility as a rationale for maintaining Jewish women in subordinate positions.<sup>12</sup>

As Sheila B. Kamerman has recently pointed out in a paper on American Jewish family policy, when one analyzes fertility trends and the available evidence on decisions concerning fertility, it is clear that a major factor in the decision not to have more than one child is dealing with the conflicts and struggles between the demands of work and those of maintaining responsibilities to family.<sup>13</sup> While the tensions between work and family are not new, they were, somehow, managed somewhat more easily when only one parent was at work

<sup>12</sup> Examples of each of these positions are: Reuven P. Bulka, "Women's Role—Some Ultimate Concerns," *Tradition*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1979), pp. 27-40, and Shirley Frank, "The Population Panic: Why Jewish Leaders Want Jewish Women to be Fruitful and Multiply," *Lilith*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Fall/Winter 1977/78), pp. 12-17.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila B. Kamerman, "For Jews and Other People: An Agenda for Research on Families and Family Policies," Paper presented at "The Planning Conference for Modern Jewish Studies," Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass., Oct. 22, 1979.

and the other parent, invariably the mother, remained at home. Today, however, with the significant increase in the numbers of women working, and the growing trend of mothers with very young children working outside the home, the tensions between work and family for both parents are magnified. As was indicated earlier, women today are in the labor force for the very same reasons that men are. Many of them are there for economic reasons. While many are there for other reasons as well, it must be remembered that many men are in the work force for equally non-economic reasons. Just as men's place in the work force is taken as a given, the evidence is persuasive that women are in the work force to stay, and their number will continue to increase. It is, therefore, both non-productive and nonsensical to make the fertility issue a focus for arguments on feminism. On the contrary, only by examining it as it really is, and by diffusing it from the polarizing rhetoric, will the issue and the needs which are at its heart be addressed. My understanding of the issue leads me to concur fully with Kamerman:

If we are concerned about adults continuing to be productive in the family, at home, and in the community—even as they are productive in the labor force—some attention must be paid to attenuating the tension between work and family life; and this attention must go beyond the assumption that it is only a women's problem. Indeed, unless it is defined as a problem for the whole society—men, women, and children—policy interventions are bound to be skewed, with less than satisfactory results. Restructuring the relationship between work and family life is an appropriate target for national public policy as well as for attention by private industry and organized labor. Successful intervention here could make a major contribution to improving the quality of family and community for all families.<sup>14</sup>

I would only add that, as they have in the past on other issues, American Jewish communal organizations and institutions

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

status for white American males. And, it is from their occupational status that they receive their sense of identity, of self. American men have a vested interest in protecting and enhancing their occupational status, not only for the economic rewards attached to it, but perhaps even more importantly, for the sense of identity and self-worth which it gives them. This tendency increases the higher up one goes in the occupational status system. Sexism, therefore, has been functional for the psychological well-being of males. It can also be hypothesized that sexism in the decision-making arenas will persist so long as they are the major source of self-identity. What is being suggested is that it is not the power, *per se*, that is so important for the occupants of these positions, but the sense of self-worth which derives from these positions of authority, because they are the major source of identity in our source. A frontal attack on the power positions of males, therefore, will undoubtedly be met by very strong resistance.

On the other hand, the strategy which has been recommended, of diffusing the specifically feminist element and focussing upon family and community, carries with it the potential of not only restructuring services, but by restructuring the traditional relationship between work and family life, of restructuring the traditional sources of identity and status. There is increasing evidence that the traditional division of

domains has been unsatisfactory for many men, as well as for many women. Men have not handled the conflicts between work and family as easily as was presumed. Many men, as well as many women, would welcome the initiatives for new family support systems. A coalition of men and women for policies, programs and services which would strengthen family and community, may yet provide the possibility for men to move beyond the occupational realm for their senses of self-identity and self-worth, just as women are moving beyond the confines of the home for theirs. As that occurs, it may be anticipated that men will no longer need to be possessive of the positions of power in the occupational and organizational spheres, and will grow increasingly less reluctant to the presence of women in those positions.

The time is propitious, therefore, for Jewish feminists who are concerned with themselves as women and as members of the Jewish community, and with the welfare of the American Jewish community as a whole, to reexamine their strategies and to reorient themselves to their new, significant potential. Since they define themselves as Jewish women, their well-being as women is inextricably tied up with the welfare of the Jewish community. By focussing upon the well-being of American Jewish families, they will be contributing to the enrichment of their lives as women and as Jews.