



o r e t h a n

C h e m i s t r y :

The Romantic

Choices of

American Jews

by Sylvia Barack Fishman

CONTENTS

Introduction 3

SESSION ONE

A (Re)arranged Match: *The Imported Bridegroom* 9

SESSION TWO

“A Very Precious Love”: *Marjorie Morningstar*..... 16

SESSION THREE

A Farewell to Innocence: *Goodbye, Columbus*..... 24

SESSION FOUR

Facing Facts:
Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition 34

SESSION FIVE

When Opposites Attract: *The Way We Were* 47

SESSION SIX

Opposites Attract, Again: *Annie Hall* 55

SESSION SEVEN

Matchmaker, Matchmaker: *Crossing Delancey* 64

Sylvia Barack Fishman is assistant professor of contemporary Jewish life in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University and director of publications at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Her most recent books are *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* and *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction*.

INTRODUCTION



THE FILMS in this course explore love and romance in the context of Jewish lives. The relationship between romance and Jewish identity is double-sided, for just as connection to Jewish family and community influences romantic decision-making, so too, in turn, can an individual's romantic choices significantly affect Jewish identity and continuity.

“More than Chemistry” spans 100 years of American Jewish history. Romantic choices, as presented in the films, have often been invested with larger social, economic, and psychological goals. They have often been tied in overt or subtle ways to intergenerational conflict, to social movements, to the task of acculturation, and to the love-hate relationship with the larger American culture. From turn-of-the-century immigrants to 1960s college sweethearts to contemporary Manhattanites, the film characters demonstrate that “falling in love” can be a more complicated process than it appears.

The Films: Love Stories

The Imported Bridegroom is the story of a father and daughter and their differing priorities in selecting her future spouse. The issues that complicated romantic choices in the immigrant period (and later too) – the conflicts between generations and the conflicts between American and traditional Jewish values – are explored.

Marjorie Morningstar, set in pre-World War II New York City and in an upstate summer resort, illustrates how the rapid acculturation of American Jews affected romantic choices. The heroine shares in the strong Jewish/American middle-class values of her parental home, but she is also drawn to the glamour of the theater and the freedom of a bohemian lifestyle.

Goodbye, Columbus tells the story of a poor but intellectual young man living with his Jewish caricature of an overbearing aunt in the 1960s, who meets and is seduced by a sharp, funny, ambitious, and spoiled upper-class Jewish Radcliffe “girl.” The young woman enjoys

taunting the materialistic values of her friends and relatives, but eventually capitulates to them.

The fourth session features a documentary exploration of the phenomenon of Jewish-Christian relationships, a theme in the subsequent films in the series. *Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition* explores sympathetically but honestly the factors that make outmarriage different from other types of boundary-crossing.

The Way We Were looks at a romance between an idealistic Jewish woman and a cool and careless gentile man. Contrary to many trends within American films, this movie captures a time and culture in which Jewish was likely to mean working class, and the most self-absorbed, upper-class characters were non-Jews.

The hero of *Annie Hall* is the archetypal New York Jew – overintellectual, oversensitive, overliberal – who is drawn to a dizzy Midwestern blond gentile woman. He both adores and disdains the non-Jewish world which cannot or will not share his intensity, pain, and neurotic obsessions, and has similar conflicting emotions about his non-Jewish lovers.

Crossing Delancey focuses on the lives and choices of Jewish singles in urban societies. It explores the conflicting pulls of feminist, careerist, and familial yearnings, as a young woman who is free to make her own decisions, romantic and otherwise, finds herself confused not only by her spectrum of choices but also by the irrationality of her own desires.

Love Conquers All. Or Does It?

There has been perhaps no more potent symbol of the reign of individual choice in contemporary American society than the culture-wide romance with romantic love. The triumph of true love over family, socioeconomic status, religious or ethnic differences is often viewed as the victory of equality and the individual pursuit of happiness over the inequalities and bigotries that have divided people in the past.

In the American media and in popular literature, individualistic romantic love has frequently been presented as “pure chemistry,” a mysterious potion. This chemistry of sexual, emotional, and spiritual attractions has often been

contrasted with marriages arranged for a purpose, such as economic gain or political considerations, in traditional societies. Thus, romantic love has been viewed as an expression of the primacy of the individual and individual freedom. In American popular culture, the union of two souls is “good,” and the attempt by outside forces to frustrate such a union is mistaken, even corrupt or evil.

However, as many writers and filmmakers know, a lot more than chemistry is operating when two individuals find themselves attracted to each other. Throughout history, people’s choices of romantic and marital partners have been profoundly influenced by factors other than sexual attraction and mutual regard. Indeed, even erotic appeal is influenced by a wide variety of social and cultural forces. People often find themselves attracted to those who seem to represent a powerful or glamorous milieu to which they aspire. Sometimes people choose mates precisely because they seem to further the rejection of families and societal or cultural ties that feel stifling. And yet, in other cases, in spite of attractions to those who are different, people choose to marry someone with whom they share a background and cultural or religious values.

Secret Agendas: Seeking Identity through a Partner

Choosing a partner marks a pivotal stage of life. It’s a new beginning, a time of confronting – or making peace with – values, dreams, and life goals, as well as issues of identity. For some, romance provides new avenues for self-definition.

It is not uncommon, in life or in the movies, for parents and children to have conflicting ideas about suitable marriage partners. Battles between tradition and change frequently are played out between generations. Often the two sides have agendas that have nothing to do with “chemistry” but instead with the lifestyle and status they hope to achieve. In *The Imported Bridegroom*, the father wishes to choose as a husband for his daughter a Talmudic scholar who will solidify his own religious standing, while the daughter desires “an uptown doctor” who will be a ticket to upward social status – and “Americanization.” Marjorie Morningstar and Brenda Patimkin (*Goodbye, Columbus*) each think they are attracted to their

unconventional beaux because of their physical appearance, wit, charm, and talent. But both women are also using their romantic involvements with these men to challenge the middle-class values of their parental homes. Similarly, the star of *Crossing Delancey* first hopes to use a romance with a glamorous figure to transport her into a more exalted realm of existence – and liberate from her an old-fashioned bourgeois Jewish mentality.

Spoiled Daughters and Neurotic Sons: Images and Stereotypes

The views of Jewish life and Jewish characters in many popular films are based on stereotypes – and may serve to perpetuate those very stereotypes. In these love stories, caricatures are plentiful.

Goodbye, Columbus presents a slice of Jewish life so vivid – and stereotypical – that the film’s name has become part of our vernacular language to describe conspicuous excess (as in “It was a real Goodbye Columbus wedding”). Neil Klugman at first believes that the wealth and elegance of his paramour’s palatial home can free him from the tribal obsessions of his relentlessly Jewish relatives, but he soon comes to believe that wealthy Jews are no more cosmopolitan than poor Jews, they just have more money with which to indulge their obsessions.

Both *The Way We Were* and *Annie Hall* make use of certain popular stereotypes about Jews and non-Jews, picturing the Jewish partner as far more cerebral, urbane, politically liberal, intense, and neurotic. Barbra Streisand (*The Way We Were*) and Woody Allen (*Annie Hall*) portray Jewish characters who somehow believe they are responsible for repairing the world’s ills, but who are each wildly attracted to the cool, casual, careless charm of a non-Jew who seems to epitomize the cool, casual, careless non-Jewish world. The tenement grandmother and the old-fashioned matchmaker in *Crossing Delancey* are appealing characters, but they too are caricatures. Nevertheless, although the films’ portrayal of both Jewish life and the characters’ romantic involvements may be simplistic – and life is always multilayered – there’s a wealth of fascinating material for discussion.

Intermarriage: The Unspoken Dilemma

For American Jews, intermarriage is a sensitive subject. But it would be an omission to speak of American-Jewish patterns in love and romance and not consider intermarriage, for in contemporary life it is a significant trend.

A session dedicated to discussing intermarriage is included in this course in order to look honestly at the issues involved and to present various points of view. The documentary provides an opportunity to view the lifestyles of inmarried, mixed married, and conversionary Jewish households, and explore what these changes may mean for the Jewish community as a whole.

The documentary looks at several appealing young couples who initially feel that the chemistry of true love has erased any differences between them. As they talk about the realities of married life, however, each discovers that religious differences are more salient than he or she had initially thought. By the end of the documentary, different couples seem headed toward divergent resolutions of their complex feelings.

Happily Ever After?

The relationships portrayed in these films take many different courses. As in life, great romantic beginnings don't necessarily result in lifelong love; life, even in the movies, is full of complexity. Some of the film endings are vague; it's up to the viewer to decide on the subsequent success of the union.

As certain films progress, the very attraction of opposites that was initially so compelling to the individuals involved becomes a source of irritation, and finally an irreconcilable difference. For some characters, their romantic involvements are a temporary challenge. When they tire of being different from their parents, they can still return to the world of solid middle-class values.

One ending that seems unambivalently upbeat is that of *Crossing Delancey*. Izzy breaks loose from a seductive non-Jewish writer and falls into the arms of a sweet, solid, working-class Jewish man instead. Like most persons on and off the screen, she must eventually make her romantic decisions based on actual options, not on notions of an

idealized human being, and she comes to understand that love may truly be more than chemistry.

Along with providing lively entertainment, including some unforgettable lines, these films offer some profound issues to ponder. Watching love develop – or evaporate, or run an on-again-off-again course, as the case may be – can prompt us to probe our own lives and family histories, and rethink our own romantic experiences, or our hopes for new romantic involvements for ourselves and our children.

SESSION ONE



(Re)arranged Match:
The Imported Bridegroom

Novella, 1898

Author: Abraham Cahan

Feature film, 1989

Director: Pamela Berger

Screenplay: Pamela Berger

Flora: Greta Cowan

Asriel: Eugene Troobnick

Shaya: Avi Hoffman

Length: 93 minutes

Flora Stroon almost succeeds in something many women would like to do – designing her own bridegroom.

The protagonist of this film set at the turn-of-the century, Flora is a young Jewish woman who has made good use of her father's new-found wealth in America. As a single woman, and only child, she has achieved the societal ideal of elegance. She can be seen as the first literary representation of a now well-known type, which in contemporary times stirs up controversy because of its negative imagery: an "American Jewish princess."

In order to move on in her life, to live in the sophisticated and refined style she craves, she understands that she must marry the right kind of man. In her mind, the only ticket to upward social mobility is a cultured Jewish husband, preferably a physician. Above all, she abhors the idea of a fresh immigrant, anyone too religious or too "green," too Old-Worldly and thus too obviously Jewish.

Asriel Stroon, her widowed father, is a landlord who spent most of his American life amassing wealth to provide his daughter with education and polish. As a way of atoning for his neglect of Jewish tradition, he wants Flora to marry a *yeshiva bocher*, a young Talmudic genius from his home town in Europe.

Flora has a very clear sense of what she wants from life. Like most women of her time, however, she must accomplish her goals vicariously, by manipulating the men in her life. For a time it seems that Flora is able to trick her father and her fiance into fulfilling her dream.

While deception is not admired in post-feminist America, for American Jewish women who aspired to marriage and a traditional lifestyle in Flora's time, there were basically two choices: to act or be acted upon.

Asriel: *This kind of match doesn't come by every day.*

Existence, therefore, often became a power struggle between husband and wife and between parents and children. A third option, to pursue an independent, single course in life, was too intimidating for most women like Flora to consider.

Flora's manipulative antics in attempting to reconcile her own goals with her father's emotional well-being are treated sympathetically by both Abraham Cahan in the book and by Pamela Berger, who wrote, produced, and directed the film almost a century later. Their conclusions as to Flora's eventual fate vary strikingly, however – a reflection of their vastly different eras.

The movie follows Cahan's original story until the ending but then departs from it in important ways. In the story, when the young couple's plotting has been exposed to Flora's father, Flora wants to return immediately and set things right. Shaya, however, insists that they stop off to visit his international set of intellectual cronies. There, Flora discovers that Shaya has outgrown her and that the smoky, shabby apartment filled with poorly dressed people whose conversation she can't follow "was anything but the world of intellectual and physical elegance into which she had dreamed to be introduced by marriage to a doctor."

In contrast, in the film Flora rises to a feminist triumph. She matches Shaya and his friends at their own intellectual games, and she manages to carry her feminist skills to new environments as well.

In Depth: Romance, the Jewish Family, and Social Mobility

Romantic love was not unknown in more traditional Jewish societies. Although parents generally initiated the search for spouses for their children and often used the services of matchmakers, the prospective bride and groom usually met to determine if they found each other appealing enough. Sometimes the attraction preceded the matchmaking process even in the most pious rabbinic homes. Parents might then make official the choices of their children's hearts, provided these choices met other criteria such as appropriate family, character, and social standing.

The idea that young people may choose their mates without any supervision or interference by the parental

Flora: *Can't you talk without using your hands like that?*

Shaya: *This is how I talk, always.*

Asriel: *America has robbed me of my glory.*

generation is a modern one. These romantic freedoms were far more available to Jews in the United States than they had been in Europe.

The Traditional Jewish Family

In Jewish law and in traditional Jewish life, romantic attraction was seen as an essential part of human nature, good when it led men and women to establish a Jewish home and a Jewish family, bad when it led them away from a normative home life.

Traditional Jewish societies put great emphasis on marriage and the family. On the assumption that a better, more religious, responsible, and productive life could be lived within a family setting, Jewish law prescribed marriage for all adults. Both traditional law and traditional Jewish societies frowned upon postponed marriage or deliberate celibacy. Children were regarded as the glory and reward of a successful marriage. However, childhood was seen as a training ground for maturity, and the wisdom of elders, rather than the energy of youth, was held in highest regard. Both children and adults were exhorted to attend to their familial and communal responsibilities rather than to their rights and individual opportunities.

Historically, the Jewish family has been regarded as the foundation of Jewish continuity, strength, and even survival. In traditional Jewish communities prior to the mass emigration of Jews to the United States between 1880 and 1924, the marital unit was seen as the basic building block of Jewish society, for when two Jews married they created a *bayit ne'eman b'yisrael*, a faithful household among the people of Israel. Mordecai Kaplan, the father of Reconstructionist Judaism, saw the family as the indivisible, axiomatic, essential unit of Jewish life.

Once a man or woman became newly single, Jewish societies made every effort to help them remarry an appropriate partner. Age was no impediment to remarriage, because reproduction was not seen as the only reason for marriage; it also provided access to companionship, an orderly physical environment, affection, and sexual activity.

In traditional Jewish families, men were accorded greater autonomy, authority, and public status, but

the family unit depended heavily on the physical and organizational abilities of its women, particularly the mother. Although ritual emphasized gender differences, family roles were far more permeable, and images of the macho male and the weak, incompetent female were not typical. Jewish fathers were expected to be involved parents, and the scholarly and sensitive man was accorded high status in society; conversely, women were expected to be strong, capable, organized, and good in business affairs.

Above almost all other considerations, *shalom bayit*, the psychological serenity and goodwill of the household, was supposed to be a primary consideration of all members of the family but most especially the wife. So strong was this cultural ideal that where problems existed such as alcoholism or abuse, they were often swept under the rug.

Coming to America

By the end of the nineteenth century, Eastern European Jewish communities were being shaken by historical events and modern movements. Following the Emancipation and the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), social movements such as socialism, nationalism, and Zionism each strained the fabric of the Jewish family, as many of the most talented and ambitious young Jews reached beyond Jewish cultural norms.

Of all the events that challenged the patriarchal, hierarchical structure of Jewish society and family, none had more lasting significance than the emigration of large numbers of Jews from Europe to the United States. Millions of Eastern European Jews left a familiar culture around the turn of the twentieth century to begin a new life. In the United States, traditional values were often turned upside down. Learned and respected men were often reduced to poverty and ignominy, while near-ignorant entrepreneurs sometimes rose quickly to wealth and community prestige. In America young Jews found an emphasis on individual freedom and pursuit of happiness. In many ways this was at odds with the Jewish emphasis on the greater good of the family and of society.

Of all the individual freedoms Jews found in America, none seemed more accessible or more symbolic than the right to choose one's mate. Nevertheless, for many

Flora: *You'll make a gem of a college boy, Sbaya.*

Flora: *I feel like someone is playing a trick on me.*

American Jews romantic attraction has in fact represented more than simple “chemistry.” Often, young American Jewish women and men have looked to romantic partners to help them achieve their personal ambitions, just as their parents looked to their partners to help them achieve familial and societal goals.

For many young Jews who aspired to Americanization, romance and marriage became a way to acquire a new and better identity. Films, novels, and stories that came out of the immigrant period often portrayed romance as a vehicle toward Americanization. Abraham Cahan, the founder of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, socialist, activist, and writer, was especially interested in the way immigrants and their children used romance for social advancement. He illustrated the way parents tried to ensure the continuity of the Jewish tradition by controlling the marital choices of their children. Conversely their children tried to take advantage of America’s liberal society by using marital choices to acquire a more Americanized lifestyle. Romantic choices furthered a number of hidden and covert agendas.

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ How does the film view marriage and family life?
- ◆ How does the film present the conflict between Jewish values and American values?
- ◆ Does the film have a happy ending?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How does *The Imported Bridegroom* present the conflict between Jewish values and American values?
- ◆ Flora seizes an opportunity with Shaya; she seeks to turn him into her perfect husband. Is it ever possible to remake a person according to one's dreams?
- ◆ What is today's equivalent of an "uptown doctor"? In what ways may we judge potential partners (or the potential partners of our children) by their social and financial status? Is this unfair or simply practical?
- ◆ Asriel wished to make amends for his neglect of Jewish tradition by marrying his daughter to a *yeshiva bocher*. Do parents today ever seek to fulfill their own wishes through their children's matches? Do children today ever make – or consider – a match to please their parents?
- ◆ Not only did Flora feel thwarted in her goals because Shaya was not an "uptown doctor," but he came literally out of another world, with his sidelocks and devotion to study. Are we more or less open-minded about people who look and act very differently? How are our responses – romantic and otherwise, say, on the part of parents and friends – affected by someone's appearance and habits?
- ◆ Later films in this course revolve around interfaith relationships. Do the differences between unobservant, secular Jews such as Asriel and Flora, on the one hand, and Jews from deeply religious, self-contained communities such as Shaya, on the other, seem less or greater than those between a modern American Protestant and an assimilated American Jew?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING

Books and stories

- ◆ Cahan, Abraham. *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970.
- ◆ Hindus, Milton. *The Old East Side: An Anthology*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969.
- ◆ Howe, Irving. *The World of Our Fathers: The Journey of East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.
- ◆ Hyman, Paula. "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States." In *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin.
- ◆ Peretz, I.L. "Marriage," "Morning in a Basement," "Conversation on a Hilltop." In *In This World and the Next*, trans. Moshe Speigel. Thomas Yoseloff, 1958.
- ◆ Weinberg, Sydney Stahl. *The World of Our Mothers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Films

Hester Street

His People

SESSION TWO



Very Precious Love": *Marjorie Morningstar*

Novel, 1955

Author: Herman Wouk

Feature film, 1958

Director: Irving Rapper

Screenplay: Everett Freeman

Marjorie: Natalie Wood

Noel Airman: Gene Kelly

Mr. Morgenstern: Everett Sloane

Mrs. Morgenstern: Claire Trevor

Marsha Zelenko: Carolyn Jones

Uncle Samson: Ed Wynn

Wally Wronken: Marty Milner

Length: 123 minutes

Many women who were teenagers and young adults at the time can remember exactly where they were in life when they first saw this movie.

The publication of Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* in 1955 and the release of the film in 1958 can be seen as a watershed in the public image of the American Jewish woman. While Wouk certainly should not be blamed for beginning a trend, after the appearance of the novel and movie the American literary and cinematic scene proliferated with books and films that ridiculed the ambitions of Jewish women. *Marjorie Morningstar* had an enormous impact on young female viewers.

Wouk fully develops the character of the upwardly mobile Jewish daughter. In the novel, a very beautiful and ambitious young woman falls in love not with the bourgeois young men her parents would have her marry but with a bohemian, thirtyish dramatist and musician, Noel Airman, born with the more pedestrian and identifiably Jewish name of Neil Ehrmann. Airman describes the "princess" stereotype to the young and inexperienced Marjorie early in the novel, calling this princess "Shirley" (and causing many young woman named Shirley to want to change their names).

For Noel, women are predators; men are the prey. He is afraid of respectability and imagines that marrying a Shirley will have a deadening effect on his life. He seems to think that young women who say they will become a somebody and then give up their careers for marriage and families are deliberately deceiving prospective suitors. The youthful appearances, lighthearted personalities, and ostensible career aspirations of unmarried Jewish women are all a sham, Airman insists, because they really are after what women have always wanted. Although they insist that they

Noel: *Shirley. It's a trade name for the respectable middle class girl who likes to play at being worldly.*

Marjorie: *And that's your label for me?*

Noel: *It's monogrammed all over you the way parents sew camp initials on children. Hands off. Decent girl. Object matrimony. . . . I know you. I know everything about you. I've gone out with hundreds of Shirleys. A different dress, a different body, but the same girl.*

despise domestic dullness, he believes that in the end they – the Shirleys – marry dentists, doctors, woolen manufacturers, and lawyers, and settle in for a lifetime of shopping and bourgeois social events. Marjorie correctly resents Airman's caricature of the Shirley, and spiritedly tells him he is a “damned intellectual snob . . . and a bit of an antisemite.”

The film omits many of the complexities that make the novel interesting. Wouk's Marjorie has something in her of Thackeray's Becky Sharp (*Vanity Fair*) and Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara (*Gone with the Wind*). She is a highly intelligent woman who uses her mind and her physical attributes as tools. In the novel Marjorie plans her outfits and her behavior meticulously in order to get men to react to her exactly as she'd like them to. Her long love affair with Noel Airman, and very brief one with Mike Eden, tear her apart, and for the first time make her confront the fact that deep emotions and other people cannot always be controlled. Out of her pain grows her ability to see life and people realistically. Nevertheless, even in despair the Marjorie of the novel always plans her wardrobe carefully – just one of Wouk's many insightful touches.

At the end of Wouk's long novel, Marjorie Morningstar walks down the aisle on her wedding day and looks into the face of the man she almost married, her beloved nemesis, Noel Airman. At that moment, Marjorie sees her wedding through Noel's eyes, as if she were looking through a ghastly green filter. She imagines that he sees her wedding as nothing more than “a blaze of silly Shirley glory.” In order to view her family and the man she really loves and wants to marry through her own affectionate eyes, she must brush away the green filter of Noel's hateful attitudes.

In the novel, Airman is a true Don Juan type, using and discarding women with no real feeling for them, and causing one woman to commit suicide. His disdain for the values with which Marjorie has been raised confuses her and misleads her for a very long time. His feelings toward the Jewish religion and Jewish community are openly hostile and resentful – very much tied in with his feelings of hostility and resentment toward his father, Judge Ehrman, whom he finds to be a most demanding judge indeed.

Noel: *Do you know what I've been asking myself for the last three days? Who am I?*

Marjorie: *You're the man I love.*

Noel: *I've searched my soul truthfully and honestly for the first time. I ask myself: Do you want to marry Marjorie . . . There's no other girl I've met who even comes close to you. But Marjorie, love of my life, we're through.*

Because the movie somewhat softens both Wouk's satiric portrait of the Jewish community and Noel Airman's disabling self-hatred, it presents a romantic vision of star-crossed love. In the film, Marjorie's one true love is Noel Airman. She falls in love with the theater and with him, and her love is sincere, unwavering, true, and devoted.

Marjorie is recast in the film as the ideal romantic heroine. She is never shown as a social-climbing adolescent; never shown manipulating her many boyfriends; never shown loving another man. Her purity of heart, as well as her dark-eyed beauty, is breathtaking, and no small part of the attraction which she holds for almost every man who meets her.

In the film Noel Airman is weak and unreliable, but he is not a total cad. He is terrified of being trapped in a bourgeois existence, but he is always respectful of Judaism and Jewish family traditions. His decline and fall in the novel are far more graphic and ugly than in the film.

Despite the fact that the film version of *Marjorie Morningstar* was cleansed of its characters' uglier attributes so that it would be more appealing to the general American viewing public, it is a valuable document of the ideals of American Jews in the 1950s. The character of Marjorie is presented as American Jews would have liked to have seen their daughters, and as daughters would like to see themselves: honest, sincere, and capable of true devotion. Wouk marries Marjorie to a solidly bourgeois Jewish professional and makes her into a good Jewish mother, loyal to the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. In the film, Marjorie does not entirely abandon the theater. A bus pulls away in the final scene carrying only Marjorie and the patient, brilliantly successful playwright Wally Wronken.

In Depth: What Women Have Always Wanted

The antisemitic, sexist nature of Noel Airman's caricature of "the Shirley" – the ambitious, spoiled, manipulative Jewish American Princess – is far from unique. In the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, many American Jewish writers and filmmakers satirically depicted young women whose parents were grooming them to fit into upper-middle-class American norms. The attitude of Jewish authors toward

Noel: *Your mother would be happy if I wore a gray flannel suit and made \$20,000 a year.*

Marjorie: *I love you just the way you are.*

Noel: *Marjorie, you are your mother.*

Jewish women was in many ways symptomatic of their attitude toward middle-class Jewish America. Some of the most widely viewed and read mid-twentieth-century American screenwriters and novelists, like Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Woody Allen, were second-generation American Jewish men whose lives had been permeated both with a consciousness of their Jewishness and with an acute awareness of the differences between Jewish and American mores and values. While some Jewish writers satirize Jewish men as well, depicting a variety of vulgar, aggressive, materialistic Jewish males, their discomfort with Jewish family life is more often channeled into a preoccupation with Jewish women.

In the hands of male Jewish screenwriters and novelists, Jewish women seemed to personify the foreignness of Jewish culture. They were different from American-born women. Apple-pie America might be represented by a blond, sweet woman with the childlike prettiness of Debbie Reynolds or Doris Day, a woman who always supported her man and seldom contradicted him. Conversely, America might be embodied in the glorious, uninhibited sexuality and putative stupidity of the ubiquitous “sex kitten” or “blond bombshell,” an Ann-Margret or Marilyn Monroe.

The world had changed dramatically for American Jews, and different female qualities seemed more necessary and admirable in this changed world than in the demanding, poverty-stricken Eastern European and immigrant societies of their parents. Most American Jewish women during and after the Second World War lived in pleasant neighborhoods, not in grimy tenements. They had 2.8 children, not eight or ten children. They washed their clothes in laundromats or in their own washing machines, instead of boiling vats of water on the stove. But they were as smart and as aggressive and as articulate as ever; like their immigrant grandmothers, they dramatized their lives and were on the lookout for ever-present dangers which might threaten them and their families.

But because the very real dangers of Jewish life in Europe had disappeared from the American Jewish environment, the Jewish mother’s level of anxiety seemed inappropriate. In lieu of outside employment and in the

absence of external challenges such as war or poverty, many American women became caught up in a cycle of consumerism that was easily satirized and mocked. In the hands of American Jewish novelists, both the consumerism and the satire were given a Jewish flavor. In the film version of *Marjorie Morningstar*, for example, Mr. and Mrs. Morgenstern argue on the morning of their son's Bar Mitzvah: He had wanted a small affair with just family members; she had insisted on a fancy catered affair. He complains about her spending; she retorts that many important people will be coming to their celebration.

Marjorie Morningstar struggles valiantly with a culture that sends her mixed messages about the nature of femininity, sexuality, and the purpose of life. Herman Wouk tries to have it both ways. In his novel, he uses Noel Airman to satirize the materialism of Jewish women – but, on the other hand, Wouk does not want Marjorie to abandon Judaic values or lifestyles. The author has Airman call Marjorie “a good little Jewish beauty,” and that is what Wouk believes she is as well.

Wouk indicated that Marjorie has done the correct thing, that she has followed her inescapable and life-affirming destiny, when she ultimately discards inappropriate dreams of glory and chooses the traditional religion and values she has grown up with, a stable man she has grown to love, “and children, and a warm, happy home.” While contemporary readers may well find troubling Marjorie's abrupt abandonment of her career dreams, as well as her obsession with virginity, there is no doubt that Marjorie's feelings accurately reflect normative attitudes among American Jews in the 1950s.

Marjorie: *That's really what I am. Just another girl.*

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ How do Marjorie Morningstar's values differ from those of her parents? From Noel's?

- ◆ How do Marjorie and her friend Marsha Zelenko see romance and marriage differently?

- ◆ What sorts of mixed messages does Marjorie receive about her role in life?

- ◆ How do the different characters feel about making commitments?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Compared to some of the other couples you'll encounter in this series, Marjorie and Noel are very much alike – same religion, similar socioeconomic backgrounds, similar interests. Given all this, why does their relationship fail?
- ◆ Is there any truth to the “Shirley” stereotype, and is there a male equivalent of a “Shirley”?
- ◆ What attracts Marjorie to Noel? What does she learn?
- ◆ Marjorie’s mother has wishes for her, and gives her advice, that may seem quaintly old-fashioned today. What kinds of challenges do parents see in their children’s lives today, and what advice might they want to give them at important turning-points? Can such advice be helpful?
- ◆ How would a film made about a Jewish woman and her options today differ?
- ◆ Marjorie fell deeply in love with Noel, but married another. How may we seek different qualities in a boyfriend/girlfriend, lover, and mate?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING

Books and stories

- ◆ Piercy, Marge. *Small Changes*. Garden City, New York.: Doubleday, 1973.
- ◆ Wouk, Herman. *Marjorie Morningstar*. New York: Little, Brown, 1992.

Film

Sheila Levine Is Dead and Living in New York

SESSION THREE



Farewell to Innocence: *Goodbye, Columbus*

Novella, 1959

Author: Philip Roth

Feature film, 1969

Director: Larry Peerce

Screenplay:

Brenda Patimkin: Ali MacGraw

Neil Klugman: Richard Benjamin

Mr. Patimkin: Jack Klugman

Mrs. Patimkin: Nan Martin

Ron Patimkin: Michael Meyers

Julie Patimkin: Lori Shelle

Aunt Gladys: Sylvie Straus

Length: 105 minutes

This film marks Ali MacGraw's film debut, before she would cause millions to weep in *Love Story*.

The 1959 publication of his novella and collection of short stories *Goodbye, Columbus* marked Philip Roth's literary debut. His subsequent writings have garnered him awards – as well as disdain from some Jews who found his satire too irreverent. That Roth was awarded the 1993 Jewish Cultural Achievement Award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture is a significant statement about the community's present attitude toward the writer. At the awards ceremony, writer Norman Manea described Roth as “the most misunderstood magician of Jewish American letters,” one “who never succeeded in disguising his obsession: love.”

Roth is the great poet of American assimilatory hunger, especially as it expresses itself in erotic attraction. During the time period in which his early stories and novels were published, American Jews were moving up the socioeconomic ladder in large numbers. Those who could afford to were leaving the inner-city apartments that had been their homes for decades and moving to the suburbs – and assumed that in doing so they were giving their children the best of everything. However, intellectuals, writers, and later many children of the bourgeoisie themselves rejected much of the values and lifestyles that the Jewish middle classes had so eagerly adopted.

In the film based on Roth's novella, perhaps even more explicitly than in his fiction, the Jewish upper-middle-class family is pilloried as the embodiment of crass materialism, philistinism, and manipulative behavior.

Roth's protagonist is poor, intelligent, literary Neil Klugman, a young man living unhappily with his overbearing lower-middle-class aunt and uncle. He

Neil: *How can I make you understand? You want to know what my plans are for the future, and I have none. I'm not a planner. I'm a liver.*

Brenda: *I'm a pancreas.*

is at first attracted to the sexy and scintillating Brenda Patimkin and to the luxuries of the glorious Patimkin estate in Short Hills, New Jersey (in the movie changed to Westchester County, N.Y.). For Neil, this green and spacious environment seems to embody some of the same qualities as Gauguin's sensual Tahitian canvases. However, he ultimately discovers that both Brenda and the Patimkin estate, having flourished through the profits of the Patimkin Plumbing Company, are morally inseparable from the unwavering materialism of that enterprise.

In contrast to searching yet practical Marjorie Morningstar, Brenda Patimkin, heiress to the family fortune, loves power for its own sake, and fights – fairly or unfairly, as the need arises – to maintain the competitive upper hand over every significant person in her life. Neil, Roth's poor but intellectual protagonist from urban Jewish Newark, reflects that Brenda, who has had her nose "fixed" so that it will look less Jewish, tries to "fix" her relationships with people as well.

In general, the film's portrayal of the men has humor and balance, whereas the portrayal of the women is cruelly satiric. Mr. Patimkin is unabashedly vulgar: He spatters food on his chin and clothing and talks with his mouth full. He is no paragon of honesty in his business dealings. But he is genuinely a warm, involved, and caring father to each of his children, and he works very hard to give them what he perceives as an idyllic life. In contrast, Mrs. Patimkin is a cold, angry, and suspicious woman who is never satisfied. Brenda's brother Ron is a good-natured jock, a goofy but sweet young man who has much of his father's vulgarity though none of his quickness or charm. The family's other female, sister Julie, is a real "brat" – a nasty little girl who already knows how to get her own way.

The difference between the way the film treats men and women reaches its apex in the differing presentations of Neil and Brenda. Neil, who has put up with a lot from the women in his life, is a model of restraint, gently ribbing his overbearing Aunt Gladys, affectionately teasing Brenda. But Brenda is always aware of her own superiority and fights to maintain that superiority when she feels it slipping. She treats her female friends and acquaintances with stunning arrogance, delighting in

reducing them to speechless shock. Brenda treats her father with warm familiarity but her mother with coldness and irritation. Indeed, Brenda does not seem to have any warm relationships with other women inside or outside her family, whereas she clearly loves her father and her brother, and is powerfully attracted to Neil.

The film offers knowing presentations of the complicated mixture of attraction and repulsion which flourishes in many so-called love relationships, in both familial and erotic settings. Brenda likes Neil's zinging wit, and she likes his body. She also likes shocking and tormenting her mother by repeatedly bringing this sexy but poor outsider into the house. But Brenda also shares some of her parents' disapproval of Neil's lack of financial ambition. Never giving up the upper hand in her relationship with him, she lies to Neil without compunction and uses her sexuality to gain control over him. Neil's feelings about Brenda are similarly double-sided. He is highly attracted to Brenda's beauty, charm, and intelligence, and he enjoys her spontaneity and her willingness – albeit only up to a point – to defy her parents' values. But he comes to see that she is very much their daughter.

At her brother's wedding, Brenda is totally at home with friends and relatives, dancing, talking, embracing the people who truly inhabit her world. The knowledge that these people – and not Neil – are her own past and future overwhelms her and makes her physically ill. Mr. Patimkin gives her and Neil his blessing, but the wedding confirms in her mind the utter unsuitability of Neil to the world she refuses to abandon.

The film's conclusion, unlike the novella's, lays the couple's breakup almost totally at Brenda's door (although neither of them seems blameless). In the film, Neil pleads for a "commitment" that they will continue the relationship after the summer ends. The film makes explicit Brenda's manipulateness in leaving a clue for her parents to learn of her sexual involvement with Neil. As the film ends, Brenda's face is as pouting as a spoiled child's, as she cries that she cannot possibly bring Neil home again, ever.

In Depth: A Little "Gonif" (thief) in You

Philip Roth has been the most widely read chronicler

Brenda *(about her ex-fiance):*
My mother and father adored him.

Neil: *Well, that's reason enough for you to break up with him.*

Brenda: *Yes, it was.*

of the American Jewish psyche. In his short stories and novels, American Jews have seen, in unobstructed view, their idiosyncrasies and foibles. As each of Roth's books were published, few American Jews were able to resist laughter as they read – but many exploded in anger when they finished. Roth himself has written frequently about how hurt and outraged he felt at the outpouring of hostility against him, as pulpit rabbis and some literary critics accused him of being a “self-hating Jew” because of his depictions of his coreligionists.

Perhaps the two elements of Roth's work that made American Jews the most uncomfortable and angry were his emphasis on Jewish materialism and his keen articulation of the desire for assimilation among many American Jews.

Much of Roth's satire in this film is focused on a relentless portrayal of Jewish materialism and vulgarity. Well before Roth began his writing career, two very different strands had developed in the secularized American Jewish community. American Jews proved themselves extraordinarily talented in capitalist ventures; however, they were also one of the most active ethnic groups to organize the American labor movement, and later devoted much time, energy, and money to the civil rights movement. The divergent values systems of liberalism/socialism and capitalism further complicated the romantic choices of American Jews. In this film, the Patimkins are the epitome of successful capitalists, while Neil Klugman, a liberal intellectual, sees their values as empty.

In the 1960s, the conflict between Jewish capitalists and Jews of liberal/socialist bent presented itself not so much as a conflict between socioeconomic groups but as a conflict between generations. Parents who were second-generation American Jews, who grew up in poverty and were humiliated by their own parents' accents and foreign ways, set themselves the task of succeeding in America. Working long hours, pouring any profits they made back into their business, many of them created financial empires, large and small. They sent their children to the most prestigious school they could get into; they groomed their sons to be professionals, their daughters to be professionals' wives.

Demographers have often commented on the extraordinary extent to which Jewish children of business

Neil: *Are you so spoiled that you can't imagine the possibility of something terrible happening to you?*

persons and even manual laborers received high levels of education and entered professional careers. Such parents were often shocked, in the 1960s and 1970s, when their children turned around and rejected the very material success the parents struggled to attain. The same wealthy businessmen who had often looked at their own immigrant parents disdainfully were hurt to see the disdainful eyes of their children.

This intergenerational pattern of conflict provides the backdrop for much of the action in *Goodbye, Columbus*. Most strikingly, when Neil is sent on an errand by Mrs. Patimkin to the ugly inner-city factory and warehouses of Patimkin Plumbing, he comes face to face with the source of all the luxury enjoyed by the Patimkin family. Mr. Patimkin, surrounded by paperwork, bullying business associates over the phone, is the prototype of the hard-working Jewish business tycoon. When Neil answers him with scornful humor, Patimkin, no fool, takes Neil head-on. He reveals that when he was Neil's age, he was just as contemptuous of his own parents. All young people, he indicates, think they are "something special." Life teaches them differently.

Mr. Patimkin chomps down on his cigar and tells Neil that "You've got to have a little *gonif* in you" – that is, you can't succeed in life if you are too honest or naive. Neil tells him honestly that he doesn't feel Mr. Patimkin is, in Patimkin's words, "a *schmuck*." Neil is scathingly scornful of Mr. Patimkin's primitive use of the English language, but he knows he has worked hard. In Neil's eyes, Jewish men lead benighted lives, scrambling after the dollar with eyes always fixed to the ground – and he is determined to avoid this dreary fate.

Intergenerational conflict is not limited to wealthy families, of course. By juxtaposing Aunt Gladys's home in the Bronx with the Patimkin's mansion in Westchester, and by giving the two households some very similar qualities despite their socioeconomic differences, Roth creates the impression that you can take the Jew out of the Bronx but you can't take the Bronx out of the Jew. Roth's Jews are obsessed with certain things, including maintaining total control over their children, food, and material acquisition, no matter where and how they live.

Brenda: *Has my father asked you yet about going into the business? He asks every guy I go out with.*

Brenda's parents send her mixed messages about what life requires of her, accenting the requirement to please herself and be a loyal daughter. Sporadically, however, her mother – perhaps remembering her own, more deprived adolescence – castigates Brenda for her parasitic behavior. In a memorable fight with her mother, Brenda angrily rejects the notion that she ought to contribute in any way to the household community. Indeed, Brenda does not seem to feel she ought to be responsible for anything; Neil is shocked to discover that she has been sleeping with him for weeks without using any form of birth control. But Neil, by not inquiring or offering to take precautions himself, takes no responsibility either.

All of the parent figures in *Goodbye, Columbus* feel it is their right to maintain control over even adult “children.” Aunt Gladys pushes food at Neil, monitors his telephone conversations, and shrieks, “Where’s he going, where’s he going?” as he drives away for an evening out with Brenda. Quite similarly, Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin make constant comments about who is eating what at the table (Neil “eats like a bird”) and worry over whether Brenda will marry a boy with as few financial prospects as Neil. Aunt Gladys opens Neil’s suitcase to pack a peach on top of his clean shirts; Mrs. Patimkin goes through Brenda’s drawers.

The controlling nature of Jewish parents, and the role that money plays in that control, is vivid at Ron and Harriet’s “Jewish” wedding. The scene is replete with Jewish “types.” Old women in wildly unflattering décolletage bend over and shove chopped liver into their mouths, and overweight men use the occasion to drink too much. Meanwhile, Mr. Patimkin cries, “This will be the classiest affair of the year.” Class is the one thing lacking at the extravagant but garish affair, but the implication is that crass businessmen wouldn’t know class if they saw it. They never discover their own inadequacies because they continue to believe that money can buy anything, including class. Mr. Patimkin has already arranged for control over Ron and Harriet; he has given his son a Mickey Mouse job in the family business, and he has told Ron and Harriet to “pick out a house in the neighborhood,” which presumably he would buy for them.

Trying to exert the same control over Brenda, Mr.

Patimkin tells her she can get married whenever she wants to (“there’s always room for another man in the business”), and that he is very proud of having children he can trust. He also invites her to treat herself to a nice leather coat with a fox fur collar as soon as she gets back to college, because she is so good. While the festivities progress, with traditional Jewish wedding songs and disco music blaring, Neil is harassed by Mr. Patimkin’s failed brother, who warns him to marry Brenda and grab as much financial success as he can, and not to mess up “a good deal.”

As the decades passed, although American Jews became acculturated in many ways, the gap between generations remains. The rejection of parental values and the choice of a non-Jewish or otherwise exotic mate – two situations that can be intertwined – are still powerful points of contention between parents and children.

For Neil, the choice of Brenda as a marital partner seems to mean the choice of taking on the Patimkins’ values as well as their lifestyle. Although he doesn’t yet know how he will fulfill his own values – intellectualism, liberalism, anti-establishmentism, creativity, yearning after real beauty – they seem to be represented by books and by the little African American boy whom Neil befriends in the library. The Patimkins seem to represent a yearning after affluence, possessions, and power.

Both Brenda and Neil understand the chasm dividing them. Their differences intensify the eroticism of their sexual relationship. By the end of the summer, however, both of them understand that their relationship has no future. And yet, true to human nature, neither Brenda nor Neil has the courage to admit that sexual adventure, while delightful, is not always synonymous with a firm basis for long-term commitments.

Brenda: *How can I not go home?
I have to go home.*

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ What do you think first brings Brenda and Neil together?
- ◆ Are the main characters appealing – as individuals, as lovers, as Jews?
- ◆ What images and stereotypes are conveyed by the film?
- ◆ Do the values of the film seem dated?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What are the secret agendas of the two main characters in their romantic adventures? How can we, as viewers, foresee a future of their relationship that perhaps they cannot?
- ◆ What may motivate a young woman to seek a spouse identical to – or opposite from – her father?
- ◆ In contemporary times, is “socioeconomic compatibility” – i.e. similarities in family background and status – valued by potential partners and/or their parents? Is it more or less important than being of the same religion or race?
- ◆ The brilliantly detailed picture of excessive materialism in the form of the Patimkin family is one of the artistic achievements of *Goodbye, Columbus* – and the cause for much criticism of it. Recognizing that the film is fiction, not documentary, is this a familiar or a skewed portrait? What – if anything – is Jewish about it?
- ◆ Do negative images in the media influence or only reflect our own views of Jewish men and women?
- ◆ What do you think of the accusation that Philip Roth is a self-hating Jew?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING

Books and stories

- ◆ Burstein, Janet Handler. "Lost Children in Contemporary American Jewish Literature." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1990).
- ◆ Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950.
- ◆ Gross, Barry. "Sophie Portnoy and 'The Opossum's Death': American Sexism and Jewish Anti-Gentilism." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. Vol. 3 (1983).
- ◆ Lewis, Cherie. "Philip Roth on the Screen." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. Vol. 8, No. 2 (1989).
- ◆ Roth, Philip. *Goodbye, Columbus*. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.
- ◆ Roth, Philip. *Portnoy's Complaint*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1967.
- ◆ Wylie, Philip. *Generation of Vipers*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955.

Films

Private Benjamin

The Graduate

SESSION FOUR



Facing Facts: *Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition*

Documentary film, 1987
 Producer: Lydia Kukoff
 Director: Ilana Bar-Din

Length: 33 minutes

The next three films in this course deal with interfaith relationships, an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in modern life in America.

This session is different from the others in that it features a short documentary film. The “players” are real people, young couples who are intermarried or contemplating intermarriage, speaking candidly about their experiences and their hopes. The aim of this session is to delve more deeply into some of the significant issues relating to interfaith relationships and, in doing so, to allow course participants an opportunity to reexamine their own attitudes. The discussion will provide a framework for interpreting subsequent films in the series.

To clarify the terminology: An intermarriage is a marriage between one person who was born Jewish and one person who was not born Jewish. When the spouse who was not born Jewish does not convert to Judaism, the couple (and their children) are called a “mixed married” family. When the spouse who was born non-Jewish converts to Judaism and considers him/herself to be Jewish, the couple (and their children) are “conversionary” families. Households in which both spouses are born Jewish are called “inmarried” families. Sociologists and observers of the Jewish community distinguish between “conversionary” and “inmarried” families in order to analyze the ways in which Jews by choice (converts) find it easy or difficult to fully participate in Jewish life. They do not, however, regard converts as any less “Jewish” than born Jews.

Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition was produced in association with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the religious and educational arm of the Reform movement. The five couples in the film are participants in a program designed to provide a Jewish

orientation for interfaith couples not closely affiliated with the Jewish community. Their real-life stories – and their struggles – are profound, presenting a window for understanding something about the large percentage of American Jews who marry non-Jews.

The focused-discussion group, led by a rabbi, meets for eight sessions. The film shows group members during these sessions as well as at home with their families; several parents also speak before the camera. Each couple's story has its own complexities and differences, related to the spouses' connections to their own religion, Jewish or Christian, relationships with the two sets of parents, and their outlook on how much their religious differences impact on their marriage. Because these five couples elected to attend this program, they are already demonstrating concern with issues of religion at this stage in their marriage. Although a viewer can gain much insight by listening to their dialogue, it is important not to generalize from them to all intermarried people.

Among the issues the couples discuss are raising children – whether it is best (for the parents, for the children) to choose one religion or if it is preferable or possible to bring the child up with both; celebrating holidays and family milestones; finding community; and, for the Jewish spouses, dealing with what one participant describes as the ultimate dividing issue: Jesus Christ.

Ironically, in mixed marriages, partners must confront, grapple with, and articulate their personal beliefs about religion and theology – issues that they might have cared little about when they chose to marry – to a much larger degree than spouses in inmarriages. As the rabbi in the film explains, “Two Jews marry – it’s an automatic. Whether or not they’re going to have Shabbat – we’ll come to it, maybe not, depending on their own inclination. But it’s not an automatic with you guys. Everything you do is going to be put under a microscope.”

The Jewish partners must come to terms with what being Jewish really means to them. Is Judaism a mutually agreed-upon set of religious beliefs, a civilization, a culture, or an exclusive club? What does it mean to belong to the Jewish people? Is one Jewish through prayer or action or knowledge or simply birth? One's answers to such

Eve-Lynn: *I want everything to be wonderful. The hardest thing for me to deal with is that any decision we make, somebody's not going to be happy.*

Eve-Lynn's mother: *We bring into the world something the world needs and that's worthwhile. And we're such a pitiful minority, that if Jews don't see that and make that selection there will not be any more Jews.*

Ira's mother: *We accept it. We have to be flexible. We don't want to lose our children.*

questions are relevant to considerations of how to pass on a sense of Judaism to one's children. Of course these are questions that many inmarried Jewish parents might ask, but for Jews married to non-Jews, the discussion is more complex and perhaps more consequential. And it is up to the Jewish partner to create a Jewish environment – if they choose to.

A poignant scene in the film features Eve-Lynn, a well-spoken young woman, seen trying on wedding dresses, with her mother at her side. She is about to marry a non-Jewish man, yet she doesn't want to give up her dream of a Jewish wedding – *huppah*, breaking a glass, parents lifted on chairs, etc. Although she seeks her mother's approval of the dress, her mother says she can't give it, for that would be approving the marriage. There is much pain in the conversation between two people who clearly love each other and share a set of values. When Eve-Lynn and her fiance speak of their differences in the group, another kind of deep love and intense pain are evident.

These young people discuss their conflicts and concerns with an admirable honesty. But the viewer is left wondering whether ultimately their marriages will work.

The interfaith relationships portrayed in the next three films do not deal with intermarriage head-on, as this documentary does. Although Woody Allen does speak of his relationship to God in *Annie Hall* (and several other films), most of the other characters do not speak of spiritual issues or concerns about how to raise their children. Rather, the differences are evident on a more cultural level.

In Depth: A Changing Community

If you read newspaper marriage announcements, no doubt you're aware of the large number of Jews marrying non-Jews. Moreover, it's likely that every course participant's life somehow has been touched by intermarriage.

The actual numbers are impossible to compute, as marriages in the United States are not officially registered by religion. However, recent surveys and population studies estimate the number of Jews who marry outside of their religion as 40 to 50 percent of all Jews who marry. This statistic has far-reaching implications for the future of American Jewry.

Who are the people behind the statistics? Which Jews are choosing to marry non-Jews? There are no simple answers. Some grew up in assimilated homes with little if any connection to Jewish life; they might hardly feel Jewish. Others see themselves as very Jewish. As seen in the film, there are people with strong Jewish backgrounds who choose to marry non-Jews, who view their marital choice *not* as a rejection of Judaism, but rather a decision based on love. There are still parents who might say *kaddish*, the traditional mourning prayer, for a son or daughter who marries out of the religion; others accept, with or without reservations and regrets.

How did we get here? Marriage and family itself have changed dramatically in the last twenty years. Single families, step-families, and very high divorce rates (some statistics say 50 percent of all couples who marry today will divorce), and endless combinations of culture and race have created more and different possibilities for ways of living in America today. Jews too are part of this changing definition. Some reasons for the high rate of intermarriage have to do with the greater exposure Jews have to people of other religions socially, professionally, and, particularly for young people, in educational settings. (A generation or two ago, immigrants and their children moved almost exclusively in circles with others like themselves).

The patterns of marriage and intermarriage have been changing over the decades since World War II. At midcentury, American Jewish men appeared to be much more likely to marry out of the religion than American Jewish women. During the past two decades, however, while the intermarriage rate has risen substantially (from 5 percent in the 1960s), the mixed marriage gender gap has been shrinking. Nationally, American Jewish women are about as likely as men to marry out; about one-third of men and women who were born Jewish are currently mixed married.

Levels of intermarriage today among younger Jews and among Jews who have married in the 1980s are strikingly high, and the great majority of these recent intermarriages are mixed marriages (the spouse was not born Jewish and did not convert). Significant differences reportedly exist between the Jewish behaviors of mixed married

families, on the one hand, and inmarried and conversionary families, on the other. According to recent surveys, mixed married families are less likely than either conversionary or inmarried families to join and attend synagogues, to become affiliated with Jewish organizations, to donate money to Jewish philanthropies, to visit Israel, and to perform Jewish rituals in their homes. Moreover, they are less likely to provide their children with Jewish education.

Interestingly, as Rabbi Joseph Telushkin points out in *Jewish Literacy*, a high rate of intermarriage is not unique to the American Jewish community. In Germany and France a century ago, a similar percentage of Jews married non-Jews. In those countries, according to Telushkin, intermarriage was “almost always deadly for the Jewish community,” as the Jewish partner either converted to Christianity or agreed to bring up their children as Christians. In the United States, only a small number of Jews convert out of Judaism when they marry non-Jews.

Intermarriage and Jewish Identity

Although times and concerns clearly have changed since the era depicted in the first film of this course, *The Imported Bridegroom*, contemporary Jews continue to grapple with – and must make their own peace with – some of the same conflicting impulses: the contradictions between tradition and change, between the Jewish and secular worlds. Both as a community and as individuals, American Jews continue to maintain a delicate balance between integration into American society and the preservation of a separate and distinct Jewish identity. For intermarried Jews, the balancing act can be even more difficult. The real challenge, for all American Jews, is to understand what we want to hold onto and why.

Jewish continuity is a great concern to the contemporary community. Who are the next generations of Jewish leaders? Will our grandchildren be Jewish? Are the links in the long chain forever broken? Will the community cease to be distinctively Jewish in a few generations? If the numbers are shrinking, who will support the vast network of Jewish social service and social justice institutions?

Concerns about communal vitality are far more complicated than simple issues of greater or lesser numbers

of people who call themselves Jews. Sociologist Samuel Heilman of Queens College suggests that “the challenge of the years ahead will be to give meaning to the content and character of being Jewish.” Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres urges American Jews to “keep your children Jewish.”

Much of the debate is focused on children of intermarriage. There is no doubt that the future of the American Jewish community will be profoundly affected by whether or not the children of intermarried couples are raised as Jews. Being “raised as a Jew” is of course a vague notion, and what it means is a question worth consideration. The provision of Jewish education may be an important measure of whether or not children are in fact learning about Jewish tradition and peoplehood. Many Jewish leaders feel that the vitality of American Jewish life in the future is directly shaped by Jewish commitments being instilled in today’s Jewish youth.

Some relevant statistics: The majority of mixed married couples say they are raising their children to be Jews, but fewer than half of these children receive any formal Jewish education. In contrast, more than 90 percent of children of inmarried Jews (in the pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah years, ages 10-13) reported sending their children to religious schools, as did nearly as many conversionary families. Mixed married couples are twice as likely as either inmarried or conversionary couples to say they never attend synagogue services (one-third of mixed married versus around 5 percent of conversionary and inmarried couples). Two-thirds of mixed married couples have Christmas trees in their homes; about same proportion light Chanukah candles. (This data is based on a 1990 study done by the author and Mordecai Rimor, Gary A. Tobin, and Peter Medding, *Intermarriage and American Jews Today*.)

Dilemmas and Challenges

American Jews have strong feelings about intermarriage. Although there is widespread concern about the issue, the approaches to it are not uniform. While some see intermarriage as a threat to the community’s strength, others see a potential for growth.

Some therapists, social workers, and academics who are involved in the issue see the challenge as making

Judaism more vital to the lives of Jews so that they will be committed to continuity. In a society where religion is a choice, connection to the Jewish community is no longer automatic. Many inmarried Jews are also uninvolved in Jewish life. Psychotherapist Esther Perel, who leads groups for intermarried couples, says: “Children growing up in the Jewish community know that they should not intermarry – they’ve been taught that very well – but too often don’t know why they should remain Jews.”

Many believe that raising children with a strong Jewish identity will help ensure they’ll marry other Jews. Day schools, Jewish camps, trips to Israel are seen as encouraging a lifelong commitment to Judaism. Recent research indicates that the more extensive the Jewish educational experience of children, the more likely they will be as adults to perform Jewish rituals, be involved in Jewish communal life, and marry other Jews (study by the author and Alice Golstein published by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University). But there are, of course, no guarantees.

Some see healthy benefits of intermarriage: a gain of potential Jews, an infusion of talent and energy to strengthen the Jewish community. For some Jews who intermarry, their marriage can prompt a new Jewish awareness, for they are confronting Jewish issues in mature ways for the first time, and deepening their commitment. And perhaps that person will pass on a more thoughtful and authentic sense of Judaism than an inmarried couple who “happen to be Jews” and whose Jewish education and connection to things Jewish is minimal.

Dr. Egon Mayer, a sociologist who is director of the Jewish Outreach Institute (affiliated with the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate School of the City University of New York), believes that it is essential to Jewish survival that the Jewish community reach out to intermarrieds and welcome them. Among the findings of a 1993 survey conducted by Mayer under the auspices of the institute is that most American Jews would prefer that their children marry Jews and raise Jewish grandchildren. But if they had a choice between non-Jewish grandchildren – from a non-Jewish daughter- or son-in-law – and no grandchildren at all, the majority of Jews questioned say they’d prefer to

have grandchildren.

Charles Silberman, in his book *A Certain People*, captures some of the powerful yet ambivalent feelings Jews express: “However much Jews may oppose intermarriage in principle, in short, they accept it in practice.”

Policy Responses

Today, congregations affiliated with every branch of Judaism include conversionary families, and many congregations include mixed married families. The various denominational movements have different approaches to both the theoretical issue of intermarriage and the practical concerns of dealing with intermarried couples and families.

The Reform movement is most pro-active in reaching out to intermarried couples. In 1978, a task force was established which, in 1983, became the Union of American Hebrew Congregations/Central Conference of American Rabbis Commission on Reform in Jewish Outreach. According to their literature, one of their aims is to “communicate that the Reform movement is concerned about the intermarried couple and that their family has a place in the Reform Jewish Community.” An introductory pamphlet titled “Inviting Someone You Love to Become a Jew” states that “Welcoming those considering conversion and new Jews by Choice into the Jewish community is one very important focus of Outreach.”

Many Reform temples offer introductory classes in Judaism for those contemplating conversion and also for interfaith couples considering raising their children as Jews. They also provide a range of programs for interfaith couples, the Jewish parents of intermarried couples, youth, and clergy and educators working with intermarried families.

Although the movement’s official policy is opposition to rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages (including co-officiation with non-Jewish clergy), a significant minority of Reform rabbis do officiate at such wedding ceremonies, in almost all cases with some criteria, for example, Jewish study, the intent to convert, or to raise children as Jews. (The movement has no sanctions against rabbis who choose to officiate at intermarriages.) In 1983 the Reform movement broke with tradition, recognizing as Jews the

Mark: *We almost said this is it. We're going to be over because we can't make this work. And like she said, we did a lot of crying and decided . . . We didn't decide anything. We knew that we didn't want to be apart. So we are going to find ways to make this work.*

children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, as long as they are raised Jews. (According to traditional Jewish law, only the child of a Jewish mother is considered a Jew; children born to gentile mothers and Jewish fathers must be converted in order to be regarded as Jews.)

The Reconstructionist movement endorsed a policy of recognizing patrilineal descent even earlier, in 1968. The movement does outreach work to intermarried couples, and welcomes and encourages intermarried families to join their congregations. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's guiding policies and point of view are spelled out in the "RRA Guidelines on Inter-marriage," a document approved at a 1983 convention. To help curb intermarriage rates, they call for the "revitalization of Jewish life as the essential prerequisite for imparting a sense of Jewish identification." They state that "from the perspective of the Jewish people the most promising outcome of a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew results when the non-Jew is converted to Judaism." Recognizing that intermarriage is a reality in light of the "high degree of integration of Jews into North American life," they believe that "the rabbinic community cannot afford to turn away the significant number of mixed couples" who seek rabbinic support.

The movement's policy is that rabbis should reserve the traditional rites of the Jewish wedding ceremony (*kiddushin*) for marriage between Jews, but that it is permissible for a rabbi to be present at a civil marriage ceremony of a mixed couple. Such decisions are left to individual rabbis, and an estimated 25 percent of Reconstructionist rabbis will participate in intermarriages when the couple expresses some determination to be connected to the Jewish community and to establish a Jewish home.

The Conservative movement's policy is to "make the prevention of intermarriage a greater priority than *keruv*" (outreach to those who are intermarried), as stated in a paper, "The Mitzvah of Endogamy," by Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. In the paper, he outlines five efforts necessary to prevent intermarriage: (1) strengthen Jewish identity and education; (2) encourage leaders to speak out for the *mitzvah* of endogamy and to provide

Jane: *I didn't realize how strongly I felt about being Jewish until the day my son was presented to me. . . . That child was going to have a bris.*

encouragement for those rabbinic and lay leaders who do speak out; (3) empower Jewish parents to speak the language of inmarriage to their children; (4) impact as many children as possible through intensive Jewish socialization, informal Jewish educational experiences, summer programs, and family education experiences; (5) develop appropriate curriculum materials to teach and explain why the Jewish community opposes intermarriage and favors inmarriage.

The goal of the Conservative movement's Commission on the Prevention of Intermarriage, established in 1991, is to "develop programs to help strengthen Jewish identity, thereby ensuring Jewish survival." Many of their programs emphasize "in reach," or "converting Jews to Judaism." A handbook titled "Enriching Jewish Life: Building Blocks for Marrying Within the Faith" highlights congregational programs that foster Jewish awareness and encourage Jews to marry other Jews.

Conservative rabbis will not officiate at intermarriages, and such marriages may not be held in Conservative synagogues. There is much discussion and debate about the question of synagogue outreach to intermarried couples and issues of synagogue membership and participation.

The Jewish Theological Seminary, in cooperation with the Rabbinical Assembly and other organizations of the Conservative movement, awards "Gateways" grants to synagogues to help fund effective efforts to reach out to intermarried couples. The purpose of the program is to "encourage greater efforts by the Conservative movement in opening 'gateways' to Jewish life for the intermarried who would be receptive to an outstretched hand from Conservative synagogues or other movement institutions."

Unlike the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, the Conservative movement does not recognize patrilineal descent. Thus, the offspring of a non-Jewish father and Jewish mother has a different status from the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother (unless the child converts).

The Orthodox movement is also most interested in preventing intermarriage, and sees education as the most effective method. According to traditional Jewish law, conversions for the sole purpose of marriage are

Ira: *When people say you're going to have a problem raising your kids, what they mean is you're going to have a problem dealing with Jesus.*

not condoned. They do not do outreach to intermarried couples, unless the non-Jewish spouse expresses a desire to convert and make a commitment to becoming an observant Jew. Orthodox rabbis will not officiate at intermarriages, and have urged their congregations not to attend any weddings that involve an intermarriage.

Those formulating policies on intermarriage face the dilemma of seeming to shut out those already intermarried if they seek to discourage the practice and, by the same token, to worry about seeming to encourage it by accepting the intermarried. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee is one who feels the community must make a choice. He calls for strengthening the Jewish community itself so that people wish to remain a part of it, while increasing the likelihood of inmarriage by creating ways for Jewish singles to meet. Such actions can go hand in hand with outreach to intermarrieds, but, he writes, in a volume of essays published by the Jewish Outreach Institute, “if we truly believe that the Jewish family is an historical community rather than simply personal self-fulfillment, it is there that our moral imperative lies.” It is a notion clearly at odds with “pure chemistry,” though not, perhaps, with the reality of the complex mix of dreams, values, and attraction that have always accompanied romantic choices.

A final note about the documentary film: Eve-Lynn, the young woman seen shopping for a wedding gown, whose fiance notices on camera that she has started wearing a Star of David necklace again, broke up with him three weeks after the sessions ended.

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ What is the benefit to the participants of being involved in a group like the one pictured?
- ◆ When the couples discuss plans for their children’s religious upbringing, what other beneath-the-surface issues are being expressed?
- ◆ Do you think there are differences between couples with a Jewish-husband/non-Jewish wife and those with a Jewish wife and non-Jewish husband?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Do you think Jewish traditions can be effectively passed on in a mixed marriage?

- ◆ What efforts, if any, do you think the organized Jewish community should be making regarding intermarriage? If the Jewish community were to embrace intermarried families in an organized way, would that send out a message that it was sanctioning intermarriage?

- ◆ What advice would you give to the young couples in the film to make their marriages work?

- ◆ What advice would you give to the parents? Must a parent decide between love for a child and Jewish survival?

- ◆ How would you explain the antipathy of some Jews toward intermarriage in a way that non-Jews might be able to understand?

- ◆ How may the place where an interfaith couple lives – i.e., small town, major city with large Jewish population, close to their families or not – influence how they resolve their conflicts?

- ◆ What is the effect of intermarriage on the extended family?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- ◆ Bershtel, Sara, and Alan Graubard. *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America*. New York: Free Press, 1992.
- ◆ Cowan, Paul and Rachel. *Mixed Blessings: Marriage Between Jews and Christians*. New York: Doubleday, 1987.
- ◆ Mayer, Egon. *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews & Christians*. Plenum, 1985.
- ◆ Mayer, Egon, ed. *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach*. New York: Jewish Outreach Institute and Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1991.
- ◆ Silberman, Charles. *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today*. New York: Summit, 1985.
- ◆ *Times and Seasons: A Jewish Perspective for Intermarried Couples: A Guide for Facilitators*. New York: UAHC, 1987, manual.

SESSION FIVE



When Opposites Attract: *The Way We Were*

Feature film, 1973

Director: Sydney Pollack

Screenplay: Arthur Laurents

Katie Morosky: Barbra Streisand

Hubbell Gardiner: Robert Redford

Length: 118 minutes

The unforgettable theme song about memories, sung by Barbra Streisand, won an Academy Award.

Streisand's Katie Morosky and Robert Redford's Hubbell Gardiner make a striking couple, and theirs is an unlikely romance. Differences can play a big role in sexual attraction; the greater the difference, sometimes, the more exotic and desirable a man or woman may seem, and the more dangerous and thrilling the pursuit.

In attempting to convey the emotional realities of such an attraction between opposites, some storytellers simplify the nuances and complications of human character. They purposely emphasize the differences between socioeconomic and religious groups, so that the viewer can clearly understand both the vigor of the attraction and the inevitability of its demise. This simplicity can create a powerful viewing experience, whatever its artistic flaws.

The Way We Were relies on such simplifying techniques. In a self-conscious attempt to document and recapture the historical idealism of large numbers of American Jews and also to rehabilitate the character of the American Jewish woman, this film divides the world neatly into passionate, generous, socialist Jews and cool, urbane, capitalistic gentiles. Katie and Hubbell represent the two very different worlds.

The film gathers together many themes and provides a very useful antidote to popular portraits of Jews as craven materialists. Moreover, it is one of the few films that attempts to portray the impulse toward interfaith marriage from a Jewish woman's point of view.

The Way We Were looks back in time at their romance. Katie and Hubbell attended the same college in 1937 but moved in very different circles: She worked to support her studies and spearheaded campus activism, while he earned

Hubbell: *You do it, you know.
You make yourself feel out of
place.*

Katie: *Your friends make me
feel like I'm invited for drinks
and everyone else is staying for
dinner.*

several varsity letters. They shared a writing class and in a few encounters seemed drawn to each other, but it is only years later, during World War II, that their romance begins. Katie is working at a New York radio station and Hubbell is in the military, and they meet again, by chance, in a New York City night club. For a while, at least, the two enjoy each other and their differences, and life seems idyllic.

Katie is a kinky-haired, exuberant, food-obsessed, hyperactive socialist with a great sense of humor. However, unlike many other stereotypes of Jewish women, Katie comes to love as an inexperienced and somewhat puritanical virgin with a sweet, generous, and open heart, wanting only to feed and nurture her beautiful gentile boy. Redford's Hubbell sees a kind of authentic and powerfully humanizing intensity in his very Jewish lover and then wife, but he never quite loses his ties to his buddies and their girls, who swim in a sea of alcohol, brittle elegance, superficial charm, and financial and social privilege.

In portraying Katie, Streisand draws on other stereotypes of the Jew, an interfering "fixer," unable to mind his or her own business, who is drawn to socialism and other utopian movements. She also draws on the stereotype of the Jew as a person who always tries too hard. The image of Hubbell, conversely, draws on the stereotype of the wealthy non-Jew who assumes that life owes him everything he has and will acquire. Moving only among similarly blessed aristocrats, such "golden boys" mature with an ethic that discourages them from throwing too much effort into anything.

In *The Way We Were*, Katie and Hubbell represent two divergent values systems, as well as two very different personalities. A nonromantic formulation of a similar opposition is found in the splendid film *Chariots of Fire*, which contrasts the intense, competitive, driven son of a Jewish tradesman; an elegant, laid-back son of British nobility; and the clean-living son of a Scottish clergyman. At one point, the headmasters of their boarding school scornfully deride the Jewish boy for trying too hard. They note that such sustained effort is unseemly and distinguishes the "son of a tradesman" from a true "gentleman."

Eventually the differences between Katie and Hubbell override their affection for each other. Katie cannot stop trying to perfect the world. The Jewish concept of *tikkun*

Hubbell: *Katie, the day you die you'll still be a nice Jewish girl.*

Katie: *Are you still a nice gentile boy?*

olam, bettering the universe which God left only half completed, is interwoven into the very fiber of Katie's being. One of the things she can't stop trying to perfect is Hubbell, and Hubbell cannot bear Katie's incessant attempts to remake him and the world. Eventually, they break up and find partners more like themselves.

In Depth:

A Paper Doll that I Can Call My Own

The prevalence of the motif of materialism in films and fiction about Jews has been and continues to be striking. A visitor from another planet might imagine that Jews are defined by wealth and consumerism. Ironically, the experiences of many American Jews are quite different. Rather than being preoccupied with acquiring wealth, numerous American Jews have devoted their lives to creating a more egalitarian society; rather than being preoccupied with consumerism, a disproportionate number of American Jews donate their energies to fighting for the rights of others. The commandment "Be kind to strangers because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" retains its strength in American Jewish psychology, as Jews feel responsible even for cycles of oppression that were begun long before they came to American shores.

From the creation of the unions, especially the garment workers union, in the early twentieth century, to marching for civil rights for African Americans in the 1960s, to the creation and maintenance of the contemporary feminist movement in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, to the international human rights movement, American Jews have displayed enormous altruism and, at times, a prophetic fervor for justice.

The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of extensive Jewish activism, an activism that is striking, especially among women. In 1909-1910 about two-thirds of the women employed in the garment industry were Jewish; within that industry, Jewish women – depicted with admiration as *vunderbare farbrente meydlekh* (wonderful, fervent girls) – provided the primary leadership and support for the emerging unions, partially because many had brought socialist values with them from Eastern Europe and Russia. Newspaper reporters and other observers of

Katie: *It's because I'm not attractive enough, isn't it? I know I'm attractive, sort of. But I'm not attractive in the right way, am I? I mean, I don't have the right style for you, do I? Be my friend.*

Hubbell: *No, you don't have the right style.*

Katie: *I'll change.*

Hubbell: *No. Don't change. You're your own girl. You have your own style.*

the scene described the ferocity and eloquence of Jewish girls who lead the strike of 20,000 shirtwaist workers on November 22, 1909.

Education was a tremendously important factor in transforming the lives of American Jews, and once again, the impact of education on women was particularly striking. Education not only enabled the children of immigrants to make enormous personal strides, but also exacerbated the intergenerational gap, and often opened up chasms between mothers and daughters. A study of working girls in evening schools in New York City in 1910 and 1911 showed that a larger percentage of the women attending evening school were foreign-born Jewish women than women who had been born in America. Those who were successful were able to go on to get jobs as secretaries, bookkeepers, or sales clerks in the finer stores; these jobs were seen as highly desirable – and indeed they represented a very different form of life from twelve hours a day of factory work. Many educated second-generation Jewish women became schoolteachers and social workers in numbers far disproportionate to their place in the immigrant population; early on, teaching and social work came to be considered “Jewish professions.”

In politics, Jewish liberalism is a kind of tradition. In many elections, middle- and upper-class Jews continue to vote like Blacks, Hispanics, and unemployed persons rather than like other affluent white Americans. Even after the point of being eased out of leadership positions in the civil rights movement, American Jews continued to identify with the downtrodden of their country and the world, carrying on an idealistic political consciousness and activism. While the number of conservative, Republican Jews has increased with each decade, the majority of American Jews continue to be identified as liberal.

Disturbingly, few contemporary films or novels have presented in a positive light the liberal passions of American Jewish men and women. Some notable exceptions include the novels *Davita's Harp*, by Chaim Potok, and Meredith Tax's *Union Square*. Both explore in a fictional setting the fiery devotion to prophetic ideals that often motivated Jewish socialists and communists in a less disillusioned era of American history. Tillie Olsen writes

movingly of working-class women and their constricted choices, as well as their revolutionary fervor. Grace Paley's elliptical short stories, especially those that focus on her alter ego, Faith Darwin Asbury, explore the developing social consciousness of a divorced young mother. Several of the heroines of these stories and novels, who often see themselves as citizens of the world, are involved in interfaith romances. In film, *Norma Rae* and *Running on Empty* present activist Jewish men, in the former a union organizer and in the latter a former radical.

In *The Way We Were*, director Sidney Pollack creates a retrospective romantic fable about a deeply idealistic, liberal Jewish woman who works for the communist cause and falls in love with an aristocratic non-Jew. Although it simplifies many things, this film has historical interest, and it serves as a useful antidote to the seemingly ubiquitous popular image of Jews as successful (and often money-hungry) business and professional people.

The Way We Were not only turns popular images of the crass businessman Jew upside down but reverses the popular picture of the Jewish woman as well. A comparison of Katie with Marjorie Morningstar – who ostensibly lived during the same historical period – is useful. Marjorie is not careless about people's feelings, in the way in which Hubbell and his friends are, or in the way that F. Scott Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan (*The Great Gatsby*) is. But Marjorie does take for granted the good things in life that her father has provided her. Marjorie never stops being aware of wardrobe, even in her most anguished moments. Most substantively, Marjorie tries for a while to change her own personal world, but she never even thinks of trying to change the world at large.

Streisand's Katie is, in certain ways, as much a "good little Jewish girl" as Marjorie is. But Katie is about as remote from a "princess" as possible: she cares nothing for material things (except for good food, which she makes herself), and she finds the "good life" empty and boring. One musical theme that serves as an effective foil for the heroine is "I want a paper doll that I can call my own." Katie is no ornamental, empty-headed, docile paper doll; she is a flesh and blood woman who is animated entirely by intellectualism, idealism, and love.

Katie: *Wouldn't it be lovely if we were old. We'd have survived all this. Everything would be easy and uncomplicated the way it was when we were young.*

Hubbell: *Katie, it never was uncomplicated.*

Katie: *But it was lovely, wasn't it?*

Hubbell: *Yeah. It was lovely.*

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ How does the film inform the viewer that Katie is Jewish and Hubbell is gentile?
- ◆ What draws Katie and Hubbell together?
- ◆ In what ways are their differences most evident?
- ◆ How does the outside world view Katie and Hubbell as a couple?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Katie and Hubbell joke about their religious differences. Do their concerns run deeper than that?
- ◆ Do you think this relationship could work under different circumstances? If so, what would those circumstances be?
- ◆ What are the advantages of being involved with someone similar to yourself? Someone different?
- ◆ How do you picture Hubbell's and Katie's parents and how would they view the relationship? What role, if any, does parental approval or disapproval have in relationships today?
- ◆ This film looks back. How does nostalgia color relationships?
- ◆ In the end, Katie and Hubbell part and find partners more similar to themselves. Is this a likely ending for some of the couples in the *Intermarriage* film? For interfaith relationships we may be familiar with? What kind of endings do we hope for?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING

Books and stories

- ◆ Fox, Meredith. *Union Square*. New York: Avon Books, 1988.
- ◆ Glen, Susan A. *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- ◆ Gold, Michael. *Jews Without Money*. New York: Carol and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1985.
- ◆ Goldman, Emma. *Living My Life*. New York: New American Library, 1977.
- ◆ Paley, Grace. *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1974.
- ◆ Paley, Grace. *Later the Same Day*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985.
- ◆ Potok, Chaim. *Davita's Harp*. New York: Knopf, 1985.
- ◆ Sinclair, Jo. *The Wasteland*. New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1987.
- ◆ Wald, Alan. *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

Films

Chariots of Fire

Norma Rae

Running on Empty

Tell Me a Riddle

SESSION SIX



Opposites Attract, Again: *Annie Hall*

Feature film, 1978

Director: Woody Allen

Screenplay: Woody Allen and
Marshall Brickman

Alvy Singer: Woody Allen

Annie Hall: Diane Keaton

Alison Porchnik: Carol Kane

Max: Tony Roberts

Tony Lacey: Paul Simon

Length: 99 minutes

Many Woody Allen fans agree that *Annie Hall* is one of his best films. Diane Keaton received an Academy Award for her brilliant portrayal of Annie (and inspired many women to dress like her). The film received three other Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

This Woody Allen masterpiece captures with one deft touch after another the quixotic nature of sexual attraction between men and women of differing ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Protagonist Alvy Singer admits that his choice in women has a lot to do with the fact that he “wouldn’t want to join any club that would accept me for membership.” He recalls that his first wife, Alison Porchnik, was ideal for him in every way; she was “beautiful, willing, and intelligent.” However, Carol Kane’s Alison is clearly Jewish, in a style that echoes Barbra Streisand’s bold Katie. Their marriage fails, Alvy muses, because Alison is Jewish and thus not sufficiently exotic and inaccessible.

Annie Hall, on the other hand, is a gentile female in the tradition of the “dizzy dames” of the romantic Hollywood comedies. Semi-inarticulate, willowy, possessed of long legs and long, (genetically) straight fair hair, she can eat lobsters even though they scuttle across the floor like monstrous black roaches. She has a typical American family in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, complete with a virulently antisemitic Grammy who thinks that “Jews just make money” but gave the younger Annie charming gifts. “My Grammy never gave gifts,” Alvy responds morosely. “She was too busy being attacked by Cossacks.”

Alvy himself feels that he is constantly the butt of antisemitic remarks and slurs. “The rest of the country thinks that we [New Yorkers] are left-wing communist Jewish homosexual pornographers,” he complains.

Alvy: *You're like New York Jewish, left-wing, liberal intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, socialist summer camps. The father with the Ben Shahn drawings. Right, really-strike oriented? Stop me. Before I make a complete imbecile of myself.*

Alison: *No, that was wonderful. I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype.*

Nevertheless, he flies out to Wisconsin to subject himself to just these prejudices, and he imagines that Grammy sees him as an alien bearded Hasid during a chilly family meal at the Hall household. These people are nothing like his family, Alvy observes. "They look very American and very healthy, like they never get sick." However, Annie accuses him of also feeling that he and by implication, other Jews, while they may not be robust, are intellectually and spiritually superior. "You think I'm not smart enough for you," she accuses him repeatedly.

Ultimately, Alvy's relationship with Annie is doomed, partially because of his preoccupation with antisemitism, the Holocaust, death, and the imperfections of the world. He takes dates and former wives to see long documentary films about the victims of the Nazis. He admits that "if one guy is starving somewhere it puts a crimp in my evening." Indeed, although Annie Hall is cinematically and artistically in a different category than *The Way We Were*, Alvy is in some ways similar to Katie, and the two movies provide a fascinating comparison.

Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* utilizes a flashback and *It's a Wonderful Life*-like mode of bringing together information from segments of the past and present life of protagonist Alvy Singer. Allen creates in Singer the prototypical liberal, intellectual, nonathletic, neurotic New York Jew. The scenes of Singer's childhood family, in their modest apartment under the roller coaster in Coney Island, are not only humorous but enlightening about American Jewish life. Encapsulated in just a few moments each, Allen glosses the sociology of the lower-middle-class second-generation American Jewish family. In keeping with the strong liberal tendency of American Jews from the most modest to the most affluent backgrounds, the black woman who cleans their apartment weekly is allowed to steal from them because "she suffered enough," and "from who else should she steal?" Reflecting the poverty of Jewish education and spirituality in many American Jewish households, the family fasts in celebration of their holiest day "to atone for our sins" but confesses they don't know what sins they have committed or why they have to fast for them.

The perfect physical details of every scene also often give important clues about the characters and what they

are experiencing. When Alvy Singer and Annie Hall break up, for example, the room in which they divide their household goods features a prominent Christmas tree studded with ornaments and a pair of Sabbath candlesticks hovering over the mantelpiece.

The characters work as foils for each other. Alvy's clever first wife Alison has a small but extremely significant role in revealing Alvy's ambivalent feelings about Jewishness and Jewish women. The series of girlfriends who follow Annie Hall play up Annie's glowing uniqueness. The ebb and flow of sexual activity among Alvy and his friends, their relationships with their therapists, Alvy's continuing dislike of authority figures, including teachers, and repeated evidence of his anxiety about cosmic issues, each provide the movie with continuity and provide important clues about what motivates Alvy Singer and American Jewish men like him who admit, "I would never join a club that would admit me."

Annie: *Well, lab-de-dab.*

Alvy: *Lab-de-dab. If anyone had ever told me I'd be taking out a girl who used expressions like lab-de-dab.*

Annie: *Oh, that's right. You really like those New York girls.*

Alvy: *Not just. Not only.*

Annie: *I'd say so. You married two of them.*

In Depth: Joining New Clubs

By the mid-1970s, when *Annie Hall* appeared, it was already becoming clear that the American Jewish community had undergone and was continuing to undergo extraordinary changes. Woody Allen knowingly evokes a broad spectrum of these changes in the action and dialogue of this movie, which exquisitely captures not only some eternal truths about human relationships but also the exact behaviors of American Jewish men at a particular moment in time. An awareness of those reference points makes our enjoyment of the movie even richer than it might otherwise be.

Many changes experienced by the American Jewish community were endemic to the American middle and upper-middle classes. American Jews did not behave appreciably differently than other Americans in their educational or socioeconomic class, for example, in regard to sexual activity. The sexual revolution had vividly changed the norms of dating behavior. In dramatic opposition to the quandary of Marjorie Morningstar, who suffered the torments of the damned because she eventually followed her heart and lost her virginity to Noel Airman, Jewish college students in the 1970s reported suffering

Alvy: *You know, even as a kid I always went for the wrong woman. I think that's my problem. When my mother took me to see Snow White, everyone else fell in love with Snow White. I immediately fell for the wicked queen.*

more embarrassment over the presence than the absence of virginity. Sexual activity had come to be an accepted part of dating behavior among the majority of adults.

Although Jews had for centuries been typified by their very moderate use of alcohol, by the late 1970s they had come to behave much more like other Americans in this regard. Recreational use of drugs, while not as prevalent as in the student and dropout cultures of the late 1960s, was casually accepted in many circles. Still, a substantial proportion of Jews continued to regard the regular ingestion of alcohol or drugs as a dangerous diminution of awareness, believing that a constant state of alert was necessary.

Patterns of family formation among Jews followed those of the general culture as well. Individualism and personal fulfillment became viewed as primary moral obligations. Rather than an emphasis on finding time for familial and communal responsibilities – as in the togetherness-minded 1950s – Americans were urged to learn how to find their own space. Assertiveness-training books and classes flourished, and therapy became commonplace. Jews, like non-Jews, postponed marriage as they pursued higher education and careers. They postponed childbirth as they acquired life experience, material possessions, and travel opportunities. Divorce rates rose among Jews, lagging only slightly behind those among non-Jews, reflecting a culture that discouraged “putting up with” destructive or even temporarily unsatisfactory relationships. Jewish families were often divided along chronological lines, as less affluent elderly Jews were left behind in decaying urban areas and more affluent elderly Jews departed for the sunbelt.

Jews of all ages had already begun their demographic drift to the South and West and away from the North Atlantic seaboard by the mid-1970s, although that migration would become even more dramatic in the 1980s. Southern California especially was a magnet for Midwestern and East Coast Jews, who often took to the freer lifestyles and warmer climates like ducks to water. A lively mutual hostility often developed between Eastern Jews – who saw themselves as the guardians of the true, intense, driven urban Jewish character – and California Jews – who putatively learned how to relax and enjoy the good life. Los Angeles, always attractive to Jews who aspired to

Alvy: *I'll have a corned beef.*

Annie: *I'm going to have a pastrami on white bread with mayonnaise and tomatoes and lettuce.*

careers in film, became home to ever-increasing numbers of Jews, who often swore they would never go back – but couldn't resist talking about the differences. Alvy Singer, who has already rejected life in California because "I don't respond well to mellow," comments dourly in the California sunshine, "They just eat and watch movies all day in Los Angeles. It's important to make a little effort once in awhile."

Ironically, many Jews were becoming more and more like other Americans just as they were freer to be more distinctive. The American media helped to spread the message that "Black is beautiful" and that ethnic and racial groups might pursue and reinforce their roots rather than blending into the melting pot, as in the conformist 1950s, and trying to pass for White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. An ever more open society erased the stigma of marrying outside one's faith and also erased the stigma of being openly, identifiably, distinctively ethnic. Certain young American Jews became interested in pursuing their own ethnic and religious roots, sometimes to the horror of their parents, who had tried energetically to appear as American and nonethnic as possible. At the same time, rates of intermarriage escalated among young Jews, also often to the horror of their parents.

Secularized second- and third-generation American Jewish parents had often wanted their children to be Jewish – but not too Jewish. They reacted to not-uncommon episodes like college students joining a Hasidic sect or bringing home a "shiksa" to the Passover Seder table with shock and cries (sometimes stifled) of "Why can't you just be more like us?" Often the children turned to them – in person or within the printed pages of essays, novels, and screenplays – and answered: "Why should we? What did you teach us of substance that might sustain us, that is relevant and meaningful in this open society?"

Politically, however, there was a real line of continuity. American Jews as a group continued to be far more liberal than anyone could have predicted, given their education, financial, and social successes. According to some observers, Jews continue to be liberal because, despite all of their success, on one level they still strongly identify with oppressed populations. However, it is more than

Annie (to herself): *If only I had the nerve to break up, but it would really hurt him.*

Alvy (to himself): *If only I didn't feel guilty asking Annie to move out. It would probably wreck her but I should be honest.*

Annie (aloud): *Alvy, let's face it. I don't think our relationship is working.*

Alvy: *I know. A relationship is like a shark. It has to constantly move forward or it dies. What we have on our hands is a dead shark.*

altruism that gives American Jews the feeling that they are linked to less advantaged populations; a persistent sense of vulnerability also plays an important role. As other observers have pointed out, the majority of American Jews feel that on some level they are always potentially at risk. Thus, Jews try to create and maintain legal safeguards against the persecution of minorities because they are acutely aware that they are always and irredeemably a tiny minority themselves. Consequently, an active opposition to antisemitism and a determination to remember the historical facts and lessons of the Holocaust seems to acquire more and more salience in American Jewish life as the decades pass. In fact, some studies show that the more secularized the Jews, the more the substance of their Jewish identity consists of their awareness of and sensitivity to antisemitic slurs. And it was often precisely those American Jews whose primary Jewish identification was a sensitivity to antisemitism who were likely to form romantic links with non-Jews in the 1970s.

For people like Alvy Singer, the most comfortable position can be discomfort. Many American Jews of his generation seemed to seek out situations in which they were simultaneously insiders and outsiders. This was a kind of privileged position, one that allowed them to feel superior to the limitations of both Jews and non-Jews. Today, in contrast, the children of this insider-outsider generation often seem to feel thoroughly at home in America – and to long for an edge of difference to add piquancy to their lives. Ironically, some college students express envy of ethnic and racial minorities who are “multicultural,” and some seek out more distinctive forms of ethnic or religious identity. In the 1990s, some fourth- and fifth-generation American Jews, especially those who live away from the large cities of the Eastern seaboard, are bored by their uncontested membership in the American “club.”

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ Do you identify with Allen's "types"?

- ◆ How would you compare the values of Alvy Singer and Annie Hall? What does each look for in a mate?

- ◆ What makes people like Alvy and Annie appealing to people so different from themselves?

- ◆ Which of the milieus presented seem familiar and/or comfortable? Why does setting have such an important impact on people's feeling of comfort or discomfort?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Why do all of Alvy's relationships fail? How do you imagine Alvy Singer's romantic future?
- ◆ Why would a character as obsessed with antisemitism as Alvy be involved with a non-Jewish woman?
- ◆ The Hall and Singer families inhabit different worlds. How important a factor is family when selecting a romantic partner?
- ◆ A recent article in *The New Yorker* says that Allen's vision of Jewish culture is still funny but out-of-date. Do you agree?
- ◆ Do you think some Jewish men and women, consciously or unconsciously, may reject potential partners because they are Jewish? If so, what might some of the reasons be?
- ◆ Do you think some Jewish men and women gravitate toward non-Jewish partners, not by happenstance but because they may represent something specially desirable? Are such expectations realistic? Are there any patterns to the way they turn out?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING**Books and stories**

- ◆ Goldstein, Rebecca. “Rabbinical Eyes.” In *Strange Attractions*. New York: Viking, 1993.
- ◆ Ozick, Cynthia. “Levitations.” In *Levitations: Five Fictions*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.
- ◆ Ozick, Cynthia. “The Mercenary.” In *Bloodshed and Three Novels*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982.

Films

The Heartbreak Kid

Hannah and Her Sisters

SESSION SEVEN



atchmaker, Matchmaker: *Crossing Delancey*

Feature film, 1988

Director: Joan Micklin Silver

Screenplay: Susan Sandler

Isabelle Grossman: Amy Irving

Sam Posner: Peter Riegert

Anton Moss: Jeroen Krabbe

Bubbie: Reizl Bozyk

Hannah Mandlebaum: Sylvia Miles

Length: 97 minutes

This appealing film is part *Fiddler on the Roof*, part *Sleepless in Seattle*.

The trajectory of presentations of romantic love in films is interesting to follow, and provides many surprises. In the 1960s and 1970s, at the height of the greening of America, as baby boomers battled against parental and other establishments, romantic lovers often rejected overbearing families (*The Graduate*). Rebelling against the cult of virginity epitomized in earlier films starring Doris Day, cinematic romantic love in the 1970s often followed upon, rather than preceding, sexual involvement (*John and Mary*). In the 1980s, as feminism became a truly grass-roots movement, romantic love often took a back seat to personal development and independence (*An Unmarried Woman*).

Today, the pendulum often seems to have swung backward, in films that capture a kind of yearning for gentle love affairs built on friendship (*Big, When Harry Met Sally*). The friendly lovers featured in such films today do not battle familial disapproval; indeed, they are sometimes brought together by family members. Movies such as *Crossing Delancey* are typical of this trend, depicting characters who do not know themselves well enough and do not face themselves honestly enough to make good romantic choices, and thus find themselves better guided by friends and family. While a century ago in *The Imported Bridegroom* Flora fought energetically not to have her choice of romantic partner determined by her father, family involvement in romantic choices is sometimes portrayed in contemporary films as a desirable development.

When an interfaith marriage occurs in recent movies celebrating ethnic families, the moral weight of the movie does not lie with the brave and romantically independent couple but with the larger body of the family itself. The

Bubbie: *If I'll wait for you, you'll never do it.*

Izzy: *What are you talking about?*

Bubbie: *You. I'm talking about you.*

Izzy: *Bubbie, this is not the way I live. This is 100 years ago.*

Hannah: *A girl your age, after all. How old are you?*

Izzy: *Thirty-three.*

Bubbie: *None of your business!*

Hannah: *I got some nice boys. Fine, respectable boys.*

couple has done the “right” thing, according to the emotional tenor of many recent movies, when they recognize their inexorable loving links to the family unit and stop trying to tear free of its demands. The spouse of differing heritage is subsumed into and becomes part of the familial whole. In comparison, two decades ago Brenda Patimkin’s moral failure occurs precisely because she is unwilling or unable to break free of her family’s clutches.

Crossing Delancey, Joan Micklin Silver’s charming comedy, is one more manifestation of this cinematic trip back to the familial future. Izzy, the heroine, is a modern woman with a whole world of choice open to her. But romantic love, long the supreme symbol of individual freedom, blossoms only when it accepts a vulgar, gluttonous *shadchante* (female matchmaker) and a sly, lovingly manipulative grandmother – played by the late Reizl Bozyk, a star of the Yiddish theatre – as its handmaidens. On its own, romantic love seems to yield only the shallowest and most disappointing, exploitative affairs.

All the women in this movie yearn toward family. Izzy (even the name recalls her roots in immigrant American life, with all of the Isaacs who were transformed into Isidores by Irish first grade teachers) is a sensitive, literary, attractive young woman who imagines that artistic excellence is the best qualification in a lover. When Izzy’s tradition-minded grandmother and Hannah Mandlebaum, a Lower East Side matchmaker, arrange a meeting between Izzy and a pickle-manufacturer, Izzy resists mightily. She assures her grandmother that she has plenty of good friends and doesn’t need a man to make her life meaningful. In the world of feminist individualism, when Jill Clayburgh was *An Unmarried Woman*, this sentiment was the punchline. But Izzy’s contemporary friends, in contrast, have other ideas. One openly declares she is looking for a sweet, old-fashioned boy. To her, the pickle man looks like the man of her dreams. Another friend tires of waiting for an appropriate husband and has a child on her own.

The film perfectly creates different milieus in the same city, with authentic sights, noises, and even aromas. The action moves between two worlds Izzy frequents: Uptown, site of her rent-controlled apartment and the literary bookstore where she works, and Downtown – below

Izzy: *Listen. I didn't have anything to do with this. It wasn't my idea.*

Sam: *You feel funny, bub?*

Izzy: *This isn't the way I live.*

Sam: *How do you live?*

Izzy: *For one thing I don't live down here. I live uptown. A million miles from here.*

Sam: *This isn't your style?*

Izzy: *It's not my style.*

Sam: *Sometimes you can change your style.*

Delancey Street – where she frequently visits her spirited grandmother. Each world holds the possibility of a very different romantic choice for Izzy.

Izzy is infatuated with a strappingly handsome author – a man whose gentile European lineage is only slightly more striking than his narcissism. Sam the pickle man, on the other hand, while certainly pleasant to look at, is a familiar Jewish type with seemingly nothing glamorous about him. He is a thoughtful, generous, nurturing fellow who begins each day with prayers in the synagogue, chats with customers as he plunges his hands into brine, and comes to clean an old woman's apartment windows on demand. Izzy would never have discovered Sam's tender, romantic nature, his uncompromising strength and dignity, and his intelligence if her grandmother and Mrs. Mandlebaum didn't break all the rules of contemporary relationships by mixing in, by telling Izzy what she should do, by pushing, and manipulating.

In the words of Mrs. Mandlebaum: "Love comes and goes but a good business, a nice home, a man who's nice and kind, this is what counts." Mrs. Mandlebaum's words could have been a mantra for a whole line of cinematic Jewish mamas, from Mrs. Morgenstern to Mrs. Patimkin and onward. This far has the Hollywood pendulum swung, but it is unclear whether in nostalgia toward the past or wishful hopes for the future.

In Depth: Changing Personal Options for American Jews

Ironically, contemporary films depict the extended family as a guiding force for the individual when, in real life, the American family seems to be fighting for survival even in its most limited nuclear incarnation, with about half of all recent marriages likely to end in divorce. Extended families are unusual today, with the generations often scattered to opposite coasts. In the movies, however, the Hollywood camera is having a love affair with the warm, loving, supportive, controlling, irritating, extended ethnic family. Such families serve as the irresistible protagonists of such movies as *Moonstruck*, *Once Around*, *Twenty-ninth Street*, *Avalon*, *Radio Days*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, and *Modern Love*, among others.

Anton: *You do have an exquisite stillness, Izzie. I've always admired that. I measure my own jangling motion against it.*

Crossing Delancey illustrates many, though not all, of the diverse options for personal life arrangements available to American Jews today. During the past two and half decades, the social climate of the United States has undergone dramatic changes, including a lively and much publicized “singles culture,” later marriages, smaller families, increasing divorce rates, high geographical mobility, and chronological segmentation of populations. The behavior of American Jews epitomizes many of these changes.

For American Jews, as for other Americans today, there is no one model of “the family.” Jewish families reflect, in somewhat less extreme profile, an America in which fewer than 15 percent of households conform to the model of father, mother-at-home, and children living together. Jewish households in the United States include persons who have never married, some of whom live alone, some with roommates, and some with romantic partners; the traditional, two-parent family with children; the dual-career two-parent family; divorced households without children; divorced and “blended” families; single-parent families; homosexual couples with or without children; and elderly couples or widowed elder “singles.”

For many years, the singles culture was celebrated by the media as an exhilarating, vital way of life, and singles were given the impression that their personal options were unlimited. Like others in their socioeconomic class, Jewish men born in the late 1940s and 1950s seemed uninterested in early commitments; when they did marry, they usually chose younger women rather than choosing from the larger number of unmarried women in their own age group. In addition, many more Jewish men than women intermarried, leaving a sizeable proportion of Jewish women unmarried. And the media has had a field day with studies (based on questionable statistics) whose findings suggest that single women in their later thirties and forties have little chance of getting married.

A growing emphasis on feminist aspiration, achievement, and career fulfillment also contributed to later marriage and childbearing for women. (A much-circulated cartoon features a career woman looking up and exclaiming that she forgot to have children.) Rather than viewing job skills as useful for earning money only in cases

Hannah: *Ya look, ya meet, ya try, ya see. Sometimes it fits, sometimes it doesn't.*

of necessity, women began to see themselves acquiring professional education and careers in much the same way as men. Jewish women, like Izzy and her friends, often postponed marriage and family.

Meeting appropriate men can be difficult. In our fast-paced, competitive, and impersonal society, it's often tough for men and women to connect. Women joke that it's far easier to find a great job than a great (single) man. And many complain about the problems the men they do meet have about making commitments.

This is the backdrop for the dilemma of Izzy's female friends in *Crossing Delancey*. Women who have postponed marriage for one reason or another often find that they feel "squeezed out" of marital choice. National data shows us that in 1990 one-quarter of Jewish women aged 35 to 44 were unmarried or divorced. And yet the data also show that highly educated Jewish women, more than other ethnic or religious groups, express the desire to have children. Some highly educated professional Jewish women have made the choice that Izzy's friend makes, to become single parents – the so-called "Jewish Murphy Brown syndrome." In fact, more than half of the women in the New York chapter of Single Mothers by Choice identify themselves as Jewish.

A century after Jewish matchmaking was in full bloom, computer-assisted and other types of matchmaking have become big business in American life, and recent movies such as *The Imported Bridegroom* and *Crossing Delancey* pay homage to the positive potential of the arranged marriage. Despite the bad press that the notorious "fix-up" receives in each generation, significantly, recent scientific data show that meeting through family and friends is still the single most effective way for Jews to meet other Jews.

Some researchers are attempting to delve into the possible reasons for attenuated singlehood among American Jews. Psychologist Esther Perel, for example, does workshops with New York Jewish singles who harbor what she calls "toxic feelings" about Jews of the opposite sex. She has found that many American Jews remain single for a long time because they have deep-seated hostilities toward Jewish women or men, yet they are uncomfortable about the idea of intermarriage. Unable to resolve their

Sam: *This is what I've been waiting for. You don't know how I was about tonight. I was off the ground. No one could talk to me. I was making wrong change all day. I was so happy I was going to see you that I made a special bracha for the occasion. I said the prayer for the planting of new trees. Don't ask me why. (He kisses her). How should I talk to Isabelle?*

conflicts, such singles continue to date non-Jews almost exclusively, but do not marry them. Perel suggests active communal intervention in the form of workshops and public awareness of destructive stereotypes, such as the “Jewish American princess,” the “Jewish mother,” and the “Jewish mama’s boy.”

Some people believe the line of the old song that “Fate supplies a mate,” that someone out there is their *beshert*, their intended one. Others feel that it’s a matter of being open to possibilities – and having some good luck and good timing. Matchmakers, dating services, friends, and community-organized programs can encourage the process. The next step – deciding whether to marry someone – is a problem many single woman would love to have.

Both in films and in real life, American Jews today have discovered that choices, romantic or otherwise, are bounded by circumstances. Erotic attraction may be a necessary but not a sufficient basis for long-term commitments. Opposites may initially attract, but living with a person with whom one does not share a value system can eventually turn into a chilling situation. Interfaith romances may bring with them an extra set of problems, especially when children are born.

Marriage is a serious matter, and it changes – forever – the composition and texture of our lives. Every romantic choice is a gamble of sorts; there are no guarantees and no insurance policies available. Grandmothers like to say that “nothing in this world is certain.” In selecting a partner, a certain leap of faith is required. Our grandmothers’ wisdom would also advise us to base our leaps on reality – not chemistry.

Thinking about and discussing romance, our own and that of others, is fascinating, because it holds the potential for fulfilling some of our grandest dreams.

The characters presented in this series are an interesting assortment of strong-minded individuals, all looking for love. Imagine if Neil Klugman were introduced to Izzie Grossman, if Hubbell Gardner dated Annie Hall, and what Hannah Mandlebaum the matchmaker would do if she could get her hands on Alvy Singer.

While you watch, consider:

- ◆ How different is Izzy's view of the world from her grandmother's?

- ◆ What do Anton and Sam each represent to Izzy?

- ◆ How does the movie present single life?

- ◆ What's your opinion of the role of matchmakers?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Like Izzy's friends, many young Jewish women who see the film would be pleased to meet someone just like Sam. Why?
- ◆ What do Anton and Sam represent to Izzy? Are they familiar figures in our own lives?
- ◆ Sometimes Jewish men and women may wish to find partners who are Jewish, but it does not happen. What do you think are some of the reasons for this? Does it matter? Can (or should) anything be done about it?
- ◆ In contemporary America, it is estimated that for every two marriages one ends in divorce. What does this say about our belief in the primacy of romantic love? Are we following it too closely, or not closely enough?
- ◆ What may we (or our children) seek in selecting a Jewish partner? What, if any, difference do we think it makes to marry a Jew?
- ◆ What can be done to try to make it easier for Jewish men and women to meet, get to know each other and choose to pursue a Jewish life?

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND VIEWING**Books and stories**

- ◆ Bayer, Linda. *The Blessing and the Curse*. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988.
- ◆ Blankenhorn, David, Steven Bayme, Jean Bethke Elshtain, eds. *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family*. Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1990.
- ◆ Genovese, Elizabeth Fox. *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- ◆ Goldstein, Rebecca. *The Mind-Body Problem*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1983.

Films

Once Around
Moonstruck
An Unmarried Woman
Modern Love

**Jewish Heritage
Video Collection
Advisory Committee**

(in formation)

Abba Eban

Elie Wiesel

Cynthia Ozick

Leonard Goldenson

Newton Minow

Richard Dreyfuss

Paul Mazursky

Joan Micklin Silver

The Jewish Media Fund gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Charles H. Revson Foundation, which made possible the development and production of this guide. The statements made and views expressed, however, are those of the authors.

*J*EWISH HERITAGE VIDEO COLLECTION

A Project of the Jewish Media Fund
c/o Charles H. Revson Foundation
55 East 59th Street, 23rd floor
New York, New York 10022