

TRIPLE PLAY: DECONSTRUCTING JEWISH LIVES

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Following the lead and example of Marshall Sklare, this paper uses the tools of quantitative and qualitative social science analysis along with literary analysis to explore changing behaviors and attitudes of Jewish women, and manifestations of connectedness to and alienation from Judaism, the Jewish people, and Jewish institutions among them.

When I came to the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University in 1985, the Center's founder and director, Professor Marshall Sklare, of blessed memory, assigned me the task of investigating a series of topics in American Jewish life. Professor Sklare shared with me his own techniques for exploring new developments. In addition to his ground-breaking work conducting primary research as a participant-observer on subjects as diverse as the suburban Jewish community and the Conservative movement, Professor Sklare liked to make use of written materials from a broad range of sources — the general and Jewish press, books, scholarly articles, and magazines. A voracious reader, he continually clipped articles which would be useful in current or future research projects, and he arranged those clippings in a systematically organized comprehensive bank of vertical files. Moreover, Professor Sklare was always attentive to anecdotal materials: an experience at a family Bar Mitzvah, a television program, a casual interaction, he showed me, might offer clues to significant trends which could be fruitfully investigated.

I enjoyed my work with Marshall Sklare immensely. He was a delightful conversationalist as well as a thoughtful scholar, a man whose wit grew out of genuine interest in human beings. We spoke together long and often about Jewish life in the United States, broad-ranging conversations about what Jews ate and thought and studied, about when and why they married, about the work they did and the trips they took and the children they chose to have or not to have. But it was not until Professor Sklare had passed away, bereaving the entire field of the sociology of the Jews, which he had shaped, and most especially Brandeis University and the Cohen Center, that I began to understand that Marshall Sklare's eclectic modes of information gathering pointed in the direction of an important methodology.

With Marshall Sklare I had been initiated into the use of a far broader range of written and anecdotal materials than scholars often turn to. From other colleagues at the Cohen Center I learned how to analyze statistical data and how to conduct structured interviews and focus groups. My own graduate training in English literature predisposed me to use fiction, poetry, and memoirs for a different kind of illumination of individuals and societies. Because of Marshall Sklare's example, I began to understand that casting a wide net was more than an idiosyncratic personal preference, but was, instead, a valuable approach to the study of contemporary American Jewish life.

When a navigator or astronomer is having difficulty getting her bearings on the position of a distant object, she can employ a mathematical technique called triangulation. By measuring the angles at the points of a triangle, she can determine the exact position of the elusive object. The farther apart the points of the triangle, the more reliable the technique, and the more exactly the object will be located. Triangulation is a technique in the social sciences as well, in which multiple methods of information gathering are employed in order to more accurately pinpoint and explore social trends.

Feminist and other contemporary social scientists have urged greater permeability of the boundaries between social science research and historical analysis (See: Reinhartz 1992: 159). I would like to suggest taking this type of triple play, or triangulation, one step further, by incorporating literary analysis into an inter-disciplinary approach to describe, analyze, and interpret contemporary American Jewish life. By using data from quantitative, statistical studies together with qualitative data and literary analysis, we create an inter-disciplinary framework for interpretive analysis. The use of these three disciplines serves as a corrective for methodological shortcomings which may occur when one particular method is used exclusively. The resulting analysis can be not only richer but also more representative.

This paper uses the tools of quantitative and qualitative social science and literary analysis to explore changing behaviors and attitudes among American Jewish women, and manifestations of connectedness to and alienation from Judaism, the Jewish people, and Jewish institutions among this group. One of the great lacunae in much writing about Jews and Judaism has been the tendency to analyze the actions and cultural artifacts of men alone and call such studies a "history" or "sociology of the Jews." During the past 15 years, scholars analyzing the roles, contributions, and experiences of women in every period of Jewish history have done much to ameliorate this situation. However,

as Lynn Davidman (1991) pointed out following the publication of her book on newly Orthodox Jewish women, although gender has emerged as a significant factor in understanding the behaviors and attitudes of social groups, sociological studies of contemporary American Jewish women are rare. Although women are the subject of this case study, this interdisciplinary method is appropriate and useful for studying all areas of contemporary American Jewish life, including transformations in Jewish family life, intermarriage, and Jewish organizational and philanthropic behavior.

When we study contemporary Jewish life, we are positioned, as participant-observers, in the flux of change, as eminent social psychologist Simon Herman (1989:20) remarked in his landmark study, *Jewish Identity*. In order to effectively study contemporary life, we use, in addition to the tools of the historian, specialized tools of information gathering and analysis which enable us to examine a constantly changing world. Thus, the study of contemporary life is a little like putting together a jigsaw puzzle in which the shapes of the pieces are constantly shifting, even as the study and analysis proceed.

Quantitative Data

One important new data base for quantitative research is the first national survey of the American Jewish community in two decades, the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), a cooperative study which was supervised by the Council of Jewish Federations.¹ It involved initial screening of some 125,813 adult Americans which located 5,146 households that could be identified as Jewish. Further screening yielded 2,441 households in which interviews were completed. Lengthy questionnaires were administered to respondents in those households, asking not only about the respondent, but also about each member of the household.

Marriage and Fertility National data from the 1990 NJPS show relatively high rates of singlehood and rising rates of divorce, with the result that fewer than two-thirds of American Jews are currently married. Even among Jews ages 35 to 64, traditionally the most married of all groups, 25 percent of women are not currently married. This marks a dramatic break with the recent past. In 1953 almost two-thirds of Jewish women were married by age 22 and more than three-quarters were married by age 25. Today, Jewish women, as they always have, still marry slightly later than other white women -- and

all Americans marry later now than they did 40 years ago. However, Jewish rates of marriage and divorce today much more closely match those of the general population than they do those of American Jews in the past.

Today, facts change rapidly, and yesterday's accepted truths are tomorrow's untruths. For example, in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Jewish women as a group had distinguished themselves by their punctilious use of family planning and birth control, and as a result among Jewish women expected family size was almost identical to actual completed family size. When Jewish women said they wanted a family of three children, they almost always ended up with three children. During the 1980s, prominent Jewish demographers insisted that despite the fact that Jewish women were significantly postponing marriage and childbirth, these women would eventually give birth to the number of children they said they wished to have, an average of 2.2 children (Goldscheider 1986: 92-98), which is considered adequate fertility level to prevent the shrinkage of the Jewish population. I argued against equating expected family size with actual family size, because of delayed marriage. Effective use of contraception is a salient factor only when one is trying to prevent conception. Given medical reports which demonstrated the strong correlation between infertility and the aspiring mother's age, I hypothesized, demographers should no longer assume that expected family size would be equal to completed family size.³

Data from the 1990 NJPS show that changes in marriage patterns have indeed affected both the timing and the size of today's families. In 1990, more than half of women ages 25 to 34 (55 percent), and one quarter of those ages 35 to 44 had no children. While almost all American Jewish women ages 45 or over reported having children, either biological or adopted, it is not clear that all or even most of one out of four childless women in the age 35 to 44 group will in fact achieve the status of motherhood.

Among Jewish women today, a gap exists between fertility expectations and completed family size. Jewish women are less likely than women of any other religious or ethnic group to state that they *wish* to remain childless. Most American Jewish women say they *hope* to have children "some day." Calvin Goldscheider and Francis Kobrin Goldscheider (1989) point out that among Jewish populations – unlike among Protestants and Catholics – "educational attainment is directly rather than inversely related to the fertility expectations." Thus, "Jews with doctorates expect 2.2 children and only 11 percent expect to be

childless; Jews with college degrees expect only 1.8 children and 21 percent expect to be childless." In contrast, the reverse pattern is true of highly educated Protestant and Catholic women.

However, highly educated Jewish women do not actually *have* as many children as they once expected to. Although Jewish career women are more committed to the idea of having families than any other group of career women, they are at least as likely as other white middle class women to postpone the onset of childbearing until they have reached what they consider to be an appropriate level of financial or occupational achievement. Expectations do not always give way to reality. As Frank Mott and Joyce Abma (1992) point out, Jewish women ages 16 to 26 years old who were interviewed in the national study in 1969-70 expected to have an average of 2.5 children; that same cohort, today ages 35 to 44, have in fact born an average of 1.5 children and expect an average of 1.7 children when their families are completed. Contrary to their own expectations, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1989) conclude that, "as education increases among both Jewish men and women, the proportion with no children increases." Indeed, "among those with a masters degree ... Jews have significantly higher levels of childlessness than non-Jews."

Labor Force Participation Another enormous change in the lives of American Jewish women centers around patterns of employment. The majority of American Jewish women today continue to work for pay outside the home throughout their childbearing and child-rearing years. Among American Jewish women ages 44 and under, only 17 percent are homemakers, 11 percent are students, 70 percent work for pay (59 percent work full-time and another 11 percent work part-time), and four percent are not employed (1990 NJPS Jewish female respondents). These changes have affected women across the religious spectrum, and few differences are seen between women who call themselves Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist in terms of likelihood that they will work.

In contrast, until very recently, Jewish women were distinguished by the pronounced plummeting pattern of their participation in the labor force. In 1957, only 12 percent of Jewish women with children under six worked outside the home, compared to 18 percent of White Protestants. As recently as 15 years ago, it was still true that Jewish women were likely to work until they became pregnant with their first child, and then to drop out of the labor force until their youngest child was about junior high school age.

Jewish Communal Involvement The Jewish and contemporary American secular lives of women are closely related. The data show that secular education is not, as many have portrayed it, a factor which undermines strong Jewish identification. Despite widespread Jewish communal anxiety about the impact of higher education and careerism upon the communal activities of American Jewish women today and tomorrow, the data show that the "enemy" of the dynamic involvement of Jewish women in American Jewish communal life is not higher education for women or careerist aspirations, but rather a weak Jewish life in other areas as well -- socially, culturally, and religiously -- regardless of educational or occupational profile.⁴

As in the past, single women are much less likely to volunteer time for Jewish causes than married women. This is a long-standing pattern, but it is of much more concern to Jewish communal leaders today because the single years make up a much larger segment of women's lives. Among married women, the most likely group to volunteer, mixed marriage -- rather than education, occupation, age, presence of children in the home, or any other factor -- marks the single greatest difference in levels of female voluntarism for Jewish causes. Jewish women who are married to non-Jewish men have drastically lower rates of voluntarism for Jewish causes than other married Jewish women: among American Jewish women age 44 and under: five percent of mixed married Jewish women volunteer time for Jewish organizations, compared to 42 percent of Jewish women who are married to Jewish men.

Persons critical of the phenomenon of working Jewish mothers have sometimes charged that careerism leads women away from a Jewish social life -- and ultimately away from Jewish involvements. Friendship circles are a very significant indicator of whether or not Jewish women volunteer time for Jewish causes. Jewish women who say that none of their best friends are Jewish almost never volunteer for Jewish causes, although 40 percent of them volunteer for non-Jewish causes. Thirteen percent of Jewish women who have some Jewish friends volunteer for Jewish causes, and 40 percent volunteer for non-Jewish causes only. However, among Jewish women who have mostly Jewish friends, 35 percent volunteer for Jewish causes, and 19 percent volunteer for only non-Jewish causes.

In the past, popular impressions were that the most traditional Jewish women would be at home with their children and have the most predominantly Jewish friendship circles, while less traditional Jewish women would work outside the home for pay and have more non-Jew-

ish friends, presumably persons they may have met at work. However, data on American Jewish women ages 18 to 44 do not support these stereotypes. The religious makeup of women's friendship circles is not strongly related to employment status.

Jewish Education Friendship circles, are, however, closely tied to extent of Jewish education among younger American Jewish women. The combination of years and type of Jewish education has a statistically significant positive relationship to every aspect of Jewish life — Jewish philanthropic behavior, emotional attachment to Israel, Jewish organizational participation, levels of religious ritual performance, desire to live in a Jewish milieu — as well as a negative relationship to levels of intermarriage. This analysis shows that intermarriage is not affected today by higher levels of secular education or by gender — two areas which used to be thought very relevant — but that one of the most important indicators for Jewish behaviors among American Jews today, both men and women, is the extent of their formal Jewish education. Indeed, formal Jewish education is one of the best indicators of whether Jewish women will marry Jews, volunteer for Jewish causes, and give their children Jewish education.⁵

Orthodox women are the most likely to have received some formal Jewish education and non-observant or "just Jewish" women the least likely, although significant numbers of older Orthodox women did not receive any formal Jewish education — reflecting the opinion of some Orthodox thinkers that girls need not know the holy tongue. Orthodox Jews are more likely to provide their daughters with a rigorous Jewish education than any other wing of Judaism. Half of all born-Jewish respondents ages 18 to 44 who were raised as Orthodox Jews received day school education, and among those Jews the percentages of boys and girls in day school were virtually identical. The gender gap in Jewish education today is seen primarily among supplementary school students and primarily among persons whose households of origin were Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist. Jewish education for girls rises in Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist settings among younger women who are presumably more likely to have been affected by the growing popularity of the Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

Thus, we learn from quantitative data about large patterns of change in the lives of American Jewish women. We learn that Jewish women today are more likely than Jewish women in the past or than non-Jewish American women today to work toward complicated

combinations of educational, occupational, and personal aspirations. Jewish women are likely to receive high levels of education, to work throughout their adult lives, and to express a desire for children. We learn that these complex lifestyles are not necessarily associated with attenuated Jewish connections, but that weak levels of Jewish identification are associated with minimal levels of Jewish education and with personal definitions of identity which exclude "Jewish by religion."

Limitations of Quantitative Approaches We often prize quantitative research because it seems to be a way around the subjectiveness of human perceptions. It is sometimes assumed that because emotional factors supposedly do not enter into the historical or scientific analysis of a given society or historical period, the descriptions which historians and social scientists propose represent objective facts. However, the scholar who transforms raw materials into an analysis of experience also shapes one's understanding of that experience. By selecting for analysis certain facts and not others, by analyzing those facts with a distinctive interpretive framework, and by presenting those facts in a particular context, each analyst creates a view of reality which wittingly or unwittingly bears his or her own personal imprint.

As Simon Herman (1990: 20) forthrightly states, Social scientists, like other men and women, have their biases ... these beliefs and valuations, which shape the social scientist's approach to any social problem, often remain hidden even to the scientist ... their operation is accordingly unchecked. It is not sufficient ... that the conscientious researcher seeks out facts with scrupulous honesty and care ... it behooves him, in addition, to make explicit ... the underlying value premises on which the conclusions he predicted are predicated.

Moreover, even setting aside the researcher's bias, measuring human behaviors and attitudes through survey research techniques is not like weighing out a pound of pistachio nuts. All of the information gathered through survey research on Jewish populations is based on the reporting of information by respondents.

Quantitative studies such as the NJPS are absolutely critical for analysis. Numerical studies and statistics can provide a panorama, a broad picture of the outlines of an entire culture or society. The information they provide is, quite simply, the best, indeed the only way we have of understanding the large-scale trends among American Jews.

However, like all methods, it has its limitations. By looking for broad-based information, researchers often do not focus on acquiring detailed information about significant sub-groups.

Moreover, because the subjects of survey research only respond to previously determined questions, no information is gathered beyond those questions. Respondents generally will not stay on the phone for more than a 45-minute interview, so researchers must make choices about which questions to ask. Unfortunately, research choices are sometimes made which ignore important developments in American Jewish life, and especially in the lives of American Jewish women.

Examples of two areas which are closely involved with Jewish feminist transformation of women's lives -- and which have not been included in the 1990 NJPS or in most studies of Jewish populations in major metropolitan areas -- are the *Havurah* movement and life cycle celebrations. Despite the growth and influence of the *Havurah* movement in the United States, the NJPS questionnaire limits its questions about public, group worship to asking if the respondent currently belongs to a synagogue or ever belonged to a synagogue as an adult. Women and men who support and attend the many non-synagogue connected *Havurah* services are not distinguished from, within the format of the survey instrument, and are computed the same way as persons who never step into a synagogue, even if they attend *Havurah* worship services every week. The proliferation of *Havurah*-style services has been especially significant for women during the past two decades, because the participatory nature of the *Havurah* service has made it the locale for dramatic growth in women's participation in public Judaism.

Similarly, as a way of measuring connectedness to Jewish religious rituals, the NJPS questionnaire asks a battery of questions about traditional observances, including the following: do you light candles on Friday night, buy kosher meat, use separate meat and dairy dishes, light Hanuka candles, have a Christmas tree, attend a Purim celebration, fast on Yom Kippur, celebrate *Yom Ha-Atzmaut* (Israeli Independence Day), refrain from handling money on the Sabbath, or fast on the day before Purim, called *Ta'anit Esther*? However, the questionnaire does not ask about most rituals connected with life cycle events -- the *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision) or *Shalom Bat*, rituals surrounding the wedding, and rituals surrounding death, such as observance of a *shiva* period or reciting *kaddish*. How widespread are these emotionally powerful experiences today? Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that these life cycle rituals have far more salience for

most American Jewish men and women than many traditional observances, such as separating meat and dairy dishes or fasting on *Ta'anit Esther*. Moreover, much creative religious activity on the part of Jewish feminists has focused on Jewish life cycle events. Because questions were not asked about life cycle events, we have no answers in that area from what is currently our most comprehensive data base.

Ironically, unless researchers start with a comprehensive knowledge of trends in the lives of Jewish women and men as they begin new research, they often do not elicit as much useful information and as complete and accurate a picture of Jewish behaviors and attitudes. A sensitivity not only to Jewish life in the past but to the flux of current Jewish life, including issues of gender, is an indispensable component of the intellectual equipment of a competent researcher of contemporary Jews. Quantitative research is especially useful when the researcher wishes to depict and analyze what C. Wright Mills (1959: 8-13) calls "public issues of social structure." These "issues transcend the individual and the range of [her] ... inner life." Quantitative research gives us meaningful pictures of the "larger structures of social and historical life."

Qualitative Research

In *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community*, I (Fishman 1993) use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data as well as literary texts to provide a multi-faceted picture. In writing this book, I used data elicited from the as yet largely untapped wealth of data in the NJPS. In addition, I conducted interviews for 2 and a half years, from January, 1990, through September, 1992, with 120 women ages 18 to 80 living in diverse communities across the United States.⁶ Women were selected for these interviews with the aim of providing maximum diversity among women who have a connection to and interest in some aspect of contemporary Jewish life. The women interviewed included 15 female rabbis and Jewish educators, 20 students, 30 writers and professors of Judaica, 12 Jewish communal professionals and 12 Jewish communal volunteers, 14 professionals in non-sectarian spheres, and 16 women's prayer group participants. Although I constructed and used a questionnaire as a guideline for these interviews, our discussions were designed to and did range far beyond the standard questions, following each woman into her own special area of concern and expertise. Several useful questions

were added to the questionnaire at the suggestions of the interviewees themselves. The dialogue reported below consists of direct quotations.

In moving from an analysis of the NJPS quantitative data to this qualitative research on contemporary American Jewish women, I was, in effect, moving from an exploration of transformations in large, social structures, such as shifts in marital status, endogamy, and labor force participation, into a consideration of the ways in which new tendencies played themselves out in the lives of women in a variety of social situations. The following are quotes from qualitative research, which shed light on which experiences tend to make women feel more connected to Judaism and to Jewish life, and which experiences are alienating. They help us to understand how American Jewish women actually perceive and interpret the changes in their lives. They also help us to fill in the gaps and answer questions which were not asked in the quantitative survey data. Quantitative data for example, indicated that large numbers of American Jewish women are juggling three identities -- as professionals, as family-oriented women, and as Jews. Women across the religious spectrum are now likely to work outside the home. In the interviews some women describe integrating their deep Jewish concerns with the rest of their lives very successfully. Despite potentially conflicting roles, they report a sense of well-being.

Here is a vignette of the positive and family-nurturing ways in which some contemporary women combine these three roles:

I had a special opportunity. When I was 39 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I spent days thinking deeply about the way I had lived my life, what I had done and what I wanted to do. And I realized that I would not have wanted to change one minute of my life. When my husband and I were young, we knew we had to help each other. When my children were very small, I spent a lot of time volunteering for Jewish organizations. My career grew from a one person public relations firm in 1966 to a national agency employing 28 people, with international accounts. As my children were growing up, they were always involved with my work and I was always involved with them. They used to help me collate and staple reports on the dining room table and I used to rush home from work to get them from one activity to another. They all got a good Jewish education. They're all grown now, and they have

remained tied to the Jewish community, and they all say those growing up years were wonderful years (Fishman 1993: 40-41).

However, the growing number of women who do not fit the normative Jewish family pattern often feel the Jewish community is not responsive to their special needs. Many of them express the opinion that the Jewish communal and religious worlds are not keeping pace with a Jewish community in which one out of four adults will be divorced at some point in life. This perceived lack of communal responsiveness creates in them feelings of anger and alienation. Here is what one young Orthodox divorcee said:

When we get to synagogue on Saturday morning and my little boys go to the other side of the *mekhitzah*, no one takes an interest in them. They run around wild, and everyone says, tsk, tsk, how come she doesn't discipline her children better—but no man calls them over and says, here, sit down near me, I'll show you what we're doing now. I think that providing the male children of divorced women with male role models is something the whole community should be concerned with, rather than leaving us on our own this way (Fishman 1993: 35).

Another Orthodox woman, herself happily married and a successful attorney in Chicago, does *pro bono* work on behalf of *agunot*, women whose husbands refuse to give them a *get*, or religious divorce. She describes the recalcitrance of many in the rabbinic world as follows:

The Jewish communal consequences of *mamserut* are irrevocable. Unequal bargaining power yields lots of opportunities for exploitation. There are no statistics on the number of women who end up giving in to blackmail. The community has to deal with this on a case by case basis — [because] no policy decisions have been made. Lots of rabbis encourage women to "pay off" their husbands — They say, "It's only \$50,000, your father is rich — pay him off!"

She says,

As a feminist, I try to be goal oriented and I try not to get distracted by disturbing details. If they ask me

to sit at a separate table, I sit there, but I won't let anyone dislodge me from my ultimate goal of getting fair treatment of these women (Fishman 1993: 36).

The Reform rabbinic establishment also came under fire for its lack of sensitivity to the realities of divorced women's lives in some interviews. One woman insisted:

The Reform movement should not allow itself to be used as a haven for men who won't give their wives a *get*--but want religious ceremonies when they themselves get remarried. "Many men would come around if their Reform rabbis would only insist that they give a previous wife a *get* before they can have a *ketubah* for their new wife (Fishman 1993: 37).

But by far the most universal alienating experiences which Jewish women found in the Jewish world centered around the death of a parent and the exclusion of women from the recital of *kaddish* in many traditional settings. One woman told the following story:

We were sitting *shiva* in our living room, when all of a sudden there was this invasion of men in suits and ties, sweaty, on their way home from work, men from our conservative shul (synagogue) I hardly knew and my mother had never met. They ordered my mother and me and all our female friends out of the room--and I mean ordered. "We have to *daven* (pray)," they said. "Your husband has to say *kaddish*." "What do you mean my husband?" I asked them in tears. "My father was buried this morning. My husband's parents are alive and well. I'm saying *kaddish* for my father." "No you're not!" barked the *gabbai* (sexton). "You can say *kaddish* 'til you're blue in the face but it won't count. If you want your father's soul to go to heaven, you better get a man to say *kaddish* for him three times a day" (Fishman 1993: 140).

Some women found particular styles of synagogue worship alienating, and a substantial proportion were deeply disturbed by prayer with separate seating. A writer from a Moroccan Jewish background said:

The first time I went to a Sephardi synagogue, I was flooded by feelings of both profound joy and profound anguish. I wept. It was wonderful to be worshipping in my own tradition—at last. And yet I was furious at being stuck up in a balcony. Sitting up in the balcony of that synagogue gave me a different concept of the nature of sin. Do you know what sin is—it is the hypocrisy of men. Women are locked away and segregated in synagogues so that men don't have to deal with their fear....Sephardi Jews lived in and resemble Moslem society. I was always enraged growing up...Father said, you're rebelling against nature. Because of feminism I began to understand not just why I was angry but what I should do about it. For me the medium was language (Fishman 1993: 156).

Others, however — even some who are not especially observant religiously — feel more comfortable with the traditional synagogue. Many find themselves caught betwixt and between, full of conflict. Among aspects of American Jewish life which have been virtually untouched by quantitative research, is the enormous creative ferment which is going on today among Jewish women who are involved in trying to make the Jewish community more responsive to their changing needs. A highly educated Conservative woman in her 50s, for example, is involved in the effort to construct new prayers for moments such as pregnancy and birth, which she describes as:

the most religious episodes in my life. Five times from an act of love I have felt life growing inside of me. I know what a miracle is. Crossing the Red Sea is nothing compared to that ... I'd like to retrieve and reuse many of the beautiful, traditional ... *techinot* utilized by our grandmothers to provide us with at least the beginnings of liturgical responses to our own bodies (Fishman 1993: 128).

A Reform woman in her 70s describes the profound positive impact which evolutions in Jewish life have had on her feelings of connectedness with Judaism:

I would say that three kinds of days were the highlights of my life — the day I got married, the days

when my four children were born, and the day 10 years ago when I had my Bat Mitzvah, read from the Torah, and helped to put the Torah back into the ark. Every time I handle the Torah I want to weep with joy. I realize how much it means to me. All my life I have been Jewish, and at last I have a way to express my Jewishness (Fishman 1993: 131).

A 22-year old rabbinical candidate at the Jewish Theological Seminary, who grew up in a weakly identified Reform Jewish home, has the following to say about the evolution of her own Jewish life:

This Rosh ha-Shanah for the first time I began to use a *talit*. Now I use it daily when I pray. It shuts out the whole external world, and it also shuts out interfering thoughts and feelings. It envelops me in thoughts of God and the words of my prayers.

And an Orthodox adolescent describes the forging of powerful links with Judaism through the enfranchisement she felt when she celebrated her Bat Mitzvah at an all-female worship and Torah reading group:

I know on Shabbes when I was *davening* [praying, here—leading the female group in prayer] and I was *layning* [chanting the portion of the week from the Torah], I felt when people talk about being close to *Hashem* [the Name, respectful Hebrew euphemism for God], this is what they mean. I felt awe. A Bat Mitzvah's about taking on a new role in Jewish society. Since then, I've been a lot more aware of what I should and shouldn't do. It used to be that I wouldn't care too much if what I did was right and wrong. Now I know that this is my responsibility, not anyone else's. No one else is watching me, no one's going to fix my mistakes (Fishman 1993: 133).⁷

Qualitative research demonstrates powerful, simultaneous trends toward continuity and change in the lives of American Jewish women today. As they juggle multiple roles, Jewish women frequently have high expectations of the Jewish community, and are disappointed when the community does not seem to provide communal and religious support systems that are responsive to their new lifestyles. Perhaps

more consciously than ever before, Jewish women today explore their Jewish heritage and their own spirituality in modes which are sometimes built on patterns derived from past Jewish cultures and sometimes depart from prior patterns. Among a limited but very diverse subgroup of women, Jewish feminism has created powerful feelings of connectedness to Judaism and Jewish life.

Using Literary Texts

Through qualitative research we can learn a lot about what it means to be an American Jew, about as yet unquantified changes in Jewish life, and about the complexities which gender adds to the experience of being an American Jew. However, even in such interviews the researcher is dependent on information which the informant wishes to reveal. A very different type of "handle" on reality is provided by literature. Fiction can give the researcher valuable insight into things that are usually unrevealed and unquantifiable — the hearts, minds and souls of contemporary American Jews. It is in this exploration, the exploration of what experience feels like from the inside, "where the meanings are," that literature can help us most. And, as we struggle to understand transformations in the American Jewish notion of what it means to be a Jewish woman or a Jewish man, this is an area perhaps more revealing than many have realized in the past.

One contemporary school of literary criticism concentrates on the concept that literature is embedded in the cultural context out of which it grew.⁸ The converse is also a powerful and important approach to contemporary social sciences: we can learn much from literature about the complex matrix in which feelings about Judaism and Jews are embedded. In the literature briefly dealt with in the following pages, women have confused and angry feelings about Judaism which are interwoven with their confused and angry feelings about other aspects of their lives. This kind of conflict is seldom expressed quite so clearly in sociological research. Whereas the respondent is sometimes inhibited by the desire to please, to tell a coherent and consistent story, the good fiction writer fearlessly illuminates the inner workings of a character's mind.

The intersection between feminist literary criticism and the experience of contemporary American Jewish women, as depicted by Jewish female writers, is particularly instructive. Sandra Gilbert and

Susan Gubar (1979:53-54) describe the evolution of a monster-woman character as a result of "patriarchal socialization." They point out, any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness as in some sense sickening . . . The girl learns anxiety about, perhaps even loathing of, her own flesh . . . It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters."

For the female author, the stakes can be especially high, and the tendency to see herself as a "monster-woman" is especially strong: As Elaine Showalter (1977, as cited by Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 50-51) has suggested,⁹

women writers participate in a quite different subculture from that inhabited by male writers ... At its best, the separateness of this female subculture has been exhilarating for women ... While male writers seem increasingly to have felt exhausted by the need for revisionism which Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence accurately describes, women writers have seen themselves as pioneers in a creativity so intense that their male counterparts have probably not experienced ... its like since the Renaissance or the Romantic era.

At its worst, however, female authors are subject to a gender-distinctive "anxiety of authorship," in which the very act of authorship is consciously or unconsciously perceived by the female writer to be inappropriate to her sex. Thus, by the very act of writing, she feels herself to be a monster-woman. Poet Adrienne Rich makes this image into a powerful symbol for the discomfort of the intellectual, creative woman in her poem, "Planetarium." She writes,

A woman in the shape of a monster
a monster in the shape of a woman
the skies are full of them

These are the women who feel monstrous precisely because they are brilliant and creative.

Female Jewish writers in the United States today often depict women being manipulated by society to reject intrinsic aspects of their

personhood. In different societies the objectionable -- or monstrous -- portions of the female psyche change, but the dynamic of deconstructing one's own life, of displacing pieces of oneself, and of creating within and yet outside oneself a "dark sister" -- a golem -- to embody the "monstrous" elements remains the same.

Cynthia Ozick's (1992) playful short story, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," deals with these issues by turning stereotypes on their heads. The protagonist, Puttermesser, (Yiddish for butterknife -- Puttermesser is not very sharp) is a female *luftmensch* (Yiddish expression for an absent-minded intellectual type, almost always male, a sky-man, a person who does not relate to the exigencies of daily life) and devotes herself exclusively to matters of the mind. Semi-consciously, she literally creates a female "golem" to house the pieces of herself she cannot cope with. Just as the male golem of Jewish legend -- a maleness unmediated by reason -- becomes more and more destructive and must eventually be destroyed by his creator, the female Golem Xanthippe represents a femaleness unmediated by reason. Xanthippe fulfills male anxieties about the fully sexual adult female and becomes a monster of sexuality. Her voracious sexual predatoriness -- which reduces all of New York's male civil servants into mere shells of men -- is meant to be humorous. It suggests that only a golem could be as mindlessly sexual as some misogynists think all women are. It also suggests that some relentlessly "intellectual" feminists misguidedly deny a whole segment of their own selves, a physicality which they may subconsciously fear and repress as much as men do.

These themes pervade literature by American Jewish women, even when they are not the main focus of the novel. For example, in Lynne Sharon Schwartz's (1989) brilliant recent novel, *Leaving Brooklyn*, Audrey, a young woman growing up in Brooklyn in a lower middle class Jewish home, can see the world the way her solid, mainstream parents and their friends see it -- with her one good eye. She often retreats to her other eye, an eye badly damaged during birth, which shows her a very different world indeed, a random and dizzy world with unlimited opportunity and unlimited danger. Her mother and her good eye warn her to be a good girl, to follow the beaten path, to live an orderly existence and stay "in Brooklyn" and out of danger. Her wayward eye leads her across the bridge to the sinister glamour of Manhattan, that world which is not Brooklyn, to dark and thrilling sides of human nature, her own and that of others.

The 14-year old Audrey is seduced by her Manhattan ophthalmologist. Their long, voluptuous affair eventually enables her to

see Brooklyn and herself with new eyes. Much to Audrey's surprise, she discovers that her parents and their card-playing cronies and their seemingly ordinary and unexciting friends have braved the very real dangers and threats of the McCarthy era with unpretentious and unsung courage. She sees that people may dwell in Brooklyn and partake of greater, more dangerous, and more noble adventures in living than she had ever imagined. She thinks, "there was life in Brooklyn. Passion. Conflict. Thought. An ample scene for both my eyes.....I left Brooklyn. I leave still, every moment. For no matter how much I leave, it doesn't leave me."

Rebecca Goldstein's (1983) fiction often explores the *Mind-Body Problem*, the need which some men have to divide humanity into mind and body, and the destructive ways in which women have internalized these false dichotomies. Renee Feuer, the protagonist, is pulled between Judaism and secularism. Her mother first castigates her for being too pretty, and therefore not *edel*, refined, and later "greet[s] each announcement of my educational plans with 'Nu, Renee, is this going to help you find a husband?' so that the consequence of all my academic honors, Phi Beta Kappa, summa cum laude, scholarships, fellowships, prizes, was only a deepening sense of guilty failure." When Renee calls to tell her mother that she has become engaged to a world-famous mathematician, her mother uses this happy occasion to strip Renee even further: "You should be very proud, Renee, that such a man should love you. Of course, I know you're not just any girl. Who should know if not me? This is why God gave you such good brains, so that you could make such a man like this love you." Pursuing a Ph.D. in philosophy at Princeton University, Renee is not taken seriously by her professors because she is too pretty to be smart and too smart to be pretty.

It is not only Renee's Orthodox mother and her atheistic professors who have trouble dealing with the concept of a beautiful but brainy woman. Some women internalize these dichotomies and adopt male distrust of the attractively sexual female. Renee's best friend from undergraduate days at Barnard, a fiercely anti-religious physicist named Ava, is convinced women must make themselves both androgynous and ugly to be taken seriously as intellectuals.

Goldstein's (1991) more recent female protagonists feel even more compelled to reject parts of themselves. A hulking, brilliant, reclusive woman named Hedda (head-a), who behaves like an all-mind Golem, is obsessed by complicated feelings about her mother and a sister, who is supposedly the opposite of her in many ways, a volatile

woman named Stella. Hedda writes a novel in which a very conventional and proper woman imagines that she has an unconventional *Dark Sister*. This unconventional sister, who is an astronomer, appears only by night. Eventually, the separation between the two parts of herself breaks down, and the protagonist is flooded by her own unacceptable feelings and interests.

Literary texts reinforce the observations of social scientists that modern Jewish men and women, who often cope with one set of assumptions in secular workplaces and another set of assumptions in Jewish social, religious and communal settings, have found the technique of compartmentalization especially useful in reducing the discomfort of cognitive dissonance between their secular and Jewish worlds. Along with other women writing today, Rebecca Goldstein suggests that American Jewish women approach their own lives as a text, deconstructing, rewriting and reinterpreting chaotic experience so that it appears to have a narrative flow and inner coherence. She indicates that women have often come to regard large segments of their own personhood as alien, as a fifth column, as "the dark sister" to their more politically correct, acceptable public personae.

Fiction by Goldstein and others indicates that for Jewish women, there is often an additional layer of conflicting values and behaviors. Not only do Jewish women have to cope with the conflict between Jewish and non-Jewish values systems, but also with the conflict between society's prescriptions for correct feminine behavior and their own innate talents, energies and preferences. They often find themselves indulging in "triple play," compartmentalizing on three levels. Separate eyes, for seeing Jewish bourgeoisie propriety and the wild outside world. Separate sisters, and golems, to embody the rejected pieces of women's selves.

Using Multiple Approaches

The description and analysis of objective experience emerges as a very elusive goal. Each method of gathering and analyzing information has particular limitations. Quantitative studies, while absolutely critical to our understanding of contemporary life, and while sometimes thrilling in the information they can provide, present numbers which are always a blend of the experiences of many individuals and are never the actual experiences of any one individual. Moreover, quantitative studies seem to lend themselves more easily to exploring the way people act, rather than the way they feel. From

quantitative research, we learn that American Jewish women today enjoy unprecedented levels of secular education and formal Jewish education, but we do not learn about the ways in which their secular and their Jewish learning and lives either fit well together or are experienced as a conflict.

Qualitative studies can provide valuable insights about a given group. They give us the flesh and blood voices of the men and women behind the statistics and fill in many gaps in statistical data. However, they do not always place that particular group within the larger picture or tell us about the influence or importance of the group being studied within the larger matrix of society. From qualitative research, we learn that some Jewish women find the synagogue and Jewish communal world has been supportive to them, while others have had profoundly alienating experiences. But we do not learn how those experiences affect them at the core of their being, how they affect their perceptions of themselves as human beings and as Jews.

Fiction, memoirs, poetry and essays do not aim to convey a broad picture of all the different ways in which people can behave or think. Moreover, successful fiction needs dramatic tension. By its very nature, fiction tends toward individualized pictures of idiosyncratic people. From fiction by American Jewish women we have learned that women can be alienated from their inner selves as Jewish women. Their feelings about Jews and Judaism are sometimes embedded in fears that they are also unacceptably intellectual, artistic, scientific, mystical, violent, angry, or non-maternal — any of these pieces of themselves can potentially be viewed as "other."

Qualitative research, quantitative research and literary analysis are each valuable tools when we are trying to reconstruct the truths of lives of American Jews. Used alone, each can lead to and reveal important insights, but each used alone can lead to significant distortions of the whole picture. Used together, they can illuminate both the broad outlines *and* the inner workings of American Jewish life today. Most scholars of the current American Jewish scene will choose to focus their energies primarily in one of these areas. However, I believe that to the extent that we can make simultaneous use of these three types of analysis, we will enrich our understanding of the role of gender in contemporary American Jewish life, and we will enrich the field of the sociology of American Jews as well.

There is often a tendency to regard quantitative research, including descriptive or analytical materials which are based on numbers, as scientific or factual; and conversely there is often a

tendency to regard evidence from literary texts with suspicion. I would like to suggest that we need to see the "facts" within fiction, and to see what may be "fictional" about putative "facts." It is also important that we learn to regard quantitative material with educated suspicion, valuing it, but understanding the ways in which the pieces of the numerical picture may be misrepresented or distorted.

By this, I do not suggest that we lose sight of the differences between fact and fiction. I agree with historian Dan T. Carter (1992) that the act of blurring this line can be intellectually dangerous:

Over the last 40 years, humanists and social scientists alike have been acutely aware of the limitations of "knowing"—the problems that philosophers have always grouped under the term epistemology. Influential scholars in many fields have moved beyond the "hermeneutics of suspicion" toward a skepticism so pervasive that it severs the connections between reality and language. Pushing the argument to its limit, they embrace the complete contingency of language and treat all knowledge as "texts" that are divorced from reality, totally dependent upon the prejudice and preconceptions of the author (and the reader), and thus subject to infinite interpretation. Even social scientists, who traditionally have prided themselves on their commitment to search for forms of objective, verifiable truth, have suddenly found that the very foundations of their enterprise are in doubt.

We can take our cue from Philip Roth (1986), who, after years of arguing with readers about the issue of representativeness in art, produced a tricky but magnificent novel which speaks profoundly about what it means to be an American Jew today, and called it *The Counterlife*. He (Roth 1988) also wrote a memoir which provides the outlines of his life and slyly called it *The Facts*. There are more facts about the Jewish heart in *The Counterlife* than there are in *The Facts*. Researchers of contemporary Jewish life need to explore the counterlives of American Jewish women and men, or they will not understand the facts either.

NOTES

1. The first national study of American Jews undertaken since 1970, the 1990 NJPS, conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations, studied households representing Jews across the country living in communities of diverse sizes and composition. A summary of the findings is provided by Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar and Scheckner (1991).
2. For earlier discussions of these changes, see: Fishman (1988, 1991a).
3. See my extended argument of this issue (Fishman 1993: 45-64).
4. These issues are explored at more length in Fishman (1991b).
5. For a more extended discussion of the impact of Jewish education, see Fishman and Goldstein (1993).
6. Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Baltimore, Berkeley, Boston, Brooklyn, Bronx, Cambridge (MA), Cherry Hill (NJ), Chicago, Columbus (OH), Columbia (MD), Denver, Encinas, Gainesville (FLA), Los Angeles, Miami, Norfolk (VA), Orefield (PA), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland (OR), Providence, New Haven, Newton (MA), Rockland County (NY), Rockville (MD), San Diego, San Francisco, Sharon, St. Louis, Silver Springs (MD), Teaneck, Tucson, and Westchester County (NY).
7. Quoting from Goldman (1991).
8. See especially Greenblatt (1990) for a coherent discussion of his theories of "cultural poetics" or "new historicism."
9. See also Carpenter and Kolmar (1991).

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