

THE FEMINIZATION OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

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As helping professionals we already have personnel and programs that promote transcending restrictively defined gender roles. It is our lagging consciousness which must catch up to the reality.

For the past five years when we meet with our friends and colleagues who make up a professional advisory committee for the School of Jewish Communal Service one question we know they will ask is "how many women will be graduating this year" Regardless of the specific number, since it is never "a majority of men," the shrugging of shoulders and the silence speak to the sensitivity of our committee members who would not articulate their disappointment.

Why is it that women's entry into the field, with the anticipation of executive positions, causes so much concern in our colleagues? Why is there dismay about our profession becoming feminized when the reasons given for why both men and women choose the field could be considered traditionally female. Nurturing is at the heart of this profession. *Tikun Olam*, empowering others, teaching, reaching out to the unaffiliated, and providing continuity could be called classically female activities.

Why then is the increasing presence of women in the field viewed as a problem? We believe that this attitude within Jewish communal service reflects the profound social transformation in American society as a whole as our gender role definitions change.

In this paper we will focus on how women's entry into the top management of the work force is, in fact, affecting and

changing Jewish communal service. We will look at it in three stages.

Stage I: Equal Opportunity—the gradual elimination of discrimination against women.

Stage II: Women's Issues Become Everyone's Issues—the strengthening and support for redefined family systems.

Stage III: Transcending Gender Roles—cooperation and nurturing becomes effective strategies for society as a whole.

STAGE I: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Why is it that "the feminization of professions" is seen as a negative trend rather than a positive evolution of our society? In Jewish communal service as well as in society there are increasing rumblings about the profession becoming feminized. There is a widespread concern that if communal service gets defined as "women's work," status and compensation will lower. Unfortunately that implies a belief that the work which women do is worth less simply because women do it. For Jewish communal service to continue to define the problem as too many women seeking jobs is to perpetuate discrimination against women. There is a bitter irony in this. Jewish communal service was created in part to eliminate discrimination and has a history of activism devoted to challenging negative stereotypes.

The problem for Jewish communal service is not that there are too many women trying to enter and influence the profession but the low status of women in general.

There have been both progress and backsliding for American women. A most dramatic example of progress was the Congressional Committee hearing on Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court which demonstrated the seriousness and centrality now accorded equal opportunity for women in the work place, not to mention the prestige and power gained by individual women and women's organizations who played key roles in the testimony.

At the same time, women's pay remains lower than men's for the same jobs; reproductive rights remain tenuous at best; the advancement of women to key positions is still "news," and women who have achieved executive levels are reporting a "glass ceiling" in major corporations. ("Glass ceiling" refers to the phenomenon of women hitting an invisible barrier to further advancement).

In the Federation world, gains for women remain ragged. In some communities women hold executive positions but few with full equality, while in others women cannot be considered for positions higher than middle management. Mostly a woman's place is in support, rather than in leadership.

According to the Statistics Department of the Council of Jewish Federations, in 1986, while women comprised 47% of professional staff in Federations only 43% of them earned \$30,000 or above while 95% of men professionals earned in excess of 30,000. It is also interesting to note that the survey included seventeen women executive directors in intermediate and small cities, none in large cities.

Even where the advancement of women has taken place, it is not clear to what extent this is because the Jewish community embraces the principle of equal opportunity or is a result of a decline in the field's status and entering salaries resulting in fewer men entering the field.

STAGE II: WOMEN'S ISSUES BECOME EVERYONE'S ISSUES

Industrial America, though long wedded to a separation of home and work, is in the midst of change. Traditionally, family life has been women's responsibility, and the work place has been seen as man's domain. To the extent that a tension exists for individuals between the family and the demands of those of the workplace it has been seen as a women's problem.

Betty Friedan has recorded¹ how women's issues have become recognized as transcendent issues facing society. According to Friedan, "second stage" feminism cannot be viewed as a challenge to women alone or to their achieving "equality" with men. In the second stage, women and men need to accommodate to each other and transcend a battle for equal power in institutions. Friedan asks:

How do we transcend polarization between women and men to achieve the new human wholeness that is the promise of feminism and get on with the business of solving the concrete, practical everyday problems of living, working and loving as equal persons? This is the personal and political business of second stage.

These concerns are not just the concerns of feminist sociologists and radical or progressive thinkers. Politicians, community leaders, labor organizers, educators are decrying the fact that among western societies only America and South Africa are without comprehensive national day care, family allowances and health care programs.

In November 1987, the AFL-CIO adopted a policy statement and plan for legislative action on issues that are coming to be known as "Work and Family." The work and family issues include child-care, family and medical leave, pay equity, and services for the elderly.

Jewish communal service could take

1. *The Second Stage*. New York: Summit Books. 1981.

leadership in the movement toward integrating family and workplace issues. Rather than narrowly defining Jewish survival issues as family issues, Jewish communal service needs to reframe our concerns to include the larger context of our lives (e.g., workplace, government).

The nostalgic family composed of man as full time wage earner and woman as full time homemaker now represents only seven percent of America. While this rearrangement in family structure is still being treated substantially as women's concern, in fact this means that individual family units cannot be expected to maintain traditional care-giving roles since most of the healthy adults are working outside the home. In a redefinition of family support networks the government and the workplace will have to be included as part of the extended family.

The Women's Committee of the Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel is taking some initiative. In recognizing the severity of the crisis in the families of Jewish professionals, the committee has advocated that Jewish communal service focus on a number of pressing issues: parental leave, day care, time-off at workplace to care for sick children, spouses and elderly parents, time-off for Jewish family life.

These concerns are of particular interest to young people thinking about entering the field. They have many questions about whether working in the Jewish community will enable them to live in a Jewish rhythm and raise a Jewish family. Will they be able to afford Jewish day care, synagogue and center membership as well as to contribute to *tzedakah* on their Jewish communal service salary?

STAGE III: TRANSCENDING GENDER ROLES

Carol Gilligan,² reframes qualities regarded as women's weakness and demonstrates

how they are in fact human strengths. She believes that psychology has persistently and systematically misunderstood women—their motives, their moral commitments, the course of their psychological growth and their special view of what is important in life.

Gilligan prefaces her discussion by saying that the voices she designates male and female coexist within each person, male and female. She characterizes modes of thought rather than gender. She says, there are two voices in each of us, a voice advocating rationality, autonomy and separation from others, and a voice advocating intuitiveness, concern and connection with others. In American society, the voice of rationality and autonomy is associated with men and the voice of intuitiveness and community with women. Gilligan's search is within the context of moral developmental stages. Prior to her work, research on developmental reasoning has been male oriented, the implicit view being if you describe the males, you described the universe.

Gilligan shows us that if you heed women's experience you will hear different perspectives of adulthood. Her research suggests that "men and women may speak different languages that they assume are the same, using similar words to encode disparate experience of self and social relationship. Because these languages share an overlapping oral vocabulary, they contain a propensity for systematic misinterpretations creating misunderstanding which impede communications and limit the potential for cooperation and care in relationship.

According to Gilligan "as we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and have theories of developments that these experiences inform, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of women lives the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibilities, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection."

Briefly, in the best of all possible worlds,

2. *In A Different Voice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Gilligan would lead us to a dialogue that fuses the highest developmental ethic of caring i.e. no one should get hurt (female) with the highest developmental moral stage of justice i.e. everyone should be treated equally (male). In this representation of maturity the dialogue between fairness and care not only provides a better understanding of relations between the sexes but also gives a more comprehensive portrayal of adult work and family relationship.

Beginning in the late 70's, a sincere feminine approach began to be heard in many male sectors of the society, without being recognized as feminine per se. For a dramatic example one can read,³ *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*.

The authors depart from conventional wisdom which asserts that success in business depends solely upon rationality, logic and that which can be quantified. They propose that a good business depends equally upon an understanding of human behavior, a broad vision, and a sense of history. The most modern and effective management techniques reject authoritarian, hierarchial models or leadership in favor of shared leadership, team building and respect for human uniqueness. The central problem with a rationalist view of organizing people is that people are not simply or narrowly rational. Our imaginative symbolizing right brain is at least as important as our rational, deductive left.

In trying to deepen the discussion of the influence of professional women on Jewish communal service we have emphasized three issues:

1. The "problem" of feminization of the field is a problem of the professions' status and salary structure, and the low

status of women in society, not of "too many women."

2. The twin issues of Jewish survival and the quality of Jewish life have usually been defined chiefly as traditional family issues, but they also must be addressed within the broader context of the changing roles of women, a new consciousness for women and men and a redefinition of family care-giving that includes an acceptance of government's and industry's responsibility. Jewish professionals must be committed to politicizing society's attitudes for changes in the workplace.

3. A more conscious exploration of feminist thinkers and writers, such as Gilligan will help us better understand how to proceed more effectively with significant aspects of our work agenda (e.g. inter-ethnic dialogues) and intragroup agenda (e.g., "outreach") and our personal and professional working relationships with each other and lay people.

CONCLUSION

We began by noting that many within Jewish communal service consider the increasing number of women in leadership positions to be a problem. We redefined the problem to be the discrimination against women in society. By focusing on the lower status of women in general society and the negative consequences of traditional gender roles we have broadened the discussion.

Jewish communal service has a unique role to play. As helping professionals we already have personnel and programs that promote transcending restrictively defined gender roles. It is our lagging consciousness which must catch up to the reality. As professionals we combine our capacity for nurture with our intellectual expertise. Now we need our organizational structure and our leadership to reflect a pride in our "androgynous" approach to our work.

3. Thomas Peters and Robert Watman Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons From America's Best-Run Companies*. New York: Warner Books.