

Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance among America's Jews

Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer

Within the liberal wings of American Judaism, women are increasingly prominent both as leaders and participants, and men are increasingly marginal. This gender imbalance differs from most Jewish communities historically and from many other Jewish communities around the world today, in which men characteristically played the most prominent roles in Jewish affairs as well as public religious settings and rituals. The systemic alienation of American Jewish males begins in boyhood, and has profound effects on every aspect of Jewish life. This development is of concern to Jewish leaders and policy planners because it affects not only religious but also communal and demographic realities. Jewish activities have less value, and Jewish friends and potential marriage partners seem less appealing to Jewish boys and men than they do to girls and women. American Jewish men are also less engaged than American Jewish women in the "peoplehood" aspects of Jewishness, including visiting Israel and seeing Israel as very important to their personal lives. This essay suggests that research and policy planning efforts should be placed in the broader American context, which profoundly influences American Jews. Gender imbalance is not a foregone conclusion. Jewish social history, and other Jewish societies today, show that men need not be distant from Jewishness.

Introduction

As the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close, Jewish men and women in the United States have become characterized by a gender imbalance that differs from most Jewish communities historically and from many other Jewish communities around the world today. In liberal Jewish America, women have become central and men have become marginal.

The "feminization" of almost every aspect of non-Orthodox American Jewish life means not only that girls and women outnumber their male counterparts, but also that Jewish activities have less value and seem less appealing to Jewish boys and men. Because Jewishness seems less compelling and meaningful to Jewish men, Jews-male and female-are similarly less attractive to them. American Jewish women are more engaged than American Jewish men in the "peoplehood" aspects of Jewishness: visiting Israel, seeing Israel as very important, having mostly Jewish friends, wanting to marry a Jewish husband and to raise Jewish children.

This contemporary American Jewish gender imbalance reverses a historical gender imbalance in which girls and women are marginalized from public Judaism which is still characteristic of Orthodox Jewish societies. American Jewish synagogues, classrooms, religious ceremonies and rituals and secular cultural expressions disproportionately do not engage boys and men. The challenge facing the American Jewish community is not that women are more active-surely a positive development, but that men and boys have retreated from much of American Jewish life.

The feminization of religion has long been common in Protestant America, and the feminization of Judaism can be regarded as a dimension of assimilation. American social scientists routinely assert that women are more "religious" than men are, whether through essential psychological differences or social conditioning: "By now it is so taken for granted that women are more religious than men that every competent quantitative study of religiousness routinely includes sex as a control variable."^[1] But the feminization of American Judaism has an insidious sociological impact upon Jewish societies. Because Jews have regarded themselves as a people-not only as a belief system-the disengagement of men comprises a crisis. This essay summarizes the problem and presents a new focus on the policy

implications and the necessity for more extensive research. The problem is discussed at greater detail in our monograph: *Matrilineal Ascent/ Patrilineal Descent: The Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life*.^[2]

Methodology

This study works with quantitative, qualitative and cultural data—a kind of triangulation of source materials. We trace the trajectory of changes in gender roles precipitated by modern social trends, and review the social and religious transformations facilitated by Jewish feminism in contemporary American Jewish societies. We include in this overview the positive effect of women's involvement in Jewish religious and communal leadership, as well as the disturbing decline of men's involvement in these areas in liberal Jewish environments.

We focus on married households with children because those are the households in which religious issues are most likely to surface. We compare statements about Jewish feelings and connections and parental goals made by both Jewish and non-Jewish men and women who are currently living in endogamous (two born Jews married to each other), exogamous (one born Jew married to one current non-Jew), and conversionary marriages (one or more of the spouses is a Jew by choice, a convert to Judaism).

Throughout, we use a statistical data set of Jewish parents with children under 17 in the home, generated from the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey conducted by the United Jewish Communities, to paint the big picture, and quotes from Sylvia Barack Fishman's studies of intermarried, inmarried and conversionary families to explore the emotional dynamics behind the current gender imbalance.^[3]

Gender Roles in Jewish Societies Yesterday and Today

While basic biological differences between males and females are genetic, each society constructs its own ideas of what those biological differences mean, and how males and females should conduct themselves as a result of their differences. The way specific societies create their ideas of "maleness" or "femaleness" tells us a lot about those societies.^[4] Societies and social networks define norms—including "normal" gender roles, and "femaleness" is often defined as the opposite of "maleness" in a given society.

In historical Jewish societies, "maleness" was defined by activism in public religious settings such as sacred study, ritual responsibilities, and societal responsibilities. Since most societies define "femaleness," to some extent, as "not maleness," women were largely absent from—or invisible in—public religious settings like the synagogue and the study hall. Although women were central to the religious life of the home, and were required to fulfill most negative and a few positive rituals their visibility was limited even at home to quasi-public events such as the Passover Seder, where men's roles were emphasized and women's were marginalized. Thus, pre-modern rabbinic authorities argued over whether it was proper for women to lean on pillows during the Seder service (a behavior limited to "free persons"—i.e. men), and concluded that only "important women" (i.e. women who share the financial or status characteristics of men) could do so.^[5]

The pre-modern Jewish construction of gender was idiosyncratic. For centuries, Jews often differed from their neighbors in how they understood "maleness" and "femaleness." While Western societies frequently constructed maleness around physical strength, battle prowess, stoicism and lack of emotionalism, Jewish societies from the Middle Ages onward created a very different ideal of masculinity which emphasized ritual piety, spiritual intensity, and intellectual learnedness, as well as active roles within social networks such as the family and community.

Emotionalism among men was not discouraged, unlike in many other cultures. The proliferation of Jewish legal obligations, along with Jewish cultural and social mores, required men to attend to many domestic and social welfare tasks that other societies often delegated to women alone. Traditional Jewish ideals of femininity also differed from non-Jewish societies. Thus, as numerous scholars have recently

demonstrated, Jewish women in medieval societies were often actively involved in economic and even educational pursuits.[6]

Emancipation and the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) were among the historical, political, and sociological factors that transformed Jewish gender role construction, along with many other aspects of Jewish life. German Jews led the way in the recreation of Jewish gender roles. In 19th century Germany, while Jewish men immersed themselves in commerce according to the middle-class pattern, and Jewish thinkers reformed and transformed synagogue life, Jewish women became the designated agents of *embourgeoisement* and the transmitters of Westernized lifestyles and forms of Judaism to the next generation.[7]

When the Western, assimilated Theodor Herzl and other secular authors of Zionist theory created their images of a "new"-and masculine-Jew, they rejected the pious masculinity of the *shtetl*, which they perceived as being powerless, and thus effeminate. In its place they proposed a new Jewish masculinity which incorporated all the physical prowess and aggressiveness that the old Jews lacked. Part of becoming "normalized" as a people meant ending the clustering of Jewish minds and bodies in overly intellectualized strata of society.

The writer Micha Josef Berdichevski expressed this goal dramatically when he declared that modern Jews needed to choose: "To be or not to be! To be the last Jews or the first Hebrews." [8] American Jews also left the traditional Jewish understanding of maleness behind-although a variant of the Jewish "nice boy" has certainly been enshrined and popularized in the films of Woody Allen and the early novels of Philip Roth.

With emigration to America, which reached sweeping proportions from 1880-1924, Western European gender role constructions became normative for Eastern European as well as German Jewish new Americans. Expectations that religiosity would be an attribute primarily of females and not of males had already begun to permeate the American Jewish community during the period of rapid socio-economic upward mobility in the 1930s and 1940s.

Nevertheless, synagogues within all wings of Judaism - and most Christian churches as well - remained male bastions of religious leadership, as trained male leadership presided over passive male and female worshippers. This all changed with the rise of American "Second Wave Feminism" in the late 1960s. Like late 19th and early 20th century American women's movements, the 1960s women's movement was a utopian social movement.[9]

However, while earlier feminists had struggled to obtain the vote and political and economic legal rights for women, American feminists in the 1960s and beyond questioned many primary tenets of middle class institutions and social structure, behavior and morality-including such assumptions that bourgeois women should marry, have children, and leave the labor force, and the until-then nearly universal assumption that priests, ministers and rabbis should be males.

Social disruptions nurtured the questioning of many previous norms. Although some Jewish feminists were simply Jews who were feminists, and did not turn their analytical gaze on Jewish life, history and culture, substantial numbers of Jewish feminists used their feminism to understand Jewishness in new and often deeper ways. Their Jewish focus was supported by America's new embrace of ethnic difference.

The bland, conformist "melting pot" American ideology seemed less compelling. The exploration of Judaism as a religious culture was encouraged by the American Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War protest movements, and by a lively and often transgressive youth culture that advocated "doing your own thing," including the celebration of ethnic differences. This Jewish awakening was reinforced by Zionistic American Jewish feelings of pride immediately after the 1967 war in the Middle East, during which Israel defended itself against massed armies of the Arab states. In a parallel development, American Jewish intellectuals and artists had become extremely influential and were increasingly exploring and emphasizing their own Jewishness.

The rise of women into leadership of the American Jewish community was part of an environment in which activism and spiritual searching helped produce a readiness to experiment with new forms of religious expression, including the *havurah* style of small worship and study groups. In its beginnings, the Havurah movement emerged out of the Reconstructionist movement and was led almost exclusively by elite Jewish males who had received extensive amounts of Jewish education. Soon, however, "havuroid" groups sprang up within all the wings of American Judaism.

Egalitarianism-with a pronounced emphasis on female inclusion-became a central value of these cooperative groups. Meanwhile, on a scholarly level, Jewish studies departments were established in many non-sectarian universities. For many decades, these departments consisted almost exclusively of male scholars, many of them European-trained. Thus, the Jewish awakening of the 1960s and 1970s was, for men, primarily an elite phenomenon.

However for women the Jewish renaissance was really a rebirth, simultaneously an elite and a grass-roots movement. The narrative of the perseverance and triumph of Jewish feminists, bringing women to the center of public Judaism, and public Judaism to the center of women's lives, is still intensely meaningful to women who lived through it and made it happen. Sweeping social historical changes provided impetus and context for transformations in women's roles.

Before Second Wave Feminism, Jews were the ethnoreligious group most likely to acquiesce to the American middle class norm of homemaker-mothers, dropping out of labor force participation with the birth of their first child. As the movement gathered force, however, on a grass roots level, Jewish women were among those most likely to join feminist "consciousness-raising" sessions and to change their lives in accordance with feminist ideals of independence, assertiveness, and self-actualization.

Rather than devoting their excellent educations to volunteer work, which had been the previous American Jewish pattern, in the 1960s Jewish women began to reverse that pattern, and increasingly began to take jobs for pay outside the home. By the year 1990, paid outside employment was reported by three-quarters of Jewish women aged 25-44 and two-thirds of those aged 45-64.[10] Today, the majority of American Jewish women are employed for pay even when they have young children at home. For American Jewish women, this strong work profile has had an extremely important influence on expectations of the Jewish world as well. Jewish women grew to expect to achieve in Jewish environments because they were able to achieve in the world outside.

Jewish feminists have had several different areas of primary interest. Some focused on leadership and some on the lives of Jewish girls and women at large. Attention was paid to sacralizing women's life cycle events with celebratory rituals, incorporating girls and women into Jewish public worship on every level as leaders and active participants, upgrading the Jewish education and Jewish cultural literacy of girls and women, promoting Judaic scholarship by Jewish women and about Jewish females in classical Jewish texts and throughout Jewish history; creating gender-inclusive synagogue liturgy and other prayers and rituals, researching and publishing materials about the experiences of Jewish girls and women historically and today; and examining Jewish religious texts, laws, customs and culture through the lenses of feminist theory and issues of equality.

For adult women, preparation for and celebrating the adult bat mitzvah-a ceremony unknown in historical Jewish communities-emerged in a sweeping, grass-roots phenomenon as a powerful and meaningful tool for motivating continuing education. Many hundreds of women acquired new levels of Jewish literacy, including synagogue liturgical skills, initially motivated by the desire to participate in an adult bat mitzvah.

In the United States, Canada, and especially Israel, much effort was and continues to be devoted to creating religious and secular legislation to end diverse unequal power relationships and abuses against women, such as women who are *agunot* or *m'saravot get* (women who have not been successful in obtaining desired religious divorces from their husbands).

Although these issues have hardly been resolved-and indeed have emerged as painful and powerful symbols of conflict between the rabbinic religious and political establishment and outraged Jews across the religious spectrum-the emergence of numerous religious and civic responses is in itself testimony to the contemporary centrality of women and women's issues.

Women and women's experiences are brought to the center of ritual life through changed liturgical language and liturgical symbolism as well. In most Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist congregations - which comprise the vast majority of American congregations - the names of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah have been incorporated into the central Amidah prayer, along with the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At Passover Seders, some families set out a cup of water for the prophetess Miriam in addition to the cup of wine for Elijah. Remembering the diverse anecdotes-perhaps apocryphal-about rabbinic authorities who said that female rabbis, or women in public Jewish leadership settings were as out of place as "an orange on the Seder plate," many celebrants triumphantly place an orange on the Seder plate, although the origins of this symbol of Jewish feminist strivings is unclear.

Another variant of the anecdote has the rabbinic authority saying that lesbian Jewish leaders are as out of place as bread on the Seder plate, but the orange, rather than the bread, has become the feminist Seder symbol of choice. Many congregations have stopped using the pronoun "he" to describe God, opting instead for nouns that refer to God's attributes or activities, such as "Creator." The use of gender-sensitive language has subtly and overtly changed the prayer experience for men as well as women.

Although the impact of feminism in Orthodox environments is clearly tempered by the restrictions of *halakhah* (rabbinic law), these changes have affected modern Orthodox environments as well. In many American modern Orthodox schools and synagogues, care is taken to give girls as high a profile as possible within halakhic boundaries, as defined by the *posek* (adjudicator) for that group.

Thus, for example, in one of two adjacent modern Orthodox synagogues, girls celebrate their bat mitzvahs by delivering a learned *d'var Torah* (sermon) to the entire congregation from the *bimah* at the conclusion of the service, and also by being called to the Torah (*Aliyah*) in a synagogue-sponsored exclusively female Women's Tefillah Group, in which girls and women perform all parts to the service and Torah reading that are not specifically prohibited by rabbinic law. [Briefly, women are prohibited from being prayer leaders for the *Amidah* (silent devotional prayer, sometimes called the *Sh'monah Esrei*), but not from leading in services welcoming in the Sabbath (*Qabalat Shabbat*), the preliminary morning service (*P'sukei d'zimrah*), or reading from the Torah scroll.]

At the second, larger modern Orthodox synagogue, in which the rabbi prohibits Women's Tefillah Groups and does not allow women to speak from the *bimah*, bat mitzvah girls give their equally learned sermons to the congregation after the post-service refreshments (*Kiddush*) have been consumed, to make it clear that their sermon is not part of the Torah service. Although the second, more limited variety of bat mitzvah is both much more common in Orthodox synagogues (and much less "feminist"), both of them would have been unthinkable in Orthodox congregations several decades ago.

In [Jerusalem](#), a newer model of Orthodox egalitarianism thrives in the Shira Hadashah congregation, in which men and women evenly share leadership of Sabbath services (but not the *Amidah*, etc., as detailed above) from their own sides of a *mekhitzah* (divider) that separates males and females in the synagogue and the table upon which the Torah is read. This model has been replicated in more than a dozen other congregations in Israel, the United States, Australia and elsewhere.

The most sweeping, dramatic changes in Orthodox life center around intensive learning for girls and women. In modern Orthodox environments, extended years of intensive learning, including the learning of the Talmud and other rabbinic texts that were off limits for women for millennia, are now considered normative.

Institutions of higher education for women, like New York's Drisha, and a spectrum of post-high-school women's *yeshivot* in Israel, and co-ed institutions that often attract Orthodox as well as non-Orthodox learners, like Jerusalem's Pardes, have created an environment in which Orthodox women-far more often than non-Orthodox women-become high-level Torah scholars. These Orthodox female scholars write articles and books, some of which challenge the non-feminist proclamations of male rabbinic *halakhah* (rabbinic law) authorities.

Not surprisingly, *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) authorities have often pushed back against feminist changes in Orthodoxy by declaring various Orthodox feminist behaviors "unkosher." Many observers believe that today *haredi* authorities actually exaggerate gender divisions and women's subordination as a way of

symbolizing their rejection of feminism and preventing feminization by keeping men-especially rabbinic authorities-in charge and unchallenged.

Learned articles have been written defending-and condemning-a variety of Orthodox feminist practices. These articles are circulated on Internet chat rooms and blogs, along with lively conversations and commentaries. Indeed, although numerically small, Orthodox feminism comprises a vibrant world for participants. Although Orthodox congregations have not been feminized like non-Orthodox congregations, and Orthodox men attend services regularly (twice as often as Orthodox women!) and typically are involved in some type of sacred learning or in groups, modern Orthodox men sometimes express envy about Orthodox feminist women's dynamic engagement and intrepid explorations of Jewish tradition. Tellingly, the Jewish Orthodox Feminism Alliance (JOFA), formed in 1997, with a membership of thousands, has gone on to grow and thrive while some other modern Orthodox organizations have collapsed during the same time period.

Across the wings of Judaism, from Orthodox to Reform, the two most sweeping impacts of changing women's roles center around the relationship of women to their Jewish cultural and intellectual heritage: (1) the inclusion of females in Jewish education; (2) the inclusion of gender and women's issues in research. As late as the 1960s, school-age boys were more likely than girls to receive Jewish education, especially in the Conservative and Reform congregations that comprised the majority of American Jews, partially because preparing for the bar mitzvah ceremony was a prime educational motivator for many families.

By the 1970s and 1980s, that gender gap had narrowed significantly, as rates of Jewish education for girls and boys became more similar in response to the spread of the bat mitzvah ceremony for girls. Today, the gender gap has been reversed for American Jews in the liberal movements, and American school-age Jewish girls are more likely to receive Jewish education than Jewish boys. Differences in Jewish educational levels of young girls and boys become enormous as they enter their teens: After bar/bat mitzvah girls are far more likely to continue in formal and informal Jewish educational settings.[11]

Jewish girls in college participate in Hillel activities and take Jewish studies classes in much greater numbers than Jewish boys, except for the Orthodox young men who comprise a substantial client group for many Jewish studies classes and Hillel Foundation facilities. On an elite level, increasing numbers of women have become Judaic studies scholars, teaching and publishing in fields ranging from the Bible and Ancient Near East, Rabbinics, Jewish history, Ancient and Modern Hebrew literature, Jewish thought, Zionism and Israel studies, and the sociology of contemporary Jewish communities.

Moreover, Judaic studies fields themselves have been transformed by insights provided when gender becomes an analytical tool. Paying attention to the lives and sometimes the writings of women in historical Jewish societies has added more than an understanding of women-it has deepened the overall comprehension of the Jewish experience. Feminist scholarship has illuminated the critical importance of gender as a tool for historical understandings, and the centrality of Jewish domestic life to the transmission of Jewish culture historically.[12]

For many observers, the impact of Jewish feminist change has been epitomized by the movement of women into public religious leadership roles. In 1972 the Reform movement ordained the first female rabbi, followed in 1974 by the Reconstructionist movement. In 1985, urged on by Ezrat Nashim and a determined group of rabbis, the Conservative movement's first woman rabbi was ordained. Today, women comprise a large proportion of rabbinical and cantorial candidates, and serve as professionals in numerous Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform American congregations.

Attitudes toward Religion and Judaism among Men and Women

American social scientists assume that women are "naturally" more religious than men, as we have noted. While this assertion is arguable since other societies differ substantially, it has certainly become characteristic of liberal American Jews. In the interview data that we analyzed for this study, women-both Jewish and non-Jewish-were more likely to describe themselves as more "religious" than their husbands.

Women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were more likely to describe their intermarried households as relating to one of the formal wings of Judaism, while men, both Jewish and non-Jewish, leaned more toward calling the household Secular or Cultural, or Atheistic or Agnostic. Mothers, rather than the fathers, said it was important that their children have some type of religious orientation. Men more often said they feel "secular" and much less convinced that organized religion is the foundation of moral and ethical behavior.

Many non-Jewish wives of Jews in our interview population complained, "I am in the weird position of initiating activities in a religion that I don't know a whole lot about." They remarked that "everyone we know who is interfaith-the mother is not Jewish-says the children are primarily being raised Jewish." One non-Jewish mother remembered:

I wanted our children raised with some kind of religious background. I was pretty frankly indifferent to what it was. My husband didn't really care whether or not they were raised with religion, but he said, "If there is going to be a religion, they got to be Jewish, because I would feel weird having a Christian child....My husband is in the awkward position of feeling he should provide some leadership for something he really doesn't believe in. That is true of all these other couples [their friends]....Almost all these men who want their children to be Jewish believe in that for cultural reasons-it's a kind of very masculine, very interesting thing. [NOTE: Unless otherwise cited, all verbatim quotes are drawn from our original interview research and will not be footnoted.]

Non-Jewish women perceived their Jewish husbands as fundamentally uncomfortable with religion in general but opposed to having Christian children. Typically, non-Jewish wives said their Jewish husbands would "love to" bring them children without religion. "It would make things a lot easier for him." However, most mothers thought bringing children up without religion "is a mistake."

A substantial minority of Jewish and non-Jewish fathers of "Jewish" children saw religion as a good framing structure for children as they grow up but unnecessary for adults, something that could and should be put aside as people mature. Men typically said they feel "disconnected from religion," and say they will tell their children about their real values during "their early teen years":

I don't think of myself as a Christian. I believe in a higher power and that's pretty much it. And so, when the time is right, I will sit down and explain to them what I think and what I believe. I really want them to grow up learning about other religions....from early on I want them to understand that there are other religions out there, and to me, religion is not a matter of right and wrong, rather it's an issue of raising inner peace. I want them to grow up not being prejudiced against Indians or Buddhists or whatever.

Although their childhood religious backgrounds are often rather similar, intermarried Jewish women and men create very different religious profiles in their adult households. These gender-based discrepancies in descriptions of the family's religious profile were much smaller and in general not statistically significant among our inmarried or conversionary informants.

In comparison with the active involvement of non-Jewish grandparents, both Jewish and non-Jewish spouses in intermarried families reported that the Jewish grandparents were much more reticent about providing Jewish religious or cultural content for their grandchildren. In conversionary households, in contrast, it was much more common to report that Jewish in-laws had pressured toward conversion, and now provided Jewish religious and cultural content to the family.

Jewish men married to non-Jewish women in our interview population were much more likely than Jewish women married to non-Jewish men to perceive fewer differences between Judaism and Christianity. Among our interview population, one-third of intermarried Jewish men said that the two religions were "the same except for Jesus", or that they "shared more than they differed"; or that "all religions are essentially the same." In comparison, one-fifth of intermarried Jewish women saw Judaism and Christianity as quite similar. The belief that "Judaism is more than just a religion" was expressed by two-thirds of intermarried Jewish men, compared to three-quarters of Jewish women.

These disparities between Jewish husbands and wives and their Christian spouses are all the more striking when compared with the attitudes of inmarried and conversionary Jewish husbands and wives.

Among inmarried couples in our interview population, the belief that Judaism is unique was expressed by four out of ten of both men and women. The idea that Judaism is based on more than just common religious values was shared by six out of ten of both men and women. None of the inmarried couples saw Judaism and Christianity as very similar.

**Table 1:
Inmarried Jewish Parents by Importance of Being Jewish
(as a percentage of the total)**

	Affiliated Jewish Fathers	Affiliated Jewish Mothers	Unaffiliated Jewish Fathers	Unaffiliated Jewish Mothers
Very Important	56	62	38	51
Somewhat Important	38	35	46	49
Not Very Important	3	3	11	0
Not at all Important	3	0	5	0

Fishman and Parmer, 2008. Source: NJPS 2000–01

Table 2:
Intermarried Jewish Parents by Importance of Being Jewish
(as a percentage of the total)

	Affiliated Jewish Fathers	Affiliated Jewish Mothers	Unaffiliated Jewish Fathers	Unaffiliated Jewish Mothers
Very Important	27	54	30	18
Somewhat Important	63	36	47	58
Not very Important	10	8	17	20
Not at all Important	0	2	6	4

Fishman and Parmer, 2008. Source: NJPS 2000–01

Tables 1 and 2, which depict the importance of being Jewish among inmarried and intermarried affiliated and unaffiliated intermarried families, are particularly revealing. The majority of intermarried Jewish women (54 %) who are affiliated with a synagogue or temple in any wing of Judaism say that being Jewish is "Very important" to them, compared to 27 % of affiliated intermarried Jewish men. Put another way, intermarried Jewish mothers are twice as likely to see Judaism as "Very important" as are intermarried Jewish fathers. Indeed, there is little difference among intermarried Jewish fathers whether or not they are affiliated, while there are great differences among affiliated and unaffiliated intermarried Jewish mothers. Thus, although Jewish women in general value Judaism more than men, intermarried Jewish mothers who do not affiliate with any wing of Judaism may be a very alienated population indeed.

In the American setting, in which religiosity is perceived as a female rather than a male characteristic, it is not surprising that secularized Jews have absorbed that expectation. One of the most striking differences between inmarried and intermarried Jewish families in terms of gender roles is that Jewish fathers as well as mothers in inmarried families often have extensive connections to Jews and Judaism, and are committed to raising Jewish children, while Jewish fathers in intermarried families have limited or weak connections and are much less likely to be committed to raising Jewish children.

As a result, ethnoreligious values and religious cultural and familial tasks are much more shared and evenly divided in inmarried households than they are in mixed married households. Inmarried Jewish fathers play a much more active role in the family's Jewishness and in familial relationships. More than three-quarters of both inmarried husbands and wives feel religion is important in their lives and in the way they raise their children. That having been said, the feminization of Jewish gender roles is apparent even in inmarried families, but in less different ways than in intermarried families.

Especially outside the Orthodox realm, husbands often delegate many religious activities to their wives, because both husbands and wives assume that mothers will be the ones responsible for implementing day to day Jewishness. Husbands and wives often assume that the mother would be the person routinely accompanying children to synagogue for Sabbath services, for example. As one inmarried Jewish father put it:

When we decided that we wanted to affiliate with the temple, I was very uncomfortable at first going to a Reform temple, because I couldn't get used to the choir or to the organ and to the way just the whole thing was done. I don't think it mattered so much that there was a woman cantor, but it just all sounded so different....And Jenny's attitude was, "I am going to be the one principally responsible for taking them and for being there, and I have to be comfortable with it, and that is what I am going to be comfortable with. So get comfortable with it." And I am, it worked out.

Jewish Rituals and Synagogues: Women's Domain in Liberal American Settings

For much of Jewish history, the synagogue was the place where little boys left the world of their mothers to join the world of their fathers. Today, girls and women are much more active than boys and men in almost every aspect of religious and educational Jewishness within liberal American Judaism, including synagogue religious and lay leadership. In the Fall of 2005, for example, women outnumbered men two to one in the entering rabbinical class at HUC-JIR. Girls outnumbered boys in all youth activities, exceeding the number of boys in percentages anywhere from 57 percent to 78 percent according to Rabbi Michael Friedman, director of junior and senior high school programs at the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).

Friedman graphically connects this demographic shift directly to the movement's ordination of female rabbis and the predominance of female cantors: "Before it was always a man high up on a bimah wearing a big robe in a deep voice, a model of leadership that was male-only and top down," Friedman comments. "Those synagogues now have everybody sitting in a circle with someone playing a guitar and sharing feelings....they are styles that women may be more comfortable with than men...[boys] don't necessarily see themselves there." [13]

A female Reconstructionist rabbi interviewed by a Brandeis student reflected on the way her congregation looks to her from the *bimah*:

Women are more present in more ways than they used to [be]. But I feel like, in literal Judaism, in Orthodox Judaism, men don't have a choice. You have to show up, so you do. Once that "you have to" piece disappeared in liberal Judaism, men were like, "ok, we don't have to", and they disappeared. So I think that the issue is not so much that the synagogue has gotten feminine-it's that the men have retreated. I don't know if this is a question for clergy. I think this is a question for the men, themselves: "What do you want? What's not meeting your needs that you're not there?" One theory that I have is that in American culture, it's okay for women not to know things, or not to be good at things, and it is not okay for men. In a synagogue like ours, which attracts...a lot of people who aren't Jewishly knowledgeable....it's easier for a woman without a lot of background to sit in a service and say, "I don't know what's going on." My guess is that for a man that is intolerable in our society.....it's hard for men to say, "I don't know."

A 20-something young man interviewed by the same student reflected on the "maternal vibe" emanating from women rabbis and Jewish religious leaders:

Mostly women have taken over the power of the congregation. We have a female president, and a lot of the board is run by women....And it seems when you go to services, there's less men every single time, and more women. Sometimes it's a little too lovey-dovey, hugging everybody....Men don't care.there are a handful of men who make a concerted effort and do a great job.....Beth El is trying to integrate women, but at the same time, now that they are doing that, women are kind of overpowering. I only had 3 male teachers in 13 years of Hebrew School.[14]

Their words echo many of the thoughts of Reform Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin in his reflections on "The Retreating Man" in a recent issue of *Reform Judaism*. "Liberal Judaism is following the lead of liberal Christianity," he notes, but it is the Christian right that is growing today, while liberal Christianity is shrinking. "Tough Christianity" does well because it makes demands on its adherents, especially men, Salkin asserts. Liberal Judaism, like liberal Christianity, makes few demands.

Salkin describes a kind of "Catch-22" situation. On one hand, "demonstrating Jewish skills - like *davening*, chanting Torah, and putting on *t'fillin* - is a kind of Jewish macho that fathers want to pass on to their sons," a pattern that can be very engaging for boys and men. On the other hand, these skills are often not salient to men in the liberal wings of Judaism, although they have become desirable to many women in recent years. Perhaps even more important, if men do not have the skills, expecting them to have them can actually alienate men by making them feel incompetent:

In the age of classical Reform, it was easier for men. People in the pews didn't have to have expertise in Hebrew; they basically relied on the rabbi to have all the Jewish knowledge. The turning toward tradition with an expectation of Jewish literacy is a direct challenge to men who grew up in the Classical Reform tradition.[15]

**Table 3A:
Inmarried Jewish Fathers in Current Wing of Judaism by
Frequency of Synagogue Attendance
(as a percentage of the total)**

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Just Jewish/ Secular
Weekly or more	88	14	9	17
Once or twice a month	1	40	26	22
Less than once a month	6	29	31	6
Once or twice a year	0	13	8	18
Never	5	4	26	37

**Table 3B:
Inmarried Jewish Mothers in Current Wing of Judaism by
Frequency of Synagogue Attendance
(as a percentage of the total)**

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Just Jewish/ Secular
Weekly or more	42	16	17	20
Once or twice a month	28	27	23	12
Less than once a month	16	31	23	7
Once or twice a year	12	17	15	27
Never	2	9	22	34

Fishman and Parmer, 2008. Source: NJPS 2000–01

**Table 4:
Inmarried Jewish Parents by Frequency of Synagogue
Attendance (as a percentage of the total)**

	Affiliated Jewish Fathers	Affiliated Jewish Mothers	Unaffiliated Jewish Fathers	Unaffiliated Jewish Mothers
Weekly or more	11	17	17	20
Twice a month or less	63	52	28	19
1–2 times a year	11	16	18	27
Never	15	15	37	34

Fishman and Parmer, 2008. Source: NJPS 2000–01

Table 5:
Intermarried Jewish Parents by Frequency of Synagogue Attendance (as a percentage of the total)

	Affiliated Jewish Fathers	Affiliated Jewish Mothers	Unaffiliated Jewish Fathers	Unaffiliated Jewish Mothers
Weekly or more	1	14	0	1
Twice a month or less	42	40	13	10
1–2 times a year	16	17	8	2
Never	41	29	79	87

Fishman and Parmer, 2008. Source: NJPS 2000–01

Tables 3, 4 and 5 show that how often Jewish parents attend synagogue varies by four characteristics: (1) Whether they are married to a Jewish spouse; (2) What wing of Judaism they affiliate with, if any; (3) Whether or not they are synagogue members; and (4) Whether they are male or female. Among inmarried Jewish parents, if they are Orthodox Jews, almost nine out of ten men attend synagogue weekly or more, compared to four out of ten women.

However, Orthodox women's rates of attending weekly or more are far higher than those of either non-Orthodox men or women. Conservative men (14 %) and women (16 %) have almost identical weekly attendance rates. Reform women (17 %) are almost twice as likely to attend services every week as Reform men (9 %). At the low end of the inmarried spectrum, affiliation or lack of affiliation was far more important than gender: "Never attending services" was reported by 34 % of unaffiliated mothers and 37 % of unaffiliated fathers, with affiliated mothers (16 %) and fathers (15 %) half as likely to "never attend." (Table 4)

However, among intermarried Jewish parents, gender made a difference within the affiliated population. Of affiliated Jewish mothers who were married to non-Jews, 14 % said they attend services weekly or more-almost the same rate as affiliated (non-Orthodox) inmarried Jewish mothers! An additional 40 % of affiliated intermarried mothers said they attend services twice a month, again, rather similar to the synagogue attendance rates of affiliated inmarried Jewish mothers. For the intermarried Jewish fathers, however, the rates were strikingly different. Of affiliated intermarried fathers, 41 % said they never went to synagogue services. Fifteen percent were there once or twice a year. About one-third (32 %) of affiliated intermarried Jewish fathers said they attended services twice a month, compared to well over half of intermarried mothers. Among intermarried, unaffiliated men and women the rates of synagogue attendance were exceedingly low.

Gender is also much more of a key factor affecting ritual observances in intermarried families than in inmarried families. Simply put, homes with Jewish mothers tend to have much higher levels of ritual observance than homes which have Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers. Whether one speaks of once-a-year rituals like fasting on Yom Kippur, or weekly observances such as Shabbat, having a Jewish mother makes a big difference in American families. Perhaps most symbolically, American Jewish mothers, including intermarried Jewish mothers, were far more likely to insist on their sons having a *brit milah*-a ritual circumcision-than were Jewish fathers.

Ritual circumcision is still virtually universal among inmarried Jewish parents who affiliate with any wing of American Judaism-Orthodox, Conservative or Reform. Only "Just Jewish/ Secular" inmarried parents report about one in five not providing their male children with a *brit milah*. However, among the intermarried population the picture is very different. About one-third of Conservative men and well over half of Reform men married to non-Jewish women report that their male children have not had a *brit milah*. The pattern for intermarried Jewish women is diametrically opposed. Among Conservative women married to non-Jewish men eight out of ten, and among Reform women married to non-Jewish men, seven out of ten report their sons have had a *brit milah*.

The determination of intermarried affiliated Jewish mothers to see that their sons receive a ritual circumcision is perhaps counterintuitive, because popular psychological theories say that fathers like their sons to look like them. However, this finding is very much in keeping with our interview data. Our interviews showed that most Jewish fathers are not willing to battle with their non-Jewish wives over the issue of providing ritual circumcisions for their sons. As one father put it, reflecting many interviews: "I just didn't want to go to the mat fighting over that issue." In contrast, Jewish mothers see themselves as responsible for their sons having a *brit milah* whether or not their non-Jewish husbands are thrilled with the idea.

American Jewishness and the Religious Factor

For many secular Jews in the United States, other Diaspora communities, and for many secular Israeli Jews, the measuring of variables such as synagogue attendance or Jewish ritual observance may seem beside the point. In South America, some European communities, and in secular Israeli society Jews are far more likely to identify with Jewish culture and Jewish peoplehood in a secular fashion. Synagogues are not central to their lives. Why then does our study focus on religious or spiritual aspects of Jewishness when assessing the centrality of Jewish connections?

The fact is, however, that most American Jews do not relate to their Jewishness through secular routes. Our study shows that American Jews who affiliate religiously to any wing of Judaism are also the most likely to read Jewish books, listen to Jewish secular as well as religious music, watch Jewish films, read secular Israeli novels, learn Hebrew, care about and visit Israel. In contrast, South American Jews often attend secular Jewish schools where they learn Hebrew and secular Jewish culture, and Israeli Jews especially can be completely secular, and yet have high levels of *ethnic social capital*-that is, they speak an ethnic language, they listen to Israeli music, they eat Israeli food, and the public, secular holidays they celebrate are Jewish public secular holidays.

Israeli Jewish men develop connections to other Jewish men and to their own Jewishness through service in the Israeli Defense Forces, and through returning for *miluim* (reserve duty) frequently throughout their adult lives. These social networks are a primary source of Jewish social capital for secular Israelis. While Israelis may declare that their ethnicity is "Israeli" rather than "Jewish," the ethnicity to which their social capital links them is arguably a Jewish ethnicity.

For American Jews, however, Jewish social capital is primarily developed through connections with Jewish institutions. As theorists of *social capital* explain, even informal social networks such as friendship circles are usually loosely draped over institutional associations. Thus, individuals make school friends through school, and work friends through work, and friends who are the parents of the children attending school with their children. *American Jews who have Jewish social networks find those networks by*

associating with Jewish institutions. The more Jewish institutions, the more Jewish friends. This is why, on a sociological level, synagogues matter.

The same is true for children and teenagers and Jewish schools. Attending Jewish schools from the pre-school through the teen years is important on the American scene, because for most American Jews—who live in areas with little Jewish population density—the way young Jews create Jewish friendship networks is by attending Jewish schools. Jewish friendship networks matter because they are the single factor that is most predictive of whether or not an individual will have a positive Jewish identification and Jewish connections as an adult.

Moreover, for teenagers the "coolness" factor becomes very important. If teenagers have so few Jewish friends that the only "cool kids" they know are not Jewish, they will never think of Jewish culture as attractive. If, however, they have enough Jewish friends so that they see some of them as "cool" or appealing people, they will think of Jewishness and Judaism as appealing as well.[16]

In today's America, teenage girls are much more likely to continue their Jewish education after bat mitzvah than boys are after bar mitzvah. Partially as a result, they also have more Jewish friends. The combination of more Jewish education and more Jewish friends is part of what makes American Jewish adult females more attached to Jewishness.

Within each wing of Judaism some Jews develop extensive Jewish social capital. Some of this capital can be defined as "secular" in that it has to do with culture and social networks. Some of it is specifically religious. In Jewish culture, the ethnic and religious aspects of social capital have long been intertwined. Even today, "secular" Jewish ethnic social capital may be derived from and borrow much from religious terms, history, concepts and activities.

Jews increase their ethnic social capital when they learn Jewish languages, are involved with Jewish organizations, including temples and synagogues, participate in Jewish culture by reading Jewish books, listening to Jewish music, and viewing Jewish films. Social capital deepens when Jews are engaged by ideas of Jewish peoplehood, and when they make and keep many Jewish friends, visit Israel, and care about Israel, often to the extent that their caring about Israel influences their attitudes about American politics. Although it seems strange to many Israelis, the American Jews who know the most Hebrew and secular Israeli culture are those who are formally connected to some wing of American Judaism.

Within the more traditional wings of Judaism, these characteristics typify both men and women. Within the liberal wings of American Judaism, the Jews who are most likely to have religious and ethnic social capital today are female Jews.

Today, inmarried families are much more differentiated from intermarried families, especially those with Jewish fathers, than they were in previous decades. Inmarried mothers and fathers tend to share values and goals for themselves and their children, although Jewish mothers tend to be more Jewishly focused in their thinking and in their social networks than their husbands are. Orthodox Jewish men and women, despite their more emphatic gender role definitions, were the closest of all the groups studied in sharing Jewish values and goals for their children. Interestingly, younger Orthodox married couples also have the highest rates of educational and occupational spousal equity: physicians married to physicians, lawyers married to lawyers, etc.

Not surprisingly, the ambivalent or negative feelings toward Judaism as a religion or Jewishness as an ethnic culture that are expressed by many intermarried Jewish men also extend to their negative feelings about Jewish women. For male Jews, the person who he marries makes a difference in how strongly he connects to Jews and Jewishness after marriage. This is a social network factor. Just as friendship networks make a difference in one's ethnoreligious connections, spouses make a difference too. Men married to Jews get more involved; men married to non-Jews do not, although they often report themselves "feeling more Jewish," i.e., they are conscious of their Jewishness more sharply than when they are together with Jews.

Jewish women who married non-Jewish men overwhelmingly said that their original preference was to marry a Jewish man, but that with the passage of time other factors gained consideration. (Jewish women

who marry non-Jewish men marry on average three years later than those who marry Jewish men.) And while it is certainly true that the weak Jewish identification of intermarrying men precedes their intermarriages, rather than the intermarriage causing the weak Jewish identification, the intermarriages themselves then continue to contribute to decreased connections, compared to the Jewishly reinforcing effect of inmarriages.

Jews with high levels of religious and ethnic social capital marry earlier than Jews with weak religious and ethnic social capital. They have more children, they give those children Jewish educations, and their children are more likely to create Jewish homes of their own. They are more likely to transmit Jewish culture to the next generation. Jewish with high levels of religious and ethnic social capital are more likely to reproduce Jews and to reproduce Judaism and Jewish culture.

In contrast, within the liberal wings of Judaism, and even more so among unaffiliated secular Jews, Jewish boys and men are in many cases alienated from synagogue life, or at least apathetic to it. Synagogues do not seem engaging places. Other Jews may not seem engaging either. As we saw in the interviews, many adult Jewish men, especially those who are attracted to and marry non-Jewish women, complain that dating Jewish women is "work," not "fun," and that Jewish women are demanding, overbearing, and best escaped. Thus, growing rates of intermarriage may be related in not so subtle ways not only to the continuing negative stereotypical depiction of Jewish women in American popular culture, but also to the perceived domination of Jewish life by Jewish women.

The alienation of Jewish men and their weak attachments to Jewishness have the auxiliary effect of increasing the likelihood that they will marry non-Jewish women, a decision which in turn decreases the strength of Jewish attachments. As we have shown here and elsewhere, the presence of a Jewish mother in the home dramatically increases the likelihood that the children will be raised as Jews. Her absence increases the likelihood that they will not.

Thus, the more estranged from or ambivalent toward Jewishness a Jew is, the more likely this individual will articulate negative attitudes toward other Jews and be attracted to and marry someone from a non-Jewish cultural background. When Jews do not find Jewishness attractive, they do not find Jews attractive, and vice versa.

Research and Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance

Our research shows that the alienation of boys and men from Jews and Judaism is a systemic problem in American Jewish society. It affects not only religious rituals and synagogue attendance, but also attachments to Jewish peoplehood, in the form of friendship circles, marriage choices, caring about Jews in Israel and around the world. This phenomenon has been developing for many decades, but it has been virtually ignored, and today it has become sweeping and dramatic.

Outreach programs aimed primarily at non-Jewish mothers that do not also deal with the ambivalence or antipathy of their Jewish husbands will have limited success. Intermarried men who have negative feelings about Jews and Jewishness are the "weak link" in contemporary American Jewish life.

American males are less attached to Jewish life not because men are innately "less religious" than women in some essential psychological way, but because American culture and society value religious activities and behaviors for women but devalue them for men. Jews in Israel, or in Diaspora communities outside the United States, sometimes suspect that the impact of the Jewish mother (and the weak attachments of the Jewish father) is produced by Halachic rabbinic insistence on matrilineal descent. However, most intermarried Jews who affiliate do so in Reform temples, and matrilineal descent does not apply to American Reform congregations since the Reform movement's 1983 decision that children of a Jewish father are considered *zarah yisrael* (literally, the "seed of a Jew," Biblical phrase implying paternal Jewish descent). This Patrilineal Descent policy has been in place for a quarter of a century.

Most Reform congregations go to great lengths to welcome the children of intermarriage. In an effort to treat the children of Jewish fathers and mothers equally, children of one Jewish parent, father or the mother, are presumed Jewish at birth. When that child becomes an adolescent that child has to affirm his

or her Jewishness. Thus, in the United States gender differences in Jewish connections cannot be explained away by Halachic considerations.

It would be a mistake to regard male distance from Judaism as a kind of tsunami that cannot be addressed or ameliorated. There are at least two sources of models that can and should be worked with in devising strategies to create stronger bonds: models provided by girls and women, and models provided by traditional Jewish communities.

Strategies for men can be based upon the way Jewish women have reclaimed many traditional life cycle rituals for their own use, and are inventing other rituals to help them sacralize life cycle events which are specific to the female experience. Women have sought out and revitalized some and created other Jewish rituals because many people find ritual meaningful and satisfying on a personal, communal, and spiritual level.

For example, in the United States it is now almost ubiquitous in congregations across denominational lines for women to recite the *kaddish* prayer at services after the death of a loved one and on the anniversaries of that bereavement (*yahrzeit*). Similarly, immersion in the waters of the *mikveh* has enjoyed a resurgence not only in Orthodox communities but in liberal Jewish life as well. Indeed, in some communities facilities have been built to accommodate new rituals created to utilize the *mikveh*, including rituals to mark women's life cycle transitions such as divorce, abortion, adoption, or menopause.

Because so many Reform-affiliated Jewish homes include weakly identified Jewish men and their non-Jewish wives, the Reform movement is leading the way in exploring strategies to engage Jewish boys and men in Jewish experiences and connections. At the 2007 Biennial of the Union of Reform Judaism, for example, a men-only *minyan* prayer group took place, along with the more typical egalitarian services. Reform Jewish educators and men's club leaders are paying increasing attention to devising activities that will meet men's needs for male bonding and increase their engagement with Judaism.

One of the problems that leaders trying to engage men struggle with is that men seem to be more sensitive than women to feelings of incompetence. When men think they should have the skills to do something Jewish, and they do not have those skills because of gaps in their education or Jewish experience, they often avoid Jewish activities. They may not articulate their avoidance in this way. Instead, they often say, "I don't like that," or "I'm not interested in that." This avoidance, for example, is observed among men who have never learned Hebrew and feel deeply uncomfortable in services that include substantial amounts of Hebrew. But when men are given the opportunity to acquire the requisite skills, their enjoyment of the given activity often emerges.

Applying creativity in adapting traditional Jewish activities to men's lives - as has already been successfully done for women - is one very important positive response to the challenge of gender imbalance. Pilot programs are occurring in independent venues as well as within the religious wings of American Judaism. For example, Mayyim Hayyim, an independent communal mikveh and educational facility in the greater Boston area, created by author and activist Anita Diamant and largely utilized by the non-Orthodox community, is hosting a first ever "Men, Mikveh, Macanudos and Single Malt" event for men only.

The invitation states: "Mikveh is not just for women. At Mayyim Hayyim, men immerse to celebrate milestones, for healing, to prepare for Shabbat and High Holidays-for a whole host of reasons. With this event, we hope to reach out to more of the men in our lives and our community."^[17] It is certainly true that in traditional Jewish communities men immersed in mikveh waters before they get married, before Yom Kippur, and, for certain Hasidic sects, on the morning after seminal emissions (typically on Shabbat morning). It is also true that in Orthodox communities these mikveh experiences can be the locale for male bonding, as brilliantly described in Allen Hoffman's *Kagan's Superfecta*:

Kagan descended until the warm, receptive water was up to his waist. As he waded into the pool, he felt the softly oscillating clutches of the heat receive him. In his naked return to thermal oneness, the perfect 98.6, that sheltered return to consanguineous fluids, he felt the warm waters....they whispered "sh" and, nodding in gentle waves of reunion, held him fast in the warmth and perfect unity of the pool. Kagan, the waters a fraction of an inch below his nostrils, peacefully watched the bodies resolutely submerging and

surfacing. His watching turned into a meditation as the unifying procedure became a natural process to calm the universe....[18]

Most non-Orthodox American Jewish men have never heard of, let alone participated in, these customs. American Jewish women have used the mikveh in a recontextualized way. The event's authors, by reclaiming mikveh for men as well as women, and by reframing mikveh rituals within a modern mindset, are modeling the kind of Jewish creativity that can make a difference. Similar creativity is taking place around classes, trips to Israel and other Jewish sites, cultural events, weekend retreats and combined sports and study activities for fathers and sons and male peer groups.

The systemic alienation of Jewish males begins in boyhood, and this is an area where new, original, targeted research is sorely needed. We actually know very little about what will attract school age and teenage boys to connections to Jews and Jewishness. Some very promising collaborations with non-sectarian researchers on education for adolescent boys have taken place under the aegis of the organization "Moving Traditions," under the leadership of Deborah Myers. "Moving Traditions" not only supports research but also "best practice" programming that disseminates information on successful educational strategies in their "Campaign for Jewish Boys." [19]

Models for bringing Jewish boys into a positive relationship with their own Jewishness can be fruitfully adapted for liberal Judaism from traditional Jewish societies. Observant societies did, and still today, effectively enculturate boys into Jewish male roles with step by step socialization. Toddlers, school-age boys, young teens each in turn have positive experiences bonding them to their peer group. Such boys typically admire the boys and men slightly older than them who model the next accomplishments: the first haircut, the first day at Jewish school, the first opening of the Holy Ark, the first leading of the congregation in the closing hymns, the first leading the congregation in the prayer service as a *shaliakh tsibbur* (cantor and messenger), and ultimately being called to the Torah as a *hatan* (groom) and standing under the wedding canopy. For these boys, bar mitzvah is no stand-alone event terminating Jewish education. It is one of many steps certifying bona fide membership in a male community, a position that carries with it status as well as responsibility. The challenge today is how to recreate that status, without making it dependent on marginalizing girls and women.

Research and policy planning efforts should be placed in the broader American context, which profoundly influences American Jews. Research and policy discussions about gender imbalance must start with an awareness that gender imbalance is not a foregone conclusion. Jewish social history shows that men need not be distant from Jewishness.

For much of Jewish history men have defined Jewishness. Without advocating that historical Jewish gender imbalance, we must acknowledge that many American Jewish men are alienated, and Jewish peoplehood needs men as well as women. It is now "politically incorrect" to confront this issue, and research and discussions exploring it are attacked as attempts to discriminate against women.[20] Now that we are finally confronting this critical issue, it would be tragic for the Jewish community to turn away. We need targeted research, along with honest and open conversations to learn from each other how to honor "Jewish sisterhood" and "Jewish brotherhood" as well.

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Notes

[1] Rodney Stark, "Physiology and Faith: Addressing the 'Universal' Gender Differences in Religious Commitment," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2002): 495-507, 496.

[2] Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer, *Matrilineal Ascent/ Patrilineal Descent: The Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life* (Brandeis University: Hadassah Brandeis Institute and the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2008), available from hbi@brandeis.edu.

[3] The original analyses of these interviews, funded by the American Jewish Committee, were published in two AJC reports and a book, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. We have returned to these more than 300 transcribed interviews to look at a new subject: the relative impact of gender and family type in connections to Jews and Jewishness and as regards parental ethnoreligious goals.

[4] R. W. Connel, "Class, Patriarchy, and Sartre's Theory of Practice," in *Theory and Society* 2: 305-320; *Which Way Is Up? Essays on Sex, Class and Culture* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1983); *Gender and Power* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1987); R. W. Connel and J. W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," in *Gender and Society*, 19: 829-859, 832. Gender theorists explore the ways in which social constructions of masculinity and femininity are influenced not only by the values of individual societies, but also by historical trends and changes. Like other aspects of human behavior, these gender role constructions are affected by the shift of time, with new struggles "for hegemony," as "older forms of masculinity" are "displaced by new ones."

[5] Rabbi Mordekhai ben Hillel, Ashkenazi 13th century Germany, declared, "In our community all the women are important," a statement that was reiterated by Rabbi Moshe Isserles in 16th century Poland. The Vilna Gaon, in 18th century Lithuania and others suggested an economic interpretation: "An important woman (is wealthy enough so that she) doesn't need to busy herself with the needs of the household or the preparation of food." The *Shulkhan Aruch* (Joseph Caro, Venice, 1565) does leave the option open for "important women," but this option is seldom exercised in traditional circles even today. Only in modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and other liberal settings is the Passover Seder an egalitarian setting.

[6] Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[7] Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[8] Excerpted from Micha Josef Berdichevski's "Wrecking and Building," (1900-1903), in Arthur Herzberg ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 293.

[9] The reader is referred to Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

[10] Sidney Goldstein, "Profile of American Jewry: Insights from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey," *American Jewish Year Book 1992* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992), 115-116.

[11] National Jewish Population Surveys 1970, 1990, 2000-01.

[12] Among the many examples that could be cited, historical understandings have been dramatically revised by such works as Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century European Jewish Society* (Waltham, MA: Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Series on Jewish Women, 2004); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[13] Debra Nussbaum-Cohen, "Reform Jews Examining Ways to Retain Their Young Men," *New York Times*, 4 February 2006.

[14] Both interviews were conducted by Mitzi Grossman for her unpublished Brandeis University Senior Honors Thesis, *Feminization in Liberal American Jewish Congregations*, May 2008.

[15] Jeffrey Salkin, "The Retreating Man," in *Reform Judaism* 35, No. 1 (Fall 2006): 70-71.

[16] Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Generating Jewish Connections: Conversations with Jewish Teenagers, Their Parents, and Jewish Educators and Thinkers," in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *Family Matters: Jewish*

Education in an Age of Choice (Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England, 2007), 181-212.

[17] For more information, write to laurend@mayyimhayyim.org.

[18] Allen Hoffman, *Kagan's Superfecta and other stories* (New York, London & Paris: Abbeville Press, 1981), 16.

[19] www.movingtraditions.org/index.php?option=com.

[20] See, for example, Katha Pollitt, "Who's Afraid of Judy Maccabee," in *The Nation*, 21 July 2008; and Rona Shapiro, "The Boy Crisis that Cried Wolf," in *The Forward*, 5 January 2007.

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PROF. SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN is Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University, as well as co-director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, and is a Faculty Affiliate of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute. Prof. Fishman is the author of seven books and numerous monographs and articles on the interplay of American and Jewish values, transformations in the American Jewish family, the impact of Jewish education, gender studies focusing on the changing roles of Jewish men and women, and contemporary Jewish literature and film.

DANIEL PARMER is a Graduate Research Assistant at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and is a 2007/08 Mandell L. Berman Steinhardt Social Research Institute Fellow. He received his dual MA in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies and Jewish Professional Leadership at Brandeis University and is currently pursuing a PhD in Social Policy at Brandeis University. He is co-author of "Matrilineal Ascent/Patrilineal Descent" (2008) with Sylvia Barack Fishman.