

The Myth of American Jewish Feminization

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ABSTRACT

Historians, sociologists, and contemporary critics have used the trope of the “feminization of the synagogue” to describe and critique gendered changes in American Judaism. Yet, given its many usages, the concept has proven too ambiguous and wide-ranging to function as a useful analytical description. This article begins by parsing the multiple uses of the term feminization: Who uses it, and what might they mean? Equipped with this map of the many meanings of the concept, the article then takes the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a case study. In this period, there is little historical evidence to support the idea that a single, identifiable phenomenon we should call feminization of the synagogue occurred. The persistence of the scholarly trope of feminization of the synagogue, despite the uneven evidence and slipperiness of the term, suggests the need for greater specificity and clarity in scholarly use.

Key words: feminization, gender, women, American Judaism

“**W**hen women in the gallery were admitted to the main floor of the synagogue, the men disappeared from the services,” the British playwright Israel Zangwill said to the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods’ 1916 meeting.¹ Whether the women in attendance believed him, many historians of American religion have. Narratives of the history of American Judaism often include a story about the “feminization of the synagogue.” To take a typical instance, one historian writes: “Reform rabbis and their Conservative colleagues as well had to admit that Zangwill’s observation was right on the mark: As the most ‘enthusiastic of shuel-goers,’ women filled the American synagogue; without them, one observer related, ‘the spacious and

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luxurious temple would be almost empty.’”² Nevertheless, a close look suggests that widespread concern about feminization of the synagogue in the United States is more a narrative trope than it was a specific, identifiable phenomenon for early twentieth-century Jewish communities. Moreover, historians have applied the concept of feminization to every period of American Jewish history since the early nineteenth century. Feminization, in its current scholarly usage in American Jewish history, I will argue, has proven too ambiguous and wide-ranging to function as a coherent analytical description.

I begin by parsing what historians—and historical actors—mean when they talk about feminization. I then use the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a case study, examining the primary sources cited by historians and showing that the wide-ranging uses of the term *feminization* make it a poor candidate for illuminating the social and religious dynamics of the time. I then ask why the standard narrative has had such staying power despite its lack of analytical clarity and uneven historical support. In response, I offer historiographical reasons for the appeal of the “concerns about feminization” narrative.

I. What Do We Talk about When We Talk about Feminization?

The term *feminization* is complicated because of its unstable meaning. Sometimes historians use it; sometimes their historical subjects use it. Sometimes it describes a social process, sometimes it functions as a critique of a process, and sometimes it serves as an analytical term to help make sense of a social process.³ In every case, what counts as *feminine* changes with time and cultural context. So what does it mean for historians of American Jews?

Feminization has two basic meanings. First, it can mean that something or someone that was not previously feminine has become feminine. Here it is crucial to note that femininity is neither an inherent nor an objective quality. “Being” feminine itself is a linguistic shorthand for a complex set of social processes involving not only the person, thing, or idea that has “been” feminized but also others around it. Judith Butler reminds us that the gender of a person, for instance, is not solely an act of will or self-description, but it is always shaped by both the person herself and the others who describe her, categorize her, and treat her according to their own perceptions of her gender.⁴ Adding to the complexity of the concept, the idea of femininity changes in different cultural and historical contexts. To take a trivial example, today, painting a room pink could be described as feminizing the space. But in the early

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twentieth century, pink was not strongly associated with girls or women; in fact, some style books recommended blue for girls and pink or red tones for boys.⁵ An early twentieth-century observer, then, would have been unlikely to refer to painting a room pink as feminizing it. Second, feminization can refer to something or someone who had some feminine qualities now having more feminine qualities or those qualities becoming more pronounced or more visible. Like the first meaning, this meaning depends on something—what I’ve called *feminine qualities*—that differs with cultural context.

But each of these definitions begs the question of what it means for something to become feminine. One sense in which scholars have used the term *feminization* is to refer to women specifically.⁶ I call this shift in demographics *women’s increasing presence*. In this case, women participate in a cultural, political, professional, or religious space either for the first time or in higher numbers. Commentators sometimes say that a profession, such as education or the practice of family law, became feminized when women entered the profession in greater numbers.⁷ Faith Rogow discusses the “phenomenon of synagogues’ feminization,” which she characterizes as “large percentages of women congregants.”⁸ Some scholars have even referred to the “feminization of the clergy” in American history.⁹ A related phenomenon is women’s increasing authority, which often accompanies women’s increasing presence. For instance, as more women began to work in education, more women became school principals. A trend toward more women in the synagogue might be accompanied by more women heading synagogue committees.

A common—though by no means necessary—corollary to women’s increasing presence is the “disappearance” of men. The explanation takes women’s presence and involvement as the cause of men’s absence. Zangwill proffered this interpretation, but he was far from the last to do so. “The feminization of Jewish life has either neutered men or driven them to other safe harbors,” wrote one rabbi about American Reform Judaism in 2011.¹⁰ “Jewish Women: Bring on the Orthodox Sexodus!,” a 2015 *Times of Israel* piece, argued that egalitarianism and women’s presence in Orthodox synagogues drove men away.¹¹ Sociologists Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer also recently connected women’s increasing presence and authority to men’s absence in contemporary American Jewish communal life.¹²

In every period, the majority of primary sources that use the term *feminization* do so with negative connotations. American Jewish historians and sociologists attempt to use the term in more neutral and descriptive ways, but these vary in their success. Riv-Ellen Prell puts it most pointedly: “When historians have written about the

feminization of culture or religion, it usually is an attack on women who have driven men away from culture or religion.”¹³ It is, of course, possible for scholars to take a term their sources use, transform it, and then use it as an analytical term. But in these cases, scholars must explain why and how they are transforming and adapting that term to an analytical context. If scholars want to use the term *feminization*, they must explain the difference between their own usage and that of their sources.

Feminization, however, is not always used to describe the increasing presence of women. The reference to the “feminization of the clergy” hints at this ambiguity. Does it refer to a historical trend according to which more women are ordained and work as clergy? Or might it refer to male clergy, such as Catholic priests, who were seen as having feminine characteristics? This latter option points to another sense in which *feminization* is used. Something or someone might become feminized by taking on qualities associated with women. I refer to this model of feminization as *taking on feminine qualities*. No women are Catholic priests, and yet the office could be considered feminized where priests have nurturing, compassionate, or sacrificing roles with decreasing political influence. During the Progressive Era, some Protestant Christians complained that Jesus was feminized, for example. Best-selling Protestant author Bruce Barton complained that in his boyhood Sunday school, the pictures of Jesus showed “a pale young man with no muscle” who was “the Lamb of God,” which sounded to him “like Mary’s little lamb, something for girls—sissified.”¹⁴

Something can also be feminized by others attributing feminine qualities to it, even if it does not have those qualities. For instance, a man could be feminized if others called him feminine names and insisted he was like a woman. Jewish history has seen many examples of the feminization of the (male) Jew in this sense. The Middle Ages had the trope of the menstruating Jewish man.¹⁵ Of course, (cisgender) Jewish men did not menstruate, during the Middle Ages or at any other time. But others claiming that they did was a process of feminization. The stakes in feminization as taking on feminine qualities are significant: historian Joan Scott reminds us that ascribing gendered characteristics is a “primary way of signifying relationships of power.”¹⁶ And feminization, historically, has often marked disempowerment. In late nineteenth-century Europe, to take another example, nationalist discourses often feminized Jewish men by claiming their bodies were too weak to serve as soldiers or model citizens.¹⁷ Religious practice could be feminized if it was characterized by

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emotion, sentimentality, or domesticity. As these examples suggest, this kind of feminization carries implications beyond the presence or absence of women.

Many scholars have used the term *feminization* imprecisely, and it is not my goal to list people to shame. The following examples are suggestive not because the scholarship contains particularly unclear usage but rather because they demonstrate that even scholars who carefully attend to issues of gender have used the term imprecisely. Judith Baskin, best known as both a writer and an editor of careful scholarship about Jewish women, writes,

As increasing numbers of women become rabbis, some in the Jewish community have expressed fears that an imminent “feminization of the rabbinate” will diminish the respect in which the rabbi and the rabbi’s functions are held, and that “men will relegate religious life to women and cease being active in the synagogue,” in the words of one woman rabbi.¹⁸

It seems that the contemporary Jewish community Baskin is studying does not differentiate among the multiple meanings of “feminization.” The passage indicates a thicket of women’s increasing participation and leadership, the attribution of feminine characteristics to all rabbis and the office of the rabbinate in general, and perhaps also concern at rituals taking on feminine characteristics. We need Baskin, as the scholar, to parse these multiple meanings and analyze how they function in tandem.

When scholars put quotation marks around the word *feminization*, it is clear that they are wary of the term. Nevertheless, the use of scare quotes can still lead to ambiguity. In a review of Jonathan Sarna’s *American Judaism*, David Biale discusses “a striking dynamism” within Reform Judaism and gives the example of “the ordination of women, arising out of the external feminist movement, but also out of the internal ‘feminization’ of the synagogue.”¹⁹ But the internal processes that characterized this feminization—more women attending, more women visible in leadership roles, seemingly more feminine prayer or other rituals, or something else—goes unmentioned. Biale’s use of the term also obscures how “external” feminist movements may have overlapped with, influenced, or been influenced by the “internal” processes of Jewish feminization.

Paula Hyman writes that acculturated Jewish women

sustained aspects of religious practice that their husbands had abandoned. In doing so, they created a Jewish version of the bourgeois

Protestant wife and mother. The “feminization” of the synagogue, which occurred above all in nineteenth-century American Reform Judaism, and the association of religious sensibility with women made Jews more like their Christian neighbors.²⁰

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Though Hyman’s research is exceptionally attentive to Jewish gender dynamics, even here the precise meaning of this feminization of the synagogue remains unclear. Does it denote more women attending, women adopting rituals that were traditionally men’s domain within the synagogue, changes in the leadership and visibility of women at American Reform synagogues, or some combination of these? And how is feminization related to “the association of religious sensibility with women,” which Hyman lists separately from the feminization of the synagogue?

Given this ambiguity, parsing the concept of “the feminization of the synagogue” proves a significant task. First, we need to clarify who is claiming to see feminization. Is it the Jews whom scholars study seeing and decrying feminization, or is it the historians who analyze documents and see a set of social processes they name *feminization*? When historians uncritically reproduce the term, either from their primary sources or from elsewhere in the secondary literature, they leave the readers with a muddy sense of what the term might mean. Second, we need to parse what the speaker means by *feminization*. Is it feminization in the sense of increased women’s presence or in the sense of taking on feminine qualities? And what is the content of the observation or concern? It could have been about women’s presence, authority, or bodies; or it could have been about the synagogue or services taking on qualities that attendees deemed feminine. Jews might have thought that women were forcing men out or silencing them. They might have been concerned that women were taking over positions of power and authority in the synagogue. They might have observed that women were attending services in larger numbers than men. Or *feminization* may have been a more general commentary on American Judaism, beyond the bodies and actions of women themselves. For instance, they may have thought that practices and theologies were taking on feminine qualities. Jews, like some Protestants, could have become concerned about their religious figures becoming “sissies.” Any of these could be described as feminization, and so scholars should be clear about who is using the term and what it means, even when the primary sources use it imprecisely.

II. Interrogating the Feminization Narrative, 1880–1924

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My purpose here is not to criticize particular scholars but rather to critique the usage of the category of feminization. Not only is it an analytically unhelpful category for understanding American Jews or Judaism around the turn of the century, but the way historians have used it also suggests that the term has not been helpful for illuminating any period of American Jewish history. Some historians use the term *feminization* to describe the early nineteenth century;²¹ others use the term to refer to the mid- to late nineteenth century;²² others late nineteenth and early twentieth;²³ and others the nineteenth century as a whole.²⁴ Still others talk about feminization in the second half of the twentieth century²⁵ or the 1970s and 1980s,²⁶ whereas some use the term to refer to American Judaism today.²⁷ Here I have chosen the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a case study because my research suggests that more historians use the term to describe that era than other eras. But all together, the term *feminization* has been used to describe every period of the history of American Judaism since the beginning of the nineteenth century. When a term seems to apply to every period for more than two hundred years, we should be suspicious of its utility as an analytical category.

The scholarly story of feminization is a story of acculturated, largely English-speaking Jews. This is for two reasons. First, when these Jews talked about the “feminization of the synagogue” or worried that fewer men were attending, they worried about acculturated synagogues, not immigrant-attended shuls. Nor did immigrant congregations themselves record worries about feminization of the shul.²⁸ As far as I have been able to tell, in this period Yiddish did not even have a word for *feminization* or *effeminization*.²⁹ Though Jewish immigrants borrowed words liberally from English, it seems that *feminization* was not a word they needed in order to discuss their observations and concerns about synagogues. It was not that immigrant Jews did not care about gender or utterly lacked the vocabulary to discuss it. Letters to the editor, exposés, and even day-to-day news stories opined about the proper ways for Jewish immigrant women to dress and behave in public and in private.³⁰ They discussed the *froyen frage* (women question) and negotiated how to adjust to different gender roles from the norms of eastern European Jewish life. And yet Yiddish writers did not express feminization as an explicit concern about synagogues. Second, scholars, too, have used the term *feminization* to discuss acculturated Jews and their religion but rarely the Judaism of Yiddish-speaking Jews in the United States. Since the goal here is to evaluate the utility of the

scholarly use of the term *feminization*, the discussion focuses on the historical phenomena scholars have used it to describe.

When historians discuss a change in gender roles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they are discussing a very real and significant cultural shift. The years 1880 to 1924 saw the immigration of nearly two million eastern European Jews to the United States. These Jews joined the acculturated Jews, many of whom descended from families in Western Europe, who had already made the United States their home. Most of the acculturated Jews aligned with more liberal forms of Judaism, such as the Reform and nascent Conservative movements. When they continued to practice Judaism, immigrants were more likely to be Orthodox or observant of halakhah. They often gathered for prayer services in storefront spaces rather than large synagogue buildings. Women rarely attended these storefront shuls. Even given these broadly sketched differences, there were no bright lines between “American” Jews and “immigrant” Jews, and many of the latter quickly became the former. With these sweeping demographic shifts, the face of American Judaism changed over these four and a half decades.

These rapidly changing demographics combined with larger shifts in American culture. Respectable, married, middle-class white women were not expected to work for wages outside their homes. They were expected to stay in the domestic sphere. Acculturated Jews in the United States had long espoused this ideal, and immigrant Jews strived to meet it too.³¹ But they could—and increasingly did—embrace other kinds of public roles, especially in voluntary and philanthropic associations and even in certain kinds of politics.³² “The Jewish woman has felt, with her non-Jewish sister, the breadth of a new sky,” the Reform rabbi Emil Hirsch wrote in the inaugural issue of *The American Jewess* in 1895.³³ In addition to a growing number of appropriate civic and public roles for women, cultural perceptions of the relationship between women and religion shifted. Beginning earlier in the nineteenth century, American cultural discourse had increasingly identified women with religion, religious practice, and church.³⁴ These historical trends meant that gender expectations, especially in relation to religion, looked different in 1880 than they had a century earlier. American religious norms, too, looked different. The emphasis on personal religious experience increased. Broadly, religion had become more closely associated with women. For these reasons, historians are right to pay attention to gender and the changing role of women around the turn of the twentieth century.

But when scholars explain that religion had become more closely associated with women in the nineteenth century, we should note that

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religion by and large means Christianity. American religion has long taken Protestant Christianity as the default and as the model for what it means to be a religion or to be religious.³⁵ When nineteenth-century Americans said “religion,” they were usually thinking of Protestant denominations. Even when scholars have used the category, they are still reliant on the Protestant roots and foundations of the category.³⁶ Knowing that religion and women came to be identified in the mid-nineteenth century, then, does not necessarily mean that women and Judaism were associated with one another in the same way that women and Christianity were associated. The American Jewish story need not be the same as American Protestant stories.

Although religion and women came to be closely identified in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, where and how religion took place were not uniform. Even if we grant that American public discourse identified Jewish women with religion in a way parallel to their Christian neighbors, we must keep in mind that for most Christians the natural place for expressing that religion was the church, whereas for Jewish women it was the home. Even when women’s presence in Judaism was celebrated, then, it was hardly a foregone conclusion that their presence in synagogues was part of that idealized picture of women’s special capacity for religion.

Zangwill, quoted at the opening of this article, anticipated a common scholarly narrative of feminization in this era: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American Jewish women went to synagogue more often, outnumbered the men there, took on larger roles, and changed the face of Judaism, and men complained that the synagogue had been feminized. To take a typical example, one historian refers to the “complaints about the feminization of the synagogue—and there were many.”³⁷ But buttressing this story turns out to be a difficult task. Even where there is evidence for some aspect of it, feminization proves an unhelpful category of analysis because the concept is ambiguous and shifting, and it therefore does not describe a cohesive phenomenon of the time.

III. Feminization Sources, 1880–1924

Not only is the concept of feminization ambiguous, but in most histories the cited sources are few. In fact, on a close look, there is something of a scholarly citation circle. Faith Rogow’s history of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) has the most significant number of primary sources, at six.³⁸ Much of the secondary scholarship that refers

to the feminization of the synagogue in this period cites Rogow without citing additional sources. When it cites other secondary scholarship, that other secondary scholarship often cites only Rogow. Moreover, these six sources cannot hold much broad explanatory weight because they span more than 20 years, beginning in 1895 and ending in 1916, and appear only in specifically Reform publications.³⁹ A close examination of these primary sources (along with several others) shows that feminization proves an analytically unhelpful concept for making sense of them. Some of the authors of these sources expressed concern about a decrease in men's synagogue attendance or an overall decrease of both sexes, but none attributed it to women's increasing presence. Many sources in fact praised the participation of women. Nary a source lamented the growing participation of women or its consequences. And few expressed concern about Judaism taking on feminine qualities. As this section will suggest, what *does* seem to have developed is a heightened perception of women's presence.

However we define *feminization of the synagogue*, the historical evidence for it is weak. It was surely not a case in which women were suddenly present in a space where they had been absent. Women had been present in significant numbers at American synagogues for decades. By the middle of the nineteenth century, many acculturated Jewish women attended synagogues. Nor did the synagogues themselves, as architectural spaces, undergo changes that could be described as feminizing. By the 1880s, American synagogue architecture had already been suited to give women a place: in most synagogues, women were neither excluded nor relegated to small balconies or areas behind screens. Rather, they sat in pews alongside their families.⁴⁰

Even the suggestion that women outnumbered men in synagogue attendance—feminization as women's increasing presence—misses the mark. Here we have some excellent historical data. In the 1920s, the Conservative movement commissioned a series of rigorous demographic studies, which counted attendees at synagogue services across Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox synagogues on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. These surveys were supplemented with more than three hundred completed questionnaires. They were organized by geographic location and day of the week rather than by movement. The survey found, for instance, that in Scranton, Pennsylvania, women attended at a significantly lower rate (8 percent of the town's population of Jewish women on Friday, 11 percent on Saturday) than the overall rate (12 percent of the town's total Jewish population on Friday, 18 percent on Saturday). The two synagogues in New Britain, Connecticut, had roughly equal attendance for men and women. The massive study



also counted all of the attendees in 27 Boston synagogues and found that on Friday men overwhelmingly outnumbered women (1,039 to 162), on Saturday morning there were nearly twice as many men as women (1,592 to 891), and on Sunday morning women slightly outnumbered men (125 to 100).⁴¹ The survey of 40 of the “most important synagogues” in a New York neighborhood counted about one thousand women out of 4,190 Saturday synagogue-goers.⁴² Empirically, women had not taken over synagogues with superior numbers.

The Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative governing body made up of the movement’s rabbis, decided to use these studies to discuss synagogue attendance at its 1928 annual conference. Despite having data on the sex demographics of synagogue attendance, the rabbis at the meeting focused their long discussion on how to involve and retain young people in the life of the synagogue. Neither women’s attendance nor women’s leadership garnered attention. Despite the presentations and subsequent discussion sessions entitled “Inadequacies in the Synagogue Today” and “Synagogue Attendance,” nowhere did these Conservative rabbis express concern that some services saw more women than men in attendance.⁴³ They worried about the future of Conservative synagogues, and they worried about overall attendance, whether it was adequate, and whether it might decline. But they expressed no concern about either women or feminization in any of its guises. The studies that the Conservative rabbis discussed tell a different tale than historians’ narratives: these Conservative rabbis knew that women did not drastically outnumber men, nor did they interpret women’s participation as the cause of men’s nonparticipation. Feminization in the sense of a trend in which women outnumbered men or in the sense of women’s presence constituting a significant social or theological problem for the synagogue had not happened in these synagogues.

In addition to the survey, Reform and Conservative communities dedicated considerable energy to describing women’s roles in Judaism, in the synagogue, and in the home. But there were rarely complaints about women’s increased participation in synagogue life. Rather, complaints were about a perception of men’s decreased participation alongside nervousness over women’s changing roles in society. The few writers who expressed concerns when they talked about feminization overwhelmingly expressed concerns about men rather than women or the feminine characteristics of American Judaism.

Many of these sources typically cited to support the idea of feminization likewise suggest a more complicated picture. In 1885, Rabbi Adolph Moses worried that most Jews “went without religious

instruction” and that services were largely attended by “women, children, and a few old men.”⁴⁴ His comment betrayed the sexism and ageism common to his era—it is clear that women, children, and old men were not the most important demographics to him—but his complaint was not about women attending, transforming, or taking over either synagogues or Judaism. And perhaps this was just a crotchety moment for the rabbi. Elsewhere, Moses often celebrated women’s presence and contributions to religious life, community, and philanthropy. In the first issue of *The American Jewess*, Moses wrote a paean to Jewish women’s participation:

While a ceaseless battle is being waged by the men for the possession of material wealth, woman keeps watch over the holy ark of the ideal, and ministers as priestess in the sanctuary of God-seeking humanity. It is she that upholds and upbuilds the temple of religion in this country. The wholesome and growing religious life of the nation derives its vital powers from the enthusiasm, devotion and self-sacrificing activity of women.⁴⁵

In this account, women’s religious participation was neither new nor detrimental. In keeping with wider American rhetoric, Moses imagined that women were more moral and more religiously inclined than men, but he saw this as an essential characteristic, not a new trend. Since in any of its guises *feminization* signals some change from the way things have been in the past, it does not describe Moses’s view. For Moses, women had always been “good” at religion, and fin-de-siècle Judaism was just another instance of women’s religious contributions. It was men’s lack of presence that was the new trend and the cause for concern.

When Jews in Reform circles lamented the lack of men in the synagogue, they sometimes simultaneously wished for more women also. Some expressed their concerns about participation broadly, without reference to sex, but others made overt reference to gendered differences in their jeremiads. Former president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the Reform rabbinical association) Rabbi Joseph Silverman bemoaned the state of American Jewish commitment in an egalitarian fashion in his 1918 book *The Renaissance of Judaism*:

The Sabbath against commercialism. Which is about to win? Look around you and ask where are the men? The answer is, in the clutches of commerce, industry, and worldly pursuits. Second, conflict between our religious service and the social world. Where are our women? The answer is, following the lead of fashion wherever it carries them on the Sabbath or at other times.⁴⁶

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Although Silverman diagnosed different causes for the perceived lack of synagogue attendance, he in no way blamed women for taking over. In fact, he called for women to abandon their adherence to social trends in favor of returning to the synagogue. Jews of both sexes, he explained, had become too involved in secular society in a different way: economics. Consistent with Progressive Era norms, Silverman associated men and women with different aspects of economic life—men with economic production and women with economic consumption—but he found them equally at fault in trending away from “the Sabbath” and toward “commercialism.” Silverman suggested that Jewish men had betrayed traditional Jewish gender norms, which then caused them to further neglect Judaism by failing to attend the synagogue. He thereby denounced the wholesale espousal of American gender norms when it came to consumerism.

On the rare occasion that Jews discussed a concern with feminization, they often used the term in a way that seemed more intended to shore up acculturated Judaism’s Americanism than to lament any shortcomings. In this way, Judaism could pat itself on the back for embracing religious roles for women that mirrored American Protestantism without sacrificing its distinctive Jewishness. In his journal *Reform Advocate*, Rabbi Emil Hirsch reprinted an interview he had given to a London Jewish publication. When asked about Jewish women in the United States, he explained:

The Jewish women in America take a deep interest in religious matters and long ago asserted their right to be consulted in all matters. In the United States we have the third generation of Jewish women, and they are women of culture. They have passed through the higher schools, and a good many of them have taken degrees. They are the mainstay of American Jewish life, of religion and of philanthropy.⁴⁷

Hirsch began his answer to the interviewer’s question by asserting that the expansion of the role of Jewish women had happened “long ago.” Moreover, he stressed the Americanness of these Jewish women. For Hirsch, Jewish women were both cultured and committed and were active especially in education, religion, and philanthropy. One could hardly find a better description of the ideal Progressive Era American woman.

Although he remarked somewhat offhandedly that synagogues might “get” feminized, he immediately followed the remark with positive interpretations of the sentiment that aligned it with American culture at large and American Christianity more specifically:

Sometimes the thought even occurs to me that we are in danger of getting the synagogues feminized. In America, as in no other country, the higher life is almost entirely in the hands of women. Jewesses have followed the example of their Christian sisters, and that is a very hopeful feature of American life. It may be the result of the Reform Movement that it has almost equalized the positions of men and women.⁴⁸

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First, he noted, women are cultured and active in the “higher life” (religious life), and he marked that involvement as distinctively American. Second, Hirsch suggested that Jewish women were so active because they had taken on similar roles and tasks to their “Christian sisters.” Far from objecting to Jewish women acting like non-Jews, Hirsch deemed this a “very hopeful feature of American life.” Lastly, Hirsch lauded the Reform movement for its moves toward redefining gender roles: the growing religious roles of women demonstrated both the movement’s egalitarian impulses and its Americanism. In sum, for Hirsch the change in women’s roles had happened “long ago,” and it was a change unequivocally for the better.

Even when participating in conversations about religious crisis and gender, rabbis seemed mostly unperturbed by the presence of women. When Reform rabbi Rudolph Grossman spoke on a panel alongside Fred Smith, the leader of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, Grossman did not lament the participation of women. The panel was instructed to discuss the questions, “Is religious faith declining in the United States? If so, what are the causes? . . . What is the remedy?” Whereas Smith discussed the “crisis” among many American men, Grossman discussed the ways in which Judaism had sought to make itself more relevant to the people in general—he talked of bringing the synagogue to the people if the people were not coming to the synagogue—but not men or women in particular.⁴⁹

Women spoke about religious demographics and trends in very similar language to that of the all-male rabbinate. None explicitly invoked the term *feminization*, but they often considered women’s religious roles and presence. In 1897 in the *Reform Advocate*, for instance, Theresa Lesem noted that women outnumbered men at her Reform service: “[The rabbi’s] efforts in sermons and lectures have been prepared for and delivered to congregational audiences composed mostly of women.”⁵⁰ She was more sanguine than Silverman about women’s participation. But like Moses, she indicted men for nonattendance while praising women for their commitment and interest in self-improvement. (Given the numbers in the Rabbinical Assembly survey, we may question whether their observations that women outnumbered men were strictly true and

whether perhaps Lesem and Moses had merely perceived an increase in women relative to men.) Other women agreed. “Upon her [the Jewish woman], from times immemorial, has devolved the task of kindling enthusiasm for ancient Jewish ideals and of revivifying ceremonial life,” explained Rebekah Bettelheim Kohut (credited as Mrs. Alexander Kohut) in a 1916 symposium in the *American Hebrew*.⁵¹ After relating present-day worship to the biblical patriarchs, Alice Menken wrote, “the Synagogue combines spiritual service with the highest conception of human service, and it is this conjoined obligation which characterizes woman’s relationship.”⁵² The other four women writing in the symposium offered judgments about the place of women in Judaism. Ernestine Dreyfus noted that women had become more likely to take places on synagogue boards of trustees, and Carrie Oberdorfer Simon (Mrs. Abram Simon) noted the increasing role of sisterhoods in Reform synagogues.⁵³ But each insisted that nothing about Judaism had changed and that women’s participation only helped American Judaism live up to what they saw as transhistorical Jewish ideals. And, like Silverman, some women also reflected the gendered economic concern: the 1900 report from the NCJW, the Reform women’s organization, lamented, “The men unfortunately were confined to their business, tied down in the pursuit of gain and the increase of wealth, and the Sabbath services must go on without them.”⁵⁴

Similarly, one character in Leah Morton’s novel *I Am a Woman—and a Jew* (which presented itself as a memoir)⁵⁵ said: “The principle thing for rabbis to do to-day is to fight the indifference of men. The men pay their dues to the synagogue and feel it’s enough. . . . The women come, and they bring their children. But the men stay home.” Morton interpreted this comment by explaining that it was the “same story” as the “Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists.”⁵⁶ In doing so, she situated Jews alongside widespread and respectable Protestant denominations and thereby the mainstream of American religious life. During a time of increased differentiation in vocabulary—when Reform Jews had decidedly moved away from such Protestant-influenced terms as “Jewish church,” “Jewish minister,” and “Jewish Easter” in favor of *synagogue* or *temple*, *rabbi*, and *Passover*—these Protestant-mirroring discussions of feminization and the religious roles of men and women could serve as a way to claim Judaism as an American religion. Reform congregations, where the presence of women was most significant, were actively seeking something closer to gender parity in synagogue life. Therefore, when women did attend services and participate in synagogue activities, it fit within their larger interpretations of what an acculturated Jewish woman was expected to do. Making such

observations publicly made Reform Judaism and its adherents seem more American.

How do we square the Rabbinical Assembly's quantitative data with the qualitative observations of synagogue-goers? The survey's data showed that women rarely outnumbered men. Perhaps they did in a few isolated congregations not included in the survey, but the data demonstrates that pews filled with only women were not a widespread reality. We can, however, imagine that people accustomed to seeing more men than women would perceive that the crowd was "mostly women" if the number of women increased modestly and especially if women's participation became more visible. And it seems likely that women's participation in synagogue spaces may well have become more visible because of the creation and growth of women's religious organizations. During this period, Jewish women organized themselves: the National Council of Jewish Women was founded in 1893, the (Reform) National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods was founded in 1913, the (Conservative) Women's Religious Union of the United Synagogue was founded in 1918, and countless synagogues organized their own sisterhoods and women's groups. Perhaps women did attend more than they had several decades earlier, though this increase would have been modest at most. But they did likely become more visible in Jewish religious life.

Although the primary sources occasionally refer explicitly to women's increasing presence as feminization, historians should not uncritically follow suit. If what historians mean when they use the term *feminization* is that women attended services more often or took on more support roles at the synagogue, they may be seeing a real phenomenon (as we have seen, the evidence is mixed), but they are not describing it in an analytically precise or illuminating way. Women's increasing presence and involvement by themselves are observations about *women*, not observations about *gender*. *Feminization* as an analytical category adds nothing to help us understand these demographic changes. The term may sound more scholarly, but that does not mean that it is better. This is similar to trends in which some scholars use the term *gender* to mean *women*—in that case, too, substituting one for the other is neither analytically sound nor illuminating.⁵⁷ Of course, the historical world is not always so simple: sometimes one sort of feminization happens alongside another. Although women's increasing presence alone should not be labeled feminization, sometimes it occurs concomitantly with taking on feminine characteristics. In cases where this latter social process happens, applying the label *feminization* can do useful analytical work.

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What about feminization as taking on feminine characteristics? Did this second sense of feminization happen in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, and if so, did people object to it or express concern? Reform Jews rarely painted Judaism or its practices as feminine. Even when they called attention to what they saw as its feminine elements, they tended to praise them. For instance, Tobias Schanfarber opined about the value of women's religious participation and criticized those who did not like it. His summary judgment pulled no punches: "The man who raises the bugaboo of synagog [*sic*] or church effeminization should be regarded as a bugaboo himself."⁵⁸ His phrase "synagog or church" demonstrates that he was thinking about a larger American religious discourse. Schanfarber's idea of "effeminization" was a multifaceted one that went beyond attendance at worship. He discussed a process that was about gender and taking on feminine qualities, which he connected to women's increasing presence:

Some have gone so far as to declare that there is danger of an effeminization of the synagog because of the predominance of women over men in synagog attendance. It is feared that with women taking the major interest in synagog matters the feminine element of religion will supersede the masculine and we will get a religion of vapid emotionalism and sentimentality.⁵⁹

Far from expressing concern about women's increasing presence, Schanfarber imagined it would be a positive move. Women might even "outshine" men "a trifle," which would be just fine. The key was the presence of both men and women, and Judaism itself was at its best when it held together both masculine and feminine components:

That the emotional element predominates in woman will not operate to the detriment of religion. Religion needs sentiment, even if it does not want sentimentality. Religion is lost where the emotions fail to play their part. A religion where cold intellectualism shuts out every trace of sentiment or emotion soon degrades into an enlightened or unenlightened scepticism; it loses itself in sneering and cynicism, and certainly true religion can not thrive where cynicism is sovereign: We need the intellectual element in religion to hold in check the emotional element, and there is just as much urgency to have the emotions hold in check the intellectual element. We need both. We need the feminine and the masculine.⁶⁰

Schanfarber espoused a gendered theory of religion often called *complementarity*. That is, men and women, masculine and feminine,

were two complementary halves of one whole. They were not interchangeable, and perhaps not even equal, but they complemented one another. Because each was particularly skilled in one area (intellect for men, emotion for women), the two would balance one another out. Religion needed men and women, and it also needed masculine and feminine elements.

Schanfarber was not alone in his attention to masculine and feminine elements in American Judaism, but he did discuss them at length. And even he called the idea of “effeminization” a “bugaboo.” He saw subtle changes, and he approved. As Schanfarber, Hirsch, and others suggest, amidst the increase in Jewish immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the shifting gender roles in American public life during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, public participation in Judaism also changed. But “feminization of the synagogue” is too ambiguous an analytical concept to describe these changes.

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IV. Origins of the Feminization Story

If feminization is not a particularly useful analytical concept here, and if there is little evidence that American Jews regarded women’s increased participation as a bad thing, why does this story appear in scholarly histories? For some, the conflation of women and gender—or, more specifically, the conflation of women’s increasing presence and the taking on of feminine qualities—allows the term to seem useful for describing a historical development. Nevertheless, many careful historians know that gender is not merely a more academic-sounding term to refer to women and that women’s presence or women’s bodies are not the same as femininity.

But even for those who do not conflate these two terms, the idea that feminization happened to American Judaism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seems plausible. Here is another reason for scholarly usage of the term *feminization*: because Jews’ Protestant contemporaries complained about feminization in both senses, it would make sense if Reform and Conservative communities were, in fact, concerned about increasing women’s presence in the synagogue and the practice of Judaism taking on feminine qualities. American Reform Jews reflected many of the social and philanthropic assumptions of the white, middle-class American communities around them. Given these similarities, it would make sense if acculturated Jews conformed to the same

patterns witnessed in American Protestant religious life. When historians of Jews tell a story of the feminization of the synagogue in the early twentieth century, their narratives conform to the narratives of other American religious historians.⁶¹ Some of them are quite explicit about this conformity. Mark Bauman, for instance, writes of the nineteenth century: “Thus one can speak of the feminization of American Judaism as similar to and influenced by the feminization of American Protestantism.”⁶²

But most Protestant denominations did not actually undergo new demographic developments. In many of these religious communities women had been dominant in public worship since the early colonial period. Therefore, as Ann Braude has argued, turn-of-the-century feminization of these Christian communities—particularly in the sense of women’s increasing participation—is a narrative fiction.⁶³ Nevertheless, it is clear that men began to express their concerns about feminization in the Gilded Age and continued through the Progressive Era.

Laments about women taking over the churches, or theology and religious practice taking on feminine characteristics, were far more common in mainstream Protestant communities than they were in Jewish communities.⁶⁴ Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Protestants began to worry that Christianity and its practice had taken on feminine characteristics. A sample of early twentieth-century titles shows that Bruce Barton had plenty of company in promoting a more manly Christianity: *The Masculine in Religion*, *The Manhood of the Master*, *The Masculine Power of Christ*, *The Manly Christ*, *A Man’s Religion*, and *The Call of the Carpenter* were all published between 1900 and 1920.⁶⁵ The ecumenical Protestant Men and Religion Forward Movement, which was sponsored by organizations from the YMCA to the International Sunday School Committee, sought to promote men’s attendance in churches and public religious life.⁶⁶ Organizations like the Knights of King Arthur and the Boys’ Brigade tried to attract boys to religion, often using sports as a lure but also as a means to Jesus.

Many of the Jewish sources, like Schanfarber, Morton, and Hirsch, explicitly identified the story of Judaism with that of their Christian neighbors’ religion and of American culture more broadly. When they discussed women’s religious participation, they celebrated Jewish participation in the American trend of highlighting and valuing women in religious spheres. Given this interest in identifying Jewish religiosity with Protestant religiosity, we might expect parallel complaints about women’s increasing presence. What’s more, for the Jewish community, unlike many American Protestant

denominations, a synagogue where women equaled or outnumbered men was a relatively new historical phenomenon. The early nineteenth century proved to be a time of change for Reform congregations in the United States (and in Western Europe). Women and men had instituted such reforms as mixed seating or “family pews,” choirs, and organs in order to seem more egalitarian and, most important for the reformers, more decorous.⁶⁷ By the middle of the nineteenth century, these widespread reforms had already made Reform Jewish services appear more outwardly similar in form to Protestant worship.⁶⁸ The move toward more Protestant-like forms of worship simultaneously reflected a move toward revaluing womanhood vis-à-vis religious life.

Given these historical changes to women’s place in the synagogue, in combination with some acculturated Jews’ depictions of Judaism as similar to Protestant Christianity, we would expect significant complaints about the new gendered arrangement of public services. But there were none. Few Jews complained about feminization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women’s participation was celebrated by men and women, rabbis and laypeople alike. Moreover, when they observed it, writers frequently couched it in terms of continuity rather than change. Few described Judaism itself, or its practices, as having feminine characteristics. And those who did, like Tobias Schanfarber, valued those feminine characteristics positively when they observed them. Reform and Conservative synagogues experienced women’s increased visibility and even germs of leadership. Though a few Jewish men displayed some discomfort with allowing women too much control or roles with too much influence—in 1922, for instance, the Reform body of rabbis decided not to ordain the first woman rabbi—more often than not, rabbis and leaders celebrated women’s participation and lamented the perceived “disappearance” of men from services without imagining or bemoaning some kind of invasion of women. In this sense, these gendered laments would be much better characterized by scholars as regret about men’s attrition, admittedly more clunky than *feminization* but also more precise. In the end, the sources show that immigrant Jewish communities expressed almost no concern over women’s increased synagogue participation, and even acculturated Jews rarely saw it as cause for concern.

Given the way acculturated Jews stressed Judaism’s Americanness and its similarity to Protestant forms of religion, it is unsurprising that historians have used this rubric of feminization. It just so happens that it is unhelpful and a minor, rather than a significant, trend.

V. Conclusion

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The language of feminization has a long history in American Judaism. It surfaced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Today it recurs online and in print with regularity. To take just one representative example, in April 2015, popular conservative blogger Debbie Schlusel wrote:

I note that fewer Jews will celebrate the holiday with the traditional “Seder” dinner because Jewish men are fed up with the feminization of Judaism, which has hit all branches of the religion, but for the real thing: Orthodox Judaism, where the males are still the leaders in family and in religious ceremonies. Liberal (which also means obnoxious) Jewish women have taken over everything in the other sects of Judaism, and the men hate it. They’ve reacted by leaving.⁶⁹

Schlusel blames “feminization,” by which she means some muddied mixture of changes in ritual and women’s participation and leadership, for men’s decreasing religious practice.

Scholarly literature, too, has used the term *feminization* to describe eras past and present. Scholarly tone is rarely, if ever, so vituperative or dismissive of women and eschews dramatic hand-wringing over any perceived wrongs feminization has wrought. But the term’s shifting meanings—from descriptive to normative, from women to gender, from demographics to ideas about religious practice and back—demonstrate that it signifies a variety of social processes. To take just one example, Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer recently wrote, in two articles, that “contemporary liberal American Judaism, although supposedly egalitarian, is visibly and substantially feminized”⁷⁰ and “the feminization of American Judaism has an insidious sociological impact upon Jewish societies.”⁷¹ Fishman and Parmer’s study includes discussions of men’s comparatively lower rates of participation and commitment, women’s comparatively higher rates of participation and commitment, women’s conceptions of religion as more important when compared with men’s conceptions, women in leadership roles, gendered changes in ritual, and other factors, but because the study includes all of them under the umbrella of “feminization,” they seem to be a single trend. And because they are considered facets of the single trend called *feminization*, the evidence for causation among these phenomena is murky at best.⁷² In its current ambiguous usage, *feminization* does not serve American Jewish historians and sociologists well.

This is not to say that feminization is never a helpful category. It can be a useful term, provided scholars define it carefully and use it to refer to taking on feminine qualities and not only women's increasing presence. That is, feminization is best used for commentary about *gender*, not *women*. Because feminization is about gender, it can be used to focus historical analysis through the lens of power relations. Feminization can be used to signal people's dissatisfaction, not only with relationships between men and women but also with something else (politics, economics, morals, etc.) as signified through gender.⁷³ Gender is socially constructed and varies across historical and cultural contexts, so this usage will have the additional burden of describing what counts as feminine within the context it analyzes. But this restriction in usage will have the benefit of greater clarity.

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Notes

- 1 *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods* (1913), 27. This line is quoted in Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community and the Interwar Years* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), 172, and idem, "The Middle Class American Jewish Woman," in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge, Engl., 1987), 211.
- 2 Joselit, "Middle Class American Jewish Woman," 211.
- 3 Jeanne Boydston makes a similar point about *gender* more broadly when she differentiates gender as a social process from gender as a historian's analytical category; Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," *Gender and History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 558–83.
- 4 Following Louis Althusser, Butler calls the process by which others form a person's gender *interpellation*; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, 2002).
- 5 An article in an Earnshaw's clothing company publication ("Infants' Department: Pink or Blue?") in June 1918 said, "The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl." See Jo Paoletti and C. Kregloh, "The Children's Department," in *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, ed. C. B. Kidwell and V. Steele (Washington, D.C., 1989), 22–41.
- 6 For another typology of feminization, see Ann Braude, "American Religious History *Is* Women's History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley, 1997), 87–107.

- 7 To take one particularly relevant example, Dianne Ashton refers to the “feminization of Jewish education,” by which she means women’s growing and transformative leadership roles in Jewish education, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Dianne Ashton, “The Feminization of Jewish Education,” *Transformations* 3, no. 2 (1992): 15. David Kaufman uses *feminization* to refer to the period from the 1960s until 2000; David Kaufman, “Women and Jewish Education,” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington, Ind., 2006), 903.
- 8 Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1993), 74.
- 9 Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (New York, 1997). Nesbitt discusses the increase in ordained women as clergy. Dozens of others, both scholars and practitioners of Judaism, use the phrase *feminization of the rabbinate* or *feminization of the clergy* to describe the rabbinate specifically. For a few examples, see David Ellenson, *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice: Studies in Tradition and Modernity* (Lincoln, Neb., 2014), 330; Peter J. Rubinstein, “The Next Century,” in *Tanu Rabbanan: Our Rabbis Taught: Essays in Commemoration of the Centennial of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, ed. Joseph B. Glazer (Columbus, Ohio, 1990), 149–51; Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, eds., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1992), 250; and Beatrice De Gasquet, “The Barrier and the Stained-Glass Ceiling: Analyzing Female Careers in Religious Organizations,” *Sociologie du Travail* 52 (2010): 22–39.
- 10 Shael Siegel, “Men at Their Best,” *Rabbi Shael Speaks . . . Tachles*, Jan. 25, 2011, accessed June 10, 2015, http://shaelsiegel.blogspot.com/2011_01_01_archive.html.
- 11 Avi Woolf, “Jewish Women: Bring on the Orthodox Sexodus!,” *Times of Israel Blogs*, June 5, 2015, accessed Oct. 5, 2015, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/jewish-women-bring-on-the-orthodox-sexodus/>.
- 12 Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer, *Matrilineal Ascent/Patrilineal Descent: The Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life* (Waltham, Mass., 2008), accessed Oct. 5, 2015, http://bir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/22985/Gender_Monograph_Complete%5b1%5d.pdf?sequence=1.
- 13 Barbara Trainin Blank, “The Jewish Gender Gap,” *Na’amat Woman* (Winter 2007): 7.
- 14 Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1925), 3.
- 15 John L. Beusterien, “Jewish Male Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century Spain,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73, no. 3 (1999): 447–56; Irven M. Resnick, “Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (2000): 241–63.
- 16 Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.
- 17 Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York, 2013).

- 18 Judith Baskin, "Women in Contemporary Judaism," in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan Avery-Peck (Malden, Mass., 2008), 403.
- 19 David Biale, review of Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism, Jewish History* 19 (2005): 300.
- 20 Paula Hyman, "Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2/3 (2002): 156.
- 21 Mark K. Bauman, *Jewish American Chronology: Chronologies of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 2011), 35–36. These citations of scholarly usage of *feminization* are representative rather than exhaustive. Each of the sources cited in the following seven footnotes uses the term *feminization* or *feminized* explicitly.
- 22 Jeanne E. Abrams, *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West* (New York, 2006), 98–99; Arthur Kiron, "'Dust and Ashes': The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais," *American Jewish History* 84, no. 3 (1996): 155–88; Paula Hyman, "Modern Jewish History," in *Feminist Perspectives in Jewish Studies*, ed. Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 131–33.
- 23 Ashton, "Feminization of Jewish Education"; Felicia Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess," in *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Pamela Nadell and Jonathan Sarna (Hanover, N.H., 2001), esp. 148; Pamela Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889–1985* (Boston, Mass., 1998), 8–9; Kathleen Nigro, "Rachel Calof and Jewish Immigrant Women: Between a 'Land of Opportunity' and a 'Terrible New World,'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 27, no. 1 (2008): 23–33. Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890–1940* (Princeton, N.J., 1999), 150, locates the term in the "late 1920s" and restricts it to urban areas.
- 24 Hyman, "Gender," 153–61.
- 25 Kaufman, "Women and Jewish Education," 903.
- 26 Biale, review of Sarna, *American Judaism*, 300; Bonnie Morris, *Lubavitcher Women in America: Identity and Activism in the Postwar Era* (Albany, N.Y., 2012), 128.
- 27 Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer, "Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance among America's Jews," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 20, no. 3/4 (2008): 7–34; Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Gender in American Jewish Life," in *American Jewish Yearbook, 2014*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira Sheskin (New York, 2014), 117–18; Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* (New York, 2009), 74; Elyse M. Goldstein, *Seek Her Out: A Textual Approach to the Study of Women and Judaism* (New York, 2003), 79, 84; Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, "Jewish Men on the Decline? Is Judaism Becoming Too Female?," *Slate*, June 24, 2011, accessed Oct. 5, 2015, www.slate.com/id/2297575.

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- 28 For an excellent discussion of Yiddish speakers' religious attitudes, practices, and worries, see Anne M. Pollard, "'The Sacredness of the Family': New York's Immigrant Jews and Their Religion, 1890–1930" (Ph.d. diss., Columbia University, 2004).
- 29 Thank you to Sebastian Shulman, Asya Shulman, Tony Michels, Jessica Kirzane, and Anne Pollard for help in confirming this.
- 30 See, for example, Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (Boston, Mass., 1999), 21–87, and Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle, 1995).
- 31 Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*; Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).
- 32 Melissa Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York, 2013); Marjorie Feld, *Lillian Wald: A Biography* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008); Selma Berrol, "When Uptown Met Downtown: Julia Richman's Work in the Jewish Community of New York, 1880–1912," *American Jewish History* 8, no. 1 (1981): 35–51; Elisabeth Israels Perry, *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith* (Boston, Mass., 1987); Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago, Ill., 1989).
- 33 Emil Hirsch, "The Modern Jewess," *American Jewess* 1, no. 1 (1895): 10.
- 34 For the classic outlining of this history, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1978), 97–98.
- 35 Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Boston, Mass., 2013), 276; Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulations and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Boston, Mass., 2004).
- 36 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago, Ill., 2005); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago, Ill., 2004), 179–96.
- 37 Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess," 165.
- 38 Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting*, 253 n. 27. Sources that cite Rogow include Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin (Detroit, Mich., 1998), 335 n. 62; idem, *Gender and Assimilation*, 24–25; Arthur Kiron, "Dust and Ashes: The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais," *American Jewish History* 99 (Sept. 1996): 180 n. 90.
- 39 Rogow's focus on Reform women makes sense because her study is about the NCJW, which was populated almost exclusively by Reform women.
- 40 Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Jonathan Sarna, "The Debate over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue," in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge, Engl., 1987), 363–94. This seating arrangement was distinctly American: American Reform Jews' counterparts in Germany did not attend

synagogue in any great numbers, and fewer had family pews; see Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, 8–9.

- 41 Though the Friday and Saturday numbers are from mixed denominations, the Sunday count included only the Reform synagogue, as that was the only Sunday service.
- 42 Alter Landesman, “Synagogue Attendance: A Statistical Survey,” in *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly: Twenty-Eighth Annual Conference* (Wilkes-Barre, Penn., 1928), 41–52.
- 43 *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly: Twenty-Eighth Annual Conference*. (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Penn Printery, 1928), 32–69.
- 44 Walter Jacob, ed., *The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1985), 96, 115.
- 45 Adolph Moses, “The Position of Woman in America,” *American Jewess* 1, no. 1 (1895): 19.
- 46 Joseph Silverman, *The Renaissance of Judaism* (New York, 1918), 20.
- 47 “A Talk with E. G. Hirsch,” *Reform Advocate*, Sept. 10, 1904, p. 50.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 “Men of All Creeds Say Faith Will Live,” *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1912, p. 9.
- 50 *Reform Advocate*, March 1897, p. 80.
- 51 “Women and the Synagogue: A Symposium,” *American Hebrew*, Apr. 14, 1916, p. 655.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 659.
- 53 Carrie Simon had founded the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in 1913, so it is no surprise that she mentioned it. See Marc Lee Raphael, “‘Training Men and Women in Dignity, in Civic Righteousness, and in the Responsibilities of American Citizenship’: The Thought of Rabbi Abram Simon, 1897–1938,” *American Jewish Archives* 49 (1997): 71–75.
- 54 “Council of Jewish Women,” *American Hebrew*, Mar. 9, 1900, p. 553.
- 55 For the story behind the author Elizabeth Stern and her pseudonym, see Ellen Umansky, “Representations of Jewish Women in the Works and Life of Elizabeth Stern,” *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 165–76.
- 56 Leah Morton, *I Am a Woman—and a Jew* (New York, 1986), 230.
- 57 Historians Catherine Brekus and Joan Scott each discuss the *women* versus *gender* labels for scholarship; see Catherine Brekus, “Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History,” in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine Brekus (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007), 10–11, and Scott, “Gender.”
- 58 Tobias Schanfarber, “News and Views,” *American Israelite*, Dec. 11, 1908, p. 5.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Barbara Welter, “The Feminization of American Religion: 1800–1860,” in *Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary Ha and Lois Banner (New York, 1976), 138–41; Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, 97–98.

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- 62 Bauman, *Jewish American Chronology*, 36; see also Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess," 165, and Hyman, "Modern Jewish History."
- 63 Braude, "American Religious History." See also Susan Juster, "The Spirit and the Flesh: Gender, Language, and Sexuality in American Protestantism," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry Stout and D. G. Hart (New York, 1997), 334–61.
- 64 Betty DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1990), 75–98; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York, 2003), 87–123.
- 65 Carl Case, *The Masculine in Religion* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1906); Henry Emerson Fosdick, *The Manhood of the Master: The Character of Jesus* (New York, 1913); Jason Pierce, *The Masculine Power of Christ: Or, Christ Measured as a Man* (Boston, Mass., 1912); Robert Conant, *The Manly Christ, a New View* (Chicago, Ill., 1904); Fred Smith, *A Man's Religion* (New York, 1913); Bouck White, *The Call of the Carpenter* (New York, 1911).
- 66 Gail Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough: Men and Religion Forward Movement, 1911–1912, and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1989): 432–65.
- 67 Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*.
- 68 Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 24.
- 69 Debbie Schlusel, "Feminism Destroyed Passover (and Synagogue Attendance)," Apr. 3, 2015, accessed Oct. 2, 2015, <http://www.debbieschlussel.com/78049/expert-feminism-destroyed-passover-synagogue-attendance/>.
- 70 Fishman and Parmer, *Matrilineal Ascent/Patrilineal Descent*, 2.
- 71 Fishman and Parmer, "Policy Implications," 8.
- 72 The evidence is not nonexistent, however. Fishman and Parmer quote one man who describes his synagogue as having "maternal vibes." Nevertheless, causation between women's participation, men's nonparticipation, and feminine modes of worship requires evidence.
- 73 For an excellent example of this kind of historical analysis, see Bederman, "Women."

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