Introduction

I was born Jewish and I’ll die Jewish. I will always just be plain Jewish.

—Intermarried Jewish Woman (2001)

Hannah Noble met her husband in medical school. He moved in with her on their second date, and they named their future children. Though he was Methodist, Hannah, raised as a secular Jew, knew she wanted to marry him and did not think that their different backgrounds would generate problems: “I didn’t really think about having a Jewish life back then.” However, they discussed religion during their engagement; her betrothed refused to raise his children as atheists and Hannah refused to raise them as anything but Jews. As a result, what had been a non-issue when they first met and later wed in 1992 became a new way of life: “I’m much more Jewish, now . . . than I was then. . . . My parents think I’m a religious fanatic now because I say the prayers on Friday night.” Hannah’s comment about her parents illustrates a common phenomenon in the recent history of Jewish women, namely, that daughters become more observant than their parents. The couple joined the Jewish Community Center, researched which temple to join, and began having Shabbat dinners with friends. Hannah’s story is not unique.

This book is the first history of American Jewish women who intermarried during the twentieth century. The history of intermarriage has largely been the history of men, written by men about men. This trend is not to say that women did not intermarry—for most certainly they did—but the vast majority of work has neglected to consider gender. The few studies that mentioned women did so only cursorily. They pointed out that fewer Jewish women intermarried compared to Jewish men, and that
the gender gap decreased late in the century. In this book I seek to answer three main questions: What did intermarriage mean to and for women who were Jewish at the time they married Gentile men? In what ways did Jewish women shed or retain their ethnic and religious heritage despite marrying “out”? And how was intermarriage portrayed by the mass media and religious activists? This endeavor strives to understand how women’s lives changed over time according to their exogamous marriage choices and whether they further integrated into non-Jewish society or contributed to Jewish continuity by self-identifying as Jews and raising Jewish children.

In this book I discern how assimilation or transformation has occurred among Jewish women by “entering” their homes to assess the influence of intermarriage on their lives. By looking at the intersection of intermarriage and gender across the twentieth century, I describe the lives of Jewish women who intermarried by taking into account historical factors. To date, Jewish-Gentile intermarriage has been a topic studied largely by sociologists, whose scholarship brought the topic of intermarriage out of the family closet and into public discourse. My analysis uses this body of work as evidence while integrating the variable of change over approximately one hundred years to contextualize the historical significance of several dozen intermarried Jewish women.

Although the issue of intermarriage has intrigued scholars and concerned the Jewish community nearly since permanent Jewish settlers arrived on America’s shores in 1654, sociologists became fascinated by the topic only in the twentieth century. Melting pot observers generated a plethora of social science research about intermarriage as a barometer of assimilation. Prior to 1930, the only large-scale study of American intermarriage was by Julius Drachsler in New York City, covering the years from 1908 to 1912. Drachsler wrote, “The subtle interplay in mixed marriages of different types of mind and culture has thus far almost completely eluded the observation of the scientific student.” Scholars devoted unprecedented attention to marriages between different groups of people beginning in the 1930s, following the great “wave” of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, and interest continued during the 1940s and 1950s. Intermarriage studies focused on rates and factors leading to marriage between groups, characteristics of both intermarriage and those who intermarried, and marital adjustments and outcomes. Many of the studies incorporated rhetoric concerned with biological and cultural mixing between groups, illustrating the social preoccupation with assimilation
and amalgamation. Some scholars in the 1940s and 1950s advanced a "triple melting pot" hypothesis that intermarriage occurred across ethnic lines more often than across religious ones. Intermarriage as an index of the assimilative process had reached a level of national interest.

Although much has been written about inter-religious marriage during the past quarter-century, previous scholarship has insufficiently accounted for the passage of time and the role of gender. The vast majority of scholarly books on intermarriage are sociological. For example, Egon Mayer's classic Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians (Schocken, 1985) and Sylvia Barack Fishman's recently published Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage (Brandeis, 2004) do not account for change over time. The meager historical literature that does exist does not use gender as a primary category of analysis. Anne Rose's Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America (Harvard, 2001) has some useful insights about women and religion, in general. However, until now, no studies have delved deeply into Jewish women's intermarriage in twentieth-century America. Although the historian Paul Spickard's Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America (Wisconsin, 1989) discusses Jews in one part of a work admirably devoted to multiple groups, it treats gender as immutable. Hence Still Jewish aims to contribute significantly to a topic that has heretofore received sparse attention from historians of women and Jewish studies.

Two major debates are currently being waged by scholars of Judaic studies and activists in Jewish organizations. One is academic, and the other regards policy decisions and programming; both are political and inform each other. The academic debate is between assimilationists and transformationists; the former believe that intermarriage will eventually eliminate the Jewish people, and the latter see intermarriage as an aspect of ongoing change. For them, unlike assimilationists, change means transformation, not necessarily crisis. Calvin Goldscheider, a transformationist, contends that high levels of intermarriage are not equivalent to assimilation, as many intermarried Jews take part in communal life, or else were marginal to it in the first place, and therefore these marriages cannot be a cause of weakening. The two groups differ over several key issues, including their definition of Jewish continuity, the import of modernity, and their assessments of American life in terms of its receptivity to ethnic and religious subcultures. The debate within Jewish institutions is how to handle intermarriage as an issue of Jewish survival, which I discuss in
the conclusion of this book. One camp promotes outreach to intermarried Jews and their Gentile spouses, conversion if possible, as well as Jewish learning for Jews who are uneducated about their heritage. The other camp encourages “in-reach,” otherwise known as prevention.

Although this book primarily focuses on the meaning and representation of intermarriage, I use the assimilation versus transformation debate as a framework for understanding the significance of a history of intermarriage and its ramifications for Jewish continuity. By “assimilation,” I intend the definition proposed by the scholars Richard Alba and Victor Nee: “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.” I use the word “amalgamation” to mean the blending of two or more parts to create something new, and “acculturation” to signify integration without ethnic disappearance. This book is concerned with describing the experiential and cultural issues generated by intermarriage. This research effort contributes to the debate by suggesting a new paradigm that expands the discussion of continuity as it relates to religion and ethnicity by including gender. The changing relationship between women and men influenced intermarried Jewish women’s identities. Intermarriage, like all marriage, is a relationship of power, and gender is a primary way of signifying this relationship. Therefore gender must be fully taken into account to accommodate this fluidity of identity so that the stories of intermarried Jewish women are no longer marginal. I specifically examine how gender politics in intermarried women’s lives impacted their experiences and what this history can tell us about ethnic survival and whether intermarriage was “good or bad for the Jews,” to quote the sociologist Shelly Tenenbaum.

Continuity

Next to the fate of the State of Israel, continuity is the number 1 concern in the organized American Jewish community, and has been for at least the past two decades. The rising rates of intermarriage over the twentieth century in America seem to illustrate, on the surface, that total assimilation draws nearer with every passing decade: increasingly fewer Jews are marrying fellow Jews, resulting in fewer Jewish offspring. Prior to 1940, the rate of marriages between Jews and non-Jews was estimated to be between 2 percent and 3.2 percent, doubling to approximately 6 percent between 1941 and 1960. According to the latest national sociological research, the percentage of born Jews who remained Jewish before marrying
non-Jews increased roughly as follows: from less than 13 percent before 1970 to 28 percent between 1970 and 1979; from 38 percent between 1980 and 1984 to 43 percent between 1985 and 1995; and reaching an all-time high of 47 percent between 1996 and 2001. The numbers alone suggest that concern about the future of American Jewry is highly warranted.

The grave alarm over intermarriage is based on the assumption promulgated by religious and academic authorities alike that once American Jews intermarry, they become fully assimilated into the majority Christian population, religion, and culture. The common belief, throughout the twentieth century, was that Jews who intermarried were “lost” to the Jewish community. The Anglo-Jewish newspaper The Hebrew Standard, for example, warned in 1905 “against matrimonial alliances with those outside the faith, because “the Jew must remain a Jew.” The sociologist Milton Gordon contended in his 1964 book, Assimilation in American Life, that intermarriage spelled “identificational assimilation.” Gordon’s theory was that intermarriage leads to ethnic dissolution. He postulated that once minorities enter the social milieu of the majority, intermarriage will

occur and the minority group develops a sense of peoplehood based on the majority society. The assumption by some Jewish advocates was that those who intermarried had essentially forsaken their Jewishness; their Jewish identity was no longer important to them and would never be so. Illustrating this perception was the 1997 statement by Alan Dershowitz, a distinguished law professor and Jewish activist, in his book, *The Vanishing American Jew*: “A decision by a young Jewish man or woman to marry a non-Jew is generally a reflection of a well-established reality that their Jewishness is not all that central to their identity.” The possibility that being Jewish remained a vibrant identification to someone who intermarried, or that it might become such in due course, was persistently beyond the comprehension of those who wrote about the issue.

Jewish identity is dynamic, constantly interacting with and being influenced by environmental factors, such as partner and lifestyle. Self-identifying as Jewish for the women in my study meant integrating the ethno-religious identities they inherited at birth and their intermarried lives within their respective historical contexts. Being Jewish for the women in my study meant maintaining allegiance to the Jewish people and, for those who intermarried in the later decades, making Jewish choices regarding observance and education despite having married outside the tribe. Although intermarriage affected women’s identities, diluting them earlier in the century and accentuating them toward the end, being Jewish was a persistent part of women’s ideological makeup. It influenced their self-perceptions, their view of their immediate social circles and the world at large, and their notion of how others saw them. Moreover, Jewish identity within intermarried women’s sense of self was an intricate mixture of religion, ethnicity, and race. Whereas religion could be accepted or rejected, ethnicity and race were malleable but permanent.

The inherent tension between the selection of a Gentile husband and the maintenance of a Jewish self evolved over the twentieth century, as American women gained more political rights and personal power within their most intimate relationships. While democratic culture enabled Jewish women to blend into the mainstream, and some did when they intermarried, it also increasingly encouraged them to assert their Jewishness. In the words of the literary scholar Ruth R. Wisse: “American Jews find themselves in the tough position of having to bless America precisely for what endangers them, and of proving the depth of America’s hospitality by refusing to be absorbed into its folds.”
The paradox of pluralism in America enabled the Jewish women discussed in this book to intermarry while forcing them to determine for themselves the ways that they wished to integrate into the American population and retain their ethnic and religious heritage despite marrying “out.” America, with its religious freedom, ethnic diversity, and marital opportunities, offered Jewish women the chance to choose their own spouses and how they would self-identify. In the process, the meaning of religious identity became increasingly personal and individualistic, as it did for many moderately affiliated American Jews. Because they were married to non-Jews, however, women who identified as Jewish needed to go beyond their most immediate personal circles to find Jewish fellowship, for example, at their synagogue, through their children’s Jewish education, and through Jewish cultural activities. Intermarried Jewish women increasingly expressed and enacted their Jewish identities through explicitly public means. Lest she be utterly alone, the “sovereign self” of the modern intermarried Jewish woman, the principal authority for contemporary American Jews described by Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen in *The Jew Within*, reached out to organizations and institutions to connect her private Jewish self with the larger Jewish community.

The assumption that an intermarried person ceases to identify as a Jew is exacerbated by the assumption that a Jew who marries a non-Jew does not raise Jewish children. Although this project focuses on Jewish women rather than their offspring, the more crucial issue for people interested in Jewish continuity regarding intermarriage is not how the individuals involved identified but how their children were raised and what that would mean for the future of the Jewish people. The recent statistic that roughly only a third of the children with intermarried parents are raised as Jews, combined with the low fertility rates of Jewish women that are below replacement levels, make the *halakhic* position—that is, the one that accords with Jewish law—against intermarriage all the more pragmatic. If approximately half the American Jews intermarry and less than half raise Jewish children, the Jewish future would indeed seem to be in jeopardy. American Jews who care about continuity, many of whom now have adult children, want an answer to the question: “Will my grandchildren be Jewish?” I would respond to this question with another question: “Do you have an intermarried daughter or son?” If it is a daughter who intermarried in the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, the likelihood is strong that she will raise children to identify as Jews.
The historical stakes for my study of intermarriage are high: using gender, it will reconceptualize how intermarriage is understood to affect Jewish continuity according to the histories of forty-six women who intermarried between 1901 and 2000. The evidence illustrates that women who intermarried later in the century were more likely to raise their children with strong ties to Judaism than women who intermarried earlier in the century. In the chapters that follow I discuss the particular historical circumstances that influenced women’s own identities and choices on behalf of their children. Here I summarize how the women raised their children with respect to the issue of continuity. Of the three women who intermarried in the first decade of the century, two had children and both raised them without any discernable Jewish identity. Seven of the Jewish women I interviewed who intermarried between 1938 and 1960 raised their children as Unitarians, five as Jews, one as Catholic, and one was childless. Ten women who intermarried between 1963 and 1979 raised children who identified as Jewish, the children of two identified neither as Jewish nor Gentile, and the children of two others identified reportedly as “both.” Finally, of the fifteen Jewish women who intermarried between 1980 and 2000, twelve were raising children to identify as Jewish, two were childless, and one was pregnant at the time of the interview. Although drawing generalizations using a sample of only forty-six women would be imprudent, the steady increase in the ratio of women who raised children to identify as Jews is unmistakable.

Recent scholarship suggests that Jewish women who marry non-Jews raise Jewish children at higher rates than do intermarried Jewish men. Prior to the new millennium, the minimal attention to the gender of the Jewish parent suggested the disinclination, perhaps inadvertent, on the part of scholars of intermarriage to truly confront the role of gender in the construction of families in general, and in intermarried families in particular. It should be emphasized, however, that how children were raised to identify is no guarantee of how they will identify when they reach adulthood. Nevertheless, the presence of Jewish mothers married to Gentile men in intermarried households is a stronger predictor of Jewish identification than are non-Jewish mothers married to Jewish men. Although the study of the children of intermarriage is still young, a 2002 report by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that college freshmen tended to affiliate with the religion of their mothers. Of students with a Jewish mother and a Gentile father, 38 percent identified as Jewish compared to 15 percent of
students with non-Jewish mothers and Jewish fathers. In a 2005 study of a nonrepresentative sample of ninety young adult children of intermarried couples, 77 percent of respondents with Jewish mothers reported that their Jewish parent encouraged them to “identify with the Jewish religion” compared to 45 percent of respondents with Jewish fathers. According to Fishman, “households with Jewish mothers are more connected to Jewishness and less connected to Christianity in every measurable aspect of Jewish life than households with Jewish fathers.” Quantitative data strengthen what qualitative research patterns suggest: an analysis of the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), thought to be representative, found that of the roughly one-third of the children of all currently intermarried Jews being raised Jewish, 47 percent were children of intermarried women and 28 percent were children of intermarried men. These findings from contemporary sociological research reinforce my historical research about the roles of intermarried Jewish women and American religious life.

Jewish History and Matrilineal Descent

A twentieth-century history of women and intermarriage in America has as its background an ancient Jewish story resulting in a monumental conflict of interests. Whereas Americans believe in “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” Jewish law warns Jews not to intermarry, and sages told those men who did to purge Gentile wives from the Judean tribe. The classic biblical prohibition of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage is Deuteronomy 7:3-4: “You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from me to worship other gods, and the Lord’s anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out.” After the ban against marriage with members of the seven larger non-Israelite nations, Jews were warned against marriage with people of all lands and nations, urged by Nehemiah only to marry fellow Jews. In the fifth century BCE, Ezra took the decree further, aiming to expel “foreign” wives and their children from the Jewish community. This ancient writer expanded the notion of holiness and extended the requirement of genealogical purity, formerly required only of Israelite priests, to lay Israelites. According to Ezra and Nehemiah, the distinction between Israelites and Gentiles was genealogical, not moral or ritualistic; hence intermarriage and conversion became impossible because the holy seed of the Israelite
could not be joined with the profane seed of the Gentile. Jewish marriage was between two Jews, period.

The intense religious objections to intermarriage held by today’s traditional halakhic Jews (those who follow Jewish law) reinvigorate Ezra and Nehemiah’s ancient discourse regarding tribal boundaries, as well as the discourses of subsequent Talmudic rabbis who devised the principle of matrilineal descent. Previously the issue of genealogical purity was not gendered; although descent was formerly inherited from the father, and, correspondingly, the children of an Israelite man and a non-Israelite woman were considered to be Israelites, the idea of the people of Israel as a holy seed excluded Gentile females and males such that only children of two Israelite parents could be Israelites. In the words of one scholar, the idea for the matrilineal principle first appears in the Mishnah “like a bolt out of the blue,” and may date from the end of the mid-second century CE or the late fourth century. According to two textual segments, the offspring of a Gentile mother and a Jewish father follows the mother; similarly, the offspring of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father follows the mother. Whereas the law penalized the Jewish man by making his child born of a Gentile woman also Gentile, the law penalized the Jewish woman by making her child conceived from a Gentile man a mamzer (illegitimate) but a Jew nonetheless. The basis for the bastardization of the child is that there is no potential for a valid marriage in these circumstances. Although there was dissent between some rabbis who considered the child of a Jewish father and a Gentile mother Jewish, and rabbis who considered the child of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father Gentile, the matrilineal descent principle became nearly universally accepted within rabbinic circles and, I argue, outside them as well. (I discuss the adoption of the patrilineal descent principle in the 1980s by the Reform Movement in chapter 4.)

In an important historic twist, the matrilineal descent principle contributed to making the experiences of Jewish women who married exogamously less noteworthy and therefore less visible from the earliest centuries to the twentieth century. Previously the author of the Book of Jubilees, who reworked biblical text, did not know the matrilineal principle and condemned the intermarriage of Israelite women more vociferously than those of Israelite men in his paraphrase of Genesis 34:

And if there is any man who wishes in Israel to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is of the seed of the Gentiles he shall surely die,
and they shall stone him with stones; for he hath wrought shame in Israel; and they shall burn the woman with fire, because she has dishonoured the name of the house of her father and she shall be rooted out of Israel.33

What, then, can be surmised about Israelite women who had unions with Gentile men? The biblical figure Dinah, daughter of Leah and Jacob and great granddaughter of Sarah and Abraham, defied the reported word of God when she had sexual relations with and married Shechem, a Gentile Egyptian prince. Although some scholars interpret the story of Dinah as a rape, it seems equally plausible that she intermarried and that the charge of rape was subsequently issued to explain the unthinkable: a Jewish woman marrying a non-Jewish man.34 That Dinah “went out” of the Jewish tribe and that Shechem did whatever was necessary to keep her as his wife, including being circumcised, suggest that intermarriage was the real issue. Moreover, her brothers’ slaughter of her husband and all the males in his kingdom was apparently an attempt to physically eliminate any other potential Gentile mates for Jewish women (Genesis 34:1-27).35 Thus, although the injunction against intermarriage applied to Jewish men as well as Jewish women, the union of a Jewish female with a non-Jewish male was by far the more grievous offense.36

Patriarchy supersedes the matrilineal descent principle both before and after its invention. Whereas the Jewish woman who joined her body and life with a Gentile man “shall burn” and “be rooted out of Israel” (Book of Jubilees 30:7-8), the Israelite warrior could take captive a non-Jewish woman he desired. He could bring her home, change her appearance by cutting her hair and discarding her clothes, allow her a month to grieve for her parents, and “after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife” (Deuteronomy 21:10-14).37 In contrast to the silence surrounding Dinah, numerous biblical accounts describe Jewish heroes and kings who intermarried. Such pairings included Judah with a Canaanite woman, Joseph with an Egyptian, Moses with a Midianite and an Ethiopian, David with a Philistine, and Solomon with “women of every description.”38 Subsequent rabbinic midrash (the interpretation of Jewish texts) generally argued that Gentile women who married Jewish patriarchs were not actually foreign, as the women were either of Israelite origin or had converted to Judaism prior to their marriages.39

Gender explains why, paradoxically, more Jewish men intermarried than women despite the matrilineal descent principle. The negative portrayal of intermarriage was in highly gendered terms, with dire
consequences for individual women if they disobeyed, but more significant consequences for Jews as a group if men did. There was considerably more concern about Jewish men becoming idolatrous, because it was a patriarchal society in which everything of importance was men’s domain. Regarding this imbalance, the scholar Shaye D. Cohen argued, “if Israelite men are incited by their foreign wives to abandon the worship of the true God, the result would be catastrophic; if Israelite women are turned astray by their foreign husbands, who would notice? . . . Hence the legal and narrative texts pay little attention to marriages between Israelite women and foreign men. Like the women themselves, they were easily overlooked.” 40 Perhaps this hints at one of the reasons why Jewish women who intermarried later in history and maintained ties to their Jewish heritage were overlooked: they were less conspicuous than men to begin with and were assumed to disappear into their husbands’ houses. 41

**Why Jewish Women?**

Difficulty tracing intermarried Jewish women, combined with cultural assumptions about gender roles, contributed to scholarly analyses that underrepresented women. Social scientists merely reported, without much commentary, that, between 1930 and 1960, Jewish women intermarried less often than Jewish men did. As Milton Barron wrote, “Everywhere Jewish men were found to have intermarried more than Jewish women.”42 A multitude of research studies documented the sex-ratio differential. 43 For example, a study conducted by students at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1944 surveyed twenty-one cities in seven mid-western states and remarked that the most striking result was that, of the 152 intermarried Jewish individuals, 133 (nearly 88 percent) were men and only 19 were women. 44 But surveys can be misleading, at least when it comes to the meanings behind the intermarriage sex ratio. Although more Jewish men than women may very well have intermarried, the lack of critical analysis to date regarding this gender differential undermines a deeper understanding of intermarriage history.

More Jewish women may have intermarried than historians will ever know, because studies conducted between 1930 and 1960 that used “Jewish” surnames to locate interfaith couples potentially missed Jewish women who married non-Jews, changed their names, and became “invisible” to researchers. Jewish men who married outside the fold may also have been inadvertently excluded. Although scholars exercised great care
in their attempts to include only actual intermarriages, others probably went undetected because numerous intermarried Jews dropped their original Jewish names and adopted non-Jewish names, sometimes even prior to marriage.\textsuperscript{45} It is likely that more women assumed their husbands’ names than men assumed non-Jewish names upon marriage, though only a study of Jewish men who intermarried could confirm this idea. For example, all the women I interviewed who intermarried between 1938 and 1960 took their husband’s name when they wed. As the sociologist Erich Rosenthal wrote in the \textit{American Jewish Yearbook 1963}, “the data on intermarried Jewish women do not lend themselves to consistent analysis.”\textsuperscript{46} In the case where a non–name-based methodology was employed, intermarried Jewish men still far outnumbered women. The states of Indiana and Iowa asked the religious affiliation of the individuals who purchased marriage licenses. Based on this information, a study including the years 1953 to 1959 found that 75 percent of the mixed marriages of Jews in Iowa involved a Jewish male, and only 25 percent involved a female.\textsuperscript{47} The question was, why? Answers, though not plentiful, suggest that Jewish women who intermarried were exceptions.

The perception of intermarriage as a “men-only” course of action obscured the actual history of intermarried Jewish women. Students of intermarriage intertwined speculation about why Jewish women presumably intermarried less frequently than Jewish men with gender stereotypes reinforced by double standards.\textsuperscript{48} Social scientists in 1934 surmised that Jewish men had more opportunity to meet Gentile women in business, and that religion exerted more influence on Jewesses (a term used for Jewish women in the early twentieth century) than on Jewish men. These scientists’ observation that “many Jewish businessmen marry their Gentile stenographers” overlooked the fact that Jewish stenographers could also marry Gentile businessmen. They specifically cited the difficulty in ascertaining how Jewish women became acquainted with Gentile men.\textsuperscript{49} Tacit approval of Jewish males’ sexual relations with non-Jewish females, allowing greater access to Gentile women, is illustrated by a Yiddish saying for Jewish boys: “In the Torah it is written, that you may lie with a Gentile girl, but if the girl does not let you ‘have’ her, may she be afflicted with Cholera!”\textsuperscript{50} The saying is a cultural manipulation of the aforementioned biblical text (Deuteronomy 21:10-14) that, although not discussing any ailment, dealt with the treatment of sexually desirable non-Jewish women who are captured in war that includes marriage, intercourse, and conversion to Judaism.\textsuperscript{51} As late as 1968, the psychologist Louis A. Berman
contended that men, “whose sex role designates a greater degree of inde-
pendence and aggressiveness,” were more likely to violate the social taboo
of intermarriage, whereas the Jewish daughter “would seem more vulner-
able to threats of ostracism.”52

Whereas Jewish men could engage in sexual relations with Gen-
tile women that might lead to marriage, it was more difficult for Jewish
women to cross the religious line, because, in addition to their friends
being carefully screened for Gentiles, they were expected to remain chaste
until marriage. There is also a Yiddish aphorism to this effect—“No
Chuppe, No Shtuppe” (“No Wedding [Canopy], No Sex”)—reflecting the
expectation that Jewish girls will avoid premarital sexual relations.53 The
prospect of being marginalized probably made some women think twice
about marrying a non-Jew. The writer Toby Shafter observed the follow-
ing in a 1949 Commentary article about her Maine community:

The announcement that a young man is about to marry or has already se-
cretly married a shiksa hardly creates a sensation by now. The few Jewish
girls who have married Gentile men have, on the other hand, been sub-
ject to vehement criticism, coffee-hour gossip, and unending speculation.
In all cases except one, they have not remained in town.54

Keren Hadass’s 1941 booklet, A Marriage Guide for Jewish Women: Es-
pecially Prepared for the American Jewish Woman, concerned endogamy
only.55 How many Jewish women intermarried despite social pressure
against doing so is undeterminable. One thing is certain, however: Jewish
women who intermarried defied the cultural expectation that they would
“save” themselves for Jewish men, some of whom made other plans.

Although it became clear in the 1960s and 1970s that Jewish women
were, in fact, intermarrying, Jewish women’s intermarriage stories went
untold. In 1970, for example, the American Jewish Year Book reported that
analysis of a survey by the National Opinion Research Council (NORC)
suggested that the gender differential between Jewish women and men
was not as great as earlier intermarriage studies suggested. Acknowledg-
ing that more Jewish women might have intermarried than suspected,
one scholar explained: “The narrowing gap between male and female in-
terramarriage rates may have resulted from the inclusion of that portion of
the Jewish population most frequently underrepresented in intermarriage
studies—the Jewish girl who marries out and is lost to the Jewish com-
unity.”56
extended from Jewish communities in the Diaspora to Israel, causing the Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs to publicly lament, in May 1971, about the number of Jewish females who married Muslim men.57

Still, the actual experiences of those Jewish women who crossed the religious line remained concealed by the contention that they were reluctant to intermarry before second-wave feminism.58 Moreover, the oft-cited 1970-72 National Jewish Population Study finding that the Jewish husband-Gentile wife marriage was “about twice as prevalent” as the Jewish wife-Gentile husband combination curtailed extensive inquiry or commentary about Jewish daughters who married “out,” perpetuating in the process the assumption that intermarriage was largely the domain of Jewish men rather than women.59 This assumption was overturned in the last decade of the twentieth century, but the imprint of its long history lingers. Only through interrogating the relationship between gender and intermarriage does it become possible to effectively illustrate that Jewish women, those in my study and I suspect many others, may not have been so reluctant to intermarry after all and that most remained Jewish after they wed. They may have indeed intermarried in fewer numbers than their Jewish brothers for most of the century, but this assumption should not be used to explain why Jewish women were ignored.

**Methodology and Chapter Overviews**

I define “intermarriage” as follows: the legal union between a born Jew and a born non-Jew who has not converted at the time of marriage. I use the anthropological terms “exogamous” (marriage outside one’s own group) and “endogamous” (marriage within), interchangeably with “intermarriage” and “in-marriage,” respectively. I include a Jewish woman whose spouse converted sometime after their wedding day. For example, a Jewish woman who married a non-Jew in 1970 and whose husband converted to Judaism in 1980 would no longer be considered “intermarried” by the present standards of Jewish organizations or by most people (although some rabbis would disagree). I include her, however, because she originally wed a Gentile and her spouse’s conversion to Judaism is part of change over time. This trend is not in any way to discriminate against women who are Jews by choice or to stigmatize conversionary couples as still intermarried, but rather to accurately trace the changing meaning of intermarriage to Jewish women and in public discourse. Although same-sex couples and long-term heterosexual partnerships are often also interfaith, this study
focuses on male-female relationships defined by conventional marriage under current law. I also do not include marriages between born Jews of different backgrounds (for example, Conservative-secular, American-Israeli, or German-Russian marriages), despite that sometimes these unions are considered to be “intermarriages” by the individuals involved and by some scholars, in both different and strikingly similar ways.60

This is a multigenerational history, beginning with women who immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century, using two methodological techniques.61 The first involves collecting women's self-reports to describe the experience and meaning of intermarriage. “Jewish women” is loosely defined as those who were raised Jewish and either did or did not later identify as Jews. In cases where women have parents of different religions, I rely on women to identify themselves as Jews at the time of marriage (rather than using matrilineal or patrilineal descent as a determinant). I augment interviews with letters, memoirs, biographies, and novels about women. I consider how contextual factors such as immigration trends, world wars, the Depression, antisemitism, and the Civil Rights and Feminist movements influenced intermarriage.62 The second technique is to integrate throughout my study an analysis of how interfaith relationships and intermarriage were portrayed in the mass media, advice manuals, and religious community-generated literature to situate women's self-representations within larger discursive contexts.

The meaning of intermarriage and gender is best understood through individual experiences within their respective contexts. To obtain these life stories, I conducted in-depth personal interviews with women who intermarried.63 This methodology produced the oral history narratives that enabled me to interpret what intermarriage meant to and for Jewish women within their particular social milieus and how this changed over time. This approach embraces the “personal” as an epistemological tool and uses individual experiences to uncover and chronicle the meaning of intermarriage. It employs contemporary ethnography which assumes that, in one noted scholar's words, “all knowledge in the field is produced through the interactions between a researcher, who is a socially situated self with particular life experiences, and her respondents, who bring to the dialogue their own embedded assumptions and meanings.”64 The interviewees’ own intermarriage histories constitute the content of this scholarship. By asking women “How are you Jewish?”—and not “How Jewish are you?”—this book considers the “invention of ethnicity,” to borrow the title from a work by another scholar, Werner Sollors. This book looks at
intermarriage as a historical process during which women defined and redefined their own ethnicity, that is, the ways in which they belonged to an ethnic group, as well as how others perceived them as belonging. I recognize the fluidity of ethnicity and that it involves personal choice by describing and analyzing a woman’s ethnic identity as her subjective orientation toward her religious origins.

In addition to archival research about three women who are deceased, I conducted forty-three interviews in fourteen towns and cities in the Boston area with women of mostly Ashkenazi descent and assorted generations whose intermarriages occurred in seven twentieth-century decades. This sample does not strive to be random or representative. Rather, it selectively sheds light on the complex histories of some Jewish women who intermarried and whose voices have yet to be heard. This sample size is large enough to illustrate some common experiences among women who intermarried and the meanings these experiences generated at various points across time. The interviews were conducted in the Boston area for convenience; a multi-regional study, though enviable, was beyond my resources as the sole researcher. Unless otherwise noted, the phrase “intermarried Jewish women” in my text refers specifically to the women in my sample. Italicized words situated within direct quotations indicate the women’s own verbal emphases. Pseudonyms are used to preserve the women’s anonymity. As a historian, I longed to include women’s actual names. However, anonymous participation strengthened my research by enabling many women to share intimate details and emotions un–self-consciously, information they would otherwise have omitted for fear of their friends and families someday reading this book and identifying them. I do use the real surnames of the semi-famous immigrant women discussed in chapter 1, as their personal papers are accessible to researchers, and also the actual name of the published novelist discussed in chapter 2.

Three minor limitations should be pointed out regarding the makeup of my sample. None of the women I interviewed married Muslim men; none married men who were devoutly religious; nor did any of the women formally convert to Christianity. Certainly such intermarried women exist, but that none of these particular women chose to participate in my study suggests two important points. First, there were probably fewer such women than women who married non-religious Christian men. Second, and more significant, that most women in my sample who married non-Jews during the twentieth century continued to identify as Jewish illustrates the unique “tenacity of Jewishness” in American society. It also
suggests that, when studied historically, intermarriage, at least involving Jewish women, may not be “bad for the Jews” in the long run. My sample is self-selected and all women volunteered their time, that is, no incentives or compensation was offered. More important is that this was not a skewed group of women who felt proudly Jewish and therefore participated. Rather, the women illustrate the ways in which being Jewish and intermarrying was experienced differently depending on the time period.

In chapter 1, I discuss the intermarried lives of three well-known immigrant Jewish women: Mary Antin Grabau, Rose Pastor Stokes, and Anna Strunsky Walling. Their experiences shed new light on the inner workings of intermarriages early in the twentieth century that disputes the conventional idea that religious differences were the primary cause of marital failure. The lives of lesser-known women who intermarried between 1930 and 1960 are analyzed in chapter 2, where I argue that diminished religiosity, assimilation, and wider social contacts increased the possibility of intermarriage and that antisemitism was sometimes a contributing impetus. Chapter 3 illustrates how the liberalism, ecumenism, and feminism of the 1960s and 1970s simultaneously created more room for Jewish women to intermarry and, for an increasing number of women, to proactively define themselves as Jews. In chapter 4, which covers the years from 1980 through 2004, I show how multiculturalism, combined with rampant changes in religious affiliation and individualism in American society, meant that, although Jewish women married Gentile men who were often not religious, their encounters with the “other,” paradoxically, inspired many women to reconnect with their Jewish heritage and communities. The Jewish women in my sample who intermarried toward the end of the twentieth century initiated what I call a Jewish-feminist modus vivendi by creating meaningful ethnic self-identities that were non-halakhic (counter to Jewish law) yet authentic, and by charting the religious courses for their families. In the conclusion I summarize my findings and discuss the polarized Jewish community’s response to intermarriage, which is known as the “outreach/in-reach debate.” Suggested avenues for further inquiry may be found in the afterword, followed by an appendix that includes seven tables containing relevant statistical information for the reader’s reference. It is my hope that this book will convince anyone interested in pursuing research on intermarriage of the absolute necessity of analyzing gender.