

**The AJS Women's Caucus:
Report on the Paula Hyman Oral History Project**

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Foreword

This report was commissioned by the Women’s Caucus of the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS), following the untimely death of Paula Hyman in 2011—partly in recognition of her signal contribution to Jewish Studies and its intersection with Jewish feminism, and partly as a way of documenting the recollections and reflections of the generations of Jewish Studies scholars who founded the Women’s Caucus. It is a work of oral history, based on interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013 with some twenty of the leaders of the caucus, including as many of the group’s founders as possible, backed up where possible with documentation included in Women’s Caucus minutes and related organizational documents.

In no small part, the project was spurred by the recognition that there is no archive of Women’s Caucus documentation, in the hands of the AJS or elsewhere. Thus in addition to this report itself, documents collected in its preparation will be donated to AJS¹.

The sections of this report are suggested by the interviews that comprise it, beginning with recollections of the situation in which the Women’s Caucus came into existence, its founding in 1986 and its reception within AJS, and recollections of the first two decades of its operation. Section 6, “A New AJS,” recounts how efforts by the Women’s Caucus to achieve parity in opportunities for women have led to profound changes in the AJS itself, benefiting all of its membership and helping transform Jewish Studies as a scholarly discipline. This discussion is followed by a brief discussion of thoughts on the future of the Women’s Caucus and some concluding thoughts.

As a reflection of the multidisciplinary nature of Jewish Studies itself, reflections are included from women who are scholars of every subfield of Jewish Studies, including ancient and medieval Jewish texts and history, early modern and modern Jewish history, and American Jewish history, as well as literary studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, theology, and religious studies. It should be noted that the interviews discussed here offer leadership perspectives on the issues they address; nearly all of the interviewees are former co-chairs of the Women’s Caucus.

¹ Acknowledgements are due to Harriett Freidenriech, Laura Levitt, Pamela Nadell, and Beth Wenger who donated archival papers to this project.

One of the challenges in crafting this report has been to understand how best to accommodate the many memories included of Paula Hyman, whose influence on the Women's Caucus, like her influence on Jewish feminism and Jewish Studies, has been an outsize contribution that cuts across nearly every area addressed in these pages.² While this report is not a memorial for her, it seems particularly fitting that the project itself is named in her honor.

Funding and support for this project has been contributed by the AJS Women's Caucus itself, the JWA, and the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute of Brandeis University.³ Any errors of fact or interpretation are, of course, the sole responsibility of the report's author.

1. Introduction

The reflections recounted in these pages are best understood in conjunction with the social and historical context that gave rise to them—on the one hand, the origins and growth of Jewish Studies as a scholarly discipline and, on the other, the nearly simultaneous emergence of Women's Studies. While a thorough account of these complex histories is beyond the scope of this report, this introduction seeks to recall the situation into which these distinct scholarly orientations emerged, interacted, and, occasionally, clashed.

An account of the growth and development of Jewish Studies in the United States is included in an organizational history of AJS, prepared by Kristin Loveland in 2008 and posted on the AJS website.⁴ Loveland's report notes that AJS, founded by an initial 47 members in 1969, grew steadily in subsequent decades. Early struggles to establish the legitimacy of Jewish Studies as an academic pursuit, explains Loveland, were reflected in the organization's efforts to distinguish itself from communal and pastoral commitments (10). As its legitimacy was firmly established, the field underwent sustained growth in the 1980s and 1990s, reflected not only in the numbers of AJS members but also in the increasing diversity in their academic training as well as the variety of subfields they worked in. In a 1992 report, AJS catalogued some 4000

² A brief biography of Hyman is included on the Jewish Women's Archive at jwa.org/weremember/hyman-paula.

³ Oversight for this project was provided for the Women's Caucus by a committee including Caryn Aviv (University of Colorado at Boulder), Karla Goldman (University of Michigan), Marion Kaplan (NYU), Rebecca Kobrin (Columbia University), Deborah Dash Moore (University of Michigan), and Gail Reimer (JWA).

university courses in Jewish Studies in the United States and Canada, not including those taught in rabbinical seminaries (13).

The emergence of Women's Studies also dates to the same era, propelled by the rise of the feminist movement, which in turn followed the growing admission of women into institutions of higher education as well as the increasing entry of women into the paid labor force. Although these developments for women emerged in different ways and at different moments, by 1970 all of them had joined together into a powerful force for social and cultural change.

Tallying the rapid growth of Women's Studies, a 2002 article in the *Women's Studies Quarterly* notes the existence of a "single integrated program" in the field in 1970, increasing to 150 by 1975, doubling to 300 by 1980, and then doubling again to 600 by 1990.⁵ The founding of the National Women's Studies Association in 1977 marks only one of many steps toward the institutionalization of the field. Many major journals in Women's Studies were likewise founded in the 1970s; both the *Women's Studies Quarterly* and *Feminist Studies* were founded in 1972, while *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* was founded in 1975. Jewish women played a prominent role in the growth of the feminist movement, as well as in Women's Studies as a scholarly discipline.

In the case of professional employment in higher education, however, the experiences of Jewish men and Jewish women diverged in important ways. The characteristics of this divergence as well as reasons for its existence are explored in a 2007 article by Harriet Freidenreich, published in *Nashim*.⁶ (Freidenreich, it should be noted, is a founding member and former co-chair of the AJS Women's Caucus, as well as a participant in this oral history project.)

In this article, Freidenreich explains that before World War II, Jews and women alike faced "major obstacles" in the U.S. academic world, owing to the prevalence and social acceptability of antisemitism as well as sexism in academic hiring and promotion. After the war,

⁴ Kristin Loveland, "The Association for Jewish Studies: A Brief History," 2008 (<http://www.ajsnet.org/mission.htm>, accessed 24 September 2013).

⁵ Marilyn J. Boxer, "Women's Studies as Women's History," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3/4, Fall/Winter 2002. This article is included within a special double issue of the journal on "Women's Studies Then and Now."

⁶ Harriet Pass Freidenreich, "Joining the Faculty Club: Jewish Women Academics in the United States," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, 2007.

public expressions of antisemitism became unacceptable, and “Jewish men managed to gain access to academic appointments” in most fields. Jewish women, however, “remained relatively scarce” and “near the bottom of the academic pyramid” (69).

Through a thorough study of data from the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, as well as her own interviews, Freidenreich documents the existence of this disparity across many disciplines in the postwar university in the United States. In exploring the reasons for this divergent experience, Freidenreich comments on the doubling of the outsider experience faced by Jewish women (90). As many observers of U.S. intellectual and social life have noted, one way that Jewish men have responded to their own experience of marginalization was by seeking the further marginalization of women.⁷

Each of these phenomena has been the subject of active contention in a wide variety of forums. In the case of the AJS, this divergent experience forms an important background for the perspectives discussed in this report, chronicling the entry of women into Jewish Studies over the past thirty years. The memories and reflections that are recounted here of the founders and leaders of the AJS Women’s Caucus should thus be understood as part of this much broader social process, providing texture and detail to a comprehensive process of change in Jewish Studies as a field as well as AJS as an organization .

With respect to Jewish Studies, Freidenreich concludes her article by observing that “[j]ust as Jewish feminism has wrought a major transformation within non-Orthodox synagogues since 1970, so, too, within Jewish studies, women have made significant strides toward equality. [...] In 1978, the list of 102 full professors belonging to [AJS] still included just one woman! By the early twenty-first century, however, women have served in every rank and position within the leading programs and organizations in Jewish studies” (94).

Echoing Freidenreich’s conclusion, a 2008 survey of AJS membership found a rough gender parity, with the respondents comprising 53 percent men and 47 percent women.⁸ This

⁷ Freidenreich quotes noted literary scholar Carolyn Heilbrun making this point in *Reinventing Womanhood* (1978); nearly two decades later, Ann Pellegrini makes essentially the same point in “Interarticulations,” her contribution to the edited volume *Judaism Since Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁸ Steven M. Cohen and Judith Veinsten, “The 2008 Association for Jewish Studies Membership Survey.” The survey was performed by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive on behalf of AJS. Accessed 17 Sept. 2013 from <http://www.ajsnet.org/survey.pdf>.

survey provides an indispensable snapshot of the situation of professionals in the field of Jewish Studies, with valuable data about programs, positions, salaries, and more. Unfortunately the salary data is not disaggregated by gender; one can only assume, however, that the current situation of women in the field echoes the persistent gender inequities reported across institutions and disciplines by the annual surveys of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).⁹

In the following pages, this oral history project tells the story of this process, which has brought about profound changes in Jewish Studies and AJS, and yet is still unfolding, within AJS as an organization as well as in the continuing evolution of Jewish Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and the larger projects they are part of in the contemporary U.S. university.

2. "Totally Unwelcoming": AJS Before the Women's Caucus

Looking back, it can be difficult to appreciate the depth of the change in AJS since the creation of the Women's Caucus in 1986. Comments Susan Shapiro, a key founder of the caucus and currently the director of the Religious Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst,

it's hard to paint a picture for those who were not there at the beginning of how stark it really was. I loved the Copley as a place,¹⁰ but it was palpable that women were there as ornaments and not to be spoken to intellectually.

Similarly, Gail Reimer, executive director of the Jewish Women's Archive, notes that "the AJS is a different world now. It used to be all men in dark suits—men talking to other men, and a few women wandering around looking uncomfortable."

Chava Weissler, professor of Religion Studies at Lehigh University, recalls that her first AJS meeting in the early 1970s, when she was a librarian considering a doctorate in Jewish Studies, was "so negative that I called my parents from the airport and told them I was never

⁹ "2013 AAUP Faculty Salary Survey," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 Sept. 2013, with links to results from earlier years (accessed 26 Sept. 2013 from chronicle.com/article/aaup-survey-data-2013/138309#id=144050).

¹⁰ Boston's Copley Plaza Hotel was the home of the AJS annual meetings until 1999.

returning to graduate school.” It took her several years to summon the determination to proceed, inspired by a program on Yiddish at Columbia University.

In the mid-1970s, remembers Judith Baskin, currently serving as Associate Dean for Humanities at the University of Oregon, “AJS was a very alienating place” for the few women who attended, who were met with “rude and dismissive comments” if they ventured to deliver a paper. “Women were very apologetic then,” recalls Susan Shapiro. “They were very afraid of being surveyed by their male colleagues.”

Harriet Freidenreich, a retired professor of history at Temple University, recalls being “self-conscious about being a woman”:

We didn’t want to distinguish ourselves. We’d always be sure to have both men and women present. I remember the first time that four of us went out to dinner together. It was remarkable: here we are, a group of women, and we can talk about whatever we want. We continued to do that for a number of years, long after the Women’s Caucus was organized.

Freidenreich’s memories are echoed by Deborah Dash Moore, director of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. Like Freidenreich, Moore was a graduate student at Columbia in those years:

A group of women scholars used to have lunch together at the deli across the way from the Copley Plaza. We would talk about such topics as whether the clothes we were wearing were appropriate for a professional meeting. It was a sign of our progress that we could talk about our lives and not be embarrassed. But we needed a critical mass of women to move from this kind of informal gathering to a formal step like a women’s caucus.

3. “A necessary refuge”: Founding the Women’s Caucus

The necessary critical mass came about when Ellen Umansky, currently director of the Center for Judaic Studies at Fairfield University, shared a plane ride with Susan Shapiro. In 1986, Shapiro came to deliver a talk at Emory University, where Umansky was teaching at that time. Following the talk, they both flew to New York City. As they talked on that flight, Umansky recalls,

we both admitted that we hated going to AJS every year. Even when we were around men who were our friends and colleagues, they ignored us as they entered into that space of the old boys network. After that, we said to each other, let’s see if we can form

a women's caucus. By then the American Academy of Religion had a women's caucus, as did many other professional organizations.

At the annual AJS meeting that December, the two women posted a sign on a bulletin board outside the lobby of the Copley Plaza. Minutes of the first meeting of the Women's Caucus in 1986 report that some forty women were in attendance, with "many others who are interested, but unable to attend the meeting." The minutes explain that the group had identified two basic purposes: "a network for women in Jewish Studies," and "the creation of an intellectual location for women's issues and studies within the context of Jewish Studies, in particular at the annual AJS meetings."

Recalling that moment, Susan Shapiro emphasizes that "we acted without knowing whether other women would support us. It was quite a risk—I was just out of graduate school and didn't have tenure. But we thought it was time that Jewish Studies needed to change," just as other areas of the academy had already. "Once we made the move," she adds, "there were others who rose to the occasion, notably Paula and Rela."

Immediate plans were made for investigating the status of women in the field,¹¹ development of a directory of Women's Caucus members,¹² and presentation of a panel at the next AJS meeting. According to the minutes,

Professor Anita Norich volunteered to organize a session for the 1987 AJS meeting that would examine the resources within feminist approaches to various disciplines (e.g. literature, history, bible, philosophy, rabbinics, sociology) for Women's Studies as practiced within Jewish Studies.

¹¹ As one of the organizers of this study, Rela Geffen (known then as Rela Monson) realized that without baseline data about all AJS members, it would not be possible to pinpoint the situation of women in Jewish Studies. Questionnaires were published in the Fall 1988 and Spring 1989 issues of the *AJS Newsletter*, and Geffen published an article about the results in the Spring 1990 issue.

¹² The caucus's first address list of 62 members, dated 1986-87, was contributed to this project by Harriet Freidenreich. A more formal directory, compiled in 1991 by Judith Baskin, included brief biographies and publication lists as well as contact information for 80 caucus members, with 15 more added as a supplement the following summer. Additional directories from 1996 and 1999 were contributed to this project; after 2000, computerized lists appear to have replaced printed directories.

Sara Horowitz, currently director of the Center for Jewish Studies at York University in Toronto, remembers “tremendous excitement” at the founding of the Women’s Caucus, and also “a sense of relief”:

There were two things that occupied us. One was the status of women members of AJS—what we could attain, what voice we had. We were quite the minority in AJS. The other was the presence of scholarship on women and gender at the AJS. That, too, was under-represented and regarded with disdain. The people in charge of AJS, the intellectuals shaping it, at that time were not terribly receptive to work on gender.

Looking back at that moment, Deborah Dash Moore comments that

our efforts at that time were more focused on intellectual issues. It was a struggle to attain recognition of the study of women, and Jewish women specifically, as a legitimate academic enterprise.

It was a struggle on multiple fronts. I remember Paula Hyman advocating at the Berks¹³ that historians needed to pay attention to the experiences of Jewish women. At AJS, the Women’s Caucus was a place to make those kinds of intellectual demands that had been taken up already at other professional organization.

Notes Sara Horowitz,

all of us had our foot in Jewish Studies and our foot in a discipline. ... Women’s Studies had taken hold—not that it wasn’t a contested area at any of our universities, but it certainly had taken root much more firmly than it had in Jewish Studies.

For most, the professional challenge was inseparable from the personal experience.

Comments Harriet Freidenreich,

at the time the Women’s Caucus was created it was really necessary to have a place where women could be with other women without being self-conscious about being “one of the guys.” It was all part of the evolution of women in academia.

In the eyes of Chava Weissler,

the Women’s Caucus made AJS a much more comfortable place for women. It was a necessary refuge, a place of solidarity, where our concerns were taken seriously. It made an enormous difference in how it felt to attend the AJS. At the beginning it was incredibly important.

¹³ The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians.

At the same time, the reception of the Women's Caucus was decidedly cool in some quarters. In Susan Shapiro's recollection,

that first year there was whispering. People would come up to us and say "yea" or "nay," pretty strongly. Women were trying to publicly disassociate themselves, even women who later became quote-unquote feminists. I'm not going to name names, but there are women who ... at that point were aligning themselves with the men. That had to do with power. Either they felt vulnerable or they thought that it made more sense politically.

That first year ... we knew we had created something because the buzz was really big. But it really wasn't until the following year that push came to shove.

In 1987, the caucus's second year, a lunchtime meeting of the group is noted in the AJS conference program. Recalls Shapiro,

we had been talking for about ten or fifteen minutes, when all of a sudden [a well-known male AJS member] threw open the door of the room and said he was a member of the AJS and he had a right to be there, and that we were exclusionary ... He completely disrupted the meeting. It turned out he had plants— one of the women present was his employee and she had come there because he wanted to do a whole expose. She had been taking notes—our "safe space" already had a spy. This was a symptom of the way it was, with women who felt they had to do the bidding of the more powerful men.

He would not leave and he would not stop talking. His purpose was to disrupt the meeting and to not allow us to have this safe space. So I decided that what we would do was to disband for the moment, and that we would meet off the schedule in approximately an hour.

This incident offers a powerful indication that women's attempts to strengthen their collective voice were perceived from the outset as a threat to male privilege and power.

Partly as a result of this confrontation, the nascent Women's Caucus was spurred to develop by-laws and a formal definition of membership, to defend their right to hold a women-only gathering. Caucus business was completed at the reconvened meeting; significantly, the group's formal minutes do not reflect any of these controversies. For the next six years, however, the Women's Caucus met as an autonomous organization—the Jewish Studies Women's Caucus —and not as a unit of the AJS. In great part, this was because the officers of

the AJS objected to the women using the AJS name for what they deemed an “exclusionary” group.

This attack on the Women’s Caucus met with the support and approval of at least some other AJS members. As Shapiro recalls that occasion,

I saw it when I came out of the meeting, other men were around him and they were slapping him on the back. ... A lot of the membership felt like that. They had all these stereotypes about feminism. They saw it as part of a larger culture war.

The controversial nature of the Women’s Caucus in its early years is an important aspect of AJS history, and was reflected in other ways. Notes Harriet Freidenreich:

There was a perception that the AJS board, which was so male-dominated, was not sympathetic to the Women’s Caucus, that it was trying to make it harder for the caucus to become a legitimate part of the organization. ... AJS really dragged its feet in recognizing women as a group who had different needs from those of their male colleagues.

Rela Mintz Geffen, the retired president of Baltimore Hebrew University,¹⁴ notes that

every year on the program there was a fight. Could it be listed in the program, how it could be listed in the program, if men could join. We heard complaints that having a women’s caucus “is not fair because it’s not a scientific perspective, but a political opinion.”

Though the idea of a women-only body was controversial at AJS, many of the Women’s Caucus founders still believe it was necessary, at least at first. Notes Sara Horowitz,

some people complained that it should not be part of AJS because it was restricted. At that time, women needed a safe space to discuss issues pertaining to professional challenges and disadvantages at the AJS, and we felt that we needed people not to be overhearing that conversation.

Certainly later on, as the caucus evolved, it opened itself up to male members. But at that point, when the goal was attending to the needs of women members as such ... at least for the first few gatherings it had to be a women’s space.

Susan Shapiro adds that

¹⁴ In 2009, Baltimore Hebrew University became the Baltimore Hebrew Institute of Towson University

only women understood the language of a safe space for women. In other organizations, it was never an issue because men would never think of doing what they did at the AJS. That proved why we needed it so badly.

It should be noted, however, that the antagonistic reception of the Women's Caucus was not a uniform response of the AJS leadership. The early efforts of the caucus, notes Shapiro, were able to move forward in part

because of the one male person on the board who really supported us and that was Robert Seltzer¹⁵ ... As I tell you this I am so moved by it. He was the only man who really stood [up] for us on the board. And he did. He made sure we got on the program, and he supported us. He would say to me, is there something else I can do? ... He didn't do the labor, but he made sure that it wasn't blocked.

Nearly all of the interviews conducted for this project agreed that efforts to support women's participation on equal terms came later to AJS than to most other parts of the academic world. Possible reasons for this delay are suggested by Lori Lefkowitz, who today directs the Jewish Studies Program at Northeastern University:

The field of Jewish Studies had privileged male scholarship, and that was a relic of what was valued in Jewish life – it was all about texts, and for umpteen generations access to that kind of learning had taken place in an all-male environment, especially in *yeshivot*.

Comments Susan Shapiro,

it's interesting that there are so many parallels between the minority status of Jews and that of women. ... Jewish Studies was regarded in the same way that they regarded Women's Studies—it was seen as parochial, inconsequential, particularistic—all those things that made it not actually a proper object of study. In a way they displaced that onto women, all the ways that they were viewed in the academy at that time. ... That marginalization was how they further inscribed their being truly serious scholars, by marginalizing women further.

4. “Not an equal playing field”: The First Decade

Once established, the Women's Caucus grew steadily. In the memories of its early leaders, nonetheless, many of its accomplishments were accompanied by frustrating and

¹⁵ Seltzer served as vice-president for programming in the early years of the Women's Caucus .

sometimes painful memories of a continuing clash over the terms of women's participation in AJS.

The initial panel sponsored by the Women's Caucus was deemed a success, according to the group's minutes for 1987:

The panel ... organized by Anita Norich on interdisciplinary approaches to women's studies in Judaism was very successful. The papers were outstanding and the attendance was exceptionally large, representing the membership of the AJS generally.

Continuing its evolution, that year the group established a Steering Committee (later renamed the Women's Caucus board) and decided to organize a breakfast for the following year.

For that first breakfast, Ellen Umansky invited caucus members Deborah Dash Moore, Judith Wegner, and Marsha Rozenblit to "share with us some of their professional experiences both as individuals and as women in the male-dominated field of Jewish Studies."¹⁶

Since its beginnings in 1988, the breakfast has become the key public face of the Women's Caucus. Riv Ellen Prell, who today teaches American Studies at the University of Minnesota, recalls "the sense of excitement" engendered by the breakfast as well as the conference sessions sponsored by the Women's Caucus:

The caucus breakfast always featured speakers, and we spent a great deal of time deciding who to invite—feminist scholars, feminist activists. There was always a pull between the networking that was so important to these events and bringing a feminist to the podium.

These events were held in the grand ballrooms of the hotels where we met. They were huge and the sheer sense of those numbers was inspiring. There was an atmosphere of intellectual excitement, of being at the center of a profound change. That sense of changing something was hugely important. It was energizing.

At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the AJS in 1994, the caucus organized a breakfast program featuring three caucus members representing three different generations of scholars: Judith Hauptman of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Pamela Nadell of American University, and Miriam Peskowitz, then teaching at the University of Florida. Each of them shared stories about their experiences in Jewish Studies and their reflections on how the field had changed.

¹⁶ Minutes by Ellen Umansky, contributed by Pamela Nadell.

Hauptman, the first woman scholar to specialize in the Talmud, commented that “establishing her credentials in rabbinics precluded her, at the beginning of her career, from conducting research on women. Now, however, graduate students frequently come to her, wanting not only to study rabbinic texts but to use feminist methodologies in their work.”¹⁷ Nadell noted that she attended her first AJS meeting in 1976. As a female graduate student at Ohio State University, “she felt triply isolated. Few women appeared on panels.”¹⁸ Things began to change with the formation of the Women’s Caucus and the presence of scholars committed to a gender perspective. The sessions sponsored by the Women’s Caucus “quickly moved beyond the more accepting disciplines of history and literature to philosophy and rabbinics, areas hitherto resistant to women’s and gender studies.”¹⁹ In her 2012 interview for this oral history project, Nadell recalled

I remember describing how during my early years in AJS I felt as if I were swimming in a sea of bearded faces. I used to hide out in the ladies’ room to meet other women.

As the youngest speaker on the 1994 panel, Peskowitz, then a recent Ph.D., felt unable to comment on changes in the field. Instead, she noted the “striking differences in feminist scholarship in the 1990s from the first pioneering efforts of the late 1960s and 1970s. Then feminist scholarship lacked footnotes because there were no sources to cite.”²⁰

Reflecting today on the Women’s Caucus breakfasts, Nadell comments:

we were consciously in a public forum sharing our stories and our paths to academe—much as the first women who became rabbis did with each other. The breakfasts helped us alleviate the isolation we felt as individuals.

Even now, adds Nadell, “the breakfasts offer an opportunity to meet young scholars on their way up.”

The formal programs at the breakfast were discontinued after 2003, according to caucus minutes from that year. Notes Nadell, the decision to abandon a formal program at the break-

¹⁷ Women’s Caucus minutes for 1994.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

fast in order to leave more time for networking “marks a turning point for the caucus, a sense that we had grown and integrated into the AJS, and that we no longer needed to share our stories to sustain each other.”

For many years, an integral part of the breakfast was the display and sale of new feminist books. Laura Levitt, a professor in the Religion Department at Temple University, organized the display:

For over ten years a women’s bookstore in Cambridge provided books for sale at the Women’s Caucus breakfast, until about eight years ago when women’s presses and women’s bookstores began to disappear. I had tried to urge women’s presses to come to the AJS book exhibit, but the fees to participate were prohibitive for small presses, as was the cost of staffing the exhibit. I thought it was really important for these works not to remain invisible. So I became very involved in broadening the visibility of women’s books. I did it as a labor of love, telling people to bring their own work if they had new books, or knew of other books.

In the early years of the Women’s Caucus, the need for solidarity among women took many forms. Rela Geffen recounts an experience in 1989, when she was mourning the death of her father. Some of the men had “a room set aside to have a *minyan* every morning, before the program started.” At that moment, another active member of the Women’s Caucus, Anne Lapidus Lerner of the Jewish Theological Seminary, was also in mourning:

I used to say *Kaddish* once a day. She used to go three times a day. We used to go to this, quote, men’s *minyan* and stand in the back. This guy who was leading the service, I won’t say his name, got ready to lead the *davenning*. He looked around and saw us standing there. Now, we both wear *kippot*. Anne puts on *tefillin* every day, and I have a *tallit*. He turned around, he looked at us, and he walked out. He said he wouldn’t lead the *davenning* because there wasn’t a proper *mechitza*.

Anne and I are not shrinking violets, yet we never said a word. There were men in there who were friends of ours, but nobody spoke up. Finally, in silence, they started—this is unbelievable, I know—they started taking chairs and they made a barrier in front of us. They put a row of chairs, so that would be like a *mechitza*. We sort of cowered against the back wall.

It was horrible, just horrible. After that happened, we decided that the Women’s Caucus should help us create a *minyan*, so that if any woman needed say *Kaddish*, there would be a *minyan* for her and she wouldn’t have to go through that experience.

We didn’t try to get the men to make an egalitarian *minyan*. We just wanted to have a *minyan* where the woman who was saying *Kaddish* could lead the *davenning*, or it was just mixed or whatever. And so we worked on that.

Reflecting this experience, beginning in 1989, the Women's Caucus minutes include an announcement at the end that "any women requiring a *minyán* at the meeting" should contact either Anne Lerner or Rela Geffen in advance. Comments Geffen,

now it's just established practice that if a woman needs to say *Kaddish*, she can just put the word out. At the time, it was very hot, very controversial. When I asked one of the men later why they had such a strong reaction, he said, because you were wearing *kippot*. You were revolutionaries.

In the wider Jewish world, the Conservative Movement had already begun to ordain women as rabbis by 1985; significantly, Lerner, who experienced this type of blatant sexism at AJS, had been a champion of that effort at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Another much-told story concerns the effort by women to change organizational policy regarding job interviews. In the early 1990s, Sara Horowitz and Ellen Umansky were invited to join the AJS board, a recognition that they had both provided significant service to the organization. As Horowitz recounts:

I was disturbed, as were a number of other women, that it was still the prevailing practice to conduct interviews in bedrooms. This created uncomfortable situations for women candidates who might be interviewed by a group of men, or sometimes a single man in the hotel bedroom, sometimes in the evening. I raised it as an issue for the board to deal with. I thought the board had to deal with it as a matter of policy. The board received what I said skeptically. Clearly they were convinced that nothing untoward would ever happen, that I was being a bit paranoid, but I was quite insistent. Ellen and I together spearheaded a policy change so that there were tables where interviews were to be conducted.

Recalls Beth Wenger, director of the Jewish Studies Program at the University of Pennsylvania:

I myself had the experience as a graduate student of having job interviews in hotel bedrooms with major male scholars. Nothing improper ever happened, but it should never have taken place. Other associations had established standards for job interviews years before.

It was also a time, comments Horowitz,

when women were concerned about whether anybody would realize that they were pregnant during an interview ... or people might actually ask them at an interview whether they would keep working if they had children. There was still this lingering sense that women weren't equal, it was not an equal playing field for women, although already in our universities to it was clear that you couldn't do those kinds of things. These kinds of comments would not have been tolerated anywhere else, but they still hadn't been rooted out of Jewish Studies.

Neither Horowitz nor Umansky was reappointed to the board, even though, notes Horowitz,

most of the board were members of long standing. It may have been just one of those things, or we may have been too vocal.

Judith Baskin also recalls this incident. Her appreciation is that both women “were punished for their outspokenness by not being reappointed.”

Despite these frustrations, the Women’s Caucus continued to move forward. Beginning in 1989, Women’s Caucus minutes reflect discussions of gender-inclusive curricula for Jewish Studies, through panels at AJS. The Women’s Caucus also began to gather and share teaching materials. These efforts came to fruition in 1994 with the publication of *Gender and Jewish Studies*, edited by Judith Baskin and Shelly Tenenbaum. This book grew out of the Women’s Caucus syllabus archive, although, notes Baskin, “at that point the AJS was still touchy about us using their name.”

Another consequence of its lack of recognition as an official part of AJS was that, in its early years the Women’s Caucus had to manage itself—relying, of course, on the efforts of volunteers. This meant that the caucus had to make its own arrangements with the conference hotel for meeting rooms and for catering for the annual breakfast, manage its own membership lists, send out its own mailings, and collect fees for membership in the caucus itself and for attendance at the breakfast. The task was a burdensome one, particularly in the days before computer technology became widespread.

In the mid-1990s, after nearly a decade of this anomalous status, members of the caucus considered whether to admit men to both the breakfast as well as membership in the caucus. Riv Ellen Prell remembers that Paula Hyman, at that time a member of the overall AJS board as well as the Women’s Caucus Steering Committee, was a strong advocate for this change, which she argued would increase the ability of the Women’s Caucus to influence organizational policy. Others expressed qualms about the impact of surrendering the caucus as women-only space. At its 1993 meeting, the caucus Steering Committee decided to poll the membership by mail, sending out 173 ballots; the change was overwhelmingly approved in the course of 1994, by a vote of 61 to 10.

“Ultimately,” recalls Harriet Freidenreich, “We voted to admit men, assuming—quite correctly—that no man would really want to come anyway. Why would they?” This change in policy paved the way for the Women’s Caucus breakfast to be listed in AJS’s conference program, beginning in 1995. Later, as AJS modernized its administrative systems, it became possible for fees for the breakfast and for Women’s Caucus membership to be collected along with overall AJS membership and registration fees.

More than a simple change in policy, however, this development also reflected a changing sensibility. Notes Beth Wenger, part of a later generation of Women’s Caucus leadership, “In the beginning, gender was on the margins. Today, the presence of men would never be questioned.”

5. Gathering Momentum: The Second Decade

In the second decade of the Women’s Caucus, a combination of factors accelerated the process of change. AJS was growing very rapidly as more and more scholars became interested in Jewish Studies. As more women entered the academic workforce, their presence in AJS also grew; by the 1990s, according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*,²¹ women comprised more than a third of the association’s members. As will be discussed in the next section, the Women’s Caucus was part of each of these developments, often as their initiator.

Since its founding, the Women’s Caucus has sponsored conference sessions on a wide variety of issues. In 1994, AJS added a division on Gender Studies as one of its academic divisions. Judith Baskin remembers her amazement when she was invited by the AJS vice-president for program to serve as the body’s first chair. The 1994 program listed ten sessions in the category of “Women’s Studies/Gender Issues.”

Comments Sara Horowitz,

Now it’s unthinkable in Jewish Studies as in any other area of academia to not think about gender if you are doing an academic project. I don’t mean to say that every single individual has

²¹ Fred Skolnik, editor-in-chief. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2d ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Publishing House, 2007.

to be writing about gender, but that it has an integral place in research, and it's not questioned any more.

Success, in this case, has brought its own dilemmas. Referring to her work on the AJS Executive Committee, Horowitz adds:

For a while we had been noticing that the number of submissions [to the Gender Studies division], which at first had climbed, was on a steady decrease. We realized pretty quickly that it wasn't because people weren't writing about women or gender in various fields, but that across the board almost everybody was talking about gender. People did not feel the need to submit it to a special section. There was no longer the fear that if you wrote about women, or images of masculinity, or about some aspect of queer studies, that you wouldn't get a fair reading by the person who was vetting submissions for your discipline.

Notes Marsha Rozenblit, director of graduate studies for the History Department at the University of Maryland:

We've considered whether we should eliminate this as a division, since many people who are working on women submit their proposals to other divisions. Ultimately we decided not to eliminate the division because it would send the wrong message. It's a sign that Women's Studies and gender studies have been so totally naturalized. Today there is no Women's Studies ghetto in AJS.

Chava Weissler served as the third head of the organization's Gender Division, following Judith Baskin and Laura Levitt. In Weissler's view,

It was very frustrating when no one attended the meetings of the section. I ended up recommending that the Gender Division be discontinued. Very few people were using it to suggest papers or panels. In many cases gender issues were proposed to the other divisions.

At this writing, adds Weissler,

After several years of discussion, the Program Committee has decided to discontinue the Gender Division as such. Most topics can be accommodated within other divisions. If people want to look specifically at gender theory, those panels will be handled as interdisciplinary discussions, of gender theory, queer theory, or critical theory.

Although she was not involved in AJS's recent decision to suspend the Gender Division, Susan Shapiro sounds a cautionary note, critiquing the conventional vision of disciplinary change set forth by Marion Schuster and Susan Van Dyne.²² In this model,

²² Marion Schuster and Susan Van Dyne, "Placing Women in the Liberal Arts: Stages of Curricular Transformation,"

at the last stage, issues of women and gender are fully integrated into the discipline. ... Not only do I not think that will happen, but I also do not think it is desirable. I think that once again it is a way of making those issues invisible. It's a notion of the universal that once again wipes out particulars and differences. ... The mistake of the AJS is to think that the marginalization of women is a problem you solve and then you move on.

There is little doubt that the most important initiative coordinated by the Women's Caucus in its second decade was the provision of child care for AJS participants. A proposal urging the AJS to offer child care was submitted by the Women's Caucus and approved by the board in 2003.

For the previous generation of women, asking for child care was simply out of the question. Notes Marsha Rozenblit,

many older women didn't feel the need as acutely as younger women, who may have been single mothers—or who may have a partner who is also in Jewish Studies.

Deborah Dash Moore, who is a few years older than most of the founders of the Women's Caucus, comments that:

Several of us involved in the earliest years had made the decision not to bring our kids. I remember the first time I went to a conference with Paula—maybe the AHA.²³ We had arranged with our husbands to take care of the kids. It was a total disaster. Later, when the issue of childcare came up in AJS, our kids were already grown.

By the early 2000s, though, when the child care issue came to a head, changes in the workforce were prompting younger women to rethink the issue. Andrea Lieber, a professor of Religion at Dickinson College, played a central role in the child care initiative:

My first child was born in 2001. My partner is in the same field, so we brought the kid to AJS. It made some people uncomfortable, but we had to do it. There were a few of us who had children around the same time, so we began to organize to meet our common need.

Laura Levitt, co-chair of the Women's Caucus at that time, recalls that Lieber asked the Women's Caucus to provide financial support for child care. Some caucus members were resistant to the idea, Levitt notes, "asking why women should once again have to take responsibility for children." AJS leadership, meanwhile, was also wary, concerned about questions of liability. In

Harvard Education Review No. 54, 1984.

²³ American Historical Association.

the late 1980s, Levitt explains, “a child died in a tragic accident at a conference of Jewish educators.” Nonetheless, she helped Lieber write the proposal and present it to the board.

When the child care issue came before the board, Judith Baskin was president of the AJS. She recalls:

I began not as an advocate—I was worried about liability—but I was won over. I was reacting to the terrible event that had taken place at CAJE,²⁴ but women needed child care. In the end we found a commercial firm that was bonded and licensed to take it on.

Although it was ultimately successful, this effort also created deep and sometimes bitter divisions within the Women’s Caucus membership. As vice-president for program at that time, Sara Horowitz was also a member of the AJS Executive Committee. She recalls the issue as an area of great controversy:

Various proposals were submitted – a fee that might be levied on all the members, on the order of \$20 or \$30, to subsidize the cost of childcare. Women sent in testimonials about how vital this form of support was for their participation. Simultaneously the Executive Committee received communications from other women who were affronted, as non-parents and sometimes as people without partners, that they should be taxed to support other women. People wrote to us for and against the idea.

In the Executive Committee we were trying to find a solution that would allow childcare to happen but also took into consideration the views of other members. We also had some concerns about insurance – it was quite a complicated issue. The resolution was that we would provide support in kind by turning over for the exclusive use of child care space that the hotel would provide us for conference use.

I remember this as a moment when many members were embittered, in different directions. I don’t know how full the awareness of this embitterment was, but it was something that I could see because I was a member of the Executive Committee. The people who were on the caucus who were spearheading this initiative felt quite angry at the executive of the organization. I think that some of them felt betrayed by us. In reality we were trying to deal with the economic realities of the AJS, which was still struggling, and also with the quite diverse and varying feedback that we were getting from AJS members, including AJS women members, about to what extent they felt it was appropriate that they personally pay for it. It was quite difficult.

According to Laura Levitt, women from many different quarters helped push the proposal through:

Paula Hyman fought for it on the board. Women on the staff were particularly helpful in getting this through. Deborah Glansberg’s husband was on the board of a family foundation, they gave a start-up grant that made it possible to hire a bonded child care agency. After that, Andrea and I were able to secure the support of the Posen Foundation.

²⁴ Center for the Advancement of Jewish Education.

At this writing, however, the support from Posen has ended. Since child care is not affordable without some kind of subsidy, the Women's Caucus, or AJS as a whole, will need to identify renewed sources of funds.

Later in its second decade, the Women's Caucus turned its attention to institutionalizing support for new generations of scholars, by awarding travel grants to graduate students, as well as a prize for innovative scholarship on gender and sexuality. Comments Harriet Freidenreich, such awards are "the best thing the Women's Caucus ever did—providing scholarships to make it possible for graduate students to come and give papers." Notes Beth Wenger, "the Women's Caucus innovated in providing travel grants to graduate students before the AJS as a whole—and may well have been the source of change" in that area.

6. A Different AJS

As time went on, the efforts of the Women's Caucus not only opened up more opportunities for women, but contributed significantly to changes for everyone in the AJS. This section will explore how the attempts to change the status and position of women led to much broader changes in AJS, as well as for Jewish Studies as a scholarly discipline.

Pamela Nadell comments on the simultaneous growth of these varied types of change:

Jewish Studies has expanded exponentially as the organization itself has expanded exponentially. Presentations about women's experiences were unheard of – but so were presentations about folklore, or using anthropological approaches.

The archive of AJS conference programs illustrates how the growth of AJS as an organization (and Jewish Studies as a field) both accompanied and reflected the growing presence of women and the increasing strength of their voices. In 1979, when AJS was only a decade old, the program for the 11th annual conference fit on the front and back of a single page; all of the session chairs, and all but two of the presenters, were male. Ten years later, at the 21st annual meeting in 1989, the conference program had expanded to 31 pages, with five concurrent sessions in most time slots. The impact of the Women's Caucus, then three years old, is visible in the presence of sessions on Women, Writing, and Memory; Gender and Jewish Studies; Immigrant Jewish Women in the United States; and Images of Women in Ancient Jewish

Texts. Two of these sessions are identified as sponsored or cosponsored by the Women's Caucus. The sessions on women's issues generally had women chairs and women presenters; the remaining sessions usually had a slight majority of male chairs and presenters. Nonetheless, women's presence is reflected across the board.

After another decade, at the 31st annual meeting in 1999, the conference program filled 53 pages. Ten concurrent sessions appeared in each time slot. Chairs of the sessions included 53 men and 29 women, while the presenters included 194 men and 151 women.

Summing up the changes in AJS, Judith Baskin comments:

Over the course of the 1990s, change began to come to the organization. ... By 2000, women could be scholars without question—there were differences over child care, but no one questioned whether women could be scholars.

Rela Geffen emphasizes how broad collaboration has often been key to the effectiveness of the Women's Caucus:

I don't think it did much that was alone. It highlighted issues that lots of individuals may have been thinking about, but they didn't have a platform. So it created a platform – and it also created connections among women that were very effective.

One of the clearest markers of change was the growing inclusion of women in positions of organizational leadership. Notes Sara Horowitz,

after a period of years in which very few women had served as AJS president—and no one until Judith Baskin had taken on Women's Studies as their field—it was really unprecedented that we had the two of us in a row, followed by Marsha Rozenblit.²⁵ I think that is really symbolic of change in the organization.

In the appreciation of Susan Shapiro,

it wasn't until Judith Baskin became president and the next president was Sara Horowitz—both women who had been in the founding generation of the Women's Caucus—that things really began to change, so women really felt safe. So much so that today many women don't see it as an issue, although there is a lot more work to be done.

²⁵ Judith Baskin served as AJS president from 2004 to 2006, followed by Sara Horowitz (2006-2009) and Marsha Rozenblit (2009-2011). The earliest women to serve as presidents of the AJS were Jane Gerber (1981-1983) and Ruth Wisse (1986-1988); even though neither of them were associated with the Women's Caucus, they undoubtedly helped pave the way for later women to accede to positions of organizational leadership.

Although the role of women as the organization's president has both symbolic and practical importance, their presence in other leadership roles is also important. Comments Harriet Freidenreich, since 2000,

it's become common for women to be on the board, to be in charge of the Program Committee—and gender is one of the areas where you can organize sessions. ... That really took a long time. It didn't happen in the first ten years of the Women's Caucus.

Likewise, Susan Shapiro believes that the naming of Marsha Rozenblit as editor of the *AJS Newsletter* in 1990 allowed the two of them to collaborate in using the newsletter as a vehicle to publish its first report on the Women's Caucus (see Appendix D).

Noting that Paula Hyman never served as co-chair of the Women's Caucus, Deborah Dash Moore observes:

The Women's Caucus was not her idea—she was more committed to placing herself and other women in positions of organizational leadership. She was, however, one of the founders of the Women's Caucus and a member of its Steering Committee early on. She was deeply committed to women's participation and recognition.

Rela Geffen, who also never served as Women's Caucus co-chair, recalls:

I was the program chair²⁶ for three years. Before that I was on the Program Committee, and I was also on the board. ... I tried very hard to get more history and social science and arts and music.

Everything was a stepping stone. Sara was a co-chair of the Women's Caucus. That was another function of the Women's Caucus—it made certain women visible and when they were looking to nominate people, they couldn't say, "there are no women." It was like breaking the glass ceiling.

Comparing those years to her initial experience of serving on the AJS board, Sara Horowitz reflects that:

It was a different kind of board by then. I began helping the program chair on an ad hoc basis, vetting the applications and mapping out what the program should be. Eventually I was also asked to be on the Program Committee. I think it was on that basis that I was approached and asked if I would become program chair. ... I gave it a lot of thought and ended up agreeing to do it, because I had a lot of notions of what I wanted to see more nurtured at the AJS ... Ensuring that there would be a continuing place for gender. As

²⁶ In formal terms, the vice-president for programming.

someone who is in literature, which has always been kind of peripheral to the AJS, I wanted to create a more established place for the arts.

As Lori Lefkowitz observes, “the women who were strong voices in the Women’s Caucus ultimately became strong voices in the organization.” The Women’s Caucus nurtured a generation of leaders who went on to influence the overall agenda of AJS conferences, and indirectly, the growth and character of the field.

Accompanying such changes in women’s access to leadership was the growing professionalization of association’s staff, as well as the modernization its administrative systems. Comments Judith Baskin, “AJS used to be run out of the back pocket” of its long-time executive director, Charles Berlin, who served in that position from 1973 to 1995. As Rela Geffen comments, “he held the contemporary stuff back, not only in terms of subject matter but also the technology of getting the program done.” His successor, Aaron Katchen, served as executive director from 1995 to 2004, also a formative period in the evolution of the Women’s Caucus.

Notes Deborah Dash Moore,

the really big change occurred when Rona Sheramy was hired as executive director. At that time I was serving as vice-president for membership. The system in those days was designed to keep people out, not invite them in. They didn’t want people without Ph.D.s, they didn’t want rabbis. The leadership at that time was very worried about Jewish Studies being taken seriously.

Rona began as an academic but she was committed to learning how to manage the organization. ... She helped bring women into leadership roles. ... Big changes occurred with Rona in how women were recognized and where and how they were included.

During her period as vice-president for programming, recalls Sara Horowitz, “I was on the hiring committee that hired Rona Sheramy,” the current AJS executive director:

She learned the ropes as executive director and I learned the ropes as vice-president for programming simultaneously. We were both on a learning curve. I was delighted to work with her at her beginnings at AJS ... We both would have to think creatively about how to take the organization to the next stage. It was a small organization when I first started going as a graduate student. It was still fairly small when the Women’s Caucus started. It had grown considerably in numbers and also in the fields ... So the AJS was at a turning point because of the number of members and the diversity of their interests.

All of these processes of change accompanied as well as fostering profound changes in AJS as a scholarly organization. Recalls Marsha Rozenblit,

AJS has changed a lot. At the beginning it only included Jewish history or fields that were based on knowledge of ancient languages or ancient history, such as rabbinic literature or rabbinics. In the early days of AJS most people had a grounding in classical Jewish texts, which required a knowledge of Hebrew. Very few women were among the presenters then.

Now the field is far more open to people who don't have that grounding. Their participation has provided many new perspectives. These changes have expanded the field beyond those who have this kind of classical training. This has opened up to new areas of literature and also to questions of film and visual art. It has also incorporated the social sciences, opening to such areas as sociology or anthropology, which has brought a wonderful complexity to the discussions.

Echoing Rozenblit's comments, Riv Ellen Prell observes that

AJS used to be old-school historians, men doing classical rabbinics. I came in as an anthropologist, looking at folklore. Over time as the field expanded the types of people who came to the meeting also expanded.

Explains Harriet Freidenreich,

it used to be that most women were in the modern period. It used to be that women didn't have the languages or skills to do ancient and medieval. Certainly not that many of us had studied Talmud. ... Traditionally Jewish Studies has emphasized Talmud, biblical studies, medieval philosophy. Now all that is changing. There are a significant number of women who do medieval, and are even leading scholars in the field, as well as in earlier periods. In previously all-male fields, everyone was ordained as rabbis and went into academia. That was the standard route into academics in my generation—for Jewish men. Of course, Jewish women didn't have that option.

Notes Pamela Nadell:

The process of change in Jewish Studies as a discipline has been very striking. You could verify it by looking at the nature of books published in the field each year. Sometime in the 1990s, Shelley Tenenbaum and Lynn Davidman published a book on Jewish Studies and feminism, with comments from scholars in the field about what changes they had observed in response to the emergence of gender studies.²⁷ Paula Hyman wrote the chapter on modern Jewish history – I remember a quip from those days, that all roads lead to Paula.

Deborah Dash Moore recalls the importance of Hyman's 1995 publication, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*.²⁸

²⁷ Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum, eds. *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

²⁸ Paula Hyman. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*. Seattle: University of Washington, 1995.

Publishing this book was an important decision for her; she was making an intellectual claim about the importance of gender in understanding modern Jewish history. It's hard to recognize how daring it was to do this then. Previously she had tended to subordinate her interest in women to the overall topic of modern Jewish history.

Moore also comments on her experiences of collaboration with Hyman:

I worked with Paula on *Jewish Women in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*. I still recall our experience as we asked people to write contributions. Men would mostly say no—and women would usually try to find some information. Because of that, people who had never been paid attention to entered into the historical record.

Hyman, recalls Moore,

championed women's history and took a lot of guff for it from senior male scholars. Many stories are told of how she was challenged, but she never wavered. She was always focused on why it was important. ... She was a fierce feminist, a tireless advocate of the study of women and gender.

Paula also championed other women's scholarship. Marion Kaplan's work was questioned because she was not fluent in Hebrew. Paula fought for Chava Weissler's work on women's Yiddish prayers.²⁹ It is hard today to get a sense of the amount of guff women scholars received. After Chava published her book, it was dismissed as a contribution by men saying "we knew that already."

Gail Riemer reflects on accompanying changes in the organizational culture of AJS:

The sessions now are a lot more diverse. They all used to be organized in the same format: three papers that would be presented, and then the audience would tear them apart, which was called "commenting." Now there are a lot more interactive formats, more real conversations.

Adds Deborah Dash Moore:

Today we are looking at types of books that would never have been taken seriously before – cookbooks, travel literature, children's books.

Notes Chava Weissler:

Today there is a lot more interest in the religious lives of ordinary people—folk religion, popular religion. It is part of the movement that has led to social history. It's also been a feminist struggle, because women by definition are not part of the elite.

Pamela Nadell comments that:

²⁹ Chava Weissler. *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.

Changes in AJS were an outgrowth of the feminist revolution and the development of Women's Studies. The changes at that time were transformative – not only in the AJS but in every field of social sciences and humanities.

Through all of these changes, the impact of the Women's Caucus is a constant thread. Comments Sara Horowitz, "I think that the role of the caucus should not be underestimated." In the appreciation of Beth Wenger, the Women's Caucus

has played a pivotal role in organizational change. It began on the margins—but what we innovated is now institutionalized. Papers on gender and sexuality are common. Child care is provided.

Many of the initiatives for opening and changing the organization began in the Women's Caucus. It has been a conduit for the impact of cultural studies and queer studies—reflecting a change not only in subject matter but also in theoretical perspectives.

Argues Gail Reimer,

none of this would have happened before the Women's Caucus. The Women's Caucus has enabled women to claim their space. It has served as a safe space to talk about the challenges of doing it all. It allows women to be women and not put aside who they are.

Adds Pamela Nadell:

The Women's Caucus was not a CR group,³⁰ but it definitely helped us to raise our consciousness that what we were experiencing was not an isolated event. The field of Jewish Studies became transformed as a result of these changes, which has also been echoed in the progress of AJS

In the process, comments Riv Ellen Prell,

the Women's Caucus went from being a truly tiny group to one that was always growing. The Women's Caucus board meetings were always late at night after a very full day. The mood in the room was always a sense of pleasure at being with peers, with people you could count on. I remember the sense that "we are women who get things done."

I felt that we were living out our politics and making a difference ... When I won an award in 2011 I needed to acknowledge how important the Women's Caucus had been to my career. It wasn't easy to enter the space of the AJS. It was not an easy place for women to be. The Women's Caucus made it possible for women to keep coming.

Through her work with the Women's Caucus, adds Prell,

³⁰ CR, or consciousness raising, groups were a common strategy for the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Such groups used personal testimony to highlight the political character of their experiences.

we worked hard to bring in younger women, graduate students and junior scholars. Usually there were three generations together in the room.

It was such a multigenerational group—the people who were ahead of you and the people coming along behind you.

Prell concludes that:

We were very aware of the most basic lesson of feminism: women could succeed only by networking, by creating a presence for ourselves. We could only succeed together.

7. Thoughts on the Future

The interviews conducted for this project did not indicate any strong agreement on the future role of the Women's Caucus. This section notes common themes that emerged in the interviews, but also reveals some areas of disagreement.

When the Women's Caucus began, many, if not most, of its founders were early career scholars or graduate students. Notes Chava Weissler:

Those of us who fought to have women's voices respected created a kind of generational solidarity. Younger women may feel like, what's the point? But it's always useful to have a group with whom you can strategize.

A key aspect of working with the Women's Caucus, reflects Susan Shapiro,

was working with some really fantastic women. That was really a privilege. ... Women really helped one another. Rela was older than I was, and Paula was not only older but more advanced in her career—but there was a lot of mutual support. ... There was, at least among some of us, a sense of being able to rely on one another—in a context where there weren't really any foremothers.

On the question of whether AJS should still have a women's caucus, believes Karla Goldman,

the question is important because it's a way of asking, what are the outstanding challenges? ... Did it provide a collective voice, or strengthen the collective voice, that changed AJS policies toward what kind of papers we allow in? Is the introduction of daycare redefining the AJS experience? Those are pretty central things. Even once you accomplish those things, I never like to make the assumption that "our work is done."

Comments Lori Lefkowitz:

The Women's Caucus is invaluable. It was a necessary intervention in the early years that has matured into an important community ... Just the number of people who sign up for the caucus, who come to the breakfast, suggests that absolutely it needs to continue.

Regarding the suspension of the Gender Division, Chava Weissler says:

Although I've been one of the proponents of this change, I continue to feel that the Women's Caucus is an essential location—to support solidarity among women, to create a space to have necessary discussions. It has been an important base of power for women and the location for a lot of important thinking.

A less sanguine note is struck by Riv Ellen Prell, who says,

we need to ask whether the Women's Caucus succeeded so well that it went from being at the center of women's activism to becoming very small. ... As the number of young women grows in the field, the number of women at the breakfast continues to shrink. ... In my day we filled a whole ballroom. ... How is the Women's Caucus perceived from the outside? What is its reputation? What would younger women say about why they don't come? What are the needs today in the eyes of younger women?

A related concern is raised by Susan Shapiro:

There are fewer places you can go—especially since Paula's passing—for gender training in Jewish graduate studies. A lot of the women who do gender studies are not teaching in institutions with graduate students. That is another challenge for keeping women's studies and gender analysis really viable inside the Jewish academy. ... I can see the distance we've come, but I'm also very worried about what will happen in the next stage. I'm worried about gender studies dying out and not being passed onto another generation.

The importance of mentoring was a common theme in many interviews. Comments Marsha Rozenblit,

I was well mentored so I want to do the same for others, for young historians of Jews. I make a point of talking to them and befriending them. Of course I mentor my own graduate students. I try to know younger scholars whose work is closely related to mine. But I also try to go beyond that.

Ellen Umansky sees mentoring as a key role for the Women's Caucus :

The AJS still needs a women's caucus, and mentoring should be its most important role. It's important for younger scholars to meet older women.

For Susan Shapiro, meanwhile, "there has to be more mentoring, but there also has to be more institutional change." Comments Shapiro,

I think the issue of women in the academy is still an issue. There is definitely not equality for women in the academy—not just in Jewish Studies, and not just on pay but in other

ways as well. ... In the larger culture women are not treated with proper respect ... There is still pervasive sexism in our culture and our society.

Shapiro continues to question the suspension of AJS's Gender Division, "at a time when Women's Studies programs across the country have been transforming themselves":

Here at the University of Massachusetts it's become Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. So once again AJS is behind the curve ... I think that is part of the unfinished task. Instead of complicating and nuancing, to make it more inclusive of different kinds of differences, we just closed down a section.

Beth Wenger notes that the role of the Women's Caucus has inevitably evolved over time, as more forums are created for discussion of mentorship and other key issues. Wenger asks outright:

Is the Women's Caucus still as important? We won't know for ten or twenty years. As gender studies are normalized, the role of the Women's Caucus is less clear. People still remember being marginalized, however. What will happen in twenty years? We don't know.

Notes Deborah Dash Moore,

a Women's Caucus can always evolve. I think that mentoring continues to be an important role. Raising money for travel grants is also important. I think the Women's Caucus still has things to do—but it's the younger women who should define their own needs.

8. Conclusion: A Transformative Impact

The AJS Women's Caucus made its mark at the intersection of some of the most important social changes in the United States toward the end of the twentieth century. In the broadest sense, the stories recounted here are part of women's quest for both equity and recognition within the American Jewish community as well as higher education as a whole. Its most immediate impetus was the origin and rise of Women's Studies in the U.S. university curriculum, followed by the many challenges accompanying the integration of a gender perspective into the world of Jewish Studies.

Reflecting on what has—and hasn't—changed in AJS, Sara Horowitz comments:

One issue that has been resolved is gender studies is accepted throughout the field. Sort of resolved is that women have a presence and can take on leadership roles in the AJS.

Women do not face obstacles in acting as presenters. But I still think that there is a place for women interested in gender studies to convene. I also think there is a place for an organization that is concerned, maybe as a watchdog.

For Susan Shapiro, the ability of caucus members to work together despite their disagreements has been one of the most important aspects of the experience:

Those are skills and muscles that I developed in forming the Women's Caucus and learning how to deal with people who have quite a range of perspectives on really fundamental issues. I don't actually think that an organization, or a discipline, should all have unanimity—it's important to have a diversity of views. But you have to know not only how to live but how to lead in such a culture

As often occurs with movements for social change, the efforts of the Women's Caucus include significant accomplishments to be proud of as well as areas of inequity that have proved more resistant to change. On the positive side, the Women's Caucus unquestionably fostered the acceptance within the world of Jewish Studies of gender as a category of analysis, with its customary impact on the field's epistemological and methodological horizons. It also accelerated the accession of women to positions of organizational leadership at every level.

"When looking back," Susan Shapiro reflects,

it seems like the existence of the caucus was almost a foregone conclusion once it was begun. This was not really the case, however. Its existence was threatened or weakened a number of times. It was especially crucial for the group's sustainability over time that the running of the caucus was passed successfully between and among co-chairs and across generations. We made sure that only one chair cycled off at a time so that the practical and tacit knowledges related to running the caucus were passed on.

Despite the many accomplishments of the Women's Caucus, however, the economic inequities faced by women in the academic workforce continue in Jewish Studies, as they do throughout the academic world. Likewise, questions of work/life balance remain primarily an individual challenge, which characteristically imposes disproportionate costs on women. Both are issues that may well prove decisive for the future of the Women's Caucus—as will the possible outcomes of AJS's future efforts to secure funding to subsidize child care at its annual meetings.

In recent years, academics across the board have witnessed the marked decline of tenure-track appointments and the shrinking of academic employment overall. Both changes have been accompanied by the rise of a contingent academic workforce, adjunct instructors

who work without benefits or job security. Likewise, many universities have witnessed a concerted attack on the value and scope of the humanities. All these changes are aspects of the rise of what could be termed the neoliberal university.

The social movements that arose during the 1960s and 1970s emerged during a period of sustained expansion in the U.S. economy, and were likewise influenced by the expansion of higher education here and around the globe. The problems noted above, however, derive from deeper changes in the U.S. economy, and as such cannot be addressed at the level of Jewish Studies or any other single discipline. AJS and those committed to Jewish Studies can, however, contest whether such processes of retrenchment will reinscribe the gender inequities of earlier eras. This, too, is a challenge that may well have a decisive impact on the possible futures of the Women's Caucus.

Appendix A. Interviews for this Project

This report is based on interviews with women who played a leadership role in the Women's Caucus during its first two decades.

Judith Baskin

Harriet Freidenreich

Rela Mintz Geffen

Karla Goldman

Sara Horowitz

Lori Lefkowitz

Laura Levitt

Andrea Lieber

Deborah Dash Moore

Pamela Nadell

Riv Ellen Prell

Gail Reimer

Marsha Rozenblit

Susan Shapiro

Ellen Umansky

Chava Weissler

Beth Wenger

Appendix B. Women's Caucus Co-chairs, 1986-2013

Susan Shapiro, 1986-1990

Ellen Umansky, 1986-1989

Judith Baskin, 1990-1991

Sara Horowitz, 1991-1993

Harriet Freidenreich, 1993-1994

Pamela Nadell, 1994-1995

Tamar Rudavsky, 1995-1996

Rochelle Millen, 1996-1997

Riv Ellen Prell, 1999-2000

Laura Levitt, 2001-2003

Gail Reimer, 2002-2003

Beth Wenger, 2002-2004

Miriam Peskowitz, 2004-2005

Andrea Lieber, 2005-2009

Marjorie Lehman, 2008-2009

Gail Labovitz, 2009-2012

Caryn Aviv 2011-2013

Shira Kohn, 2013-

Jessica Cooperman, 2013-

Appendix C. Women's Caucus Statement of Purpose (1988, revised 2002)

Statement of Purpose (1988)

The Women's Caucus of the Association of Jewish Studies is a support and networking organization of and for women in Jewish Studies. Its primary concerns are the advancement both of women in the profession and the academic study of women in Judaism. Reflection on our experiences as women is central to the realization of these two purposes.

—Drafted by the newly formed Steering Committee³¹ and approved unanimously at the 1988 meeting of the Women's Caucus.

Statement of Purpose (2002 revision)³²

Founded in 1986, the AJS Women's Caucus provides a forum for building relationships among Jewish feminist scholars and supports women in the profession. Working to advance the study of gender within the Association for Jewish Studies and within the wider academic community, the Caucus welcomes both women and men within its membership. Annually, the organization sponsors at least one session on gender at the AJS conference and offers travel grants to graduate students presenting papers related to gender. In the past, the Caucus has published a collection of gender-inclusive and women's studies syllabi in Jewish Studies and it currently sponsors several electronic discussion groups for its members and for AJS members.

The Caucus holds a breakfast each year at the conference with presentations about recent work in gender and Jewish Studies or issues of concern within the profession. At the breakfast, the Caucus also displays newly published books, provides information on programs, conferences and fellowships, and offers an opportunity for graduate students, junior and senior scholars to meet and exchange ideas.

Founded at a time when feminist concerns and scholarship on gender were marginalized within the field of Jewish Studies, the Women's Caucus has helped to bring these issues to greater prominence within the Association for Jewish Studies and the larger scholarly community.

³¹ The caucus's first steering committee is listed in the 1988 minutes as the two cochairs—Susan Shapiro and Ellen Umansky—as well as Paula Hyman, Deborah Dash Moore, Judith Baskin, Chava Weissler, Hanah Kliger, Rela Monson [Geffen], and Anita Norich.

³² From documents contributed by Beth Wenger.

Appendix D. Published Accounts

This brief list includes accounts that are directly related to the story told in this report or are mentioned in the interviews discussed here. The listing is presented in chronological order to highlight when each piece was published. Note that the AJS Newsletter was renamed AJS Perspectives in 1999.

Many of the women interviewed for this project are well known as authors of works related to Jewish women's history, Jewish feminism, and other scholarly areas. Readers are urged to consult their works or to refer to bibliographic essays concerned with the emergence and growth of Jewish feminist writing. A 2009 article by Paula Hyman, "Judaic Studies in the United States," posted on the Jewish Women's Archive, provides an overview of women's research in the field, including a description of the work of many women who were participants in this oral history project.³³ An extensive review of the impact of Jewish feminist scholarship and activism is presented in the encyclopedia article "Judaism and Gender" by Laura Levitt.³⁴

1990 (Spring). Susan E. Shapiro, "Voice from the Margins: Women and Jewish Studies," *AJS Newsletter*.

1990. Vanessa Ochs, "Jewish Feminist Scholarship Comes of Age," *Lilith Magazine*.

1992 (Spring). Judith Baskin, "Report from the AJS Women's Caucus," Association for Jewish Studies [*AJS Newsletter*].

1994. Judith Baskin and Shelley Tenenbaum, eds. *Gender and Jewish Studies: A Curriculum Guide*, New York: Biblio Press.

1995 (Fall). Pamela Nadell, "Report from the AJS Women's Caucus," *AJS Newsletter*.

1995 (Fall). Dorothy O. Helley, "Gender and Jewish Studies," *AJS Newsletter*.

1996. Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum, eds.. *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

³³ Online at jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/judaic-studies-in-united-states, accessed 4/12/2013

³⁴ *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Dr. Neil J. Smelser and Dr. Paul B. Baltes, Editors in Chief. Oxford: Elsevier Science Limited, 2001, 8011-8014 (updated version forthcoming 2013).

1996-97. Sarah Blustain, "Constructing (Not Deconstructing) the Jewish Feminist Pantheon: What's going on behind the pillars of academia," *Lilith Magazine*.

1997. Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, eds. *Jewish Women in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge.

1998. Judith Baskin et al., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*. 2d edition, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

2007 (March 9). Megan Pincus Kajitani, "Bring the Kids," *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

2011 (Dec. 30). Deborah Dash Moore, "Remembering Paula Hyman, Pioneering Historian and Feminist: An Appreciation," *The Jewish Daily Forward*

2013. Lila Corwin Berman, "Paula Hyman and the Engendering of Modern Jewish History: A Defining Scholarly Life," *Jewish Quarterly Review*.