Creating bonds of friendship and community with American Jewish women. Effective action plans require a full understanding of the perspectives of both Israeli and American Jewish women.

**Evaluation**

Now connections to Israel and the renewal of existing ones must be evaluated and findings shared widely both in the United States and Israel. Research is needed to examine the effects of each of these interventions—dialogues between American and Jewish women, professional, educational, and cultural exchanges; collaborative projects; and outreach to Israeli Americans and to young women and college students. What outcomes, intended and unintended, did initiatives achieve? How many women did they reach? How did participants react? How did the interventions affect relationships between American Jewish women and Israeli women? Complete and accurate evaluation information is invaluable to efforts to build strong and enduring connections between Jewish women in Israel and America.

**Action Research Proposals**

**The Perspective of American Jewish Women**

Little is known about American Jewish women's relationship to Israel. What does Israel mean to American Jewish women today? How interested are they in learning about Israel, visiting the land and becoming acquainted with Israeli women? What are their stereotypes of Israelis? What experiences do they have when they visit Israel? Such information is critical to women's Zionist organizations' planning and to the development of meaningful programs for young American Jewish women.

**The Perspective of Israeli Jewish Women**

Equally important are Israeli women's views of their American counterparts. What do Israeli women know about American women, their lives, values, and concerns? How close do they feel to American Jewish women? To what extent do they recognize a common agenda for Jewish women in both countries? How interested are they in studies often are designed from a male perspective or are generic so that the very questions they ask fail to probe issues of particular concern to women. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey asked interviewees how many Jewish organizations they belong to, how much money they contribute, and so on. In contrast, a 1993 study commissioned by the Women's Division of the Baltimore Federation was specifically interested in women's reactions to Jewish organizations. This survey included questions about perceptions of women's groups versus men's groups and about women's ability to achieve top positions in the community. Such questions about the distribution of power or the desirability of women's associations usually are not included in studies sponsored by federations or Jewish organizations, other than women's groups.

A rich literature by and about women has developed since the mid-1970s. Topics include female emotional disorders, communication patterns, leadership and organization styles, job equity, sexual harassment, and institutional discrimination. Much of this work was motivated by the women's movement and the attendant founding of women's studies programs, professional associations, and social science journals dedicated to women's scholarship and advocacy. Research studies on women generally
have not included separate analyses of Jewish women. The underlying assumption is that Jewish women are basically similar to other white women and that class and race are more powerful predictors of outcomes than religion.

Nonetheless, existing research indicates that Jewish women in America differ in significant ways from the general white female population. Jewish women are more highly educated and tend to hold higher positions in the work world. Patterns of childbearing and employment also differ for Jewish women. Differences in core demographic characteristics and early-childhood socialization, along with the particular expectations and requirements that come from membership in the Jewish community, can be expected to produce a number of distinct attitudes, values and experiences for Jewish females. The one study that looked for such differences (B'hai Brith Women, 1985) found, for example, that Jewish women's views on many social issues are significantly more liberal than those of their non-Jewish counterparts. There is some suggestion that exposure to the workplace—more common for Jewish women—has a liberalizing effect on some socio-political attitudes such as support for the Equal Rights Amendment and for a woman's right to choose abortion. The assumption that Jewish women are indistinguishable from other American women is challenged by current research, scant though it is.

In this chapter, recent research on American Jewish women is organized around two questions:

- Who are today's American Jewish women?
- What is their attachment to Judaism and the Jewish community?

This literature review reveals the gaps in our knowledge and understanding and points to directions for future research. It also serves to ground women's conversations, action plans and interventions in objective data rather than anecdotes, untested assumptions, myths or stereotypes. The research provides a common knowledge base from which action plans can arise.

**Sources**

Information in this chapter comes from three sources: (1) journal and magazine articles, (2) unpublished research papers, and (3) documents from federations, Jewish women's organizations and other agencies in the Jewish community. This material was gathered by searching library databases, contacting researchers in the field, and working through the national offices of Jewish organizations. The focus of this literature review is on quantitative and qualitative studies produced between 1984 and 1994.

**Methods**

The studies presented in this chapter employ various research methods: national population surveys, surveys based on local populations, surveys of Jewish organizations, interviews with selected individuals.

**National Population Surveys**

Some researchers used data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (e.g., Fishman, 1991; Geffen, 1991). Given the scope of this database, they were able to break out results according to various demographic characteristics such as work status, family composition, volunteerism and philanthropy among younger and older women. Others (B'hai Brith Women, 1985; Cohen & Rosen, 1992) created their own national sample. Cohen & Rosen's study was based on 543 men and 570 women selected to reflect the overall American Jewish population with regard to age, income, marital status, geographic region and Jewish heads of household.

**Surveys Based on Defined Populations**

Other studies are based on local samples. The 1992 Baltimore Women's Division study was comprised of 229 telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of women on the Jewish federation's list of active participants and contributors. In another study, views of domestic violence were tested with a survey of 3,000 randomly selected households in Philadelphia's Jewish community (Silverstein, 1994). Occasionally, studies use samples developed from the membership list of a single organization. The Hadassah National Membership study (Kosmin, 1994) consisted of telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,502 women, all dues-paying members of the organization.

**Surveys of Organizations**

Surveys of organizations generally are conducted by national agencies that gather data from their member organizations. Often the topic—domestic abuse, sexual harassment on the job, or women in the work force—is relevant to women. The Association of Jewish Family & Children Service Agencies conducted two surveys of their member agencies—one on single-parent family caseloads (1987), the other on the incidence and treatment of abuse cases (1988). The Council of Jewish Federations (1993) conducts periodic surveys on the representation of women in the governance of local Jewish federations. The JCC

Association/N.A. has gathered data on female employment and salaries in Jewish Community Centers nationwide (Pine & Kagen, 1992).

**Interviews with Select Individuals**

Other material presented here derives from a qualitative, journalistic approach in which individuals were selected to be interviewed in depth. Schneider's 1993 exploration of Jewish women's philanthropy, for one, is based on interviews with more than 100 women donors to Jewish causes, professional fundraisers, money managers and psychologists.

Each of these methods has serious limitations. When existing databases are used (e.g., the National Jewish Population Survey), the investigation is constrained by the questions contained in the original research. Many valuable hypotheses go untested and fruitful avenues of inquiry are left unexplored. When local samples are used, it is questionable whether findings can be generalized to other situations. It cannot be assumed, for example, that findings from Baltimore Women's Division would hold for other federations or that the experience of women in Philadelphia would be similar to that of women in smaller communities or elsewhere in the country. When purposive sampling is used, such as in more journalistic pieces or studies that rely on samples of convenience, it is not entirely clear whether the sample represents a larger population and, therefore, whether results can be generalized.

These limitations must be acknowledged and redressed in future research. Nonetheless, findings from what research there is cannot be dismissed. Together, these diverse studies present a picture of the current status of American Jewish women.
their personal lives and communal attachments. The data answer some questions and invariably raise others. As we examine what is known today, the course for future research becomes clear.

**WHAT CHARACTERIZES TODAY'S AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN?**

**High Achievement**

Jewish women are achievers. They are the most highly educated women in the United States and their level of education has been increasing markedly. More than half of all Jewish women are college graduates, compared with only 19% of non-Jewish white women (Chiswick, 1993; Geffen, 1991). Consequently, Jewish women are highly employable in many occupations. Forty-six percent of adult Jewish women work full-time outside the home and this percentage is increasing. The majority hold professional, semiprofessional, or managerial positions; they earn enough to be self-sufficient and/or a significant economic partner in the family (Fishman, 1991; Geffen, 1991; Greenberg, 1991). The paycheck undoubtedly keeps many women in the work force; quitting would entail a loss of independence or a major cost to the family.

**High Achievement and Marriage**

Close to two-thirds of American Jewish women are married, down from 20 years ago when more Jewish women married and fewer divorced. Women increasingly are leading complex lives that blend familial and professional obligations. To Jewish women, such a mix is defensible. A majority of Jewish women believe that working women make more interesting marriage partners than nonworking women, and that they are equally good as mothers. Non-Jewish women are significantly less likely to hold such views (B'Nai B'rith Women, 1985).

**High Achievement and Parents**

High achievement appears to be a legacy from Jewish females' parents. Although Jewish and non-Jewish women share many of the same desires for their daughters, Jewish women rank higher such qualities as ambition, intelligence and strength, which would help their daughters to become successful. Jewish women also are significantly more likely to maintain that parents have an obligation to pay for their children's college education (B'Nai B'rith Women, 1985). These data suggest that Jewish women are more likely to encourage their daughters to seek higher education and to support them in this endeavor. Thus, their daughters are likely to become another generation of well-educated women who, in turn, will similarly encourage their own daughters.

Jewish fathers, too, contribute to the high achievement of their daughters. A study in Boston found that 81% of Jewish fathers who are professionals have daughters who also became professionals. That is about the same level as for Jewish sons, but is significantly higher than for non-Jews (Goldsheider, 1986).

**High Achievement and Children**

Jewish families are relatively small and are likely to remain so. Jewish women on average have fewer children than do non-Jewish white women and the fertility rates of Jewish women are declining (Goldstein, 1992). Many Jewish women (59%) do not feel that children are essential to their adult family life and maintain that a child-free marriage can be as complete and satisfying as a marriage with children (B'Nai B'rith Women, 1985). These childbearing attitudes and behavior, however, cannot be blamed on increases in Jewish women's employment. Research indicates that employment and occupational status are unrelated to the number of children women have or expect to have (Geffen, 1991; Monson, 1987a).

Jewish women with children adjust their work schedules when their children are young. Particularly when preschool children are in the home, Jewish women are less likely to work than non-Jewish women if they do work, it is for fewer hours (Chiswick, 1993).

**Friends**

Friendship networks forge an important link between individuals and community. The sociological theory of "plausibility structure" posits that the network of people with whom we interact regularly helps make certain beliefs and thoughts more or less plausible to us. The conversations we have with our friends confirm or strengthen our beliefs and direct our behavior. The majority of American Jewish women (65%) report that most of their closest friends are Jewish (B'Nai B'rith Women, 1985). Given the plausibility structure of a Jewish social network, it is not surprising that the women who are in primarily Jewish social networks are also the ones most connected to the Jewish community. These women are more likely to be affiliated with a congregation, volunteer time to Jewish organizations, and donate money to Jewish causes than are women with fewer Jewish friends (Fishman, 1991).

**Interruption**

More than a fourth of young Jewish women today are intermarried, a significant and growing increase over the intermarriage rate in past generations (Clarrar, 1991). Interruption is particularly acceptable to divorced and widowed Jewish women as they consider marrying again. About half of these women say that intermarriage is definitely an option for them (Monson, 1987a). Friendship networks may be implicated in the choice of marriage partners. Single women in large Jewish friendship circles view Jewish men more positively than women with close non-Jewish friends (Monson, 1987a). Thus they may be more inclined to consider a relationship with a Jewish man and less inclined to look outside the group for a partner.

Interruption touches many dimensions of a Jewish woman's connection to the Jewish community. For example, Jewish women married to non-Jewish men are significantly less likely to belong to a synagogue or to volunteer for Jewish causes than are women who marry Jewish men. They are more likely than other Jewish women to put their time, money and energy into non-Jewish causes (Fishman, 1991). Intermarried women can face difficulties in the organized Jewish community—they may not feel welcomed by
congregations and other groups, and they may have trouble finding a niche that suits them and their family.

It is not possible to determine whether communal involvement creates Jewish friendships and Jewish marriage or vice versa. It is quite likely that each influences the other. Regardless, the connection between Jewish social ties and Jewish communal behaviors appears consistently in the research—as one intensifies so does the other; as one weakens, the other does too.

**WHAT IS THE JEWISH WOMAN’S ATTACHMENT TO JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?**

**Community Support for Jewish Women**

Many women (55%) experience the Jewish community as either neutral or unsupportive in its attitude toward women combining marriage, childbearing and careers (Monson, 1987b). This perception is not likely to draw working Jewish women closer to the community.

Jewish communal institutions and congregations are designed around marriage and traditional family life. It is often difficult for single, divorced and widowed women to find a comfortable niche in these organizations and to have their lifestyles accepted and validated. Unmarried women are the most negative in their evaluations of the organized Jewish community (Monson, 1987b). They complain that the community wants their talent but does not make them feel comfortable as singles or help them find mates.

The Jewish community may not be supportive of working women, single women, or women in “nontraditional” households. It also is not always supportive of its own female professionals working within Jewish communal agencies. The Jewish community is not immune to the institutional discrimination noted in the general literature on women in the workplace. This discrimination may not be readily acknowledged. When participants in studies are shown information about an individual’s outcomes (e.g., a person denied a promotion at work), they fail to see discrimination. Only when aggregate data are presented do patterns of discrimination emerge and are people able to recognize the existence of institutional sexism (Crosby et al., 1989). In the same way, research shows that most Jewish professionals do not believe there are obstacles that keep women from attaining the highest level positions in their organizations (Iserman & Hostein, 1994). Regardless of the perception, aggregated data paint a consistent picture of institutional discrimination in which women’s work is devalued and the “glass ceiling” is impenetrable.

At the entry level in Jewish communal organizations, there are no gender differences with regard to salary, assignment, responsibility and power. Once women move toward mid-management, discrepancies and inequities become more apparent. An estimated 60% of the 12,000 to 15,000 Jewish communal professionals in the United States are women (Iserman & Hostein, 1994). However, the majority work down in the ranks. For example, 61% of federation staff are women; however, only 18% of executive directors are women, and none of these is in a large city (with 45,000 Jews or more) (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993). Likewise, 66% of JCC professionals (not including nursery school directors and teachers) are women, yet only 16% of Center executive directors are women (Pine & Kagen, 1991). Of the New York UJA/Federation agencies, only 20% are headed by a female executive. Of all the national Jewish organizations (excluding all women’s organizations such as Hadassah), only one has a woman at the helm (Iserman & Hostein, 1994).

Lower positions necessarily mean lower salaries. In Philadelphia, for example, the fourth largest Jewish community in the country, women are more often found in the second and third tier of the city’s organizations and agencies, and they are commemorously clustered at the lower ends of the salary range: 11% of the female employees earn more than $55,000; 76% of the male employees earn more than that (Iserman & Hostein, 1994). Even when men and women are matched by job category, discrepancies can be noted. Male executive directors in JCCs average $84,346 in annual salary; female executive directors average $68,032. Male Jewish education specialists in the Center movement average $44,241 while their female counterparts average $36,079 (Pine & Kagen, 1991).

There undoubtedly are a number of explanations for these findings: the enduring power of the “old boys’ network,” stereotypes about women held by predominantly older, male lay leaders who do the hiring, or low turnover at the top creating few openings for women (Iserman & Hostein, 1994). Full understanding of the gender gap will require careful, objective study of these and other institutional factors that create and sustain gender differences in the Jewish community.

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Research also has documented women’s involvement as lay leaders in the community. Findings show that volunteerism in the Jewish community is not threatened by Jewish women’s educational achievement, career aspirations, or professional success. Rather, it is weak Jewish life in all other domains—social, cultural and religious—that jeopardizes community participation (Fishman, 1991). Women who volunteer for Jewish organizations are most likely to be married to a Jewish man, to have predominantly Jewish friendship circles, and to be affiliated with a congregation. They are also most likely to be younger than 44 and well-educated.

Here is what the research shows about Jewish women’s community involvement:

- **Jewish women are donors.** They are somewhat more likely than Jewish men to volunteer time to both Jewish and nonsectarian organizations, and compared with non-Jewish women they are much more likely to belong to business, professional, ethnic/national, civic and public affairs organizations (B’nai B’rith Women, 1985; Cohen & Rosen, 1992).

- **Non-Jewish organizations have a far greater pull on the volunteer energy of Jewish women than do Jewish organizations.** While 45% of young Jewish women who work full-time volunteer for non-Jewish causes, less than half that number (18%) give their time to Jewish causes (Fishman, 1991). The reason is simple;
women contribute where their interests lie (Baltimore Women's Division; 1992; 1993). Those who feel committed to Judaism and Jewish causes put their time and energy into Jewish organizations; others are attracted elsewhere.

- There are structural blockages to involvement in Jewish organizations. About one in three Jewish women say they are less involved in Jewish organizations than they would like to be (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). This finding suggests that the personal desire or motivation to participate is there, so it must be contextual or institutional obstacles that are preventing full expression of the desire. One possibility is that Jewish organizations' outreach efforts are insufficient—many women simply are not invited to join in. Almost a third of the women interviewed for the Baltimore Women's Division study said they became actively involved because someone asked them to. Other research corroborates the notion that people often do not participate or contribute merely because they are not asked (Berger, 1991; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1990).

- Women are increasingly able to move through the hierarchy in Jewish organizations. In the last two decades, women have gained notably in their participation in federations and in the level of leadership they attain. Twenty years ago, only 17% of the officers and board members of federations were women; today, 32% of federation leaders are women (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993).

- Some old notions of the appropriate roles for women in Jewish organizations remain. Women on federation boards, for example, are much more likely to be the secretary than the treasurer. Women's Division remains an important route into power for female leaders. More than 4 in 10 (42%) of Women Division chairs have gone on to become officers in their federations; a few (10%) have become presidents (Council of Jewish Federations, 1993).

Those who feel committed to Judaism and Jewish causes put their time and energy into Jewish organizations; others are attracted elsewhere.

- Jewish men and women have similar involvement profiles. They are equally likely to belong to Jewish organizations, attend meetings and functions, pay dues, hold office and give money or gifts. They generally agree that the most important goals for these organizations are transmitting Jewish traditions and values and helping other Jews (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). The fundamental views and behaviors that support the organized Jewish community are not differentiated by gender.

- Women are motivated to become involved with Jewish organizations for somewhat different reasons than men. When men join Jewish organizations, they are more likely than women to consider the organization's potential to enhance their professional networks (20% men vs. 10% women). Women are more likely to think about helping others or a cause they believe in (76% women vs.

69% men) (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). Although neither entirely characterizes one group or the other, men are more likely to have self-serving motivations and women to have other-serving motivations.

- Most women enjoy being involved in co-ed groups. Many of these same women, however, also enjoy being involved in women's-only groups. It generally is not the case that women prefer one type of organization over the other. Research further shows that women do not disdain women's-only groups but feel they are as serious, purposeful and efficacious as men's-only or co-ed groups. The majority of women (57%) see the need for a separate Women's Division in federation. They feel it gives a woman a way to be involved in federation and to receive recognition in her own right. Only 19% feel that Women's Division is unnecessary (Baltimore Women's Division, 1992).

- Jewish women believe Jewish organizations should be inclusive. Asked to rate guidelines considered most important for a Jewish organization other than a synagogue or temple, the majority said the organization should include men and women, Jews and non-Jews. Most said the organization should offer cultural experiences that appeal to non-Jews as well as Jews. Few felt it was important for the organization to focus on Jewish issues or to include Jewish education at functions (Cohen & Rosen, 1992). In the long-standing tension between universalism and particularism, Jewish women in the 1990s appear inclined toward the former with an emphasis on inclusion, liberalism and assimilation.

PHILANTHROPY

Women also contribute to the community through charitable donations. Giving time and money appear to complement rather than substitute for one another. Those who participate as volunteers give more money than those who do not volunteer (Monson, 1987a; 1991). Contributions to Jewish causes are associated with Jewish identity and practices. Denominational affiliation, synagogue membership and Jewish friendship circles relate significantly to giving patterns to federations and other Jewish organizations. Traditional Jewish women contribute more often to Jewish causes than do women in the liberal denominations or those who characterize themselves as "just Jewish." Women who are synagogue members are significantly more likely to contribute than are nonmembers. And those who report that all of their close friends are Jewish are more likely to contribute to Jewish causes than those who report predominantly non-Jewish friendship circles. Other results show that women who believe their Jewishness has played a positive role in their career advancement are more likely to give to their local Jewish federation than those who see no effect or a negative one (Monson, 1991).

Many women choose to make their Jewish contributions specifically through women's channels. Women's Divisions, particularly in smaller communities, contribute significantly to
federations. In small and intermediate cities, with Jewish populations of less than 15,000, Women's Division accounts for about 20% of the total campaign. In parts of South Florida where elderly retired women comprise a large part of the Jewish population, the Women's Division raises more than 30% of the local total (Kosmin, 1989).

Jewish women also support women's causes in the general community, but the secular women are most likely to do so. Nearly 47% of Orthodox Jewish women make financial contributions to women's causes, compared with 80% of the secular Jewish women who make contributions (Monson, 1991).

RELIGION

Jewish identity is a mixture of religious and ethnic or cultural identity. It has been suggested that American Jews have moved from being a religious group, a community of belief governed by an all-encompassing system of laws and practices, to a community of shared identity in which feelings of ethnic belonging are dominant (Medding, 1987). Jewish women reflect this move; only 28% of Jewish women—versus 56% of non-Jewish women—say that religion is very important in their lives. Jewish women also attend religious services less regularly than do non-Jewish women. Only 10% of Jewish women say they attend regularly compared with 44% of their non-Jewish counterparts (B'nai B'rith Women, 1985).

Some writers maintain that Jewish identity has clinical implications (Beck, 1990; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1980; Saper, 1991; R. Siegel, 1986). Jewish observance may or may not promote physical, psychological, or social well-being but there are indications that Jewish identity may produce conflict, avoidance and/or humiliation. The issues are equally complex and difficult for those who eschew their religious tradition (the assimilationists), those who had left but now seek to reclaim their Jewishness, and those who are openly Jewish and confronted by negative images and hurtful stereotypes of Jewish women.

Jewish Education

While Jewish identity may be shifting, there has been a significant increase in the Jewish education of women. Young American Jewish women today are far more likely than their grandparents were to receive some formal Jewish education. In Metro West, New Jersey, for example, 56% of women over age 65 have received some formal Jewish education, compared with 80% of high school-aged girls (Fishman, 1987). Not surprisingly, there are substantial differences among women with traditional Jewish, liberal Jewish, and secular backgrounds. Orthodox women are the most likely to have had substantial Jewish education; secular Jews the most likely to have had none. Despite these differences, it should be noted that 30% of young Orthodox women (ages 25-44) have had no Jewish education and an equal percentage of young secular women have had a substantial amount (Fishman & Goldstein, 1993).

Religious Observance

Jewish women are selective in their practice of Jewish traditions and rituals. Research shows that most women light Hanukkah candles and fast on Yom Kippur; few celebrate Purim and even fewer regularly light Shabbat candles (Geffen, 1991). It is interesting that Hanukkah and Yom Kippur are the two ritual observances that capture women's attention as they represent very different aspects of Judaism: Hanukkah is a historical commemoration, Yom Kippur a holy day. Hanukkah is a time of joy; Yom Kippur a time of reflection, awe and atonement. Hanukkah, some would say, has been re-created for modern youth as the "Jewish Christmas"; Yom Kippur remains a day of serious Jewish intent. It may be that each holiday is maintained precisely for the qualities listed here.

The observance of home ritual is more the province of married than single women. For example, 79% of married women usually or always light Hanukkah candles compared with 61% of single women. Sometimes ritual is in the service of creating a Jewish home; other times it is not. Thus, 30% of married Jewish women frequently have a Christmas tree in their household compared with 16% of single Jewish women (Geffen, 1991).

Home ritual is also maintained more consistently by working women. Employed Jewish women who are well-educated, working in high-status occupations, and juggling career and family are those who most often incorporate Jewish rituals and synagogue affiliation into their lives (Geffen, 1991). Some Jewish women (23%) find that religious observance enriches their lives and thus relieves some career stress; some (37%) find that Jewish communal involvement provides networking valuable for their careers (Monson, 1987a). For many Jewish women there is a connection between their Jewish identity and their business or professional lives. This connection is often advantageous and satisfying.

Women and Traditional Judaism

Modern Orthodox women are much more likely than traditional Orthodox women (73% vs. 9%) to voice feelings of conflict related to the sex roles articulated in Jewish law rather than those of secular society. Modern Orthodox women also are less likely to be fully satisfied with their religious community than are traditional Orthodox women (10% vs. 50%) (Schwartz, 1991). There thus appear to be trade-offs for traditional women who decide to move toward more liberal practices of Judaism—what they gain as women they may lose as members of a religious community.

The aspects of life in traditional Jewish communities that provide women with strength has been well-researched. Results suggest that separate but equal roles for men and women, control of sexuality, help in finding marriage partners, and guidelines for nuclear family life offer women clarity and security in their lives (Fishman, 1988; Umansky, 1992). The research, however, is equivocal on the suggestion that Orthodox and religiosity are associated with higher incidence of depressive symptoms among women. One study finds a positive correlation between traditional Judaism and women's depression, another finds the opposite (Lowenthal & Goldblatt, 1993; Schwartz, 1991).

Traditional practices may be linked to psychological and social benefits for women, but there is little evidence that they affect physical health. Research on this topic has focused on the practices of miktzah (the ritual bath) and nidda (abstinence from sexual intercourse during
Religious Leadership

The role of women in religious leadership has changed dramatically in recent years. Since the first woman rabbi was ordained in 1972, more than 300 women have been ordained. In 1983, the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary decided to admit women into the rabbinical school as candidates for ordination. Now half of the doctoral candidates in Talmud, rabbinics and midrash are women (Musilah, 1994). Women who were not even considered members of the congregation in many Conservative synagogues during the 1940s and 1950s are now leaders in local synagogues and in regional and national synagogues and organizations (Monson, 1992). Close to 30% of UAHC (Reform) congregational presidents are women, nearly double the percentage in 1978 (Kaye, 1992).

Women are still underrepresented in the national denominational bodies. The low numbers of women in the Reform movement, where we would most expect to see women, indicates there is still a long road to travel to arrive at equality of the sexes. Of the more than 50 full-time tenured HUC-JIR staff members at the three campuses in the United States, only five are women. Of the 30 standing committees of CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis, the association of Reform rabbis) only three are chaired by women. Of the 14 regional directors of the UAHC, only one is a woman (Kaye, 1992).

Women Who Are Rabbis

Women rabbis have faced discrimination in their education at the seminary, in applying for jobs, in their salaries, and on the job:

- 43% of women rabbis feel that being a woman put them at a disadvantage during rabbinical school.
- 48% of women rabbis say they were asked inappropriate questions about being a woman during job interviews.
- Half of women rabbis believe they have not been offered a job because they are female. 46% say they are paid less than male rabbis with similar positions (Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress, 1993).
- Only 5% of women rabbis feel that women have equality within the rabbinical organizations.
- Slightly over half of Reform women rabbis have experienced some harassment (Musilah, 1994).

Nonetheless, as women gain position, voice and power in the religious institutions, change has followed. A majority of women rabbis (66%) say their congregation or institution gives them the same respect it gives male rabbis. Women rabbis have inspired changes in liturgy, added a new perspective to Jewish scholarship, and brought a more egalitarian and inclusive quality to Jewish life. Most women rabbis (71%), for example, hold events about feminism and women and Judaism at their jobs even though many get criticized for doing so (Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress, 1993; Schneider, 1992).

Women rabbis sometimes find that being female is an advantage when doing pastoral counseling or performing life cycle ceremonies. Women who are rabbis bring unique qualities to these tasks and congregants often seek them out precisely because they are female.

Directions for Future Research

The demographic characteristics of American Jewish women described in this chapter offer insight into their attachment to Judaism and the Jewish community. Yet, the research has limitations; though it answers some questions, it raises many more. This literature review makes clear the need for further research, based on a more realistic view of American Jewish women.

Research on American Jewish women can be very valuable. It informs us about the quality of women’s lives, their aspirations, interests and concerns. Such information reveals patterns and trends in American Jewish women’s characteristics, behaviors and attitudes. The research enriches our understanding: it is a mirror into which we gaze to see ourselves more clearly.

Research on American Jewish women also can have useful applications. It can be an evaluation device, assessing, for example, the Jewish community’s success in reaching and serving diverse women. It can be a needs assessment tool, indicating where there are unmet needs and where there is interest in specific programs and services. And it can serve as an early warning device, pointing to issues on the community’s horizon.

Research on American Jewish women must be both quantitative and qualitative. Many questions concerning demographic characteristics—age, education, employment, income, fertility rates,
neighborhood, residential mobility, patterns of volunteerism, philanthropy and congregational affiliation; frequency of personal Jewish practices; and political, social and religious attitudes—are best answered through the analysis of survey statistics.

Other questions require the in-depth, richly textured data produced by qualitative research (e.g., personal interviews and focus groups). Such research can reveal Jewish women's feelings and motivations. For example, although statistical data on women's personal and work lives are useful, mere numbers are superficial and lack human sensibility. Research should delve beneath the surface: Why do Jewish women pursue educational achievement? What leads them to their occupational choices? How do the women who experience work/family overload feel about this situation? Pursuing such questions will move the research enterprise from description to explanation.

Exploration of Differences

Current research shows that American Jewish women are best characterized by their diversity. They differ in terms of their Jewish backgrounds and experiences, their lifestyles, family compositions and occupations. They live in different parts of the country. They are young and old; rich and poor; single, divorced, married and widowed. They are homosexual and heterosexual. They are religiously observant, liberal and secular. And on and on. When we focus on the various groups that comprise the population of American Jewish women, the possibilities for research expand exponentially. Studies need to be refined in this way, without losing sight of the essential bonds among all Jewish women.

The demographic data remind us that there is no "average" or "typical" American Jewish woman. Each time we notice a trend, we are compelled to inquire about those who are not in the bulge of the distribution curve. For example, 90% of Jewish women under age 45 have graduated high school and completed at least some college. Although the overall trend shows a high level of educational achievement, we need to remember the 10% of young Jewish women who are less well educated and thus potentially face limitations in their personal and work lives.

The data on personal and family life disabuse us of stereotypes of Jewish women and their lives. For example, over the last two decades, the percentage of Jewish women who are married has declined from 72% to 64% while the percentage of those who are divorced, widowed, and/or single (never married) has increased. Research shows that Jewish women generally have more liberal views of divorce than their non-Jewish counterparts. Furthermore, a notable proportion of unmarried Jewish women feel that marriage is unnecessary or unimportant (45% of the never married and 60% of the divorced and widowed). Such research draws our attention to the fact that women increasingly are living in households that do not fit the traditional Jewish norm of first-time married Jewish husband and Jewish wife with two children.

It is thus important to develop a demographic profile of Jewish women today—the distribution by age, education, marital status, family composition and social class—because these characteristics affect most aspects of a woman's life. Significant differences often emerge when research data are analyzed according to demographic variables. For instance, women 45 and older have been shown to have life experiences and attitudes quite distinct from those of younger women. Research results regarding women's community participation, philanthropy, Jewish education or ritual observance should always be analyzed by demographic variables to uncover the differences among diverse groups of American Jewish women.

Results should also be analyzed by geographic region. Jews from urban centers have slowly but steadily been forming Jewish "outposts" in small cities, suburbs, and exurban areas across the country. Research must take into account the experiences of Jewish women living outside New York City, Baltimore and other major centers of Jewish life. Our studies need to ask: How do the experiences of Jewish women in small towns compare with those of women in urban areas that have large Jewish populations? Are the values and interests of Jewish women in the Northeast shared by Jewish women in the South, Midwest, Northwest and West?

Use of Comparison Groups

Research on American Jewish women also must be considered in light of two comparison groups, Jewish men and groups of non-Jewish women. Such examinations will reveal what is unique in the experience, perceptions, values and needs of American Jewish women and what is shared with other Jews and with other women. For example, focus groups can be designed for Jewish men and women to discuss questions concerning the complexities of everyday life, Jewish communal involvement, and Jewish experiences. Findings would indicate which issues are gender-related and which are not. Similarly, research that compares Jewish women with other women will clarify which views and experiences are related to being female and Jewish in America, and which are not.

Research on American Jewish women will never be complete. Continuous social and cultural changes mean that contextual factors are constantly shifting. The experiences of one generation can differ markedly from those of the next. Since the onset of the women's movement, for example, the quality of women's lives and the expression of their interests and concerns have been changing. Now there are Jewish feminist literature and publications, women's rituals, prayer groups and study sessions. More Jewish women are entering the work force than ever before, and notable changes are occurring in the Jewish family, such as increases in divorce, blended families and intermarried families. Social discrimination based on antisemitism is on the decline and the movement for peace in Israel is on the ascendency. Across religions and denominations in the United States, women are calling for a greater voice in their religious institutions and congregations. Research from 10 years ago may no longer accurately describe
today's realities. Even from one year to the next, shifts in the economy, politics, technology, law, medical research, and so on, can mean substantial shifts in the lives, views and needs of American Jewish women.

The research on American Jewish women must be continually updated and upgraded. There is no end to what we can learn, and no end to our need to know.

REFERENCES


