



PROJECT MUSE®

Gender and American Jews

Harriet Hartman, Moshe Hartman, Sylvia Barack Fishman

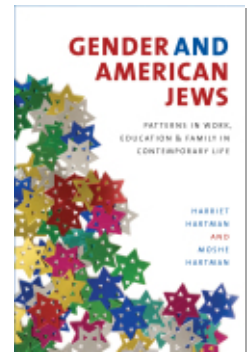
Published by Brandeis University Press

Hartman, Harriet, et al.

Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education, and Family in Contemporary Life.

Brandeis University Press, 2009.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/15685.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15685>

CHAPTER 2

Education Patterns

The Foundation of Family and Economic Roles

We start by looking at gender differences in educational attainment among contemporary American Jews. Education is a good starting point, for (at least) two reasons: (1) It is basic to considering achievement in secular activities. By providing access to the training and credentials attesting to occupational “fitness,” education acts as a gatekeeper to occupational status and rewards. (2) It is related to many considerations regarding family roles, which further interact with secular achievement. Entrance into a permanent intimate arrangement may be postponed until education is completed, or childbearing may be delayed until education is completed and a career established. Thus, the years a person spends pursuing education may condition decisions about family roles. Education may also provide information that affects decisions about family roles (e.g., about the economics of family life or contraception). And educational settings serve as marriage markets, where potential partners congregate, thus influencing the homogamy later found among intimate partners.

Contrary to what might be expected, American Jewish men and women do not have equal educational attainment. This fact is sometimes camouflaged in comparisons with the broader U.S. population, because the gender differences are concentrated at the top end of the educational spectrum, which is sometimes conflated with all those receiving college degrees. But if we look at the proportion of those who earn graduate degrees or professional degrees, men and women are not equal (as we shall show later in the chapter). The inequality common to the rest of the U.S. population is simply transferred up the educational ladder, as we found in 1990 (Hartman and Hartman, 1996a).

But the inequality between men and women is not great and certainly does not resemble any gender gaps seen in developing countries, for example. Nor does it resemble the gender gap in formal Jewish education (see

Chapter 6), which has been influenced by a tradition that emphasizes men's formal training for the widespread public ceremony of Bar Mitzvah (which for many entails a knowledge of Hebrew and reciting or chanting at least some portion of the weekly Torah reading) and for public religious leadership roles. Although women have made inroads into both of these public arenas, particularly among the non-Orthodox, it would be inaccurate to conclude that gender parity has been achieved in the celebration of Bar or Bat Mitzvah or in rabbinical or cantorial roles (Geffen, 2007). But it is not at all clear that the inequality in formal Jewish education spills over to secular education. On the contrary, because traditionally more men were involved in formal Jewish education and the culture valued men's immersion in such study, there is a parallel historical tradition of Jewish women's immersion in secular training, especially for economic roles that would help support the family (Katz, 1973; Webber, 1983).

If we were to consider "college education" a single category, we might indeed conclude that there is gender equality in the educational attainment of American Jews, especially among those under 65. But patterns of gender equality in educational training raise new questions about family dynamics. We cannot assume that all parties concerned view educational homogamy as desirable, especially if it challenges traditional statuses within the family. Furthermore, it may or may not imply class and status homogamy within the family. Even when their educational attainment is similar to that of men, women do not usually earn the same wages as men (Padavic and Reskin, 2002), although the gender gap is narrower than it used to be. We need to examine whether the differences in educational attainment that we find among American Jews are sufficient to maintain traditional roles within the family, or whether there is a greater likelihood of spousal equality in this respect among American Jews than in the broader population. We also need to examine how the level of educational attainment among Jewish men and women is reconciled with the importance of the family, which is central to Jewish tradition. These are some of the threads our analysis will follow.

But first, let us turn to the educational patterns themselves—the subject of this chapter. Gender differences in Jewish education are considered in Chapter 6.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF AMERICAN JEWISH MEN AND WOMEN

By any standard, and especially compared with non-Jews in the United States, American Jews are well educated (Table 2.1). Less than 4% have not completed high school, 80% have completed more than a high school education, and 58% have completed at least an undergraduate degree. A quarter

Table 2.1 Education of American Jews and U.S. White Population by Gender

Education	American Jews, 2000–01			U.S. white population, 2000		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Less than high school	3.8	3.1	3.4	22.1	22.0	22.1
High school graduate	13.2	18.3	15.9	28.7	32.9	30.9
Some college	19.7	25.7	22.9	27.2	28.2	27.7
Bachelor's degree	33.1	30.5	31.7	13.7	11.7	12.7
Master's degree	18.8	17.9	18.3	4.7	3.9	4.3
Doctoral, professional degree	11.3	4.6	7.8	3.5	1.3	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(<i>n</i> , thousands) ^a	(1,569)	(1,752)	(3,321)	(380,521)	(414,702)	(795,223)
Bachelor's degree or higher (%)	65.2	52.0	57.8	21.9	16.9	19.3

Data source for American Jews: NJPS (2000–01); for U.S. Whites: 2000 U.S. Census.

^aNJPS data weighted by person-weights provided with dataset.

of Jews have earned graduate degrees, and nearly 8% have earned professional or doctoral degrees, including 1% who have earned medical degrees and about 2%, law degrees.

Both Jewish men and women are highly educated, and overall the gender differences are small.¹ However, as education increases, the gender gap widens: while more than 96% of both men and women have completed at least a high school education, nearly two-thirds of men have earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared with slightly more than half of women; 30% of men have earned some graduate degree, compared with 22.5% of women; and 11% of men have earned a doctoral or professional degree, more than double the 5% of women. Among Jews who earned a graduate degree, more than a third of the men went beyond master's degrees, compared with only 22% of the women; 23% of the men earned doctoral degrees, and 13% earned first-professional degrees (D.D.S., M.D./D.O, or law); whereas only 14% of the women earning graduate degrees earned doctoral degrees, and only 7.6% earned first-professional degrees.

Gender differences in education are greater for American Jews aged 45 and older than for younger cohorts. As in the broader U.S. population, American Jewish men had greater access to higher education than women until about the 1960s, partly because of the association of higher education with preparation for professional careers that were not open to women

(Hunter College, 2005) and partly because of assistance with higher education offered by the GI bill to (male) veterans after World War II (McLaughlin et al., 1988). Only after 1960 did the proportion of women with a higher education begin to catch up with that of men. The results can be seen among American Jews: more than 72% of American Jewish women between the ages of 25 and 44 have earned undergraduate degrees, compared with 65% of women 45–54, less than half of women 55–64, and only about a third of the women 65 and over (Figure 2.1). Unlike women, men between the ages of 45 and 64 are as likely to have earned undergraduate degrees as are men 25–44. Among men, a lower level of education characterizes only the age group of 65 and older.²

Therefore, among American Jews under 45, there are few gender differences in the proportion earning undergraduate degrees, and they are not statistically significant. However, from age 35 and older, the gender gap is wider, and it increases with age.³

Among those who received graduate degrees, women are more likely than men to have discontinued their education after earning a master’s degree, in all cohorts (Figure 2.2). However, there are some interesting differences between the cohorts. Among men, the proportion receiving doctorates is greater in the 35–44 cohort than in older cohorts, while the proportion earning

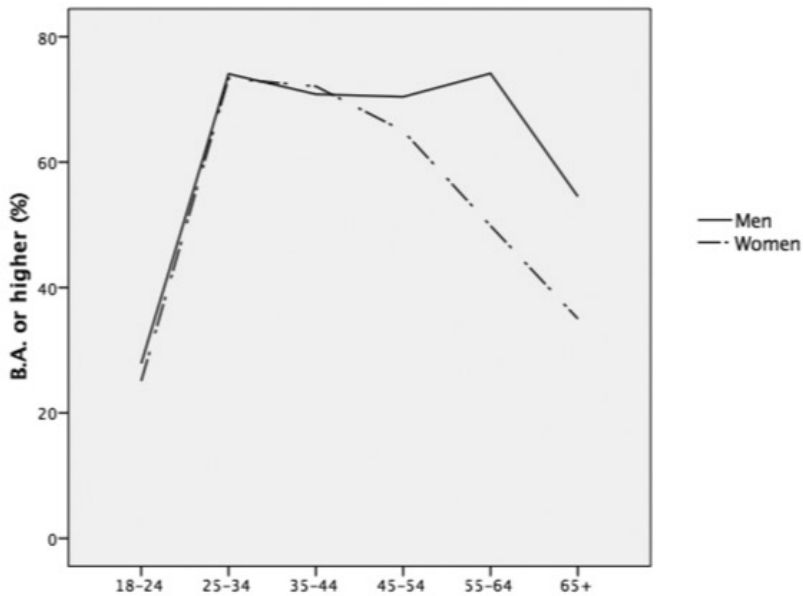


Figure 2.1. Percentage of American Jews achieving a B.A. or higher, by age and gender. *Data source:* NJPS, 2000–01.

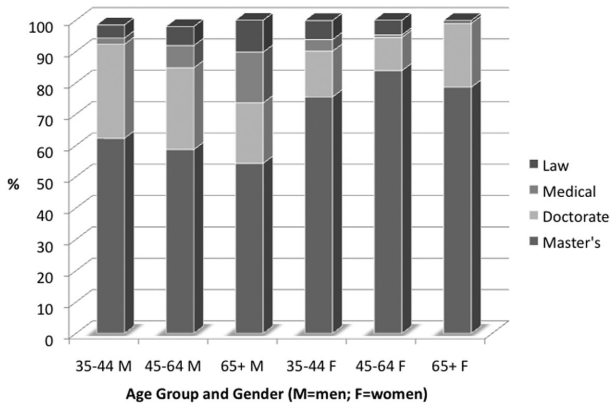


Figure 2.2. Distribution of graduate degrees, by gender and age (35 and over).

professional degrees is greater in the older cohorts than in the 35–44 cohort. Among men 65 and older, more than 16% of those earning graduate degrees went into medicine or dentistry and more than 10% went into law; among men 35–44, only 2% of those earning graduate degrees went into medicine or dentistry, and less than 5% went into law. Among women, on the other hand, the proportion earning professional degrees is greater in the 35–44 cohort, reflecting a proportion increasing from less than 1% among women 65 and older earning graduate degrees to nearly 10% of women 35–44. As a result, in the age cohort 35–44, the proportion of women’s professional graduate degrees is actually greater than that of men’s.

EDUCATIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN JEWS AND THE BROADER WHITE U.S. POPULATION

Compared with the broader U.S. white population, American Jews are much more highly educated. The modal educational attainment of American Jews is a bachelor’s degree, whereas that of the rest of the white population is a high school degree (Table 2.1). Seventy-eight percent of those in the U.S. white population have completed high school, compared with more than 96% of the Jewish subpopulation. Less than 20% of U.S. whites had completed an undergraduate degree in 2000, compared with 57.8% of Jews, and less than 7% had completed graduate or professional degrees, compared with more than a quarter of Jews. Nearly four times as many Jews have completed graduate or professional degrees than the broader white population, while nearly seven times as many whites have not completed high school as American Jews.

These general comparisons are reflected in the comparisons of each gender. Jewish men are much more highly educated than men in the

broader white population: 21.9% of white men have received an undergraduate degree or higher, compared with nearly two-thirds of Jewish men; and the proportion of Jewish men who have received graduate degrees is almost four times that of white men. On the other hand, the proportion of white men in the broader population who have not completed a high school education is nearly seven times that of Jewish men.

Similar differences are found when white women in the broader population are compared with Jewish women. Twenty-two percent of white women have not completed a high school education, more than seven times the percentage of Jewish women who have not completed high school. Only 16.9% of white women have earned an undergraduate degree, compared with more than half of Jewish women. The proportion of Jewish women who have completed a graduate degree is more than four times that of white women.

These differences can be expressed by dissimilarity coefficients, which measure the differences in educational distribution from one (sub)population to another (Table 2.2). The coefficient of dissimilarity is defined as $D = \frac{1}{2} \sum |P_{ai} - P_{bi}|$ where P_{ai} and P_{bi} are the percentages in each educational level (or other percentage distribution) from the first in a pair of distributions (*a*) and the second in a pair of distributions (*b*), respectively. (This formula applies wherever a coefficient of dissimilarity is used in this book.) In this case, the coefficient of dissimilarity tells us what percentage of the subgroup would have to change its educational distribution to have the same distribution as the subgroup with which we are comparing it. For example,

Table 2.2 Dissimilarity Coefficients of Educational Distributions for American Jews and U.S. Non-Hispanic Whites, by Gender

Population	American Jews, 2000–01			U.S. white population, 2000		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
<i>American Jews, 2000–01</i>						
Men						
Women	11.0					
Total	5.9	6.5				
<i>U.S. white population, 2000</i>						
Men	20.0	23.0	21.3			
Women	27.4	23.3	25.2	10.7		
Total	21.7	21.6	20.5	7.1	7.4	

Data source for American Jews: NJPS (2000–01); for U.S. whites: 2000 U.S. Census.

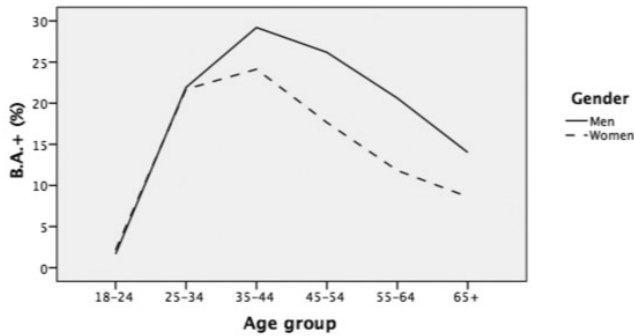


Figure 2.3. Percentage of U.S. non-Hispanic whites achieving a B.A. or higher, by age and gender, 2000. *Data source:* U.S. Census, 2000.

the coefficient of dissimilarity of 20.5 between the total white population of the United States and the Jewish population in the NJPS sample tells us that over 20% of the white population would have to change its education to have similar educational achievements as American Jews (or vice versa). The differences between Jewish and white women are slightly greater than those between Jewish and white men, with their dissimilarity coefficients 23.3 and 20.0, respectively. In each of these cases, it is the broader population that would have to increase its education to have achievements similar to those of American Jews.¹

The gender gap in education among American Jews is very similar to the gender gap in education among the broader white population (about 11% of women in each population would have to change their education to have achievements similar to those of men). In both populations, these differences reflect a higher proportion of women than of men who do not continue their education after high school graduation or drop out of college before completing a degree, while a higher proportion of men than women complete doctoral or professional degrees. A higher proportion of Jewish women go on to some college than do women in the broader white female population, but the pattern of gender differences is the same in both populations.

There is virtually no gender gap in the proportion completing high school or obtaining a higher degree in any age group in the broader white population. However, as among Jews, from age 35 on, there is a gender gap in the proportion receiving undergraduate degrees (Figure 2.3). The lack of gender difference among those under 35 may reflect the trend toward equality in educational achievements (or may simply be camouflaging gender differences in higher educational degrees, as we find among American Jews).

LIFELONG LEARNING

Even with their high educational attainment, a substantial proportion of American Jews are continuing their education as adults. Leaving out the youngest respondents (ages 18–24, of whom more than 70% attended school, many of whom were still completing college degrees), 15.5% of respondents aged 25 and over had attended school during the year preceding the survey (1999–2000). Twenty-five percent participated in adult Jewish education. A total of 32% participated in one or both of these educational pursuits. This was equally true of men and women over 25.

The proportions decrease with age, but even among those 65 and over, 11.9% had attended school that year, and 21.6% had received some adult Jewish education; 27.5% had participated in one or both (Table 2.3). Note also that, among women, there is an increase in school enrollment in the 40–59 age groups, indicating a pattern of “re-entry” as mothers return to continue their education after their children are older. In these age groups, women are more likely to be enrolled in school than are men.

The proportions enrolled in school as adults are higher than in the broader population: more than a third of American Jews aged 25 to 29 are enrolled in higher education, compared with only 11.4% of the broader population (Swail, 2002), but because many may be completing graduate degrees, a fairer comparison might be of older age groups. Among those, only 6.7% of those in the broader population between the ages of 30 and 39 were enrolled in school during the year 2000, compared with 16.8% of American Jews.

American Jewish adults enrolled in school are also more likely to be attending full time than are adults in the broader population. Among those between the ages of 25 and 29 in the broader population, 51% of those enrolled attend full time, compared with 55.6% of Jews; among those 30–34, the respective percentages are 39% (broader population) and 44.4% (Jews). Of those attending school, women are more likely to attend part time than men (62% compared with men’s 56%). But during the most intense work years (ages 35–54), men are more likely to be attending part time than women. In those age groups, men enrolled in school are also more likely to be employed than women (less than 10% of the men are not employed, compared with about a quarter of the women). This may reflect both work-related schooling and the increasing proportion of “nontraditional students” who are re-entry women returning for college degrees, often after their main childbearing and childrearing years—both trends increasing in the broader population as well.

Most of those enrolled in higher-education classes are married, among Jews as well as the broader population; this is especially true after age 35 for

Table 2.3 Percentage Enrolled in School and Percentage Who Receive Some Adult Jewish Education, by Age and Gender^a

Age	Enrolled in school, 1999–2000			Received adult Jewish education ^b		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
25–29	40.6 (126)	31.5 (144)	36.0 (270)	22.3 (126)	19.0 (145)	20.6 (271)
30–34	20.9 (140)	17.2 (155)	19.0 (295)	24.0 (140)	16.6 (155)	20.2 (295)
35–39	13.0 (139)	12.8 (155)	12.9 (294)	16.8 (139)	25.1 (154)	21.1 (293)
40–44	8.1 (169)	17.9 (204)	13.3 (373)	31.6 (169)	32.4 (201)	32.0 (370)
45–49	12.6 (188)	20.5 (232)	16.6 (420)	30.4 (188)	35.6 (232)	33.0 (420)
50–54	12.7 (212)	17.3 (242)	14.9 (454)	25.9 (212)	26.5 (241)	26.2 (453)
55–59	8.8 (127)	16.1 (181)	12.9 (308)	18.9 (127)	32.9 (181)	26.6 (308)
60–64	11.5 (106)	10.6 (140)	11.0 (246)	17.5 (104)	24.2 (139)	21.0 (243)
65+	12.6 (415)	11.3 (606)	11.9 (1021)	22.8 (412)	20.7 (601)	21.6 (1013)
Total	14.7 (1661)	16.2 (2128)	15.5 (3789)	23.9 (1656)	25.4 (2016)	24.7 (3772)

^aUnweighted sample size in parentheses; calculations performed using person-weights provided with dataset.

^bRespondents were asked, “During the past year, did you attend any adult Jewish education classes or any other kind of adult Jewish learning, such as synagogue programs, a book group, a study group at home or work, or a Bible study group, but excluding any college courses you may have taken?”

Jews. A higher proportion of women than men who return to school as adults over the age of 35 are divorced or separated (or, among those 65 and over, widowed). Among men, a higher proportion of those returning to school between 35 and 65 who are not currently married have never married (rather than being divorced or separated).

In summary, the patterns of learning that established higher educational attainment among American Jews than in the broader population appear to be evident in their patterns of lifelong learning as well. But the gender inequality characterizing more traditional education is different in

these patterns, and even reversed. Thus, women make up more of the adults attending school between the ages of 40 and 59, and more of the adults receiving Jewish education between the ages of 55 and 64. Such gender differences are not unique to American Jews, but they may increase the extent of gender parity in education over the life course. Non-married men engaging in later education are less likely to have ever married than are non-married women continuing their education; the women are more likely to be divorced or separated, presumably using their education to train for a better occupational position with which to support themselves and/or their families.

CHANGES SINCE 1990

Among both Jewish men and women, the proportion who did not go beyond high school in 1990 was more than twice the proportion of those who did not in 2000–01 (Table 2.4). About four and a half times as many men completed some college in 2000–01 as compared with 1990; and nearly five times as many women completed some college in 2000–01 as compared with 1990. There is only a small increase in the proportion earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees among both men and women in 2000–01 as compared with 1990, but the proportion of women completing doctoral and professional degrees increased, while the proportion of men completing such degrees actually decreased. In 1990, 85% of the graduate degrees

Table 2.4 Education of American Jews, 18 and Over, by Gender

Education	American Jews, 1990 (%)			American Jews, 2000–01 (%)		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Less than high school	4.5	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.8	3.7
High school graduate	29.6	40.3	18.3	15.9	13.2	34.9
Some college	4.3	5.2	25.7	22.9	19.7	4.7
Bachelor’s degree	31.1	28.9	30.5	31.7	33.1	30.1
Master’s degree	16.2	19.1	17.9	18.3	18.8	17.6
Doctoral, professional degree	14.2	3.5	4.6	7.8	11.3	8.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n, thousands) ^a	(1,874)	(1,821)	(1,752)	(3,321)	(1,569)	(3,696)
Bachelor’s degree or higher	61.7	51.5	52.0	57.8	65.2	56.6

Data sources: NJPS (1990, 2000–01).

^aWeighted by person-weights provided with datasets.

Table 2.5 Education of U.S. Non-Hispanic White Population, by Gender

Education	U.S. white population, 1990 (%)			U.S. white population, 2000 (%)		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Less than high school	22.7	22.6	22.6	22.1	22.0	22.1
High school graduate	29.8	33.9	32.0	28.7	32.9	30.9
Some college	26.1	26.9	32.0	27.2	28.2	27.7
Bachelor's degree	13.5	11.5	12.4	13.7	11.7	12.7
Master's degree	4.6	3.8	4.2	4.7	3.9	4.3
Doctoral, professional degree	3.3	1.2	2.2	3.5	1.3	2.3
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Weighted <i>n</i> , thousands)	(3,692)	(4,052)	(7,744)	(3,805)	(4,147)	(7,952)

Data sources: U.S. Population Census (1990, 2000).

earned by women were master's degrees; in 2000–01, this proportion dropped to 78% (the rest being doctoral or professional degrees).

Changes in the education of the broader white population of the United States have been much less dramatic (Table 2.5). There is a slight increase in the proportion of those finishing high school and also in the proportion of those going on to some college, but the proportion earning bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees is remarkably stable. Women's enrollment in undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs has increased at a rate greater than men's enrollment (NCES, 2003), but these changes are not reflected in major changes in educational distribution between 1990 and 2000.

In summary, increases in the education of Jews since 1990 are more dramatic than in the broader white population. The increase of Jewish women going on to doctoral and professional degrees is also more dramatic than in the broader population, although enrollment trends suggest that such changes will become apparent in the broader population in the near future.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We see that Jews' educational attainment continues to be higher than that of the greater U.S. population of non-Hispanic whites, extending into patterns of lifelong learning. In fact, the education of American Jews appears to have increased at a more dramatic rate than that of the broader population, maintaining and even increasing the gap in achievement.

We also see that the patterns of gender inequality in education among American Jews remain very similar to such patterns in the broader population—small but persistent, even at the higher levels of education of American Jews. Some indications that this is changing can be seen in the greater educational similarity of younger cohorts, especially in the higher proportion of Jewish women aged 35–44 who have completed master’s and first-professional degrees than men of similar age. However, this may only reflect women finishing their degrees faster than men (Buchman and Diprete, 2006).

In the coming chapters we will see whether the small but persistent differences in education influence educational patterns in marriage, labor force participation, or occupational attainment.