Gender and American Jews

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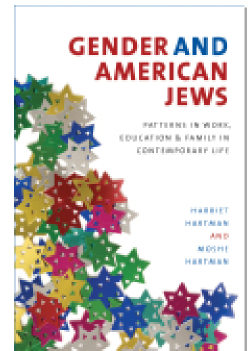

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CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Gender and American Jews and the Significance of the Inquiry

I think gender is no longer the essential issue of American Jewry. . . . Egalitarianism has become so pervasive and normative in American Jewish life that it rarely makes headlines.
—Rela Geffen, 2007

A recent book questions the "declining significance of gender" in the U.S. population (Blau, Brinton, and Grusky, 2006). Geffen (2007) considers egalitarianism to be so pervasive and normative in American Jewish life that it is no longer a topic of interest. Yet here we are, writing a book about gender roles and Jewishness among American Jews. Are we beating a dead horse? Has egalitarianism been achieved and is gender no longer an issue for American Jews? Are we setting up a "straw person," only to knock it down with negative findings? Perhaps. And yet we cannot help but feel the questions still need to be asked, particularly of this subgroup in U.S. culture. Few other subgroups can claim such high educational and occupational achievement, coupled with strong leadership in the feminist movement for gender equality. Few other subgroups are positioned between religion, ethnicity, and secularism the way American Jews are. Few other subgroups can claim unique status as family oriented yet as having one of the lowest fertility rates in the country. So we raise the question: Has gender equality in secular achievement been attained by American Jews? And whatever the answer, is it because of or in spite of Jewish religious and ethnic identity?

We did not approach the question with a blank slate. We built on a previous study we had done, *Gender Equality and American Jews* (Hartman and Hartman, 1996a), using data from 1990. Then, too, we compared the educational achievement and economic roles of American Jewish men and

women and related them to "Jewishness," in an attempt to explore whether there was a "Jewish" pattern of gender differences in secular achievement. We had reasons to suspect gender equality: strong human capital of both men and women; small family size, which diminished the negative effect of childcare on mothers' secular achievement; a historical tradition of wives participating in the labor force and often supporting the family economically while the husband engaged in religious studies; Jewish women's involvement in the movement for gender equality in the third wave of U.S. feminism; and support for gender equality by highly educated Americans like most American Jews. On the other hand, the centrality of the family in Judaism implied a strong investment in family roles, which often conflict with women's investments in higher education or a career; and a tradition of gender inequality in religious roles was suspected of spilling over to secular roles. We noted that some interpret gender inequality in religious roles as gender difference rather than status ranking; and in some denominations (the most numerous), religious roles have become increasingly accessible to women and men, which weakens the impact of this factor.

We confirmed tendencies toward equality in secular roles that we were expecting, but we also found some unexpected inequalities, and the sources of both equality and inequality were somewhat surprising. Although both American Jewish men and women are better educated than their counterparts in the broader U.S. society, American Jewish men retained an educational advantage over women, just that they did so at a higher level than in much of the rest of U.S. society. As in the broader society, Jewish women had achieved parity with men in terms of high school and undergraduate degrees, but there were still fewer graduate degrees awarded to women. Cohort analysis showed us that there was movement toward educational parity, but it had not yet been achieved according to the 1990 data we were analyzing. Although American Jewish men and women had high labor force participation rates compared with their counterparts in the broader population, a sizable minority of women, many more than men, were not participating in the labor force or were working part time rather than full time. This pattern was more common when women had children, especially young children at home, as might be expected.

In this book we focus on whether there remains a distinctive secular behavior among American Jews, and whether those who identify themselves as more "Jewish" in a variety of ways are more likely to engage in this distinctive secular behavior. American Jews' distinctively high secular achievement has long been recognized (Smith, 2005). Several explanations for this have been offered: human capital (e.g., education, long work hours); cultural capital (e.g., placing a high value on education and achievement); social capital (e.g.,

networking among Jews); and marginality (a motivator of creativity) (Burstein, 2007). However, as Jews have become more integrated into American life ("white," per Brodkin, 1999), their marginality has become increasingly part of the cultural legacy rather than an everyday experience; and their cultural particularity has become less self-conscious and salient, so much so that a sizable minority (about 20%) that others would term "Jewish" do not identify themselves as such (United Jewish Communities, 2003c). The question then arises as to whether the cultural basis for secular distinctiveness is eroding or can be traced primarily to human capital factors.

Even more interesting, perhaps, than the distinctiveness of American Jews from the broader population is the variation among Jews. In trying to capture the "cultural" capital imparted through Jewishness, we find ourselves with the daunting task of trying to define "Jewishness." Fishman has captured the myriad "varieties of Jewishness" (2006), clearly showing that there is no unique way of being Jewish. Jews differ not just by their origins or their denominations. They may emphasize Jewishness as a religion or an ethnicity, they may be communally involved or privately spiritual, they may be involved with other American Jews and/or Jews in Israel or the rest of the world, they may see being Jewish as being a member of a race or tribe, or they may consider themselves purveyors of a universal morality—the variations are truly astounding. One would expect that those who define their Jewishness as more pervasive might find their secular roles and achievements influenced more by their Jewish identity, such as it may be, and that those who compartmentalize their Jewishness might be detached from "Jewish" ways of behaving.

In our 1990 work, we attempted to relate some varieties of Jewishness to secular (in)equality between Jewish men and women. When analyzing the contribution of Jewishness to this pattern of inequality, we found it was less the direct influence of Jewishness than the indirect influence of Jewishness on family roles that accounted for the different labor force patterns between men and women. More traditional and more strongly identified Jews tended to have more children, which curtailed labor force participation to some extent. However, among traditionally and more strongly identified Jews, there was more likely to be gender equality in education, occupation, and occupational prestige, including within their marriages. We concluded that American Jewish women were particularly responsive to family roles but that Jewishness per se did not bring about unequal secular achievements.

The collection of the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) data affords an opportunity to reexamine these issues, with an expanded data set that includes much more information about ways of "being

Jewish," a larger sample that allows better comparisons between subgroups of respondents, and an updated social context that brings us into the twenty-first century.

Since 1990, the broader U.S. context has changed, and so has the context for American Jews. Marriage is increasingly delayed, divorce and single parenting have become more common, women are more likely than men to complete undergraduate and master's degrees, and the labor force participation rate of women and especially mothers is at an all-time high (though still not as high as men's). We cannot ignore the differences in family status as we analyze gender differences in American Jews' secular achievements. Twenty-one percent of American Jewish mothers with children under the age of 18 at home were not married at the time of the survey (though the vast majority had been married before giving birth); nearly 10% of the women were in their second marriage (or beyond). We examine whether these differences in family status influence the secular achievement of American Jewish women and whether they affect gender equality.

In the United States, women's representation in many previously considered "male" occupations has doubled or tripled, and in some cases women have achieved parity with men (Chao and Utgoff, 2005), and the gap between men and women's earnings has narrowed (though not disappeared) (Sweet and Meiksins, 2008). Within the increasingly "postindustrial" economy, there has been an expansion of occupations in which representation by American Jews has traditionally been disproportionately high (information processing; professional, retail, and wholesale trade) (Sweet and Meiksins, 2008; Wyatt and Hecker, 2006), challenging perhaps the distinctiveness of the American Jewish occupational structure.

Yet another difference is the change in the context of the feminist movement. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, stay-at-home moms and labor force dropouts were devalued in much discourse, the 1990s and 2000s have seen a renewed sense of the value of family contributions; there is less disparaging of family-oriented women and more bemoaning of how much career may take away from family involvement for both women and men (Edlund, 2007; Muñoz, 2007; Newcombe, 2007; Steiner, 2007). Dual-earner couples have become the norm (Bond, 2002), but research and public discourse recognize that extensive hours in the labor force affect the family adversely by taking parents away from their children and sapping their time, energy, and other resources (Accenture, 2007; Becker and Moen, 1999; Crompton, 2006; Shellenbarger, 2008). With such awareness, one can legitimately ask whether couples, if they can afford to, cap the number of hours they collectively spend in the labor force, and whether it is still the mother or wife who bears the brunt of family demands or whether

economic and family roles are shared. A highly qualified subpopulation like American Jews, in which women and men both have strong human capital, presents a case study for exploring how gender roles are managed in contemporary society. Insight into gender differences among American Jews, especially when children are present, may help us understand the limits of gender equality among those who are family oriented.

Gender roles are not only a product of intimate arrangements. Riv-Ellen Prell (1999) has shown us how much gender relations among Jews reflect the relations between Jews and the broader society. American Jews are becoming increasingly accepted as part of the mainstream majority of whites, so much so that many of the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews are increasingly blurred. One clear implication is easier intermarriage; intramarriage may occur just as much by chance as by intention, or it may be socioeconomically rather than culturally or religiously based. In 1990, the sections of our book dealing with couples focused solely on Jewish adults married to Jewish adults. If in 2000 we had considered only intermarried couples, we would have been leaving out one-third of the couples in our sample of American Jews. Secular achievement is actually important to examine as it interacts with intermarriage, as we will show. Jewish men married to Jewish women tend to have higher educational and occupational achievement than Jewish men married to non-Jewish women. The dynamics of this are beyond the scope of the data we use (i.e., does intramarriage promote educational and occupational achievement, or does lower educational or occupational achievement promote intermarriage?), but they are interesting to speculate about.

At the same time, because Jews are more widely accepted as part of the mainstream, they are freer to express their "Jewishness" in a variety of ways, which may strengthen (or weaken) their "Jewish" identity in multiple respects (Kaufman, 1999). So the question again arises, how are various expressions of "Jewishness" related to the distinctiveness (or lack thereof) of secular roles of Jewish men and women? The rich variety of questions in the 2000–01 NJPS enabled us to explore such expressions more fully because of the larger number of data related to Jewish identity collected in the survey. There are questions related to religious identity, ethnic identity, public participation in Jewish culture, private observance of home-based ritual and prayer, and more (as we present in Chapter 6). Among contemporary Jews, there appear to be two tendencies with regard to "Jewishness": one toward less involvement and engagement and one toward more involvement and engagement (Cohen, 2005). We can examine whether one leads to less or to more distinctiveness from the broader U.S. population. The answer, which we address in our analysis, may be surprising.

Another change related to gender equality among Jews is the development of women's roles in the contemporary Jewish community. Women have always been active in the American Jewish community, but there have been several ways in which their activity has developed in the past few decades (Geffen, 2007; Prell, 2007b). Across the denominational spectrum, women have become more involved in both lay and professional leadership, prayer and study circles, philanthropic giving circles, life-cycle rituals relevant particularly to women's issues, and more (Geffen, 2007). They still face obstacles to reaching the pinnacles of public leadership in secular, voluntary organizations like the Jewish Federations, but as our opening quote shows, gender no longer drives strong ressentiment (Geffen, 2007, p. 9). This book examines whether there is "pervasive and normative egalitarianism" in Jewish secular roles as well.

THE DATA

Our primary data come from the National Jewish Population Survey undertaken in 2000 and 2001. Sponsored by the United Jewish Communities (UJC), it constitutes the largest survey of a national sample of American Jews ever conducted. It also encompasses the widest range of questions on Jewish topics (including education, religious behaviors and attitudes, ethnic attitudes, engagement with Jewish culture, organizations, Israel, and intermarriage) of any other large survey of contemporary American Jews. (More information on the survey can be found in Kadushin, Phillips, and Saxe, 2005; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2006; United Jewish Communities, 2003b and 2003d; see also the Web site www.jewishdatabank.org, where registered users can freely download the data.)

The survey was conducted by telephone using random digit dialing (RDD) techniques and a stratified sampling frame, oversampling areas of high Jewish population density. More than 170,000 households were screened, resulting in 5,148 respondents, who received various versions of the questionnaire, depending on how closely they fit a number of criteria of Jewishness. The sample that we used for this study includes 4,144 respondents, who fulfilled two of the following criteria: they said that their religion was Jewish/Judaism,[1] their parentage was Jewish, they were raised Jewish, and/or they considered themselves Jewish. Because we broke down the sample by age, marital status, and sometimes gender, education, labor force participation, and occupation, some of our sub-samples are very small, as we note throughout the text.

For simple calculations, "person-weights" were used to estimate actual numbers in the wider Jewish population with the same attributes. These person-weights were provided with the data set and are explained in more

detail in the study documentation provided by the United Jewish Communities (2003b and 2003d). For analyses based on correlations, including factor analyses and multiple or logistic regressions, or to conduct significance tests, the unweighted data were used. Most of the tables report unweighted sample sizes, even if the calculations were performed on the weighted sample. Notes clarify this for each table. Unless otherwise noted, the data source for each table and figure is the NJPS 2000–01.

Considerable attention has been devoted to the limitations of the survey (see Kadushin, Phillips, and Saxe, 2005; Saxe, Tighe, Phillips, and Kadushin, 2007), including a low rate of response in general and to certain questions in particular, an underrepresentation of young non-Orthodox and baby boomer Jews (owing either to sampling errors or to lack of response) (Saxe et al., 2007), as well as missing data because certain questions were not asked of certain subpopulations. Regarding the low response rate overall, estimates have been made as to whether parts of the American Jewish population are so underrepresented as to present a bias in the results. This is a problem for us, particularly with regard to the underrepresentation of baby boomer Jews, whether for non-response or sampling reasons, as they are likely to be in their prime career years and their labor force behavior and achievement may not mirror those of other cohorts. The underrepresentation of younger Jews poses a less serious problem, because they are often not married and are more likely to be excluded from much of the analysis anyway. With regard to particular questions, the biggest problem is the low response rate regarding income, which is always a sensitive question. Chiswick and Huang's (2008) analysis suggests that the non-response on this topic is biased toward higher-income respondents, as might be expected.

These limitations are real and must be kept in mind so that we exercise appropriate caution when interpreting the results. However, since there is little reason to expect that these problems affect men and women differently, when we are analyzing comparisons between men and women in various subpopulations of the sample, we may have more confidence in the results. Furthermore, these are the most comprehensive data available for a reasonably sized national sample of Jews. Therefore, we believe that this is the best data source for our analysis, but we try to be mindful of the data's limitations.

The survey was constructed to yield information on the American Jewish population for both planning and policy-making purposes as well as for academic research. At times this meant that theoretical considerations were compromised in the interest of keeping the survey brief enough that respondents would be motivated to answer all of the questions. We find this particularly troubling when we attempt to understand what "Jewishness"

means, as we shall note in Chapter 6. We apologize for the limitations the available questions placed on our analysis, but we trust the reader will find there is certainly much in this rich data set that is worth considering.

For comparison purposes, we use the 1990 NJPS, wherein the population of Jews is defined as meeting two of the following criteria: (1) born Jewish; (2) raised Jewish; (3) consider themselves Jewish. For comparison with the broader U.S. population, we use published and unpublished data from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses, the 2004 Current Population Survey, and the 2001 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Where possible we concentrate on non-Hispanic whites aged 18 and older in our comparisons, as nearly all of the Jewish population is white, and we focus on the education and labor force participation of Jewish adults 18 and over (unless otherwise noted).

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The first part of the book focuses on the distinctiveness of American Jews as compared with the broader U.S. population in terms of men's and women's educational attainment, familistic behavior, labor force patterns, and occupational attainment. Following something of a life-cycle approach, we begin with an examination of the educational attainment of American Jews, according to the 2000–01 NJPS findings; we discuss the distinctiveness of American Jews compared with the broader U.S. population in 2000 and examine whether this distinctiveness has changed since 1990 (Chapter 2). A major focus is the difference in educational attainment of Jewish men and women. We briefly look at lifelong learning as well. Chapter 3 examines the family behavior of American Jews with a similar purpose, to show its distinctiveness in comparison with the broader U.S. population. We consider a number of measures of "familistic behavior," including marriage, age at first marriage, age at birth of first child, number of children, divorce, and number of times married. We also examine educational homogamy among American Jews. Chapter 4 continues with labor force participation and occupational achievement, relating them to educational attainment and family roles, and examining whether the patterns we find among American Jews differ from those seen in the broader population. In Chapter 5, we consider the dominance of dual earning among American Jewish couples, examining the extent to which that phenomenon is related to equal economic contributions of the spouses and equal occupational attainment, and whether the patterns we find are similar to or different from those within the broader U.S. population.

The second part of the book deals with the second way in which we examine the relationship between gender, "Jewishness," and secular behavior. We

examine the various meanings of “Jewishness” in Chapter 6 and compare their manifestations among men and women. In Chapter 7 we relate the various expressions of “Jewishness” to familistic behavior, examining whether “more” Jewishness in any sense is related to a particular pattern of familistic behavior among men and/or women. In Chapter 8 we relate expressions of Jewishness to secular attainment—education, labor force, and occupational status and rewards—and to the patterns of gender equality we find in each. Chapter 9 relates Jewishness to dual-earning patterns among Jewish couples. Chapter 10 focuses on the differences between intermarried Jews and intramarried Jews in terms of their family behavior and secular attainment, addressing the question of whether intermarriage results in “less Jewish” patterns of behavior.

We conclude in Chapter 11 with a summary of our findings, indications of trends, implications for Jewish communal policy, and suggestions for further research on the topic.