WOMEN OF VALOUR: LITERACY AS THE CREATION OF PERSONAL MEANING IN THE LIVES OF A SELECT GROUP OF HASSIDIC WOMEN IN QUEBEC

by

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Sharyn Weinstein Sepinwall

Acknowledgments

One of my colleagues at McGill in the Faculty of Management was fond of saying "writing a dissertation should change your life." Her own dissertation had been reviewed in the Wall Street Journal and its subsequent acclaim had indeed, I surmised, changed her life. I did not think at that time, or at any time since, that there was even a remote chance of my work finding its way into a newspaper, but I did hold on to the possibility that writing a dissertation, while often a frightening thought, could offer me an alternative lens through which to see my world. As I became increasingly entangled with the world of Hassidic women, it became more difficult to separate myself from my research. The better I grew to understand my research stance, my worldview, the better acquainted I became with myself, the individual, the teacher, the mother, the wife and the woman. After a slow start, I began to see the opportunity to write about something that really mattered to me.

The rhythm of my writing process was not always smooth. There were periods in the early years when my thoughts barely progressed, let alone my writing. Even the rough moments of writing (or not writing) were significant opportunities for deepening my understanding, not only of the focus of my study but also of my own conceptualizing and composing processes. Looking back on my dissertation journey, I can still feel the

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impact of its effect on me. Working on my dissertation – not only what I learned but also how I learned – was the start of an adventure that has enriched my life in many ways, both personally and professionally. This journey would not have even begun if it were not for the following people who have played such an integral role in my life. Although there are more meaningful ways of saying thank you than words on paper, this thesis would be incomplete if I did not express my gratitude to those who lent their ears, wisdom, support and encouragement.

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inspire me to raise the bar for myself. My youngest daughter, Andrea, has been my voice of reason and intellect. She is the buoy that has often kept me afloat. As a mother, it is unique and exciting to be sharing stories of life in school with three daughters and a son-in-law.

I reserve my greatest thanks to my partner in life's journey and my partner in this endeavour. His constant love and support gave me, as a forty-nine year-old mother of three and full-time McGill University lecturer, the courage, to even contemplate becoming a doctoral student. He has always allowed me the spotlight yet it is he who is my shining star.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the Hassidic women participants of this inquiry who welcomed me into their homes and into their lives, who shared their time, their dreams and their innermost thoughts with me and allowed me to tell their stories in this thesis format. It says in the *Ethics of the Fathers* that the world stands on three things: on Torah, on prayer and on deeds of loving-kindness. These women have taught me that each of the first two rests on the third pillar. In caring for and being concerned about others, they often deny their own interests and needs. I am inspired and humbled by their sense of community and by what I characterize as their inner serenity.

For Hassidim, the story of Reb Zusia of Annipol is an example to live by. Reb Zusia was not concerned that at the end of his life, in the heavenly court, he would be asked why he was not more like Abraham, Issac, Jacob

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or Moses. Rather, he was concerned that he would be asked "why weren't you, Zusia, the best you, Zusia, could have been"? From the Hassidic women in this inquiry, I have learned that finishing a dissertation should not be the culmination of all one knows or all one will ever be. This doctoral thesis is not a destination but a part of a journey, like Zusia, of evolving and becoming a better teacher, scholar, mother, wife, sister, daughter and friend. This is why writing my dissertation has been one of the most meaningful events in my life.

Abstract

In this ethnographic inquiry, I examine the way in which literacy creates personal meaning in the lives of ten Hassidic women in Quebec, Canada. Using an integrative qualitative methodology, I draw from Goldberger, Tarule, Belenky and Clinchy (1996), theories of feminist notions of knowledge, current epistemological discussions about difference, power, multiculturalism, and the expression or suppression of voice. From Street's (1994) ideological model of literacy and from Barton (1994), Hamilton (1998), and Maybin (2000), I more clearly conceptualize the pivotal role of literacy practices in articulating links between individual people's everyday experience and wider social institutions and structures. Marilyn-Martin Jones and Katherine Jones (2000) provide a further theoretical lens for viewing the plurality of literacies associated with the values, understandings and intentions that people have about what they and others do.

The findings led me to four conclusions. First, in the private realm of her home the Hassidic woman commands and receives a great deal of authority and respect. Second, it is the Hassidic woman who is the final arbiter of her own information needs and her literacies encompass a diversity of purposes, materials and competencies. The third finding is that the Hassidic woman is able to successfully negotiate the various arenas of her life without compromising tradition and religious law. Finally, although many of these women in their roles as homemaker and wives, experience financial, emotional and physical hardships while raising large families, I have observed in them infinite amounts of patience, good will, serenity and love.

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Résumé

Au cours de cette enquête ethnographique, j'examine la façon dont l'alphabétisation donne un sens à la vie de dix femmes hassidiques du Québec, au Canada. À l'aide d'une méthodologie intégrante et qualitative, j'emprunte à Goldberger, Tarule, Belenky et Clinchy (1996), des théories sur les notions féministes du savoir, des discussions épistémiologiques actuelles sur la différence, le pouvoir, le multiculturalisme et l'expression ou la suppression de voix. À partir du modèle idéologique d'alphabétisation de Street (1994), de Barton (1994), de Hamilton (1998) et de Maybin (2000), je conceptualise davantage le rôle de pivot que joue l'alphabétisation en ce qu'elle établit des liens entre l'expérience quotidienne d'individus et des institutions ainsi que des structures plus importantes. Marilyn-Martin Jones et Katherine Jones (2000) nous fournissent un autre outil théorique qui nous permet de voir la pluralité des savoirs associés aux valeurs, aux compréhensions et aux intentions que les gens ont par rapport à ce que eux et les autres font.

Les résultats de ma recherche m'ont amenée à tirer quatre conclusions. Premièrement, dans la sphère intime du chez-elle, la femme hassidique commande et reçoit une part importante d'autorité ainsi que des marques de respect. Deuxièmement, c'est la femme hassidique qui prend la décision finale quant à ses propres besoins d'apprentissage et ses connaissances incluent une diversité d'objectifs, de domaines et de compétences. La troisième découverte réside dans le fait que la femme hassidique est capable de négocier avec succès les divers aspects de sa vie sans toutefois compromettre la tradition et les lois religieuses. Enfin, j'ai observé chez ces femmes une patience infinie, de la bonne volonté, de la sérénité et de l'amour bien que bon nombre d'entre elles, en tant que

femmes au foyer et épouses, vivent des difficultés financières, émotionnelles et physiques alors qu'elles élèvent des familles nombreuses.

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PROLOGUE: BETWEEN THE BRAIDS

What's in the spaces between the braids Of these new *challahs* I just made? How much of me is hidden there? Between the braids, my thoughts appear.

First I sifted the flour through Thinking of what else I can do. Who wants to be here baking bread? I could write my first book instead. I added each ingredient And wondered why my soul was sent. I cracked two eggs and then two more. Is this what I was created for?

Shabbos Kodesh, Shabbos Kodesh, my lips whisper, hands knead the dough. Let me see my work is holy. Raising high what seems so low.

Does the *challah* absorb frustration? Does the *challah* hear my voice so shrill? Does the *challah* absorb my confusion? As it rises on the window sill?...

Stuck here in the kitchen and still longing for fame. When did simple giving get such a bad name?

"Shabbos Kodesh, Shabbos Kodesh," – Open my eyes. Let me see my work is holy. Let me stop chasing lies...

When every crumb has vanished from the *challahs* that I madeWhat will remain? Just my secret struggles.Offered up between the braids.

Bracha Goetz

In her poem, "Between the Braids", Bracha Goetz reveals her "secret struggles" of finding an integrated identity as an observant Jewish woman, using bread as a metaphor for a woman's capacity to complete her husband's person. Bread in Hebrew is *lekhem*, from the root meaning to join or weld together, *l'halkhim*. Bread, according to this poet, keeps together the two foundations of a human being, body and soul, just as a woman joins together with her husband in a faithful union to unite their spiritual and material worlds.

This poet's ultimate belief in the framework of traditional Judaism resonates with the views of the select group of Hassidic¹ women I interviewed for this inquiry. Like Goetz's woman, they too struggle between power and powerlessness, resistance and acquiescence. The meanings I found in "Between the Braids" are reflected in the conflict between the physical and spiritual demands that are placed on a Hassidic woman as she reaches towards her goal to grasp the intangible for the godliness which is inherent within. She knows that with the help of God, she will realize the real holiness of her labour.

Critical writing about Hassidic women has consistently treated their voices as "other", mis-analysing and misrepresenting them, their

¹ Within Judaism, the Hassidim represent one stream of ultra-observant religious Jews. The word Hassidic can be spelled in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this inquiry, I will be using the spelling that appears in the documents of the Coalition of Hassidic Organizations of Outremont

communities and their particular locations and positioning. In this inquiry, I address the myths and biases about how Hassidic woman think and live. To do so, I have adopted an integrative qualitative methodology that will allow these women whom I interviewed and observed to have their own voices.

Throughout this research, I have sought to document the lives and activities of this group of women in an effort to understand their experiences from their own points of view. I conceptualize literacy not from the standpoint of basic or functional skills, abilities or competencies but as expressions of the social-cultural contexts in which they define themselves and find personal meaning. In this inquiry I examine how these Hassidic women make a successful link between two worlds: the secular and the religious. The themse that guide my inquiry fall into four broad areas:

- 1. The Hassidic woman and modernity.
- 2. The Hassidic woman and feminism.
- The roles, uses and functions that literacy plays in the lives of the Hassidic woman.
- 4. Literacy and empowerment is the Hassidic woman seen and heard and, if so, how?

What follows here, then, is a topic-oriented ethnography, the product of years of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, artifact collection and close researcher-informant relationships. It is at once the study of a culture and of literacy, the story of ten women and how they create personal meaning in their lives, and it is the product of my own significantly raised awareness. The Hassidic women with whom I met are hopeful that after hearing their words, there will be a better understanding of their culture, values, religion, customs and the roles and uses that literacy plays in their lives. These Hassidic women welcome you to their world, to enjoy and perhaps learn from it as I have.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Situating the Study

The rules of modesty require a quiet, cultured and refined demeanor and these do not exist if a woman shouts or talks loudly in the street. It is instinctive in the make-up of a woman and girl to be refined rather than boisterous and rowdy anywhere in public. (Chaya, Nov. 14, 2001)

It may be that when women talk their behavior is not compared with men's but is assessed against a standard that holds that women should be seen but not heard. When women deviate from a standard of absolute silence, they are thought to be loquacious and out of line. (Gloria Steinem, 1987, p. 78)

Most women grow up and learn by virtue of their particular contexts

to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity,

womanhood and gender relationships. For example, one theme shared

by some women is that they, like children, should be seen and not heard.

Rabbi Falk (1998) writes that "it is so fundamental for a female to be quiet

spoken that Hashem [God] created women with a guieter voice than men"

(p.32). He refers here to Shir Hashirim (2:14) the Song of Songs (Soncino

Books of the Bible) when he says "your voice is sweet" as he explains

why a woman should speak softly. In Eishet Hayil (A Woman of Valour) it

is written "her mouth is full of wisdom." Falk understands this to mean that

intelligent women express themselves quietly and calmly.

Using the metaphors of sight and sound – being seen and heard – in this study I explore the public and private spheres of a selected group of Hassidic women in Quebec. I examine their "inside" and "outside" lives, and the contexts in which there are particular opportunities for these women to express their voices to "hear", to be heard, and to be considered worth being heard. I explore the roles these women play in influencing their own lives and the lives of others.

In this inquiry, I enter a contextual landscape that is strangely silent

- where women for the most part are not heard in public, as it is learned

that in their roles as Jewish women, they must remain inconspicuous and

unpretentious. In his volume, Modesty: An Adornment for Life (1998)

Rabbi Falk explains his position insofar as the Hassidic woman's role in

the public realm is concerned:

Even when she is right and her opinion has been accepted, a Jewish woman remains refined and does not take the central role. Moreover, she is particularly careful not to undermine the authority of her husband. Fortunate is the daughter who sees this at home. (Falk, 1998, p. 28)

To emphasize his point, he recounts the story of Sarah Schneirer, the

founder of the Bais Yaakov (Beth Jacob) schools for girls in Poland:

The cornerstone of the *Bais Yaakov* Seminary buildings in Krakow was to be laid. The leaders of world Jewry were there, important personalities of the Torah world and the communal world, writers, thinkers and a great crowd of ordinary people – all gathered together to participate in this event. It was a real celebration – with music, a band playing and speakers being called upon to address the crowd. Amidst this celebration and gaiety, where was Sarah Schneirer, the founder and inspiration of all this? She was standing at the far end of the crowd, together with the other women, her

friends and neighbors, shedding tears and whispering a prayer. (p.27)

The heritage of religious thought that is embedded in language, in various written and oral expressions, in law, in custom and imagery, in cultural values and implicit expectations, in the infrastructure of the concept of holiness and in associations and myths determines what will be considered significant in their private and public spheres. Active participation in the public domain – that place where the public voice can be heard, where one can take part in decision-making and change, where one can influence the community by means of language, knowledge, and study, and where one can acquire information connected to authority, power, and status – is thought to be an entirely forbidden arena for this group of women.

Of utmost importance to the Hassidic woman is the concept of modesty, or *tznius*. This notion refers to the outward physical appearance of the woman, and also to the manner in which she is taught that, in the public domain, she is to be humble and unassertive. Women are instructed from early on that true modesty extends far beyond dress. It is a trait that shapes the complete character, behaviour and way of thinking.

Feminist scholarship in western contexts is sensitive to absence and silence in the process of constructing female gender identity. Studies from this stance have concentrated on the powerful socio-cultural and

political processes of silencing women's voices (personal knowledge and experiences) that entail in the construction of gender identity (Gilligan, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Fine, 1992). A powerful principle in feminist movements is to listen to and validate women's experiences and women's voices as distinctive aspects of humanity and as ones that are particularly salient for other women. Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky (1996) maintain that the theme of voice concerns the relationship, within an individual, of what can be expressed and not expressed and how that relates to who one is and who one can become. They argue that to learn to speak in a unique and authentic voice, women had to "jump outside the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame"(p. 37).

These authors contend that women are subjected to powerful socio-cultural scripts, expectations and constraints that derive from cultural assumptions on the essence of womanhood and woman's place and role in society. Gilligan (1993) claims that "voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds" (p. xvi), and its expression or suppression has important psychological consequences.

Studies on gender differences in the use of verbal language (Tannen, 1999; Kimbell, 1995), suggest that the world of communication

is most commonly divided into two domains: speaking and listening. Moreover, it appears that it is the men who do the talking and the women who do the listening. Tannen (1990) writes that the alignment in which women and men find themselves arrayed is asymmetrical. "Women and men fall into this unequal pattern so often because of their differences in their interactional habits. Since women seek to build rapport, they are inclined to play down their expertise rather than display it" (1990, p.125).

In the Hassidic world, this pattern of communication and these different aspects of the relationship between men and women reflect disparate concerns of each gender and the interdependence that exists between them. Men and women need and rely on each other. Because the male tends to do more of the talking, and the woman does more of the listening, their goals are complementary. As Tannen explains, the act of speaking, by definition, frames one in a position of higher status and the act of listening frames one as lower. But when Hassidic woman listen, they are not thinking in terms of status but in terms of tradition, culture and the religious tenet of modesty. In her examination of the differences in communication styles of men and women, Tannen (1999) labels this communication style as public versus private speaking. She argues that, for most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport, a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships.

More men she suggests feel comfortable doing 'public speaking,' while more women feel comfortable doing 'private' speaking. Another way of capturing these differences, Tannen points out, is by her use of the terms "report-talk and rapport-talk" (p.77). Tannen believes that the difference between the public versus private conversational styles of men and women are a result of the fact that "women do not want to put themselves on display, or claim public attention for what they have to say or catapult themselves onto center stage" (p. 88).

A study conducted in Israel by Tamar Rapoport and Yoni Garb (1998) concerns the silencing of the female voice exists in order to preserve the patriarchal order. This silence, according to Rapoport and Garb, "is critical for religious fortification as institutional practices and the experience of growing up converge in shaping womanhood" (p.18). In all female schools, a "fortress" or sanctuary is created shielding young women from the dangers of modernity, fortifying them to be able to cope with the ills of secularity in their adult lives. The structure of these Hassidic girls' schools also serves to empower the young women by encouraging the development of a close-knit, all female group wherein each woman can develop her religiosity as well as high quality scholastic achievement, among other women in a safe, secure environment. In this way, their

experience of the secular world is mediated by the religious educational discourse in which they are embedded.

The Hebrew verb "to be fortified" (*l'hitchazek*) means to be strengthened both physically and in relation to one's inner faith. Thus, it implies that the unfolding of religious faith should not be taken for granted – it demands the investment of both personal and educational labour. Religious men and women are instructed to behave as if they belong to separate worlds, only to come together in marriage. The result of this creation of a mini-culture of women is a fortress in which they can safely fortify their faith as a necessary condition to intensify their religiosity and to assert their spirituality independently.

Traditional or Orthodox Judaism addresses the deity as masculine, teaches that God's message was conveyed primarily through men such as Abraham and Moses, and bestows the privilege of leadership (rabbinate and priesthood) upon men. It has, for the most part, traditionally excluded women from such central areas of religious expression as study and vocal participation in the synagogue. One example related to these differences in religious ritual practice between men and women is a difference in their physical location within the synagogue. When Judaism is discussed in Orthodox teachings, invariably it is the male role that is under discussion. Judaism becomes, in many

books and articles, "what the men do." Jewish feminists bemoan the fact that religious Orthodox women are excluded from participating in Judaic practices and often overlook, if not degrade, the role Hassidic women do play in their religious lives (Fishman, 1993; El-Or, 1994; Rotem, 1997; Wolowesky, 1997).

Elior (1992) maintains that ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Judaism could not possibly empower its subjects as women. She cites three main interrelated sources to arrive at her conclusions: (1) the written tradition, codified in the Torah and halakhot (laws), attributing to each sex a different status, set of rights and duties in the private and the public domain; (2) the traditional patriarchal order which acts as a check for the balance of power between the sexes and is enforced by law and custom. (This way of ordering the world, which caused women to be present in their homes and absent in public, draws from Jewish sources which distinguish in dialectical terms between inside and outside in relationships between the sexes. It also is influenced by a gender-based order in the surrounding culture.); (3) strong societal expectations, cultural conventions and religious thought, that differentiates the sexes based on such concepts as strength and weakness, authority and obedience, voice and silence, outside and inside, liberty and subjugation.

It is these three historical sources that, she believes, have shaped the attitude towards Hassidic women in the traditional world until the 20th century. Elior (1992) further suggests that, in many ways, these notions have left an impression on the post-modern discourse which reflects the relationship between the sexes even today.

When voices are not there to be heard, one has to create them using one's informed imagination by filling in the empty spaces. In this inquiry, I attempt to bring the hidden to life – that private sphere of Hassidic women – out into the open. I uncover a female tradition that differs from, but parallels and is usually consonant with, the dominant male system. For example, I will demonstrate how the clearly delineated roles of Hassidic men and women complement each other, and I present the Hassidic woman as the queen of this private world. By including the women's voices in this inquiry, the story of the Hassidic women changes and, in so doing, new narratives emerge and evolve.

Original Contribution to Scholarship

While the history and social structure of Hassidism have attracted countless studies by Judaica scholars, the role of Hassidic women remains shrouded in mystery, thereby permitting myths and stereotypes about their status to flourish unabated. Recent research and writing about Hassidic women generally, and Quebec Hassidic women in particular, is

minimal, and present the voices of Hassidic women as either muted or silenced altogether. For example, Weissler (1998) writes about the Hassidic women as "a group of people and aspect of a culture that has been excluded from consideration" (p. 172). Some previous studies portray Hassidic women as relegated to the inside or private domain of the home, as distanced from the centres of culture, as enslaved by the endless needs of the family and the bringing up of countless children, and as subjugated to their husbands (Elior, 1992). Most authors who study this culture tend to downplay or ignore the real power that the women hold (Davidman, 1991; Eisenberg, 1995; Heilman, 1992; Kranzler, 1988; Mintz, 1992; Shaffir, 1987). Weissler argues that sociological studies of the Hassidim have been conducted largely by men who used research samples comprised by other men, thus leading to the exclusion of the Hassidic woman.

Of particular relevance to the line of inquiry pursued in this thesis, and one that makes this research original are the following questions. What is it that Hassidic women do to exercise influence over their lives and the lives of those around them? What can one learn from them as they describe their lives in such positive and affirmative terms? These women, for whom Yiddish is their mother tongue, and English is a second language, are part of a distinctive community, making them an interesting focus for study. It is significant that many of the women I interviewed represent an entirely new era of Hassidic women because they are the first generation ever to pursue a secular education beyond high school.

This study provides the opportunity for this group to speak aloud for, perhaps, the first time about their affirmations, self-revelations, selfcontradictions – about how they see themselves and their world as they confront their own challenges, triumphs and conflicts in their efforts to remain faithful to their traditions and religious backgrounds. As a non-Orthodox feminist Jew, I adopt the perspective that Hassidism is a normative phenomenon and I concentrate on *what* Hassidic women do with their lives and their influence, rather than question *why* Hassidic women have views or values different from those of assimilated and non-Hassidic Jews.

The conceptualized stories of the selected group of participants in this inquiry provide insight into how this religious group of women maintain themselves in the face of the challenges of modernity. Because little is known about this group in the context of a Quebec, Canadian perspective, and furthermore, because what is known and believed by both Jews and non-Jews alike is often erroneous, stereotypical and negative, this dissertation significantly contributes to the few qualitative studies of Hassidic women that exist to date.

Research Issues and Questions

This inquiry focuses on the ways a selected group of ten women in the insular community of Outremont Quebec, negotiate the challenges they face as they articulate their roles and lives in a society defined by history, tradition, faith and religious law. Drawing on insights from cultural pluralism and feminism, I describe the ways the women in this particular community use literacy to read and understand their worlds. I conceptualize literacy, not as a set of skills, abilities or measurable items on a task list, but I view literacy as a way of constructing personal meaning, a context dependent phenomenon that relates directly to different aspects of Hassidic life and culture. I attempt to portray this community of women, not as victims, oppressed and powerless, but as the figures of strength they have historically been. The four broad topics that guide the questions for this inquiry evolved from my association with this community over the last five years, my role as a teacher in the seminary program at an ultra-Orthodox school, Bais Yaakov (Beth Jacob) and from my engagement with current literacy literature.

For each of the topics, I developed focal questions. They are:

1. The Hassidic Woman and Modernity.

a) How do these women negotiate the various arenas outside their observant community and find fulfillment and satisfaction within the centrality of *Halakhah* (Jewish law)?

b) Are the boundaries shifting between generations – are young women today more or less insular, observant or religious than their mothers?

2. The Hassidic Woman and Feminism

a) How do a selected group of Hassidic women respond to the modern secular feminist movement? Do they incorporate any of it into their lives, if so, how?

b) How do these Hassidic women feel about themselves as Jews and as women, while surrounded by secular values often at odds with Jewish values, without sacrificing their femininity or identity?

 The Roles, Uses and Functions that Literacy Plays in the Lives of the Hassidic Woman

a) How are literacy-related knowledge and skills acquired or
expected in one context required or valued in another?
b) Does the Hassidic woman graduate of post-secondary school studies feel an "inner vacuum" exists when she devotes her
time and talents to making a home, rearing children and

creating a family? Does she feel "guilty" for working or not working outside the home? Does she seek to justify the intensive study in which she was involved? In other words, does she feel her advanced secular education was meaningful or wasted?

4. Literacy and Empowerment

a) Since men and women have different educational backgrounds, both secular and religious, and different literacy skills, what, if any, are the problems, issues that result when they marry?

b) Do values surrounding women's education present a conflict to the image of the ideal woman who stays home to take care of her ever-growing family?

Literacy as the Creation of Personal Meanings

There are as many definitions of literacy as there are purposes for defining it. In tackling the problem of a suitable definition the literature offers an endless series of disagreements and controversies reflecting the fact that literacy is a complex "amalgam of psychological, linguistic and social processes layered one on top of the another like a rich and indigestible *gateau*" (Levine, 1986, p. 22). For example, "basic" literacy which is often defined by grade level or a measurable test score that is
used for placement or gate keeping in various institutions; "functional" literacy connotes the skill level of an adult to survive in a particular context. Verhoeven (1994b) defines functional literacy as composed of five basic competencies: grammatical competence, discourse competence, decoding competence, strategic competence and sociolinguistic competence. Grammatical and discourse abilities become critical for people, from ethnic minorities, such as the Hassidim in my study who have to learn to read and write in a second language. Sociolinguistic competence also becomes important in this culture as it encompasses literacy conventions in various social situations as well as in the cultural background.

The definition of functional literacy was expanded by Hunter and Harmon (1979) to:

the possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders and members of social, religious, or other associations of their choosing. (p. 7)

Given the diverse literacy needs of ethnic minorities such as Hassidim, functional literacy can be defined in terms of their multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. Important additions to this definition are the notions of self-perception and the self-determined objectives of the people themselves. Hunter and Harmon suggest: If we take seriously the dynamic interaction between self-defined needs and the requirements of society, measurement of functional literacy becomes infinitely more elusive. Who but the person or group involved can really describe what "effective function in one's own cultural group" really means? Who needs to know whether skills can be used "toward personal and community development"? How is "a life of dignity and pride" measured? (p. 19)

The researchers quoted above are trying to pin down more

precisely the definitions of or provide a methodology for precise measurement of functional literacy by analyzing the uses of literacy and relationships to the target population in selected settings. It is clear that functional literacy varies in time, in space, and in relation to the needs of each individual. Levine (1986) argues that having accepted that literacies are differentiated by the type of information they assume and transmit, literacy is meaningless if it cannot be harnessed to the individual or the group's needs. This notion accepts that individuals are the final arbiters of their own information needs and thus their status as functionally literate or illiterate. Cook-Gumperz (1986) also reminds us that literacy encompasses a diversity of purposes, materials and competencies and that no single definition will suffice for analyzing literacy.

Weinstein (1984) writing in *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, suggests that literacy is embedded in social organization and that it is pluralistic. He believes:

that literacy is more than a set of mechanical skills and that the practices of reading and writing are inextricably bound within specific uses by particular actors from their different positions in the social order. (Weinstein, 1984: 480)

The term social order, Weinstein argues, points to the things people do, their social practices, and to the relations among people brought into being by those practices. Literacy's "operative meaning" derives not from individual skill but from the fact that literate skills and materials are shared among people in literate communication with one another (Havelock, 1976, p. 20). When people read and write, they produce the social order that exists.

Careful historical and ethnographic work has begun to display how people use different literate practices and how they are tied together in different ways. Examples of some of these practices exist when literacy is a matter of religious ritual and study, or when it is a matter of a community's own informal communication and record-keeping, or when it is used in administrative processes (Heath, 1983; Reder & Green, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Weinstein, 1984). This understanding of literacy is significant in the analysis of the Hassidic community in that it asks how much literacy does one need in order to function in a particular society. That is, it addresses literacy competence as a relative state affected by considerations of motivation and self-esteem and particular socio-cultural and political forces.

This inquiry is informed by Paolo Freire's (1968) epistemic description of literacy as an adult's ability to read the word and world, to empower herself or himself and to act in society connecting literacy to people. Freire's work is situated outside of a school setting and in disenfranchised communities with Brazilian and African adult literacy programs. He resists a school-based definition of literacy associated with the values and aspirations of the middle class. "Reading the world always precedes reading the word and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35). Freire (1968) sees the acquisition of literacy as an active process of consciousness, not just the passive acquisition of content. He rejects the 'problem solving' ideology from which many literacy programs operate, and substitutes for it the notion of 'problematising' social reality. Individuals acquiring literacy should have their consciousness raised in the process, enabling them, for instance, to analyze the historical and social conditions in which particular 'problems' arose in the first place. In his view, literacy programs should not be tied merely to the mechanical skills of learning to read. Rather, an important factor in Freire's notion of literacy is the reader's development of a critical comprehension of the text and the sociohistorical context to which it refers. For Freire, literacy instruction was simply the process through which students would come to reflect critically on the world and

take action to transform oppressive conditions. The ultimate purpose of literacy from a critical perspective is for personal empowerment and social transformation. Freire, like others after him, sees thoughtful critique as a part of the ongoing processes of democracy as well as personal and social transformation.

Scribner and Cole (1981) conducted an investigation that has had great impact, not only as a result of its articulation and challenging of central western beliefs about the effects of literacy, but for its shift towards a culture-relative understanding of literacy. They undertook a comparative research project of the Vai people of Liberia to examine the social and cognitive consequences of literacy in a cultural context. Their classic work, The Psychology of Literacy (1981) presents the results of this study. They conclude that the cognitive changes and benefits in terms of reasoning power that are usually attributed to literacy per se are actually due to the process of Western-style schooling. Scribner and Cole's research clearly indicates that what matters is not literacy as some decontextualized ability to write or read, but the social practices into which people are apprenticed as part of a social group, whether as students in school, letter writers in the local community, or, as in the case of my inquiry, members of a religious group.

The theoretical framework for literacy as the creation of personal meanings metaphor is found in the ideological model of Brian Street (1984), who also views literacy practices as aspects of culture, power structures, authority and politics. Whereas the autonomous approach is a set of technical skills which enhances the capacities of those who own them, through both learning and using them, the ideological perspective looks at different literacy practices that exist and develop within different social contexts. Street explains:

I prefer to work from what I term the "ideological" model of literacy, that recognizes a multiplicity of literacies; that the meaning and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies. (Street 1994a, p. 139)

Based on Street's model, literacy scholars concern themselves with what is culturally specific and what is universal in literacy practices. Those who subscribe to the ideological model examine the social institutions through which the process takes place – the home, community, school and religious institutions.

Street (1984) reports how his characterization of his fieldwork in Iranian villages during the 1970's as literacy practices, helped him make sense of "variations in the uses and meaning of literacy" (p. 23). Street (1995) views ideology as encompassing the relationships between the individual and the social institution and their mediation of the relationship through sign systems. He suggests that, by participating in the language of an institution, whether as speakers, listeners, writers, or readers, participants position themselves within the language. Relationships of power, authority, and status are implied and reaffirmed. Street contends that literacy as a critical social practice would make explicit from the outset both the assumptions and the power relations on which models of literacy are based.

There is an assumption that learning literacy is not just about acquiring content about vocabulary words but about learning a process of coming to know the self and others. Street (1995) stresses the following:

Every literacy is learned in a specific context in a particular way; the social relationships of student to teacher are modes of socialization and acculturation. The student is learning cultural modes of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or to write a particular hand. (p. 140)

Street argues that in studies of literacy events, one cannot know how meanings are constructed. That is, the underlying conventions and assumptions are unclear. Using the concept of literacy practices, however, Street shows that the events and patterns of activities are linked to social models regarding the nature of the practice, what makes it work and what gives it meaning. Literacy practices, Street suggests, refer to a broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about reading and writing as well as doing them in cultural contexts. Street acknowledges that moving from the term literacy events to literacy practices requires one to take into account the construction, uses and meanings of literacy in context.

This social-cultural perspective on literacy is further echoed in the work of Shirley Brice Heath. Heath's classic *Way with Words* (1983) is an ethnographic study of the ways in which literacy is embedded in the cultural context of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas in the United States; Roadville, a white working-class community that has been part of mill life for four generations; Trackton, a working-class African-American community whose older generation were brought up on the land, but is now also connected to mill life and other light industry; and a community of mainstream middle-class urban-oriented African-Americans and whites.

Heath analyzes the ways these different social groups 'take' knowledge from the environment, with particular concern for how types of literacy events are involved in this taking. Heath considers literacy events as any event involving print, such as group negotiation of meaning in written texts (e.g. an ad), individuals looking things up in reference books, writing family records in the Bible, and dozens of other types of occasions when books or other written materials are integral to interpretation in an interaction.

Heath interprets these literacy events in relation to the large sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect, such as patterns of caregiving roles, uses of space and time, age and sex segregation, and so forth. This approach obviously connects with Scribner and Cole's practice account of literacy. And, in line with Street's ideological approach to literacy, it claims that individuals who have not been socialized into the discourse practices that constitute mainstream school-based literacy must eventually be socialized into them if they are ever to acquire them. The component skills of this form of literacy must be practiced, and one cannot practice a skill one has not been exposed to, cannot engage in a social practice one has not been socialized into, which is what most nonmainstream children are expected to do in mainstream schools.

The children from these different communities were, then, socialized into fundamentally different worldviews by means of, among other things, the specific ways in which literacy was taught and in which, in their daily interactions with adults, certain practices were reinforced and others discouraged. Heath concludes with a statement that makes explicit some of the fundamental tenets of the 'ideological' model of literacy and which has remained implicit in many of the writers being examined:

Literacy events must ... be interpreted in relation to the larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect. For example, ethnography must describe literacy events in their sociocultural contexts, so we may come to understand how such

patterns as time and space usage, caregiving roles, and age and sex segregation are interdependent with the types and features of literacy events a community develops. It is only on the basis of such thoroughgoing ethnography that further progress is possible toward understanding cross-cultural patterns of oral and written language uses. (Heath, p. 74)

This ethnographic approach to the study of literacy, such as developed by Heath (1983), Street (1984) and Scribner and Cole (1981) provide the opportunity as Graff puts it, "for explanations, and approaches to literacy's variable historical meaning and contribution" (1981, p. 127).

Jennifer Horsman (1990) provides a further example of this notion of the socio-cultural dimension of literacy in her study of women in Nova Scotia. She examined their aspirations and values regarding family and career and the connection they saw between education and work. During the spring and early summer of 1986, she conducted interviews with twenty-three women who had participated or were participating in basic literacy upgrading and training programs, and with ten workers in these programs. She began her research questioning the concept of illiteracy but still had a sense of literacy as something unitary, universal, almost something that could be tested. As she analyzed the interviews, the women's accounts of their lives pushed her farther and farther away from an analysis based on the organizing concept of illiteracy. Gradually the inadequacy of this concept to encompass the complexities of these women's lives became clear to her.

In Horsman's research, she draws on the concept of discourse to include language, assumptions and meanings. She views this concept as one that allows us to speak of the importance of language as a way of framing reality and shaping how we see ourselves and the world. Because of oral and written language, there is a shared understanding of concepts that shape the lives of the women who participated in her study. Discourse theory, according to Horsman, offers a way of seeing how we give meaning to experience through language as our perceptions change and we form new subjectivities and identities. Of particular interest to my inquiry is her view of the discourse of mothering as demanding that mothers deny their personal desires in order to focus on their children. In the dominant discourses, women are seen, by virtue of their "nature", as best suited for the service or "caring" professions – work that replicates

the domestic and childcare work which women have traditionally done in the home. In discourses of mothering and childcare, this work is seen as women's primary responsibility. Work of this form is seen then as natural to women and regarded as requiring little skill and little training.

Horsman's study shows ways in which the dominant discourses preserves the status quo. The Nova Scotian women in her study appeared to resist the power of discourse to define them as outsiders, as incompetent and stupid. Many of the women she interviewed spoke about

the importance of the challenge of an educational program and the search for meaning in their lives: They wanted something in their minds "besides the everyday" (p. 3).

Horsman's focus then was not to explore whether the women with whom she met were real illiterates, nor did she seek to create the perfect definition of illiteracy. Rather she explored the way a unitary concept of illiteracy is socially constructed, as part of a dream of a "better life". In this way, literacy helps to form our sense of self, our assumptions and a shared understanding of meaning. Viewing literacy as "socially constructed phenomena", she considers the processes by which it is constructed in everyday life through interactions, exchanges and the negotiation of meaning in many different experiences (Horsman, 1990).

Further explaining the concept of discourse is James Paul Gee (1996) a socio-cognitive theorist, who views discourse as an identity kit, that is, ways of saying-writing-doing-being-believing and valuing. Gee (1996) breaks down the notion of literacy as a monolithic concept and instead analyzes varieties of discourse practices, each of which he characterizes as a form of literacy. In Gee's analysis, literacy becomes pluralized as it is embedded in the social context. Gee recognizes that not all forms of literacy are the same; he characterizes the varieties in terms of their dominance and power relations as well as in terms of their

relationship to home-based and community-based ways of using language. He maintains that one never learns to simply read or write, but to read and write within some larger discourse and therefore within some larger set of values and beliefs. Gee's arguments resonate in many ways with my study. He specifically addresses the issue of women and minorities who, when they seek to acquire status discourses, may be faced with adopting values that oppose their primary identities. He explains how all discourses are not equal in status, and that some carry with them social power.

A further example of literacy as a set of cultural and social practices is put forth by Stephen Reder (1994). He describes crosscultural studies of literacy that serve to demonstrate the sharp variation in the ways literacy is incorporated into everyday life. Reder argues that literacy does not necessarily have the same meaning or function in all societies, or in all communities within a society. In a comparative ethnographic study of functional literacy development in Inuit, Hmong, and Latino communities in the United States, Reder described three modes of engagement in literacy practices – technological, functional, and social, in which the latter two modes of engagement are mediated by the first. Reder suggests that the development of an individual's literacy is shaped by the structure and organization of the social situations in which literacy

is practiced. Literacy development, according to this theoretical position, is derived from "qualities of individuals' engagement in particular literacy practices" (1994, p. 36). Reder suggests "literacy events are culturally patterned into recurring units," (p. 36) and he too borrows Scribner and Cole's (1981) term "literacy practices". Based on these understandings and assumptions, according to Reder, a focus on literacy activities implies attention to the ways in which engagement in literacy events, interactions, and practices enable participants to create personal meaning in their life experiences.

The new literacy theorists (Barton and Ivanic 1991; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Hamilton, Barton and Ivanic 1994; Ivanic 1997; Maybin, 2000) also make use of the concept of literacy practice in their studies of everyday literacies where they observed particular situations and drew out their characteristics. In contexts where multiple literacy practices are associated with different arenas of public life, their ethnographic research describes and explains variations in literacy practices across and within cultures. In her own study of children's everyday speech in a British school, Maybin (2000) explains:

I used the term 'practice' to refer to observable patterns of behavior across events. A contrast between different practices would be between children often using reference books to announce newsworthy bits of information while teachers are using them to frame observation and epistemology. These different behaviors assume different beliefs about what the texts are for, different

values and ideologies and, therefore, to me signal different 'practices'. So I was focusing on the more empirical end of the term. (Maybin, 2000, p. 197)

I borrow this notion from Maybin in my own inquiry, in her words, to "more clearly conceptualize the pivotal role of literacy practices in articulating links between individual people's everyday experience and wider social institutions and structures" (Maybin, 2000, p. 197).

Barton's ethnographic description of literacy also challenges the autonomous model. He approached literacy as a social activity that is embedded in particular cultural contexts. Barton focuses on the range of literacies that people possess, each associated with particular contexts of their lives, such as home, work, and school. Drawing on his ethnographic work, Barton places the literacy practices that he studies in the broader social relations. In addition, Barton's work highlights the notion that it is the attitude towards literacy that often guides people's actions. He proposes an ecological approach to the day-to-day uses of language, both in reading and writing. He argues:

Rather than isolate literacy activities from everything else in order to understand them, an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, language and learning. (1994, p. 32)

That literacies are social practices bound up in "social processes" and include "the values, understandings and intentions people have both

individually and collectively about what they and others do" (p. 42) is the theme of Marilyn Martin-Jones and Kathryn Jones in *Multilingual* Literacies (2000). From Martin-Jones and Jones' perspective, an event does not tell us how meanings are constructed. In their attempt to provide an account of the contemporary literacy practices of a sample of Gujaratis Hindus in Leicester, England, Martin-Jones provide a further example of the social and ideological model of literacy referred to above. In this study, they successfully merge and incorporate insights in two distinct fields: socio-linguistic research on bilingualism and multiculturalism, and ethnographic research on literacy. Their research reveals a social view of language and literacy and the wealth and diversity of local literacy practices which co-exist in the context of urban life. The notion of multiple languages and literacies investigated by these authors is therefore, an important construct in challenging the autonomous singular view of literacy as a separate, reified set of neutral competencies.

In their essay "Language, Literacy and Worldview," in *Multilingual Literacies*, Edwards and Nuenmely (2000) further highlight the contextualized nature of the social construction of literacy. They also argue that the study of literacy can no longer be promoted as a phenomenon divorced from social context.

The ways in which different groups of people use the written word have an ideological dimension, inextricably linked with power

issues in society. In all cases, the worldview of the group in question will determine the uses to which literacy is put, the choice of language and the meanings which are attached to this choice (p. 102).

This social constructivist approach to literacy posits that literacy practices are almost always integrated with, interwoven into, and constitute part of the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interactions, values, and beliefs. These authors suggest that people learn how to construct and interpret different types of texts by being socialized or encultured into the social practices of a variety of groups.

Neilson (1989) in her study of the lives of three literate adults in the community of Hubbards in Nova Scotia, details how literacy is a window on the world, an individual way of knowing, behaving, understanding and making meaning. She views literacy as a process of learning how to be at home in the world. Neilson's work resonates with my own inquiry because she too came to understand that she could not know what being literate means until she understood the people with whom she was working. Looking at what they read and write would not be enough. Standing outside their lives and tallying the frequency, number, and variety of their literacy activities would not give her a clear understanding of them as literate members of society. She needed to understand her participants and the stories of their lives. She writes:

I had to track them daily to understand the stories of their lives, and I had to probe into the past to see the roots of their literacy. I had to talk with them about their goals, their dreams, and their experiences. Because I believe literacy is not a skill that we acquire but is a reflection and creation of who we are, my findings show these people in the process of living. (p. 47)

Neilson concludes that just as literacy cannot be separated from culture, literacy cannot be separated from the individual. For Neilson in her description of the Hubbards in Nova Scotia and for me in my inquiry of Hassidic women in Quebec, each of these communities is the stage on which these people act out their lives. To represent who they are and what their literacy means, I believe it is necessary to see them at home and at work, to know what motivates them, to see the contexts that shape their view of the world.

The arguments about the heterogeneous nature of the experiences of women in different local minority groups is supported by the territory which Wenger (1998) refers to as a community of practice. The notion of community of practice posits that as a full member of a community, one can handle oneself competently; one knows how to engage with others; and one understands why one does what one does. These dimensions of identity can be applied to the Hassidic women as they demonstrate Wenger's "mutuality of engagement" in terms of the way they have learned to treat others with kindness and to live together in harmony. They also exhibit an "accountability to an enterprise". For example, being a wife and mother gives them a certain focus as to how they view their world. For Hassidic women, this sense of identity, according to Wenger's theory, allows them "to come up with certain interpretations, to engage in certain actions, to make certain choices, to value certain experiences – all by virtue of participating in certain enterprises" (p. 153). A further dimension identified by Wenger is "negotiability of a repertoire." Again, I liken this concept to the Hassidic woman who through a history of practice in the artifacts, actions and language of her community, is able to create a personal set of events, references, memories and experiences. In this sense, through practice, the Hassidic woman knows who she is "by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable" (p. 153).

Literacy researchers have recently begun to place a greater emphasis on the connection between the "new literacies" and the power structures within each society. For example, Bachu (1993), demonstrates how when women enter the labour force and have a source of independent income they have a stronger hand in the negotiation of power in the domestic sphere. This notion rings true for the participants in my inquiry as well. Although addressing a different community, Bachu focuses on their asymmetric gender relations imposed by the very same constraints that affect the lives of Hassidic women, namely arranged marriages, dress codes and child rearing practices. She says that "the

way in which women define themselves is an outcome of these experiences" (p. 109). Bachu argues that by defining new identities in the context of migration, the women she worked with were continually negotiating and transforming cultural practices and values. These identities were "contextualised" (1993, p. 110), that is, they were located in experiences and opportunities that arose in particular settlements. Bachu goes on to write: "Ways of speaking and ways of reading and writing serve as a powerful means of making statements about identity. They therefore merit closer attention in ethnographic accounts of the ways in which women redefine their identities" (p. 109).

Rockhill (1987a; 1987b) further develops these themes of power structure and literacy in a study of immigrant women in Los Angeles.

Women engage in literacy practices as part of the work of the family. When it becomes associated with education, literacy poses the potential of change and is experienced as both a threat and a desire. Thus the anomaly that literacy is women's work but not women's right. (1987b, p. 33)

Again this resonates with the experiences of Hassidic women who avail themselves of the experience and opportunity of higher secular learning. Rockhill argues that the assumption that literacy is "neutral" causes us to miss this dynamic aspect in women's lives. She points to the need to look at the "personal" to understand the gendered practices which reinforce the subordination of women. Rockhill believes that the construction of literacy is embedded in the discursive practices and power relationships of everyday life: "It is socially constructed, materially produced, morally regulated, and carries a symbolic significance which cannot be captured by its reduction to any one of these" (p. 33).

It seems that for the minority women in her inquiry, moving into the world of higher education posed a threat to the gender relations in which they were involved at home, the only world with which they were familiar. Like many of the women I met during the course of my project, the women in Rockhill's study were confined primarily to the private domain -- the home. Their learning English was tolerated to the extent that it enabled them to deal with the everyday literacy "work" involved in running the home and in taking on other chores, such as dealing with social services, public utilities, health care and children's schooling.

I further connect Rockhill's work and my own inquiry to the study done by Marcia Farr (1995) as part of the Mexican-origin Language and Literacy Project at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Farr gathered data for this study through long-term participant observations: that is, she participated in the lives of one social network of Mexican immigrant families over the course of several years. She learned how both Spanish and English literacy are used in the various domains of their lives. She illustrates the embedded nature of these practices by describing those that occur within two institutions: the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and the Catholic Church. Although many adult members of these families have relatively limited literacy skills due to restricted access to formal education, they nevertheless manage a variety of literacy practices that, to a greater extent than most people are aware, serve their specific literacy needs. Her studies also support the argument that literacy may be an enabling factor especially in relation to how literacy is used in a given culture. She concludes that literacy is embedded to varying degrees, in the lives of the members of this social network. As Rockhill and Farr have demonstrated in their studies, and as I have attempted to uncover for the Hassidic woman in my inquiry, to have access to higher education is to enter a world that holds "the promise of change and, because of this, threatens all that they know" (Rockhill 1993, p. 171).

The implications, for both the theory and practice of literacy development, of all of these studies suggest that researchers and educators look towards the broader range of cultural activities and see multiple literacies as they develop directly within specific contexts of practices that vary across languages and cultures. Literacy cannot be separated from the culture or from the signs that make meaning in that culture. When I approached my study, my task was to understand the signs these women know and use that enable them to be at home in their

world, to behave appropriately in the personal and social contexts of their lives. This inquiry has brought me to an understanding that the study of literacy is not a means for describing what people read and write, but it is a means of seeing the ways in which they behave in the world. For that reason, I have given the reader as much information as possible to know the participants of this inquiry. The anecdotal sketches of life issues, of ways of knowing and being literate, are meant to provide a contextually rich understanding of Hassidic women as participants.

The participants in my inquiry demonstrate a range of literacies which are situated in broader social relations and their attitudes toward literacy often guide their actions. In defining new identities in the context of their education, these Hassidic women are continually negotiating and creating their personal meanings and transforming cultural practices and values.

Summary

Teach a woman letters? A terrible mistake: Like feeding extra venom to a horrifying snake. (Menander, c 342-291 BC)

The specific experience of Hassidic women and the ways in which their lives are structured by and around men, children, community, cultural and religious institutions, are conducive to seeing literacy as their own creation of personal meaning. I have chosen to sum up this conception of literacy, as I apply it, by adopting the three metaphors that Dorothy Mackeracher (1988) outlines in her work, *Adult Literacy Perspectives.*

Literacy As Power

Traditional divisions of power and labour have resulted in the creation of a widely-accepted worldview based on the experiences of men (Sherman & Beck, 1979). Being a receiver of knowledge is more congruent with the traditional roles of women than being a producer of knowledge construction. The knowledge women have traditionally received has been grounded in a male-defined worldview. "Women constitute an enormous, historically submerged group of people, deprived of the power to conceptualize, to name, and to categorize [their own] reality" (Sherman & Beck, 1979, p. 88). Women judge and are judged by criteria created by and for men. Throughout history, women have acquiesced to this version of reality through silence. It is not just that women have failed to "speak their minds" but that they have tended to use male-created meanings to define their reality before they speak (Belenky, Telephone communication). To view literacy as power is to view literacy skills as tools that women use that help them develop feelings of autonomy. In the case of Hassidic women, this translates into being able to work outside the home to support their husbands while they continue their religious Jewish learning. This idea can also be applied to the literacy

skills which empower them as women. For example, in many cases it is the women who are able to fill out government forms in French for their husbands who are unable to do so.

Literacy as a State of Grace

In considering literacy as a state of grace, literacy skills confer on individuals' special virtues through their knowledge about the "content and methods of arts, sciences and humanities" (Mackeracher, 1980, p. 380). This notion is especially true in the case of Hassidic women whose essential knowledge relevant to this state of grace is passed on from woman to woman, mother to daughter, in close-knit social networks or learned through role-modelling. Neither of these processes required written literacy.

As Hassidic women began to further their secular educations, with many attending post high school institutions or CEGEP², they maintain this state of grace within society by training in occupations in special education, social service and teaching. For the women I spoke with, attending CEGEP was not simply a matter of motivation. Whether they were able to attend or wished to attend was bound up with other considerations: social agencies required it; men in their community were

² The acronym CEGEP is translated as Collège d'Enseignment Général Et Professionnel. It is a mandatory junior college for Quebec students who plan to go on to university studies. It also offers three-year post secondary school programs to equip students with the necessary skills for technical or professional vocations.

either opposed to their attendance or supported it. Most Hassidic women who attend CEGEP do so in order to access a particular career.

Literacy as the Creation of Meaning

In this chapter, I have argued that meanings are unique, personal, shared, and negotiated processes of making sense of situations and of the world and illustrate that meanings are closely related to the places and the values they serve in the social and cultural environment. I have outlined views of understanding literacy events by capturing participants' perspectives of those events. The nature of discourse is examined through which new understandings are negotiated among participants in particular concepts (Gee, 1992; 1996). I discuss the recent emergence of the concept of multiple literacies whereby literacy is viewed as sets of social practices (Street, 1984; 1995).

The ethnographic studies to which I refer suggest that researchers and educators are connecting notions of literacy to how people behave, understand and read their worlds in particular contexts. Focusing on my own inquiry, I relate the function of literacy as the creation of meaning to Hassidic women who find themselves in a culture that has historically promoted and, in fact, praised women who are silent in the public realm of their lives.

In the following chapter, I situate the Hassidic women who participated in my inquiry within the relevant history and philosophy of the Hassidic movement. I explore the demographics of Hassidim in Quebec and specifically examine the Hassidic interpretation of the role of women in their community.

CHAPTER TWO: HASSIDIM PAST AND PRESENT

Background to the Study

The Hassidic world resembles a wedding. A tremendous amount of preparation goes into a wedding, and its entire purpose is that the groom should marry the bride by reciting, "You are consecrated to me." Thus, everything in the world has but one purpose - that a person should consecrate himself to cling to God. If a person always attempts to find the divine spark which is contained in everything in the world and thus attaches himself to God, in whom is rooted all the good in the world and he believes that in every single thing there is His inspiration and His animation, without which nothing in the world can exist for even a moment, he will not fear any creature in the world, and fear only Him, may He be blessed.... It is thus correct to say that Hasidism strived to change and to improve, according to its view and way, the social and religious life of the Jew, within the framework of the Torah as written and handed down, and to bring the Jews to its lofty goal, which, as mentioned, is the awaited redemption. (Wertheim, 1992, p. 89)

One central tenet of Hassidic religion and philosophy is expressed in the above quotation – the fervent belief that a good person is a godly person and believing in God means accepting that He controls everything, that His judgments are true, and that nothing happens outside of God's control or against God's wishes. Dalfin (1996) argues that it is only the Hassidic Jew who "has developed his belief to the point that it permeates every fiber of his being" (p. 33). He describes this difference as a faith that not only sees God but rather is like God. According to Dalfin (1996), this faith will not just impact one's actions but will influence one's mind and heart as well. Dalfin suggests that this faith is all-encompassing, penetrating ones inner core, a Jew who does not want to and is unable to separate himself from God.

Canadian Jewry is divided in its approach to religious practices, ranging from the pious to the secular, bearing the labels of Orthodoxy, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform and unaffiliated secular Jews. In a survey, conducted by Montreal demographer Charles Shahar for the Community Planning Department of the Federation of Jewish Community Services in 1997, about one fifth of the participants (21.9%) describe themselves as Orthodox, 29.2% as Conservative, 4.5% as Reform, 1.7% as Reconstructionist, 11.3% as Secular, and 16.4% as "Just Jewish". The term Orthodoxy encompasses many groups with overlapping beliefs, practices, customs and observances. According to the *Encyclopedic* Dictionary of Judaica (1974) this term is used to designate those Jews who accept the totality of historical Jewish religion as recorded in Written and Oral Laws and codified in Shulhan Arukh (Ganzfried, 1961) and its commentaries. The same source defines Conservative Judaism as the trend in Judaism developed in the United States in the twentieth century. While opposing extreme changes in traditional observances, it permits certain modifications in response to the changing life of the Jewish people. Reform Judaism (also known as Liberal or Progressive) represents the trend of Judaism advocating modification of Orthodoxy in

conformity with exigencies of contemporary life. Reconstructionism is an offshoot of the Conservative movement which attempts to interpret Judaism without abandoning its traditional values and usages. Although these definitions are fairly simplistic, they are intended to provide the reader with an understanding of the major differences between each.

Hassidic Jews are sometimes referred to as ultra-Orthodox, Torahobservant or "fervently" Orthodox. However, as one Hassidic woman stated "labels tend to divide people rather than connect them and this is clearly contrary to the principals of Hassidism." Because all these descriptions of Hassidic Jews imply that other Jews are not as observant or religious, I have chosen to not use them to locate Hassidim on a spectrum of religious custom or belief. I will refer to them as Hassidic or ultra-Orthodox or both and differentiate them, when appropriate, from those who are commonly referred to as modern Orthodox. Even, with this distinction however, it is to be noted that there is tremendous overlap and lines are often blurred.

Background of the Researcher

In this section, I provide readers with a brief description of my own Jewish background which I hope will be helpful in illustrating how I situate myself within the Montreal Jewish community. In 1926, my maternal grandparents came to Montreal from Poland with my mother who was a

small child. My father's parents were born in Montreal in the early years of the twentieth century. I identify myself as a Conservative Jew with strong leanings toward egalitarianism as far as women's religious involvement is concerned. In my home, I observe the laws of *kashrut* (keeping kosher). Although I do not follow the Orthodox laws concerning the Sabbath and its proscriptions, I have a strong commitment to certain symbolic ritual practices involved with celebrating Jewish holidays, such as the New Year, Chanukah and Passover.

My religious education was almost non-existent, as I did not attend a formal Jewish day school. However, all three of our children received a thorough full-time Jewish education from primary school through to their completion of high school. In 1990, I began teaching college level psychology courses at an all girls religious school in Outremont Quebec called *Bais Yaakov*. I refer to this school as ultra-Orthodox in order to differentiate it from the Hassidic groups to its right. However, the school administrators, parent body, and students themselves would probably define themselves as simply Orthodox Jews. As previously stated, there is an overlap between all branches of Jewish Orthodoxy and very often the distinctions are fuzzy. In Montreal, *Bais Yaakov* is an elementary school (kindergarten to grade 6), a high school (grade 7 to grade 11), and a Seminary for post-high school students (ages 17 to 19). Girls who enroll in

Seminary undertake both religious and secular studies. The secular program provides them with the opportunity to attend CEGEP (junior college) leading to specialized certificates. Bais Yaakov Seminary is a satellite campus of Marie Victorin CEGEP in Montreal. Until I began teaching at *Bais Yaakov*, I had never met or interacted with this population in any meaningful way. In fact, I had not ever spoken to a Hassidic Jew for any length of time until I went on a trip in 1990 to Poland to visit the concentration camps in Poland. During this trip, I had the opportunity to get to know Pesach and his wife Malky, both belonging to a sect called Lubavitch Hassidim. One result of this two week trip was it first sparked my interest in the Hassidic community. It was toward the end of our time together that I felt comfortable enough with them to ask them some questions about Hassidism and their lifestyle. I was initially curious to know about how they met, as I had heard that the Hassidic way of courtship was quite unique. Malky willingly shared with me these intimate details during that lengthy conversation on our plane trip back to Montreal from Europe. The following narrative represents the first conversation I had with a Hassidic woman.

FINDING A HUSBAND

It is a religious injunction of Hassidim to marry and have children. Hassidic couples generally marry young, somewhere between the ages of 18 and 20. The Hassidim recognize that in adolescents, sexual desires can only be deferred for so long. A *shadkhan*

[matchmaker] suggests a suitable spouse, and parents inform themselves of the religiousness of the family and of the character of the young man or woman in question. The following quote from Malky tells of the traits she was looking for in a groom and the sequence of courtship practices:

I wanted someone tall, dark, and reasonable looking. I wanted someone who was smart - that was the most important. He should have a good character. He should not be angry nor stingy. He should come from a fine family with *yikhes* [pedigree]. The parents should not be beggars in terms of status, money, learning, or *yikhes*. If at this point, the families agree, the couple will meet, sound each other out, and, if they are in accord, become engaged. All encounters take place in a public venue or at the woman's home. In rabbinical families, however. even greater care is taken to search for families of equal piety and *yikhes*, with the result that frequently the children of Rabbis marry the children of other Rabbis. At the time of engagement, the young woman will be offered a Marriage Preparation Workshop by an experienced kallah [bride] teacher. These sessions cover topics such as love, sex, respect and issues of privacy. The leader of this seminar will also discuss the different expectations that men and women bring to a relationship and the religious laws concerning the creation of a Jewish home. This instruction focuses on laws of family purity. It comprises fifteen hours of classes. I came to this point in my life knowing very little about the sexual dimension of a relationship. The thrill of the unknown attraction and the tension created by the absence of intimacy before my marriage all heightened the passion and love of our first encounter alone. (Apr. 3, 1989)

In the rest of this chapter, I explore the Hassidic history and philosophy from its origins to the present day and situate this inquiry in Quebec. I examine the social and economic structure that has been instrumental to the Hassidic community's survival and growth. In particular, I focus on a select group of Hassidic women as I explain their observances, obligations and gender role differences. I conclude with a discussion of the education of the Hassidic community, past and present, secular and religious, male and female, as I address the notions surrounding Hassidic literacy.

Relevant Social History of the Hassidic Movement and Its Philosophy

The term Hassidism is derived from the word *hesed*, generally translated into English as loving kindness, mercy, love, loyalty, even grace or charm (Mintz, 1992). Dalfin (1996) believes the Hassidim (sing. Hassid) are distinctive in the "intensity and emphasis in beliefs, varieties of Rabbinical allegiance and social structure and organization" (p. 15). With their unique customs and traditions, Hassidim are often viewed by the larger Jewish community as fanatical in their adherence to religious ideas and principles and in their zealous observance of Jewish law. The Hassidic community comprises a number of Hassidic groups, each devoted to its *rebbe* (leader). Each group may differ slightly in their practices, philosophy, social organization and techniques of insulation.

The first *rebbe* and founder of the Hassidic movement was Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name). Begun in Poland, in a region now part of the Ukraine, the movement arose in the 1760s and 1770s and subsequently spread to Lithuania, Romania, Hungary and Russia. The early success and growth of the movement can be attributed to the social, cultural, and economic conditions of Eastern European Jewry around the turn of the eighteenth century (Mindel, 1969; Rabinowicz, 1970).

Shaffir (1995) maintains that there existed a need for spiritual uplifting and guidance as a result of material impoverishment, decline in the intellectual level of the Jewish population, and sharp class divisions between scholars and ignorant masses. In 1736, the Baal Shem Tov, who is also referred to as Besht (an acronym of his name), is reported to have wandered through towns and villages becoming acquainted with the conditions of Jewish life, and soon was regarded as a miracle worker and a righteous man by the masses. His messages were that it was everyone's duty to serve God, that this duty was not exclusive to the study of the Torah, and that every aspect of one's daily life should be filled with a joyful affirmation of life and the hallowing of all passions and delight in the service of God (Newman, 1963). The Besht taught that prayer should be joyful, cathartic and uplifting and, as such, the Hassidic ecstasy could be transferred from the leader to onlookers and followers. The Besht stressed the concept of *devekuth* (clinging to God), which is essentially a service of the heart rather than the mind with an emotional commitment to the Divine will. Mindel (1969) believes that the Besht endeavored to instill

the quality of joy in service to God and awareness of the presence of the creator at all times. The Besht held that through communion with God, any Jew should have a perpetually happy frame of mind. The desire for communion with God was considered the object of worship and to be more important than knowing the meaning of the prayers. Take for example, this interpretative commentary from Rabinowicz:

"I have come into this world," maintained the Besht, "to show man how to live by three precepts: love of God, love of Israel and love of the Torah." There are no divisions between the sacred and the secular, God is everywhere. No place is free of Him," and there are no veils between Man and his Creator. His radiance might be glimpsed anywhere and everywhere. For those who have eyes to see, the world is a mirror in which is reflected the glory of God " Joy was the keynote of the Besht's philosophy. "Our Father in Heaven hates sadness and rejoices when His children are joyful. And when are His children joyful? When they carry out His commandments." This immediate, this worldly joy is the true reward, the greatest reward, for the performance of a good deed or the fulfillment of a commandment. Tears of joy are permitted and are even desirable. But a man should subdue sadness and raise himself to the higher realms of joy. Worshipping with spontaneity was more important than worshipping at prescribed times. (Rabinowicz, 1970: p. 34)

Dubnow (1975) writes that after the death of the Besht in 1760, the

dissemination of Hassidism began systematically through his successor

Rabbi Dov Bear and his trained staff of apostles. Hassidic houses of

worship and dynasties appeared in numerous communities in Poland and

Lithuania. Efforts to implant the Hassidic philosophy among the Jewish

masses, however did not always meet with success. The opponents of the
Hassidim, the *mitnaggdim*, viewed the Hassidic philosophy as a dangerous element in Jewish life and the Hassidim became the objects of persecution, being referred to as the "godless sect" (Dubnow, 1975). The Hassidim, however, remained firm, forming themselves into groups, each with a *rebbe* (leader).

From about 1815, the Hassidim had formed an alliance with their former enemies, the *mitnaggdim*, against the *maskilim* (the adherents of the Jewish Enlightment movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Toward the end of the century, however, a further threat to the Hassidim was posed by the secular Jewish socialist and Zionist movements, which found support among the Jewish masses (Dalfin, 1996). Certain Hassidic dynasties declined in some areas, but Hassidim remained by far the largest Jewish social movement in Eastern Europe. Mass emigration of East European Jews to Western Europe and the United States began in the 1870s. Historian Bekove-Shalin (1995) reports that Hassidic leaders believed that the comparatively open and secular societies of the West held great danger to their way of life. Thus, they attempted to dissuade their followers from joining the migrations.

After World War I, the largest concentration of Hassidim was found in the newly independent state of Poland. By 1939, Poland had over three and one half million Jews. Mintz (1992) reports that at this time, Eastern

Europe was threatened by revolutionary social change. The major division within the Polish Jewish communities was between the religious Jews, largely Hassidic, and the secular Zionist and Jewish socialist movements, which had their own political parties, educational systems, communal organizations, youth movements, and press. The Hassidim responded to the new opportunities for political expression in the Polish state and to the threat of Jewish secular movements by organizing political parties and by participating in the municipal and parliamentary elections.

Only a fraction of the Hassidim survived the Holocaust. They came to North America as shattered refugees, many directly from Displaced Person's camps, and they began to settle in New York, primarily in the neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Crown Heights and Borough Park. The shared mission of these Jews was to reconstruct the religious world that had existed in pre-war Europe. To ensure continuity, to preserve the past in the present, they felt the need to remain insular.

The Hassidim faced formidable obstacles to establish themselves in their new worlds. Their options for jobs were limited by their religious obligations to refrain from work on Saturday and Jewish holidays. Potential employers hesitated to hire workers who looked so obviously different. They were also limited in the area in which they could live, as they had to be in an environment where they could practice the Orthodox

way of life (e.g., within walking distance of the synagogue because operating a motor vehicle during Sabbath is prohibited).

Hassidim in Quebec

The multicultural character of Canada, where minority, ethnic and religious groups are an accepted aspect of the social and economic structure fostered the Hassidim's establishment of roots and flourishing. This phenomenon is particularly true in the province of Quebec. In fact, Quebec has the second largest Hassidic community in North America after New York. There are an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 Hassidim residing in this province, representing one stream within its diverse Jewish community of about 100,000.

As previously discussed, Hassidim are divided into several subgroups, sects or "courts". Those who live in Montreal's Outremont community are mainly members of the courts of Belz, Satmar and Visnitz, which originated in Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic, while those who live in Boisbriand, Quebec are members of the Tosh court. A recent publication by Montreal author Mackay Smith (1997), includes a mixture of personal observations, and historical/cultural background material about the Jews of Montreal and their Judaism. Table 1 is a breakdown by Smith of the number of families in each sect or court.

 Table 1

 Orthodox Hassidim in Greater Montreal (Smith, 1997)

Orthodox Hassidim in Greater Montreal	
Court Name	# of Families
Lubavich	350
Satmar	
Belz	160
Skver	60
Vishnitz	60
Muncacz	25
Pupa	20
Klausenberg	15
Santzer	10
Tasch (Boisbriand)	160
Total	

Noteworthy is that Smith's breakdown of sects (p. 94) reflects the number of families in each sect. Because Hassidim traditionally have many children, sixty families, for example, may in fact represent 450 people. A further observation from my own interviews is that some Hassidim do not characterize themselves as belonging to any one particular sect but call themselves "international". An example of this category would be the Mesifta group located in Outremont. A further addition that I would make to Mackay Smith's breakdown of Hassidim in

Montreal is the inclusion of the Bobov sect which comprises 15-20 families.

Hassidim in Outremont

Most of the Hassidim in Quebec today live in the community of Outremont, Montreal, an urban municipality. In fact, a federally funded study, conducted by demographer Charles Shahar reveals that this community is in the midst of a population explosion that will double its size in 15 years. Shahar concludes these communities will likely grow as a proportion of the Montreal Jewish community and of the Montreal population in general. They will grow both because of natural increase and significant immigration of young men from the United States, marrying and settling in Montreal" (p. 43). In fact, a recent documentary film aired on television on Dec. 10, 2001, entitled Keepers of the Faith, reported that the Hassidic Jews in Outremont have one of the highest growth rates of any community in Canada. Nearly a guarter of the Montreal Hassidic community today is American-born and more than half of the Hassidim in Outremont are under the age of 15. Fifty percent of all Hassidic households in Outremont have five or more people, and almost ten percent have at least ten individuals. Thirty percent of households have at least five children living at home.

These large families have contributed to the high proportion of households living below the low-income cutoff set by Statistics Canada, commonly known as the poverty line. Low income status is defined by a combination of (greater) household size and (lower) household income. According to Statistics Canada and the 1995 census tabulations, that line ranges from \$16,318 for a single person to \$41,290 for a household of seven or more. Shahar reports that 41.4% of adult participants to his survey in Outremont, live in low-income households. He concludes that "it is certainly likely that the proportion of Jews in our study living below the poverty line is far higher than the 20% rate found for the total Jewish population as a whole or the 22% found for the general Montreal population. In other words, there are serious problems of poverty in the communities studied in this survey" (p. 3).

Shahar attributes this growing problem of poverty to low-paying jobs that Hassidim fill, and, in the case of some men, to little, if any, participation in the labour force. He adds: "Other contributing factors are large family size and the special financial burdens involved in keeping kosher, marrying off children, and in some cases supporting male children who pursue additional Talmudic [Oral law] studies" (p. 18).

However, material wealth is not valued by this community as much as spiritual wealth. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson (1994) a noted

Hassidic *rebbe* put it succintly: "Jewish wealth is not houses and gold. The everlasting Jewish wealth is: being Jews who keep Torah and *mitzvos*, [commandments] and bringing into the world children and grandchildren who keep Torah and *mitzvos*" (p. 37). While this community has historically relied on internal charitable support for their needy, their problems, according to Shahar, may now be too great for their own resources to handle. A member of the Coalition of Outremont Hassidic Organizations maintains that today many community members are ready to work more closely with governments, which was anathema to an older generation of Holocaust survivors who regarded governments with suspicion.

In this community, often it is the women who work outside the home, thus enabling husbands and sons to study. This pursuit, as will be discussed, while not always promoted by all members of the community, is commonly accepted. Rabbi Schneerson in addressing the topic of equal rights for women declared in the following 1984 address to the Lubavitch Hassidic community in New York: "As a means of furthering Torah study, for example, there is a long Jewish tradition of women working to allow their husbands to devote themselves totally to studying Torah" (Schneerson, 1984).

The Tosher Hassidim of Boisbriand, Quebec

Fleeing Hungary after the Holocaust, the Tosh sect, a distinct group of Hassidim, settled in Montreal living in close proximity to other Hassidic groups. But in 1962, Rabbi Ferencz Meshullam Lowy, the Tosher Grand *rebbe*, led his flock away from the city in the belief that a rural setting would be more conducive to a life of Torah. The group called their new home Kiryas Tasch: kiryas is Hebrew for village, while Tasch recalls der heim, the hometown of the rebbe, their most revered teacher and spiritual leader. This word is also spelled Tash or Tasch. The present day community spells it 'Tosh' so I have chosen to preserve their spelling. According to sociologist William Shaffir (1987), the decision to move away from Montreal was apparently taken to escape the deteriorating moral climate of the city. The Hassidim themselves justify their seclusion by pointing to the adverse conditions in large urban centres. They cite crime and drug and alcohol abuse and then invite a comparison with the Hassidic style in their own enclave. One of the community's administrators explained: "What we have is precious to us. Our teachings tell us that when you have something precious, you build a fence around it the better to protect it" (Kezwer, 1996, p. 72). This move `was enabled by a loan of half a million dollars from the Federal Government's Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. A farmer's field of some 130 acres was acquired,

and the supply of electricity was arranged through Hydro Quebec, while provisions for running water and sewer were coordinated through the Boisbriand municipality. The community promptly built a synagogue with accommodation for 1,000 persons, a ritual bath (*mikveh*), classroom space for boys and girls, offices, 18 bungalows for the *rebbe* and senior staff members, dormitories, a kitchen and a cafeteria.

The Tosher community today lies in the shadow of the General Motors plant on the Laurentian Autoroute about thirty minutes north of Montreal. Just past the mailboxes bearing French names like Dion and Desjardins, one finds bearded men in long black coats and broadbrimmed hats, women in high-necked dresses and headscarves. The community of 160 families, with an average of nine children in each, lives sheltered from the influence of the secular world. Cloistered in their *shtetl* (village), they dedicate themselves to *Hashem* (God), and maintain a simple, pious lifestyle that has been virtually untouched for generations. I include this history and description of Tosh as some women of this community comprised the pilot study for this inquiry.

On my initial trip out to Boisbriand to meet with members of this community, at first glance, Tosh seemed much like any Canadian suburb built in the 1960s; the two main streets are lined with modest brick duplexes and bungalows. At the end of the main road stand two imposing

structures, a *cheder* or boys' elementary school, and the *rebbe*'s sprawling complex of religious institutions – study halls, libraries, chapels, a ritual bath, the community's main synagogue and yeshiva (men's school for advanced talmudic and rabbinic studies) students' dormitories. There are few cars here; during my stay, I noted some of the youths eyeing my red convertible, an unimaginable luxury for them. And while the *cheder* includes a small playground, there are no soccer fields, baseball diamonds or swimming pools. For Hassidim, time is a means to learn Torah and perform charitable acts; every minute is precious, and to use time frivolously with sports or other diversions is derided as *bittul torah* – the wasting of Torah time. It is also immediately apparent that here in Tosh the emphasis on the spiritual has led to a benign neglect of the physical. Many parts of the settlement look run-down and poorly maintained, due in part to the modest means of the villagers but also to their lack of interest in the mundane aspects of life unsanctified by the Torah.

Some Hassidic members believe that the Hebrew letters that make up the word *rebbe* are an acronym for *Rosh Bnei Yisroel*, the head of the people of Israel. According to this notion, just as the head, the seat of the brain and the faculties of sight, smell, hearing, and speech, actually controls the body, so too the *rebbe* leads and controls the Jewish people

who are compared to the body. Being the head, he cannot be defined as someone who excels only in Torah knowledge or in the practice of *mitzvos* (commandment). Nor is he viewed merely a miracle maker or charismatic figure. A *rebbe*, according to his followers, is someone who addresses the needs of people's souls. Questions involving one's spiritual direction are the main reason for going to a *rebbe*. Since a *rebbe*'s purpose is to give spiritual direction, he need not necessarily function as a rav (Rabbi), in the sense of giving laws and rulings. This difference is illustrated by the following story about the Kotzker *rebbe*: A *Hassid* once came to have a private audience with his rebbe. The *rebbe* asked him why he came. He responded that he came for guidance on how to find God. The *rebbe* said, "To find God in the Torah, that is, the *halachah*, (law) one goes to a rav. The reason one comes to a *rebbe* is to find oneself!"

The Hassidim revere their *rebbe*. The Tosh *rebbe's* followers, in particular teenagers and men in their early 20s, swarm around him wherever he walks. Now close to eighty, the *rebbe* keeps a grinding schedule and his followers have adjusted their clocks and lives accordingly. He routinely rises at 6 AM to go to the *mikveh* (ritual bath) and recite from the Book of Psalms. He then spends several hours engaged in Talmud study. "People are ready to change their schedule at any second because the *rebbe* said to, even if it's hard for them," one devotee explained to me (Aug. 14, 1997). Boisbriand is the world headquarters of the Tosher Hassidim, and their *rebbe's* presence lures Jews from around the globe. Few important decisions from choosing a marriage partner or having a gall-bladder operation to investing in business are made without consulting the *rebbe*.

Their isolation in Boisbriand requires communication with the francophone community that surrounds them, as Boisbriand is a solidly francophone city of 23,000. The grand *rebbe* is frequently solicited for support in the hope he will sway the votes of followers. Shortly after its first provincial election victory in 1976, the Parti Québécois (PQ) introduced Bill 101 (Charter of the French Language). One of the more controversial aspects of the Bill was its stipulation that all commercial and road signs in Quebec be written in French only. In the anxious days after the PQ's 1976 election victory, these Jews turned to the *rebbe* to ask whether they should leave Quebec. His advice: "Stay put". To practice what he preached, the community secured a federal loan and built 78 homes. In gratitude, they named a street after André Ouellet, the federal Liberal urban affairs minister at the time.

To the PQ, the Toshers have represented a badly needed ally in the overwhelmingly federalist Jewish community. In 1979, Premier René

Lévesque was even ready to let the Toshers do something he might have envied: become independent. In an article that appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* on September 16, 1979, Richard Cleroux reported that the Quebec government is "helping an ultra-conservative religious group about 400 Hassidic Jew of the Toshaver sect form their own suburban enclave just north of Montreal". He goes on to write:

It will be the first time that Hassidic Jews have been able to form their own municipality in Canada, although there are two in the United States and some in Israel. This will enable them to pass their own laws and regulations in keeping with their traditional customs and scripture, and to raise their children in an environment that protects them from what they consider the evils of the outside world. For the Parti Quebecois, it will mean a chance to show the rest of Canada how superbly it treats minorities. (*Montreal Gazette*, Sept. 16, 1979, p. 3)

The Tosher Hassidim take a purely pragmatic approach to politics,

supporting whoever is in power. When it comes to politics, the Toshers

have traditionally shown themselves adept at playing both sides of the

linguistic and political debate. The struggles between Quebec and

Canada are largely irrelevant to them. What matters is the survival of their

Yiddish-speaking and religious world.

A set of bylaws, established by the *rebbe*, governs the behaviour of all the resident's; and each adult, whether male or female, must agree to abide by these bylaws before taking up residence in the settlement. The following is an excerpt of these bylaws prepared by the Tosher in 1979 for Quebec's Provincial Court in connection with their bid for autonomy.

All male members of the community must attend religious services, three times per day, at the synagogue.

- No radio, television, record, or cassette is allowed in the buildings of the community.
- All women residing in the community must dress in accordance with the Orthodox laws of modesty, as follows:
 - All dresses must be at least four inches below the knees; no trousers or panty hose may be worn by young girls 3 years of age or older.
 - [Married women's] hair must be completely covered 24 hours a day, by a kerchief or by a wig, which is no longer than the nape of the neck.
- It is forbidden for men and women to talk together in the street.
- Men and women must be separated by a wall, at least 7 feet high, when attending any gathering of a social or religious nature.
- No car may be driven by a woman or by an unmarried man.
- Members must study the Bible and other religious texts for at least two hours daily. (Shaffir, 1987, p. 33)

Boundary Maintenance Behaviour

The Tosher community is unique in Quebec because of its rigorous effort at boundary maintenance as a result of their geographic isolation from the city of Montreal. Almost all aspects of Tosh existence conspire to sustain and strengthen the community, both by promoting it from within and protecting it from without. William Shaffir (1987) conceptualized boundary maintenance behaviour that has enabled the communities of Tosh and that of the Hassidim in Outremont to flourish. Shaffir believes that both these communities have instituted three sets of "mechanisms" to ensure their continued growth: insulation, commitment and social control.

Insulation

The strategy most commonly used by the Hassidim both to cultivate and to maintain a distinctive identity is insulating themselves from outsiders. Their seemingly exotic customs are a protective fence around the community. As Mintz observes:

By distinguishing themselves from the gentiles and nonreligious Jews, the Hassidim believe that they can best preserve their identity, keep their children from becoming acculturated, and prevent possible infractions of the religious law.... This need to maintain their insularity is a recurrent theme in Hassidic tradition. (1968, p. 138)

One important means of insulation is the use of distinctive dress and language to symbolize identity, the styles of which have undergone little, if any change from one generation to the next. Hassidic men wear the traditional clothing of eighteenth-century Eastern European Jews, which was originally derived from the clothing of Polish nobles: long black topcoats and wide-brimmed black hats. From the age of three, boys have their heads shaven periodically except for sideburns, which grow into long dangling curls. Men also grow beards. Female dress in all Hassidic groups is not as distinctive as male dress, or as that among non-Hassidic Orthodox Jews. It is governed less by traditional styles than by rules of modesty: arms are covered at least to below the elbows, dresses and skirts cover most of the legs (pants are never worn), and dark stockings are worn even in summer. Most women have their hair cut at marriage, after which they wear a headscarf, a wig and/or a hat. All Hassidic groups use Hebrew as the language of prayer, and most use Yiddish as the language of everyday discourse. Some non-Hassidic Jews speak Yiddish, but unlike most immigrant groups, the Hassidim have maintained their language in that it is the first language of their children. Most Hassidic groups do not allow their members to own televisions and radios, attend theatres and cinemas, or read non-Hassidic newspapers, fiction, or scientific writings particularly with regard to religiously sensitive areas, such as evolution.

The Hassidim have achieved a considerable degree of institutional self-sufficiency, which reduces their dependence on outside agencies and

groups. Both the Tosh and Outremont communities contain agencies that specifically meet their vocational, health and social needs. They are staffed by employees who are either from the community themselves or trained to be sensitive to the concerns of the Hassidim they service. For example, there is an employment centre with a Business Outreach and Development service that "assists members of the community to make career choices and find suitable employment". As well, it provides information to "enable entrepreneurs with both new and existing businesses to access services to help them compete and thrive in the global economy." Appendix A contains a brochure of the Coalition of Outremont Hassidim outlining this service.

Although most Hassidim produce and prepare their own articles of consumption which have important religious meanings, they are far less self-sufficient and insulationist in their patterns of consumption than rural Christian introversionist sects. In contrast to the Amish, for example, the Hassidim do not reject modern technology, and in contrast to the communitarian Hutterites, the Hassidim feel a need to achieve individual economic success. In addition to their economic involvement in the wider society, and again in contrast to the Christian introversionist sects, the Hassidim have taken advantage of social security benefits, external welfare provision, and other governmental programs. The Hassidic

community welfare and charity programs are of great importance, and the collection and distribution of money is a regular activity.

Commitment

The mechanism of commitment is dependent on conformity to a strict religious Orthodoxy and to the particular *rebbe*. The agencies of socialization, the family, peer groups, and formal educational institutions, emphasize the same values and reinforce each other. The Hassidic schools both insulate the young from the non-Hassidic world and help to integrate the community by socializing each generation to the distinctive values, norms, and patterns of behaviours.

Social Control

Important contexts of social control as a third mechanism in boundary maintenance in the Hassidic community are the synagogue and the *mikveh*, a place for ritual bathing associated with a return to a pure state. In these places those who deviate from the social norms may be harshly treated. Through a system of rewards and sanctions, one who persistently transgresses is likely to experience the rejection of his family and community. For example, one participant reported that her fourteenyear-old son was caught smoking a cigarette one evening. In less than three hours, this news was widely circulated in the immediate area of his residence by women who were at the *mikveh*. It was not long after, that his mother found out about her son's transgression. This means of social control is a powerful constraint in an inclusive world where the individual is ill-prepared for living in the wider society. Social control is also conducted through material channels. The community assumes responsibility for its poor and sick, and the system of charity applies pressures on both the givers and the recipients. The charity organizations distribute goods and services to needy members, but only if they conform to Hassidic norms. For example, in the Outremont community an organization called *Ahavas Chesed* is a social service agency mandated to provide services and funding for the poor and infirm members of the Hassidic community such as delivery of kosher meals to the elderly. This boundary ensures a close relationship between social control and social status, since status is dependent on the level and intensity of observance and scholarship.

Women in Hassidim – The Woman of Valour

What treasure [equals] a woman of courage? Her value exceeds even rubies. All the people place their trust in her. (Eishet Hayil, Proverbs 31: 10-31)

According to Gottlieb (1995), the Woman of Valour, or Eishet Hayil, is a woman who is courageous of heart, walks with her head high, knows the fruits of hard labour, is not afraid to tread new ground and is loved and trusted by all who know her because of her generosity of spirit.

S.A. Horodecky (1923) singles out the position of women in Hassidim as an area of sufficient novelty and interest to merit particular discussion. Horodecky views the equality between men and women within a framework wherein intellectuality was by nature a male quality, while the female temperament was innately emotional. As a result, he portrays "rabbinism" as innately, and so also effectively, the exclusive domain of men, while conceiving of mystical-messianism, and ultimately Hassidism, as inherently, and so historically, more accessible to women. In one form or another, acknowledged or unacknowledged, Horodecky's findings as well as his analysis lie behind virtually every subsequent treatment of the subject in the popular, literary and semi-scholarly writings about the Hassidim.

The Hassidic interpretation of women's gender roles rests on an 'essentialist' view of women. Abramov (1994) expresses this view in the following:

This idea is expressed in the Hebrew words *panim* and *p'nim*. *Panim* [face] and *p'nim* [interior] have the exact same letters in the same order, because according to the Torah *panim* is a reflection of the *p'nim*. Even if fashions and hairstyles and names all become unisex, it is plainly evident that there is an inherent physiological difference between men and women, and this difference in the *panim*, the external, is also a distinction to be found in the *p'nim*, the internal. (Abramov, p. 176)

In the equality versus difference debates by feminists in the mid to late 1980s, the question emerged as to whether or not women and men were essentially the same or different, and if they were different how was one to deal with these differences specifically relating to power, authority and voice (Kimball, 1995; Tannen, 1999). The essentialist notion postulates that there exists enduring, distinctive and natural or biological gender differences between men and women (Goldberger, 1996). Femininity, it is believed, is attained to a great extent through the roles of marriage, childbearing and nurturing children. That is, a woman's greater involvement with childbearing is a metaphor for her essential nature. Davidman (1991) argues that women are taught that any deviation from this notion of femininity is a violation of their own inner natures and inconsistent with the demands of a domestically based feminine role.

The Three *Mitzvot* (Commandments)

The Torah contains 613 *mitzvot* (commandments). Women, are not obligated to observe all of these, although their exemption from certain obligations does not exclude them from performing them. However, there are three commandments or obligations that are considered to be "specifically enjoined upon the Jewish woman by Divine command" (Ghatan, 1986, p. 72).

The first obligation is the taking of *challah* (a portion of dough). The Bible commands that the first part of dough used in baking be set aside and consecrated to the priests in the Holy Temple. After the destruction of

the Temple, it is symbolic to offer this part by breaking off a small piece of dough and throwing it into a fire, or burning it in the oven. Although men may also obey this commandment, because women are traditionally the homemakers, this *mitzvah* was specifically given to them. The following explains one reason behind this commandment:

Judaism wants us to recognize that material success is a divine gift and that pursuit of materialism should not become an end in itself. In domestic realms, women demonstrate that God's providing us with food is not simply so that we can fill our stomachs. His sustenance is a blessing we are supposed to use to serve Him. Part of this service includes sharing our food and material blessing with others, especially those who teach Torah and provide the world with spiritual sustenance. A woman who bakes bread does an act in her home that parallels the priests' baking and setting out the showbread in the holy Temple every Friday. Taking *challah* is also a way of showing the members of our household that all material blessing comes from God. By separating *challah*, women demonstrate that the ultimate purpose of material blessing is to use it to serve God. (Ghatan, 1986 p.75)

The second obligation is the kindling of the Sabbath candles. Both men

and women are obligated to light the Sabbath candles. However, in view

of the fact that the woman is the one who is more commonly found at

home attending to household affairs, she will likely perform this duty. Even

if the husband desires to light the candles himself, his wife takes

precedence, and he fulfills his obligation through her. The significance of

lighting the candles is made evident in the following quote:

By lighting candles prior to the Sabbath, which technically does not begin until sunset, women illuminate and spiritually enrich their homes. They demonstrate that every moment of time is significant. Each moment has its own unique potentials, and it is up to every Jew to take advantage of these opportunities and elevate them. There is a difference between the holy and the secular, between light and darkness, between the Sabbath and the six days of Creation. Women demonstrate that it is within human capability to take what is neutral or secular and invest it with so much sanctity that one moment of time can be qualitatively different from the next. When women elevate time by connecting themselves to God, their actions open up storehouses of spiritual blessing that overflow into their homes and into the souls of their families. (Ghatan, 1986, p. 41)

The third *mitzvah* pertains to the Jewish laws of family purity – the laws of *niddah* or marital separation. Jewish law forbids all sexual contact between husband and wife during the wife's menstrual period and for seven days thereafter. Before resumption of intercourse, the wife must immerse herself in the *mikveh*, a special type of ritual bath.

This is a pool of water that is connected to a natural water source.

The waters of the *mikveh* are called *mayim chayim*, or living waters.

Immersing in the *mikveh* is an ancient Jewish practice for removing

spiritual impurity and the water must completely envelop the Jew who

enters it. Not even the hair on a person's head may float above the

surface. It is and has been used by both men and women for various

ritualistic reasons associated with a return to a pure state. As an Orthodox

Rabbi explains in *Moment* magazine (April 2000):

It is just this feature – the idea of envelopment, of engulfment – that makes the *mikveh* so powerful and meaningful to me. Just as we wrap prayer shawls around ourselves before we pray, so the waters of a *mikveh* wrap themselves around and about us as we descend the pool's steps and enter a liquid world.

The *mikveh* is ultimately about renewal and rebirth. One Hassidic master compares the *mikveh* to the womb: The inner mind set you should have for immersion in the *mikveh* when you double yourself over like a fetus within its mother, and you are born as a new creation – giving up your soul to God.

To be naked and enveloped in the water mirrors the condition of a fetus in the womb. Upon coming forth from its mother, the fetusnow an infant emerges into a new life. Its prior state is over and done with, In the spiritual context, to enter the waters of a *mikveh* is to re-enter the waters of the divine womb. As an act of repentance and purification, a person must give back if only for an instant his or her very being, before a reunion with God occurs. It is this self-sacrifice that leads, paradoxically, to inner redemption. Rarely do I feel God's presence as palpably as within the marble walls of a *mikveh*. (Goldstein, p. 35)

The laws of family purity are, according to Brayer (1986) designed for the following reasons: (1) they serve to remind the married couple that the Divine Presence permeates all areas of their lives; (2) they function to strengthen the Jewish family structure; (3) they serve to periodically separate couples thus making each spouse more dear and causing them to look forward to getting together with greater enthusiasm and anticipation; (4) these laws remind the couple not to treat each other as sexual objects or simply as a means of gratification; (5) they make it possible for the couple to relate on a more human and non-sexual level; (6) they are viewed as commandments that purify and ennoble the outlook of man and woman toward each other and sanctify the relationship.

Other traditional uses of the *mikveh* are for brides just before a wedding and for converts at the point of becoming Jews. Hassidic men often visit their own mikvaot (plural for mikveh) before Shabbat and before daily morning prayers. There are special *mikvaot* for the purification of dishes. However, today the *mikveh* is being reinvented and reclaimed for a variety of old and new purposes by women across the spectrum of Jewish observance. It is being reinvented physically, so that new *mikvaot* feature marble tile and an emphasis on privacy and hygiene, countering the stereotype of decrepit facilities known for cold water, dirty baths, and embarrassing body inspections. It is being reinvented semantically, so that it is now described as a special place where women's bodily cycles are celebrated, not as a place where impure women are cleaned. In addition, it is being reinvented conceptually, so that some women visit the *mikveh* to celebrate the birth of a child, to grieve a miscarriage, or to heal after recovering from a disease.

All three of these commandments are related to the sphere of home and family and are considered the woman's special privilege. Each is regarded as household obligations and a sanctification of the spiritual way of living, at home for herself, and for her family. Greenberg (1996) explains that these three positive commandments that are traditionally performed by women qualitatively make up for the different number of

positive commandments that are not incumbent upon them. For example, certain *mitzvot* cannot be performed by women simply because of physical inapplicability - for example, circumcision and not cutting off the *peyote* (side curls) of the beard. Since women are supposed to actualize themselves by developing in internal ways, women do not have to be legislated away from the external distractions that men have in order to focus on their relationships with God.

There is a presumption that women are more innately focused on their internal states than are men and that women are more aware of the needs of others. This is because the Torah assumes that women will use their *binah* (understanding) to appropriately give of themselves to others, rather than being distracted by the external world. Thus, their realm of self-actualization allows them to observe somewhat fewer rituals. As an example, when a woman with a family awakens every morning, she must immediately make judgments about what each person needs. If she has young children, the first order of the day may be for her to feed the baby, make breakfast for the other children, and send them off to school. If she were required to say the morning prayers by an early hour, and sequester herself away from the distractions of her children, it would be counterproductive to raising a family. Her first priority is to imitate God by helping take care of her children. Once they are taken care of, if she can

reasonably make time for it, she can then focus her attention on directly relating to God. Were she required to observe time-bound *mitzvot*, they would often interfere with her ability to tend to the family's needs, which are paramount (Dalfin, 1996).

El-or (1994) and others have described the Hassidic and ultra-Orthodox society as extremely goal oriented. Strict observance to these *mitzvot* is seen in the emphasis that is placed on realizing the goal or intent of Jewish law. Therefore, even in cases where a woman can claim exemption from the law for valid reasons, a maximalistic or goal-oriented approach ensures that exemptions are applied only when necessary.

Hassidim see gender categorization as explicitly significant throughout the course of life. Compared to the broader Jewish community, where unceasing attempts are made to gain a new understanding of the differences between men and women and to reshape relations between them accordingly, this group seems to be an island of conservatism and stability within the larger secular community (El-or, 1994).

In Shapiro's (1993) view, the declared ideology of Hassidic Jews speaks not of inequality between men and women, but instead of "differentiation". Under the force of this ideology, all things, including power roles, authority structures, control of resources, dress codes, and education are assigned. Hassidic women seem to accept this ideology a

priori. Shapiro argues that according to the Hassidic view, a woman's status at home and in society, corresponds to her "superior intuitive capacity" (Shapiro, 1993, p.72), and is not the object of discrimination, but one of definition and responsibility. Although men, according to Shapiro, control the public realm of Orthodox Judaism, women are not prohibited from participating in religious ritual. In fact, her domestic chores are viewed as expressions of religious devotion, so that the life of an Orthodox woman is filled with worship and ceremony. Because the nature of this role is domestic and takes place mainly in the home, the ritual life of women is private. Thus, many times this rich, hidden, ritual life is overlooked. Yet, the hidden nature of the women's spiritual world makes it no less meaningful for them than the public nature of their husbands' world.

Rabbi Falk (1998), a native of Gateshead, England, has written a book entitled *Modesty: An Adornment for Life*, that is considered by Hassidic women to be the ultimate authority and explanation of the rules of *tznius* or modesty. Indeed, according to Rabbi Falk (1998), author of *Modesty*, the woman's role sets the tone for the religious life of her family. It is the woman who must encourage her husband to learn Torah. "The woman who has her priorities right understands that Torah stands above all" (p.564). She is therefore prepared to sacrifice the time she would have

in the company of her husband and children, so that they devote

themselves fully to the learning of Torah. She is instructed not to disturb

her husband while he is learning, treating the time he spends at this

activity as the most sacred and important hours in his day. Falk goes on to

say that some women take on full or part-time jobs in order to enable their

husbands to give up some of their time earning money, so that they can

devote themselves instead to learning on a more intensive basis.

Some women choose prospective spouses according to how much commitment the men will make to learning more about Judaism on an ongoing basis. Other women take on certain domestic or practical responsibilities in order to free their husbands to learn more than they might otherwise be able. (p. 564)

Rabbi Falk suggests the woman herself will ultimately benefit personally

from her husband's Torah:

Just as the moon is illuminated by the great light that is emitted from the glow of the sun, so too, the light of Torah learnt by her husband reflects onto his wife, giving her a closeness to the *emes* [truth] which she would otherwise not be able to obtain. When the wife takes the right position corresponding to her husband, by both respecting him and encouraging him, she has a great share in the Torah he learns and in everything else he achieves. (p.565)

For Hassidic women, upholding Torah norms and values does not

necessarily imply that the role of the wife or mother is subordinate, or that

these norms are insensitive to or disrespectful of women. Instead, it is the

Hassidic view that if the spiritual role of women is clearly elucidated,

genuine satisfaction and contentment among women who assume it will prevail.

Modesty

The centrality of the Jewish concept of modesty in the lives of the

Hassidic women is a theme that recurred throughout their dialogue with

me. It is considered to be a prerequisite for true religious observance.

Rebbetzin Fleisher, one of the participants in my inquiry explains the

concept of *tznius* or modesty this way:

We have only a certain amount of time and energy in our days. The more we develop our outer self, the less time and attention we have to develop our inner self. The more we are preoccupied with how we appear to the outside, with others' opinions of us, and with their approval, the less time and emotional energy we have left to focus on our inner selves. The more people's roles encourage them to view themselves as important because of how others react to them, the more these roles can detract from people's awe of and obedience to God. (Rebbetzin Fleisher, Dec. 17, 1998)

Because Hassidic women conduct their entire lives with the laws of modesty in mind, I felt that this particular topic merits further elaboration. In this very detailed and comprehensive guide, Falk discusses *halakhot* (laws) and attitudes concerning *tznius* (modesty) of dress and conduct. He describes what *tznius* is, the positive aspects of it both in appearance as well as in speech, choice of words, self-disclosure, and privacy matters. He elaborates on *tznius* as a "woman's ultimate distinction" as it relates to her purity, humility and righteousness. From this lengthy volume of rules and explanations, he explains the two meanings of tznius in the following

excerpt:

The word, which literally means "hidden", is used to describe two attributes that are seemingly totally different from one another. On the one hand it is used for refinement of dress or conduct, the opposite of which is inadequate dress or immoral conduct. On the other hand it is used for the trait of unpretentiousness and humility the opposite of which is haughtiness and pride. The same occurs in the English language where the word "modesty" is used by people for both these traits which appear to be unconnected and two very different attributes. Although in both cases something is being "hidden" - in the former case the physical body and in the latter case the qualities and deeds of the person, which are hidden and withheld from the public eye - there is nevertheless apparently no true association between these two attributes. This, however, cannot be the case as they share one and the same name. (p. 43)

Hassidic women view the concept of *tznius* as a virtue so vital that

the effort in seeking to achieve this goal is a counterpart to the day-and-

night Torah study and toil of a man. Falk's explanation underscores the

notion that *tznius* involves much more than not wearing garments that are

forbidden because of pritzus (immoral conduct). Modesty is considered "a

main artery, giving life to a heart that is to be filled with love and respect

for Torah and *mitzvos*" (commandments) (Falk, 1998, p.43).

Rabbi Falk explains the laws of modesty by giving their underlying reasons so that the reader "gains an appreciation of the profound wisdom and truth that lie behind each and every *halacha* [law]" (p. 29). He has

written this guide for the "fully observant woman or girl" but states in its

preface that it is intended for men as well:

If both husband and wife and both father and mother are aware of these *halachos* [laws] and their guidelines, far less oversight and misunderstanding will occur. Moreover, part of the blame for the problem that has developed nowadays lies at the doorstep of the men. It is all too often they who want their wives to look overly attractive even in public, and it is often they who buy ostentatious jewellery for their wives to wear even outdoors. It is therefore most important that they too know the Torah viewpoint on matters pertaining to the dress and public conduct of Jewish women and girls. (Falk, 1998, p.103)

He recommends that his guidebook be used in schools, in

seminaries and read in homes and advises that it is studied slowly, no

more than two or three features at a time. In this way, he believes, the

reader will not feel indoctrinated and the material will not be found to be

too heavy.

When I asked Rebbetzin Fleisher to explain all the rules relating to

modesty in clothing, she referred me to Chapter Six of Rabbi Falk's

volume. I have summarized his principal rulings:

- All women and girls, married or unmarried must cover all parts of their main body (torso) plus parts of their arms and legs when in public or in the presence of individuals outside their immediate families (this he considers to be closest blood relatives),
- The neckline of the garment must cover everything that is below the actual neck,

 A woman must ensure that her knees remain fully covered at all times, even when she is sitting, stretching, ascending stairs and so on. The skirt length must therefore ensure that her knees will not be uncovered even for a moment, since she could be seen just then.

The requirement for Hassidic women to have their skirts fall to at least

four inches below their knees is explained by Rabbi Falk:

Skirts and dresses that just cover the knee when the person stands straight are incorrect to wear, for two reasons: Firstly, the Poskim [legal decisors] have ruled that the garment must extend at least 4 inches (10 cm.) below the lowest point of the knee, to guarantee proper cover in all positions, as was mentioned above. Secondly, such a garment does not display an appreciation for *tznius* as it seems to show that the wearer finds it difficult to do what is right. When a garment is "just Kosher", it is tantamount to saying, "Reluctantly, I'll agree to follow the most minimal line of the halacha [law]". Covering till just past the knees (without the additional four inches) has another great drawback. If women and older girls cover just this far, younger girls will certainly do the same. As all parents know, children seem to "shoot up", and are suddenly found to be one or two centimeters taller than they were when last measured. A growing girl, whose dress just covers her knees may "suddenly", as a result of growing rapidly, be wearing a garment that does not even reach her knees, before one is aware about it. (p.302)

Pants and trousers are absolutely forbidden, and wearing such

clothing is viewed as gross *pritzus* (immoral conduct). The reason given

by Rabbi Falk is the following:

Not only do they display the general outline of the upper sections of the legs, but they exhibit and emphasize the full shape of each of those limbs - displaying the division of the upper sections of the legs. They are therefore one of the worst pieces of female clothing in existence.

The *Poskim* [legal decisors] maintain that a garment which is intrinsically not suited to a female either due to *pritzus* [immoral conduct] or some other reason is subject to this *issur* [prohibition],

even if the world at large has deteriorated and the garment is widely worn by women (p. 309).

Two-full pages are devoted to the problem of skirts that develop an electrostatic charge, the reasons that this problem might occur and the possible remedies for the problem of static electricity in clothing. Skirts made of chiffon, crepe, or stretch fabrics must not be worn, as they are see through and close fitting so as to display the shape of the body in an inappropriate manner. Falk adds:

These fabrics are extremely soft. Due to this, when the wearer walks outdoors and the wind blows on her, forcing the dress against the body, the dress clings to the body and reveals its shape in an *untznius'dik* [immodest] manner. Accordingly, when going outdoors with such a dress one should wear a coat over it (p. 316).

He views wrap-around skirts as "a shameful sign of the times" as they may open to "reveal what is beneath them" (p. 316).

For the same reasons, Falk warns that women should not wear a skirt with a slit-like opening. The lower sections of the legs must be fully covered with hosiery which "masks the legs and covers them well" (p. 316). He advises women to avoid immodest shoe styles. In this category, he includes shoes that are bright coloured, or have high heels; "excessive gold on shoes is pretentious" (p. 317).

A number of rulings are included relating to housecoats (dresses

worn at home) in terms of the sleeves, neckline and closure. He specifies

the type of housecoat he recommends:

Since many women prefer to wear housecoats in hot weather as they are light and comfortable, it would be advisable to arrange with the manufacturers that they make housecoats to specifications which would render them suitable for both indoor and outdoor wear (p. 328).

In a subsequent chapter, Rabbi Falk speaks specifically to the

reasons why women should not wear ostentatious clothing:

- 1. such clothing is damaging to the wearer's character
- 2. it causes nochrim (non-Jews) to be jealous
- 3. clothes become too important
- 4. cost factor becomes problematic
- 5. such clothes cause men to gaze at women
- 6. to prevent girls or young women from "slipping into fashion addiction"
- 7. fashion preoccupation is a form of vanity

Falk specifically warns against wearing "bright red and other highly

conspicuous colours" (p. 391) and wearing clothes that are extremely

casual. The reasons for these admonitions are the following:

- 1. they are unsuitable "for a conscientious and refined person"
- 2. if no self-respect, there is a greater danger of sinning
- 3. garments affect a person's spiritual standard
- 4. *umos Ha'olam* (nations of the world) concede that casual wear projects a low image

Tzipporah, a participant in my inquiry, shared with me her recent

quest of a winter residence in Florida to escape the cold of Montreal

winters. Because she loves to swim, she was unable to rent a unit in an

apartment building but instead she would have to rent a private home. The reason, she explained, has to do with the fact, that in a multi-unit apartment building, she and her family would not be able to use the swimming pool. According to *halakhah* (law), a women's body that is not fully clothed, may not be seen by a man other than her husband.

In this chapter on clothing, Falk also includes information about the significance, type, and use of perfumes. He cautions women to use perfume sparingly outside the home and states that a "man may not intentionally smell other women's fragrances." (p.421) His subsection on jewellery warns against wearing "excessive, extravagant or lavish jewellery as they endanger and cheapen a woman" (p. 422). He then addresses his concerns about the use of cosmetics. The following excerpt clearly articulates his position on this subject:

Likewise, the plague of make-up on the face and eyes is so widespread that many do not see what is wrong with it anymore. Sadly, it has even entered some of the finest homes. I do not mean to criticize anyone. However, in this one area - The Satan has regretfully been successful. I believe that the main reason for this is that we don't consider the consequences. Nowadays, women are in business, at work, out shopping and so on. It is no good to go out over dressed and madeup, as this *mashchsil* [stumbling block] may arouse the wrong kinds of thoughts. (p.430)

Eighteen pages are devoted to this topic of makeup. The following

is a list of titles found in this section:

1. Cosmetics are to be used with moderation.
- 2. Cosmetics are to enhance not to 'be conspicuous.'
- 3. The *issur* [prohibition] for women to cause men to gaze at them.
- 4. Cosmetics can cause conflict with *shemiras Shabbos* [observing the Sabbath].
- 5. Over-indulgence corrupts a person.
- 6. Young girls should preferably not use cosmetics.
- 7. Long nails.
- 8. Nail polish.
- 9. Artificial tanning of the skin.
- 10. Inside of house more decorated than outside.
- 11. Beauty exists when the *neshama* [soul] shines through the body.
- 12. A face that "projects purity" is beautiful.

One topic that Falk addresses expansively is the covering of a

woman's hair with a wig or a hat. All Hassidic married women cover their

hair, which is often shaved or cut short, with a wig. The reasons for this

obligation are explained by Rabbi Falk:

Hair was given the status of *ervah* [sexual organ] by *Chazal* [sages] because when any part of the female body that should be covered is uncovered, it can affect a man who sees it and cause him to feel attracted to her. (p. 228)

Over the years of my interaction with Hassidic women, I became

aware of the fact that wig styles were quite varied among them. Rebbetzin

Fleisher brought up a question that had been in my mind - what is

accomplished by covering her hair if in fact the woman is more attractive

wearing a wig? In Rebbetzin Fleisher's words:

There is no reason that women should not look *attractive;* they are prohibited from looking *attracting.* As long as the wig increases her attractiveness without being seductive, it can still make her more aware of God's presence. This, in turn, encourages her to comport herself modestly and to accentuate her spiritual beauty at the same time that her physical beauty is apparent. (Mar. 23, 1997)

Rabbi Falk also addresses this issue of wearing a wig that may not

look like a wig because it is made of human hair rather than of synthetic

material:

A wig made from human hair is "to be avoided" as are wigs that are "unusual, long or eye-catching" or are so well made that they are not barely detectable. There are actually some young women who look more "girl-like" in their *sheitels* [wigs] than real girls. *Gemara* (*Nazir* 28b) says that there is a way of making a wig to such perfection that it has as much *chein* [beauty] and beauty as true hair. This could not be further from the will of *Hashem* [God] who has indicated that a married woman is to conceal some of her beauty from the public eye by covering her hair. Therefore, for a married woman to cover her hair in a way that she looks as attractive as a girl violates the essence and character of this *mitzvah* [commandment]. (p. 241)

He suggests that a way around this dilemma is to wear a hat over

one's wig to prevent anyone mistakenly thinking that the sheitel (wig) is

the woman's real hair and that her hair is uncovered. "Women look

extremely refined and regal with such double head-wear" (p.241).

However he cautions against wearing hats that are eye-catching because

of their bright colors, bows or large flowers:

When a woman wearing one of these hats boards a bus, all the women and a large proportion of the men notice her and continue to gaze at her as she walks down the aisle. Is this *tznius*? Wearing such a hat can only be interpreted as a means of obtaining grandeur and admiration. Can it be said about this woman that she has a modest demeanour and a regal bearing? (p. 259)

One section in Rabbi Falk's book which I found particularly relevant and interesting addresses the topic of the unique responsibility of teachers. He writes about the far reaching effect of a teacher's way of dress:

Teachers who are responsible for the welfare of young or adolescent girls must be even more careful than others that their dress and general appearance reflect true Jewish modesty. They provide a role model to their pupils and charges as girls look up to them and naturally assume that their way of dress is undoubtedly perfect. Therefore, if they are lax in this all-important area it is tantamount to misleading those who are in their care. (p.100)

To date, during my years of teaching at Bais Yaakov, I observe

some of the dress code as outlined by Rabbi Falk. However, I do wear

make-up and nail polish and I do not cover my hair. The classroom is not

air-conditioned and in the warm months of June and September, wearing

long sleeves and opaque stockings is often uncomfortable and

unpleasant. However for Hassidic girls and women, the challenges to

tznius (modesty) that the summer months pose is inescapable. Rabbi Falk

specifically refers to these exigencies.

Because of the hot weather, a woman is likely to want to open the top button of her blouse or wear a T-shirt with a lower neckline or pull up the sleeves of her shirt so that she can feel a cool breeze on her arms. She could have an urge to wear thin tights which do not cover her legs well, with the excuse that anything thicker than this is too warm and causes some discomfort. Often, the urge is because the thinner tights match her summer clothes much better than the thicker ones, and therefore add to her overall appearance. She might even contemplate wearing a blouse or dress which is somewhat see-through because such garments are cooler and more pleasant to wear than others. Moreover, during the summer months she could be inclined to shorten her skirt because during these months fashions are often shorter and she likes "to be with it" (p. 168).

He concludes by saying that the reward for a woman who meets the

challenges of summer is that she will become greatly enriched and

strengthened in her commitment to the laws of *tznius*.

A further threat of summer according to Rabbi Falk is that

"excessive leisure time leads to vanity" (p.168). He warns that when a

mind is unoccupied and empty, it wanders deep into forbidden territory

where the latent base passions of a person find their satisfaction. He

explains:

Even if just part of the day is wasted, the mind is partially unused, and as a result it can wander into poisoned areas that bring the person into close contact with the world of corruption. For example, a person with a lot of spare time on his hands could spend a good part of it reading newspapers and magazines that discuss the foul types of misconduct that are currently in the news. The result of this is that the person's mind absorbs large amounts of grime every day, and this will not leave him unaffected (p.168).

Here Falk is relating the concept of modesty to the dangers of

idleness. A letter to the editor that appeared in Hamodia Newspaper in

July 1999 (p. 17) echoes Rabbi Falk's concern about girls having too

much leisure time. The following excerpt from this letter speaks to this

mother's wish for "structure" for her daughters:

Dear Editor

I am the mother of a large family, including seven daughters in Bais Yaakov institutions, and I am speaking for many mothers, when I ask, Why do our daughters need an eight-week vacation? Two full months outside of any framework with no structure or schedule - what good can come of their getting out of routine for two full months? Does anyone think that young girls can sit at home doing laundry, cooking, baking and cleaning all day long? How many dangers are the girls exposed to in the spiritual, emotional and physical realms? It makes no sense. First, the girls have 10 exhausting months loaded with unreasonable work and pressure, and then they have two months of unreasonable idleness, with nothing to do. And when all is said and done, it seems easier to manage and to maintain one's sense of direction under the exaggerated pressures of the school year than under the exaggerated idleness and lack of responsibility of the summer break .(p. 17)

On a similar note and with the concept of modesty in mind, Suri

Gittel, one of the participants in my inquiry, shares her beliefs about

children and leisure time:

I teach my daughters that it is a requirement to play quietly outdoors so as not to attract undue attention. I specifically encourage them to skip only in non-public areas as it is undesirable for a girl to play such games in the street through which men constantly pass, especially once a girl is a six, seven year olds. I keep a watchful eye on the type of girl my daughters associate with outdoors because unhealthy friendships at an early age can influence a girl's outlook and affect her whole future. (Interview, Suri Gittel, May 27, 1999)

Chaya, another paticipant, underlines how very much the notion of

modesty is integral to their lives:

Developing our sense of modesty is one way that we can examine and refine our inner values, as opposed to looking outside ourselves to find approval from external sources. Modesty teaches us how to transcend our physical selves to search for the deep, internal values that are the lifeblood of our Jewish soul. (Nov. 5, 1999)

Each and every Hassidic woman with whom I had spoken reported to using Rabbi Falk's book to guide their daily lives. Participants unanimously agreed that his volume is written in a style that is inspirational, that this book helps them to view *tznius* as a privilege rather than a burden, and that it has proven to be a most meaningful guide on the *Derech Hashem* (way of God). This guidebook, many participants suggested, ensures that future generations of Hassidic women will be aware of "their great heritage and understand that *tznius* is of prime importance during all stages of life" (Falk, 1998, p.3).

History of Ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Education

The history of Jewish men as readers is ancient. Men were commanded in the Bible to study, where the traditional interpretation of the command ("And you shall study it day and night") referred to the Jewish male's act of learning as a ritual (Heilman, 1992). The act of study *per se* creates a correspondence between the content (the traditional curriculum) and social reality. While this argument might seem tautological - how can study create compatibility between social reality and itself? -Heilman clarifies it by referring to the profound difference between the traditional Jewish way of studying (lernen) and the secular intellectual act of learning. Lernen means accurately performing a complex pattern of studying, not necessarily leading to the acquisition of any specific knowledge. Lernen as a ritual of studying assures that the participants reproduce their social reality. *Lernen* stems from the people's belief, creates something to believe in, and expresses belief. It is therefore a highly significant cultural performance. Lernen plays a major mediating role between the contradictions this situation evokes. Instead of widening the gap between Orthodoxy and modernity, the traditional way of studying affords a theoretical and a practical way of living with both. The discussions, doubts, questions and answers spiritually transfer the men to the time of the Talmud (the collection of ancient Rabbinic writings constituting the basis of religious authority for traditional Judaism). The current reality is interpreted through the teachings of the Talmud, which serves as a commentary on current situations and problems.

Unlike their male counterparts, however, Jewish women have a very short history as readers. Orthodoxy permitted education for women because of external pressures on the Jewish communities in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century (Weisman, 1976). The expansion of compulsory education and the acceptance of Jews as citizens in some central European states forced the Jewish communities to consider

educational alternatives to the state schools offered by the local governments.

The populations under the greatest cultural threat were young and adolescent girls. Boys enjoyed a well-established Jewish educational system, so that even if they went to public school to gain secular knowledge, their afternoons could be spent at a Jewish *heder*, a traditional classroom for young boys. Girls and women, who were excluded from the major religious rituals including learning, were attracted to the new cultural opportunities outside the traditional circle. Within a short time after the fall of the ghetto walls, middle and upper-middle class girls spoke German, Polish and Russian in addition to Yiddish.

The Orthodox community in Europe, unlike others such as the Zionist community, excluded women and girls from the educational system until they became aware of the great cultural gap between males and females. In 1917 the first Jewish Orthodox school for girls was established in Krakow, Poland, under the guidance of Sarah Schneirer. The name Bais Yaakov (Beth Jacob) alludes to the verse, "O house of Jacob [Bais Yaakov] come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:5). Under Schneirer, propagandist and pedagogue, the movement flourished, and by 1924 there were nineteen schools with 2,000 students. The *Bais Yaakov* schools were acknowledged by the

Knessiah Gedolah (The Great Assembly), of the *Agudah* (International Organization of Ultra-Orthodox Jews) to be "the best solution for the education of girls."

The curriculum of the *Bais Yaakov* schools was heavily weighted in favour of Judaic studies. Each student was obliged to learn fifty Psalms by heart and to become thoroughly acquainted with Jewish law and liturgy, but secular subjects were also studied. To meet the ever-increasing demand for instructors, the *Bais Yaakov* Teachers' Seminary was built in Krakow in 1931. *Bais Yaakov* graduates formed an association and the range of educational facilities open to Orthodox women expanded greatly. By the eve of World War II a chain of Bais Yaakov schools had spread across Europe, America and Palestine, enrolling some 38,000 students. Typical of the approving attitude of the Hassidic *rebbes* was the stand taken by Abraham Moredkhai Alter, the rabbi of Ger. "It is a sacred duty to work nowadays for the Bais Yaakov movement; the future mothers of Israel are being educated in the true traditional spirit of the Torah and are receiving a sound all-round schooling" (Dalfen, 1996, p. 213).

Yet, despite this proclamation, female scholarship in the Hassidic world was considered suspect and irrelevant. Intelligent girls were caught in a curriculum that did not reward brilliant women and in no way matched the intellectual demands placed on men. There was no serious

expectation of turning out scholars of distinction from the girl's schools.

Rabbi Wolf, the founder of Bais Yaakov schools in Bnai Brak, Israel wrote:

"If we succeed in instilling in our girl students that the purpose of their

studies is to aspire to emulate our matriarchs, who did not study, than we

have succeeded in educating our daughters" (p. 29).

The difference in philosophy behind the roles of boys and girls, is

particularly apparent in the area of religious studies. This disparity is

expressed by Ridwas, a famous and highly respected rabbi in his last will

and testament, published in 1908:

My dear and beloved sons, I do not need to urge you to give proper education to your sons, for I know that of your own accord you will educate them in Torah and piety. Yet I command you that you should command your sons, and they theirs, that they should be careful not to teach their daughters Torah. (Karp, 1987 p.176)

On this question of Torah study by women, the Shulhan Arukh

(code of Jewish law) states:

A woman who studies the Torah has reward for this but it is not as great as the reward of a man who studies, since she is under no legal obligation to study. Even though she has reward for her studies, the Rabbis advised against a man teaching the Torah to his daughter, because the majority of women cannot concentrate properly on their studies. However, a woman is obliged to study the laws appertaining to women. (*Shulhan Arukh*, Ganzfried, 1961)

The exemption from studying Torah is partly so that the religious

woman, who often have large families, can focus on the needs of her

family. When it comes to a question of religious service through Torah

study or family care, it is clear that caring for others comes first. One

participant in this inquiry offered her understanding of why women are

exempt from studying Torah for its own sake:

Since women have more *binah* [understanding], it is unusual for them to feel spiritually nurtured by the analysis of details which characterizes Talmud study. Women's *binah* is as much an intellectual gift to be appreciated as is *daat* [knowledge] for men. Women have historically nurtured their *binah* via family and personal interactions, such as teaching their daughters about Judaism, rather than their learning it through books. One of the Jewish commentators says that men have psychological traits and aggressive tendencies that are incompatible with the peace and tranquility of the world-to-come. Their constitutions can only be rectified through constant immersion in Torah study. Since women are innately predisposed to serenity, they do not require constant Torah study in order to merit the world-to-come. (Interview with a Teacher at Bais Yaakov Seminary, Aug. 27, 1998).

Education in Quebec Today

Today, education for the Hassidic community encompasses the entire range of individual and group behaviour that its students will practice throughout childhood and adult life. The larger Hassidic sects in Montreal and in Boisbriand, have their own schools. The Hassidic sects that do not maintain their own schools send their children to other sects' schools. For example, in Montreal, many families from the smaller sects send their children to the Squarer schools. The choice of the particular school is based largely on the Hassidic sect's religious philosophy, which determines the organization of its religious and secular curricula and the school's reputation.

At both Hassidic and ultra-Orthodox schools for girls, the religious studies programs are similar with courses offered in Hebrew, Jewish History, Jewish Philosophy, Prophets, Psalms, and Laws (*Halakhot*). In addition a general knowledge course that covers religious practices, customs, holidays, blessings and prayers (again with both explanation and translation) is included.

While today's Hassidic women are not excluded from learning classical texts, their centrality in family life discourages rigorous book learning of Jewish texts that have no practical application to their everyday lives. Obscure legal or philosophical discussions, which have no bearing on daily life, are not normally considered important for a Jewish woman to study. Her curriculum focuses on material that is designed to bring her to greater understanding and faith. Hassidic girls do not learn Talmud (the oral law) *per se* but do receive instruction on parts of the text that are narratives (*agada*) or stories dealing with daily living. Girls spend time learning *Tanach*, or bible studies as well as Jewish history. A principal once pointed out to me that the girls are learning more and more each year in "response to the changing world around us" (Personal Communication, Oct. 25, 2001).

Most Hassidic groups maintain that secular education threatens their traditional values. Despite the incorporation of mandatory secular subjects into school curricula, the schools have as their primary goal to produce students who will carry out a Torah-observant life. To minimize this threat, they run their own schools, where secular classes are closely supervised to ensure that the material imparted will not conflict with the content of their religious studies. This is assured by the hiring of teachers who are prepared to omit material that may be controversial or inappropriate. In the Seminary or CEGEP level, the students themselves will often change the wording in text books as they occur. A personal example comes to mind: In a Human Relations course that I taught at Bais Yaakov, the topic of non-verbal behaviour was being discussed. The sentence in the textbook was as follows: "Research shows that there is a difference between the sexes in terms of the amount and type of facial expressions displayed by men and women. "A student, without hesitation, read the sentence aloud making the following change: "Research shows that there is a difference *between the genders* in terms of the amount and type of facial expressions displayed between men and women." This action reveals how automatic it is for students to avoid topics, phrases or ideas that may oppose their religious teachings.

The secular programs for boys in Hassidic and ultra-Orthodox schools are narrowly defined. Like many Canadian provinces, Quebec provides sizable subsidies to any school, secular or religious, that educates children. To receive a per-pupil subsidy in Quebec, a school must have its secular studies curriculum approved by the provincial ministry of education. The Satmar sect school for boys does not comply with the requirements of the Quebec provincial legislation because it does not instruct in French. Consequently, it receives no government funding. The reasoning for not giving French instruction is that most boys in this sect eventually leave Quebec for the United States. The three other Hassidic elementary schools in Montreal do receive government grants and consequently, according to their principals, the standards of secular learning are higher. In addition to "the three R's", science, geography, history and math are included in the curriculum of all secular schools. The boys also learn Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic and English. It is to be noted that secular studies do not begin until 3 PM when many of the students may be tired and inattentive, and end at five or five thirty. The boys in the Hassidic schools complete their secular education by age twelve.

The secular program for girls at Hassidic schools is also quite minimal. Most girls elementary and high schools offer secular subjects in the afternoons for about three hours each day. Subjects like gym and art

are given little time in the very heavy schedule. The girls attend school five days a week, Sunday through Thursday, which allows Friday for Sabbath preparation. The fact that the girls are engaged in secular classes in elementary school for almost twice as long as the boys is defended on the following grounds. First, the boys must have the minimum amount of diversion from their religious studies, because they might become attracted to secular subjects to the detriment of their religious learning. Second, the girls will require practical skills later in life to raise their many children and look after their husbands and homes. As one Hassidic student justifies: "We have to be able to understand much more of the outside world and what goes on, because we are the people who will be building the home, doing the shopping and everything else" (Yoheved, Nov.16, 1998). Rabbi Falk (1998) notes that the woman is "far, far, more than just a cook, a house-keeper, a child attendant, a companion. She, in fact, brings everything together, and enables the physical to serve the spiritual in one united effort to fulfill the will and design of Hashem [God] in this world" (Falk, 1998, p. 37). This notion is consistent with the words of a Hassidic woman who was recently interviewed by Montreal Gazette reporter, Mike Boone: "Women are the neck of the household – and where the neck turns the head turns" (Jan. 11, 2002).

The languages of instruction in Hassidic girls' schools are French and English. Yet, most notices on the school bulletin board are in Yiddish. Figure 1 is a poster taken from a bulletin board of a Hassidic girls' school:



The following is a translation of this poster by a Hassidic woman.

1. Connect the wires to the source. Have faith that everything comes from G-d. 2. The flammable material Warning: Drive and enthusiasm for everyone. Instructions: A dangerous place. - To use constantly 3. Push the button Someone is letting - Become rejuvenated anew to get the results their words slip through strengthen yourself with An aura of joy which numbers 1, 2 and 3. leaves an impact.

Figure 1: Poster on Bulletin Board in Hassidic Girls School

This notice refers to the admonition to be careful and thoughtful when using words that may harm, insult or cast a negative light on others. It is forbidden to spread *lashon hara* (gossip, evil speech) even if it is true. It is still more serious to spread slander. Fear of the evil effects of loose talk is related to ancient belief concerning the animosity and jealousy of evil spirits, the angel of death, the evil eye, and plain bad luck. I have included a copy of a pamphlet that is distributed throughout the community listing the ten rules of proper speech that also relate to *lashon hara*. (Appendix B)

Although the communities distrust secular academic influences, I discovered during a visit to the library at Bais Yaakov, an ultra-Orthodox but not Hassidic girl's school, that it contained volumes by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, John Steinbeck, Jonathan Swift, Leo Tolstoy and Mark Twain. While Orthodox and religious literature dominates the shelves, according to the librarian at Bais Yaakov, parents have been complaining more than ever before about the choice of library books. A committee is presently being formed in New York to compile a list of appropriate fiction that is religiously and culturally appropriate for the classroom. Books such as *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain or *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, which were previously sanctioned, are now being reexamined and questioned because of a few inappropriate lines (e.g. "When he woke up in the

morning, her breasts were uncovered" - The Pearl). Despite some official censorship -- the alteration of offensive pictures in art and photography obliterated from texts, or thick sheets of paper pasted over pictures -inquisitive students at Bais Yaakov today do not lack access to most of the resources of a secular liberal arts education. For example, some students at Bais Yaakov do visit the Jewish Public Library in Montreal when they need information for school research projects. In cases like this, it is impossible to monitor what books they may be perusing. In contrast to the ultra-Orthodox school library, in the library of the Belz (Hassidic) School For Girls in Outremont, most of the fiction is written by Jewish authors and contains a moral lesson or inspirational message. Even though there is a fiction reading component to the compulsory provincial English literature exam, the students choices are rather limited. Every book in the library is carefully scrutinized and lines are blacked out if deemed inappropriate.

The process of textbook selection is typically initiated by the principal, who is charged with the responsibility of reviewing the appropriate material for a particular grade. The principal, however, simply recommends; the final decision rests with the sect's religious authorities. The process was described by one of the principals as follows:

I don't order the books. I make recommendations. I say, for example, for the first grade I'd like this and this book. So I receive

complimentary copies of the books from the publisher.... Now the books that are selected are evaluated by the rabbis. There's someone in the community specifically charged with this task, and he might conclude that a particular book is inappropriate because of the material. So the rabbis might say: "Page 84, you can't use the material on that page." Now if there are too many deletions, then I just don't order the book. And I take the texts they have selected and try to adapt them. So we don't use books per se. We make photostats. We create our own texts and we distribute the material to the students. Students receive the text that we have assembled. (May 27, 1999)

The techniques for censoring materials range from actually

removing pages to substituting more appropriate words, phrases or

sentences in a text. Another principal offers an example of the latter:

A teacher finds a story and I read it. I say: "Okay, remove this word," We try not to lose the idea, the context, but we change certain words. An example of a word that I would change is television. "At night he went to the living room and watched television." You'd change that to "At night he went to the living room and read a book." So we take white ink, cover it and write on top of it. (High School Principal, Dec. 16, 1999)

The same principal comments:

Sometimes they [the rabbis] have gone over parts of it [a story] in black with a marker.... Usually it happens in the geography book when they talk about fossils that are a million years old because it would come into contradiction with everything they're learning. You can't see a woman with her arms bare, you can't see a woman wearing pants. So usually you try to find drawing rather than real life pictures. But in a subject such as geography you have pictures of people, streets.... So usually with a marker you go over things you don't want them to see. (Interview with Principal, Dec. 16, 1999)

Teachers and parents alike view these modifications as the

inevitable accompaniments of secular education and they both hope and

expect that the school's religious studies program will offset them. As an intentionally organized mechanism of social control, the coordination of secular studies helps the Hassidim to maintain the boundaries separating them from the surrounding culture.

Education in Tosh

In the Hassidic community of Tosh, in Boisbriand, Quebec, a Tosher pamphlet printed in English states that the "Tosher community is living proof that one need not have advanced degrees in secular studies to succeed" (Kezwer, 1996, p. 38). Although the boy's Yeshiva and the girls' school do teach French, English, Math and other secular subjects, the *rebbe* does not place too much emphasis on them.

The Tosher Hassidim are convinced that education, whether religious or secular, is too important a matter to be dictated, or controlled, by outsiders. Shaffir (1987) reports that the Tosh community have long refused any school subsidies from the government because they do not wish to comply with the obligations that come along with the money (p. 115). In an interview with Quebec government officials in 1980, these Jews adamantly spoke out: "We are Jews. We live as Jews. We will die as Jews. If you tell us we cannot continue our education the way we want it – then we have news for you. Either we're going to leave Quebec or we're going into shelters like in Russia, in basements" (*The Montreal Gazette*, Mar. 15, 1980, p.3).

Educators from outside the community who are employed to teach secular studies in the Tosh schools are specifically instructed about the constraints within which they must conduct their work. Teachers not only receive verbal instructions from the principal concerning the regulations that they must follow, but, in addition, prescribed topics of discussion and methods of teaching are distributed to them in written form. For example, the following are the written instructions to the English staff that list these rules (Shaffir, 1987):

- All textbooks and literature to be used by the students in class or at home for extra-curricular activities, etc. must first be approved by the principal.
- No stencil or photocopy of any other book may be used without the principal's approval.
- Students are not permitted to go to outside libraries, nor is the teacher permitted to bring into the school, for the students, such books.
- No newspaper or magazine may be read in school. Students are not permitted to read the above at home either.

- No record or tape may be used in the classroom without the approval of the principal. No extra subjects, books, magazine supplements or other information that is not on the required curriculum of the school may be taught.
- No discussion of boyfriends.
- No discussion of reproduction.
- No discussion about radio, TV or movies.
- No discussion about personal life.
- No discussion of religion.
- No discussion about women's liberation.
- No homework on Thursday.

The lack of homework on Thursday is to enable the girls to help at home with preparations for the Sabbath. This particular regulation is irrelevant for the boys, however, as they are never given any homework relating to their secular studies.

The above instructions provide a clear picture of the stringent measures taken by the Tosher to ensure that their children do not become acquainted with (or, worse still, attracted to) the ways of those who do not faithfully adhere to their strict Hassidic lifestyle. Despite the lack of educational opportunities, women who grow up within this isolated community say they find their lives fulfilling. As one woman recounted to me, "Why sit and study - you miss out a lot in life if you don't get married early (Jan. 20, 1997)."

Hassidim Today

Hassidim today rarely discuss the size of their group and have to be prodded into disclosing how many children they have. Children are considered a blessing, and families with ten children are not uncommon. One report estimates that there are approximately a quarter of a million Hassidim and ultra-Orthodox Jews in North America. They are growing at a rate of 5% a year, a trajectory that is increasing, as new generations are marrying at young age and are having larger families. A 5% annual increase translates into approximately 25% every 4 years, or a doubling every fifteen years (Fishman, 2000). The Hassidim have inherited an infrastructure of community organizations that had been adequate for the needs of their parents and their smaller families, but which, in the year 2000, are woefully overtaxed and overburdened (Shahar, 1997).

Today the Hassid, both male and female, is forced to compete with the secular world of instant gratification, modern technology, pressured lifestyles and the emphasis on the ability to make one's own choices in the personal, social, political and economic arenas. For the Hassidim, understanding one's place within secular society, has become increasingly difficult. Traditional Orthodox Judaism, despite its best efforts,

is not insulated from popular culture and the pressures it exudes. In the urban environment, the intrusion of the outside world is a constant threat, but the Hassidim attempt to limit its influence as much as possible. They have a sense of righteousness in their exclusivity and believe that they are observing the correct way of life.

Much research makes one important inaccurate assumption: it assumes that all Hassidim – men and women, children and adult, and all sects, throughout their history – can be displayed in one case as though a chronologically ordered stack of data and artifacts can be crosscut along socio-religious, or customary lines, revealing a representative tableau for museum visitors to gaze at. Despite their seeming homogeneity as a social religious group, distinct individuals exist who have chosen to maintain this shared appearance and lifestyle. The strands of the Hassidic cultural web are often visible. The individuals themselves and their reasons for continuing to weave this web are less so.

In the next chapter, I have chosen to adopt an emic perspective (Geertz, 1973) to uncover the discourse surrounding what it means to these women to be Hassidic. The primary informants in my inquiry are a select group of Hassidic women who live in Montreal in the community of Outremont. Other Hassidic women encountered through these women became secondary informants. Being Hassidic is more than an unspoken

assumption; it is a constant condition reflected in their daily lives. Being Hassidic determines what they wear and what they eat, where they go and how they get there, what they do and how they do it. I examine the meaning of this behaviour, the meanings of these routines and rituals, as the Hassidic women perceive them.

By focusing on the perspectives, needs and roles of this select group of Hassidic women, this inquiry presents the following argument: Hassidic women are active agents and participants who articulate their roles and lives constantly (and most often implicitly). By interpreting, enforcing, questioning, guarding, and reshaping the rules, customs and traditions (whether based in family, community, education and religion) that affect them, they create their own personal meanings. In this inquiry, I am more interested in what Hassidic women **do** as opposed to what they are **prohibited from doing**. I explore how they exercise influence over their lives and the lives of others. I was intent on discovering what a Hassidic woman thinks about when she wakes up in the morning that makes her want to grab hold of the day. What is it in her life that makes her appear to be so content and serene? In other words, what is she talking about so positively and with such excitement?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Interpretative Ethnography

Like a rose between thorns so is my beloved one amongst other daughters." (Shir HaShirim 2:2, Soncino Books of the Bible)

A rose is a beautiful flower with exceptionally delicate and graceful petals. It seems amazing that such a tender and graceful flower survives when it is surrounded by the strong and sharp thorns of the rose bush. The thorns should apparently tear the petals to pieces, giving the flower no chance of survival. Its secret of survival, however, is that the flower always grows either out of or up and above the thorny branches, in such a way that no contact can be made with them. It stands so distinct from the rest of the branches that even a strong wind will not throw the flower against the thorns. By being proud of her heritage and rising above negative influences, by holding her head up, she remains unscathed, and grows to full maturity as a graceful and *eidel* [refined] daughter of *Yisroel.* (Falk, 1998, p. 153).

Falk's commentary compares the Orthodox woman to a flower that

grows among thorns. It is consonant with post-structuralists and postmodernists who arque that any view of participants is necessarily filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. For qualitative researchers across disciplines, there are no objective observations that would allow accurate observation while still uncovering the meanings participants bring to their life experiences. In this inquiry, I examine the Hassidic woman in the context of her world and explore how she manages to stand so steadfast and strong among the "thorny branches" and how she is able to "hold her head up as she rises above "negative influences." The metaphors Falk employs, relayed in this quote, are contextually contingent. As Wheatley (1994) suggests, "research is shaped by who we look at, from where we look and why we are looking in the first place" (p. 422).

My inquiry investigates the notion of literacy as the creation of personal meanings in the lives of a selected group of women in Outremont, Quebec and the manner in which literacy practices serve their evolving needs in three domains: the public (societal) the public-private (educational) and the private (familial, communal). I present an account of the experiences of these women as they themselves represent them. I offer an analysis of these experiences within the context of theoretical models of literacy as an embodying set of social-cultural practices (Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000).

The genesis of this study has its roots in an event that took place five years ago as revealed in this narrative vignette.

SHAKING HANDS

I was invited to a Hassidic family for dinner during the holiday of Purim. At the time of the invitation, I had not seen Pesach (Phil, in English) for a while and had never met his wife or children. I had first become acquainted with Phil when we were together on a twoweek trip visiting concentration camps in Poland. Sharing this emotionally charged trip seemed to bind us together, even though our backgrounds are very different. As I entered his home, I was happy to see him and nervously, without thinking, I extended my arm to shake his hand. Immediately I sensed his discomfort, his children's confusion and his wife's disapproval. Hassidic men are not permitted to physically touch women who are not their wives or daughters. (Oct. 17, 1990)

This incident highlights the following six epistemological principles and research activities which, I believe, drive my own inquiry as I research the "lived experiences" of the Hassidic women participants. They are: (1) Turning to a phenomenon to make sense of certain aspects of human existence; (2) Investigating experience as we live it, by re-learning to look at the world (as it appears to us) rather than as we conceptualize it. This has been called "a turning to the things themselves", which requires that the researcher both stand in the fullness of life as well as explore the categories of lived experience; (3) Asking the researcher to truly grasp what it is in a particular experience that makes it especially significant. This is about a lens bringing into focus, that which would otherwise remain obscure, and reflectively asking what it is that constitutes the nature of this lived experience; (4) The art of describing the experience through writing (and rewriting) indicates how thinking, speaking, rationality and language derive their contemporary meanings from the same root – logos. This perspective is the application of *logos* to a phenomenon (of lived experience) "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself" (Gadamer 1975, pp. 366-397); (5) Maintaining a strong orientation to the fundamental issues to be explored. This requires the researcher to avoid the many temptations of getting sidetracked. To be strong in an

orientation means that one will not settle for superficial speculations, selfindulgent preoccupations and falsities; (6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. Qualitative research recognizes that the researcher must be vigilant in constantly measuring the overall design of the study against the significance that the parts play in the total structure. At several junctures, it is necessary to step back to examine each of the parts as they contribute to the total.

Although I have presented these six principles in a particular order, this does not mean that one must proceed by executing and completing each "step" in that order. Throughout the actual research process, I have been guided by various aspects of each concurrently. Geertz (1973) the originator of interpretative ethnography, conveys the spirit of researching lived experience in these lines from *Interpretation of Culture*:

Believing... that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.... The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is ... to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects [sic] live. (p. 24)

In my inquiry, I attempt to "access the conceptual world" of the Hassidic participants that Geertz writes about. This necessitated an extended engagement with the Hassidic community. Geertz explains:

The trick is to figure out what the devil [the members of the community] think they are up to. [And] no one knows this better

than they do themselves; hence the passion to swim in the stream of their experience... (1983, p. 58).

Because the investigator cannot achieve "transcultural identification" or "inner correspondence of spirit" (pp. 56, 58), she needs to focus on what she can access. Accomplishing this task involved is, in Geertz's words, the "searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviour – in terms of which, in each place, people actually [represent] themselves to themselves and to one another" (1983, p. 58). For Geertz, the goal of interpretative ethnography is to develop a "thick description" (1973, p. 6) of a community's "interworked systems of construable signs" (p. 14). As Geertz puts it:

What the ethnographer is in fact faced with... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. (p. 9)

My intent is to reconstruct an account of the Hassidic community's meaning-making activity, or its "symbolic action" (1973, p. 27), which "hovers over" the participants' conceptions of reality (p. 25). I have chosen the interpretative ethnographic model as my methodological approach for the following epistemological reasons: (1) It holds that social life can only be adequately understood from the point of view of the actors themselves; (2) It provides, with its emphasis upon interpretation of the past, a baseline to examine the social history; (3). It stresses the principles of

intentionality to grasp the active side of human behaviour that is, for the most part, deliberate and reflexive; (4) It takes seriously the question of language and meaning, and gives priority to unraveling actors' descriptions of events and activities in a qualitative fashion, rather than quantitatively focusing on observations. The results in first-person accounts are provided by subjects themselves in their own language; (5) It is an approach that allows for open endedness and the possibility of changing directions and using a variety of sources of data; (6) It recognizes the inevitable involvement of the researcher and the developing of relationship with the subjects. This leads researchers to choose more direct participant forms of observation.

I have chosen to follow Geertz's lead since I merged informants' experiences with literacy theory to develop an ethnographic account of knowledge-making among these Hassidic women. This necessitated my use of convergent data: Geertz (1983) explains this term:

I mean descriptions, measures, observations [which] turn out to shed light on one another as they are directly involved in one another's lives.... Something you find out about A tells you something about B as well, because having known each other too long and too well; they are characters in one another's biographies. (Geertz, pp. 156-157)

The Hassidic communities in both Boisbriand and Outremont are very much examples of what Geertz (1983) means by "multiply connected individuals" (p. 157).

Geertz's suggestion of identifying frequently employed terms by "explication of linguistic classifications," is another strategy I employ here since the Hassidic women I work with have a particular vocabulary and discourse in how they talk about themselves.

Geertz explains that:

Exploring linguistic categories involves focusing on key terms that seem, when their meaning is unpacked, to light up a whole way of going at the world.... The vocabularies in which the various disciplines talk about themselves to themselves are a way of gaining access to the sorts of mentalities at work in them. (p. 157)

Furthermore, I found his notion of the examination of the life-cycle a particularly useful conceptual approach to apply to my own inquiry. This refers to the method of eliciting narratives from informants and examining these narratives for their meanings. By these and similar methods, my goal was to produce an account of the "mutually reinforcing network of social understandings" (p. 156) that comprises the particular versions of reality shared within the group of these Hassidim.

To produce my account, I engaged in two levels of activities. The first involved collecting a particular kind of data: what Van Maanen (1979) refers to as "first-order constructs," informants' own observations and explanations of events in their world, gathered "as they arise from the observed talk and action of the participants in the studied scene" (p. 542). The second level of activity involves interpreting this data: identifying significant "themes" (North, 1987) in informants' first-order constructs, and bringing these themes together into a "theoretical scheme", thus providing the basis for a textual representation of the community's life.

In these research activities, gathering data in the form of subjects' first-order constructs, and interpreting the data, were not sequential. I discovered that they are in fact 'dialectically linked' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 176) in an ongoing process of meaning-making. My own research supported the recursive, rather than linear, direction of my research process.

Gaining Access: From Resistance to Collaboration

Over the last five years that I have engaged with the Hassidic community, I have collected and analyzed a wide variety of data. In the first stage of my research (1995-1998), I examined a selected group of Hassidic women from Boisbriand, a community which I describe in Chapter Two. I conducted a pilot study in Boisbriand, the home of the sect of 160 Tosher Hassidic families. While the community has 2,500 residents, my study focused on 12 women ranging in age from 20 through 50 all of whom were housewives and most of whom I had taught in 1995 at a seminary CEGEP program at Bais Yaakov in Montreal. As I became more interested in this group of women, I decided to interview them as the participants for my study. I began to visit them in their homes to study this community "in their natural habitat," to borrow a phrase from Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1986, p. 274). In so doing, I was actually examining a unique socio-cultural space that has rarely been documented. I was interested in a wide range of topics relating to their lives – everything from their education, to their lifestyles, religious observance, family background, extra-curricular activities.

In the second phase of my inquiry (1997 - 2001) I focused on the Hassidic women in Montreal, in the community of Outremont. As a teacher, I continued to work at their Seminary (Bais Yaakov) but occupied a position in many areas of their lives – home, synagogue, community and place of employment (where relevant and appropriate). As time went on, a synergy developed between my dual roles as teacher and researcher and, as a result, my original research questions and focus gradually evolved and changed. I was initially oriented by the particular reading and writing skills and abilities that Hassidic women consider and value as they contribute to their academic and personal success. My aim then moved towards an investigation of the literacy practices and values in the broader sense of seeing and understanding how this group of women negotiate diverse literacy practices.

In this chapter, I present a description of the research contexts and my researcher role in both phases. In addition, I reflect on what I learned from my initial pilot study in Boisbriand, which helped me negotiate a more effective and intimate role with the participants in the Outremont inquiry. I attempt to chart the network of shared meanings that constitute reality within this community and to discover how the Hassidic women construct their social world, both through their own interpretations of it as well as through their actions which are based on those interpretations.

I begin by describing the issue of gaining access to both of these communities – a particularly complex one given the closed nature of Hassidic communities. I describe the pilot study and the inherent problems that arose as I began my research in Boisbriand. I discuss the methodological issues of conducting research with this population. I present the questions which guided my research. I conclude this chapter with an overview of each of the four methods of data collection I employed – formal interviews, participant observations and informal discussions, and an analysis of documents and archival materials. The final section of this chapter describes my methodology of data interpretation.

The Tosh Community

I don't know why you are here. What do you expect to learn from us? What are you going to do with the information that you are writing down? Who will read it? What if you don't get it right? Did you check with the *rebbe* to get permission to be here? You know, we are all busy with our lives so it's going to be difficult for any of us to meet with you. You probably are wasting your time. (Nov. 25, 1995)
This commentary from a participant in the Tosh community of Boisbriand, is representative of the type of questions that I was repeatedly asked. The problem of gaining access to ecologically valid data in ethnography is a practical issue that includes the discovery of obstacles and effective means of overcoming them. A symbolic interactionist perspective requires a researcher to focus on the interpretative and interactive processes of social interaction and to strive for an intimate familiarity with the participants of the research (Gergen, 1999). In the case of the Tosh Hassidim in Boisbriand, (as in most field research), there are few, if any, precise rules concerning the process by which access to conduct research is gained, rapport established, and relations maintained – all elements that are critical if one is to achieve intimate familiarity and ecological validity.

Nevertheless, some problems, regarded as common in many ethnographic pursuits, are also particular to my study. For example, I often wondered about how open and receptive my particular participants would be to being interviewed and observed. On many occasions as I tried to schedule appointments, it was clear that my participants were making excuses to delay or avoid our meeting. They would ask me to call after Shabbat, and when I did they requested that I call them later that evening, or next week, or after their guests leave, or after Passover. That

is, they would offer excuses that delayed my contact with them. More often than not, I was unable to set up a meeting and finally acknowledged the fact that they were clearly not prepared to meet with me but did not want to explicitly say so. Other concerns surfaced about meeting with the Tosh Hassidic women – for example I wondered about whether my invasion into their privacy would become a stumbling block? Would my appearance be an issue in terms of modesty and appropriateness? A further issue that I worried about concerned my religious background. Although Jewish, would I be considered "Jewish enough" in terms of my religious observances, knowledge and background. I have always been viewed by my students at Bais Yaakov as only Jewish by virtue of birth. Because I am not an Orthodox or observant Jew, I am considered by Hassidim to be closer to the non-Jewish and secular world than to their ways of understanding and practicing Judaism.

Because the Hassidic women's lives in both Boisbriand and Outremont are insular and limited in outside experience, finding common ground to build rapport required some creativity. The process of establishing rapport with participants is considered to be important in ethnography (Finch, 1984; Oakely, 1981, 1985; Wolf, 1992). Shulamit Rheinharz (1992) noted that "by achieving rapport, the researcher reassures herself that she is treating the interviewee in a non-exploitative

manner. Rapport thus validates the scholar as a feminist, as a researcher, and as a human being" (1992, p. 265). One example of the way in which I was able to establish and maintain rapport with some participants in Boisbriand was to solicit their advice and experience in how to plan a wedding for my daughter. They were excited and flattered to offer opinions and names of resources for every wedding detail from rental companies, to florists, to bridal gown stores.

The interpersonal strategies and resources required in order to gain access to the closed insular community of Tosh provided insights into the social organization of the setting. Because I had been their teacher a few years earlier, women of the community were initially keen to welcome me into their homes; however, I am not sure that I was ever able to clearly explain my interest in them as participants, or clarify why I wanted to ask them questions.

In reflecting on the three years that I spent in Boisbriand and the various approaches that I took to secure access to these participants and conduct my research, I concluded that my acceptance (and rejection) was closely tied to the group's cohesion and need for control. Even though I had developed what I perceived to be a warm and amicable rapport with these women, my presence in their community was greeted with a mixture of politeness and suspicion. One example comes to mind: A few women

reported to me that the last person to do research in their community in the 1980s was William Shaffir, a prominent sociologist in Canada. These women claimed that they were very upset with him because they believe he portrayed them inaccurately and unfairly. They were concerned that I might do the same, and so they were reluctant and unsure as to whether they should meet with me.

Gaining Access in Outremont.

While I acknowledge that efforts of boundary control are perceived as crucial to the Tosher group's continuity, I discovered that the Hassidim in Outremont are far more welcoming. The distinction between insiders and outsiders appears to be less problematic for the Outremont community for two reasons. First, because I am a classroom teacher at Bais Yaakov on a weekly basis, I am granted formal permission to interact with students, by both the head school administrator and his wife, the Seminary principal. While Bais Yaakov is not considered a Hassidic school, per se, it does attract a few Hassidic women students and teachers in its Seminary program. These women were able to introduce me to their friends and give me names and telephone numbers of other Hassidic women they thought might be willing participants. Therefore, these 'gatekeepers' enabled my initial point of contact with participants. The second condition that facilitated access in Outremont was the

considerable use I made of key informants, who checked my inferences and observations and referred me to other participants whom they believed would be helpful. For example, a Seminary teacher in Judaic Studies and an active community leader shared many hours of her busy time to answer my questions. She also provided me with the names and phone numbers of other women in the community who were teachers,

librarians, and administrators at schools and at social agencies. The

following excerpt from my field notes illustrates Mrs. Goldstein's support.

A KEY INFORMANT

As a fellow teacher in an ultra-Orthodox school, Mrs. Goldstein and I have had occasion to interact as colleagues. Mrs. Goldstein has taught for many years and therefore is sensitive to the issues surrounding meeting with Hassidic women. She is very highly regarded in the Outremont community as an educator, woman and activist. Because, over the years I have been helpful to her with my time and expertise, she proved to be a key informant who seemed committed to helping me whenever she could. For example, on one occasion I asked her to look over my proposed interview questions. She suggested names of women whom she thought would be willing to disclose and from whom she believed I would gain additional perspectives and insight. Mrs. Goldstein, herself, has written articles and pamphlets relating to issues of modesty. (Fieldnotes of interview with Mrs. Goldstein. (Feb. 24, 1999)

Mrs. Goldstein represents one of many key informants in

Outremont who: (1) were especially sensitive to my area of concern; (2)

were naturally reflexive and objective; (3) had done extensive reading and

writing; (4) who were more "willing to reveal" (though all participants are

guaranteed confidentiality); (5). were generally considered to be more "inthe-know"; (6) established an "information network" for me. Whereas in Boisbriand I was unable to identify and secure the necessary key informants, in Outremont I had the co-operation of school administrators, rabbis, social workers and community activists. Through these interactions, I developed an informal relationship with many of these informants that facilitated my data gathering collection. The questionnaire used to elicit information from key informants appears in Appendix C.

One lesson I learned from the initial pilot study in Boisbriand which has been useful in my gaining access to the Outremont Hassidim, is that I have come to recognize that time I spent observing and participating in the life events of the community constituted a very important investment in my research. These moments not only heightened my visibility, but led to the cultivation of my social relationships with members of the group. The life events that I refer to here are the numerous engagement parties, weddings, three year-old boys' hair cutting ceremonies, holiday and *Shabbat* celebrations, as well as one circumcision ritual. As well, I was often invited to ladies teas in the women's homes and fund-raising events at local community halls. These opportunities afforded me a better position from which to appreciate situations and events from the Gittel is recalled in the following narrative.

WELCOME TO ALL

I was very privileged to be invited to spend Shabbat (The Jewish Sabbath) at the home of Suri Gittel and her family. This entailed an hour and a half walk to her home as it would have been disrespectful and against religious law for me to drive my car after sundown on Friday evening. As well, I was unable to carry anything, so my purse and all other belongings were brought to her home earlier in the day. On the door of her home in Outremont, a Hebrew sign is posted that reads "Mishpachat Ungar, baruchim habaim – (the Ungar family, welcome to all). This message literally came alive on the Shabbat that I visited with them, their eight children who live in Montreal along with six more invited guests. As Suri Gittel explained: "Our house is open all Friday night. It's great. It's wonderful. We try to make it as spiritual as possible. I know when I light the Shabbas candles, it's a time where body and soul really become as one. It's just such a very peaceful feeling that kind of sets the tone. Sometimes, people think of Shabbas as a day of rest, but it also has to be a day of holiness, and we try to bring it to people. If you have a precious jewel, you want to show it off to everybody."

As I arrived on Friday afternoon, Suri Gittel seemed to be doing many things at once: making coffee for me, baking a cake, cleaning the kitchen, taking care of a few babies and children and answering the phone. I felt dizzy. Her kitchen was a tribute to technological innovations. In addition to the standard refrigerator, oven, microwave, and a laundry room with a washer and dryer, she proudly pointed out that she has a second fridge, which she uses only for meat, as well as an additional kitchen in her basement for Passover use. She opened her gigantic freezer which was loaded with home-made meals and desserts ("for all the unexpected company"). She does not see the appliances as a concession to modernity, or a means to an "easy life" – an ideal mostly shunned by the Hassidic community. She believes that they allow her to devote more time to the children. At about 4:00 pm a delivery of fruits and vegetables arrived, a further convenience, and added expense, but one that she has indulged in to allow her to feel rich and important.

At the Shabbat meal itself, Suri Gittel's husband stood at the table to deliver a *dvar Torah* (speech). At that moment, all eyes were focused on him. The silent guests seemed to soak up his every word. Suri Gittel herself seemed enchanted by his fervor and the content of his remarks. It appeared as if she had never before heard such brilliance, such eloquent language. She confided to me later that when he speaks it casts a spell on her and she feels "like I'm falling in love all over again." After all the blessings were completed, we sat down to a bountiful meal with generous portions of food and of conversation, served up until the early morning hours. (Nov. 28, 1999)

Gaining access to the Hassidim of Outremont was further facilitated

as a consequence of my earlier career work. For a few years, in private

practice, I focused on the interaction and dynamics of mother-daughter

relationships, a particular area of interest and research for me as I am a

mother of three daughters. This background, I believe, was instrumental in

helping the participants perceive me as an ordinary woman and a mother,

and as someone who respects them and is genuinely interested in and

kindly disposed toward them. In the following passage, a quote from

Yehudit, one of the participants, illustrates how I was viewed.

You know, Sharyn, one thing that we really like about you as a classroom teacher is that you seem to be genuinely concerned about us. We particularly appreciated the fact that you postponed our test because we didn't have time to study over the Passover holidays. Even though you are not like us, you always show that you care and always make the effort to respect us. You are the only teacher who goes out of her way to work the class schedule around our crazy lives. (Mar. 27, 1999)

In Boisbriand and Outremont, I found that my prior familiarity with Orthodox traditions facilitated my effectiveness as a field worker. For example, I already knew that I am not permitted to shake hands with the husbands of the women in my inquiry or even acknowledge their presence in the room at all. I knew to make sure to wash my hands and say a blessing before eating any food they may have prepared for me. On the day that President Clinton's impeachment over the Monica Lewinsky affair was the highlight of all news broadcasts, I knew that this topic was not to be discussed with the women with whom I was meeting. My knowledge of Orthodox rituals meant that I did not have to worry unduly about making mistakes or behaving inappropriately. Rather than attending to my own feelings of self-consciousness, I was able to pay attention to the events, dialogue and individuals themselves.

The Role of the Researcher

The way in which the researcher's social identity and values affect the data are of principal importance to researchers (Borland, 1991; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Rogers, 1993; Stacey, 1991; Wolf, 1992). This is so, because, as Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) point out, "who a researcher is, in terms of their sex, race, class and sexuality, affects what they `find' in research" (p. 228). As indicated earlier, I identify most strongly with the interpretive tradition of qualitative research. A key

assumption in this tradition is that knowledge is socially constructed through discourse in interpretive communities. Given this epistemological orientation, I was willing to enter into discourse with the participants as an integral aspect of deliberation and inquiry. At the heart of the inquiry is my own capacity for encountering, listening, understanding, and thus "experiencing" the phenomenon under investigation rather than assuming the traditional stance of a detached and neutral observer. Eisner (1991), in The Enlightened Eye, uses the phase "self as an instrument" to describe this capacity: "The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It is the ability to see and interpret significant aspects. It is this characteristic that provides unique, personal insight into the experience under study" (p. 33). From this notion, I learned that in order to develop oneself as an instrument, an honest understanding of what one brings to an interpretive inquiry is required. I worked throughout my study at cultivating an awareness of my worldview, experiences, preconceptions, biases, and so on, and recognizing how these may expand or constrict my capacity for resonating with the experience of the study.

Clifford Geertz (1983, p. 6) notes that knowledge is the product of "local frames of awareness". I recognized that as an outside researcher, I am multiculturally situated, and therefore I approach the Hassidic world

with both a set of ideas and a framework (theory and ontology). From this perspective. I composed a set of questions, an epistemological concern: these questions were then examined, constituting a methodical activity. In this endeavor, I recognize that I speak from within a distinct interpretative community that incorporates its own historical research traditions into a distinct point of view. My own beliefs shape how I see the world and act in it. As a result, I am bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which became the paradigm or interpretative framework. Because this methodology posits that social reality can best be experienced from extended involvement as a social actor. I needed to develop an insider's perspective on informants' theories, or constructs of the reality of daily life. If I was to characterize my own role, I would apply the conceptualization of Adler and Adler (1987) who describe this position as one of a "co-participant in a joint endeavor" (p. 50). A fundamental goal of my fieldwork was to understand the women's actions from their own points of view so that readers of my account could grasp the process and meaning. But as an "outsider", my experiences in the research settings were never identical to those of the women: I could never quite "think. feel, and perceive" as they did. As the anthropologist James Clifford (1986) writes, this inability of field-workers to "inhabit indigenous minds... is a permanent, unresolved problem of ethnographic method" (p.106).

Instead of attempting the impossible, I strove to achieve a stance referred to as "detached involvement", which acknowledges the complexity of my position as "part of and distant from the community." I attempted to understand the women's experiences through my own engagement with them and involvement in their daily activities. I used myself as an instrument, realizing that my reactions to the setting were a valuable clue to what the other women might be experiencing, I also strove, however, to pay attention to what made their experiences distinct from mine.

Prior to my arrival in Tosh, I had been anxious that some of the women might feel suspicious and threatened by a researcher in their midst. However, some were actually pleased that someone "outside" thought they were worthy of study. For example, one woman remarked, "Oh, what a fascinating project!" (Jan. 29, 1995). I was reassured by their responses that I would probably be well received by the other women and relieved, I settled down to start my work. As I have described, unfortunately this initial enthusiasm eventually waned.

As a researcher, I was a novelty and a unique person in both communities. I was someone with whom people wanted to talk, and I was often introduced and had access to many of the leaders of the groups. Throughout this research, I had to clarify for myself as well as for the

members my own personal stance toward the religious teachings of the communities I was studying. I would point out to the Tosh women that although I was Jewish, I did not observe, for example, the laws of keeping the Sabbath holy by not driving or watching television.

Throughout the research project, I solicited the guidance of the women, rabbis, rabbis' wives, and teachers I met. I continually asked the members of the settings what concerns were primary for them, what they would want to know, and what questions they would ask if they were doing this study. This line of questioning was one way of finding out what issues and themes they thought most important or at least those that they felt comfortable expressing to me.

I would fully echo Judith Stacy (1991) who believes that ethnography is, "in the last instance, the researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice" (p. 114). Because of this notion, some feminist researchers (Gregg, 1991; Klein, 1983; Kelly, 1988) return their interpretation "of what has been learned" to the original voice, their participants. I have shared most of this study's findings with my participants. In most cases, my interpretations were viewed as accurate. In other places, I had not conveyed the information exactly as the participant had intended so I rewrote my notes.

One example of this occurred in my understanding of the daily blessing recited by Hassidic men in which they give thanks to God for not having created them as women. Initially, I was troubled with what I perceived to be a prayer that speaks against a feminist spirit. However, in discussing my interpretation of this blessing with the women participants, I was given another perspective. According to them, the reason behind this prayer is that men are required to perform recurring *mitzvot* (commandments), from which women are exempt. This is interpreted to mean that more *mitzvot* translate into more responsibility. I turned to this excerpt from an article by Rabbi New (2001) for further clarification:

In his relationship with God, the male needs and thrives on structure. He needs to be told this is what you say and do, and when and how to do it. This is because his spiritual make-up is a reflection of the Divine hierarchy and system. Women give thanks to God for assigning to them a role that is important in the fulfillment of God's will. The female connection to God is not bound to the system in the same way. She reflects, much more so, the very essential being of God that transcends the system. Thus, rooted in the essence of God, her relationship with Him is not so much about doing, but about being. The male performs a lot of Jewish things. The female embodies being Jewish. Men do. Women are. Men confer upon their children their external identity, their uniform, their tribal affiliation (Kohen, Levi or Israelite). The mother provides the core identity. It is the mother alone that determines whether a child is, or is not, a Jew. In this case, her role becomes equal to his, since one cannot function without the other. (New, 2001)

This example is evidence of Denzin's (1994) notion that

interpretation is an art; it is not formulaic or mechanical. With this

challenge in mind, I have tried to be, as Norman Denzin (1994) identifies, a "bricoleur" (p. 75), as I craft meaning and interpretation out of the Hassidic women's experience.

Data Collection

Formal Interviews

As a research tool, interviewing has been incorporated into ethnographic studies of literacy (Barton and Hamilton, 1992; 1998). Combining interviews with a researcher's participant observations is intended to balance the account of the researcher with the experiences and reflections of the researched. Interviews usually involve compiling a list of questions which aim to cover all aspects of a participant's experience that are likely to shed light upon a particular phenomenon, such as literacy.

In the interviews developed within this strand of ethnographic work, research participants are encouraged to remember and reflect upon their experiences of literacy at different stages in their lives, as well as describing the present. Such interviews provide a means of gaining general insights into people, language and literacy practices and the values which shape these practices.

In developing questions for my interviews, I was very conscious of my relationship with the various participants, the sensitivity of the topics, and my beliefs about the potential influence of the interviews and the questions themselves on the participants. I spent a great deal of time sorting out my thoughts and feelings on these issues, writing notes and potential questions, and engaging in numerous discussions with members of my research committee and as well as with some well-respected Orthodox community leaders. One such person on whom I have relied for his expertise is the reference librarian at the Jewish Public Library. As an Orthodox man, he is familiar both with the customs and rituals of observant Jews and with the Hassidic population in Montreal.

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth, ethnographic interviews. I encouraged consideration of the "unstructured research interview" employing open-ended questions, because I believed it would maximize my understanding and description of the participants. Attentive listening enabled me to ask questions based on women's responses to and musings about previous questions. Learning what the women really wanted to talk about resulted in a more difficult data analysis since I was not obtaining uniform information from each woman. For example, often a participant would interpret one of my questions in a way that I had not anticipated and would go off in a direction that provided me with information that was new, something that I had not thought to ask other participants. One such exchange occurred when I was interviewing Chaya

on Holocaust Remembrance Day (*Yom Hashoah*). I asked her whether she would be putting a yellow candle in the window of her home that evening (as I would be doing), to commemorate the death of the sixmillion Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazis in World War II. She explained why she does not observe this sombre national holiday: "It's someone else's custom – the English, the non-Jews" (May 2, 1999). She went on to tell me that the mainstream account of the Holocaust overemphasizes the physical heroism and martyrdom of non-religious Jews who resisted the Nazis. It glorifies the fighters, she believes in the same way as Zionists in Israel exalt the soldiers of the national army. As Chaya concluded, "non-Hassidic Jews have their customs, we have God" (May 2, 1999). The richness of the varied data generated through open-ended questions outweighed the problems often posed by data that were not always strictly comparable.

My questions evolved and changed as time went on. For example, shortly after I began with the interviews in Outremont, I realized contrary to my initial assumptions, that a few Hassidic women drive cars and some women use a computer. Therefore, I added questions about these activities in subsequent interviews. In addition, I noted that some of my questions might be leading them on or betray a particular bias so I revised these along the way. For example, the question, "how do you feel about

the woman's role in Judaism?" was amended to the following: "Has the women's movement or feminism impacted your role as a Hassidic woman and if so how?" I would write potential questions in methodological notes, in the field notes, or in a notebook and as the time for interviews grew near, I reviewed these questions, the field notes, and the evolving conceptual framework in order to reformulate the interview protocols.

When I began this research. I had reservations about the interview process itself, about walking into people's homes and asking them to tell me about their lives. Judith Stacey (1991) highlights, in a feminist analysis of the new ethnographic literature, that there is a constant threat of exploitation of research "subjects" in ethnographic studies. A further methodological dilemma inherent in my particular situation concerns the use of audio tape-recording and videotaping. Because TVs, radios, and VCRs are non-existent in most Hassidic homes, the presence of recording equipment would not be welcome regardless of who uses it. Therefore, all interviews were conducted without a tape recorder. I refined the skill of speedy note-taking early on in the interview process. When I left the interview, I went to my car and immediately wrote down some of my thoughts and descriptions of the setting and any other noteworthy observations that I did not want to forget. The following excerpt is taken from my fieldnotes from an interview at Chaya's home.

I am very impressed with the orderliness of this home as compared to some of the others I have visited. Even though it is 8 AM, everything is so neat and tidy, the beds are made and things seem to be running smoothly. A delicious breakfast was offered to me – perhaps the food came from the bakery her husband owns. (Nov. 16, 1999)

An additional logistical challenge involved the scheduling of the interviews themselves. These women were so busy with childcare and homemaking activities, that they were understandably hesitant to give up what limited free time they had. There were many occasions when at the last moment an appointment was changed from 4 PM. to 10 AM. The underlying message, if I read it correctly, was that if you wanted to see me in the next few weeks, it is this morning, or not at all. Therefore, I had to be extremely flexible in my own day to accommodate them. I did so often with little prior notice.

Whenever I arrived at the house of one of my participants, I tried to note as much as possible: the pictures on the wall, the contents of the bookshelves, the household appliances, the cleanliness and neatness of the home. My observations and impressions of each interview setting were recorded on an Impression Sheet, a sample of which is found in Appendix D.

Interviews in Pilot Study of Tosh

In Tosh, women live behind the scenes; it is unusual to see women congregated out on the streets talking with each other. They are usually found in their own homes, or the homes of their neighbours and friends. Publicly, women are much less visible than their numbers would suggest. The males and females are kept apart in almost all social situations. In my interviews, I came to appreciate that the Tosher women live in their own unofficial time zone, Jewish Standard Time, in which everyone is late. Most often, I was kept waiting in the living room for about half an hour before the women would arrive home, or be ready to settle down and talk. I had no doubt in the earliest stages of my interviews with the Tosh woman that I would encounter resistance, if not hostility. The Tosh participants, having minimal contact with the secular world, had little understanding of the research process itself. They are not usually asked their views on issues or given the opportunity to express opinions as part of their everyday lives.

Although I had initially found women who appeared eager to be interviewed, permission to visit and permission to interview are two different things. The separation of public and private domains became evident. It was often necessary for them to ask permission of their husbands, or of the school principal, in order to secure an interview appointment. Some women refused to meet with me, claiming not to understand precisely what I wanted, or finding it difficult to comprehend why their views were important to me. Eventually, word got around the

community that my interviews involved questions requiring some degree of self-disclosure. As a result, greater numbers of women, with increasing frequency, would call to cancel our meetings offering excuses such as lack of time, doctor's appointments, or unexpected visitors from New York. Often, I suspected that it might be that their husbands prohibited them from meeting with me. This hunch was later confirmed by one participant, who confided to me that there is an extremely efficient "information" network" that exists in the community. In their tight-knit insular world, word quickly spread about my intended visit. Although there was an underlying assumption that participants would benefit indirectly from the outcome of the research, since I was exchanging child development workshops for their cooperation and time, the women in this pilot study were clearly not used to talking about themselves to a 'stranger'. Obtaining information on superficial subjects was not problematic, but as I began to probe deeper, resistance from the women in Tosh became more evident. Eventually they saw no purpose in continuing to participate in the study.

As I reviewed my discussions with the Tosh women, I noticed that I had placed too much emphasis on factual information and not enough on the participants' thoughts and feelings. I also tended to make evaluative statements. For example, in speaking with Mrs. L., a woman of forty with ten children, I asked her in a somewhat insensitive way if she planned to

have any more children. Clearly I was making a judgmental statement. I later learned that in fact, each child a Hassidic woman has, no matter what her age, is considered an additional blessing from God. These reflections were taken into consideration during my subsequent interviews in Outremont. Many Tosh women saw the interview as something that should involve their friends and children rather than a private one-on-one event. This attitude reflects the differing notions of self, the strong interrelationship that exists between each woman and her friends and family and the sense of belonging to a collective.

Oakley (1981) argues that the key to achieving a successful interview is to use "feminist research methods in which the interviewer is prepared to" invest her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 31). In the Tosh community, there was such an enormous disparity between me and my participants (age, culture, education, lifestyle, dress, etc.) that being a Jewish female educator presented some fundamental, although not necessarily insurmountable, difficulties. Some interviews were limited by my language skills: it is common when the women converse among themselves or to their children the language they speak Is Yiddish. Therefore, it was sometimes difficult for me to understand what they were saying.

In the end, the interviews did seem to provide some Tosh women with the opportunity to think about issues they had not previously considered and to share views and opinions with someone who at the very least was an eager listener. Many women let me know that I offered a valuable opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about interesting and crucial matters in their lives. One participant was especially intrigued by my questions relating to whether a woman who stays home with her child can be totally fulfilled. She told me that after I left, she called her friend on the telephone and they discussed this idea for over an hour. After some meetings I left feeling that our talk refreshed and sustained their spirit. However, I soon realized I would not be able to maintain this level of rapport. Therefore, I considered gaining access to the larger Hassidic community in Montreal, the one in Outremont.

Interviews in Outremont

My own personal philosophy is that the most important task for any woman is that she raise her family, and everything should be geared toward being able to do that in a better way. What she really needs to know are only those things which would help her become a good mother. I believe very strongly that everyone has a certain task. I do not think that women are in any way inferior – either intellectually or emotionally or in any way. Being a mother is the most challenging job. (Toba, Nov. 3, 1998)

I interviewed forty women in Outremont, Quebec over a period of two years between 1997 and 2001. For this dissertation, I selected ten of these women for analysis and follow-up. I selected the initial participants

through informal word-of-mouth contacts as I attempted to gain access to participants who were from different ages, Hassidic sects, educational levels, and seniority within the community. The typical household of the selected ten women whom I interviewed includes 9-11 individuals. Most families have 7-8 children still living at home. The largest family had 13 children and the smallest had 2. The women's ages ranged from 19 to 64. Most of the homes have between 3 and 4 bedrooms and many of the children sleep in double and triple bunk beds, often five to a room. Some of the larger families roll out mattresses from closets at night because they cannot afford the cost of larger homes. In almost all of the homes, the front hallway was the living room, dining room, den and toy room, all in one. The other rooms were all converted into bedrooms. I observed that one piece of furniture was a constant in each home - a large wood breakfront filled to the brim with the standard classics of Talmudic and Hassidic Literature. As Rebbetzin Fleisher said: "This is the most important part of our house, and it should take a central place to make our children realize that it is more valuable to us than anything else" (Mar. 25, 1999).

Often, this bookcase also contained sparkling silver pieces, most of them ritual objects, such as Hanukkah candle holders, large Sabbath Passover plates and other dishes for the Sabbath and holiday table. Many of the women were clearly proud to show me these ritual objects and point out their significance to me. For example, Raizie explains:

My then future-in-laws gave us this three-armed candelabra as an engagement present and my husband bought me these silver *Kiddish* cups [cups used for benediction over wine] after the birth of each of our children to show his love and appreciation. (May 30, 1999)

Conducting the interviews without distractions proved to be a challenge. More often than not, a few children and infants were present and required attention during our meeting. For example, I recall throughout many interviews a crying baby being a prevalent background accompaniment. As well, I felt that the phones seemed to ring incessantly, and in many cases a cordless phone was in the woman's house-dress pocket. The phone calls seemed to come from children, friends and husbands. It was not unusual in any given hour that the phone would ring six times or more. Most homes were a hub of activity with neighbouring women coming in, going out, collecting their children, dropping off their children or just visiting. It was rare that I conducted an interview without multiple interruptions. These interruptions meant that I would often need to repeat or come back to a question when I sensed that the woman's train of thought had been disturbed.

Deborah Tannen (1990) refers to this type of interruption as a high involvement strategy which she terms overlapping. For some conversations, she argues, it does not impede communication but may in fact enhance it. Interruptions such as those I experienced in some of my interviews, are according to Tannen, a co-operative means of showing involvement, participation and connection among the women. In short, this type of interruption, Tannen believes, should in fact be labelled "rapport-talk." (p. 86)

Just over three-quarters of the interviews were held in women's homes, usually at the kitchen, or dining room table, over tea or a meal. I met other participants in Kosher restaurants, some in outdoor parks in Outremont, and the remainder in Bais Yaakov, the school where I taught. I began each initial interview session with some very general conversation in order to establish rapport and put the women at ease. Often I would comment on how neat the house was, given the early hour of our meeting, or I would admire the condition of the silver religious items in the bookcase, and ask for some silver polishing tips. I always brought a bag of assorted kosher candy to offer to the small children who were present. The first 15 minutes of our time together was used to gain trust, reach a comfort level, and show the ethical consent form that each woman would then sign (Appendix E). I tried to be friendly and warm, with the hope of being viewed as likable and non-threatening. I always prefaced my interview questions with an explanation of the purpose of my study using words such as the following:

I am interested in portraying the Hassidic woman from the perspective of the rich and unique culture and tradition that you represent. I feel that other Jewish women as well as women in general can learn a lot from you and my study hopes to uncover and show that which is so beautiful and special in your lives.

At this point, I would begin with asking my questions, always emphasizing and repeating that all names would be anonymous and that I would not include any information that could possibly be linked to any particular participant. The first few minutes of questioning involved obtaining basic biographical information and covered topics, such as educational background of both husband and participant, and the number and ages of children. The Biographical Data Form that I used is found in Appendix F.

The main interview topics were divided into six areas. The first category examines the role and understanding of being a Hassidic woman. The second area looks at how the Hassidic woman negotiates her life in the year 2000 and is titled the Hassidic woman and modernity. The third area concerns the similarities and differences between Hassidic men and Hassidic women. The fourth category probes educational and literacy issues. The fifth category asks about sources of learning and literacy outside of formal schooling. The sixth category includes questions that were asked in the hope of yielding insight as to how each woman understands herself and her lived experiences. Because these questions were more sensitive and thought-provoking, I approached each woman cautiously to be sure that they would not be offended or feel I was being too intrusive or inappropriate. This list of questions (Appendix G) was usually negotiated over two or three interview appointments. Each interview lasted between one hour and three hours and touched a spectrum of perspectives, opinions, world-views and emotions.

Participant Observation

NECHAMA AND MENDEL'S WEDDING

The wedding was called for six pm. I had been forewarned that Hassidic time is always one hour later, so my husband and I entered the banquet hall at 7 pm only to discover that we were among the first guests to arrive. The women's room was set up with tables of food and a bar with soft drinks. On an elevated dias were three chairs, the center one resembing a throne. Nechama looking truly regal, sat in this chair, with her mother and future mother-inlaw on each side of her. The female guests went up to the dias to wish her and her family a *mazel tov*, or congratulatory message.

The room for the men was adjacent to the women's room. I was not permitted to enter it. My husband became my informant. It seemed that the refreshments offered to the men were less abundant than those being served on the women's side. At 8:30, one and a half hours after the scheduled time, the groom was led into the women's room, accompanied by his father, grandfathers and assorted other males in their traditional Hassidic garb of long coats and fur brimmed hats. This signaled the start of a ceremony known as the *bedeken*, or the veiling of the bride. This custom, I learned from other guests, is consonant with the laws of modesty. The bride is the center of attention at the ceremony; she covers her face so that no man other than her husband will gaze at her beauty. On this day, her beauty is for her husband alone. Another reason given for this custom is to indicate that he is not primarily interested in her physical beauty. Beauty is something that will fade in time, but if the groom is also attracted to the girl's spiritual qualities, he is attached to something that she will never lose. The custom that the bride covers her face when she approaches her groom has biblical antecedents. A bride's face is covered only after the groom sees her to ascertain that she is the woman he intends to marry. This version reflects the biblical account of Jacob's marriage to Leah instead of Rachel. At this point, then, Nechama's face was covered with a large, thick, white square piece of cloth.

I was curious to learn more about this custom as it struck me, at the time, as depriving the bride of the opportunity of being a full participant in this most meaningful event in her life. I wanted to understand why Nechama's way of knowing was constrained because all of her faculties were not available to her. This was explained to me over dinner by a woman with whom I was seated:

I felt very good about the idea of having my face covered throughout the marriage ceremony. It was a way in which I could fully concentrate on important issues and prayers for our life together, for a happy and healthy marriage with children who will follow in our ways, for the *Moshiah* [Messiah] to come. What you have to see you can hear. It's the holiest time of your life, like *Yom Kippor* [the Day of Atonement], a time to beg *Hashem* [God] for mercy for everything. The veil also creates an aura, anticipation and desire in the groom for the moment when the bride is finally unveiled.

An Orthodox wedding ceremony must be held outdoors, under the sky. Unfortunately, for the bridal party and guests, it was raining heavily. The ceremony was conducted in Hebrew and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

After the ceremony, the bride and groom, her face uncovered, came back inside followed by the 500 guests. At this time the newly married couple went to a room to be together for their first moment of privacy. The purpose of being together alone after the wedding ceremony is for seclusion or *yichud*. In this couple's case, they had met only on two previous occasions in the company of the bride's parents and for just a few hours in duration.

Despite the absence of the bride and groom, the guests entered the main dining hall of the synagogue and an elaborate meal began. Because the men and women were seated in different parts of the room, separated by a *mehitzah* or dividing wall, my husband, not knowing anyone at his table, felt quite uncomfortable. So we did not stay for the entire dinner. However, we did wait for the bride and groom to make their entry, each to his respective side of the hall. At this time the dancing began. This consisted of circle dances or *horahs*, with the bride, her mother and mother-in-law in the center. (Oct. 23, 2001)

I used participant observation as a second tool of data collection.

Becker and Geer define participant observation as:

that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in that some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time. (Becker & Geer, 1969, p. 32)

As a participant observer, I played the roles of both participant and observer in that I was a member of the group I was observing. The advantage of this dual role was that it afforded me a legitimate position within the group that I was observing (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 127). I tried to take part in a wide range of events from community social events to religious ceremonies to life-cycle celebrations, all part of the Hassidic woman's socialization process. In Outremont and in Boisbriand, I ate many meals with the women and thus had many opportunities to engage in informal talks with them. The way in which I interpreted my role as participant observer, to a great extent was determined by both the context in which I found myself and the participants themselves. The women of Tosh considered me to be a non-participant who was free to observe from a distance. In the case of the women in Outremont, however, I played the role of both observer and participant. While I knew I might be refused access to certain aspects of their community life, I had the freedom to take part in most of the activities of the group and the opportunity to move from group to group. I felt this role was the most appropriate one for me as it represented a happy medium and facilitated the information – gathering procedure in the most efficient manner.

During observation periods, I usually carried a small notebook and pen and would jot down notes on the activities and interactions I observed or overheard. Some dialogue was captured verbatim, while the essence of other dialogue was reconstructed from notes made during observations. As soon as possible after leaving the setting, I would begin transcribing and expanding the notes I had taken. This process took about two and a half times the amount of time spent observing. On one occasion, I was invited to an *opshemish*, a custom of cutting the hair of a three year-old male leaving just his *peyos* or hair that grows at his temples. It is believed that the age of three reflects a significant plateau. I am including the following excerpt from my field notes as a participant observer of this event:

OPSHERNISH

This event took place at a synagogue in Tosh. It began with a lavish buffet dinner. The child, Yankel, entered the room approximately forty-five minutes later, wrapped in his father's prayer shawl. Guests sang a "good-luck" song and threw candies on him. It was explained to me that the boy is told that they are thrown by the angel Michal for he is the source of all sweetness. The child also distributed bags of candies to the other children to share his sweetness with others. The boy was then given the opportunity to recite blessings, the rabbi spoke and then male family and friends were invited to participate in taking a snip of Yankel's hair with scissors that were provided. After this ritual, a celebratory feast of wine, food, song and music ensued. As a woman, I was not part of the ritual ceremony but was able to participate by watching from the synagogue balcony. Women adjourned to a separate room after the hair cutting to celebrate together. (Feb. 12, 1997)

I divided field notes into three types: The first type, as illustrated

above, were purely observational as I attempted to accurately record the

observed activity. These were the most extensive and included what I

observed, how I felt as a researcher and how involved I was in the

particular event or activity. The following is a further example of this type:

At *Shabbat* dinner, I was particularly uncomfortable at my lack of knowledge in regard to the rituals and blessings. I did not know that I was not to speak between washing of hands and the blessing of the bread. I was also fascinated by the amount of activity going on – children everywhere running, hiding, on top of the table, under the table, being passed back and forth. I was sure that I would return home with a major headache. (Mar. 3, 2000)

The second type of field note was more theoretical. These field

notes included interpretations, inferences, descriptions of concepts and

relationships between concepts. These notes then formed the beginning stages of data analysis as illustrated in the next excerpt.

I notice that Suri Gittel seems very much in charge of the entire *Shabbat* experience. Her husband and her children seem to constantly look to her for a sign that she is ready to proceed with the next ritual or the next course of food. She is clearly in control of what might appear to an outsider as mayhem. (May 10, 2000)

The third type of field note is methodological. These notes included suggestions or ideas for future questions, or future research activities that emerged as I was observing or writing up notes and comments. They also often served as reminders of documents I wished to collect or interview questions I thought to add. For example, in this excerpt I make a methodological note to remind myself to return: "I want to come back to this home, to take a photo of the room so that when I am trying to describe the setting in my thesis, I will have a visual reminder of what this house looked like" (Jan. 6, 1998).

Of course, I could not write anything during my visits to homes on *Shabbat*, so I had to rely on my memory, and if my husband accompanied me, on his usually excellent recall of events and conversations. In the classroom, when I felt that my note-taking was becoming intrusive, I would wait till a class break and then go to the parking lot and sit in my car to write up my observations. On rare occasions when I had a lot of

information and little time, I would speak into a tape recorder while in my car and then transcribe the tape when I returned home.

The content of the field notes changed over time. Initially, notes were broadly focused as I attempted to gain an awareness of the environments and the activities that went on and come to know the participants. Later, the notes became more narrowly focused and contained more detail and analysis. There were two reasons for this evolution of field notes. First, because the setting, the participants, and some aspects of the environment were new to me. I had a sense that I wanted or needed to capture everything. This was especially the case in Boisbriand where I found myself in a part of Quebec I had never before visited. Early in the field, I did not want to limit myself. I wanted to be open to all possible avenues of investigation. Second, as data was being collected, I was engaged in review and preliminary analysis. This process also helped to focus the study. As James Clifford (1986) points out: "Field-workers' data are constituted in situations in which multiple forms of communication are going on simultaneously, and competing interpretations of the same events are always present. These 'multivocal', 'polyphonic', and multilayered data are necessarily reduced when they are taken out of the settings in textualized forms" (p. 16). My notes and transcripts thus represented a muted and abbreviated version of the

research events and encounters. Nevertheless, together with my memories, images, and ongoing relationships with some members of the communities, these texts constituted the data I had to rely on in constructing my final analysis and writing up my interpretation of my findings.

Informal Discussions

THE DOOR LOCK

As I passed the librarian in Bais Yaakov, I asked her to explain to me why every door of each home I visited had a key pad in addition to the lock. She told me that one is not permitted to carry anything, including keys, on the Sabbath. Therefore, to be able to lock their front doors, Hassidim install door lock key pads in order to keep the laws of the Sabbath.

The preceding transcript is an example of the informal discussions I

engaged in with participants, with their families, with librarians, principals,

social workers and rabbis. These discussions often took place quite

spontaneously, in homes, at social events and in schools. Informal

discussions helped me to see their perspectives, to clarify events, answer

questions and support or discount insights.

While discussions were held with a wide range of people

throughout the years, there were clearly some people with whom I

developed much closer and trusting relationships. They proved to be my

best sources of information and commentary. For the sake of anonymity, I

am unable to disclose the positions these women occupied in the

community. All informal discussions were recorded in the same way that field observations were recorded. I took some notes about the discussions while I was in the setting, and then expanded on them shortly after I left. Notes on informal discussions were included in the field notes for the day they occurred. The following excerpt is an example of this notation from an informal discussion.

FOOD FOR PASSOVER

Today I spoke with Mrs. H., the school secretary, during the class break. Because it is a few days before Passover, she appears very hassled and excited. She told me that the last thing she should be doing now is working in the school office. I can't believe how much money she says she has spent in shopping for Passover supplies. Even though I often complain about the cost of buying Passover food, our bill now appears inconsequential. (Apr. 18, 2000)

Rereading this notation from this informal conversation, I decided to pursue the topic of how costly the Passover holiday is for Hassidic women and to determine if this cost poses a financial strain on their families.

Documents and Archival Material

A final method of data collection, one that was begun in Boisbriand, and continued in Outremont, is the collection of archival documents and materials. Written sources and accounts have a historical place in the sociological tradition incorporating interactionist and similar interpretative perspectives. Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) categorize documents as
formal or informal. Over the past six years, both types of assorted documents and archival materials have provided me with more contextualized information about my research sites and participants. Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) define documents as "lay accounts of everyday life that an enterprising and imaginative researcher can draw on for certain purposes" (p. 129). I include documents to illustrate the nature and significance of documentary material in providing me with valuable information. The following letter, sent to each student is an example of what is considered an informal document.

Dear Girls:

It shouldn't be necessary to speak to students about the *Halachos* [laws] of *tznius* [modesty] and about what is and is not acceptable clothing.

I have spoken to some of you individually. I feel it is embarrassing for me to do this, and for the student to whom it is said. It appears, though, that we have to be even more specific about what is appropriate for a *Bas Yisroel* [a Jewish woman] to wear.

Not only must the neckline, the length of sleeves and the length of the skirt conform to *Halacha*, but there are *Halachos* about the fit and colour of clothing as well. If your clothing is so tight that your body and/or underclothing are clearly outlined, it is certainly forbidden.

I hope that I never have to write this again, but I am sorry to tell you that the Rabbi finds it difficult to walk into the school because of the lack of *tznius*. Seminary is a place where we are fortunate to have Choshuve Rabbonim [Rabbis] and teachers to guide us in the ways of our *Torah Ha Kedosha* [holy Torah], and our way of dress in Seminary should reflect these ideals. I am sure that each and every one of you will try to improve in her level of tznius. As a result of practicing tznius, a feeling of tznius is awakened that becomes progressively deeper and deeper. It will become apparent to you that this trait is the royal stamp of the Jewish female, and the more perfect her *tznius*, the more brightly will shine all her other fine qualities, as *tznius* brings to the surface the inner regality of the Jewish woman.

(letter sent to each student in CEGEP program at Orthodox School October 2000).

Figure 2: Letter sent to Girls at Hassidic School (Oct. 26, 2000)

In this particular example, the information pertains to the laws of

modesty regarding the dress code of young women in a Hassidic school.

This letter clearly reflects the principal's distress about the student's

dress, which she believes is often not in accordance with the religious

tenets of modesty in appearance. The centrality of dressing, behaving and

interacting in an appropriate and becoming manner was previously

explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

This type of written material illustrates distinctive ways in which their authors, or their subjects who are reported in them, organize their experience, as well as the sorts of imagery and "situated vocabularies" they employ, the issues they grapple with, the routine events in their lives, and the troubles and reactions they encounter (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993). They are useful for suggesting potential lines of inquiry and serve as a source for analyzing a sensitizing concept. They can furnish information on experiences that are not accessible to outside observation. Even popular fictional literature is often replete with images, stereotypes, and conventional wisdom that span a vast range of social domains and are very telling. Through these documents, I have been made aware of cultural themes pertaining to sex, gender, family, work, success, failure, religious beliefs, health and law.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are those documents that are referred to as formal material found in the public domain, information gleaned from newspapers, videos and non-fiction works. Although some contemporary ethnographers may argue that data from official sources may be inadequate and subject to bias or distortion. I believe that it would be a mistake to ignore such materials. If they are regarded as social products, it is useful to examine them in the light of the interpretative and interactional work that went into their production. The reflexive ethnographer should be aware that *all* classes of data have their problems, and that none can be treated as unquestionably valid representations of 'reality'. As Bulmer remarks:

There is no logical reason why awareness of possible serious sources of error in official data should lead to their rejection for research purposes. It could as well point to the need for methodological work to secure their improvement. Cases of the extensive use of official data do not suggest that those who use them are unaware of the possible pitfalls in doing so. The world is not made up just of knowledgeable sceptics and naive hard-line positivists. (Bulmer, 1980, p. 508)

In the process of interviewing these Hassidic women, while I was committed to participant observations, there were activities that remained difficult for me to observe directly. This was especially true in Boisbriand with the Tosher Hassidim. The formal and informal documents and other assorted material that I managed to obtain provided me with additional insight that otherwise would not be available. As well, they have encouraged me to seek answers to guestions such as: How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them? The documents that I refer to are cultural artifacts that represent the Hassidic ideology and their socio-cultural norms and beliefs. They are representative of this culture's way of doing, thinking, believing and valuing. As such, they can be readily incorporated into an ethnographer's topics of inquiry as well as furnishing analytic and interpretative resources. A detailed discussion of each of these documents appears in Chapter Five. I have compiled them in a table which can be found on page 302.

Interpretation of Data

As I began to collect data in 1995 in Boisbriand, I realized that there was no end to what I might look at, what I should note and what might be relevant to include. On first entering the field, I sought to find an initial orientation. I knew little of what was there, let alone what salient questions to ask. As I got my bearings, however, and began to assume the participatory role best suited to my situation, the analytical thinking that facilitated my accession fostered my questions as well.

As my data collection had no clear end, so my analysis had no clear beginning. In order to start ethnographic research, decisions about when, where, and how had to be made. With those initial decisions, my analysis began. And with all subsequent choices of what to look at and what to note, this analysis continued. As the ethnographic research cycle (Spradley, 1980) spiralled on, my observations become more focused, more selective.

Through this concurrent analysis, more significant questions were raised. As I collected and analyzed my field notes and documents. I looked for themes or motifs in informants' first-order constructs that seemed to point to significant aspects of the participants' lives. As I progressed through the chunks of data in each category, I began to realize that the same ideas and notions were recurring over and over again, and several themes, that would become the focus of this thesis, emerged.

In time, patterns began to form from the data and themes began to develop in the patterns. Further observations were more directly focused, looking specifically at phenomena related to these developing patterns. As such themes arose, I would feed them back to informants for a reaction generating additional related data. Through this process of "using the data to think with", (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993, p. 210) I gradually extended my "interpretations of interpretations" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 514) into a detailed portrait of the significant aspects of the Hassidic woman's lived experiences.

Slowly, these themes in my participants first-order constructs were woven into larger patterns that eventually evolved into this ethnographic account. As I developed a sense of what these themes and patterns appeared to signify to the Hassidic women, these themes, then, were translated into six broad areas out of which the 75 interview questions (Appendix G) emerged.

These six areas are (1) being a Hassidic woman; (2) the Hassidic woman and modernity; (3) the similarities and differences between Hassidic men and women; (4) the role of higher secular education (that is, beyond high school) in the life of the Hassidic women; (5) literacy as the creation of personal meaning; (6) how the Hassidic woman thinks about her life - her dreams, her goals and the message she wishes to transmit to others.

Researcher Reflexivity

To reveal myself in my work means to bring the self, the psyche, soul, mind, spirit – that peculiarly structured inner world that makes each of us who we are – directly into my work... I form relationships, expecting both to influence others and to be influenced.... If I participate in authentic relationships, how could this be otherwise? (Rogers, 1993, p. 167)

Rogers (1993) acknowledges that for her, the self "is a researcher's finest and most valuable `touchstone' for making relationships and creating interpretations throughout the research process" (p. 267). Reflexivity is a critical aspect in qualitative research, because, as Norman Denzin (1994) points out "in the social sciences there is only interpretation. Confronted with a mountain of impressions, documents, and field notes, the qualitative researcher faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned" (p. 500). Mary Maynard (1994) argues that "this interpretative and synthesizing process connects experiences to understanding" (p. 24).

My own personal experience of this research process has convinced me that my ability to see more, or less, or differently was related to the theoretical lens through which I viewed women's experiences. During this process, I tried to achieve a balance between engagement with and detachment from the conceptual worlds of my participants. I thought, perhaps there was a danger, given my years teaching at Bais Yaakov, of coming to identify too closely with this institution's ideology. That is,

someone from a different location, would likely see different things in the data, and, therefore, come to a different interpretation.

A number of methodologists have voiced a similar concern about the contextually contingent nature of ethnographic practices and representations. For example, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1986) speak of "maintaining analytical distance upon explanations of activity prevalent within the culture being observed" (p. 278). In an effort to create this analytical distance, I decided to interview a number of outside informants, in academic as well as other settings, in order to situate that ideology in the larger disciplinary landscape. I sought out people I thought would share the Hassidic women's view as well as others I suspected might see things rather differently. I met with community social workers, psychologists and vocational counsellors. I interviewed directors of other Seminary programs for ultra-Orthodox women, as well as teachers and librarians in other Hassidic girls' schools. I spoke to community Rabbis, and their wives. Often I struck up conversations with Hassidic women pushing baby carriages on the street, at the check-out line at the kosher grocery store, or standing at the back of an airplane en route to seeing their rebbe in Israel. I spoke with non-Jews who were neighbors of the Hassidic women I was interviewing. All these conversations turned out to be extremely useful, both in helping me recognize further aspects of this community's

ideology and in increasing my understanding of how that ideology, as a contingent social construction, is both supported and contested within the Outremont Hassidic culture.

In taking this tack, however, I felt there was a danger of presenting a monolithic portrait of the community that would neglect individual differences in perspective. Here the risk was in ignoring what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) calls "heteroglossia," the chorus of contending voices and beliefs from which human discourse and knowledge emerge. For this reason, while looking for convergencies of perspective in the data, in an effort to identify areas of intersubjectivity, I also made a point of attending to signs of divergence – individual views that ran against the grain of conventional opinion.

How can the researcher or the reader know whether any ethnography accurately captures the settings and is not simply a product of the researcher's initial biases and presuppositions? After all, as mentioned, the researcher is obviously an instrument in the study, and her data collection reflects those features of the setting to which she attends. With this concern in mind, first I frequently tested my interpretations by trying them out on my participants while I was in the field. As Urie Bronfenbrenner (1952) informs us,

We must then, be sagacious, and always cognisant that, both we as researchers, and our conclusions should always be open to criticism.

We must be aware of the choices we make, our own subjectivities, and the interpretation of other people's experience that both of these influence. (p. 453)

Second, as I wrote papers and chapters developing my ideas, I gave them to leaders and other members of these communities to read; on the whole, they recognized themselves and their experiences in my representation. Third, I sought endorsement from outside the community. I presented my newly developing ideas to colleagues, the reference librarian at the Jewish Public Library and to members of my advisory committee. Their responses affirmed the plausibility and usefulness of my interpretations. Fourth, I continually read the literature on similar religious communities and was reassured to discover that the themes I was finding in the Tosh as well as the Outremont groups were present in communities other researchers were writing about. These various forms of confirmation provided some reassurance about the validity of my research.

Ethnographic research cannot step outside the moral values that grant ethnography its meaning. At the very least, the ethnographer needs to be aware of the fact that research may have certain effects on the people with whom the research is concerned. This is particularly true in the case of Hassidic women. In the course of the interviews, I sensed feelings among the women that ranged from discomfort, anxiety, false hope, guilt, and self-doubt to increased awareness, moral stimulation, insight, a sense of liberation and certain thoughtfulness. Some of our conversations became intense enough to have possibly led to new levels of self-awareness, heightened perceptiveness, deeper understanding and increased thoughtfulness for both myself and the participant. An example of this occurred one day in a discussion around a kitchen table with Raizie:

The Talmud says that the hallmarks of a Jew are that we are compassionate, modest and do deeds of loving kindness. As a full-time mother and housewife and teacher, I felt I didn't have time to devote to helping others in the community. I never found the time to do anything for anyone else besides my family.

In the last few weeks I started to question how I might use my own individual strengths to contribute to the world. I asked myself some questions — why was I put here? What should I be accomplishing with my life? Am I living up to my potential?

A few months ago I decided to begin doing some charitable work at our local senior citizens home. I now realize that by serving others, in fact, I am serving God. If I do not contribute to the world's upkeep, I am not entitled to take from it. Now, I feel so much more at peace when I sleep (Nov. 7, 1998).

Hearing Raizie's words, I too began to think about how I no longer did

volunteer work. The way she spoke about doing deeds of loving kindness

inspired me to consider adding a component of volunteer activity to my

own life.

The methodology I have chosen, and my research in general, does

not claim to represent the viewpoints of all Hassidic Jewish women. My

ultimate goal was to present a vivid, detailed account of participants'

perspectives in the communities I observed. Like all ethnographic accounts, this one will be necessarily partial and incomplete (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). This account does not claim to represent the viewpoints or to portray the lives of all Hassidic women in Quebec. Nevertheless, it is my belief that well-done case studies of particular communities highlight tendencies and patterns that can be found in the larger society as well.

Although I have sought to let my research participants speak for themselves as much as possible, so that the reader will have some basis for assessing my analysis, in the end it is I who have staged their comments. As a researcher, I have developed a particular interpretation of their experiences, and in the following chapter, as author, I explore the patterns and themes that emerged. Nevertheless, the intention of this inquiry is not to provide final, definitive answers but to keep the analysis and dialogue open.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WOMEN OF VALOUR

Hassidic Women – Their Contexts and Their Voices

"A Woman of Valor"

A good wife, who can find? She is more precious than corals

The heart of her husband trusts in her.

And he has no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm

All the days of her life.

She seeks out wool and flax And works it up as her hands will.

She is like the ships of the merchant,

From afar she brings her food. She arises while it is yet night,

And gives food to her household, And a portion to her maidens.

She examines a field and buys it, With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength, And braces her arms for work. She perceives that her profit is good:

Her lamp does not go out at night.

She lays her hands on the distaff,

Her palms grasp the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor, And extends her hands to the needy.

She does not fear snow for her household.

For all her household are clad in warm garments.

Coverlets she makes for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is distinguished in the council

When he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen cloth and sells it, She delivers belts to the merchant. Strength and honor are her garb, She smiles confidently at the future. She opens her mouth with wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household,

She eats not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed,

And her husband praises her: "Many daughters have done excellently,

But you excel them all."

Grace is deceptive and beauty is passing:

A woman revering Adonai, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own work praise her in the gates

(Proverbs 31:10-31)

The poem, "A Woman of Valor" demonstrates the significance of the woman's role in the lives of Hassidic families. In Hassidic homes today, it is customary for husbands to sing it to their wives every Friday (Sabbath) evening; it is often read at the funerals of Jewish women.

Sarah, one of the prophetesses in the Bible, reached prophetic

heights, according to Aiken (1992), by dedicating every aspect of her life to

fulfilling the will of God. At one level of understanding, "A Woman of Valor"

indicates Sarah's accomplishments during her lifetime. At a deeper level, it

conveys what she contributed to every successive generation of Jews.

Aiken relates the importance of this poem in the following:

It is significant that we recite these words on Friday nights. The Sabbath is that time when we are supposed to elevate our bodies to the level of our souls, without allowing the external world to intrude on our spiritual equilibrium. The Sabbath's essence is precisely what Sarah achieved, insofar as she devoted herself to making peace between her body and soul. (Aiken, 1992, p. 219)

According to Aiken, "Sarah's major contribution was her implanting in

each of her female descendants a spark that motivates her to live and teach

Godly values." She goes on to say:

One of the fundamental places where God reveals His Divine Presence to us individually, regardless of whether or not we have a Temple, is in the Jewish home. Sarah gave us the wherewithal to make our homes sanctuaries for God, to inspire our children and ourselves with the highest spiritual values, and to use everything in the material world to serve our souls. She transmitted to us the intuition to see what is truly meaningful and good and the knowledge of how to achieve it. She also modeled how we can develop the means to transmit this legacy to others. (p. 223) "A Woman of Valor" captures the essence of what it means to be a Hassidic woman. Fulfilling the myriad of responsibilities of a good wife, without complaint, aptly describes the lives of the women participants who work tirelessly to meet the needs of husband and children. It is noteworthy that all ten participants reported being an Hassidic woman as a most positive and meaningful experience. In all cases, participants claim to feeling very special in being entrusted with the primary responsibilities of homemaking and childcare. For example, Raizie states that for her, it means "being the centre of the family, the hub of the wheel, a very beautiful existence – I wouldn't want to be anything else." Toba believes that being a Hassidic woman ensures "a deep seated comfort level and a fundamental acceptance of why God put you on this earth."

The Ten Participants

I am so honored to be chosen as one of the women that you wanted to meet with. I only hope that I can answer all your questions and I hope you will let me see the finished product. I don't really know what a thesis is but this opportunity to share my thoughts with you is very exciting for me. It makes me feel important that someone from a university would care about what I think. (Toba, July 17, 1998)

As pointed out above, of the 40 women with whom I met over a two-year period, I selected ten women who lived in Outremont to continue my study. Six of the women were born in Montreal, two were born in Europe and two others were born in New York. My purpose in the first

meeting with each woman was to establish a rapport, explain the goals of my study, present the consent form to participate in the research and collect biographical data from each one. This questionnaire is included as Appendix F. An overview of this relevant background information collected in this first meeting is presented in Table 2 entitled Biographical Data of Participants. It is to be noted that I have changed all the names of the participants in order to assure anonymity and confidentiality.

Biographical	Table 2
Data of	
Participants	

							· · · · · ·			-		1997 - C.		
	Age	fluchund's øge	Years married	# of children	Range of ages of children	Woman's educations) background	Husband's educations) background	Religious affiliation	Language spoken at home	Languages spoken w/hushand	Languages spoken w/inends	Languages spoken at school	Work outside of home	Full-time or part-time
Chuşa	42	45	24	2	10 & 13	Bais Yaakos Seminary	-	Munkatz	Yicklish & English	Yiddish & English	English	-	Bakery	pert-time
Raizie	41	43	22	3	21, 19, 15	Special Care Counselling at Bais Yaakov	Yeshiva after grade 7	Belz	Yiddish	Yiddish	English & Yiddish	-	teaches in resource room in religious school	part-time
Sarsh Charm	46	47	25	12	2-26	after high school took courses in computers and in French	went to 8th grade in Chicago and then to Yeshiva	Satrowr	Yiddish	Yidelish	English & Yiddish	-	-	-
Devorsh Esther	64	70	46	10	12-35	graduated from seminary in New York, got a DEC at Marie Victorin in Social Counselling	after grade 6, took secular courses in technology in order to tearn how to read Nueprints (he is a builder)	Bobov	Yiddish	English	English	-	co-ordinate of a community coalition group	full-tume
Retibitzea Fleisher	39	43	20	•	8-18 -	Seminary in Europe in Jewish studies, DEC in Special Care Counselling at Bais Yankov	Yeshiva in London and Israel: Studied in "kolfel" for Syssers and is presently a Rabbi	Vishnitz	with sons: Yikhish Wdaughters: English	English	English & Yiddish		-	
Eziporah	41	45	25	11	2-23	Seminary at Balis Yaakov	-	Sक्र सय	Yicklish	Yiddish	English		librarian at community library	full-time
Shoshuna Ruchel	48	49	30	11	2-26	Seminary at Tav in Jewish studies and sewing	no format secular education	Klosenherg	Yiddish	Yiddish	English	-	volunteer work in hospital	pert-time
Suri ()incl	49 .	52	29	13	28-6 -/	after high school, 3 years teacher training in Europe	self-culucated in history, goography and computers	International (a combination)	Yiddish .	Yiddish	English & Yiddish	-	runs a catalogue business in her home	part-time
Yehudu	19	עו	2	2	1 csionth & 1 year	Bais YaoLov Seminary in Special Education	Certified emergency medical technician	Vishnitz	Yirklish & Hetnew		Yiddish	English & Yiklish	works ad # substitute teacher in Jewish subjects at religions school	pert-time
[uba	38	40	20	6	2-17	Seminary in N Y. after high school in teacher training, parenting courses	formal secular education ended at grade 6, tochnicol schenil after to learn auto rocchanics	Vishnitz	Yishish & English	Yiddish & English	English	-	runs religious girts day camp in summer	pert-time

A few general observations may be gleaned from Table 2. The first concerns the disparity between the education of the women and their husbands. All the woman completed post-secondary school education at a seminary in Canada, United States or Israel. More often than not, the area of specialization was in Teacher Training, or Special Education. On the other hand, their spouses rarely completed high school. Secular education ended at their *Bar Mitzvahs* (coming of age), age 13, after which *Yeshiva* (school for advanced religious studies) training began. Raizie explained to me what the general pattern of a Hassidic boy's education might look like:

He stops his secular learning at his *Bar Mitzvah* [age 13] and completes high school until about age 14 in a *Yeshiva* where he just learns Jewish subjects. Most boys at about age 15 then go to Israel or New York to continue religious studies until it's time for them to get married, usually at 18-20 years old. After they marry, they will continue their religious learning for about two years, although some may continue longer, in a *Kollel* [school for married men to continue their Torah studies]. Although they receive a salary from the *Kollel*, it is very low. During their *Kollel* study, some men take evening courses in English, computers and French to prepare themselves for the job market when they leave *Kollel*.(Raizie, Dec. 4, 1999)

Many of the women interviewed were eager to point out that the difference

in the level of secular education between the spouses was of little

consequence. In fact, as Suri Gittel explains:

Although my husband has no secular education beyond high school, he is far more learned than I ever will be. His education has taught him how to think, to reason. He knows much more than most college graduates, because he reads a lot and is self-educated. (Suri Gittel, Jan. 10, 2000) Toba corroborates Suri Gittel's view:

My husband is a self-made man. He learned mechanics, engineering, computers on his own. He didn't need formal secular education to become very proficient in his field when he went to work after studying (Toba, Jan. 10, 2000).

The significance of the differences between the secular education of the husbands and wives is analyzed in more detail later in this chapter. All of their husbands have completed the required formal religious learning and now are employed in a variety of careers. Some are running their own businesses. Suri Gittel's and Chana's husbands head large companies in the real estate and electronic industries. Other men are employed in small family-owned businesses, or in blue-collar trades. One male, after completing his religious training, is presently the Rabbi in his community.

The second observation concerns the size of Hassidic families. In total, the number of children in my sample of 10 women is 74. The largest family has 13 children (Suri Gittel). Birth control and abortion are strictly forbidden except in cases of serious health problems. Not one woman in this inquiry voiced any form of dissatisfaction with the size of her family. A recurrent theme throughout all interviews was that their children provide them with such joy and pride that all their necessary sacrifices are made worthwhile.

A third aspect that may be gleaned from Table 2 are the languages spoken, read and written at home, with friends and at school. Because most Hassidic boys have a weak proficiency in English, all participants speak Yiddish at home while only two also converse in English with their families. The girls English skills are far better than her brother's due to, I suspect, the greater secular learning that elementary school girls receive. Rebbetzin Fleisher, as is noted, speaks Yiddish to her sons and English with her daughters. This is not unusual in conversations between parents and children. Code switching between Yiddish and English is found in the conversations with spouses. Interestingly, when communicating with friends in person or on the telephone, English seems to be the prevalent choice. When asked why this is, Tzipporah explained that there was no particular reason except that she was used to it, and it was the accepted way among them (Jan. 12, 1998). A description of each participant follows:

1. Chaya

Chaya, age 42, works in her husband's bakery part-time as a saleswoman. She met with me at her kitchen table, which was beautifully set and laden with cakes, cookies, bagels, cream cheese, smoked salmon and coffee. For two of the three interview sessions, her eight year-old daughter was present. I have known Chaya for over ten years, having taught her at Bais Yaakov Seminary in 1990, and I have developed a very warm and comfortable relationship with her. Of all my participants, I could probably most easily maintain a friendship with Chaya. She is particularly

intelligent and willing to disclose very personal feelings about her life and her role as a wife and mother.

2. Raizie

For most of the interviews with Raizie, we sat at her dining room table. At each session, she made sure to offer me a drink and some dessert during our meetings. Raizie is very articulate and thinks carefully before she answers. She spoke wistfully of her life goals and dreams and often asked to go back to previous questions to make sure she had answered them completely and fully. Raizie's home is located in what is considered the "downtown" Hassidic area. This is a part of Outremont where the East-West dividing line is thought to be Stuart Avenue. Although ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Jews live in both what is referred to by them as "downtown" and "uptown" Outremont, there are distinctions made between these two communities by the inhabitants themselves.

"Uptown" Jews are considered to have more money for discretionary items such as housekeeping help. As well, on average they have fewer children. The style of dress is perceived to be different as well - uptown Hassidic Jews are thought to be more modern in their hairstyles, dress styles and make-up. As one uptowner explained, "We don't dress as modestly as the downtowners. We might on occasion wear ankle socks instead of thick stockings, our skirts might have a slit of a few inches on the

side and the colors of our clothes might be bolder" (Suri Gittel, May 17, 2000). Uptown women are more likely to drive a car, thus allowing them more mobility and freedom, so that insulation and boundaries are virtually non-existent. As one downtown woman explained, "the uptowners can operate in shades of gray." Uptown women agree that they are more exposed and perhaps as a result more open-minded:

We will go out to restaurants to eat and a few of us will have T.V.'s and radios in our homes. In uptown circles, our husbands might help us on with our coats in public. This type of interaction between husbands and wives wouldn't occur downtown. (Suri Gittel, May 17, 2000)

"Downtown" Jews in Outremont feel they have a greater pull toward

their *rebbe* in Israel than do "uptown" residents. They consider themselves

to be more *Hassidishe*, more observant and religious, although the same

laws are followed by both. Downtowners believe they are more sheltered

and not as likely to be fashionable in their dress, hair and head coverings.

Downtowners think of themselves as more insular and not as open with

their Gentile neighbours, especially when it comes to members of the

opposite sex. Raizie explains the differences:

There is a barrier between us – a downtown man would not greet a woman he knows on the street even if she was Hassidic. If there is a *mazel tov* [congratulatory message] to be given to a man I know well, I'll let my husband wish it. Downtowners tend to have larger families. *Tznius* [modesty] is a big dividing line between us and the uptown residents. I believe that if you are wearing a wig, it should look like a wig. Some uptown women have *sheitels* [wigs] that are so expensive and well-made [a good wig can cost \$3000] that it looks

like their own hair. We tend to use Yiddish more frequently in our conversations than uptowners do. (Raizie, Jan. 25, 1999)

Figure 3 is a map of Outremont. I have highlighted in yellow the dividing line between uptown and downtown.



Figure 3: A Map of Outremont, Quebec

As I left after the last visit with Raizie, she said that it is very exciting for her to talk with someone who teaches psychology and that she never met anyone before who had so much education.

3. Sarah Chana

Sarah Chana, age 46, does not presently work but has taken some computer courses for interest. I recall that our interview meetings were particularly noisy. During the day, she not only looks after her own small children, but also baby-sits her daughter's two infants as well as a neighbour's child. At each meeting, there were five to seven children present, each requiring some degree of attention, food or amusement at any given moment. In addition, incoming telephone calls were non-stop. She spoke for about a minute to each caller in Yiddish. Because of the incessant interruptions and distractions, we met on seven separate occasions. Sarah Chana's duplex has only three bedrooms to accommodate her twelve children. During the time of my inquiry, six of her children still lived in her home - the others are either married or, in the case of two sons, are studying in New York. The two children's bedrooms have bunk style beds and trundles that pull out in the evening. At the time of this writing, she was pregnant with her thirteenth child.

4. Devorah Esther

The interviews with Devorah Esther took place in her office – a modern, fully equipped room. Her husband was seated at a desk nearby in an adjoining office. Devorah Esther is very open, and often outspoken. I sometimes sensed that she made a point of wanting to show me that she was no different from other women just because she was Hassidic. She seems to take pride in the fact that she is an atypical woman in her community. For example, her vocabulary includes words that are inconsistent with those of other women with whom I spoke. She often resorts to the use of profanity to make her point or perhaps to shock me.

On one occasion, I expressed my interest in visiting her home on Sabbath. Her response was very matter-of-fact: "Why would you want to come? Where are you going with all this information? Would your visit be for pure curiosity?" She told me that she keeps her family life completely separate from her outside community activity life. She seemed very reluctant to even consider inviting me to her home for a Sabbath dinner.

Devorah Esther seems to take pride in having a full and busy schedule. She was eager to give me a description of what her days are like:

At 6 AM, I wake up, shower, dress and put myself together. At 6:30 AM, I wake the children, give them breakfast, and, at 7 AM, I start the housework. I leave my house at 8 AM and I'm at my office often till the late hours of the evening. (Mon. Jan. 18, 1999)

I recall that I interviewed her one evening at 8 PM and she appeared

vivacious, and full of energy. As a further example of how hectic her life is,

she described the amount of work that the holiday of Passover entails:

The preparation for this one week represents a monumental undertaking for Hassidic women. For a complete month, my family and I devote our time to cleaning the house with the goal of "bringing in" the holiday in the most fastidious way possible. No room is left untouched, no coat pocket is left unclean. I use a mascara brush to clean in the corners of the rooms. Cabinets, drawers, closets are all under rigorous scrutiny. I scrub and polish, oversee the grocery shopping and plan countless menus for the eight days of meals for family members arriving from out-of-town. On some years the entire house gets painted before each Passover to ensure that the walls are meticulously clean. Dishes, glasses, pots, pans, cutlery all need replacement with the Passover set, all counter tops covered with wooden boards, the refrigerator, the stove and sink cleaned and the silverware polished. Often, we purchase new clothes for the children for the holiday. New medicine, vitamins, cosmetics and toiletries also need to be bought. The central topic among my friends in the month leading up to Passover is how the preparations are progressing. (Mar 14, 2000)

Knowing for myself what my own Passover preparation entails and then

hearing how much more work the Hassidic women do makes me wonder

how they are able to stay awake at the table as the Haggadah (the tale of

the historic events of which Passover is the commemoration) is recited.

5. Rebbetzin Fleisher

Rebbetzin Fleisher, age 39, and mother of four met me in the dining

room of her home. She was particularly proud to point out her vast

collection of Judaica books as well as the silver religious ritual objects in a

enormous glass enclosed bookcase. She was very willing to talk and

seemed to enjoy answering the interview questions. For example, on the

day of the first interview, she called me at home later that evening to report that I had given her "things to think about that she had not ever thought about before." (Oct. 29, 1999)

Throughout each of the three interview sessions with Rebbetzin Fleisher, her husband was present in the adjoining living room. I was able to see him glance in our direction at various times during the meetings. I observed that Rebbetzin Fleisher seemed to be making eye contact with him. Eventually, I asked her if he was able to understand English and, if so, would he like me to tell him about my study and its purpose. After a few sentences between them in Yiddish, he walked over and I explained to him the nature of my research. He seemed satisfied with my answers, although I was not entirely sure that he was happy with my visit. Before leaving us, he stated that what he really wanted me to know was how important the woman is in a Hassidic home and how very much she is valued and respected.

6. Tzipporah

Tzipporah, age 44, runs a small business from the basement of her home. We met in her dining room and although her husband was present in the home for the two hours of our first interview, he never emerged from the kitchen which was the adjoining room. Initially, she was quite suspicious and wary of the reasons and motives for my interview. Thus, I needed to

spend a lot of time trying to develop a rapport and level of comfort with her before I could proceed with interview questions. In our second meeting, she was juggling two infants on her lap, one on each knee. At every moment for the entire 90 minutes, one or the other was crying or fussing. This distraction affected both Tzipporah's and my own concentration, as well as the flow of our conversation. I kept having to repeat my questions and to ask her to repeat her answers. At one point, she explained to me that the reason for the poor behaviour of these two infants was that they were jealous of each other and of the attention she was giving to each of them. As it turned out, the infants were the same age. However, one was her son and the other was her grandson. I learned that having a child and grandchild of the same age is not a particularly unusual occurrence in Hassidic families since mothers are often having children late into their forties at the same time that their elder daughters or sons are starting their own families.

7. Shoshana Ruchel

Like everyone else, the Hassidic woman, if she can afford it, enjoys a properly furnished home with good serviceable furniture. Shoshana Ruchel's home was very much like the other homes I visited that had large and impressive bookshelves filled to the brim with the standard classics of Talmudic and Hassidic literature as the focal point. All the volumes

crammed into this floor-to-ceiling bookcase appeared leather bound with gold stamping on the bindings. As a part-time volunteer at a local hospital and mother of eleven children, she is busy from early morning to late at night. She initially agreed to meet with me at the request of another participant whom I had already interviewed.

8. Suri Gittel

Suri Gittel's home was unlike any other that I visited. It is a very large, detached home with what appeared to be expensive furnishings. The kitchen, where we met, was equipped with ultra-modern appliances. Suri Gittel herself is very "modern" looking despite her wig and 'covered-up' clothing. Although she wears little make-up, she wears fashionable and expensive jewellery. I was perplexed at this display of what, by ultra-Orthodox standards would be considered immodest and inappropriate adornment.

I questioned Suri Gittel about this apparent inconsistency between her jewellery and the laws of *tznius* (modesty). She explained that the occasional trinket that her husband gives her is not to show off with, but a way in which he thanks and appreciates her for keeping a *baalebattishe* (comfortable) home. Through her appearance, she broadcasts a sense of personal style that combines creativity with conformity. Seated in her

beautiful home she appeared to be an anomaly among the Hassidim with whom I met

9. Yehudit

Yehudit, age 19 and youngest of my participants is a former student. I taught her at Bais Yaakov when she took her DEC (CEGEP diploma) in Special Care Counselling. Her two young children were present throughout each interview. After the initial visit with Yehudit, it occurred to me that perhaps, on subsequent visits to the homes of my participants, I should bring Kosher Candy for the children as a goodwill gesture. I felt that this would serve to both keep the children happy (and quiet) and observe the Jewish tradition of bringing something "sweet" into the home to assure a "sweet" visit. As it turned out, this small gift was greatly appreciated by the mothers, the children and by me as on some occasions it pacified the child long enough so as to be able to proceed with the interview without interruption.

10. Toba

Toba, age 38, lives in a large lower duplex in an older building on a side street in Outremont. On each occasion that I visited, I noticed that the rooms were cluttered with children's toys. In the entrance hall, there is sink so that the washing of hands *(netilat yadiym)* before a meal can be performed without having to go into the kitchen. Toba prides herself on

being an activist in her community. To illustrate this, she recounted the following story:

Every morning last fall I would look out my living room window and notice that there was dog feces on our lawn. I was convinced that this was an act of anti-semitism and I was determined to catch the perpetrator. So I called a security company and they placed a surveillance camera on the lawn. I watched and waited. After a few days, we were able to identity the dog owner as a Gentile neighbour who often complained about my children. I took the case to the Human Rights Commission and I was awarded \$5000. (Toba, Jan. 16, 2000)

On another occasion, she reported how she became involved with the conflict in Outremont concerning the placing of an *eruv* on city streets. An *eruv* is created by a series of barely visible wires or fishing line that symbolically extend the Jewish household. Strung up high above the street, the *eruv* allows observant Jews to do basic tasks outside the home on the Sabbath such as carrying a prayer book or pushing a baby carriage. To show how discriminatory the city laws were prohibiting the use of an *eruv*, Toba took pictures of her neighbours' Christmas and Halloween decorations. She brought these to City Hall and pointed out that if neighbours were allowed their religious symbols on the street, than the Jews of Outremont should be accorded similar privileges. In Toba's words: "I am very proactive – I wish I could have become a lawyer." Toba believes that as a result of her actions along with those of other Outremont Jews, a recent ruling by Quebec Superior Court Justice Allan Hilton gave this community the right to string up an *eruv*. Justice Hilton wrote that Outremont is simply being asked to "tolerate a religious practice that has not been shown to cause any inconvenience or undue hardship to Outremont residents." To quote directly from his ruling:

Apart from Outremont, the Court has not been informed of any other municipality anywhere in Canada or elsewhere in the world that has acted in a similar manner to prevent the installation of *eruvim*. How or why Outremont has managed to achieve such isolation, especially from sister municipalities on the Island of Montreal, remains a mystery. Legal proceedings that assert claims based on freedom of religion are bound to excite passion (*Globe & Mail*, Friday, June 22, 2001).

Toba reported that a group of Outremont residents began to jeer in the courtroom following his decision, shouting out that Outremont's rapidly growing community of Hassidic Jews were "fundamentalists" who are turning their city into a ghetto. Toba said that she hoped the Justice's ruling would in time restore good relations with her neighbours.

The misconception that all Hassidic women are found in their homes, surrounded by multiple babies, and that they are submissive and powerless is one that this study hopes to investigate. When reviewing the comments from many of my participants, another image of a Hassidic woman emerges. I have termed her the "new" Hassidic woman. She is often careeroriented and successful according to mainstream, secular standards. She often appears attractive and fashionable, an intelligent woman who has made a successful link between the Hassidic world and the secular one. These women represent what author Bernard Davids, in *Wellsprings*, describes as the "synergy of Jewish ideals and contemporary ideas... the woman who can move from Freud to feminism, from Kafka to Kabbalah." Although Hassidic women have not been formally exposed to Freud or Kafka, they nevertheless seem to be saying, "we are not so different from you at all" (Davids, 1990, p. 22). Alongside the home-based role of traditional Hassidic women, this study uncovers one woman running a major catalogue company from her home, another who is a community leader and activist, and a third who has a very prominent position as a coordinator of volunteers in a hospital.

Devorah Esther and Suri Gittel, for example, represent this type of modern Hassidic woman in Montreal who is successful in walking in the secular world as far as her religion will allow, yet who continues to find her feminine, spiritual, emotional, intellectual fulfillment within the confines of Hassidic tradition. These women themselves talk about their heroines – the ultra-Orthodox women models of important and talented women throughout history, who were dedicated to traditional Judaism if they were not Jewish leaders themselves.

All the participants interviewed for this inquiry displayed initiative and industriousness. Some enjoy prosperity and financial security. Confidence to be who they are within their social world, and their commitment to their

way of life is what they believe keeps them grounded. They insist that there are many other Hassidic women who live as they do. Their fulfilment allows them to be content and also gives some women the personal courage that is expressed in the anecdotes and sentiments which follow in the next section of this chapter.

Being a Hassidic Woman

Yehudit, my student at Bais Yaakov and the youngest participant, refers to the blessing she says each morning in which she thanks *Hashem* (God) for making her according to His will, thus allowing her the honour of being the "pillar of the home, the strength of the family. Aiken (1992), in her analysis of this blessing, suggests that in Genesis, the snake's final argument to Eve was that by sinning, she 'will be like God'. Aiken explains this to mean that she would be able to create worlds. This was especially appealing, Aiken concludes, because God made human beings with the need to be creative and productive. This sentiment of the Hassidic woman's role being a privilege and blessing resonates with all the women who I interviewed. The pride they see or attribute to the magnitude of this position is clearly evident in their voices and in the smiles on their faces.

Hassidic women are historically recognized as the mainstays of the values of the family and the faith. The most important task for the wife is to raise her children well, and much of her education is focused on this goal.

The community acknowledges that this is a most challenging job and husbands appear to value their wives' endeavours in this most important role. Towards the end of the poem "A Woman of Valor", is the verse: "Her children rise up and call her blessed and her husband praises her." This is explained by Rabbi Falk (1998) in the following passage:

Both her children and her husband feel that they owe their attainments to their respective mother and wife. The *tahara* [purity] and *kedusha* [holiness] that permeates the atmosphere of their home is conducive to Torah study and *tefilla* [prayer]. This spirit emanates from the mother who ensures that only Kosher literature is brought into the house and with her personal example of *simcha* [celebration] and satisfaction she brings beautiful harmony and tranquillity to reign in the house. (p. 561)

The last two lines of "A Woman of Valor" speak of the woman as a

deserving recipient of reward in the world to come. Rabbi Falk (1998)

explains these lines in the following manner:

She will be rewarded with, splendor, greatness, strength, glory and leadership. These seem a strange choice, as they are terms that are usually reserved for leading positions in Torah, *Avoda* [priestly tasks] and *Malchus* [sovereign tasks] which are not held by women. The *Eishet Hayil* [Woman of Valor] is nevertheless considered to be closely associated and to have produced these qualities, because the husband who she had assisted all her life and the children she has nurtured and raised, are in possession of these great qualities only because of her. She is therefore a deserving recipient of them as they are considered to be the fruits of her labor. (p. 561)

Defining Success

But does the Hassidic woman herself feel that she is deserving of

such praise, reward and recognition? I began this section of interview
questions with the intent of discovering what the women participants

believed counted as success and whether they themselves felt they were

successful.

The answers I received converged. In each case, the women defined their own success in terms of the well-being and happiness of their husbands and children. Suri Gittel conceptualizes her viewpoint in the following excerpt:

A successful woman to me means a woman who is able to create and generate a happy family – if I am able to help my husband by being encouraging, if I can get through my day's work and still smile, if at the end of the day, my house is clean, the laundry is done and the supper is on the table, then I am a successful woman. (Suri Gittel, Feb. 8, 1999)

Chaya concurs and believes that one can measure a successful woman not

by the quantity but by the quality of children that she raises. She says: "If

your children follow in your ways and go on your path then you are

successful - it is all reflected in how your children turn out" (Feb. 10, 1999).

From her perspective, quality of children is evaluated by whether they do

good deeds and are educated as talmud chochen (exceptional students of

Talmud). Shoshana Ruchel defines success using a similar measurement:

If I see my kids grow up to be very special, I know I did something right – to me a person with a career means nothing. A successful woman is someone who builds a true Jewish home. I get compliments on how my kids are growing up. (Shoshana Ruchel, Nov. 11, 1999) These comments suggest that Hassidic mothers do not define their success as parents by acknowledging their children's academic or intellectual abilities (Gaskell, 1995). Nor do they measure their success as parents by the productive professional accomplishments of their children. What counts as success to the mothers whom I interviewed is how carefully their children follow the Hassidic lifestyle that she has instilled, taught and modelled.

A woman who works in the Orthodox community of Outremont as a family counsellor concurs that the mothers put a lot of energy into making sure that their children are a positive reflection of themselves. She argues that most Hassidic women are not conflicted about their roles. The following demonstrates her position:

There's not a conflict where she first has to find herself, and do her own thing, and be successful at work. They have clear goals. Their success is measured by their kids. They do spend a lot of time making the kids feel good about themselves. They want their kids to be religious and to marry and have kids. They want their kids to have lives like they've had. They're not interested in other experiences. (July 22, 1999)

Devorah Esther is an activist in the Hassidic community and, along with her husband, holds a very prominent position. After reflecting about success for a few moments, she commented: "A successful woman is one who has it all – health, wealth, power and contentment, someone who is independent, competent and fulfilled." For Devorah Esther, the challenge is to be able to balance all her responsibilities and still have time for herself.

She adds the following:

A successful Hassidic woman should be first a wife, mother, but also a volunteer, she must be out there helping others in some way. Yet, she still should feel comfortable within herself, not wanting things she cannot have, not wanting to be what she is not. If you feel comfortable and at peace in your own place, you don't need someone else's. (Feb. 22, 1999)

Blythe McVicker Clinchy (1993) refers to validation by others as

"affirming the knower" (p. 86). She argues that fully developed connected

knowledge requires the affirmation of the subjective reality of the other.

Conformation or affirmation involves "a bold swinging" into the life of the

other (Clinchy, 1993, p. 112). Hassidic women, as connected knowers,

need to have affirmed that their thoughts and actions "mean something" to

someone else (Ruddick, 1995, p. 148). The fact that all participants

interviewed feel valued by their families, their husbands and their

communities is intrinsic to their feeling of being successful as women.

From Yehudit's perspective, this validation takes the form of

compliments she receives from her husband and the fact that her work with

the children is appreciated by him. This excerpt signals how her husband

depends on her:

Anything that I would want, my husband would tell the kids, did you hear what mommy said, go get it for her. When I go out of town for a few days, my husband doesn't know how to manage, he is in a real bad mood while I am away. (Feb. 22, 1999)

Sarah Chana reports that now that her children are grown and living on

their own, she realizes how much they value her: "Whenever they need

advice, they call me. They want their homes to be exactly like mine is. This

makes me feel very important." (Nov 12, 1999)

In the private realm, the home, it is the woman who should,

according to Rabbi Falk (1998) be the recipient of all recognition and praise:

The following excerpt elaborates his position:

Women and girls need recognition and self-esteem just like everyone else. However, under normal circumstances a woman receives this at home, where her husband and grown-up children show her recognition and gratitude for all that she does. They also display their high esteem for her special individual qualities. With this healthy home-based recognition, a woman has no need to seek recognition and esteem elsewhere. (p. 96)

Addressing the issue of the homemaker who works hard but gets little

recognition or praise, Falk offers, the following advice:

The Torah values above all the woman whose self-image is primarily that of homemaker. We should never think of our work in the home as something we are stuck with, or forced to do. Rather, by looking to herself, her family, and her home for creative fulfillment, she can find infinitely deep and meaningful satisfaction in her life. We are incredibly lucky people, given the chance to devote our lives to challenges within reach, the ones which can help us grow the most. (Falk, 1998, p. 96)

From Chaya's perspective, Judaism itself enables her to feel self-

worth and happiness, but not necessarily by providing what secular society

values:

It takes patience and study to discover how Judaism validates our

identities, feelings, and self-worth. We must also be willing to abandon our need for Judaism to validate us on our terms; rather, we must find validation in Judaism's terms. (Oct. 10, 1997)

A woman of valour is more "precious than corals". She measures her

success in large part according to the respect she receives from her family.

Respect is viewed as one of the three basic virtues of the Hassidim along

with refinement and relating to others. For example, at the beginning of this

school year (2000-2001), the following "home inventory" was sent to

parents by a Hassidic school administration:

Do your children listen to you the first time? Do your children ever disagree or argue with you? Do your children respect your opinion? Do you children help you willingly? Do your children say 'please', 'may I' or do they say 'I want', 'need', 'gimme'?

What, how and when to make comments or ask questions is an area in child rearing considered by these women to be of paramount importance. It is this notion of respect that Hassidic women conceptualize in their definition of success. The women that I interviewed expend a great deal of time and energy teaching their children how to respect parents and other adults. In Appendix H, I have included six workbook pages taken from a manual given to children at a Hassidic school entitled *Respect for your Parents.* The following are the titles of the various handouts found in Appendix H: (1) Kosher Speech Chart; (2) What Should You Say? (3) Did You Show *Kovod* and *Yirah* Today? (4) Common Forms of Contradiction; (5) What Would be the Respectful Phrasing? (6) Modelling and Reinforcing.

To illustrate how significant this notion of respect is in the Hassidic home, I include in Appendix I a letter sent to students from an elementary school administration. In story form, a mother writes about the hard work and tireless effort that parenting involves. All that is asked in return, according to this author is "for you to respect us because we are your parents."

The King and Queen

A Jewish home is built like a palace that is continually being beautified. I am the Queen and my husband is the King - if I don't let him be the King, then I no longer am the Queen. My husband adores me and wouldn't do anything without me. (Chaya, Mar. 29, 1999)

Chaya's palatial metaphor illustrates the way in which these Hassidic women view themselves in relation to their husbands. Aiken (1992) suggests that God wanted men and women to develop their respective attributes of power, control and nurturing, and to mutually give to each other in marriage that which each other lacks. In this way, according to Aiken, when a couple lives together harmoniously, they can bring God's Holy Presence into their lives. From the above excerpt, one can infer that Chaya believes that a woman was created to be an equal partner to her husband and that it is only when husband and wife work in tandem that they will both grow spiritually.

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Abramov (1994) in Two Halves of a Whole relates the following

anecdote:

A woman once came to the *Ponivitizer Rav*, crying bitterly about her husband's despicable behaviour toward her. The *Rav* listened sympathetically. The *Rav's* assistant, who had been present while she spoke, asked if he believed all those things the woman had been saying about her husband. The *Rav* replied, "Certainly. Words spoken in truth are recognizable." The *Rav's* assistant was genuinely mystified. "How could this man, who had been known as a very decent fellow, lower himself to such behaviour?" he begged to understand.

And so the *Rav* explained to him that when a man gets attacked at his most vulnerable point (his male ego) on a continuous basis, it can result in a tremendous deterioration in his behaviour. This is a subconscious reaction to save himself from feeling as if all his power has been taken away from him. In these desperate attempts to defend his own honour, his logic can become totally "crooked," until he, himself, will not understand how he could have possibly stooped so low.

"The answer," said the *Ponivitzer Rav*, "is for his wife to build him back up to the position of king in their home. This will prevent such situations from recurring, since then there will no longer be any reason for the husband to *demand* his own honour. A king can afford to be very kindhearted, as he feels assured of his esteemed position and does not live in fear of being put down." (p.146)

In a chapter entitled "Of Kings and Queens", Abramov suggests that

one can learn about kings and queens from observing the sun and the

moon:

"G-d created the two great lights – a great light to rule by day and a small light to rule by night, and the stars" (*Bereshis* 1:16). The *Midrash* points out the apparent contradiction in this verse. Initially, it states, "the two great lights," which makes it seem that they are equal in stature, and then it refers to them as a great light and a small light with the stars. The *Midrash* resolves this by enlightening us as to the sequence of events. After being created equal, the moon approached the Creator and said, "Two kings cannot share one crown." G-d responded, "Go then, and reduce your light, and I will give you the stars as compensation."

The wife who elevates her husband to the position of king, thereby making herself into a queen, is likewise rewarded for doing so with peace in her home and shining little "stars."

And just as the sun and the moon complement one another, so do the husband and wife complement one another. Both are of equal importance, but are not identical in their roles. (p.133)

I believe both of these quotations accurately depict the notion of the

necessary synergistic and complementary relationship of the husband and

wife. The participants I met with take these sentiments to heart. From the

time they were young girls they have been taught that a woman will be

treated as a queen if she elevates the position of her husband.

From Rabbi Falk's (1998) perspective, a good wife is the crown that

makes her husband regal. He explains the three properties of this crown as

it relates to a man's spouse:

1. It transforms the person into a king.

A person becomes a king, when, on his coronation day, the crown of royalty is placed on his head. The crown therefore makes him a king. So too, a good wife makes her husband the esteemed and admirable person he becomes. Her sterling qualities are the building bricks of their home which becomes a sanctuary for *Hashem* [God] and His Torah. Hence, she is the crown on her husband's head as she gives him his regal status. (p. 46)

2. When worn it is testimony to the status of the man wearing it.

The crown that adorns the king's head bears witness to the fact that he holds royal office. It announces to all that he is an important and influential individual whose very word commands respect. So too, a good wife is a crown upon her husband's head. Whoever comes into contact with her and her sterling qualities realizes that her husband must be a man of great worth. Hence, she shines forth as the crown upon her husband's head bearing witness to his worth. (p. 46)

3. It is cherished and guarded by the king.

A crown is one of the most precious and cherished articles a king possesses. As such he treasures and protects it with extreme care. So too, the husband of the *Eishet Hayil* [The Woman of Valor] knows to treasure his wife and appreciate how much she contributes to his life and achievements. He therefore protects her and supplies her with all she needs, to proceed further along the golden path she has chosen. (p. 46)

Abramov (1994) warns the woman that:

if she does not recognize and accept her essence and sphere of responsibilities, not only will she be fighting often with her husband, but she will be in a constant, stressful battle with herself, going through the motions, feeling like a martyr and all the time experiencing tremendous tension. (p. 148)

The author of Two Halves of a Whole continues to explain:

When a woman begins to revere her husband, while maintaining her own dignity completely, she almost immediately feels more feminine, and also noble.

She suddenly has the makings of a queen. What does it mean for a wife to "treat him, like a king"? It means, for example, trying hard to please him, being enthusiastic about his ideas, being straightforward and stating her preferences, but accepting his final decision. It is amazing how well and how quickly it feels congruous, as we allow our natural selves to be expressed in this royal relationship. (p. 147) Abramov suggests other reasons why it is a good idea for a woman to make her husband into a king: "it will make him kinder, less likely that he will have to prove his strength and importance; less stubborn, less frustrated and less desperate to prove himself" (p. 147). If she makes him feel wonderful, the author suggests, he will become wonderful. Referring to the wisdom of sages, Abramov concludes his chapter with the following:

Our sages have taught us that every blade of grass has a *malach* [an angel] appointed over it, to make it grow. The wife is like that angel. She is appointed over her husband to make him grow into a king. Then she will have reason to enjoy a double celebration – for his coronation as king and for her coronation as his beloved queen. (p. 152)

A question that came to mind was how are men instructed to treat

and view their wives? From the conversations that I had with

participants, I learned that, in fact, men are required to treat their wives

with the utmost respect. Many participants shared with me that, in their

homes, they are treated like queens. Abramov writes a specific chapter

for men in which he addresses this issue:

The nature of a woman is to derive pleasure from the amount of favour she finds in her husband's eyes, and she is constantly trying to achieve this favour. Therefore, it is incumbent upon him to show her love and closeness through an abundance of conversation and expression of fondness. (p. 158)

He goes on to advise that every individual man needs to develop a

sensitivity to his own wife and her particular needs. Abramov speaks to the man's obligation to focus on his wife and her needs:

This is how we come to love our wives. By showering them with a multiplicity of kindnesses, we create love in ourselves, and we imbue our wives with this love. *Hashem* [God] created the world in such a way that through a man's satisfying his wife's needs, he becomes satisfied. There is nothing said about the man's needs. There is no reciprocal *mitzvah*. This is man's nature. By focusing on her needs, he will inevitably receive pleasure. (p. 206)

In an effort to put this metaphor of king and queen into a theoretical framework, I refer to an examination of gender and power relationships discussed by Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky (1996). These authors in Women's Ways of Knowing, argue that one of the great achievements of late twentieth-century feminists is the notion that gender relations are in fact fundamentally social and cultural relations. They cite analyses of marginalized women and include Jewish women to illustrate the diverse historical and cultural patterns of gender identity that came into existence and changed over time. To the extent that women and men are assigned different activities and experiences, the Hassidic husband and wife, as evidenced in Abramov's excerpt above, will each develop knowledge about different aspects of nature and social relations. This understanding by men and women, according to Goldberger et al., would be evident even if there were no power relations between them. Structural gender is achieved by assigning different social activities to each sex

(Harding, 1996). This notion which starts as early as birth, is apparent in the Hassidic husband-wife relationship, whereby each become gendered through the positions that they are assigned culturally.

Gender, as it is viewed in Hassidism, is always interlocked with religion. Thus, what women do and what womanliness means are culturally specific. As well, gender relations are dynamic. Consider the number of Hassidic women who are for the first time taking CEGEP level courses. With this drastic change in many Hassidic women's lifestyles, questions continually emerge, and answers are not easily reached. Should women be studying instead of staying at home? What should they or should they not be learning? Will this learning impact the husband-wife relationship? Any kind of social change can be a site of struggle over gender relations while each group tries to control the outcome of such changes through manipulating the meanings of their own social relations.

Drawing on Falk's view of the husband as king, I asked participants to explain to me the meaning of the quotation. "And he shall rule over you" (*Vehu yimshol bakh*, Bereshis 3:16). Rebbetzin Fleisher summed up how she interprets it:

In my eyes, I consider my husband as the king in our family. I show him all the respect that I think he deserves. But, it is not a one-way street. He also demonstrates a great deal of respect for me and my role as a wife, and particularly my role as a mother. He doesn't have much time for the children, so he realizes and appreciates the fact that how they turn out is largely due to my input and effort. Neither

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one of us feels inferior to the other. I respect and look up to him for his strengths and for the way he fulfills the responsibilities that are accorded to him, and vice versa. We are definitely an equal couple. (July 21, 1999)

Rabbi Falk (1998) in his comprehensive explanation of laws explains it this way:

The words *vehu yimshol bakh* usually mean "to rule over you." Since *vehu* means "and he," the phrase could be translated, "And he shall rule over you," referring to a husband ruling over his wife. But those same words have another meaning as well: "to learn from your example." Therefore, *Vehu yimshol bach* can also be translated: "He will learn from your example." (p. 148)

This issue of respect, power and control by a man over a woman is

addressed by Dr. Rashi Shapiro, a psychologist who works with the

Orthodox community in New York. He believes that one source of conflict in the Hassidic home results from husbands who use religion as a way of establishing control in the marital relationship or in the family. Usually, he says, the husband will be quoting *halakhah*, (Jewish law) "saying you have to do this and that." Shapiro argues that the woman feels disadvantaged because she has not studied as much and she is not sure if she is being taken advantage of, or whether he is correct in his interpretation of the laws (Shapiro, telephone conversation, July 21, 1999).

Dr. Shapiro's conclusions are not consistent with my own. From the many months of interaction with my participants, I believe that it would be inaccurate and patronizing to assume that Hassidic women are manipulated or controlled by the male leadership of their group. I discussed with several participants Dr. Shapiro's findings about men who use their religious knowledge to dominate their wives. Raizie makes the point that boys are instructed by their mothers as children, and then by their fathers when young adults, that women are, in fact, viewed as the "conductor" in their homes:

ON BEING THE MAESTRO

I am the one in our house who holds the baton. As the conductor, I recognize that my husband and I are different instruments, each with our own unique sound. My role is to blend all the sounds and experiences together so that our home will be filled with harmony and a beautiful sense of peace. My husband recognizes that I am the maestro. He would never try to control me because he is impressed by the teachings of the sages regarding the way a man should respect his wife. He knows that *shalom bayis* [a peaceful home] is more important than anything. (Raizie, Nov 4, 1999)

While it is clear from some of their dialogue that the men in their lives

often circumscribe their choices, the women in this inquiry are more concerned with ethnic survival than in liberating themselves from Hassidic men. By upholding the virtues of the Jewish home, by constructing those virtues as separate from the realm of Christian experience, Hassidic women believe they are already "liberated", that is, from Christian ideals of womanhood. The Hassidic woman is likely to be more oppressed by outsiders' misrepresentations than she is to be oppressed by her own community of laws and values. As I will discuss, Hassidic women see the danger to themselves and their families as emanating from outside the community rather than from inside their homes. They are fearful that the secular environment in which they live will undermine their traditional belief structures as a result of the myriad distractions and temptations. The perceived threats are both intellectual and material. The data suggests that Hassidic women do not allow themselves the time or energy to consider themselves to be oppressed by their own people, their male relations or their leaders.

Private Realms

The entire glory of the king's daughter lies on the inside. (Psalm 45: 14)

From this verse, Ghatan (1986) concludes that the glory of the

Jewish wife and mother is to be found in the inner chambers of her own

home, which is her palace and her royal domain. The Midrash (a collection

of scripture interpretations) holds that true achievement is always attained

in the private sphere, the one not visible to the public eye. Suri Gittel

explains the origin of the belief that a woman's domain is in the private

sanctuary of her home by quoting the following:

Happy are all who fear the Lord, who follow His ways.

- You shall enjoy the fruit of your labours; you shall be happy and you shall prosper.
- Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons, like olive saplings around your table.
- So shall the man who fears the Lord be blessed. (Psalm 128; 1-4)

Continuing with this theme of control, power, submissiveness and

silence, I posed the following question to my participants: "Hassidic women are sometimes viewed as submissive, silent, without power – neither seen, nor heard. Is this true and, if so how and why and if not, please explain." Sarah Chana responded with the following:

It might appear that we are submissive, hiding in the shadows and often we do let our husbands speak for us. But this is our choice. Just because I don't speak up when outside my home does not mean that I have nothing to say. (Mar. 15, 1999)

Beyond referring to the womanly virtue of modesty, Sarah Chana I believe is suggesting that in Torah Judaism, the woman is not a seeker of the public eye. Her fine qualities and talents are directed inward, to home and family. In contrast, the man is the one whose role is directed outward – to act in society at large. Reviewing this notion with my students at Bais Yaakov as well as with participants of this inquiry, I came to understand their interpretation of it. From their perspective, rather than viewing the woman's position as demeaning, they see that the Torah exalts the role of mother and homemaker. The home is everything in Judaism. So she who nurtures and runs the home is really in a position of the utmost importance and responsibility. A woman's ability to internalize this truth and recognize the importance of what she does is believed to be the highest form of personality development.

More often, participants' answers seem to indicate that if Hassidic women are perceived as silent, it is only in the public sphere where the laws of modesty are expected. In the public realm, these women are urged to remain modest, refined and unpretentious. In his treatise, *Modesty*, Rabbi Falk explains the reasons why and how a woman's voice is to be silent. In accordance with the rules of modesty, he provides examples of what is appropriate and inappropriate for Orthodox women in public:

- Bursting into raucous laughter is unfitting as it reflects a coarseness of character. (p. 200)
- It is unhealthy to use humour in public as it attracts an audience and "if used incorrectly, humour and jesting are the cause of considerable immodesty." (p.200)
- Shouting or talking loudly anywhere in public is considered an aspect of "uncultivated and coarse behaviour. Should a woman have a bellicose masculine-like voice it is viewed as a defect in her general make-up. If a woman has a heavy masculine voice it is a blemish." (p. 200)
- *Tznius* should be used in the choice of words as purity of speech "is of maximum importance" and "the vocabulary a person uses has a far-reaching effect on his personality and general make-up." (p. 201)
- When people speak *nivul peh* [unclean speech] and talk about the lowest forms of misconduct humans can fall to, there is such contamination in the air that anything which is spiritual cannot exist in its midst (p. 200).

Even when she is right, a Hassidic woman is cautioned not to

undermine the authority of her husband. Rabbi Falk (1998) further

discusses the occasions when a woman's voice may be heard.

It must be made clear that although all forms of aggressive behaviour are unfitting for a Jewish daughter, this does not mean that she must always keep quiet and never voice her opinion. On the contrary, a woman has greater intuition than a man in discerning right from wrong. In the Torah way of life, a wife's opinion is considered most carefully. It is indeed part of the beautiful partnership between husband and wife that she respectfully presents an alternative point of view for her husband to contemplate, knowing that the final decision will be made only after both outlooks have been examined carefully. (p. 31)

Women participants are quick to corroborate Falk's position that in the

private domain, that is, in the home, the woman is not silent or absent but,

in fact, in a central position. Suri Gittel explains, "I have as much power and

noise as I want. I run my home and the entire family. This is one of the

biggest misconceptions about Hassidic women - inside our homes we are

not quiet at all." (Feb 23, 2001).

Chaya refers to her palace analogy to support the notion of the

power that the Hassidic woman wields in her home:

It is the woman who is the power behind the throne. In public, we are quiet because of *tznius* [modesty]. All the great Hassidic men became great because of their wives. A woman can get her husband to do whatever she wants. In fact, she has more power over her husband than he has over her. A woman can turn anyone's heart. (Mar. 29, 1999)

To better understand the public/private space distribution, I asked

Suri Gittel to explain to me what domains are considered public and which

she includes as private. The difference between these domains, she

suggests, is not as much about the physical space as about the conduct of

women when they are in a public venue, outside their homes. Suri Gittel

explained the dichotomy between the public and private realm this way:

In my home when I am among my family and friends, I am front and centre. Really I am running the show. When I go to my friends homes, or my parents home and there are no men around, I consider that a private place as well. However if I am ever in a situation with other men, say at a public gathering where the men and women are together, then this is considered a public place and I will abide by the rules of modesty in my behaviour. That is, I will not ask a question or draw attention to myself in any way. There is not a lot of opportunity to be in a public place with men anyway. (Feb 23, 2001)

Toba sums up the sentiments around this issue this way:

The secular world thinks that because Hassidic men and women are separate, that we are in the background. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In a Jewish home, the respect that the husband has for his wife is amazing. You don't have to be loud and throw your weight around to have power or to be heard. I have as much power as I want or need - why would I want to be more vocal or more visible? (Mar. 18, 1999)

Goldberger in *Knowledge*, *Difference and Power* (1996) also

addresses the issue of how cultural practices and cultural authority inform the notions of status, power, powerlessness, authority and silence. The cultural standards of the Hassidic community hold that women should be listeners, subordinate, passive and unassertive in the public realm. This characterization reflects how women in this community may resort to culturally and ritually endorsed silence, when outside their homes but may, at the same time, have other well-developed ways of constructing knowledge. The rigid gender-role stereotype seen in the public lives and personal meanings of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women is not unlike the silent women Dubold describes in *Knowledge, Difference and Power* (1996) who accept the powerlessness that they experience. She writes "These women's refuge in a private knowledge based in their personal subjectivity seems then protective and echoes the historical creation of women's knowledge within a distinct domestic sphere" (p. 100).

Some proponents of Orthodox Judaism believe that men and women should have equal rights to influence others but that women generally should not exercise this from positions of authority. The positions of legal and external authority are generally reserved for men, whereas the power that is exercised from the home and in personal domains is primarily wielded by women. Aiken in *To Be a Jewish Woman* (1992) argues that women have the preeminent positions of molding people's lives on an individual basis in the home; men have the position of doing so on a societal level. Both exercise their abilities to influence others through teaching and role modeling (p. 76).

From the above passages from my participants, it would seem that these Hassidic women are implying that they have status and authority in the place where they perceive it to be most significant, namely their homes – this is the quiet and internal power of effecting change and influencing others. This type of power may not be as visible but is every bit as potent and important. A mother's influence is believed to be the most powerful tool in molding others' characters and behaviour.

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The themes of repression and equivocal liberation resonate throughout texts, as writers, scholars and Jewish feminists reflect on the silencing of the female voice in a traditional Jewish culture that most often denies women the education and the empowerment required to express their thoughts and feelings. In the passage below, Sylvia Fishman (2000) relates these themes to Orthodox women:

The social construction of reality within contemporary Orthodox communities is such that women's voices are always considered dangerous. Women's voices are dangerous when they sing prayers in the synagogue where men are present; when they pray and study the Torah in women's *tefillah* [prayer] groups where no men are present; when they sing *zemirot* at the private Sabbath table; when they address family and friends at a public *simcha* [celebration]; and when they engage in ordinary conversation with men who are not their husbands. (Fishman, 2000) (p. 57)

Fishman (2000), in her critique of the danger of hearing women voices in public places, fails to recognize that, for Hassidic women, this is not an issue. Fishman's position that the public (male) sphere is the only important or real one is an acceptance of the andro-centered view. For the Hassidic woman, to have authority in her home is to have it where it really counts.

Time and Timely Matters

A real and serious limitation in the lives of Hassidic women, one that often denies them the opportunity to engage in self-enhancing activities is the severe lack of time. Because of the extraordinary demands of their busy lives, there is no time for a day off to indulge in purely altruistic egoism or being good to themselves. The theme of fatigue and lack of time is one that

resonates throughout conversations with Hassidic women.

The verse in "A Woman of Valor" that also refers to the long tiring

hours that being a mother and wife entails is as follows: "She perceives that

her profit is good, her lamp does not go out at night." Rabbi Falk (1998)

suggests that this passage means that she herself values the work she is

involved in and she works diligently and tirelessly on it even until late into

the night. He goes on to further comment:

The *Eishet Hayil* [A Woman of Valor] is particularly enthusiastic about the most significant of her undertakings – bringing up and attending to the needs of her family. Due to her healthy and wholesome attitude, and her correct priorities, even though she might work late into the night she is up bright and early in the morning to look after her family. (p. 581)

Similarly, in the next narrative segment, Rebbetzin Fleisher describes her

16-hour day:

I have no time for my own activities or to fulfill my own potential although I don't even know what that potential might be. I'm the type of mother who believes that my place is in the home, and although I might have liked to do other things, go out, go to more places,. I don't do it. If you understand and accept your role in Jewish life, you do not feel like you are missing anything. (Mar. 29, 1999)

Rebbetzin Fleisher underlines a frequent sentiment - that being a

Hassidic woman involves acceptance of one's lot in life. She infers that

through that understanding comes an inner satisfaction. Therefore, by using

a cost/benefit analysis, enjoying and doing things for oneself is not as

meaningful as the contentment derived by fulfilling the roles of wife and

mother. Suri Gittel elaborates on how having large families affects her life:

Because we do not believe in birth control, we have many children and that limits you from many activities that might have been interesting to me as a person. I believe there is always place to grow, but I never felt I had the time to go further. (May 17, 1999)

Yehudit, age 19, discusses her upbringing and the obligations that she feels

strongly about:

It is all related to the way we as young girls have been taught to think - my mother, my school and my community has taught me to be happy with who I am - I guess the grass always appears greener but in the end, I'm not really missing out on anything. I feel I'm good at doing what I'm supposed to be doing. (May 20, 1999)

Tzipporah gives the example of her never having gone to a movie. She

relates how she recently met someone who asked her how she could be

Jewish and never have seen *Fiddler* on the Roof. Her response was that

she does not feel she misses out on anything. In this example, Tzipporah

echoes many other women who feel that if you do not know about

something and your life is already busy and fulfilling, why would you feel

you are being deprived?

Even with their overwhelming responsibilities, busy schedules and tiring days, in reviewing their responses, it is clear that most of the women do not see themselves as being overworked. They appear to accept every burden almost lovingly. Although many readily admit that sometimes they would like to escape from their home and childcare responsibilities, they reject the notion that they are over-taxed. Even those who told me how they collapse in the evening seem to be able to pull themselves together with each new day, ready to meet its challenges. In this inquiry Hassidic women overwhelmingly reported that they often have to deny their own personal desires in order to satisfy and provide for the needs of their families. However, they view their lives as enmeshed with the care of others. Tannen (1998) argues that other cultures, such as those found in Asia and Africa, also see the individual self only in relation to others. She suggests that it is not unusual to find societies where one's responsibilities to family members trump one's individual rights to pursue happiness.

I was interested in learning if they would have more time for themselves, what activities they might choose to pursue. Toba, the activist and participant who seems to most want to stretch the boundaries of Hassidic womanhood, claims wistfully that she believes she was born to change the world: "Had I gone to college I would have gotten my Ph.D. – at the very least I am a frustrated doctor and lawyer" (May 24, 1999).

She points out that in Israel and in New York, there now exists the possibility for Hassidic women to take nursing courses. In Montreal, as yet, there are no institutions that provide separate education to allow women to pursue a career in the health or legal fields. Other participants who have finished CEGEP and received their certificates also report that if there had

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been a "Jewish way" of going to McGill University or Concordia University, they would possibly have considered it (enrollment in these institutions would necessitate segregated classes). Sarah Chana also laments the fact that when she first arrived in Montreal from New York, she could not even attend the immigration classes in order to learn French because they were not for women only.

A few women reported that one activity in which they would like to participate in more regularly is physical exercise. Women – only gym and pool classes are regularly scheduled at the Snowdon Jewish Community Center. As well, there are two other venues for Hassidic women to participate in exercise. Both are in the basements of women's homes. Classes are given here on a regular but informal basis. Again, many do not attend these classes because of lack of time in their days. As will be recalled, the laws of modesty dictate that Hassidic women never wear pants or trousers. Therefore, exercise clothes are not an option. Thus, if they do participate in women – only gym classes, they will wear long skirts, heavy stockings and many wear their hats or kerchiefs on top of their wigs, not exactly comfortable or appropriate attire for physical activity.

At the start of my interviews in 1995, I thought I would be repeatedly told of how difficult, tiring and unfulfilling a life of caring for and mothering many children would be. Without question, there was a general acknowledgement of the drudgery and boredom of housework and

childcare. Suri Gittel confesses:

Don't we all get a little bored of cooking? Yes, I sometimes feel overwhelmed, but I would not say that I want to escape from it – I wouldn't trade my life for anything. My kitchen and children come first. The satisfaction that I get from home and child care make up for any denial of my own personal enjoyment that may occur. (July 12, 1999)

Shoshana Ruchel concurs with Suri Gittel and reports that even when her

eleven children were young, she was never bitter, angry or resentful that

she was "tied down" to her house:

My treat to myself twice a year, one day after Passover and one day after the High Holidays is taking the metro to nowhere just to have a little break. I'll sit on the train for the whole day, transferring lines. I don't even know where I am in Montreal but I am watching the people and just enjoying being by myself. It's such a wonderful day. (Aug. 16, 1999)

Although some of the women I interviewed are financially able to

afford to take vacations away from their busy lives, most participants do not

take holidays away from their families. Tzipporah reports that "when I go to

sleep knowing that the children are well and everything is normal - that's

my vacation – as a mother you have to give up certain things, but that's how

it is and it's my choice" (Mar 11, 1998).

Yehudit, works as a substitute teacher to make ends meet so that her husband can continue to learn. She reports an overwhelming sense of fatigue due to sleep deprivation that results from caring for two infants. She says that she would love to be able to afford some part-time help in her home:

When I come home from school, I don't have time for myself. Even if I'm not hungry, I still have to prepare dinner. But when I look at the faces of my two babies, it is all worthwhile. Being the best mother, wife and daughter that I can be is the greatest aspiration that I have for myself. (Mar. 22, 1999)

In the preceding anecdotes and dialogue, participants imply that their primary task in life to ensure the physical, spiritual and emotional well-being of others, their families first and then the larger community. That is, their most important personal goals are to be successful mothers and to be effective members of their community. Each of these excerpts reveals the trade-offs that Hassidic women make in relinguishing their own personal goals and desires for the greater good of their families and communities. Each new day is viewed as yet another opportunity to use her individual strength to make a contribution to serve others and in so doing, ultimately to serve God. The Ethics of the Fathers says that the "task is a difficult one, and the day is short.... You are not obligated to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from trying" (Mishnah, 16). These women grapple with the challenges of their self-sacrificing, busy and often difficult lives, content in the knowledge that their role as mother and wife is of paramount importance.

The Stay-at-Home Mother

Of the ten women in my study, five work in paid positions outside of their homes either part- or full-time, two work from their homes, one is a volunteer at a hospital and two do not work outside their homes at all. Questions seven through eleven address the stay-at-home versus the working mother issue and ask whether the stay-at-home mother is in fact a better mother, one who finds total fulfillment in this role. The overall consensus from the participants is that it depends on the individual woman. Shoshana Ruchel believes that in her case it would have been disastrous to work outside of her home. She explains her situation this way:

I tried it for a few weeks. When I came home I was a nervous wreck, much too tired to run my house properly. But for some of my friends, if they don't go to outside jobs they are in a bad mood. I have a sister who if she didn't go to work, she would lose her head. Every woman is not born to be an excellent mother. It depends on each woman's attitude. If she feels miserable about staying home, it will be transmitted to the children. I have eight children still at home and I'm always there for them. There is enough to do at home to give satisfaction. (Nov. 22, 1999)

Rebbetzin Fleisher, the mother of four children, believes that it is a mother's

place and duty to be in the home. She says:

A mother has all the time for her kids. I can understand it if for financial reasons a mother has to work, but for a lot of women they go out just to air out their heads. A baby-sitter cannot replace a mother. This idea of quality time isn't enough – children need quality and quantity. I am totally fulfilled in being a stay-at-home mom, because in the end my job is more important than a fancy title or position – I am entrusted to bringing up *Yiddishe neshamahs* [Jewish souls]. (Dec. 6, 1999) Suri Gittel agrees with Rebbetzin Fleisher:

It's crazy how women are throwing their kids into \$5-a-day daycare centres at 18 months old. I feel sad that my own daughters work and send their children off. In today's world, staying at home to raise children is looked at negatively – this is a way that feminism has impacted our lives – the young girls feel they have to get out or they'll go insane. (Dec. 13, 1999)

Coming back to the issue of how children 'turn out', Devorah Esther says,

"Maybe at one time I would have envied my friend who got a CEGEP

diploma but when I see how her children turned out, I wouldn't have traded

places." (Dec. 16,1999).

Rabbi Falk (1998) encourages women to be full-time mothers if at all

possible. He compiles a list of all the ways in which the mother plays a

significant role in the development of her children:

Although it is the father who is the master marksman, motivating his son to grow into a serious student of Torah and eventually a *Talmed Chucham* [sage] of repute, it is the mother who prepares him and ensures that he is fit to reach his target. She straightens out the child's character, and implants within him basic *Yiras Shomayim* [fear of heaven].

The tender child acquires these qualities by watching his mother incessantly and observing her reactions to all types of situations that arise. He sees how particular she is not to speak *lashon horah* [gossip] or say anything that can be hurtful to a person. He sees how soft-spoken and refined she is in her dealings with her husband, parents, parents-in-law and everyone else. He sees the earnestness with which she *bentches* [recites blessings] *davens* [prays], lights the *Shabbos* lights, etc. He sees how careful she is to ensure that her hair and her whole person are adequately covered before opening the door, etc. He sees before his eyes a life based on selfdiscipline and *Yiras Shomayim* [fear of heaven]. All this affects the child deeply and brings respect for *Yiddishkeit* [Orthodox Jewish culture] into his life. Although the father plays the major part in creating the bond between the child and the Torah, it is the mother who prepares the child for this, and it is she who "leads the child to the Torah." (p. 192)

The participants in this inquiry all acknowledge and recognize their instrumental roles as mothers. In their parenting, they endeavor to fulfill the obligations that Rabbi Falk suggests in the above quotation. Three of the working women confessed to having feelings of sadness and perhaps guilt because of their time working outside of their homes. Raizie shared her regret that, while she was at school taking a DEC in Special Care Counselling, she was not home at lunchtime for her son. To the question, "do you think a woman who stays home with her children is a better mother?" Raizie responded: "If she isn't then why do I feel guilty that I go out to work?" Raizie seems to be suggesting that if she did not have to work in order to supplement her family's income, perhaps she would be a better mother which in turn might make her feel better. She told me that she herself had a stay-at-home mother and believed that she was better looked after when she was a child than are her own children who are in daycare.

Taking an outside job for a Hassidic woman requires careful consideration so that it does not conflict with religious laws. Hassidic women must not work at unconventional jobs or those that would not be congruent with their way of life. This may explain why most Hassidic women find themselves in schools or offices that are owned and operated by other religious Jews.

Rabbi Falk addresses the concept of modest behaviour should a woman find herself in a public place where men are present. He writes about the harm caused by men and women intermingling, addressing each other in a familiar manner, and the prohibition against shaking hands with a member of the opposite sex. He continues by discussing the "dangers" inherent in working in a public place. He urges women that if at all possible to get a job in an office of observant Jews and to be careful not to become too familiar with men they may encounter in such a setting. He explains:

An office job is an awesome hazard to *tznius* [modesty]. One of the greatest misfortunes that have befallen our generation as far as *tznius* is concerned is the fact that many Orthodox women and girls work in offices or as secretaries. The dangers and pitfalls in such jobs are of such proportion and magnitude that a large part of the material in this book is directly relevant to it. The woman or girl who works many hours a day is in an environment that has every potential to destroy *tznius* and all that it stands for, for herself, for her employer and for all males and females that work together in a large office. (p. 508)

Because there are only a limited amount of jobs available to women within the Orthodox community, some participants prefer to stay at home and not work at all rather than possibly "destroying" the laws of modesty.

In the last part of this section of interview questions, I was interested

to know if a Hassidic woman felt that her sense of herself as a woman has

changed over the years. In each case, participants alluded to the maturity,

wisdom and experience that comes with age. For some of the women, their sense of self changed as a result of going out to work or to school after being a full-time mother. Raizie tells about the first ten years of her life as a married woman: "I was very happy and fulfilled and then I starting branching out and turning to other things. My self-esteem is greater now. I didn't know before what I was really capable of" (Aug. 23, 1999). Sarah Chana shares a humorous anecdote:

My children and grandchildren urged me to learn computers. I didn't want to stay behind so I enrolled in a women's computer course at Tav. In the first class, the teacher told everyone to put their hands on a mouse – I jumped because I was so scared. Now even though I will not use the Internet, I spend a lot of my time with my computer, and I feel that it opened up my eyes and my life (May 20, 1999).

This sense of self-evolution is often accompanied by a greater

appreciation for what these women consider to be truly important. Most

women I interviewed felt that as they grew older they have a stronger self-

identity, are more confident, and more easy going. Suri Gittel adds:

As the years have passed, I have become more visible and less willing to be in the background. I have become more content, more fulfilled. When I see how fortunate I am compared to others, what I have, *baruch Hashem*, [Thank God] I feel prouder than ever for being a Hassidic woman. I am more confident as to what I believe in and perhaps even more religious than I was thirty years ago at age 19. I just know myself much better. (Feb. 18, 1999)

Sarah Chana, a forty-six year-old housewife and mother of twelve, seems,

in the following response, to pull together many of the sentiments

expressed by these woman in this section of interview questions:

Throughout my life since I had children I had but one goal and that was to try to get the kids the best *chinuch* [education] they can. That's the *ikar* [essential principle]. I don't care to own a house. The more *gashmiyos* [worldliness] you have, the less *ruchaniyos* [spirituality] you have. The main reason we're here is to have a house in *olam haba* [the World to Come]. You can't have a house in this world and that world too. I am very happy, *baruch Hashem* [thank God]. Happiness is in your mind. And if you decide being a housewife – the supporter of your husband and the mother of your children – is the happiest you can be, then you are a happy person. If you buy into being a Hassidic woman, secular values, feminism and the outside world do not have any attraction. (Mar. 16, 1999)

From this excerpt, I infer that, for Sarah Chana, material wealth and

the acquisition of earthly goods are not attractive to her. Rather as a

Hassidic woman, she values spiritual wealth and this accounts for her

contentment.

The Hassidic Woman and Modernity

The women's movement disgusts me. They think they talk for you when in fact they represent a weak group of women who blame everyone but themselves. I do not want them to represent me. The feminist movement has belittled and exploited women. My husband holds me in high respect and it has nothing to do with the women's movement. I really don't know what feminism is altogether. (Suri Gittel, Nov. 10, 1999)

A number of questions emerged as I considered how Hassidic

women negotiate modernity: How does the contemporary Hassidic woman

understand her role in a society influenced by the women's movement?

How can she be committed to following a way of life, prescribed by the

Torah, while continually facing the many challenges, questions and dangers

of incursions from the secular world? How can she feel that her own lifeorientation has purpose and meaning when it is often challenged, if not obscured, by the critics of wifehood and motherhood? These are issues that naturally surfaced out of the literature and research that addresses the engagement between feminism and Judaism. In order to analyze the impact of feminism, feminist attitudes and goals must first be defined. I therefore begin this section with a very brief overview of the history and framework of contemporary North American feminism and of Jewish feminism in particular.

The women's movement grew out of other protest movements in the 1960s such as the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement, as well as the general anti-establishment, anti-materialistic spirit of the age. Female participants in these protests soon came to see themselves as an oppressed group as well, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1981) became an early Bible. Friedan argues that this "mystique" was based on the assumption that women were unsuited for labour-force participation and independent life. Friedan goes on to suggest that women were left with no bases upon which to evaluate themselves except those of their physical appearance and homemaking skills. In the years that followed, for many feminists, the family became the enemy. It was viewed as a patriarchal, repressive institution that served merely to restrict women to a domestic domain.

Accordingly, there emerged a proliferation of articles and books exploring feminist issues. A wide variety of organizations emerged with the purpose of translating feminist insights into social change. These include NOW, the National Organization of Women, which concentrated on economic issues; WAP, Women Against Pornography, a group who opposed pornographic literature and films characterized as hostile to women; and 'Take Back the Night' which organizes marches to reduce rape and other violence. Together these and other feminist organizations were devoted to transforming the status of women in the United States and Canada.

Jewish Feminism and Modern Orthodox Women

One might think that the increased Jewish feminist awareness of the past decade, corresponding to the general "women's movement," would be met with opposition in Torah circles... actually, the Torah gives the Jewish woman a lofty status. The times are ripe for a deeper look into the essence of Jewish womanhood. (Schneerson, 1994, p. x)

In the late 1960s, at about the same time as the advent of the women's movement, a feminist movement with a specifically Jewish focus emerged with the agenda of examining the inequities and forms of oppression in Jewish life and exploring Judaism as a culture and religion

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from a feminist perspective. Modern Orthodox Jewish women were influenced by the broader feminist social movements described above as well as by revolutions in the more liberal Jewish denominations. Attacks were raised against Judaism for its part in relegating women to an inferior status and to narrowly prescribed roles at home and in the wider world. The Jewish family was depicted as a woman's prison. Female volunteers were denigrated as unpaid slave labourers, and widespread Jewish values were denounced. In a 1971 article entitled "Woman as Outsider," Vivian Gornick, a Jew, writes:

In the fierce unjoyousness of Hebraism, woman is a living symbol of the obstacles God puts in man's way as man strives to make himself more godly and less manly. These structures are not a thing of some barbaric past, they are a living part of the detail of many contemporary lives. Today, on the Lower East Side of New York, the streets are filled with darkly brooding men whose eyes are averted from the faces of passing women, and who walk three feet ahead of their bewigged and silent wives. If a woman should enter a rabbinical study on Grand Street today, her direct gaze would be met by lowered eyelids; she would stand before the holy man, the seeker of wisdom, the worshipper of the spirit, and she would have to say to herself:

Why, in this room I am a pariah, a Yahoo. If the rabbi should but look upon my face, vile hot desire would enter his being and endanger the salvation of his sacred soul.... So he has made a bargain with God and constructed a religion in which I am all matter and He is all spirit. I am (yet!) the human sacrifice offered up for his salvation. (p. 21)

In this passage Gornick expresses anger for the manner in which she and

others are regarded by Jewish men. Here, it is her belief that her status as a
woman is compromised both on the street and in the office of a Rabbi. She refers to her lowly position as a woman in the Judaism she understands.

In the religious realm, Jewish feminists cried out for immediate rectification of specifically Jewish issues, such as the Jewish divorce law. By late 1971, Jewish women's prayer groups and study groups were being formed in New York, and like-minded friends were getting together on college campuses to challenge authority and to explore the status of women in Jewish law. The 1973 Women's Conference organized by the North American Jewish Students' Network drew more than 500 women and spawned new groups, regional conferences, the National Women's Speakers' Bureau and, in 1974, the Jewish Feminist Organization (JFO), which was committed to promoting the equality of Jewish women in all areas of Jewish life.

The growth of Jewish feminism was helped by the presence of antisemitism within the ranks of the general feminist movement (Fishman, 1989). This anti-semitism first surfaced as a wave of anti-Israel criticism. Some Christian feminist theologians claimed that Christianity had been ruined by Judaism and ascribed the misogynist and antisexual attitudes of some of the Gospels as "a concession to Judaism." In reaction to this pressure, many Jewish feminists began to voice their Jewishness forcefully and with pride as a "means of asserting both Jewish visibility within the

feminist movement and feminist consciousness within the North American Jewish community" (Fishman, 1989, p. 78).

The goals of Jewish feminists, can be divided into communal and spiritual areas. While communally oriented Jewish feminists have worked to gain access to decision making and power, the spiritualists have worked for development in the areas of ritual, law, liturgy and religious education. It should be noted that the division between these two spheres is not always clear and, in a woman's life, they may be linked emotionally and intellectually. This communal and spiritual dichotomy raises interesting epistemological issues about knowledge and ways of knowing.

In an address in Montreal on March 19, 2000, Judy Rebbick posits that the Jewish feminist movement has not made significant changes in the one area that she believes to be the most important: the private sphere of the home. She suggests that women are still responsible for most of the housekeeping and childcare, even in homes where men are unemployed. Norma Joseph, a feminist, scholar, and Montreal Orthodox Rebbetzin (wife of a Rabbi), takes a different stand. She feels feminists, in general, have not paid enough attention to the role of women in the home. She argues that women forty years old and under, and those with young children, often complain that they are made to feel inadequate if they are not pursuing careers at the same time as they are raising their families. Although many

women are, in fact, content in and proud of their role as homemaker, she argues that many are made to feel that this role is devalued and disregarded by society at large (Telephone conversation, May 20, 2000).

According to a talk given by Susan Aranoff, an Orthodox activist, the "most intractable issue in Orthodox life in the United States and Israel", is the situation of an agunah, a woman chained to a situation of marital limbo (New York, Mar. 5, 1999). An agunah is a woman whose husband refuses to grant her a religious divorce thereby preventing her from remarrying. In a groundbreaking case, reported in *The Montreal Gazette* of Mar. 23, 2000, an ex-wife claimed 1.3 million dollars from her husband saying that his refusal to grant her a religious divorce kept her from moving forward with her life. The husband countered that his wife was just using the case and the Jewish faith as a means of financial blackmail. In my conversations with Hassidic women, while some express sorrow that the agunot (plural of agunah) are thus afflicted, they still believe that the principles of rabbinic authority and halakhic integrity are more important than the individual status of a woman in this position. From my own perspective, I cannot imagine a husband wielding such authority and power that prevents a woman, he no longer considers his wife, from remarrying if she chooses to.

Not all Orthodox Jewish feminists feel that Judaism closes doors to them. Arna Poupko, a feminist, an activist, and an Orthodox Rabbi's wife in

Montreal, spoke at a local synagogue about her experience of being both Orthodox and a high profile woman with a career. She insists that Orthodox Jewish life has not been an obstacle to her professional ambitions, or to her desire to affirm her womanhood. In fact, she considers her Orthodoxy "irrelevant" to that part of her life at all. Poupko points out that some women she knows wear their feminism "as a cap," but in her case, "it's part of my whole identity." Poupko acknowledges that, while it may appear that Orthodox Judaism is "patriarchal" in nature and imposes limitations on what women can and cannot do, her attitude has always been that the key is to "behave as if it doesn't matter" (Canadian Jewish News, Apr. 6, 2000, p. 17).

Some Jewish feminists have taken the position that Jewish women are in fact too strong. Micheline Wandor (1997), a British Jewish feminist, asserts that in fact "the feminist prototype of woman as victim may not be applicable to Jews" (p. 13). She suggests that maybe "Jewish feminists are wrongly applying the power play inherent in feminist gender paradigms, and that "Jewish women should not be looked at as oppressed and powerless" (p. 13). Linda Grant (1997) is another British Jewish feminist whose thinking is similar to Wandor's. She makes the connection between Judaism, feminism and gender studies by implying that historically Jewish women focused their strength in business and now they do so in Jewish politics.

Grant questions "who should say what you should be doing with your Jewishness?" Even in her feminist disillusionment, Grant humorously concludes:

You can dress in leather and get a swastika tattooed on your left breast in a misguided attempt to "reclaim" this ancient symbol from its current sinister meaning.... Or you can sit in *shul* [synagogue] under your *sheitl* [wig], allied against pornography with Andrea Dworkin. Is this mess feminism's failure or its success, its capacity to endure, to reshape itself for each generation? Men and women – try doing without them. (Grant, 1997, p. 7)

In this excerpt Grant expresses her deep dissatisfaction with where feminism has brought society so far. In the end, the only common ground that Grant envisions between ultra-Orthodox Judaism and Jewish feminism (other than their joint stance against pornography) is the disillusionment that the women's movement did not achieve its goals.

Ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Women and Feminism

In this era of multicultural women's studies, with feminist scholars concerned about female potential, dignity and self-image, one focus of this inquiry was to explore the links between feminism and Hassidic Judaism. The right-wing newspaper *Yated-Ne-eman*, which serves an ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic enclave in Spring Valley, New York, ran a column in 1997 calling Orthodox feminism "a movement whose poison, if left unchecked, may seep into the minds of some unaware of its essence." This poison, the article suggests, destabilizes the moral world by challenging the "root distinctions" between men and women, which "are reflected in the very different path's [sic] to *Hashem's* [God's] service which Jewish men and women have taken over the ages" (Blutstein, 1998, p. 36).

The place of women in Orthodox Judaism has become, for some, a most divisive topic. In response to a modernization of practice among less observant Jews, many right wing communities have intensified their strict interpretations of Jewish law. Women along the entire Orthodox spectrum have joined in the debate. Whereas modern Orthodox women have become increasingly vocal about modernizing women's role in Judaism, ultra-Orthodox women have responded by aggressively defending the status quo. Some Hassidic women have gone into the secular world to promote their agenda. This is especially true among the Lubavitch Hassidic group, in which two prominent women, Esther Jungreis and Rivka Slonin, are well-known, respected activists and feminists.

A conference held by ultra-Orthodox women in the spring of 1998 promoted a platform of modesty (in attitude and in dress), women's intuition and feminine spirituality. As chairwoman Lydia Kess put it, organizers hoped to project an image of the observant Jewish woman as "very happy and content" (Personal communication, May 26,1998). Far from being the self-sacrificing, undervalued and marginalized woman that liberal feminists might imagine her to be, the religiously observant Jewish woman, as

portrayed by Kess, far surpasses secular women in her "unparalleled ability to achieve self-fulfillment and improve our environment." At this conference, blame was cast on feminists who, the participants argue, made women feel frustrated, sexually vulnerable, and spiritually void. The argument states that feminists have disrupted the divine plan, and therefore the correct response to the concerns raised by feminism is a return to the natural gender roles that God created. According to Kess, modesty and mothering are to be the two primary tools in women's efforts to heal the world.

In Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women (1991), Debra Renee Kaufman presents a sociological study of baalot teshuva. This is the Hebrew term for Jewish women who were raised as secular but have taken on Orthodox religious practice as adults. As is the case with my inquiry, the novelty of her work is that she gives the women she interviews their own voices by presenting large chunks of their words verbatim. Her interviewees also believe that community is critical if Orthodox Jewish life is to be preserved. They do not see their sphere as inferior, but rather as a place where they are free to create their own forms of personal, social, intellectual, and, at times, political relationships. Kaufman's work suggests that these women find inner contentment and satisfaction in their roles as women with their life's work centering on the care and well-being of others. The following excerpt from Kaufman sums up the sentiments of ultra-

Orthodox and Hassidic women around the issue of feminism:

They seem to expand the domestic limits of matriarchal living, not by entering a man's world, but by creating a world of their own. The solidarity, self-esteem, and strength they receive from this world reinforces them in their celebration of difference and womancentered values and in making claims upon the community as a whole for care, commitment and connectedness. (Kaufman, 1991, pp. 113-114)

The woman's role, therefore, according to Kaufman, is not one of

discrimination but of definition. To the Hassidic woman in her inquiry, the

abandonment of exclusivity of roles for men and women is not at all

liberation. Rather, it forces people into roles for which they are ill-suited, in

fact limiting their opportunities for fulfillment.

The Women's Movement and the Participants in My Study

The women's movement had many valid claims. It was born as a result of women being abused by a male-dominated society, and their response was to strive for equality. Torah-observant Jews, however, have not had to respond to their claims, because our wives were never subjected to these abuses. They have never been relegated to secondary importance. (Abramov, 1994, p. 175)

As insular and removed from the outside world as Hassidic women

have tried to remain (the community in Boisbriand is geographically isolated

as well), I was particularly interested to understand if and how the women's

movement or their feminist sisters in modern Orthodoxy, have touched the

lives of the women participants in my inquiry. If I were to summarize their

sentiments, it would seem that they feel feminism and the women's

movement "just made trouble". All participants concurred that their lives were busy enough without having "to think about such nonsense". The feminist demands within this closed community are, for their members, irreconcilable with Torah norms and values and at very conflicting odds with their *mesorah* (tradition). Accordingly, these women rebuff the incursions of the feminist movement and celebrate the role the Torah has accorded them.

Suri Gittel perhaps the most "modern" of my participants, points out that the reason there is no conflict between loyalties to Judaism and loyalties to feminism is because she knows that she can only let her feminism go as far as her religion allows. "There are certain parameters and you just don't go beyond them." This response indicates that religious boundaries, for her, are clearly delineated and accepted and more important than anything else (Feb. 17, 2001).

Some of the women reported that the women's movement did affect them to some degree. For example, Raizie indicates that "we don't pretend to live in a vacuum, some stuff has filtered through to our lives" (Jan 30, 2000). Yehudit believes that the feminist movement made young Hassidic husbands more aware of the needs of a woman:

I see other young couples today – all the men know how to change Pampers, they will take their children to the park. It gave permission for friends of mine to go to work. It opened up courses such as

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م. م computers for us. One great thing the women's movement did is that I don't have to bother wearing a girdle! (Nov. 20, 1998)

Toba, Suri Gittel and Raizie all pointed to the negative impact of the women's movement on their lives. For example, Toba explains: "Feminism is thinking that everything is mostly all about me. This is contrary to the Hassidic way of thinking. It has created confusion – today a lot of my friends don't know what is right to do" (Apr. 3, 2000). Devorah Esther reports that remaining true to her Jewish values has never been problematic for her personally:

The values of secular women have nothing to do with me and besides a lot of them are anti-Jewish. My religion gives me a sense of pride, purpose and privilege. I recognize that I am different from the Gentile woman. We are taught that our loyalty to Judaism is the loftiest value of all. Being a Hassidic woman means loyalty to home, children and husband. Why would there be a conflict? (Aug. 9, 1999)

Ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Jewish women, a few of whom are well versed in feminism, believe that the things the Torah has addressed for thousands of years, the differences in the ways men and women think and the ideas of *tznius* (modesty) have all been wrongly attacked by "difference" feminists. They argue that feminism came along and said that women, because of their modesty, are being silenced and subjugated. Yet, these religious Jews believe that "*tznius* is a way to tap into their source of self-esteem and power, knowing that it comes from one's inner self and one's relationship with *Hashem* [God]" (Blutstein, 1998, p. 12). It is their conviction

that Orthodox Judaism empowers women precisely because of the spiritual and physical separation between men and women.

From my discussions with the participants in this inquiry, ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic women feel that their Orthodox feminist sisters are making a grave error in their attempt to become "more like men", in their blurring of lines between the sexes. Most of these women believe that women do not need to perform male functions to feel important, worthwhile or to maintain their faith. For the women of the inquiry, it is not a question of feeling insulted by their limited role; they perceive their limited role as an honour.

Many outside observers who have studied the Hassidic community have focused on the anachronistic traditions representing the Hassidic community as old-fashioned Judaism at its most patriarchal (Poll, 1962; Rubin, 1972; Kaufman; 1991). From my own study, it appears that my participants have indeed discovered in their tradition and religion, a deep understanding of the "feminine" which speaks to them on the most profound levels of an appreciation and empowerment as women. Throughout this inquiry, I have argued that just because we cannot read oppression in their words does not translate into an assumption that the women must be deceiving themselves. In dialoguing with these women, I heard them repeatedly tell me that they have put themselves within a system that

values them no less than men and perhaps even more. They describe this system as one that empowers them in their own women-centered domains. If their power, their matriarchy, is no less influential than a man's power as patriarch, then we have a picture of patriarchy and matriarchy side by side – a patriarchy that does not dominate the realms that the matriarchy dominates, and is ultimately no more valued than the matriarchy and that is defused of the assumption that it is oppressive.

In the search to understand the prestige and power of the mother in her home, Jewish feminists (Grant 1997; Kaufman 1991; Wandor 1997) need only hear the voices of these Hassidic women and their veneration of the family structure with the Jewish woman at its helm. The patterns that emerge from this inquiry demonstrate that far from being peripheral in Jewish life, these women believe they are central. In interrelational roles as mother and wife, centrality as a woman is a concept, I believe, whose ramifications mainstream feminism has yet to uncover.

Negotiating Life in a Secular Community

Originally, Jewish people had no need for groups and organizations, for Jewish life was generally well organized. Conduct at home was perfect. A word uttered by a father or mother was holy to all members of the household; their opinion was decisive and final in every way. There were no breaches in modesty and the Jewish woman stayed in the sanctuary of her home. Even the streets were alright. All this was tens of years ago.

Nowadays the situation has changed from one extreme to the other. Shocking things happen and the streets have become terribly corrupt. Opinions and views that utterly oppose *Daas* [Torah], wield considerable influence over all. They are strangers to the spirit of Torah and to authentic Judaism. Having forsaken the ethics of the Torah, they draw their ideas and aspirations from fractured wells. Slowly but surely their ways have penetrated even into *Chareidi* [ultra-Orthodox] homes as we see that even in these circles a daughter rebels against her mother. Under these circumstances individuals cannot hold their own. They are unable to maintain a *Torah'dik* [Torah-like] way of life against such forceful winds. Two people together are far stronger than one person alone. Now is the time for G-d fearing people to talk, inspire and encourage one another. (Falk 1998, p. 123)

In this excerpt from his volume of laws and prohibitions regarding the

modesty required of Orthodox women, Rabbi Falk warns that the world at

large is corrupt and that "immoral pollution affects everyone" (p. 123). In

this section of questioning I was interested to discover if living in a

community such as Outremont, presents a challenge to these women. All

ten participants answered in the affirmative when asked if modern

technology, new information, secular values of the outside world present

difficulties. They all agreed that it is impossible to remain insular from the

influences that continually surround them. Tzipporah lamented that "we

live in a secular world that's getting more and more immoral with

boundaries that have blurred since I was a child." She goes on to say:

Whoever heard of all the crazy things that go on in the world today — drugs, violence, pornography. I'm disgusted by what goes on in the secular world — the promiscuity, the decadence. You have to be much stronger. I envy the Hassidic women who don't know what's going on in the outside world. (Jan. 10, 2000) This comment echoes Toba's statement:

We are more 'out there'. This is not always a good thing. Some people are tough enough to withstand the temptations and the pressure. You have to be tough. I watch the Hassidic boys waiting at the bus stop. They must keep their heads lowered to avoid seeing all the ads on the side of the buses. I cannot let my teenage daughter go to shopping malls for fear that she'll walk past a TV store and see all the programs on the TV's in the window. (Jan. 17, 2000)

In her own unique way of making a point, Devorah Esther shares her view

of modern secular fashion: "When I see a woman dressed on the street

with so little clothes on, it looks like maybe there was a fire and she had to

run quickly out of her house before she could finish dressing" (Jan. 13,

2000).

Raising children who will not be lured or tempted by the outside

world, who will continue in the Hassidic way, is the most prevalent concern

voiced by these women. Raizie shares her fears about this issue with me:

It's so difficult to be a parent today. We try so hard to transmit our values but then they walk out the door and see the billboards on the street. How strong can you be? It's easier to go astray today and some of our young ones do. I know a young boy who became a dope addict. The community didn't know what to do for him or how to help him. His family was paralyzed with shame and fear. Eventually it was just too much for him and he killed himself. (Jan. 25, 2000)

Shoshana Ruchel recalled an incident with her daughter:

My eighteen year-old daughter came home one day with some birthday cards from Hallmark. But how many cards did she have to read before selecting the ones she purchased? I don't always ask my daughter what she saw or where she went, because I don't want her to have to lie to me. (Jan. 31, 2000)

Raizie, in the following anecdote relates how confused her

daughter was to see a couple kissing on the street.

The other day my eight year-old daughter came home from school and asked me, "Mommy, do only Gentile mommies and daddies kiss each other"? In Hassidic homes there is no display of physical affection between the husband and wife in front of the children. It is rare for either partner to touch the other, embrace or kiss except in the privacy of their bedroom. We pray that our daughters and sons shouldn't be exposed to too much of the outside world. If you don't know about a lot of things, you don't know what you are missing. There's a serenity by us. (Feb. 15, 2000)

The difficulty in being a Hassidic parent today is elaborated upon by

Chaya:

At one time, Hassidic girls stayed at home and learned from their mothers. Their minds were occupied learning how to be a good housewife. Today with all the programs and courses available to Hassidic girls, staying at home is not so valued. I try not to let my daughter mix with people who have other ideas. I think this generation of young women is more spoiled. Things are so easy, nothing has value. I teach my children that you will appreciate things much more if you wait for them. (Feb. 17, 2000)

Comparing life today for the Hassidic woman with what it was like

for her grandmother, Toba provides the following account:

It is much more frightening for our children today than it was for my grandmother who lived in a little *shetel* [village] among her own people who shared a common courtyard and looked out for each other. Today's girls have to be more protected and sheltered than we were. Husbands are more vigilant in their checking up on what their daughters are learning, where they are going. My husband is afraid of the craziness out there. (Jan. 25, 2000)

Keeping children insulated from the outside world presents a

conflict for Shoshana Ruchel as well:

You can't say no to everything because then they might rebel. My fear is that if my daughter is too sheltered, she will not be able to deal with the unexpected. For example, the laws of family purity are not taught to our girls before they are engaged. I think that they should have information about their bodies and sexual relations in their early teens so it doesn't come as a bombshell. (Feb. 21, 2000)

On this topic of sexual education and how much children should

know, Devorah Esther elaborates on the discussions that she has had

with her children:

I had to give my children a talk about good touches and bad touches. The world is not the same safe and secure place that it used to be, and just because we are Hassidic doesn't mean we can escape or bury our heads in the sand. Today even in our homes we hear about problems of abuse in families. Our numbers are so much greater, so we have more problems than the generations before us. Difficulties at home are greater today because of financial concerns. This generation of young Hassidic Jews doesn't seem to work as hard in solving problems as we did. (Feb. 28, 2000)

She continued to rail against the dearth of information presented in the

Hassidic schools as well:

We are under-educated in Jewish thought and philosophy, especially in our Satmar group. There is a vacuum in women's knowledge, and when people question our beliefs, our daughters cannot formulate or articulate answers. My daughters don't have enough information about Jewish law and tradition to combat all the theories that might come their way. Satmars do not believe in educating their girls for the sake of knowledge in itself. They educate them just so that they know about the Jewish laws that will directly pertain to their lives. Any abstract thoughts or philosophical ideas are totally out. (Feb. 28, 2000)

Here Devorah Esther suggests that perhaps women should be taught Torah and Jewish philosophy so that they will have the tools to combat some of the "evils" the secular world presents. Tzipporah, a children's librarian comments on the amount of audio-visual material that bombards us today:

It is much more confusing today and you have to make so many more decisions. For example, when videos first came out the Rabbis said it was OK for children to watch educational programs. Then the Rabbis realized that people were choosing other videos as well. Once all of this stuff is out there, the children ask questions and then your job as a mother is more difficult. The world outside is trying so hard to pull at us. It's impossible to live in this world and not see all the dirt out on the street . You have to decide whether you are Hassidic or not. (Feb. 21, 2000)

Tzipporah's last comment here is, I believe at the heart of what

these women are saying throughout about the difficulty of raising children

in a secular environment. Rabbi Falk offers his concern about a

"thoroughly contaminated environment full of corruption and immorality

that pollute the entire atmosphere" (p. 140). He recognizes the

impossibility of sealing off one's home to prevent the influence of the

outside world from creeping in. This excerpt illustrates his position:

In this generation, the pursuit of permissiveness is worse than in many previous generations. People read in newspapers and see on television a mode of life whose description must be categorized as *nivul peh* [unclean speech]. Consequently, even if

we close our doors to the outside world we are still being unceasingly bombarded by an extremely polluted atmosphere.

We can perceive this environmental contamination when we see that a radio switched on anywhere in a house will pick up radio waves and churn out language that no decent person, never mind an *erlicher Yid*, [virtuous Jew], would ever use. Likewise, it produces defiled songs that we would never sing. This demonstrates that the very air is polluted in a most serious manner and that closed doors and windows cannot keep this out completely. (Falk, 1998, p. 140)

Here Rabbi Falk is arguing that it is so much more difficult today for

the Hassidic woman to keep herself and her family insular. He warns that

the nisyonos (tribulations) of the times are considerably greater than they

were in the last generation. This notion is largely supported by the

participants with whom I spoke. They agree that it is the times that have

changed, not the women. Moreover, Falk continues:

When simply walking along the street, whether in the summer or winter, it is impossible to avoid coming across the most appalling forms of female dress and different forms of immoral conduct. To our dismay it can be said about our generation, "The world is overrun by immorality." (Falk, 1998, p. 141)

Rabbi Falk warns of this immorality:

Even when a person of the highest morality sees misconduct and is sincerely disgusted by what meets his eyes – he is nevertheless detrimentally affected. The "power of sight" is so great that an impression is made even though the person knows it is evil and he utterly despises it.

While men are generally aware that it is *ossur* [forbidden] for them to look at immoral sights such as those mentioned, many girls and women mistakenly think that there is nothing wrong in their looking. This could not be further from the truth, as everyone is affected by *pritzus* [immoral conduct] without distinction. (p. 123)

This was further explained to me by Chaya. Some people, she suggests believe that it is only men who are forbidden to look at immodest pictures, movies and books. "Women do not realize how much damage they bring upon themselves and their families, if they see pictures in magazines that may arouse impure thoughts" (Aug. 19, 2000). Chaya believes that no one, male or female should think that they are beyond being affected by seeing *pritzus* (immoral conduct). To combat the negative influence of the outside, secular world, Rabbi Falk quotes from Ruth 2:8:

Boaz said to Ruth – "My daughter, do not go to glean in another field". The *seforim* [holy books] write that metaphorically Boaz advised Ruth that, although elsewhere the grass may look greener, this is a misconception and very far from the truth. It is only from the distance that the lives of others may appear to be happier than ours whilst in truth we are the most fortunate of people. (Falk, 1998)

Feeling pulled by the outside world and its inevitable temptations

and forces is not a concern voiced by Rebbetzin Fleisher. Here she

maintains that it is not difficult to be steadfast in beliefs and religion:

Why should we feel we have to be like the Joneses? We have a very rich heritage, clear directives and a comprehensive manual that answers all our questions. We do not need to emulate others. (Mar. 20, 2000)

Rebbetzin Fleisher feels that it is her duty to pray that she and her family

are not influenced by the outside world.

I have a son who takes off his glasses on the street in the summer so he shouldn't see how little clothing the women wear. My husband, the Rabbi, won't go to the bank in the summer so he shouldn't have to see the way the female tellers are dressed. He tells the men that they should keep watch on their eyes. (Aug. 2, 1999)

Suri Gittel seems to sum up many of these women's thoughts about this

issue of living a protected and insular life:

The way I was raised, this is a way of life so there is no conflict. Being *frum* [religious] gives you structure and security. It insulates us from the secular values of other women. We are living in a more protected world so we are not conflicted. I'm proud of being a Hassidic woman and would never sacrifice my Judaism for the sake of secular values that are at odds with our way of life. (July 29, 1999)

Being a Hassidic woman necessitates a certain amount of contact with

secular life and values but, even when confronted with these secular

values, loyalty to Judaism and the Hassidic way of life prevails.

In these accounts, the participants voice their concerns about the

tremendous conflict they experience as a result of the acculturation

process that the Hassidic Jew faces in Montreal today. Although

somewhat geographically separated from the outside world (more so in

Boisbriand than in Outremont), going to work, passing a newsstand, being

in the street or in other public spaces, still poses a threat to these women

in their efforts to avoid being affected by what they see. As the women

report, no matter how much they close their eyes or try to shield their

children, inevitably they are exposed to the world, whether they like it or not. All women participants agree that they need very strong roots in their traditional lives in order to be able to survive and not become drawn into the secular world that surrounds them.

However, life in the twenty-first century also has some benefits for the Hassidic woman, as most participants were quick to acknowledge. They pointed to the modern conveniences and luxuries that make their roles as mother and housewife less burdensome. Examples they gave included technological advances relating to infertility and childbirth, as well as appliances in the home which make life easier and quicker for the woman today. "I can't imagine doing the supper dishes for my family without a dishwasher or having to hand wash laundry for 12 children" (Sarah Chana, July 22, 2001).

For others, the expectations and demands made on the woman today outweigh the benefits of the dishwasher and washing machine. For Yehudit, life is harder today than it was for her mother and grandmother as she reveals in this excerpt:

Today I am not only expected to be a wife and mother but also a fund raiser, gourmet cook, fashion plate. I'm supposed to be competent in so many areas that my grandmother never thought about. (Feb. 17, 2000)

Toba reports about how different her life is when compared to the lives of women in her mother's generation:

The Hassidic woman plays a more vibrant role publicly today. She is more involved in her community. I am on a women's committee in my synagogue that helps to raise money for charities by holding tea parties. I think women are being listened to and looked up to more. Today's Hassidic woman is, I think, more open-minded than in previous generations. We know more about psychology from the courses we've taken in Special Care Counselling and Special Education, so we are able to handle things better. We travel more, read more. We are out in the work force in greater numbers. I have a sister in New York who had to travel to the Orient to interview perspective applicants for her job in a nursing home. (Mar. 6, 2000)

Traditionally, Hassidic women do not drive a car. The reason most

often given for this prohibition is that if a woman has a car at her disposal,

she will likely be tempted to use it to go to the shopping malls with her

friends instead of staying home to look after home and children. Toba

explains:

I wouldn't drive a car because it's not accepted by our group. It is not *tznius* [modest]. Maybe, I would like to drive a car but the benefits of belonging to my community far outweigh any benefits of driving. (Mar. 27, 2000)

However I did meet a few women who do in fact drive. They report that they appreciate the mobility and freedom the car provides. Chaya justifies her driving by explaining "getting a license is a good thing because you can do a lot for your family, pick up things and visit people in the hospital"

(Oct. 19, 2000).

Most of the women I interviewed, however, believe, as Toba does,

that driving a car contravenes the laws of modesty that are so central to

being a Hassidic wife and mother. Driving a car is considered by most women to be inconsistent with the tenet of Orthodox Judaism that emphasizes the need for the Jewish woman to be hidden from public view. True achievement, according to the Midrash, is always attained in the private sphere (Ghatan, 1986, p. 48).

In the area of observance of the laws of modesty and religious

tenets, I was interested to note if there were any differences between how

rigorous they are as compared to their mothers and daughters. Most of

the women said that there is no difference in terms of their fundamental

beliefs, but that there do exist some differences in terms of the expression

of the laws. Chaya talks about one distinction that relates to wearing a hat

over her wig:

My mother was before the war. She doesn't "go covered" wearing a hat and a wig and I do. But at heart I think she had a stronger faith than I do. My generation tends to question more. (Mar. 13, 2000)

Yehudit explains a difference in fashion between herself and her mother:

My mother and I are similar in most things like our dress, our praying and our cooking. My mother will wear beige tights that are extra thick with seams so that one cannot mistake her legs being covered. My mother's wig is 100% synthetic, whereas mine has some human hair, so it's not considered as religious. My mother doesn't wear make-up and I do. (Mar. 15, 2000)

In Shoshana Ruchel's case, her daughters are more observant than she

is:

My daughters are more careful about laws of modesty than I am. For example, their stockings are thicker than mine are. They will wear stockings that are 40 plus denier. (Mar. 16, 2000)

Toba agrees that the generation after her is more observant than

her own.

Both my daughters are more religious than I am. I have the radio on and I read two newspapers a day. They won't. My daughters cover their wigs with hats. I don't and my mother didn't. (Mar. 20, 2000)

These women believe that the reason that their daughters are more

stringent in their application of laws is because they are less

geographically insular than the previous generations. Therefore, they

suggest, they have to be that much more careful in their customs. Suri

Gittel makes a point that I repeatedly heard, namely that it is often the

husband who will decide about a woman's dress style:

A lot depends on what your husband considers appropriate. I have two married daughters. One of their husbands is stricter in terms of my daughter's clothes than the other one is. Both my daughters wear a little makeup. I usually won't. Our values are the same. It's not that they are less observant but it's the secular world which makes more demands. (Mar. 16, 2000)

As Hassidic women speak about the generational differences as it affects them, their mothers and their daughters, one can infer that living in the secular world has two distinct effects. For some it appears that living in a secular community has, in fact, caused some of the laws of modesty to be relaxed. At the same time, it has forced some women to be even more vigilant so as not to be influenced by outside forces. In their day-today lives, these Hassidic women report that they face the ever present threat of assimilation posed by the surrounding secular world. Rather than identify with the feminist movement, they choose to direct their tenacious loyalty and hard work back into the Hassidic community. An editorial found in a Hassidic women's magazine entitled *Di Yiddishe Heim* (The Jewish Home) makes this mission clear:

Today, Jewish life is struggling for its survival, against those outside forces that intrude themselves into the citadel of Judaism, the Jewish home. Who is there to meet this challenge? — the Jewish wife. How can she meet this challenge? At various periods in our history, we have been known to answer this question in either of two ways. The basic role of the Jewish woman, *bat melech* [daughter of a king] in her devotion to her household, and her creativity in this inner sanctuary, has been to nurture with care the flower of Jewish youth. But at times of dire need and stress, the *eishet hayil* [woman of valour] has gone out of her four walls, to give of herself, for the strengthening of the structure of the Jewish community. Now at this moment, we have need for both qualities simultaneously. The ways of strangers have insinuated themselves into the Jewish stronghold. (Apr., 1996, p. 14)

This writer's explicit message is that it is Jewish women who are

primarily responsible for assuring the well-being of her children and home.

From Rabbi Falk's perspective, it is the wife and mother who has the

superior influence and thus must assure that her children and home are

protected from what he considers "ill winds." These Hassidic women

express the need to redouble their efforts to protect themselves and their

families from the threats and concerns posed by living and working on the

margins of Quebec society.

Similarities and Differences Between Hassidic Women and Hassidic Men

Although they are usually referred to as the "weaker sex," women possess unusual strengths. There is no lack of stories about great men, of course, but the sneaking suspicion remains: Women are the world's real rock of Gibraltar....

But women are more than just strong. They are smart and loving, sympathetic and joyful and creative. They are endowed with certain instinctive gifts whose exact definition has eluded scientific analysis to this day: The *binah yeseirah* [extra understanding] which our Sages mentioned a few thousand years ago, and the special *neshamah* [soul] which G-d created for them to function as the indispensable partner to man.

As part of their unique equipment, women have special "antennae" which run like long threads throughout human history and society, keeping them finely attuned to the needs of the people they know and love. The information they supply helps make our world a happier, better and more heavenly place. (Ganz, pp. 15-6)

This excerpt from a personal narrative by Yaffa Ganz (1990), a

religious woman writer, is consistent with the thoughts of the women in my

inquiry. They understand that God intended men and women to be

different from each other and that these differences are desirable.

Hassidic women believe that God created them because, as the above

excerpt suggests, there is something unique and essential about them,

without which the world would be incomplete. As a reflection of this belief,

I particularly enjoy Abramov's (1994) anecdote concerning the union of a

husband and wife:

The charismatic *tzaddik* [pious man] of Jerusalem, R. Aryeh Levin, once accompanied his wife to the doctor. When the doctor asked the couple what was the matter, R. Aryeh answered, "My wife's foot hurts us." R. Aryeh felt the pain of his wife's foot. This charming anecdote sums up for us what we are striving for in a marriage. Our goal is *v'hayu I'vasar echad*, to fulfill God's command to Adam that man and wife should be as one flesh (Bereshis 2:24). They should realize a complete merging of personalities, desires and feelings. (p. 161)

Hassidic women understand gender roles and gender differences

as distinctions inherent in creation. Rabbi Neumark (1984) uses a

battlefield analogy to explain these roles:

Men and women have different individual and national roles through which they serve God. Men can be viewed as analogous to the Torah scroll that goes out to battle. After interacting with the outside world for a certain amount of time, they can lose sight of what their true objectives should be. Jewish women can be viewed as analogous to the Torah scroll stored in the king's treasury. They are supposed to serve as the guardians of the uncompromised, original Torah.

When men come home from their days on the battlefield, their wives can offer opinions as to whether or not the men have become distorted by the pulls of the outside world. Women are models of what God's true will is supposed to be, and they are endowed with the capability of continually drawing their husbands and children back to proper standards. Through this process, women have always been the backbone of Jewish survival. (p. 39)

This view is corroborated by Sarah Chana and Toba who view

themselves as both activists and feminists. They report that gender roles

are not an area of concern for them because they believe in the idea of complementary relationships. Their Torah values are strong enough, they believe, to withstand the influence from more moderate Orthodox women and from the secular world in general. They and other women participants subscribe wholeheartedly to the tenets of their religion and therefore do not feel oppressed or coerced. They understand and accept the boundaries of their lives. For them, if a desire conflicts with *Halakhah* (law) then it is a misguided desire. As one woman explained to me:

If one has an understanding of who she is, of her place in the world, why would she be unhappy? If you feel comfortable and at peace in your place, you don't need someone else's. I have enough to do to fulfill my own role. (Toba, July 20, 1999)

As this comment reveals, responsibilities between the sexes are clearly delineated and accepted. Women and men are taught to think differently, to understand the world differently. Each partner has his or her own role and obligation to fulfil, and each complements the other. The men study the law and their wives defer to their superior knowledge in this domain. Women's lower station in the religious sphere is considered to be balanced by the respect they receive for their role in the household. Thus, the well-matched couple is able to establish an enduring and happy marriage. Hassidic women fall into the category of "received" knowers (Goldberger et al., 1996) who accept the world as hierarchically arranged and dualistic, consisting of "self" and "others" and increasingly channel

their sense of self into the capacity to care for others.

Raizie demonstrates her understanding of this notion of self and others:

My husband and I came to this marriage with a clear understanding of what our roles were to be. He watched his father while growing up, I learned from my mother. There is no confusion or decision to be made. I was happy to work while he learned. Now that he is out working, I fulfill my obligations in the home as a Hassidic wife and mother is taught to do. I respect love and admire him because he is so learned. I'm proud of him. He honours me because I work hard at making sure our home is *baalabatishe* [comfortable] and our children are raised according to our ways. We fit together like a puzzle — we complement each other. We both understand we are here to serve God. (Feb.12, 2000)

Michael Kaufman's (1996) arguments about gender differences are

reflected clearly in the traditionalist thinking of the Hassidic women in my

study who view the woman as equal to the man but believe that each has

their own unique mission to fulfil. He explains the relationship of gender to

Judaism in the following passage:

In Judaism gender differences are fundamental; men and women differ in their basic natures, personality traits, and abilities. A feminist movement which insists that men and women be treated equally and that women must suffer in order to uphold this principle cannot be in consonance with Judaism. Nor can Judaism accept a movement that is — even moderately — antimale, anti-child, anti-family, anti-feminine, or anti-altruism. Such an ideology is inconsistent with values central to the Jewish people. (pp. 88-89)

This notion of the world being divided into distinct gender arenas is one that resonates with the participants of this study. This does not mean that actions normally associated with men or women are systematically proscribed for the opposite sex. What it does imply is a basic association of actions and attitudes with one gender or the other.

These women were clear in maintaining that men and women each have distinctive biological makeups, both physical and mental. The societal difference between men and women, they believe, is not so much a function of social conditioning as it is a result of natural, psychological propensities, that is, God-given differences. Kaufman goes on to say that:

Gender differentiation in Judaism is based upon the inherent *inequality* of men and women. The roles are complementary, and of equal value. In accordance with nature, each gender is naturally more suited to perform certain tasks than the other, yet members of both sexes stand as equals before God. Men's primary role involves the public, external realm; women's primary role involves the private, internal realm. (p. 90)

Here, I draw on the work of difference theorists (Cohn, 1993;

Harding, 1986) to suggest the role of gender symbols in the construction of social worlds and discourses. In the Hassidic tradition, human characteristics are arranged in binary opposites, associated with gender and asymmetrically valued. Symbolic gender systems describe beliefs Hassidic women hold about gender rather than the behaviour of individual men and women. These norms influence the construction of the Hassidic social and natural world, including the realm that women rarely enter. Cultural systems that structure the discourses of Torah study for men as masculine and homemaking for women as feminine create beliefs that influence each sex differently.

According to the women I interviewed, erasing differences would not be desirable. They believe that the masculine qualities of the male, combined with the feminine qualities of the female, together are a blessing — one without the other would be considered a "destructive curse" (Ghatan, 1986, p. 42). That is, the male's aggressiveness, coldness, objectivity and calculation if not combined with the female's qualities of passivity, emotionality and compassion, can "cause the destruction of humanity" (Ghatan, 1986, p. 42).

Most participants agree with the adjectives that Ghatan uses above to describe men and women and believe that it is because of the different natures of men and women that women are better suited than men to doing domestic and childcare work. For example, Raizie explains that "when men help out it is a favour above and beyond what they are expected to do. My husband will say, I have to go to *shul* [synagogue]. You can't expect them to come home after a full day's work and wash dishes, can you?" (Aug. 13 1999) Because Hassidic women value and respect a man who studies Torah in *kollel* (school for married men to

continue their Torah studies), most women participants accept the fact

that they will shoulder the responsibility of childcare and home

maintenance.

Chaya says that, in her home, "looking after the children is a whole procedure for my husband. It's not in men to raise children". She strongly believes that it is in a woman's nature to be a mother:

When I let my husband take the children out somewhere he'll come home with less kids than he went with. Men don't have the same sense of responsibility. It's not his department to look after the children and the home. He is untuned into the kids, not because he doesn't care, not because he's incapable, but because it is not what he's supposed to be doing. Our roles are clearly taught. The men are the builders, the women are the nurturers. Women are born with an inborn instinct to look after children. (Dec. 3, 2000)

Sara Ruddick (1995) and Nancy Chodorow (1989), in their feminist psychoanalytic theories of the development of gender differences, look at women's lives, especially the experience of motherhood. Also working in the differences tradition, they argue that individual gender differences are embedded in social contexts. They do not believe that there is anything inherent in women's nature that makes them more able than men to care for children. Both argue that if men nurtured and cared for infants and children, both sexes would develop the relational skills and desires to parent (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 211-219) and learn maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1995, pp. 42-45). However, both base their theories in the social reality that is primarily women who mother, however, variably this activity is constructed in different contexts. Because the Hassidic woman is, for example, most often involved in maternal practices, it is important to acknowledge and validate the consequences of this social difference in one's understanding of these women's lives. Hassidic women and men are assigned different activities and experiences. It is therefore not surprising that, since it is the women who parent, juggle work and family obligations with little opportunity for play, they will be most affected by the gender differences in current theories of knowledge construction. The Hassidic woman's position in her social hierarchy, as well as the content of what she does, both enable and limit what she will know and the theories of knowledge she will be likely to develop (Goldberger et al., 1996).

The next excerpt from a participant illustrates this notion of gender roles constructed out of practice:

My husband represents the firmness. If he says that outfit is not good, that's the rule. His word goes and it's final. He is a very big scholar. I don't want him to do anything in the house that should take away from his precious time to learn. I am in charge of everything. If he has time, he'll help bathe or put the children to sleep. Basically, the home, children and making the holidays are all orchestrated and run by women. (Chaya, Mar., 2000) A comment from Raizie underlines the argument of Bohan (1993) and Lott (1990) who believe that individuals do not have gender, rather they do gender:

My husband is in charge of bringing in the money. I'm in charge of deciding how to spend it. I couldn't see my husband running this house. I take care of all the bills. If it's a major expense, then he'll look after it. He says "if you don't put my books away, I won't mess in your kitchen." (Raizie, Mar. 8, 2000)

Crucial to all these theorists, and what I believe to be true in the

Hassidic family, is that these differences in behaviour are not due to

gender per se. Rather they reflect different demand characteristics in the

social contexts and interactions of women and men in this community.

I recall a discussion about gender roles that specifically relates to

household chores. It took place in a classroom at Bais Yaakov with my

students, ages 17 and 18.

MEN AND HOUSEWORK

I have learned through many years of teaching at Bais Yaakov, that I have to be careful as to what and how much I disclose about my personal life. In the past, I have shared information that I considered unimportant but that, for Hassidic girls, opened up a door that their families preferred would have stayed closed. Hassidic fathers and husbands rarely participate in any household chore. I was waiting for the inevitable question — does your husband do any work in your home? I decided to be bold and tell the truth. I shared that he is as likely to clean, dust, vacuum, do the dishes, make the bed as I am. My students became silent — the expression on their faces registered both surprise as well as confusion. I went on to further explain that in our house, because we both work, we share the responsibilities equally. The next question posed by them was, who does the laundry? I answered that we each look after our own. My students were shocked. They had great difficulty trying to process this information. I had brought them to a totally foreign, inconceivable and perplexing place. I anticipated that, when they went home and told their families about our classroom discussion, I would receive a telephone call from an irate mother admonishing me for presenting information that was so contrary to their daughter's Hassidic life experience. Fortunately, to my knowledge the Seminary office at Bais Yaakov has not as yet received a formal complaint. (May 26, 2000)

Most of the Hassidic women I interviewed were very clear about the

division of responsibilities in their homes, as well as how this division

affects them. They tended to report that the husband more often than not

is responsible for bringing in the money and making sure that the home,

wife and children are all running according to Halakhah (law). The final

word usually rests with the husband. Tzipporah describes how things work

in her home:

My husband takes care of the schooling of the boys. He is very busy learning with them. He looks to see that everything is 100% in the house — the girls dresses are long enough and things like that. He's the disciplinarian for both the boys and the girls. The children will look to him for the answer — they'll say "Tatty is coming home, we'll hear what he says about it." (Jan. 18, 2000)

In the relationship between husband and wife, Rabbi Falk (1998),

in *Modesty*, writes that the beautiful partnership between husband and wife generates the blissful atmosphere that is found in a *Torah'dik* home (one filled with Torah). This requires that the husband carry on his shoulders the heavy responsibility for the *chinuch* (Jewish training) of the children. He sees to it that they develop into ideal *Yidden* (Jews), both in their devotion to Torah and *mitzvos* (commandments) and in their social conduct with people. In all this his wife stands at his side to assist him in his quest to fulfill his mission. She recommends what she thinks the "captain of the ship" should do under given circumstances. As she is his devoted help-mate and advisor for life, he depends heavily on her opinion and considers what she has to say with utmost care. A deep mutual trust is born out of this ideal arrangement (p. 306). Falk goes on to suggest that since it is the husband in Hassidic homes who carries the ultimate responsibility for the family, his wife should treat him with considerable respect, thereby giving him the backing and security he requires. As he is predominantly responsible for the general tendency and direction of the family, she should take guidance from him and make every effort to see things the way he sees them (p. 306).

Yehudit believes that this positive attitude enables her to agree with her husband and stand firm by his opinion even regarding issues about which she had originally thought otherwise. Rabbi Falk (1998) gives the following example:

For a woman to submit as far as possible to the decisions of her husband may seem a sign of weakness – as if she is too feeble to stand up for her own opinion and rights. In truth, it is just the opposite, as such conduct usually results from *midos tovos* [personal qualities] and from having a healthy and balanced personality. (p. 28)
As in many other traditional communities, the Hassidic woman accepts the supremacy of the male as a given. The husband's higher status is evident in even the smallest details. For example, I noticed a wedding invitation posted on the refrigerator of one woman's home. The address read "David Cohen and his wife" (not his real name). It was explained to me that it was not an insult but a question of *tznius*, or modesty. After all, doesn't everyone know "there is no home without a woman?" (Tzipporah, Aug. 22, 2000). At mealtime, the husband's place is at the head of the table. In some households I would observe that everyone around the table would stand up when the father would walk in and would sit down only after he was seated. This position relates to the man's primary role of religious functionary. Rebbetzin Fleisher explained to me that because the man is directly responsible for keeping the community alive through his study of Torah and the observance of the 613 *mitzvot*, these obligations earn him a higher level of status. A few of the women I interviewed were proud to tell me that their husbands were the smartest scholars in their Yeshivahs. Hassidic women, in my experience, appear to flaunt their scholarly husbands like precious gems.

The differences suggested between men and women very often relate to what women perceive as a man's more analytical mind. This ability of men to think more clearly, reason and analyze was a recurrent sentiment among the women. Yehudit supports this notion of a man's superior abstract thinking skill in the following comment:

Men are more into ideas and are more analytical. That's why women are not allowed to learn *Gemora* [portion of the Talmud that discusses laws]. Men can understand complex and intricate texts. We women would interpret those texts incorrectly. (Feb. 20, 2000)

Talmudic texts are not taught to girls. Because, it is believed, solid accomplishment of Torah study requires complete dedication of time and effort, as discussed in an earlier section, women are not duty bound to study Torah and are only required to learn those areas necessary for the proper performance of their *mitzvot* (commandments).

Sarah Chana believes that one of the reasons Hassidic men think

Hassidic women should not learn so much is "because the knowledge will

go to their hearts instead of their heads."Women", she adds, "look at each

situation with more understanding of feelings and with more emotion.

Women are more intuitive, more able to see the other person's point of

view. Men are more solution oriented" (Feb. 10, 2000).

Yehudit offers a comment in which she expresses a similar idea:

My husband is a man of truth who believes that learning Torah is the highest ideal. He is studying in *kollel* [school for married men to continue religious studies] and will be doing so for at least, I hope, another ten years. We get by by on his meagre salary and my income as a substitute teacher. I have my CEGEP diploma locked away in a drawer. There is no question that my husband is smarter than I am. I respect him for his clear thinking and the way he carefully makes decisions. He thinks with his head and I think with my heart. I sometimes mess up but that doesn't happen with him. (Feb. 22, 2000)

From this excerpt, one can recall the position of "received knowing" (Goldberger et al., 1996). Hassidic women believe that all knowledge originates outside of the self. They look to their husbands even for selfknowledge, striving to live up to the images that others have created for and of them. That others can have such power in defining how these women see themselves may account for the fact that some intelligent Hassidic women are discouraged from recognizing, using and developing their intellectual powers.

Devorah Esther, also alludes to the heart/head dichotomy that

Yehudit addresses in the passage above:

Women are more emotional than men are by nature. That is the reason that it is the men who decide *Halakhah* [law] because we are too easily swayed by our feelings. Men are not as sensitive and are more rational. I tend to be irrational at times. I have read John Gray — *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.* It's the same with us. Men and women are different; women listen more and are not so self-centered. You can't change the way God created men and women. (Feb. 23, 2000)

I believe that what helps the Hassidic women cope with their day-

to-day exhausting lifestyle is the sense that their husbands, in their superhuman status, are totally deserving of their efforts. For most of the women with whom I met, admiring their husbands is vital, not only for their own spiritual fulfillment but also for their understanding of the partnership. To sum up, the Hassidic woman's view of gender appears to be one of biological determinism. In the Hassidic culture, structural gender is achieved by assigning different social activities and roles to different groups. Womanly activities in this community are care giving practices and because gender is interlocked with ethnicity and religion, what Hassidic women do and what womanliness means are also culturally local. It is precisely because of the strict hierarchy of the Hassidic culture, where power relations are fixed, that inclusion in the group is ensured. These fixed relationships in turn promote harmony and intimacy.

The Role of Higher Secular Education in the Life of the Hassidic Woman

When you teach a man, you teach the individual. When you teach a woman, you teach a family, a community, a world. (Blutstein, 1998).

It is only in the last ten years that formal secular education beyond

high school was offered to Hassidic women in Montreal. Because this

generation is the first ever to receive this higher level of secular study, I

was particularly curious to know the following:

- 1. Why was secular education beyond high school of interest to the women in my inquiry?
- 2. What was their motivation to complete this learning?
- 3. What did the Hassidic community feel about women getting these advanced diplomas and degrees?
- 4. In what ways, if any, has this course of study changed the way the women feel about themselves and their lives?

5. How is this education viewed by the men in their lives, specifically their husbands, and how might it influence, if at all, the relationship between spouses.

Bais Yaakov and TAV (Torah and Vocational Centre) are the two institutions that offer CEGEP courses to the women of this community. Both programs are satellite centres of Marie Victorin CEGEP. Presently, Bais Yaakov Seminary for Women offers the opportunity to obtain a Diploma of Collegial Studies (DEC) in two programs: Letters (Arts and Literature) and Special Education. Core courses include English, French, Humanities and Physical Education. Optional courses offered vary each semester. Jewish Philosophy, Jewish History, Jewish Religion, Computers, and Graphic Arts are the most in demand. Bais Yaakov, through Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey, also offers, to the Orthodox community, a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree that may be completed in one year after CEGEP. Hassidic girls have not, as yet, enrolled in this program of study.

At the Torah and Vocational Centre, two different advanced diplomas are issued. The first is the DEC programs in Computer Science and in Arts and Literature. The second is called the AEC (Attestation D'études Collegiales). The object of this post-secondary course of study is to prepare students to enter the work force as skilled office technicians (with an AEC in Office Systems and Technology or Micro-Computing). Because male infants and children cannot be attended to by women in Orthodox day care centres after the child is out of diapers, many Hassidic men take the AEC at TAV in Early Childhood Care so that they can be certified by the Quebec Government's Office des Services de Garde à L'enfance. There were 18 men in the Tosh community taking this course in the fall of 2000. At TAV the enrolment is approximately 100 Hassidic men and 100 Hassidic women at any given time. It should be noted that all courses are offered to men and women separately. The course listings at TAV are found in Appendix J. Based on assessment of individual need, the Quebec Government will grant loans and bursaries to students who are enrolled in the DEC or AEC programs. The average amount of this financial aid is \$5000-\$6000 a year, of which \$2000 is a loan.

There are a variety of reasons why some Hassidic women decide to further their learning after high school. For most, it is simply a pragmatic decision that is purely financial. As pointed out above, in comparison with the incomes of other Jews in Montreal, the incomes reported in Shahar's (1997) study of Orthodox Jews in Outremont are low. In assessing the poverty of this community, Shahar reported that over 40% of adult participants live below the Statistics Canada low-income cutoff or poverty line. Many families, therefore, depend on communal and government support. In my own sample, all husbands spent at least the first few years of their marriage in advanced Talmud and rabbinic studies in a *kollel* (religious school for married men). Even after having one or more children, eight of the ten husbands devote themselves to intensive, full-time learning. Hence, they depend on the income of their wives, who presently hold jobs or work at intervals between having their children. For this reason, Hassidic girls welcome, for the most part, the opportunity to advance themselves academically in order to prepare for a vocation that will enable them to work outside the home and thus supplement the family income.

Tzipporah reports being content to support her husband while he studies. She refers to the biblical agreement that was struck by Jacob's two sons, in which Yisakhar sat and learned Torah while his brother Zebulun, supported him. Like Zebulun, Tzipporah as a woman of valour, brings home the bread, not from afar as in Proverbs, but with no less effort. She believes that in the world to come she will be compensated for her hard work. "I am investing in the bank of God" (Tzipporah, Aug. 16, 2001). She does not bemoan her fate for one moment. Her strength and her religious conviction make it easy for her to shrug off the daily trials and tribulations of her life. She confides that purchasing a new washing machine, reupholstering the living room furniture or buying her children new mattresses seem more distant than ever. For all the participants,

spiritual values are the priority for both husband and wife. I obtained a clear sense that an increase in income, while welcome, would not improve the quality of their life or make them happier than they already are.

Remarkably, not one of the women I interviewed expressed any dissatisfaction about their multiple roles — having to work, taking care of a large family and being tied down to housework and childcare. Most appear satisfied and content to lavish love on their children and on their home and do not want what they cannot have or cannot afford.

One respondant, when I asked how her family is able to "get by" on her meagre salary as a classroom teaching assistant, she looked above to the ceiling of her home and said "*Hashem* [God] will provide for us". Most women that I interviewed willingly made many sacrifices. A quote from Sarah Chana talks about her priorities:

Right now, one daughter is studying in Israel, five sons are away in *yeshivot* [religious schools for men], six of the children are at home. That's a lot of tuition. There are certain things we do without, she says, adding in her good-natured way. "That's why I drive that 1980s big clunker van outside. That's okay", she says. It's worth the price. Our priority in life is Torah, *mitzvos* [commandments] and *Hashem* [God]. We may not have other things, but we don't feel we're missing anything. We've got the gold." (Aug 19,1999)

Yehudit, a newly married woman, expressed her worry about

making ends meet. She is working only part-time, and after paying the

monthly rent for their modest apartment and taking care of the food bills,

there is little money left over. On Sabbath and holidays, she and her husband, a promising young scholar at an Outremont *kollel*, eat at her parents. Yet, it does not seem to occur to her to regret her decision to marry a man who would want to study. She did not even mention the added pressure of expecting a child in the near future. She clarifies her position in the following excerpt:

The most important reason that I'm completing my CEGEP diploma is to make more money. That way I can work one hour a day instead of five hours and earn the same pay. I want to work, so that my husband should be able to learn for the first few years of our marriage. Also, the government gives you a bursary to go to school so it is another form of additional income for us. (June 5, 2000)

Aside from economic concerns, other participants claimed that, by

completing a DEC or AEC, they felt a greater sense of self-satisfaction

and competency in their roles as mother and wife. Toba gives the

following explanation:

I'm taking Special Education in order to be a better mother, to understand the psychology of my child's mind. But if I didn't have my DEC, nothing would change. I have a full life otherwise. (June 5, 2000)

Raizie concurs with Toba that her DEC studies have opened her eyes to

more things:

I think I became a better mother — I know how to help my children with problems. Through studying Piaget and Erikson, for example, I'm more appreciative of my healthy children. (June 12, 2000) One of Shoshana Ruchel's children has been sick for a number of years. She reports that: "I learned things in child psychology that were very helpful so that I could talk to doctors about my son who has cancer. Now I understand his disease better".

In terms of the personal fulfilment that post-secondary courses can offer, Suri Gittel believes that it "helps women feel better about themselves. They become more confident. Education gives them power. It makes you less naive and less ignorant". She adds: "I think I learned a lot about myself — I found out about some of my qualities. The CEGEP program made me feel intelligent for the first time in my academic life" (June 12, 2000). From the words of the Hassidic women I interviewed, they appear grateful that now, because of women-only classes in Montreal, they finally have the opportunity to continue learning.

Another benefit mentioned of pursuing higher education was that this new learning offered them the opportunity to meet many people from diverse backgrounds, especially when doing their fieldwork placements. Some other reasons cited by participants for wanting to complete CEGEP include becoming more worldly and becoming a better "catch": Toba explained both these points:

My secular education helps me understand what's going on when we have an election. When my husband wanted to become a Canadian citizen, I could help him study the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so he could pass his test. He needs my help with

French for his business. Also, smart girls get smart boys. When it comes to making a *shiddach* [matrimonial match], if a girl is better educated, people will assume that down the road she can work for the first few years of marriage. They'll assume that she is a very desirable marital prospect. (June 14, 2000)

The opposite position is expressed by Sarah Chana who very

pointedly told me that the Satmar, a right wing Hassidic sect, believes that

all secular education is traif (not kosher). "When it comes to arranging

shidduchs [marriages], it's a problem for the girls who have professional

degrees. Our community does not really value our getting a CEGEP

education. The belief is that women have enough in their heads" (June 17,

2000).

Other downsides of post-secondary learning to the Hassidic way of

life are raised by Toba and Shoshana Ruchel:

Some girls get so involved in their careers that they postpone marriage until their mid-twenties. I have a friend in New York who is ultra-Orthodox and went to get a BA to become a speech therapist. She's 45 years old and still not married, because no boy has been good enough for her. (Toba, June 31, 2000)

One of my courses for my Special Education diploma was only given through the Montreal English School Board. I was in a class with eight men and fifty women. The teacher was a male. I sat by myself as far back in the classroom as possible. It was very uncomfortable. I lasted one week. (Shoshana Ruchel, June 20, 2000).

As well, problems occur from time-to-time, when material is introduced by

secular teachers that is not considered appropriate to study. Yehudit

reminded me that even I, as a teacher, was guilty of this: "If this

psychology course were given anywhere else I wouldn't be able to take it. As it is, Sharyn you sometimes say things that are inappropriate for us to hear, so I just omit them from my mind" (Mar. 12, 1998). When I questioned her about this, she referred to the time when, in teaching a child development course, I included the topic of physiological puberty changes in girls and boys (June 29, 2000) (I have subsequently eliminated this from the Bais Yaakov curriculum). Devorah Esther recounts how she encountered a situation at Bais Yaakov which was also disturbing to her:

In elementary school we learned about Noah and the Ark and how God made it rain for 40 days. Then I got to college and teachers told us that the Torah was a legend — there was no Noah and no flood but simply the end of the ice age. This was very disturbing for me, and I'm still trying to work my way to resolve it in my mind. Sometimes knowledge is a dangerous thing — you don't know where it's going to take you. (Mar. 12, 1998)

Suri Gittel provided another example of teaching inappropriate

material to Hassidic women: "At TAV we were taught about a sexual harassment case. We had to read about it and it was very disturbing and inappropriate. We were all upset with this UQAM teacher because of this topic" (June 23, 2000).

Raizie recalls a particular incident that was troublesome for her:

We learned about sexual abuse. I don't think girls need to hear about this. If you know it exists, it's one step closer to coming into our community. It's a very delicate issue. At one time you never spoke about it, today it's more out in the open. (June 21, 2000)

She also spoke about her husband's reaction to women learning

material that may be culturally insensitive. "Men don't want their wives

and daughters exposed to certain things that might be in conflict with their

way of life. Some men check over course content very carefully" (June 12,

2000). To make sure that I understood the danger inherent in learning

culturally insensitive topics, she related the story of a prominent Montreal

rabbi whose daughter "went to college and ended up marrying a Gentile.

She went totally off – away from her tradition and roots".

Chaya agrees that the type and amount of information presented to

the students sometimes must be limited.

How do we know when it's too much? I have a friend in New York whose daughter is taking a nursing course. So she has to learn biology and male anatomy. This is in direct conflict with our laws of modesty. Even as a married woman I would find those pictures in the textbook disagreeable. (June 20, 2000)

Yet for Sarah Chana, the idea of censoring, can also go too far: "I

came across a book where the word pig was crossed out --- just

because we don't eat pork, doesn't mean we can't read the word pig"

(Aug. 3, 2000).

Whether secular education for this generation of young Hassidic

girls will enhance their lives or cause them to feel conflicted and resentful

or will threaten their traditional roles as Hassidic wives and mothers is a

topic that generated much discussion. Some of the women believed that nothing one learns is ever wasted. All information is helpful. Using common sense and proceeding with caution was advocated by others. Raizie believes that you "can't give knowledge and expect it to have no impact — but if we are careful about what we teach, there is less risk of feeling conflicted or rebellious. If a secular education allows women to debate the Biblical book of Job or talk about existentialism, then it would be a problem" (June 18, 2000).

Sarah Chana thinks that each woman's situation must be looked at case by case:

It depends on how strong the religious education was when she was a child. If it's a girl that has always had lots of questions in her teens, it may be a problem opening the door to higher secular education. It may expose her to issues that will cause her to resent her traditional roles. She may find the world out there a little too glamorous. (June 1, 2000)

Speaking about the merits of higher secular education, Yehudit,

age 19, said that her Bais Yaakov Seminary program gave her "both wings and glasses." I understood her metaphor to mean that she was given the freedom to pursue her chosen path, as well as the ability to make decisions, or simply to think critically. Raizie felt that by and large the community was benefiting from the expertise of its women graduates:

At one time the child who had learning difficulties had no one to turn to, because there were not any teachers who were specifically trained to help her. Today we have women who are competent to work as resource room teachers because of their special education certificates. Our community sees the tangible skills we are learning being put to practical use to better educate our children with special needs. (June 5, 2000)

Devorah Esther, a woman with a CEGEP diploma adds the following

about the value of this certificate: "The notion that a woman's secular

education is unnecessary, meaningless or a waste of time is just shared

by those people who are naive and have their heads buried in the sand,

or they are ostriches" (July 3, 2000).

On the negative side, a potential problem about obtaining this

diploma was posed by Rebbetzin Fleisher:

Girls are taking the CEGEP courses to get better jobs. We have to hope that our community resources grow to allow them to work within the community. Otherwise, they will have nowhere to go. These women feel they should work to make their degree pay off. Our community leaders see this as a conflict to the traditional role of the woman as homemaker and mother. (June 19, 2000)

These sample excerpts about learning beyond high school suggest

that for most of the women I interviewed, the benefits of a CEGEP education clearly outway the costs. Their answers reveal the possibility of exposure to new ideas, texts or situations that would be contrary to the Hassidic lifestyle and values. Yet, Rebbetzin Fleisher sums up the belief that most Hassidic woman are strong enough to withstand the occasional insensitive exposure. She maintains that "When you are brought up as a *Hassidishe* woman you are like a brick wall — you only let what you want to go into your heads. It's not a problem if you have good grounding" (July

7, 2000).

Aiken (1992) a female ultra-Orthodox Jew believes that no matter

what level of education the Orthodox girl or woman attains, or what life

path she chooses, she should use her individual strengths to contribute to

the world in some way and by making contributions for the good of others.

She gives the Biblical example of Sarah who played multiple roles:

She was a homemaker, a businesswoman, a dispenser of charity, a teacher, and the like. At the age of 90, she became a mother for the first time. She didn't say to God, "Listen, I'm an old woman. Give me a break. Let somebody else do your work now." She viewed her every act as an opportunity to contribute something vital to the world. Everyday of her life had meaning, whether she was baking bread, providing for her husband, son, and guests, or buying real estate. Everything she did left behind a legacy that would link her with generations of Jewish women who would follow. (p. 31)

For Aiken as for most of my participants, more education merely provides

additional ways to ask oneself, "How can I serve God and fulfil my role as

a member of the Jewish people, given my talents and interests?" (p. 257)

Furthering one's learning is just another way of "investing life with

meaning, of taking the trivial and making it Godly, of making a mark on

the world that will last forever" (Aiken, 1992, p. 257).

Be the Best You Can Be

If you can't be a pine on top of a hill, Be a scrub in the valley, but be The best little scrub by the side of the hill, Be a bush if you can't be a tree.

If you can't be a highway, then just be a trail. If you can't be a sun, be a star. It isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the *best* of whatever you are. (Douglas Malloch – taken from High School Year Book, 1999)

Throughout the last ten years of my own teaching experience in the

Seminary of Bais Yaakov, I was continually impressed at how much effort

the women put forth in order to attain high marks. All participants who

have accessed a CEGEP program, have done so only in the last few

years when this opportunity became available to them. Some of the

women have returned to school after an absence of more than thirty

years. This poem, taken from a High School yearbook, captures the

Hassidic philosophy that emphasizes trying to do one's best in everything

one does. Raizie explains her own position:

I am motivated to do my best but it's not for the marks. The motivation to do the best I can comes from the philosophy of attaining excellence in everything that one does. This pertains to doing well at CEGEP or being an amazing baker. (June 12, 2000)

However, according to Yehudit, excelling at this level of secular learning is

not a life goal:

If I'm taking the course I might as well try to do well. But if I get a low mark it doesn't bother me — it's not the end of the world —

there are more important things in life. It's what's inside you that counts. (May 22, 2000)

I was curious to learn if the fathers and husbands, brothers and

uncles of my participants were supportive, negative or indifferent to the

notion of women continuing their education beyond high school. The

following comments from Chaya and Raizie present one viewpoint:

My husband was proud when I went to CEGEP. He thought I was getting a very useful education. He said if you can do it, go for it, and good for you. (Chaya, June 5, 2000)

My husband was thrilled that I was getting my DEC so that there would be additional income with an Early Education certificate. I am on a higher scale working in a daycare — my husband appreciates that. (Raizie, June 19, 2000)

This conception of the woman's education ultimately benefiting the family

is also expressed by Devorah Esther:

Men believe that education is good as long as it serves some practical purpose. If a man needs his wife to help him in business, he values her knowledge. If her education distracts her from her duties at home, it might bother him. (June 7, 2000)

Chaya who helps her husband in his business shares Devorah Esther's

view: "According to Hassidic men, a woman has no need for secular

education. If she knows enough English and French to help him in

business, that's where it can stop" (June 13, 2000). Raizie relates some of

the questions her father had while she pursued her education: "Isn't she

just killing time by taking these courses? Why is she learning all of that, if

she's going to get married in a few years and have children?" (June 15,

2000) Suri Gittel relates that "one reason my husband was not happy that I went back to school was that there was no one at home to make his lunch. I think he resented the time it took away from him" (Aug 1, 1999).

The above passages indicate that the reactions in terms of the support and encouragement the Hassidic women students received was divided. Some husbands and fathers were sincerely proud of their wives' or daughters' accomplishments. Their certificates were even more valued, if they meant a higher family income or if they had practical value for the husband in his career. Other men looked upon the time and energy spent in the acquisition of a CEGEP diploma as merely filling the gap between high school, which ends at age 16, and motherhood, which begins at approximately age 20. If the woman was married while at school, some husbands expressed displeasure that she was not home enough to attend to his needs and to homecare responsibilities. How each family resolves and negotiates this issue is a topic that I have not as yet explored with the women in this study.

As previously discussed, all the husbands of participants in this study finished their secular education at age 13. Most of them speak English poorly, cannot do simple math without a calculator and stopped all formal learning of science, geography, and history at the end of elementary school. The participants, themselves, are all high school

graduates. Seven of the ten have completed Seminary and obtained a CEGEP diploma. Given that there is a great disparity in the levels of schooling attained, it would seem that this topic is worthy of investigation. Participants do indeed acknowledge that a dichotomy exists between husband and wife as far as secular English subjects are concerned. To that end, I asked the women to describe to me the differences in these levels as they saw them. Most were forthright in outlining their husband's educational shortcomings. Shoshana Ruchel describes her husband's basic literacy level:

My husband cannot read English beyond a grade-three reading ability. Never mind French. He would not be able to tell you who the Prime Minister of Canada is. He needs to use his calculator to divide 72 by 8 to figure out how many tables he should set up in the room. He does not know history or geography. He knows we live in Canada but that's it. (June 13, 2000)

Chaya, too, expresses her concern in this regard:

Today, most husbands need their wives to fill out government forms for them. A lot of men can hardly sign their names. In the past Hassidic men [in Europe] were very well educated in secular knowledge. Today they are disadvantaged because of their lack of schooling. (June 19, 2000)

The impact of this lack of basic skills in the work force is noted by Raizie as well. She says:

Men need to learn English and French for longer in school; otherwise it's a problem when they look for jobs. I have arranged for private tutoring in English for my son this summer. With a grade-six level education, it's tough to find a job. (June 8, 2000) Economic dependence is commonplace today for young couples.

The men, who are occasionally unprepared professionally for a job, must

depend, at least for the first few years, on their parents or in-laws.

Tzipporah's concern over finances echoes Raizie's:

Parents don't have as much money today to support their married children so I think it's important for both spouses to work. Boys need to learn a trade like plumbing or computers. Today a lot of men work as managers in stores or offices and make \$10-12 per hour. They live on the government baby bonuses. (June 15, 2000)

But does this disparity affect the marriage? Is it a problem for the

couple that she is so much more formally educated than he is? This is a

critical concern, given that, as mentioned, the participants in this inquiry

represent the first Hassidic women ever to pursue formal learning beyond

high school in Montreal. Rebbetzin Fleisher, a CEGEP graduate, explains

that one potential problem is that when you give a girl a higher education

it raises her expectations.

She still wants to marry a man who is learning, but at the same time she wants the nicest furniture, clothes and a cleaning lady. This is a big problem today in the marriage and causes a lot of friction. There are many more divorces because of this. I teach my daughter that it doesn't mean because you're smart you're everything. (June 8, 2000)

Tzipporah refers to the concept of respect:

Because women are getting that certificate, they think they are smarter. They think they know everything. They degrade their husbands. A woman is supposed to look up to her husband. Men don't like it if women are smarter, because it means they get less respect. A DEC is to get ahead, not to belittle a man. (July 12, 2000)

Four of the ten participants addressed the issue of the effects of

the wife's education on her relationship with her husband with the

response "it depends," as illustrated in the following quotes:

If a man is not well-educated in the Jewish sense, or if he lacks self-esteem, then the higher education of the wife would pose a threat. Some men feel threatened by a lot of things about their wives, besides their education. I think it depends on how the wife displays her knowledge that's important. (Shoshana Ruchel, June 14, 2000)

A woman has always known more than a man. A man who comes out of twenty years of studying in a *Yeshiva* hasn't been in the world. If there is a good marriage, the couple respects each other for what they know and recognizes and accepts that the other person may know more. And just because she has learned some fancy theory that he doesn't know about doesn't mean that she's right. (Toba, June 7, 2000)

It depends on her motives for getting certificates or degrees. I can't think of any girl who would feel smarter than her husband just because she went to college. I know my husband learned much more than me. He doesn't need a secular education. (Devorah Esther, June 6, 2000)

It depends how the education is thought of and used. It gives a woman power because now she has a tool in her hand. Every wife has to know her own husband and what will threaten him. My second daughter-in-law is extremely educated. She has her college degree from New York. She's brilliant. She runs an office for her father and is very organized and capable. She married my son who can't read an English newspaper. But she wasn't looking for a college-educated boy. Whatever comes up, she'll teach him. My son is a smart boy too. (Chaya, June 26, 2000) The underlying message in each of these comments seems to be that it is not the acquisition of knowledge per se that may be problematic in the husband-wife relationship, but how the woman uses that advanced secular learning. If she feels that she is 'smarter' than her husband and puts him down, it will cause a rift in their relationship. If she believes, as most Hassidic women seem to, that her husband is far more learned than she, even though her secular learning may be greater, she will continue to respect and admire him. What I have come to understand is that the problem is not one of advanced learning as much as it is one of how much value is placed on what each has learned. Toba makes a significant point:

The difference in men's and women's education is just a difference in fields of study. According to what he's learned in *Yeshiva*, he's far more educated than I am. If he can quote Rashi and Rambam, that's far more impressive than quoting Maslow or Erikson. (June 27, 2000)

Raizie talks about her husband in the same glowing terms:

There are some Hassidic men who have a lot of secular knowledge. My husband reads the school textbooks that I have. He is bright — he catches on very fast. In the *Yeshiva* world he is the kind of scholar who can master anything. His critical thinking skills are very developed, and I think he is a brilliant man. (July 6, 2000)

This sentiment about men's scholarly abilities is echoed by Shoshana

Ruchel:

Men are so advanced in *Gemorah* [Talmud] that they do not need or want secular education. They get their worldly knowledge through studying the Talmud. If they are interested they will read the books that their wives or sisters are learning. Men learn much deeper. They are not supposed to know what girls are learning. My husband reads English, but it's only valued for its practical use. He is not considered better or more learned or a more educated person because he can read. We live Torah in our daily lives. The more educated the man is in Torah, the more the woman will respect him. (June 15, 2000)

My conclusions were substantiated by an administrator at TAV, the Torah and Vocational Centre, an institution that grants CEGEP diplomas to Hassidic women. He reports that, in his experience, the fact that there exists an educational disparity between men and women is not problematic, because an entirely different set of values exists for each sex. He explains: "Just because their husbands have less secular knowledge and education does not mean they are respected less. Traditionally women have always been more educated" (June 7, 2000). Because gender roles are so clearly defined in the Hassidic world, this administrator has not encountered a situation wherein the woman's CEGEP experience has been of concern or has posed a threat.

From the above quotations, it would appear that it does not really matter to the Hassidic woman if her husband's English and secular knowledge are limited. What is valued by the women I interviewed is his religious learning — the breadth and scope of his Talmudic studies. For Hassidic men, the principle reason for learning to read is so that one can study the sacred texts. Literate activities are themselves not viewed as

instrumental but as forms of religious observance. In the case of Hassidic men whose English literacy skills are limited, it is believed that, because they are skilled in Yiddish, Hebrew and sometimes Aramaic, they will be able to master English when and if it becomes necessary to do so. Gurnah (2000) suggests that people confident in their own cultural inheritance and language of origin are in a better position to learn new languages and take on new cultural practices and even new forms of employment.

Throughout my interviews with the Hassidic women, two significant benefits of their CEGEP diploma were often cited. Women spoke of how higher secular education contributed to their greater sense of self and empowerment as a woman. A religious female teacher at a Hassidic school captures the essence of this recurring theme in the following excerpt:

All my life I have stood at my husband's side to assist him as his devoted help mate. As it says in Mishlei 31:11, "her husband's heart relies on her." Since I began my own CEGEP courses and throughout the last five years as a teacher in the Seminary, I have started to feel that I was something special and valuable myself, and that I had something quite wonderful and unique to offer. I feel more alive and, to use the expression from the women's movement, I feel empowered in my own right. I still believe that my role is to be the queen to my husband who is the king, but now I feel that my self-worth and identity as a woman has been validated. (Feb. 2001)

Not unlike the working-class Spanish women of Los Angeles that Kathleen Rockhill studies (Street 1993), this passage speaks to the feelings of autonomy developed through furthering one's literacy skills. For some women, turning towards higher education may contribute to this greater sense of empowerment (Mackeracher, 1980).

I would argue that the newly literate Hassidic woman is presented with both a threat and a challenge. To continue her studies to CEGEP and beyond is to enter a world that is new and exciting and that holds the promise of change. However, because of this, for some women it might also threaten all they know in a society which has taught them that their primary role in life is to care for others.

CHAPTER FIVE: LITERACY SOURCES AND RESOURCES

In this chapter I describe the literacy sources and resources that form an integral feature of the everyday lives of the Hassidic women in Outremont. I include these materials in the belief that the "unique value of the personal document is its revelation of the situations which have conditioned the behaviour" (Thomas, 1979, p.42). I have divided this chapter into the following categories: formal texts, which include newspapers and magazines, videotapes of films, non-fiction, self-help literature; and informal texts, which include fiction, newsletters, pamphlets, flyers and a community directory. All of these sources provided me with an invaluable resource in my analytic examination of each aspect of everyday Hassidic life. Table 3 lists all the documents to which I refer, where they were obtained and the date and type of each.

ТҮРЕ	CLASSIFICATION	TITLE	WHERE I OBTAINED IT	DATE
Formal	Newspaper	Hamodia	Hassidic Community Grocery Store	July 9, 1999
Formal	Newspaper	Yated Ne'Eman	Hassidic Community Grocery Store	May 18, 2001
Formal	Magazine	Jewish Observer	Jewish Public Library	May 1999
Formal	Magazine	Horizons	Through a subscription	Spring 2001
Formal	Videotape	A Life Apart	Borrowed from the Outremont Community Library	July 1997
Formal	Non-fiction books	Just So Stories	Hassidic Community Library in Outremont	Nov. 20, 2000
Formal	Non-fiction book	Dear Daughter	Bais Yaakov School Library	Nov. 30, 2000
Formal	Non-fiction book	Two Halves of a Whole	Jewish Public Library	Feb. 18, 1999
Formal	Non-fiction book	To be a Jewish Woman	Jewish book store in New York	July 26, 2000
Formal	Non-fiction book	Modesty	Jewish book store in New York	July 26, 2000
Informal	Fiction (novel)	Working It Out	Borrowed from the Outremont Community Library	Oct. 16, 2000
Informal	Fiction (novel)	One Day and Forever	Borrowed from a respondent	Feb. 14, 1995
Informal	Fiction (novel)	A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew	Borrowed from a respondent	May 18, 1995
Informal	Newsletter	Community Newsletter of Outremont	Borrowed from respondent	Apr. 12, 2000
Informal	Pamphlet	Jewish Youth Library	Borrowed from the library	Dec. 3, 2000
Informal	Flyer	Employment Centre	Distributed at a Hassidic tea	Nov. 20, 2000
Informal	Newsletter	Ahavas Chesed	Distributed at a Hassidic tea	Nov. 20, 2000
Informal	Directory	Bais Yaakov Directory	Distributed at Bais Yaakov School for girls	Feb. 16, 2001

Table 3

Formal Texts

Newspapers and Magazines

The first type of formal document I collected represents some of the most popular publications the Hassidic community of Outremont might read on a weekly or monthly basis. These include two newspapers, *Hamodia* and *Yated Ne'Eman*, which are available at local Hassidic grocery stores on main thoroughfares in the neighbourhood. Both are published in English in Brooklyn, New York, on a weekly basis. *Hamodia* calls itself the "weekly newspaper of Torah Jewry". Through subscription, one may receive *Hamodia* for a year. The newsstand price is \$1.50 US per issue outside of New York. It averages 75 pages and features articles relating to Israel, selected world news briefs, a few pages of American news and British news briefs.

Some typical columns included in this weekly newspaper are entitled "Torah Pearls" and "Timeless Torah". Both are written by Rabbis to "give us a deeper insight into our own capacity to love *Hashem*". The following is an excerpt from "Timeless Torah" in the July 9, 1999 issue of *Hamodia*:

G-d first offered the Torah to the women and only afterwards to the men. This attests to the paramount role of Jewish women in Jewish life. In all generations it is the Jewish woman who is the primary caretaker of Torah and its continuity. Indeed, the very soul of Judaism is entrusted by G-d to Jewish women. (Exodus 19:3 and Talmudic commentary). (p. 17) There is a "Family Reading" page that provides inspirational stories to be

read by adults and children. Found on the "Family Reading" page is a

story written for children to impart the mitzvah (commandment) of giving

charity:



Homodia also includes a health column, meal menus for "occasions and everyday", a page with puzzles, stories for children and classified advertising. Each week the Shabbat candle-lighting times (based on sundown) are included for many American cities. In several issues of *Hamodia*, I found the advertisements to be of particular interest. One advertised a particular brand of washed and presliced lettuce (Bodek). According to a Rabbi I consulted about this, unless the vegetable is properly cleaned, bugs and dirt remain in the folds and crevices of the leaves, thus rendering it unkosher. Buying this particular brand according to the advertisement, assures one of a religiously acceptable product.

A sample of this particular advertisement is Figure 5:

The extremely rough and bumpy surface of Romaine leaves makes it almost impossible to remove all the insects from the highly infested lettuce. Bodek has tried the most sophisticated and intense washing processes currently available but they did not pass the Bodek test. We are, however, continuing our search for an adequate system for Romaine.

BODEK IS THE ONLY FRESH PRE-WASHED PRE-CUT VEGETABLES ENDORSED BY THE HISACHDUS HARABBONIM OF AMERICA-CRC AND RAV GISSINGER OF LAKEWOOD NEW JERSEY.

Now you know why Bodek continues to lead the industry in Kashrus and quality!!

Always insist on BODEK!!

Figure 5: Advertisement for Lettuce in Hamodia

In addition to advertisements for wigs, computers, caterers, financial services, announcements for upcoming "tea and Torah" get-togethers for women speakers, *Hamodia* bills itself as an "inclusive thoughtful newspaper" with "all the news that's <u>truly</u> fit to print, bringing Torah ideals and ideas to life" (p.4).

Yated Ne'Eman is the only other weekly newspaper written in English that is distributed in Montreal for this community. The number of orders placed by the local bookstore suggests it is less popular with Hassidim than Hamodia. Published and edited by Rabbi Lipschutz of Monsey, New York, it is similar to *Hamodia* with respect to the types of articles included, news events reported and advertisement and classified pages. In a box on page two of Yated Ne'Eman (May 18, 2001) is found a disclaimer that "this publication does not assume responsibility for the *kashrus* [kosher status] or reliability of any product or establishment advertised in its pages". Also noteworthy is the advice to readers that "due to Divrei Torah [Holy Writ] contained herein, the paper should be wrapped before being discarded." The reason for doing this is because the newspaper contains articles and passages from the Torah or blessings within its pages. Therefore, the newspaper should be "buried with dignity". For similar reasons, this newspaper cannot be taken into a bathroom (Interview, Ron Finegold, Jewish Public Library, Oct. 22, 2001).

Reading these newspapers provided me with a truly fascinating view of Hassidic life from the perspective of the Hassidic publishers. It allowed me to situate the literacy practice of the Hassidic community in the broader cultural conception of thinking, reading, and writing (Street, 1984). Accessing these publications provides a glimpse of another "life world" or as Martin-Jones and Jones (2000) explains it, the "spaces for community life where local and specific meanings can be made" (p. 362). Finally, through the activity of engaging with these documents, I was better able to be reflexive in my work as I checked my own interpretations of events and practices with those of the Hassidic woman I was interviewing and the literacy resources accessible to and used by them.

In addition to newspapers, many of the Hassidic women whom I interviewed stated that they read and enjoy magazines fairly often. The two that appear most popular are *The Jewish Observer*, a monthly publication, and *Horizons*, a *Jewish Family Journal*. Both of these magazines are written in English, published in the United States and distributed to Canada and to major Jewish communities throughout the world.

The Jewish Observer (edited by Rabbi Wolpin), according to the reference librarian of the Jewish Public Library, is directed at the non-Zionist branch of right-wing Orthodoxy. The editorial staff is comprised of

several rabbis. The recent issue from March 2001 featured articles relating to children with learning disabilities and other developmental challenges. Although it was present in a few homes of Hassidic families, the women with whom I met explained it would be read for the most part, by the Hassidic male who would likely share its view on political and world issues.

Raizie, one of my participants, says that she found articles with titles such as "Not All Our Children are Made Alike", "A Heart Warming Experience With Kids at Risk"; and "Our Children, Our Attitudes" to be particularly uplifting and inspirational at a time when she was distressed about a grandchild" (July 4, 2001). Another participant pointed to an article that described a project which unites Orthodox high school girls across North America "to strengthen themselves in *Shemiras Halashon* [guarding your tongue] and other areas of character development which have an impact on how we relate to others" (p. 35). She told me that she has applied many of the ideas that she gleaned from this article and recently organised a weekend retreat for her daughter and her school friends. The theme of this retreat focused on the commandment not to bear a grudge.

Throughout my research, I have found *The Jewish Observer* to be very useful in providing me with information about current trends, issues

and concerns often referred to by participants. One example is the article entitled "From Slavery to Freedom" (March 2001). From reading this particular work, I learned, in the minds of some Hassidim, Passover *matzah* (unleavened bread) is linked to redemption. The lesson taught is that God can bring about redemption so rapidly that the dough needed in the preparation of *matzah* will not have time to rise. Therefore, He can effect change in a fraction of a second. The article ends with the following bit of wisdom: "When solutions don't surface immediately despite our best efforts, there is still reason for hope that things can improve" (p. 57).

Horizons, The Jewish Family Journal, is a magazine reminiscent of Reader's Digest. A distributor in New York told me it is "wholesome reading for people so you don't have to be embarrassed to bring it in into your house" (telephone communication, April, 2000). She went on to say that it is read primarily by women. One participant referred to it as a source of "clean reading, without dirt and sex (Yehudit)". This magazine is published four times a year and features short stories, and sections entitled "Departments," "Viewpoints," and "Teen Voices". According to a recent editorial (Spring 2001), the magazine promises to offer "essays and fiction, drama and humor" (p. 17). Billing itself as a "bookazine", its goal is to "illuminate Jewish bookshelves and Jewish minds everywhere" (p. 2). For five participants, who subscribe to this magazine, it lives up to this reputation. In the issue I leafed through in Shoshana Ruchel's home (April 13, 2000), I noted essays covering a wide range of topics from childhood problems ("The Terrible Twos") to the Holocaust museum in Washington. In addition to providing reading material for the Orthodox woman, *Horizons* is a vehicle for aspiring Orthodox women writers who can contribute articles so that they may "reach new horizons" themselves. The delivery of this popular magazine is eagerly anticipated by many Hassidic women in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Chile for its articles and its information about topics and issues that directly affect their day-to-day lives.

Videotape Film

In July of 1997, I attended the New York Jewish film festival where a documentary film entitled *A Life Apart: Hassidism in America* was screened. This film was produced and directed by Menachem Daum and Oren Rudavsky, two New York filmmakers. I am including this film as a second type of document in the formal category because of the opportunity it provided me with to view the lives of the Hassidim in New York.

Early in the film, Leonard Nimoy, who shares the narration with Sarah Jessica Parker, states that the Hassidim "arouse controversy
among other Jews, no less than among Gentiles." The lives revealed in the film are rich with ceremony and prayer, with the fervent, joyous chanting, singing and dancing that from Hassidism's early days in 18thcentury Eastern Europe, set Hassidim apart from mainstream Jews. These lives are filled with *kvelling*, (bursts of pride) over the love that binds the Hassidim together, and over the faith, courage and tenacity that have led to their regeneration.

I met with Oren Rudavsky at his office on Upper Broadway in New York in March 1998. He told me how difficult it was for him to gain access to the community. He said that for every Hassid who appears on camera, there were hundreds who refused to speak. He told me about one Hassid who threw water on him and tried to knock him off a ladder as he attempted to film a *Succoth* celebration. Hassidic women, schooled in modesty were, Rudavsky admitted, especially reticent to meet with him. He went on to say that "younger Hassidim, those born in America, often hid behind their hats, or placed their hands over the camera." However, the older Hassidim, many of them survivors of the death camps, were surprisingly co-operative. He feels that this is because they wanted their stories told at long last. More important, he said, than any other issue to him, however, is the focal question of his documentary, namely how Hassidism has managed to survive. glowingly of their primary duty to be Jewish mothers. A woman

interviewed in the film illustrates this point:

Motherhood is a wonderful thing. I mean, what's so important about running Westinghouse?" asks Zeldy Abramowitz, of the Satmar sect, sitting behind the counter of her Williamsburg dress store. "Who cares who's running it? You know, a hundred years from now no one will care. But your children, they'll be a legacy. (*A Life Apart*, 1997)

Other interviewees in the film complain about the barring of women from

wider roles in religious life. The following is a summary of one woman's

story.

LEAVING THE FOLD

Pearl Gluck, a thoughtful young woman who has left the Hassidic community in which she was reared, openly criticizes what she perceives as Hassidic narrow-mindedness. Now a college student at New York University, the 26 year-old Gluck describes in candid detail the enormous internal struggle she had to undergo before she decided to abandon her Hassidic lifestyle. Articulate and intelligent, she sheds a light on the cloistered universe she once occupied. Strolling through her old neighbourhood, Crown Heights, she recalls her ambivalence about assuming a role as a "woman of valour," knowing how it would circumscribe her life. Eventually, she reports that the tension became intolerable. "I couldn't worry about writing a poem without looking over my shoulder," says the no-longer-Orthodox Gluck with an embarrassed smile, as the camera pans slowly over a high stack of books on secular topics she now reads freely. "I wanted to know what was going on out there."

In this film, we see Hassidim, many who are looking directly into the

camera, telling us about their lives, their beliefs, the compromises they

have made. In their own words, they explain their devotion to the rebbes their spiritual and communal leaders - and their commitment to a way of life that has existed for over 200 years but was nearly extinguished by the Holocaust.

Very few Hassidic women (or men) will ever be able to view this film, and as I had suspected, I was not able to secure permission to screen this documentary in my class at Bais Yaakov, or to rent a VCR and monitor to show it privately. It is interesting to speculate what the women's reaction to the video might have been.

Non-fiction

Reading books that offer courage, inspiration, strength and wisdom, written by Rabbis and other respected authorities were most often cited by the Hassidic women participants as occupying an integral place in their libraries and lives. More often than not, the non-fiction books Hassidic women read are books which have Jewish or religious themes and content. They borrow them from a library in Outremont, located in the basement of a Hassidic home. These works of non-fiction comprise the third type of document in the "formal" category. Often the Hassidic spirit is illuminated and taught through the stories found in this collection. These books are replete with pithy observations, morals and principles. For some Hassidic women, the book must justify itself. As Toba reported, "if I'm going to take time to read it, it better be worthwhile and have some educational or inspirational message" (Nov. 6, 2001). Toba reads books pertaining to religious philosophy about *gedolim* (great rabbis) — "books so that I can enrich myself spiritually" (Nov. 6, 2001).

Shoshana Ruchel, age 48, an open and effervescent woman, relates that she enjoys reading books on religious thought. The letters of the biblical commentator Nahmanides, for example, envelop her in a sense of peace and security and reinforce her religious awareness. Shoshana Ruchel also gave up "forbidden" books in favour of sacred texts. "It's been a long time since I've read light, common literature," she says. "I don't enjoy it. My religious texts are good for me." Rabbis who write on moral conduct, biographies of righteous men and Jewish philosophy are popular with her. These subjects were also mentioned by other Hassidic readers. Shoshana Ruchel enjoys being immersed in this genre of books, reading them over and over, feeling spiritually uplifted and satisfied. Rebbetzin Fleisher also reports that she "prefers to read nonfiction things that will make me grow."

Here Rebbetzin Fleisher expresses an opinion consistent with those of other Hassidic women participants. She believes that, if she is going to spend the little leisure time that she has in her day to read, it must be material that will provide her with knowledge and inspiration.

One author of this genre of writing is Rabbi A. Twerski. He is a psychiatrist and ordained Rabbi and participants enjoy his work for his ability to "navigate the sayings of the mystics and apply them to our life" (Suri Gittel). For example, Rabbi Twerski, in a volume entitled *Not Just Stories* (1997), deals with the topic of the unquestioned obedience of children to God. He describes his concept by relating a story of a young Hassid who followed the orders of his superior in the Yom Kippur War with no questions asked. The story concludes with the following message:

Hassidim said that this is how we can interpret the familiar phrase, "Fortunate is the people whose G-d is *Hashem*" (Psalms 144:15). We are indeed fortunate that our unquestioning acceptance is of Torah teachings, which emanate from *Hashem*, a Superior Whose judgment is infallible. (p. 48)

Another illustration from Twerski's book which Raizie says is particularly meaningful to her, recounts the disillusionment that some might feel in their quest for spirituality. Here the reader is told of the Baal Shem Tov, who used the analogy of a child learning to walk to make the point that one will only find God and grow spirituality if one continues to seek him. The explanation of what defines a Hassid is told in "Becoming Rather Than Being." In this essay, a person is said to be a Hassid only as long as he strives towards "flawless performance of the mitzvos" which requires "self-effacement and a total surrender to the will of God." This lesson concludes with the following moral: A person is therefore a Hassid only as long as he strives to achieve these goals. If one feels he is already a Hassid, i.e., that he has already reached perfection and needs no further selfimprovement, he can hardly be considered to be a Hassid. (Twerski, 1997, p. 95)

A few participants reported that one particular essay in Rabbi

Twerski's collection provided them with courage. They named "Reaction

to Stress", where Twerski demonstrates that although one may be

subjected to hardships and challenges, historically, it is these periods of

hardship that have "ushered in the greatest advances in Torah knowledge

and spirituality". Rabbi Twerski concludes his moral with this analogy:

If we are weak in our trust in G-d, then we are like the match that is extinguished by a wind. If we are firm in our faith, then we respond to stress like the hot coal to the wind, with a greater glow and corresponding warmth. (pp. 96-97)

I often remarked to the participants in my interviews that I was

impressed with their total acceptance of their lack of material wealth.

Rabbi Twerski addresses this topic in his essay entitled "Excess Wealth

Can Be Destructive". He quotes a rebbe, Moshe of Mekarov, who

provides this observation:

Dry land absorbs water. If the earth is already saturated, additional water turns it into mud. So it is with money. The needy can absorb money. When the person who already has enough for his needs accumulates more money, it turns into mud. (Twerski, 1997, p.42)

Rabbi Twerski's lesson here is that money is a means to obtaining one's

needs and not an end to itself. Using a kitchen analogy he suggests that

to have a house full of pots and pans that one never uses is ridiculous -"to have the necessary utensils in a kitchen is all that is needed" (p.37). Many of Twerski's stories are adaptations of anecdotes and narrative examples from the oral communication traditions of Eastern Europe. Traditionally they were used as an effective way to bind individuals and groups to each other and to the community at large. I have observed that for the Hassidic women of this inquiry, these stories form a crucial base for socialization and education as well as the learning of attitudes, norms, and habits and skills. For example, there exist countless stories of the wondrous achievements of the great leaders of the past several generations. These accounts bring these great Torah personalities out of the realm of legend into the real world to offer lessons that have a rich spiritual, moral and intellectual core. These are stories passed orally through generations that are used to teach, enlighten, heal and encourage. In this volume Twerski takes short anecdotes told and retold by Hassidic masters and interprets them so that they are meaningful to his readers. Each of the stories to which I refer contains implicit lessons. Common themes are that one must have unwavering faith, a desire for self-improvement, satisfaction with one's wealth, and that one must be on guard for the evil that lurks. Of all non-fiction reported, the Hassidic

women most often referred to Rabbi Twerski's books as those that they thoroughly enjoy.

Several non-fictional works directed particularly towards women are also considered "musts." The first is *Dear Daughter*. Its author, Rabbi Eliyohu Goldschmidt, is a prominent educator who offers "wise guidance for wholesome human relationships, a happy marriage and a serene home" (p. 6). Young women readers believe that his experience and Torah-infused advice has been invaluable to them in their marriages and have made their family lives richer and happier. For example, in one letter in this book of fatherly advice, Rabbi Goldschmidt compares a marriage to a pair of shoes that need to be broken in to assure a comfortable fit: "No matter how perfect the "fit", there will inevitably be minor irritations and discomfort in the beginning until the couple is fully adjusted to each other. But once that happens, marriage is a supremely comfortable state" (p. 39).

On a similar theme is a book entitled *Two Halves of a Whole* – *Torah Guidelines for Marriage*. It is written by a Rabbi and his wife and divided into two sections. Tehilla Abramov writes the part entitled "From Woman to Woman." Rabbi Abramov authors the second chapter entitled "From Man to Man." This volume is considered to be requisite reading for the soon to-be bride. Again using stories from the Torah to make the

author's point, the importance of the role of a Jewish woman is explained:

Our Sages teach us that the verse *"The wise woman builds her home..."* (*Mishiel*, 14:1) refers to the wife of Onn, who used her wisdom to save her husband and her home from destruction. "But the foolish woman demolishes it with her own hands" (ibid.), refers to the wife of Korach, who brought ruination on her husband and her household.

Now we can better understand the significance of the Hebrew term often used in describing women: *akeres habayis* [root of the home]. As always with Hebrew words, the term is packed with meaning. *Habayis* means the home, and *akeres* is derived from the word *ikar*, which means "root", or "essence", indicating that she is the most important part of the home. But *akeres* is similar to the word *okeres*, which means "uproot." The wife, through her actions, can choose to be the root of the home *or* its uprooter. (p. 105)

Tehilla Abramov (1994) conveys to her readers the notion of the

natural fit of husband and wife:

Since our marriages were made in heaven, we are ideally suited to our husbands. A husband and wife have the ability to be perfectly balanced with each other, and *because* of each other. The wife is suited to helping her husband with every one of his character traits. That includes the negative ones too.

The results of our efforts are so far-reaching, we cannot even imagine them. As our Sages teach us, "When a person makes peace in his home, it's as if he is making peace between every person in the Jewish nation" (Avos DeRabbi Nasan). In other words, the unity between a husband and wife in a Jewish home has such a powerful holiness that it has an effect on the totality of the Jewish People. In fact, the effects are on the whole wide world. (Rambam, *Hilchos Chanukkah*, 4:14) (p. 117)

Working towards a home that is serene and peaceful is a goal of

each participant in my inquiry. Tehilla Abramov, in the preceeding passge, tells the Hassidic woman that if she works at creating a peaceful unity and home life, it is as important as if she were to bring peace to the entire world. This perfect unity is further clarified by the following passage:

A husband and wife each have different tasks and characteristics that complement one another. Our sages compare them to the right and the left hand, which complement one another and work together. We need to be less concerned with looking out for our own particular benefit and measuring for equality. It is so much more energizing to be focused on the common goals we share our deepest priorities in life - and let these help to unify the differences that come between us and our partners. In marriage, we are uniting not only two bodies, but also two souls which are incomplete without the other half; yet each part has no demands upon the other. The majority of a woman's characteristics - physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual - are there to be utilized in her marriage. All the love and warmth within us find its outlet within marriage. Each and every husband needs his wife's specific and unique gualities. G-d created every husband to be able to give to his wife what she needs too. But the power to release the flow of love from him is in the wife's hands. A woman has the most tremendous influence on her home, through every small word that she says and action that she does. (p.117)

From these excerpts, the notion that woman was created to be man's equal partner becomes manifest. This passage is interpreted by a wife of a Rabbi I spoke with to mean that when a wife and husband strive toward spiritual growth, they will work in tandem. They will be in an antagonistic relationship, however, when they strive to accomplish goals that do not foster spiritual growth. A further concept, one related to the attributes that both husband and wife bring to a marriage, is that of woman's special quality of understanding. Again, It is suggested that it is the woman who is to take responsibility for improving spousal relationships. A passage from Abramov's book speaks to this notion of women's empathy:

Another difference between men and women that we learn in the Torah is that women, for the most part, have a more powerful ability to understand people than men have, since they were created with an extra dimension of understanding. This deeply insightful understanding is going to be the woman's main strength in overcoming the communication barriers in her marriage, and in helping her work together with her husband to develop a shared language that can make their life together more pleasurable. (p.107)

The additional measure of insight that it is believed God bestows on every woman is given, according to the author of the guidebook, so "that she would be able to fulfill her role as wife and mother and yet maintain a sense of self." (Abramov, 1994, p.28) The Sages tell Jewish women they are more richly endowed with *binah* (understanding and wisdom) than men are. This quality, the Sages say, enables the woman to engender warmth and trust, to strive to be more human and to develop the sensitivity to concepts that transcend humanity, thus raising the woman to a more spiritual level. According to Abramov (1994) *binah* (understanding and wisdom) is often mistranslated as "intuition." Intuition he offers, requires no intellectual functioning. It is simply as innate capacity. What

Abramov is suggesting to his readers in *Two Halves of a Whole* is that *binah* actually describes one's ability to enter another person's emotions and thoughts and draw conclusions from the knowledge that one obtains from this process. Therefore, he suggests, *binah* might be better translated as "inner reasoning."

I draw a parallel here with the concept of *binah* and the dispositional trait of empathy or "connected knowledge" which Belenky (1996) describes. Belenky and other feminist theorists who contribute to the book *Knowledge*, *Difference and Power*, edited by Golberger et al. (1996), emphasize immanence and relatedness, that is, an inner sense of connection, and a reliance on feeling, as grounds for knowledge and judgment. The relation of 'connected knowing' to knowledge construction is particularly striking in Blythe Clinchey's essay in this volume in which she defines the term empathy as the "ability of one person to come to know the experience of another" (Goldberger et al., 1996). Judith Plaskow (1997), a Jewish feminist echoes Clinchey: "The feminist sense of the self is essentially relational, inseparable from the limiting and enriching contexts of body, feeling, relationship, community, history, and the web of life" (Plaskow, 1997, p. 78). For both Clinchey and Plaskow, relationships, immanence and connection to nature all intertwine. These features are

not at all alien to what the Orthodox tradition has handed down to Jewish women.

Two Halves of a Whole deals with relationship issues and advises women to do as much as they can for their husbands, to compliment

them, to demonstrate that they admire them, to communicate gratitude

toward them, to make themselves attractive for them, to treat them with

compassion and respect. An example of this admiration is illustrated by a

prayer that one participant regularly says for her husband. I refer to Two

Halves of a Whole for its translation:

May it be Your will, *Hashem*, that You watch over my husband, and keep him safe from all injury, from all harm and from all illness. May You grant him a good life, a life of honour and good fortune.

Bless us with living seed - righteous children. And plant between us love, friendship, respect and peace forever.

Instill love for me in my husband's heart, so that he will never think about any other woman except me. May my husband find more happiness with me than with any other pleasure he has in this world.

Plant within our hearts love and fear of You so that we will fulfil Your will and serve You as good Jewish people. Enwrap us with holiness and purity of thought, speech and action, so that we give generously and perform kindnesses with Your people.

Bless my husband with a full blessing, with strength and with peace. As it is written, "May *Hashem* bless you and keep you from harm. May *Hashem* shine His face upon you, and grace you. May *Hashem* lift His face to you, and grant you peace." As it says, "*Hashem* shall watch over him and keep him in happiness in His world." Amen. May this be His will. (p.101)

The topic of physical intimacy between husband and wife and the *mitzvah* (commandment) by the woman of *taharas hamishpachah* (laws of family purity) are carefully explained in each guidebook for women that I consulted. According to Abramov, the couple's observance of *taharas harnishpachah* (laws of family purity) is one of the most basic tenets of Judaism, in which there are certain divinely decreed times, based on the woman's own biological rhythms, when husband and wife are not permitted to be with each other physically. The interlude of separation from the expression of physical closeness culminates with the use of the *mikveh* (ritual bath) preceding the beginning of a new period of physical intimacy. Abramov explains the holiness of the physical union:

There are three partners involved in the conception of each individual human being: G-d, the father and the mother (*Niddah* 31a). If there were something "dirty" about this act, how would G-d be involved in it, as our Sages say? As the Ramban explains: "G-d did not create *anything* that is intrinsically disgusting or ugly. Know that the act of union is a holy and pure matter when carried out in the right manner at the right time and with the right intentions. A person should not think there is anything degrading or unbecoming in the act of union, G-d forbid"

We see that the physical union between husband and wife fulfils the purpose of marriage, which is "they shall become one flesh" (*Bereshis* 2:24). It is, in fact, an entrance door through which holiness enters into the home. The Divine Presence dwells in the home whenever the couple expresses their love for one another in this ultimate way, striving to achieve the maximum closeness available between two human beings. (p.180)

Work that attempts to bring together sexuality and the sacred is a minority strand in feminist writing, but it is a strand with considerable power not only to challenge traditional dualisms but also to generate alternatives to the energy/control paradigm. Two feminist theorists concerned with the connections between sexuality and spirit have suggested a new model of sexuality that sees it as part of a continuum of embodied self-expression (Biale, 1984; Swidler, 1981). From these writers' perspectives, our passions, including but not limited to our sexual passions, our self-identity as female or male, including but not limited to our capacity for sexual expression, and our capability of feeling generally, are all rooted in our being in the world as embodied persons. As ethicist Beverly Harrison (1986) argues in setting out the base points for a feminist moral theology, our whole relationship to the world is bodymediated. "All knowledge is rooted in our sensuality. We know and value the world, if we know and value it, through our ability to touch, to hear, to see" (p.24). Without the capacity for feeling that is rooted in "our bodies, our selves," we would lose all connection to the world, all ability to act or to value. For Harrison, sexuality is an aspect of our embodiedness and inherent in it, the aspect that "represents our most intense interaction with the world" (p. 24).

Feminist reconceptualization of the energy/control model of sexuality and affirmation of the profound connection between sexuality and spirituality provide directions for rethinking the ambivalent attitudes toward sexuality within Judaism (Plaskow, 1990). In line with the fundamental feminist insight that sexuality is socially constructed, a Jewish feminist understanding of sexuality begins with the insistence that what goes on in the bedroom can never be isolated from the wider cultural context of which the bedroom is a part.

The Orthodox vision of sexuality as an aspect of life energy, as part of a continuum with other ways of relating to the world and other people, is to insist that the norms of mutuality, respect for difference, and joint empowerment that characterize the larger feminist vision of community apply also, especially to the area of sexuality. Harrison (1986) places the unification of these elements into a feminist framework:

A feminist moral theology requires that we ground our new ethics of sexuality in a "spirituality of sensuality." ... Sexuality is indispensable to our spirituality because it is a power of communication, most especially a power to give and receive powerful meaning – love and respect or contempt and disdain. ... The moral norm for sexual communication in a feminist ethic is radical mutuality – the simultaneous acknowledgement of vulnerability to the need of the other, the recognition of one's own power to give and receive pleasure and to call forth another's power of relation and to express one's own. (p. 85) It is important to note that this "spirituality of sensuality" and mutuality specifies and intensifies for sexual ethics what are also broader norms for the ways in which the Hassidic woman interacts with her world.

Abramov (1994), in *Two Halves of A Whole* addresses the new status of the Hassidic woman who now has a college diploma. This author cautions a woman that if she should find herself in a position of authority in her career, her womanly nature must not change - "if she imagines she is something or someone she is not, she will contradict her own essence and suffer the consequences" (p.84). In addition, she puts forth, if a woman shows off her success or acts in a manner of superiority, she will be alone with a "man who has only his masculine physical attributes left and is spiritually and psychologically unhealthy, or with no man at all in the home with her" (p.84).

When limited finances became a problem a few years ago, Chaya told me that the information provided in *Two Halves of a Whole* gave her insight and strength. She referred to a passage on page 143:

Money is a subject often fought about between many couples. First and foremost, we need to know that every *Rosh HaShanah* it is decreed exactly how much of it a person will have for the upcoming year. So, if a husband spends foolishly, it won't help for a wife to tell him off. She'll never really get through to him that way, anyway. It will cause a negative reaction instantaneously: he will quickly put up his defences and try to justify himself. So many conflicts are a result of those little green paper things.

In case of a shortage of money, a woman should not blame her husband. Instead, she needs to be supportive, remembering that they are not really two separate beings. Deep down, they are one. The right hand and the left hand don't fight with each other; they support and help each other out. If she has any helpful suggestions, she should make them lovingly, and not act high and mighty about any area in which she is better than him. If, for instance, she is more adept at managing money than his is, she should check herself periodically to be sure that she is not acting superior to him. (p.143)

Consistent with the information and advice found in *Two Halves of a Whole*, is Lisa Aiken's (1992) offering in *To Be a Jewish Woman*. Aiken addresses the question of how an Orthodox woman can find a place for herself within the framework of observant Judaism, in a society where secular values are often at odds with Jewish ones. Participants in my study admitted to reading and rereading this book and told me how it has helped them appreciate and understand the significance of their roles as mothers and wives. Aiken emphasizes the essential and unique contributions that Orthodox women make and how Judaism, if experienced and appreciated as a totality, validates the Jewish woman's identity, self-worth and unique contribution. Aiken demonstrates in this book how "authentic Judaism provides women with a vehicle for this spiritual development and expression" (p. 79).

This theme of self-worth, identity and validation is closely tied to Hassidic women's notion of what "liberation" really means to them. Freedom, they believe, is one's willingness to act according to God's will as it is expressed in the Torah. To the Hassidic women whom I interviewed, freedom means having the opportunity to be servants of God by accepting the Torah. This is explained by Aiken in the following excerpt:

There is no true freedom unless we accept the Torah. The Torah teaches us how to take our physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional drives, and channel them in a way that we can uplift ourselves beyond the confines of our physical beings. Unless we exchange the servitude of mortal limitations for connection to the infinity of God, we are not liberated. (p. xxvi)

Jewish feminists have described women's liberation and the pursuit of

freedom as an aspect of *tikkun*, an ingredient in the repair and

transformation of the world that is part of its redemption. It is with this goal

in mind that Hassidic women define what freedom means to them. The

task of tikkun olam (repairing the world) is, for the women I interviewed,

an attempt to create a society in which a just Judaism can contribute and

flourish.

For an observant Jewish woman, according to Suri Gittel, freedom

is not the ultimate goal in life. She quoted the following analogy, from

Aiken:

A person whose life is unbound by the structure and constraints of Torah can be analogized to a violin. When the strings of the violin are not yet bound, they are free. However, it is only after the strings are bound that they can make beautiful music. Similarly, it is only when we bind ourselves to Torah that our souls are free to sing their songs. When we accept the structure and constraints of a Torah way of life, we have a framework within which we can choose meaningful lives. (p. xxvii)

In this guidebook, Aiken, an Orthodox Jew herself, is at the same time the observer and the observed, the critic and the subject. She reiterates that the Jewish woman can indeed find self-fulfillment in traditional Judaism, but the impact of that assertion is outweighed by her implication that self-fulfillment cannot be the Jewish woman's primary ambition; more important is the fulfilment of her divine obligations. Aiken refuses to compromise Judaism or sanction Western culture. She writes:

We live in a society of instant gratification, where hard work and waiting often seem anachronistic.... Secular democratic societies , promote the importance of having rights....

In many ways, it is hard for Torah-observant Judaism to compete with the secular world on the secular world's terms.... Observant Judaism promises no instant gratification, no easy highs, no guaranteed emotional or financial outcomes. Nor does it teach that we are entitled to rights simply by virtue of being alive. We have rights because we were created in the image of God and have accepted His moral obligations upon ourselves. (p. xxi)

Aiken's To Be a Jewish Woman is a fundamental rejection of

modern world obsession with short-term "quick spiritual fixes" and

individualist sensualist gratification. In line with the Hassidic view of

women's sexuality, Aiken answers the question, "who has ultimate control

over women's bodies" in the following excerpt.

Many secular people feel that abortions should be allowed at the discretion of a pregnant woman, insofar as only her body is affected by carrying a child. This view reflects a premise that a

woman's body belongs to her and that she should therefore have ultimate say over what happens to it.

Judaism takes issue with this premise. The Torah tells us that men and women were created in God's image and we do not "own" our bodies. We are the proprietors of bodies that were given to us in safekeeping until such time as God decides to revoke our lives....

People often seek validation of their needs and rights. In Judaism, when people have rights, we also have corresponding obligations. Judaism does not believe that everyone has the right to be sexually active. Unless there are valid reasons for a woman to use birth control, one of the responsibilities of sex is the possibility of creating a new life. (p. 92)

This position is consistent with the belief of Hassidic women that

life potential and actual life are gifts that only God can grant and therefore

it is solely up to Him to determine when life should begin and when it

should end. The woman is considered to be the proprietor of her body that

was given to her for safe keeping until such time as God decides to

revoke her life.

Both Abramov and Aiken echo the views of the participants in my inquiry, who seem uninterested in self-justification and offer a direct criticism of feminist tenets. More often than not, they are concerned with making affirmative statements about women's position within Orthodox Judaism, and their writing displays a preference for this type of creative expression. Many such books defend the Jewish woman's traditional role. Prevalent themes maintain that a lifestyle based on Jewish values provides an answer to the ethical and social problems in human relationships. One example is Tamar Frankiel's *The Voice of Sarah* (1990), where the essence of her work is a description of the deeds and characters of outstanding Jewish women throughout history. She claims that, "We can recover feminine dimensions in our stories and traditions" (p. 43) that may have been there all along. What is unique about this approach is that it is built upon the premise that modernity has little to offer Jewish women. In order to look forward, we must first look back. Frankiel writes: "In my view we have not read carefully enough in the Torah, other biblical writings, and the *midrash* [an interpretation of scripture] to see what we already have" (p. 43).

Frankiel's book offers its readers an alternative model to feminism while it speaks the language of feminism. Yet, while situating feminine potency in "patriarchal" Judaism, Frankiel insinuates that it is crucial to recover authentic Jewish models of femininity for emulation as she tries to "distill what is useful for us today" (p. 48). Her concern is with what is essential to Jewish femininity "as seen through the lenses of our tradition" (p. 48). Her list of general characteristics of feminine spirituality helps the reader to understand why issues such as childbirth and childrearing are seen as spiritual challenges. Based on her reading of Jewish sources, Frankiel draws up a list of general characteristics of feminine spirituality:

prophetic/inspired future oriented, with a sense of history and destiny focused on real-life experience (e.g., childbirth) and intimate relations (family and kin) having her own distinctive relationship to G-d sexually/sensually based sense of holiness sense of power hidden beneath the surface risk taking, life saving, redemptive. (p. 48)

This list is useful to understand why issues such as child bearing are

matters of concern and why they are seen as spiritual challenges. She

continues to explain:

Many of the characteristics listed above have to do with what we might call the earthly – or as feminist theologians put it, the "immanental" – orientation of the feminine. The growth and development of our spirituality comes in daily, even biological life as much as in extraordinary experiences. Childbirth is the archetypal expression of this. It is in the struggles and victories of daily life, both of her inner life and her external activities, that women's spiritual strengths emerge. This suggests that the feminine spiritual archetype is not necessarily one clear role.... Rather it is a path of development that takes the matter of life as it comes and fashions it, bit by bit into the clarity of purpose and faith that motivated a Yehudit or a Ruth. Moreover, our examples show that extraordinary consciousness can develop in the midst of this ordinary life. (pp. 48-49)

This aspect of feminine spirituality relates to Frankiel's notion of "a

distinctive relationship with God" and is often seen in the books written by

Jewish women writers and is found in the dialogue of the Hassidic women

who participated in this inquiry. As a religious focus, it differs from the

more public form of spirituality practiced by men in that it emphasizes

sanctifying the private domain of home, so that the focus of religiosity

remains inward. Frankiel writes:

Some feminists claimed that while there may be feminine dimensions to Jewish religious life, they are not really valued in Judaism – synagogue, *yeshiva*, and law court are more important. From an experiential point of view, many women and men within traditional Judaism will affirm that this is simply not so. Torah life is a total way of life, with women's responsibilities just as serious as men's and equally highly valued. The question perhaps is whether women have appreciated the importance of affirming this dimension of their lives and speaking publicly about it.... It is only in recent times that women involved in traditional practice have begun to break the silence about the experience. (pp. 113-114)

For me this resonates with the views of Belenky (1986) in

her categorization of the five different epistemological perspectives of the nature of knowledge and truth for women. The category of "received knowers" may be applied, I believe, to extend to one's relationship with God. Goldberger (1996) also describes the centrality of God in the lives of African-American – American women in her essay entitled "Cultural Imperatives and Diversity." Hassidic women, like the women who Goldberger studied, view God as someone who directs their lives as well as expects obedience. Frankiel's goals are to show how Judaism glorifies the typical and mundane aspects of womanhood and to capture an essential femininity from Jewish sources as a model for the contemporary Orthodox Jewish woman reader.

Self-Help Literature

Themes of marriage, homemaking, parenting and emotional maturity also dominate the category of self-help literature. As I perused the libraries of my participants, this genre of writing by women authors for women, appeared to be very popular. Frequently noted is a volume entitled A Jewish Woman's Guide to Happiness in Marriage, by Sara Chana Radcliffe (1988). The overall message of this author is that any woman has the power and freedom of choice to remake much of her physical, emotional, mental and spiritual self; that she is largely responsible for who she is and how she acts. These self-help books stress that one must improve the aspects of life that one can change and positively accept those aspects that one cannot. They represent poppsychology adapted to the needs and outlooks of a religious, largely female Orthodox audience. One theme that frequently emerges is taking responsibility for one's actions. The following excerpt from Radcliffe (1988) is a powerful example of women learning to be the best wives that they can be:

Despite the presence of marital conflict, however, a woman can still strive to fulfil her own Torah obligations, including the laws concerning relations between one's fellow and oneself. These laws pertain directly to her dealings with her husband. Even if he behaves in ways unacceptable to her and contrary to Torah guidelines, she is in no way exempt from behaving in accordance with halachah [Jewish law]. His failure does not provide an excuse for her own failure. Moreover, her only chance for happiness in life is to refuse to fail. She must continue to be her best self for her own sake as well as for the sake of her marriage. If, in the end, it is *Hashem*'s [God's] will that she lacks the power to influence her husband positively, she has the comfort of knowing that she has not transgressed, that she has in fact done all that a wife can do, and that she has earned merit for her efforts. (p. 103)

The Hassidic women, whom I interviewed, voiced a similar code of

ethics in Jewish marital law and tradition. A wife would tend to view

herself as ultimately accountable to God for her actions, which confers

upon herself a sense of responsibility and control over herself. After all, it

is argued, if she believes she is accountable for her behaviour, she will be

more concerned with how she acts than with why she reacts. She will be

more likely to modify her behaviour than to justify it, aware of her

individuality within the marriage as an entity who is half of a larger whole.

A second author in the self-help category is Sarah Shapiro. In her

1990 book, Growing With My Children, she searches for self-

development through the challenge of bearing and raising children in

this poem:

Washing dishes, watching the dishes, not really seeing her hands wash the dishes, because it's always like this, and the sun lengthening along the floor.

One two o'clock, and then she's done the laundry. Get the baby crying. Sweet baby. Because. There is no because.

But one day the sun hits a frying pan in soapy water and she's holding a rainbow. The thought flashes through her like lightning: "G-d creating light!" and she sees all this, the light the water her hands herself are miracles. (p. 97).

This quest for self-improvement, self-identity and self-refinement in the context of Orthodoxy is passionate. Through this introspection, she learns to forgive herself for the imperfections of her home and to accept the fact that raising children with all its drudgery and toil combines godliness with the commonplace. The issues that Sarah Shapiro addresses in *Growing With My Children* also appear in numerous anthologies that feature women's writings exclusively and are familiar to Hassidic women: holiness versus the commonplace, identity, resisting feminism with Torah ideals, incorporating feminism into Torah ideals – in short, the place of the Orthodox Jewish woman in contemporary society.

This search for clarity of identity, the conflict between giving to others and not losing the self in the process is the theme of a renowned woman's educator and author Rebbetzin Tzipporah Heller. In her book, *More Precious than Pearls* (1993), she concluded that only a woman who is spiritually full can truly give. Included in her notion of spiritual fullness are women's status and ego needs, intellectual needs and spiritual needs. Her entire volume, then, is a discussion and debate of the spiritual fulfillment of the Jewish woman – her growth, even amidst adversity – for the sake of giving. In the writings of both Heller and Shapiro, we see how a relationship to God expresses itself in a sanctification of the mundane and through this relationship comes a woman's self-development and selfworth.

Informal Shared Literacy Practices

Although Judaism offers extensive and valuable documentation of what its finest (male) thinkers have written, until recent times Jewish women have left few written records. This is due in part to disparities in the education of Jewish men and women and in part to the deep ambivalence regarding the worth of women's words – an ambivalence that continues well into the current era.

Although a product of modern times, this emergent language of Jewish women has deep roots in the Jewish past. Often contemporary Jewish women's writings draw on traditional Jewish texts. One interesting source for contemporary Jewish women's poetry are *tchines* – short, pithy prayers composed in Yiddish for meditation at candle lighting, childbirth and other communal momentous events or crises in women's lives. Not formal liturgy, these petitionary prayers were recited privately rather than congregationally. They frequently expressed concern for family, marriage,

fertility, health, and evoked the figure of the matriarchs, turning to them for blessings. *Tchines* (a Yiddish word derived from the Hebrew *tchinot*, or petitions) were originally written by *yeshiva* students in Yiddish for women, who were not expected to attend synagogue services, nor to be literate in Hebrew. Eventually, women began to compose their own *tchines* and to pass along particularly evocative ones. The research of women scholars, such as Chava Weissler, on *tchines* has shed much light on their initial composition and usage (*Canadian Jewish News*, Sept. 13, 2001, p. 30).

Contemporary fiction, mostly written by women and addressing relationships and domesticity gradually emerged from this early writing. In my interviews with Hassidic women participants, I asked them to tell me about recent books they have read of a fictional nature. Many titles and authors were offered. Of all of the titles suggested, I borrowed ten from the women themselves and ten from the library in their community. I was particularly interested to read fiction written by Orthodox women authors. One feature of this literature is that, in its desire to be heard in its own words, the community is largely speaking to itself and thus has remained unexposed beyond the Orthodox and Hassidic groups. The literature of Hassidic and Orthodox women writers is not usually found in city libraries or mainstream bookstores. In Montreal, it would be available at the Jewish Public Library, at the privately operated library in the basement of a

Hassidic woman in Outremont or sold in Jewish bookstores run by Orthodox Jews. Often, it can be borrowed from a family's impressive private library. The dissemination of these writings by women are more often than not an informal, home-based woman-to-woman enterprise.

Religious Jewish women writers publish through a limited number of publishing houses, that distribute their works almost exclusively to the religious public. These books are not meant for non-Jewish or secular public consumption or scholarly criticism, yet among the Orthodox population they are extremely popular. Usually the only volumes of creative writing on the bookshelves of Orthodox homes are the literature of religious Jewish writers.

One seemingly very popular novel is entitled *Working it Out*, by Ruthie Pearlman (1991). This story is part one of a trilogy representing the life of a fifteen-year old girl whose career aspirations are thwarted because of her family's financial and health concerns. The Hassidic women who have read this book say that they enjoyed it because, as Raizie says, "it shows how people sometimes have to alter the course of their lives and take a different path than they thought they would like" (Sept. 16, 1999). Yehudit enjoyed the novel "for its uplifting message and courageous heroine" (Aug. 22, 2000).

Another fictional work with a similar theme of tragedy striking what otherwise would have an idyllic life, is told by Gila Diamond (1997) in *Full Circle*. This book's flyleaf describes the events:

In this emotion-packed novel, Gila Diamond relates the true story of her personal struggle, of close friendships and marital bonds strained to the breaking point by unforeseen events, of loving kindness that restores a shattered spirit, and of a young couple who learn that complete faith and trust in G-d's Grace is the key to ultimate happiness. (Flyleaf cover)

This novel recounts a woman's personal struggle with infertility and how a young couple is finally rewarded through their complete faith and trust in God.

A third fictional work, reported by the librarian with whom I spoke to be among the most frequently requested novels by the participants, is Sarah Birnham's *One Day and Forever* (1996). In it Birnham tells the story of Zeesala Hartsten's marriage to a brilliant young Torah scholar who, much to Zeesala's stark disapproval, finds spiritual fulfillment with a new circle of friends. According to Toba, this "page turning" read, is rich and vivid in character description and speaks in the language familiar to Hassidic women as the plot describes a real-life conflict and its resolution.

Rachel Pomerantz (1996), another much-read female Orthodox writer, puts her heroine's religious beliefs to the test in her novel *A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew.* The flyleaf of this novel explains the title: Upbringing, education, career, family these are the threads that comprise the fabric of one's existence. But for some people, there comes a time to rend that fabric, a wrenching time fraught with inner turmoil and conflict, until that fabric is finally sewn anew to form a richer, more pleasing pattern. The painstaking restitching demands great care and endless patience, but the satisfying results justify the effort. (Flyleaf cover)

In this story of a religious young woman who desperately wants a

career in nursing, the author explores the intellectual and emotional

challenges of religious observance, as her heroine struggles to resolve

the conflicts between secular ambitions and a full Orthodox lifestyle. The

author writes about her heroine as a 5 year-old girl who overhears her

parents lament that, if they had sons instead of daughters, it would have

been easier. The following is an excerpt from Pomerantz's novel. In it the

little girl tries to make sense of her parent's discussion:

Lying under the covers, she went over and over the conversation until she had memorized it. Much of it was above her head. What was prejudice? What were these barrier things against Jews and women? What was a surgeon? If she could solve this puzzle, she would understand what her father really wanted from her. One thing she could guess: It seemed that her father was not happy that both she and her sister Lynn were girls. What was wrong with being a girl? Her mother didn't think there was anything wrong with it; she had said it straight out, in the one part of the conversation that Beth had clearly understood: a girl would do every bit as well as a boy. If Beth could only solve this puzzle. (p. 12)

Here, we see the real issue of the novel. More than a question of career ambitions versus the desire to marry and raise a family, the novel forces the reader to question the source of his or her ambitions. We sense this question from the beginning, as Pomerantz opens the novel with a quotation from Ecclesiastes 4:4,6: "And I saw that all labor and all skillful enterprise spring from man's rivalry with his neighbor. This too, is futility and a vexation of the spirit!... Better is one handful of tranquillity, than two fistfuls of labor and frustration" (p 3) The heroine finally takes a good look at the source of her ambitions and determines their cost to her selfhood. She concludes that to "have it all" as an ambitious career woman who wants to raise a family means compromise: "In the world of secular ambitions, there is no prize, no satisfaction that is more than momentary. Each success is but an introduction to the next struggle" (pp. 215-216).

A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew represents a fictional mode in Orthodox women's literature that treats the issues that we have seen throughout: the embracing and adoption of Orthodox Jewish practice and the choices and changes that the heroine makes in consolidating her old ambitions with her present, chosen reality. A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew deals thematically with the quest of its heroine and her struggle to settle questions of the self, of Judaism and feminism, of her unwillingness to compromise either and of her repudiation or modification of what she considers Western values.

This novel faithfully continues the convention of realism in Orthodox women's fiction. It also shows how marriage and domesticity are connected with religiosity as a Jewish woman's way of serving God. It provides further evidence of the complete acceptance of the traditional roles of women and men. In this volume, the focus of the two heroines, Malka and Esther, is housework. Yet this does not diminish their heroism. Pomerantz shows that self-development does not depend on place or activity, that it is accessible to women even if they remain in exclusively traditional roles.

The authors whose works I have read to date are, for the most part, not writers first and foremost, but women who write well and have a message to convey. They have something they want to tell one another – little bits of inspiration – and they clearly love to tell it. These novels deal with human relationships; the treatment of heterosexual romance and dating is written about from a culturally sensitive perspective within the framework of the Orthodox tradition. That is, boy-girl interaction in Orthodox fiction does not necessarily begin with heterosexual romance or dating and end with marriage, as we so often see in secular women's fiction. There is courtship, but it is usually in the modest Orthodox style of *shidduchim,* in which a man and woman (or their families in the case of Hassidim) find suitable partners for marriage by consulting a matchmaker or other third party. Each side of the intended partnership checks out the other side indirectly by gleaning information from people who know the

intended partner and his or her family. The couple then meets several times to conclude for themselves (i.e., agree with their parents) that they could indeed create a suitable marriage. The goal of a date is always marriage, never romance, although it does not necessarily preclude the possibility of nonphysical or platonic romance.

Most of the fiction I have examined that is both written and read by Orthodox women, has the common theme of emotional or spiritual challenge and depicts the struggle of the heroine as she successfully overcomes the conflicts that confront her in her struggle to remain true to her observant way of life. These Orthodox writers strive to be as true to life as the authors of the non-fiction works I described above. The fiction I have examined suggests that Orthodox women are interested in writing and reading works that move them emotionally. They want to be inspired and choose to read books that are testimony to the indomitability of the human spirit and the ever-present hand of God in the play of events. Women participants describe these novels as uplifting and inspirational as stories to which they can often relate.

Fictional and non-fictional literature by Orthodox women contains perhaps, a different brand of feminism meant to empower women in a different way within the laws and principles of traditional Judaism. For

example, a feminist critic might read a work by an Orthodox Jewish woman and determine that gendered concerns are not apparent. A more contextual reading might reveal that the writer's silence about women results from her confidence and her sense of empowerment in her position as a fully participating member of the religious community. This, in fact, may give her the freedom **not** to focus on women's issues. By letting the literature of Hassidic and Orthodox Jewish women speak for itself it is contextualized in Orthodox social reality, not in imagination or preconceived paradigms. The point is that, when making a literary evaluation of this community's writing, one must take into account the cultural presuppositions that the writer is sharing with her intended readers. Patsy Schweickart (1994) in her essay "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", comments on this notion:

The feminist reader agrees with Stanley Fish that the production of the meaning of a text is mediated by the interpretive community in which the activity of reading is situated: the meaning of the text depends on the interpretative strategy one applies to it, and the choice of strategy is regulated (explicitly or implicitly) by the canons of acceptability that govern the interpretive community. However, unlike Fish, the feminist reader is also aware that the ruling interpretive communities are androcentric, and that this androcentricity is deeply etched in the strategies and modes of thought that have been interjected by all readers, women as well as men. (p. 32)

It follows from this premise that a secular Jewish critic, male or

female, cannot fairly or justly evaluate the writings of women whose
culture is "other". We learn from Schweickart (1994) that the reader's imagination must be taken into account as much as the author's imagination.

The Orthodox women writers themselves tell us about their affirmations, self-revelations and self-contradictions. They draw their subject matter from women's life experiences as they seek to support and strengthen their readers by talking about their own challenges, triumphs and conflicts as true-to-tradition women. Their writing speaks to women's spiritual, physical and moral heroism. In general, it is self-affirming, women focused and culturally self-focused. The challenge then for the non-Orthodox or non-Hassidic reader or critic is to be able to appropriate the modes of thought and presuppositions internalized by people who were raised in a particular sociopolitical culture and time. I could not help but hear the voices of my own study participants echo and resonate as I critically examined the books and themes that Hassidic women read and enjoy.

Letters, Pamphlets and Booklets in Public Places

Throughout my research, when in schools, homes or community agencies, I collected notices, letters, brochures, newsletters, and posters on bulletin boards, which I believe are representative of the values and

lifestyle of the Hassidic women in this study. These are informal documents, and a few are worthy of mention.

I refer to five different brochures that were recently circulated to homes in Outremont to advertise the services and products offered to the Hassidic community. The first is entitled *The Community Newsletter of Outremont, De Vimy, Snowdon and Tosh.* This publication is primarily comprised of advertisements aimed at the community from suppliers and retailers ranging from shoes to jewellery to discount lingerie, to bakeries, florists and pizza. An ad for *sheitals* (wigs) reads "for that special *Yom Tov* [Holy Day] look treat yourself through an original licensed professional stylist who will wash, set and style *sheitals* [wigs] as well as do emergency touch-ups" (p. 17).

I came across the following advertisement for a newly formed mentoring program that targets weak students ages 8-24. Written in both English and Yiddish, the service is explained:

Yossi (not his real name) was a weak and inattentive student. His marks were poor and his self esteem low. Yossi now looks forward anxiously to the weekly visits with his mentor. They discuss his progress in school. The mentor offers exciting reinforcements for progress made, sometimes pizza or ice cream, and sometimes a little game. Close contact is kept with both the rebbe and secular teachers. Yossi's attitude and grades have improved to the pleasure of all.

The second document in this collection is a pamphlet written to inform the community about the services of the Jewish Youth Library. This at-home

library, run by a husband and wife in their basement, is in its twentieth year of serving the community and offers books in four languages (English, Yiddish, Hebrew and French), as well as novels that are suitable for an observant reader. The library also includes audiotapes - "the very best children's music, tapes based on parenting and educating, by the greatest names in today's Torah world". The library is open to children only on Sundays between 1 PM and 6 PM. It maintains special hours for boys on Fridays between 12 PM and 1 PM. Hassidic women who borrow books are able to call the librarian to schedule their own appointments. The pamphlet for this library concludes with the following sentence: "You have dealt with us for a score of years. You know that you can trust our library with your Yiddish *neshomalach* [souls]." For the Hassid, the soul or neshomah is considered a measuring stick of one's worth as a human being. The idea of the activation of the soul is paramount. This connection between the reading of books and the focus on one's soul implies that books found in this library will elevate the soul of their readers to a higher plane of sincerity and truth. A copy of a flyer advertising the services of this library is found in Appendix K.

A third artifact in the informal category is a flyer designed to advertise the Employment Centre for the *Heimishe* (Orthodox) Community. It is a one-page notice that is circulated in the community and found on bulletin boards in local corner stores. This flyer is in Yiddish and English and lists part of its services: job placement, employment search strategies and assistance, career counseling and assessment, and workshops. It also advertises its Business Outreach and Development Centre, which offers "guidance and assistance in accessing appropriate government services and support for small businesses, researching financial and technical programs for expanding businesses, support activities for Export Marketing and advice as to how to succeed in starting your own business." Hassidic men, when ready to enter the job market after years of religious study, very much appreciate the services this employment centre offers.

A fourth publication, Ahavas Chesed Newsletter, aims at explaining the services of the Outremont social service agency. I was invited to the annual tea of *Ahavas Chesed* where the mandate of the agency was explained by the director. The following is an excerpt taken from the newsletter:

AHAVAS CHESED is all about working with unique challenges. For the past seven years, our job has been to help the community link to necessary services. We have done so by easing the route of the client who faces cultural insensitivities, bureaucratic mazes or language difficulties at a vulnerable moment. Our network of Rabbonim and professionals continues to expand, making all our efforts more comfortable.

AHAVAS CHESED is a valuable tool. With *Hashem*'s [God] guidance, we remain committed to helping you meet life's

challenges. May He grant us the strength to continue working together. (Mar. 2001)

Some of its services include a caregiver support program, a senior's nursing home and a training program for Orthodox women to "help overwhelmed mothers of young families." As explained in this flyer, the specific role of the Ahavas Chesed "educatrices" is to "model appropriate behaviors for this mother while providing support in the comfort of the family's home. From this flyer, I learned about the Tuesdaymorning ladies group that offers senior women "lively recreation, dynamic discussion and socialization." Among other services this organization provides is a kosher Meals-on-Wheels and the finding of foster homes for Jewish children. This agency is the hub of the wheel integrating the Hassidic community with the services offered by the Jewish community of Montreal at large. Of particular interest to me was the fact that the Orthodox in Outremont runs and maintains its own emergency paramedical service (Hatzolah) with religious male volunteers specifically trained to meet the culturally sensitive needs of its community. I include a recent copy of one of the newsletters of Ahavas Chesed in Appendix L.

A final piece of writing worthy of mention is a booklet distributed by the Seminary of Bais Yaakov to all residents. This book of 389 pages contains all emergency phone numbers; the times of *davening* (prayer) at various synagogues; the dates, times and speakers at *shiurim* (religious text); a *chesed* (good deed) directory; commercial listings with corresponding advertisements; and an alphabetical list of all Orthodox residents in Outremont with addresses and telephone numbers. The last few pages of this book include travel information and things to see and do in and around Montreal. The directory relies on private as well as corporate donations and sponsors for its publication and is considered to be the most valuable resource for community information that is currently circulated.

Concluding this chapter, I recall the work of Marcia Farr (1995) and her study of the embedded nature of literacy practices of Mexicano families in Chicago. In this setting, Farr explores the commercial domain of the Mexicans in her examination of Mexican language and culture. Farr concludes from the letters, advertisements and pamphlets geared specifically to this community that literacy is embedded "in the lives of the members of this social network" (p. 16). From my own analysis of this type of document, I would conclude that the Hassidic community of this inquiry clearly possesses a variety of resources that serve their own unique and specific literacy needs. Literacy is shared within the social network through these resources in the members' interactions with institutions, such as the employment and social service agencies that serve their particular needs. The interpretation and analysis of documents in the Hassidic community of Outremont provide additional insights into the literacy practices from that obtained through interviews and participant observations. What people say is often very different from what people do. This point has perhaps been most successfully established over recent years by research stemming from the work of multiple literacy writers (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Through the study of 'material culture', I present multiple voices with differing and interacting interpretations. The analysis of these literacy resources, the mundane and everyday traces of the Hassidic community's life, is, I believe, of great importance for the expression of alternative perspectives.

The formal documents (the newspapers, magazines, a video and non-fiction material) and the informal ones (the mass media, letters and fictional works), provide a fascinating analytic and interpretive resource for the socially organized practices of the participants in this inquiry.

CHAPTER SIX: Literacy and Meaning – Making Outside of Formal Schooling

If something doesn't affect your daily life, you don't need to learn about it. If you are not sure where you are going or where you came from, then the more you learn, the more options you're given and the greater the likelihood that you will be confused. I am happy not to know all the garbage that's out there. (Chaya, Nov. 18, 1999)

A socio-cultural perspective of literacy suggests a complex relationship between individuals and the contexts that shape their literacy practices (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). This perspective meshes knowledge drawn from rhetoric, discourse analysis, social psychology, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, and poststructuralism. As previously described, a major underlying premise of a social-constructivist view of literacy is that the construction of literary meanings is a context-specific social process consisting of various cultural practices.

I agree with Bruner (1990) that constructing meaning is a unique, personal, shared, and negotiated process of making sense of situations and interlocutors. Meaning-making practices are then related closely to the places and the values they serve in the social and cultural environments. He claims that the symbolic systems that individuals use in constructing meaning are systems that are already in place, already "there," deeply entrenched in culture and language (p. 11). From the perspective of social theorists of language, meanings are shaped by the environment, with languages being among the primary mediators of learning in the environment (Bahktin, 1986; Halliday, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, the concept of multiple literacies is an attempt to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize about it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded (Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000). I was struck by the parallel of Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester's (2000) work with my own. They describe the multiple ways in which people draw on and combine the codes in their literacy practices to make meaning as they negotiate and display cultural identities and social relationships.

Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986) provides yet another theoretical lens to view the way people appropriate the forms of knowledge they first experience collectively. Bakhtin argues that individuals come to know literacies through textually mediated social actions in particular contexts. From this perspective, knowledge does not exist inside the learner's head but rather as a dialectical movement between what exists in the social world and what is experienced and performed as private and reflective mental activity. Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic and philosophical anthropologist, views the self as contextualized. From his perspective, the self can exist only in relationship

to some other, whether that other be another person, other parts of the self, the individual's society, or his or her culture. In this view, the individual is always in process.

Bakhtin suggests that if we wish to trace the growth of whole people we must cease to regard people as finished entities and, somewhat paradoxically, we must find those places within narrative where the self is most clearly in dialogue with itself. The organization of the planes of self in dynamic relation to each other is, in Bakhtin's terms, the dialogic self. Similarly, when I analyze an interview with a participant, I am in fact tracking the dialogue of this individual's experience with the social world of others. Context, to Bakhtin, encompasses "infinite dialogue in which there is neither a first nor a last world" (1986, pp. 167-168). By uncovering the dialogic nature of the self – the dialogue both within the self and the dialogue with the world that is the centre of process in development and living, one can construct the signposts of Hassidic women's meaning-making.

How Hassidic women are socialized to know and make meaning outside of their formal schooling is explored in this section. For many women interviewed, literacy has many uses – from "socialization, satisfaction, entertainment, amusement, self-identification, and legitimation, to expression, escapism, or therapy" (Graff, 1981, p. 40).

Drawing from Goldberger et al (1996), I incorporate anecdotes and quotations surrounding issues of knowing and knowledge perspectives to underline the many contexts of literacy (family, community, politics, culture) and the well-developed ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge. Even though Hassidic women operate in a community with strict cultural and religious rules and laws which mandate contexts for silence and speech, they perceive themselves to be engaged in that community as active contributing knowers (Belenky, 1996).

In this chapter, I specifically examine the sources of knowledge that are not necessarily sanctioned by their community. My questions for this segment of data-collection focuses not only on what and how Hassidic women learn, but what they believe is important to know and what they think they should not learn or know.

Knowledge Through Reading

Almost all participants permitted newspapers such as *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Globe and Mail* to enter their homes. Only one stated that she does not allow the daily English newspapers into her home because they are too hard to censor. This comment is an example of the Hassidic struggle with Western culture; just to be on the safe side, some women opt to err on the side of caution. That is, they choose to not read

the paper at all, because it may contain material that is culturally or religiously offensive.

In *Modesty*, Rabbi Falk (1998) urges extreme caution in one's choice of newspapers and magazines as "such papers are lethal for all members of the family" (p. 306). He cites case histories of girls who confessed to him that the reading of daily papers and magazines caused them to "become shallow and superficial" and to lose their Torah outlook and former refinement. He quotes a proclamation concerning secular newspapers made by the Steipler Gaon (Rabbi Kanievsky):

Apart from arousing the *yetzer horah* [evil inclination], reading these papers has the effect of causing people to become indifferent to *Yiddishkeit* [Orthodox ways], to lose their *Yiras Shomayim* [fear of heaven] and to abandon their *emuna* [faith]. Therefore, whoever brings these newspapers into the house will be held responsible for grievously injuring himself and his family. Altogether, who can foresee the serious consequences of allowing such material into one's home? It is the responsibility of the Jewish woman, who attends to all the needs of the household, to safeguard herself and members of her household by insisting that such newspapers are not allowed access into the house. If she takes this approach she will merit blessings in this world and riches in the next. (p. 129)

As examined in Chapter Five, all participants reported to reading

the Jewish newspapers (Homodia and Yataad Ne'Eman) published in

English and available at local community stores. As far as secular

magazines are concerned, titles such as Good Housekeeping, Reader's

Digest, Time, Newsweek, and Women's World, were frequently

mentioned. Chaya was an exception:

I don't bring magazines into the house. Anyway, my boys do not read English well enough to understand them, I used to buy *People* but it's become so trashy, so low life. Sometimes I tore off the cover because of the pictures. (May 1, 2000)

Besides curriculum-based formal learning geared towards the social reality of everyday life, Hassidic women have found reading for pleasure a path towards enrichment. Whereas many women will not read books unless someone in a position of authority has approved them, there is, for other women, a thirst for reading that leads them to defy the limitations and prohibitions. The Hassidic woman with a passion for books will often satisfy her thirst for reading by patronizing the "forbidden." Perhaps, there is nothing as sweet as stolen water. Some of the older women with whom I have met have confided that they do sometimes read books by secular authors like Harold Robbins, Jeffrey Archer, Tom Clancy and John Grisham. Some husbands try to look the other way for the sake of marital harmony. My impression, however, is that husbands understand that, for their wives, the experience of reading provides a peephole into another world – an experience that refreshes them and is not dangerous. as long as the escaping takes place in the mind alone.

I believe the charm of these books for them lies in the fact that they are responsive to women's yearnings for thrill, romance, suspense and beauty. For Orthodox women, these books provide a fantasy and a temporary escape from their everyday lives. However, Raizie explained that she will skip pages if she sees that it is becoming too "trashy" - "I can usually tell where the story is going" (Aug. 30, 1999).

I am reminded of the time I spent a summer vacation with a group of Hassidic women by a lake in the Laurentian mountains, north of Montreal. This was a cottage colony, a group of old, poorly maintained homes sharing a common property. With their husbands away in the city and their children safely ensconced in their beds for the night, out came copies of Sydney Sheldon and Danielle Steele. When I showed surprise at their reading material, I was told that these books were used as a means of filling leisure time and as a mode of recreation. As they further explained, these novels provided a vicarious experience and a form of release and pleasure. For the Hassidic women by the country lake, literacy and consumption of literature occupies a valued place in many women's lives, despite the layers of censure sometimes surrounding these texts.

Not surprisingly, most right-wing rabbis and educators do not support this practice. They fear that reading these books will result in "romantic intoxication", and that they will lead the women to adopting inappropriate ideas and distortions about life. Such books, it is believed,

might give rise to certain kinds of questions. The enchanted reader is

likely to assimilate some of the inherent values latent in their pages. The

following excerpt is from a Rabbi with whom I spoke:

She [the reader of those types of books] will want to know the world in which the books were written: an open world, with different and diverse emotions, knowledge, and possibilities. And after she has read and internalized them, what harm could there be in leading a different kind of life? Even if she remains within the Orthodox world, not daring to depart from it, an irreversible change has taken place. She has lost the innocence that she had before she tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. In the worst case, she can become subversive or malcontent. (Feb. 14, 2000)

To ensure that only "kosher" material is in the home, Rabbi Falk advises:

If a family has a children's encyclopedia of interesting facts, the mother should "doctor" it before giving it to the children by running a black marker over all places where it is stated that the world is far older than the Torah says it is. If the anatomy of the human body is discussed - and all the more if it is illustrated - those pages should be cut out or at least glued together (preferably cut out, since, in his curiosity, a child may be tempted to unstick the pages). Should a breakfast cereal show a particular *treife* [improper] picture on the outer carton, the mother may decide not to buy that cereal for the time being, or alternatively, to pour its content into a plastic container so that the outer carton need not be brought to the table. (p. 346)

Rabbi Falk (1998) cautions that one should "frequent Jewish

libraries run by refined and responsible people" (p.378). As parents, he

suggests "It is our duty to safeguard our children from outside influences

as far as is humanly possible" (p.378). "Is it surprising then," he asks, "that

the teenage girl who has been reading such papers and books sets her

heart on wearing clothes and jewellery that are so provocative that they

are incompatible with any standard of *tznius*?" (p.378). For Rabbi Falk (1998), appropriate and recommended reading for the family would include books that "impart general knowledge about plants, the animal kingdom, seasons, planets, etc" (p. 346).

The moral bases of literacy are central to the Hassidic culture "to reveal the perceived connections between the school, the society and the economy; to inculcate values, habits or attitudes" (Graff, 1979, p. 40). Graff further argues that "no part of education is of greater importance than the selection of proper books... No dissipation can be worse than that induced by the perusal of exciting books of fiction... a species of a monstrous and erroneous nature" (Graff, 1979, p. 37). In this passage, the notion that literacy is to be a carefully guided instruction with reading seldom seen as an end in itself resonates with the concerns voiced by Rabbi Falk. Literacy is seen as the vehicle to transmit the moral message and instill the principles of correct behaviour. It is to be used as a socializing agent in environments that are carefully structured to ensure moral control.

To give a specific example of the danger that may lurk in a book, I will refer to a work of non-fiction edited by Weizman and Ofer (1998) that I once recommended to the women I taught at Tosh in Boisbriand. It contained biographies of Holocaust survivors — a seemingly simple and

appropriate choice, since it emphasized some of the concepts presented in my Adult Development psychology course. My students immediately pointed out some serious concerns in the suggested book — ones that I had not at all considered. First of all, book dealt with the Holocaust in a way that involved a challenge against God. In this community, the Holocaust is a troublesome and sensitive topic, one that is suppressed because it cannot be fully understood or resolved. Another concern in the development of these biographies arose because of the inclusion of romantic elements, which, they perceived, subtly hinted at erotica. Although the love story between the subject of one of the biographies and his future wife is written with delicacy and modesty, it was still sufficiently removed from the realm of Hassidic readers to be considered worrisome.

Knowledge-Making Through Music and Radio

The overwhelming majority of Hassidic women own a cassette player and enjoy listening to the growing number of tapes of well known Hassidic or Orthodox singers and groups. They emphasize that these tapes provide them with entertainment and inspiration during long hours of housekeeping chores. Another source of pleasure and information is the radio. All but one of the homes that I visited had a radio. The stations most listened to were stations that are all-news or ones that feature classical music. The reason for these radio station chioces would be because they are middle-of-the-

road, and therefore unlikely to raise issues that would be inappropriate to most women in this community. Most regard the radio as important listening for weather and world events - topics that directly affect them and their families. As Shoshana Ruchel explains:

My children live in Israel, so I always want to listen to the radio to hear, God forbid, if something bad is happening there. Also, I'm American, so it's important for me to keep up with politics. Right before the six o'clock news sometimes I'll listen to a talk show for ten minutes. (May 7, 2000)

Three participants in fact, shared with me that they sometimes

listen to the talk radio phone-in show - "Dr. Laura". Dr. Laura answers

questions dealing with relationships, sexuality and morality. However,

Devorah Esther says that she would not do so if the children or anyone

else are present:

Sometimes when I was in the car by myself, I'd turn on Dr. Laura. But now I decided not to listen to her. It's incongruous with the way we are bringing up our family. My husband is against it. (May 15, 2000)

The only time Rebbetzin Fleisher has ever listened to the radio, she says,

was during the Gulf War, out of concern for her son who was living in the

Middle East.

Television and Video Viewing

A more delicate topic was the use of TVs and VCRs in the home.

Concerning the use of televisions, Rabbi Falk (1998) writes:

Those who bring this monstrous machine into the house sit themselves and their children down to a live and vivid display of murder, theft and all the vices of the world. The corrupt state of present day youth bears ample witness to the damaging effect of watching these sights. Hiding the television in the bedroom or strictly allowing only "clean" things to be watched is no justification for harbouring such a source of harm in one's home. The Torah's way is to forbid a person to have a faulty weight in his possession lest he swindles it at a time of weakness (*Vayikra* 19:36). Similarly, a television, which shows the most despicable sights at the flick of a switch, may not be kept in the house lest one capitulates to temptation. (p. 131)

Of the few women interviewed who owned television sets, all units were, in fact, in their bedrooms, behind closed cabinets. Some participants confessed to watching TV when on vacation in a hotel room. Others remember a TV in a hospital room after childbirth, if the room was shared with another patient. Raizie recalls that "the last time I watched TV was when I was a child and the man stepped on the moon" (Sept. 16, 2000).

VCRs are virtually non-existent in Hassidic homes in Outremont. However, two participants did acknowledge their use for children's videos, both educational and recreational.

When I asked the women who did not listen to the radio, read a newspaper or watch TV how they learned about what was going on in the world, they said they relied on their husbands and fathers to bring home the information. Sarah Chana explains: "I hear people talking on the street. My father comes home and tells us what is important for us to know. Men discuss the world news in the m*ikveh* [Ritual bath] and then

come home and tell us" (May 23, 2000). "Just because we are Hassidic,

doesn't mean we should live in an igloo" (Sarah Chana, Oct. 20, 2001).

Using a Computer

The pros and cons of owning or using a computer are clearly a

divisive issue among the women. An administrator from one of the two

CEGEP's offering programs to the Hassidic community told me of the

violent opposition he faced when trying to start a computer program at

Tosh in Boisbriand:

There was a tremendous backlash by a small but vocal number of residents who were simply terrified about the idea. They asked me, "Do you understand the filth and *tuma* [impurity] that computers bring? At a initial discussion meeting, I noticed men passing around audio-tapes. I asked if I could have one and I listened to it. It was some rabbi in Israel railing against the threat and dangers of computers. This program in Tosh never got off the ground. (May 17, 2000)

Toba's remarks represent the sentiments of those who believe that one must adapt to the twenty-first century: "You have to go along with the flow of the world. We don't have a computer at home, but I use one at work. I use it for my business. Through the Internet, I will also watch the news in Israel. I can see my children at the *Kotel* [Western Wall in Jerusalem], if we arrange it" (Oct. 26, 2001). Tzipporah enjoys playing bridge on the Internet. Her husband is using the computer to trace his family's roots. The danger of owning a computer is explained by Suri Gittel,

mother of 13: She fears her sons will want to use it for games: "Every computer game you buy has a component of violence, even Game Boy. You can come across things by accident." Rabbi Falk (1998) refers to the World Wide Web as a menace of "extraordinary proportions - even the non-Jewish world is deeply apprehensive of the corruption and indecency it is imparting to many of its viewers" (p.378).

The following excerpt is an example of his condemnation of the Internet:

With it they can access pictures and films created by the sick minds of those of the lowest moral depravity and view them in the safety of their homes without anyone being aware of it. The viewer can see sights of live immorality that are more terrible and devastating to the *neshama* [soul] of the *Yid* [Jew] than has ever been known.

In the light of this terrible danger, parents who have a computer at home for the children to use, are strongly advised not to have a modem plus a communications program which enables connection to the Internet. They should also not allow their children to play with friends who have a computer that has a modem with a communications program in their homes. A computer without the means to communicate to the Internet may not be as efficient and up-to-date as one with such a facility. However, as a result their children's *neshamaos* [souls] will be saved, and they will be able to grow up with healthy morals. This is a very small and insignificant price to pay to prevent something which is "life-threatening" from entering the house.

If the parents require a home-based computer which must be connectable to the Internet for their profession or business, it must be strictly out-of-bounds for anyone other than the parents. Alternatively, there are Internet service providers that do not allow access to certain areas, and programs are available which allow parents to decide which areas can be accessed. (p. 138)

According to this excerpt from Rabbi Falk, the Internet poses a particularly terrifying threat to children and teenagers. Its use is regarded as a "last powerful flicker of the *yetzer horah* [evil inclination]" (p. 140) as a test of one's strength to ensure that the one's home is a fortress of "true uncontamined *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism]" (Falk, 1998, p. 140).

In addition to learning from media sources and computers, I

specifically asked what Hassidic women should learn and know and

conversely what Hassidic women should not learn and know. There was a

general consensus as to what a Hassidic woman does not need to learn

about. Yehudit, age 19, says that: "Hassidic women do not need to know

about TV shows, movie stars or the latest fashion. They don't need to

know all the gossip that is going on in Hollywood" (May 25, 2000).

Devorah Esther adds her opinion:

You don't have to look at all those magazines on the newsstands or all the billboards with the Calvin Klein ads. They can't even sell a shower faucet today without using a woman's nude body in the ad. (May 30, 2000)

Sarah Chana believes that the name Monica Lewinsky is one that is better not known:

My 15 year-old asked me why they were talking about impeaching President Clinton. I told her he was a bad president. I think my 18-year old daughter knew the story, but she would never discuss it with her sister. Children in the Hassidic world would not, thank God, know that name. (May 29, 2000)

Shoshana Ruchel relates an incident where she found knowledge

about abuse to be disturbing:

I did one school project on spousal abuse, and I still have nightmares. Why would I want to know about that dirt — it ruins your sanity and your peace of mind. You don't need to know about sex things and killings. (May 25, 2000).

What these participants seem to be saying is that they are, in fact

better off not knowing about issues relating to topics that contradict or

oppose their religion and lifestyle. To learn about spousal abuse and

infidelity would not only serve little purpose in their lives, it would, in fact,

have a damaging effect on their sense of morality. By learning about the

"sick minds of those of the lowest moral depravity" (Falk, 1998, p. 139),

these participants fear they would cause devastation to their souls.

Did they feel there was knowledge they would definitely want their

daughters to have? Devorah Esther, in the following excerpt, provides a

comment that reflects many of the women's views around the issue:

I believe in exposure. I think she needs to know as much as she can about the field she is in. I try to read more about child psychology. She should learn how to bring up children and the basics of a good marriage. She should know the laws of being a Jewish woman. There is still so much I need to learn. (Devorah Esther, May 10, 2000)

Echoing this need to learn information that directly affects their

lives, Rebbetzin Fleisher comments:

My daughter needs life skills — she needs to know how to bake, how to cook and how to be *gishikt* [capable]. She also needs to know what's going on in the world in order to protect herself. (May 29, 2000)

Syshe Heschel, father-in-law of the present Rebbe of the Boyaner

Hassidic sect, speaks to the issue of what women need to learn and

know:

My own personal philosophy is that the most important task for any woman is that she raise her family, and everything should be geared toward being able to do that in a better way. What she really needs to know are only those things which would help her become a good mother. I'm a very big male chauvinist in that fashion. I believe very strongly that everyone has a certain task. I do not think that women are in any way inferior-either intellectually or emotionally or in any way. Because I've spent much of my life working with youngsters I very strongly believe that. It is the most challenging job. Business is a breeze. You learn one thing and you do it. The most difficult thing is to raise good kids which is what my wife did, wonderful kids at the top of everything. I'm bragging about my children — tops scholastically, tops as far as personality is concerned, as far as pleasantness and good qualities, good characteristics-and that came about because both my wife and I, especially my wife, raised the children with warmth, with discipline. She has her head on in the right place on how to raise children. (Mintz, 1992, p. 62)

The importance of the role of the mother is evident in this poem

shown to me by Raizie:

There is a wide-eyed little girl Who believes you're always right And her eyes are always upon you And she watches day and night You setting the example Everyday, in all you do For the little girl whose waiting To grow up just like you.

(Author Anonymous)

The women I interviewed claim that they need to know information that has a very specific and practical focus relating to childcare, homemaking and community. Thus, personal domestic experience is seen as fertile ground on which the religious woman should focus her divine service. This translates into the "spiritual work" of becoming a better caregiver, more efficient, more sensitive to the needs of others. The giving inherent in the woman's domestic experience conforms with Judaism's expectations that the commandments as a whole will transform natural human selfishness into an other-directedness. In Judaism, giving is a basic aspect of divine service, and the observant Jewish woman in her roles as wife and mother becomes an expert in giving.

Because ways of knowing are so tightly controlled and restrictive for Hassidic women, I was interested to learn if and how a girl or woman who had a particular skill or ability might further her talent. In the United States, particularly in New York, there are opportunities for Hassidic girls to study nursing, physiotherapy and speech therapy at Stern College for

Women. In Montreal according to Raizie "we are twenty years behind

America" (May 15, 2000).

She explains the dilemma this way:

If you have a talent and you are looking for fulfilment, it's out there but it's harder to be in a field that's not related to teaching. My daughter wanted to work in a secular office, but she couldn't because the standards aren't the same — the way men speak to women and the topics of conversation. (May 15, 2000)

Tzipporah talks about her daughter's skill in creative writing:

My daughter is very creative in writing. It's a problem, because I don't know how to go about to polish her ability. She probably won't get the opportunity to learn more unless I can afford to hire a woman teacher privately or maybe she can learn through a correspondence course. (May 18, 2000)

These women participants recognize that a Hassidic girl with

particular talents, skills or drive in creative or scientific areas may have

difficulty fulfilling her aspirations within the Montreal Hassidic community.

Yet, other participants indicate that there is always a "Hassidic way" to

fulfil one's potential. Toba suggests these options:

If a girl is math-oriented, she can keep her husband's books. If she is artistic she can make backdrops for the school play. I have a niece who is very creative, so she does cake-decorating. Everyone can find their outlet. Another girl I know is creative, so she helps others with home decorating. If you write well, you could do creative writing for one of our magazines. (May 30, 2000)

As evidenced by Toba's comment, she believes that if a girl is

seriously intent on pursuing these areas of interest beyond high school,

the Hassidic lifestyle will not necessarily hold her back. While she may not be able to work in the secular world, with ingenuity and determination, she could manage to find an outlet for her talents within the Orthodox community.

Toba concludes by saying that, in any case, a "woman should not want to be a doctor, lawyer or nurse. Her role is to be a mother. As far as science goes, it's for nonbelievers because a lot of science conflicts with what the Talmud says" (Oct. 20, 2001). An example she offers of this type of conflict is the topic of the biblical view of creation as opposed to Darwinian evolutionary theory.

Most women seem to infer that their primary role is, and the majority of their time should be spent, being a Hassidic wife, mother and homemaker. While Orthodox Judaism encourages women to actualize their respective strengths, it also advocates using what God has granted to further the spiritual, emotional and physical growth of themselves and others.

In the final part of this section of interview questions, I asked about the most powerful learning experience or idea that these Hassidic women had experienced thus far in their lives. Five of the ten participants did not or could not think of an answer to this question, despite my gentle prodding. Five participants were able to give me some examples. Suri

Gittel talks about her years at Bais Yaakov as a turning point for her:

My years in Seminary shaped the direction my life took. It made me aware of the fact that I have a very full, rich life. All the Jewish teachings just seemed to make a whole lot more sense. (May 16, 2000)

Toba described her move to an unknown city as a life-enhancing event:

As a young girl of 19, I moved away from my family in Europe and came to Montreal, 3000 miles away, to be married. I was shy, introverted and had no confidence. What I learned was that I could be my own person and remake myself when I moved. It was an opportunity to not be my parent's daughter and to make my life exactly what I wanted it to be. (May 18, 2000)

Rebbetzin Fleisher shared that a personal tragedy was for her an eye-

opener: "When I lost my child, I learned things about people, about how

kind they were, that I wouldn't have known was there" (May 20, 2000).

Raizie relates how her religion and faith and the doing of a good deed

proved to have a significant meaning for her:

The most powerful learning experience I ever had was that life turns out the right way if you follow your faith. I was driving my car a few years ago, alone with my three children. We were coming home from New York. The car skidded, turned over and then miraculously straightened up again. But then I remembered that I had just done a *mitzvah* [good deed] for someone. When we think we are doing something for others, we are also doing something for ourselves. (May 23, 2000)

In many similar life-affirming accounts, the participants told me how

their religion, faith, and the Hassidic way of life provided the foundation for

them to cope with new challenges. It is the solid structure that their

lifestyle affords them that, they believe, allows them to construct meaning that is unique and personal. These meaning making practices enable these women to make sense of their lives. From a literacy perspective, they represent examples of how these women learn "cultural modes of identity and personhood" in the process of coming to know themselves and others (Street, 1995, p. 140). It's not to England that I'm traveling, It's not to France. It's not to Thailand I am going.

I am going

to clean off the stove and wipe the milk off the fridge. I'm going I'm on my way to the emptiness of the house after the children have left for school, when I and my coffee cup will murmur nothing, and we will gaze at the bright, cloudy blank of the window.

Up, up and away. I'm in a hurry. I've said goodbye. I've said so long! All by myself, I will be here in myself, with the refrigerator humming I'm letting go. And I shall sail

into my own

it's my very own whiteness.

(S. Shapiro, 1990, p. 192)

In this poem, Sarah Shapiro, a religious Jewish woman, in a book widely read among Orthodox women, not only expresses how her selftranscendence is based upon the mundane, but how the relations in her life, her children and her home are the starting point for her selfidentification. The last section of interview questions was asked only after many hours of interactions with each woman enabled me to reach a deeper level of trust and rapport. I wanted to know what was really in the minds, thoughts and hearts of each participant, what significant events stand out in their lives — what they really care and think about, what has been particularly meaningful.

It was no surprise to hear that the major focus of these Hassidic woman's lives is to produce, nurture and educate their children. Having a large family is a commandment and the hope of every bride. My dialogues with the Hassidic woman in Outremont reveal them to be the center of the emotional worlds of their families. They are the givers of life and love. Despite the economic, emotional and physical hardships that are incurred by the carrying, delivering and raising of children, I observed an infinite amount of patience, goodwill and love bestowed on children and grandchildren. These children are raised to be satisfied with very little material wealth.

The love, attention, and solid education are given freely and joyfully. One sees a profound concern for the well-being of each family member and a view of children as a vital resource of happiness. Beyond obeying the *halakhic* (law) obligation of "Be fruitful and multiply", both men and women see children as their ultimate goal. However, as community leaders and the women themselves have voiced, the demographic growth

of this sector of the population is causing serious financial strain and hardships. Most of the Hassidim I spoke with have modest incomes. In their struggle to provide for their families, the Hassidim have the advantage of their strong faith:

We don't make long-range plans. We plan for each day. And God will provide. We believe that God will help us. So we just do what we have to do. We don't say we can't have more children because we can't afford it, or we'll need for the future. We just do it. Each day is its own. God will take care of the rest. We don't plan for the future. We plan for today. (Rebbetzin Fleisher, Mar. 23, 2001)

The notion that God or Hashem watches over and protects the

righteous Hassidic Jew is also evident in Chaya's remarks:

I was in a motel one day and I lost my good earrings. I was very upset because I was given them by my in-laws for my wedding. We looked all over for them, turned the room upside down but they were no where. So, we went out and gave some money to charity and said the prayer you say when you lose something. Upon returning to the motel, there they were – right on the nightable (May 26, 2000).

More recently, this demonstration of faith linked to good fortune was

reported in an issue of Hamodia. The article contained many stories

surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist tragedy in New York City.

Each anecdote reveals the belief that "Hashem [God] with His infinite

mercy and hidden methods will guide people away from danger." I include

two of these accounts:

When Yaakov alighted from the train that morning on the way to work at his office in the World Trade Centre, he had not yet finished the *daf* [Tamud Page] he learned everyday during his commute. Afraid that his hectic day would prevent him from doing so, he sat down to finish it right in the train station. Nothing was going to prevent him from completing his self-imposed daily learning obligation. Therefore, he was late for his job that fateful morning at the World Trade Center. (Sept. 28, 2001, p. 64)

About a week before the attack, Moshe received a pink slip from the company he had loyally served for the past 22 years, headquartered in the World Trade Center. On the verge of marrying off his oldest child, he refused to give in to despair, knowing that *Hashem* [God] runs the world and His ways are compassionate. It didn't take very long for him to figure out the extent of *Hashem*'s [God] compassion. (Sept. 28, 2001, p. 64)

Both of these reports are perceived by Hassidic women to be

further examples of being rewarded with the gift of life because of their faith. It is the insular, structured and circumscribed life that provides these women with protection. It is their religious belief that seems to give them the framework and context that contribute to their sense of contentment and feeling of well-being.

As alluded to throughout this discussion, these women consistently report that it is through their children that they feel fulfilled and valued. The Hassidic women I interviewed fervently believe that their need for meaning, gratification, joy and prestige are all obtained through children. They see childbirth and the raising of children both as a privilege and obligation. Responsibility, hardship, and sacrifice are crucial components of this life's project. Although it is clear that the physical and emotional cost of bearing and raising so many children is paid primarily by the woman, I did not come across any woman who did not use the expression "Boruch hashem" (Thank God) when a discussion of children ensued.

Time and again, I was assured that nobody coerces them into

having more children, if the woman herself does not want to. I believe that

because a Hassidic woman's options are sometimes limited to home,

children, and a small selection of acceptable careers, many ambitious,

creative and intelligent women choose to channel their skills and talents

into the realm of childrearing. It is the children that cement the Hassidic

family, adding depth and meaning to the woman's existence. Yisroel

Miller's, In Search of the Jewish Woman (1984), speaks to the

significance of motherhood:

We have forgotten.

We have forgotten that the miracle of bearing children is nothing less than entering into a partnership with G-d (Talmud, *Nidda* 31a).

We have forgotten the joyous wonder of the first mother, Chava [Eve]: "I, together with G-d, have made a man!" (Bereishis/Genesis 4:1).

We have forgotten how the Torah, depicting our relationship with *Hashem* [God], describes it by a Divine metaphor of mother and child, with the whole Jewish nation portrayed in the role of the loving mother.

We have forgotten who we are, even what our physical selves are. The genes within us are the legacy of generations of saintly ancestors, and we have the sacred privilege of passing on to our children the chromosomes of Abraham and Sarah. Each baby is another link, and a step closer to the arrival of Moshiach [Redeemer, lit. Messiah]: "The son of David will not come until all the souls are born" (Talmud, *Yevamos* 62a). Once we begin to remember, does there remain any need to "justify" a career of motherhood, or to feel apologetic for the blessing of a large family? (pp. 72-73)

The essence of Miller's words is that the Jewish woman does not

have to be different to be great, that if she does nothing but bear and

raise a child in the Torah tradition, she is realizing the feminine potential of

her people. In this way, Miller's valorization of the Jewish mother is

simultaneously a validation of the significance of motherhood and of

Torah education in Judaism. Motherhood is a woman's way of connecting

to other religious women and expressing the giving that is idealized in her

society. Sarah Chana, in the following passage, crystallizes this

sentiment:

I feel very accomplished. For Rosh Hashana, I went to Monsey, New York and cooked for 22 people — all my children and grandchildren. That is what I care about and think about. It is my *nachos* [pride], my profit and the return on my investment. (Sarah Chana, Mar. 30, 2001)

The jewel at the center of Sarah Chana's life is her twelve children, who range in age from 2 to 26. In addition, she also watches over other people's children; coordinates the *bikkur cholim* (group that visits the sick) and provides meals for families in need. Sarah Chana cooks supper "in between somebody's math problem and somebody's Hebrew homework." On Thursday nights, she says, "I stay up till 2, cooking for *Shabbas*." "I love it," she adds with pleasure. "I make everything from scratch, like *challah*. That especially is very satisfying. It's busy, but it's a good busy." As she sits at the long table that fills her dining room, her sleeping toddler, Avrami is in her arms, and home-made oatmeal cookies are cooling on the kitchen counter. She continues:

You have to prioritize everything. Whatever needs to be done presently, that's what I do. I know that everything *Hashem* [God] throws at me is part of his plan. Before I wake up the kids in the morning, when my husband is in synagogue, I spend a few moments just relaxing by myself and listening to music. It really sets a great tone for the day. (Oct.12, 1999)

In the process of writing, a question that was, and always will be, a mystery to me recurred: Where do these women find the time and energy for so many extra activities? It appears that in addition to daily chores and child rearing, almost all of them were active in their community, planning fund-raisers, arranging tea parties, taking computer courses at TAV, going to exercise classes, attending a weekly study group. As well, they find opportunities for entertainment and a social life in their volunteer work for charity organizations or at their children's schools. Although the word for amusement, *bidur*, is foreign to the Hassidic spirit, (and often they voiced disdain for the secular woman's need for shallow and vulgar amusement), to these Hassidic women, these outlets provide a sense of renewal, a way to restore themselves by being joyful and creating pleasure for others.
to indulge their own desires, feel such outings are needed as a form of

release and relaxation. The intensity with which they celebrate holiday

festivities, engagement parties and weddings, for example, attests to the

integral role these occasions provide in their lives.

With this busy schedule in mind, I was able to move into a topic

that provoked the most creative and surprising answers. I asked,

If you were a non-Hassidic woman for one week, what would you want to do? Where would you be? That is, if you could be someone other than a Hassidic woman with no laws or traditions at all, what might you be doing? What career might you be in?

Almost all women initially had trouble with this question. They

smiled, thought about it, paused. Of the ten participants, four could not or

would not allow themselves to even contemplate an answer. Four

participants did provide responses:

Raizie: This question is so hard to answer. Being a Hassidic woman is my whole identity. When I look around at the secular world, there's nothing I would want to do. Maybe I would want to go on vacation and swim in an ocean. But I shudder just thinking about men seeing me in a bathing suit so immodestly dressed. (Mar. 25, 2000)

Rebbezin Fleisher: I don't have any temptations to do anything. I'm satisfied with my husband and family. I could be anything I want as a Hassidic woman, so why would I want to be non-Hassidic? We weren't exposed so we don't know. (Mar. 18, 2001)

Tzipporah: Even if I could escape from responsibility for one week I still can't imagine not *davening* [praying], or eating a lobster or going to see a show in New York. It would be a disadvantage for me, to be anything other than a Hassidic woman. Why would I want to fall lower? (Mar. 5, 2000) Shoshana Ruchel: Even if I could go on vacation for a week I would worry about the children. I never saw my mother going on vacation. It's not my frame of mind to think this way. I don't let my imagination go there. (Mar. 12, 2001)

From these comments and my own observations, I would conclude that the daily lives of these participants are so predictable, that an unknown activity is scary to contemplate. As well, it would place them in a situation that would not be nearly as appealing as their current lives. The anxiety provoked by merely imagining any of these pursuits far outweighs the pleasure they imagine this activity might provide. I was cautioned about even posing this question by Toba. She warned: "You're asking for trouble. You could possibly cause some discontent for some women by putting a worm in their heads" (Mar. 5, 2001).

These responses suggest that it is entirely out of the realm of thinking, experience, religious belief and tradition to imagine life any way other than how they are presently living it. In some cases, I felt almost insensitive to suggest that they even contemplate a life other than their present one. Even if I did lead some participants to a place in their minds they had never before contemplated, it was momentary and elusive. However, four of the ten participants did indulge themselves in this one brief moment of pure fantasy. The thoughts they expressed were accompanied by a smile:

Chaya: I'd love to go to Israel with my husband. Sometimes we escape to Ruby Foos Motel for an evening. The little children don't know. (Mar. 26, 2001)

Toba: I'd love to be a lawyer in a court of law. If there were separate classes for women to study law, I would be there. (Mar. 7, 2000)

Suri Gittel: I dream of having my hair back, of being a doctor in the ER, of skiing in the Alps. (Mar. 1, 2001)

Devorah Esther: I would want to be piloting the Concorde, knowing a yacht was waiting for me when I landed. I'm not sure I would take my family along, just my husband. If I really let my head go crazy, I would love to go to one of those all inclusive resorts in the Caribbean. I heard that people swim without their clothes on. But after 10 children, I don't think it's fair for anyone to see my body! (Mar. 18, 2001)

These answers reflect the fact that some Hassidic women are not

quite as removed from the real world as one might suppose. They are

aware of the Alps, the Concorde and all inclusive holiday resorts such as

Club Med. At the same time, even in their fantasy, I did not detect any

remorse, regret or sadness at not being able to be a doctor, a lawyer or a

pilot. At the end of the day, the Hassidic women I interviewed would not

trade their lives for anyone elses. Rebbetzin Fleisher addresses this lack

of desire to do or be anything else:

People don't understand how completely fulfilled we are even if we are bound by our laws to behave in certain ways. They think we are restricted and backwards, narrow-minded. They think we are missing out on a lot of what life has to offer. It's just the opposite — the Gentile world is to be pitied. It is their lives that are shallow and limited. Today people are so spoiled and narcissistic and only concerned with self-gratification. It's not who you are but what you have. Hassidic women think and care for others because, personally, we have it all. (Mar. 20, 2001)

In keeping with the goal of exploring what is truly important to the

Hassidic women in this inquiry, I moved to a more serious and reality -

based topic. I asked what the women, themselves, felt were the pressing

issues facing them:

If you were conducting a study about the Hassidic women in Outremont today, what do you feel are the issues, concerns that you would want to focus on? In other words, what do you worry about?

A few participants mentioned financial concerns:

Practical day-to-day living is difficult. Money issues are exacerbated because of the large families and men who can't get jobs. The divorce rate, although still very low, is much higher than it ever was. (Tzipporah, May 1, 2001)

Living in a community that is somewhat insular yet geographically

located among non-Jews is an additional worry:

The streets. Outside influence. Peer pressure is too strong today. It's hard to raise our kids the way we want to. Many men must take taxis, because they won't get on a public bus. Children can't go into a *dépanneur* [convenience store] because of the magazines. In the summer we can't take our kids to the parks because of how people are dressed. (Chaya, May 2, 2001)

Here, Chaya echoes a participant who reported earlier on that the

summer months are particularly difficult for Hassidic families in Outremont.

Unlike the Tosh community which is isolated in Boisbriand, the Hassidim

in Outremont face the summer surrounded by non-Jews who, according to

Hassidic standards, dress immodestly. Unless they are fortunate enough to have summer cottages in enclaves north of Montreal or are able to send their children to camps run by Hassidim in the Catskill mountains of New York State, it is almost impossible to avoid seeing people scantily dressed.

Tzipporah explains an additional problem of living among non-Jews in Outremont:

I don't think my neighbours are so happy that we have so many children, even though our children are taught to play quietly outside. There was recently an article in the Outremont newspaper that said, because Hassidic women are having so many children, soon there won't be room for the French to walk on the sidewalk, because the Jews are taking over. One city counsellor is trying to drive all the Jews out. She will not rest until Outremont is Jew-free. Hopefully when the *Moshiach* [Messiah] comes, Hassidic people will be looked up to instead of looked down upon. (Feb. 1, 2001)

This comment refers to what a few participants believe is the anti-

semitism they face in their neighborhood. This is manifest, according to

some women, in unpleasant incidents involving what they perceive to be

unjust confrontations and accusations.

In my final interview meetings with these ten women, I thought it

would be interesting to learn how they believe the non-Hassidic Jewish

world and the non-Jewish world view them. Devorah Esther quips, "Before

or after they found out I didn't have horns?" (Feb. 12, 2001) Shoshana

Ruchel explains: "People look at us with pity, thinking how sad and boring

our lives must be. I couldn't care less. I am what I am. I greet everyone with a smile" (Feb. 12, 2001). A similar sentiment is expressed by Yehudit: "I don't care how I'm viewed or thought about. When I walk on the street, I walk proudly" (Feb. 12, 2001). Shoshana Ruchel corroborates this attitude:

The non-Hassidic world thinks that we are closed in. The smart people know, the ones that don't, it's too bad for them. Those who get to know me end up being pleasantly surprised that I am much more "with it" than they had thought. (Feb. 22, 2001)

Directing her answer specifically to me, Sarah Chana replied:

You may know a lot more in psychology, but just because I don't have a degree and I don't know fancy terms doesn't mean that I am backwards or ignorant. Don't judge us by our dress or our behaviour. Just because we are not so exposed doesn't mean that we don't know a lot. There is a lot of intelligence behind those aprons. (Feb. 19, 2001)

From this comment, I infer that Sarah Chana is telling me that a college

degree does not necessarily imply intelligence, that one does not need to

have access to university education or other literacy resources to be

knowledgeable.

These women were very vocal and outspoken when asked what they would like the non-Hassidic world, both fellow Jews and non-Jews alike, to know about them. I asked, if there was one message they would like conveyed, what would it be? Suri Gittel says that "because English is not our first language, we are shy to speak it. That doesn't mean we are unable to express ourselves." She further suggests:

We are normal and lead normal lives — we are not held hostage. We are not to be pitied. I am a regular, ordinary person like everyone. Leave us alone. We are not objects for your curiosity. Respect my boundaries. (Mar. 14, 2001)

I sensed that Suri Gittel was pretty much fed up with people who were

quick to stereotype her as someone to feel sorry for and regarded as

strange or different. Sarah Chana was equally adamant about not being

viewed as an oddity:

The non-Hassidic and non-Jewish woman should respect us because we have principles and we stick to them. We are not brainwashed. We are not a cult. We are Hassidic because we want to be. We are not forced into this role. (Mar. 21, 2001)

Shoshana Ruchel adopts the position that not all Hassidim should

be painted with the same brush stroke. She specifically refers to the

recent income tax fraud uncovered in the Tosh community in Boisbriand:

I would like people to know that what happened in Tosh wasn't so bad. There's fraud all over the world. They didn't steal or rob a bank but it put all the Hassidim in a dark, bad light. If there is one Hassidic person that lies, that doesn't mean we all lie. We are trying to bring up an honest generation. I would like them to have a picture that Hassidim are honest, good people. (Feb. 28, 2001)

It appears from these bits of conversations, that Hassidic women

are sensitive to, and aware of, what they perceive as curiosity, pity and

disdain that emanate from the outside world and particularly from their

immediate neighbours. Yehudit sums up the way she reconciles her

lifestyle:

Hassidic homes are very special. There is so much purity, caring and giving. Even if there is no money, there is so much happiness. Our life is a pure life. It's on a higher level. It's a righteous of life. We are luckier than most. We accept what our neighbours do and we don't envy them or make fun of them. You live your way, I'll live my way. People should mind their own business. I don't care what people think about me. I only care what *Hashem* [God] thinks about me. I am happy and proud with who I am. (Yehudit, Apr. 25, 2001)

After teaching at Bais Yaakov Seminary for ten years, I began this

interview process with one recurrent purpose in mind: As a woman and as

a Jew, I could learn a lot about life, family, community and giving from this

inquiry. The answers these women gave to my last question---- what can

the non-Hassidic woman learn from you --- confirmed this notion. Each

woman offered a sentiment that is significant and meaningful:

Raizie: They can learn how to be upright and that giving brings the most satisfaction. They can look at us and see how our whole lives we strive to do what's right. (Apr. 1, 2001)

Chaya: How beautiful life can be without always trying to show off, without having to prove anything. How, by knowing and accepting boundaries, it is not restrictive but fulfilling and special. (Apr. 30, 2001)

Sara Chana: How our homes have *Shalom Bayais* [harmony and peace]. We can teach them what inner serenity is all about — that you can be happy even with limitations. (May 7, 2001)

Devorah Esther: We could teach others about what a marriage means. We don't live together to try it out. We get married for good. We do not worry about our husbands having affairs. There is a stability and security in our marriages that doesn't exist in secular relationships. We have very strong family values and there is a lot of love and respect between spouses, even though we don't show it publicly — by us there is more love and respect on the inside. We are not inferior to men. The truth is just the opposite. The more strong a Hassidic man is, the more he has to respect his wife. This is a value of Torah. (May 10, 2001)

Rebbetzin Fleisher: Everything from modesty to compassion to how to run a home, to the idea of negating of self for the sake of the family, to the sanctity of family life. A Hassidic woman does not have to go all over the world to find herself. She knows who she is, what her role is in life. It's well defined. (Apr. 26, 2001)

Yehudit: How we all help each other in our community. If someone has a baby, is sick, gets engaged, we are there for each other. There is a warmth and caring that is real and genuine. (May 2, 2001)

Tzipporah: We can teach the non-Hassidic woman what discipline means because we learn this at an early age. For example, my young son doesn't like to go to school on Sundays, but this is life and I tell him its only going to get harder. We teach him that it's all a part of who he is. (May 2, 2001)

Shoshana Ruchel: How strong we are. Our strength to restrict ourselves from certain things. When you keep the Torah and abide by its rules, your strength increases. (May 24, 2001)

Toba: We work on ourselves. We live full lives. Our values are more lasting. How we balance so much in our lives. (May 3, 2001)

Raizie: They can watch us and see how selfless we are, how we think about others, how committed we are in our marriages, how we work at making them succeed. They can learn how powerful a tradition can be. (Apr. 23, 2001)

These comments summarize what I have learned about the

Hassidic women from this inquiry. They exude a contentment and

satisfaction with themselves and their lives. That they live a life that is so

totally and completely delineated from birth to death provides them with

few decisions to make, few choices over which to agonize. The very fact that their lives are circumscribed by boundaries provides them with comfort, security and stability. Throughout the interview process and at their community events and celebrations, I was aware of the inner serenity to which Sara Chana refers. Indeed, I did observe the tremendous amount of respect and love in their relationships with their husbands. I marveled at the harmony and peace in their homes, despite the often small living space and the many children. I noted their selflessness, their commitment to their families, their friends and their community. I was struck by their sense of discipline in their unwavering religious beliefs and observances,

Shoshana Ruchel mentions the attribute of strength in her answers to my final question. These excerpts and this research has led me to reconsider the notion of the Hassidic woman as a victim who is unseen and unheard, whose voice is excluded because she is a traditionally observant Jew. The women in my study feel that they are already liberated. The findings of this study reveal the priorities of the Hassidic woman as maintaining harmony in the home and being devoted to her husband and children.

In *Distant Sisters, The Women I Left Behind,* Judith Rotem (1997) writes about her personal experience as an ultra-Orthodox woman in Israel and her subsequent defection. She subdivides the large group of

her sample of Orthodox women in Israel into three categories. The first she calls the "radiant women", who she describes as the "bold women who rub elbows with the outside world easily." Her second group is dubbed the "extinguished" women, those "who have gotten older before their time, who are "often on the brink of collapse". In the third group, which she calls the "coping women," are the silent majority who rarely express complaints and grievances, who are hard-working and diligent, who "always try harder". My own limited sample of women can also be categorized along these lines. However, I have found that I am unable to separate the women in my inquiry quite so neatly. That is, the women who appear to be more "out there", more progressive, almost feminist, the radiant women Rotem conceptualizes, would also fall into Rotem's "coping" category. Women like Suri Gittel and Toba, who wear sophisticated clothes and integrate their work outside their home with raising children, also typify the austere, righteous "everything is OK all of the time" women that Rotem describes. They "cope" with husband, home and children but without anger, resentment or bitterness. They admit to some form of self-denial and self-pleasure but do so willingly and happily if, in the end, it benefits their family and community.

My sample of participants does not support the findings of Rotem's extinguished woman category. Even the most hard-working, sleep-

deprived, poor, exhausted women I interviewed (Sarah Chana and Raizie) do not appear as Rotem suggests as "sick, depressed or irritable". From our conversations, these women did not strike me as less content than the others, or on the verge of breaking down. Their steadfast beliefs in their tradition, in the importance of their roles as mother and wife and in their duty to protect their children from the "foreign winds" that threaten them from all sides, keeps them afloat. If I were to quote the words that I heard most often from all ten participants it would be *Boruch Hashem*, or "Thank God". In their hearts and souls they are grateful for what they have. They do not want or need the material trappings of their neighbours. They are thankful for the strength they are given by God to nourish and sustain the ongoing fire, which ensures the survival of the Hassidic way of life. Aware that their role is so vital, all participants felt blessed and privileged to have been given the opportunity to create and nurture Jewish souls.

The theme of self-affirmation appears and reappears in the many hours of conversations that I had with these women. Between the lines that address issues of what being a Hassidic women is all about and how Hassidic women negotiate modernity, an indirect inward reflection and self-strengthening becomes evident. In a variety of ways and in response to many interview questions, I see these women reflecting upon and reaffirming the roles that women have traditionally played in their culture. When responding to the threats and concerns they face in a secular world, they choose in their responses to reaffirm and protect what they already have. Their answers show the community's position of not attempting to condemn detractors or to forge an identity through differentiation. While there is no direct confrontation with feminist issues, there is the call for religious women to appreciate their culture amidst the perceived degradation by feminists.

In the end, all women, even those who admitted to being initially anxious about our meeting, told me how much they enjoyed the interviews. They seemed to welcome something different in their lives. They said they found the questions "fascinating", and that they gave them something to think about, beyond their day-to-day tasks

I began Chapter Four by quoting "The Ode to the Woman" (Eishet Hayil). I have chosen to title this inquiry with the English translation of Eishet Hayil, *Women of Valor.* The in-depth interviews with the ten women of this study represent for me the modern day reincarnation of the woman of valour. This study suggests that this female prototype is very much alive and well in Hassidic circles in Outremont and in Boisbriand.

EPILOGUE

When one begins to study a group of people or an aspect of a culture that was previously excluded from consideration, a fundamental revision of how one thinks about the culture in question is frequently required. Equally important, though less often articulated, is the change this process demands on the part of the author. I write as a feminist scholar who strives to be engaged, responsible, honest, and aware of the importance of my own position in the shaping of this account. As well, I write as a woman and a Jew with loyalties to Judaism, as well as to women. For me, the loyalty to Judaism goes deep into my childhood. Judaism is my central identity and source of meaning. I am proud to be a Jew and to be a part of a rich and important tradition.

Just as the ethnographic process is not nearly as neat or selfevident as the product, I was not nearly as certain about what I was doing in the field as I may appear to have been in this writing. Not until I tried to put together all the pieces I had collected – pieces that made so much sense as I collected them – did I discover I was not where I thought I was. I believe that original ethnographic thinking is a lot harder than it looks, and that it cannot be done without mirrors. The evolution from the study I proposed in 1995 to the actual inquiry presented in this thesis was slow, often subtle, with numerous lapses of time in which I recall little

development. It was only two years ago that, with excitement, I became really engaged in this inquiry and I decided what I wanted to write, and by God and by Geertz I was going to write it!

I did not want my professional interests to eclipse my personal ones. There were times, particularly during the writing of this thesis, that I confronted information that was ethnographically significant but humanly damaging, when an incident or comment revealed more about an individual's perspective than I wanted to know. Although such unanticipated, unpredictable reactions from informants often gave me the insight that make ethnography so valuable. I had to distinguish carefully between what would help me and what could possibly hurt my participants. I simply do not believe, as Judith Stacey (1991) suggests, that "the lives, loves and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data — grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power" (p. 113). Rather, I believe there to be an ethical responsibility inherent in the research relationship, and that the "ethnographic mill" of data selection should be guided by that responsibility. Through much fine tuning of and reflection on my role in this process, I learned to make the distinctions I thought necessary to separate exploration from exploitation.

Most writers engage relatively reflexively in advocacy of woman and tend to stress women's oppression, male domination, gender stereotypes and male definitions of female roles. As I have shown, early feminist accounts of Judaism claimed that because Hassidic Judaism excludes women from *public* roles in religion and in the community, it effectively excludes them from other roles as well. Typically they do not address the ways in which a particular woman's culture and ways of believing, doing and knowing, may accept male gender constrictions for reasons beyond an outsider's understanding.

I have discovered that there is a great deal more to Hassidim than a patriarchal ideology. This discovery helped me to understand why these women would acquiesce to a system of meaning that, for the observer, seemingly disempowers them. I learned that, from their perspectives, their ways of thinking, living, believing, doing and valuing quite simply offer them something very wonderful in return. This does not mean they do not encounter tensions and struggles in their attempts to balance the religious and secular components of their daily lives. While it is true that, in the public realm, the Hassidic woman is silent because of laws of modesty, the women I interviewed, as evidenced in their dialogue and anecdotes, are very much present and vocal in the private lives of their homes and families.

Over time, my focus started to change or more accurately perhaps, had been changed — shaped by what I had seen and heard. As I began to give voice to some of those who have been voiceless and to raise to consciousness the hidden and unspoken conventions of society that have sustained that voicelessness, I gradually uncovered real-life "women of valour." These Hassidic women, I discovered, are well-respected, honoured, often exalted wives and mothers who dedicate their lives to the well being of their husbands, children and community. They are unique, forthright, open-minded and assertive – qualities I would never have imagined that I would come to attribute to this group of individuals. I am awed by the complexity of their character, by their intelligence, by their good nature, by the admirable way in which they reconcile themselves to often difficult circumstances. I am humbled by their generosity of spirit, their kindness, their tireless efforts to reach out to others in need and their sense of community and family. I am inspired by the exceptional vitality that these Hassidic women bring to their lives and the lives of others.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Hassidic way of understanding Judaism is that it touches every facet of human existence, from the most mundane to the most esoteric. A lesson that one can learn from Hassidic women is that each woman strives to make a mark on the world by investing her life with infinite meaning. These women teach one

how they make their basest instincts holy and pure, how they make the trivial godly, how dressing, speaking, eating, and even engaging in sexual relations can be sanctified. One can learn how every act, thought and word is believed to elevate one's soul. The Hassidic tradition tells its women that they can and should be intellectually and spiritually honest as they grapple with the challenges of being observant Jews. Their tradition assures them that they will realize their own tremendous potentials as they grow to greater emotional and spiritual heights. In this process, their actions, it is hoped, will soon bring the long-awaited redemption of their people.

The Hassidic women, whom I have often depicted with admiration and respect, readily acknowledge that their lives are far from idyllic. Throughout our conversations they repeatedly voiced worries and concerns over limited finances; the difficulties of raising so many children; the anti-semitism they encounter; a divorce rate that is rising; the ever present challenges and threats of negotiating life in a secular world; the pressures they face in their efforts to be a "super-mom", active community member and Torah observant Jew. It is important to note that, throughout, my personal beliefs and conclusions are based entirely on the data and theory that I obtained from participants and from other researchers. As Geertz (1973) points out, ethnographers accounts are their "own

constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (p. 9). In other words, what I have presented is the women's view of how they perceive themselves and their place in the world.

From this stance, I emerge from this inquiry with more empathy for the Orthodox world, than when I entered it. I now have a deeper understanding of its appeal to Hassidic women as well as an increased interest in finding new ways to express my own Jewish identity. Through participating with the women in their worlds, I came to appreciate the many attractive features they find in Orthodox Jewish life.

It is likely that the Hassidic population will continue to grow in strength, in number, in confidence and in economic influence given its faith and tenacity. I concur with Eisenberg (1995), who writes that Hassidim "against a backdrop of cyberspace and genetic engineering" (p. 89) will stand out as a living memorial to another era. I am confident that this inquiry, while adding to what is already known about literacy, will contribute to the complexity and richness of the field as created by others. No matter what the discipline or interest, I trust the reader will gain a palpable sense of what literacy means to these Hassidic women in Quebec and, by extension what it might mean in one's own framework. The Besht (Baal Shem Tov), founder of the Hassidic movement, devoted himself to the uplifting of fallen and lost souls. Even though I am far removed from the inner world of the Hassidic community, I have been inspired, uplifted and perhaps somewhat transformed by this small study of these women and their worlds.

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Appendix A

Coalition D'Organizations Hassidiques d'Outremont

Community leaders of the Hassidic and Ultra-orthodox communities of Outremont and surrounding areas have established a unique initiative to offer employment and business assistance services in partnership with the Federal government

The COHO initiative has been designed to:

assist members of the community to make career choices and find suitable gainful employment

enable entrepreneurs with both new and existing businesses to access services to help them compete and thrive in the global economy

provide information regarding government sponsored programs geared towards expansion and export

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Job placement

 Employment search strategies and assistance with resumés

+ Job bank

 Career counselling and assessment

Workshops

Business development services:

 Accessing appropriate government services and support for small business

 Support activities for export development and expansion

 Information on business startups for entrepreneurs

 Assistance in applying for business loans



Coalition d'Organisations Hassidiques d'Outremont

Services de placement et de développement commerciale

1209 av. Bernard ouest, bureau 205 Outremont, Québec H2V 1V7

Téléphone: (514) 272-6688 Télécopieur: (514) 272-8861 Appendix B

Ten Rules of Proper Speech

The Ten Rules of Proper Speech.

G-d desires that people live together in peace and unity, and the laws of proper speech are the Torah's way to achieve this. Actually, it is a simple principle: If one removes gossip, slander, divisiveness and anger from one's vocabulary, one automatically and dramatically improves one's own life and the lives of everyone in one's environment.

Here are the ten *basic* rules to remember:

1. It is loshon hora to convey a derogatory image of someone even if that image is accurate. Loshon hora is speech that can cause pain or harm to others.

2. A statement which is not actually derogatory but can ultimately cause someone physical, financial or emotional harm is also loshon hora. Hurtful words spoken directly to a person are another form of loshon hora.

3. It is loshon hora to humorously recount an incident that contains embarrassing information about a person even if there is no intent to cause harm or humiliation.

4. Loshon hora is forbidden even if you incriminate yourself as well.

5. Loshon hora can't be communicated in any way (i.e., writing, body language, verbal hints, etc.) 6. To speak against a community as a whole is a particularly severe offense. Harmful remarks about children are also loshon hora.

7. Loshon hora cannot be related even to close relatives.

8. Even if the listener has previously heard the derogatory account or the information has become public knowledge it should not be repeated.

⁹. Rechilus, which is telling one person a derogatory statement that another person said about them, is also forbidden because it causes animosity between people.

10. It is forbidden to listen to loshon hora. One should give the benefit of the doubt. Assume the information is inaccurate or that the person made an honest mistake.

It is important to note, at the same time, that there are times when loshon hora is permitted or, in fact, even required. Warning a person such as a potential business or marriage partner about potential harm is an example. On the other hand, second-hand information and baseless impressions have momentous implications. The questions of when you are allowed or even required to speak loshon hora are complicated. A Rabbinic authority with expertise in the Torah's laws of proper speech should be consulted in any of these cases.



10. 16.

The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation Appendix C

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Key Informant Questionnaire

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KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1. What kinds of books, texts, material, etc. are used to teach secular studies at the CEGEP level?
- 2. Who are the secular school teachers? How are they trained? How do they know what they can or cannot include in course curriculum?
- 3. Who makes the decision as to what is taught, what books are available in the library?
- 4. Have any women decided to pursue their higher education outside of the Orthodox community (e.g. at Dawson, Marie-Victorin). How is this viewed? What are they studying?
- 5. What do most women do with their D.E.C.'s?
- 6. Where else can (do) women learn (i.e., outside of formal classroom)?

Appendix D

Interview Impression Form

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INTERVIEW IMPRESSION FORM

Date:

Time:

Place of Interview:

Description of Setting:

Anyone present:

Interruptions/Distractions:

Description of Setting:

Level of Cooperation/Trust/Rapport with Interviewee:

Highlights of Interview/Noteworthy items, etc.

Overall Impression:

Name of Interviewee:

Appendix E

Consent Form to Participate

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CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I have read the description of the research project being conducted by Sharyn Weinstein Sepinwall entitled "Women of Valor - Literacy as the Creation of Personal Meaning in the Lives of A Select Group of Hassidic Women in Quebec."

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to investigate the roles, uses and functions of literacy in the lives of a select group of Hassidic women in and around Montreal. Emphasis will be on understanding how literacy serves the evolving needs of the group in the public (societal) public-private (education) and private (family, home, community) domains.

B. PROCEDURES:

This study will be conducted by Sharyn Weinstein Sepinwall. Each participant will be protected for confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms.

Conditions of Participation:

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at <u>anytime</u> without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential, that is, the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity and will use fictitious names.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published, but I will be able to see the text in advance of its publication.
- I understand the purpose of this study and know that there is no hidden motive of which I have not been informed.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT, I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print):

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE:

Appendix F

5 m. 1

Biographical Data Form

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Phone Number:

- 1. Your name: (This will remain confidential and anonymous)
- 2. Your age: Your husband's age:
- 3. Your marital status: Date of Marriage:
- 4. Number and ages of children:
- 5. Your educational background: Please include elementary, high school and beyond, plus any additional courses you took as well as the countries in which you received each diploma and names of each school you attended.

- 6. The educational background of your husband both secular and religious. Please see above question.
- 7. Your religious affiliation. (Which Hassidic group do you identify with)?

8. What are the main differences between your husband's education and your education? What are the main differences between your education and your daughter's education?

9. What language do you speak at home?

With your husband?

With your friends?

At school?

10. Do you work outside the home?Part-time or full-time?What do you do?

Appendix G

Interview Questions

BEING A HASSIDIC WOMAN

- 1. What does being a woman mean to you? Please give an example.
- 2. Do you feel valued by your husband, family, community? In what sense? Please give examples.
- 3. How do you define a successful woman? Do you define yourself as a successful woman? Why or why not?
- 4. Hassidic women are sometimes viewed as submissive, silent, without power neither seen nor heard. This is a focal point of my study is this true if so, how and why? If not, how and why?
- 5. Do you feel, because you are a woman, that you have been excluded from any activities or experiences that would have enhanced your growth and development as a woman?
- 6. Do you feel your talents, skills, and abilities are being recognized? Do you feel you are achieving your potential if so, how? If now, why not?
- 7. Does mothering and home care necessitate that you deny your personal desires? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 8. Do you sometimes feel like you want to escape the responsibilities of homemaking and child care? Explain.
- 9. Do you think that a woman who stays at home with her kids is a better mother? Why or why not?
- 10. Do you think a woman who stays home with her children can be totally fulfilled? Why or why not?
- 11. What about the woman who decides not to continue her education beyond high school and who chooses to be a stay-at-home mom? Do you think she is viewed differently by women who have received their CEGEP diplomas? How does she view herself in comparison to those who have this advanced secular education?
- 12. You are surrounded by secular values that are often contrary to Jewish values How do you feel good about yourself as a Hassidic woman? Do you feel that your femininity is sacrificed? Please give examples.
- 13. How has your sense of yourself as a woman been changing? Please give an example.

THE HASSIDIC WOMAN AND MODERNITY

- 14. Has the Women's Movement and feminism impacted your role as a Hassidic woman and if so, how? If not, why not?
- 15. How has life changed or is life changing for the Hassidic woman and how has it changed for you?
- 16. What are the differences or similarities between you and your mother in terms of observance and religion? Between you and your daughter? For example, are one of you more or less traditional or religious and if so, how?
- 17. Does modern society, confuse, create conflict, or make your role as a woman seem unclear? Does the outside secular world cause any problems today for you (compared to the time of your grandmother, etc.)?
- 18. Has the definition of mother or woman changed from that of your grandmother's era?
- 19. What are your concerns about girls your daughter's age?
- 20. Is your daughter faced with more challenges than you have been, or your grandmother was, being a Hassidic woman today? What are they? Does she face more problems or obstacles? Please give examples. Is her life more complex and perhaps ambiguous if so, how?
- 21. Did your mother drive a car? Do you drive a car? Will your daughter drive a car? Why or why not?

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HASSIDIC WOMEN AND HASSIDIC MEN

- 22. Are there differences between men and women in terms of their basic natures so that one sex is better suited to domestic and child care work?
- 23. Are there differences between men and women in terms of their basic natures, so that one sex is better suited to careers in the "caring professions"?
- 24. Some people believe that women are taught to think differently than men? Do you believe this is true? Please give examples.
- 25. Are women taught to read or understand the world differently than men? If so, in what ways?

- 26. How is the division of responsibilities done in your home? Who is in charge of what? What are the different roles? Describe how the labour is divided in your home. How do you feel about these different roles and responsibilities?
- 27. What do you think are the important similarities between men and women? What do you think are the differences between men and women?

HIGHER SECULAR EDUCATION FOR THE HASSIDIC WOMAN BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

- 28. How important is higher secular education for you and why?
- 29. Why do you want to complete your CEGEP diploma?
- 30. Does your community encourage or motivate you to undertake these studies? If so, how?
- 31. Does your community value your success in attaining a CEGEP diploma? Please describe how.
- 32. Are you concerned about getting high marks? Why or why not?
- 33. Beyond learning the course material, what other advantages do you see in going to school beyond high school)? (e.g., social)?
- 34. Has being in a CEGEP program changed the way you think about yourself or the world?
- 35. Have you come across an idea the course of your education that made you see things differently, or think about things differently?
- 36. Have you mastered a new field of knowledge that has been previously forbidden to women? If so, what is it? How has that new knowledge impacted your life as a woman, mother, in your family, in your community? (i.e., has that new knowledge changed the division of power between you and your husband, between you and your community)?
- 40. What has been most helpful to you about this CEGEP program?
- 41. Are there things this program doesn't provide that are important to you?
- 42. Are there things you would like to learn that you don't think you can learn at CEGEP?
- 43. What do you think will stay with you about your experiences here (in this

school, in this program)?

- 44. What happens to a girl who is particularly creative in terms of further education and/or career? What about the girl who is science- or mathoriented and seems to have a particular ability in this area? How would you feel if she were your daughter?
- 45. The Hassidic Jewish culture is one that has traditionally denied women access to higher education. How does CEGEP diploma impact the life of the Hassidic woman herself? How does it impact the relationship between the woman and her parents? Between the woman and her husband? Between the woman and her father? Between the woman and her community? Has this impacted your life and if so, how?
- 46. Does the education of women beyond high school present a possible threat or concern to the role of the traditional Jewish woman? Has this been the case for you? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 47. Does the granting of higher secular education expose women to issues that cause them to resent their traditional roles? If this the case for you, why or why not?
- 48. After you graduate from CEGEP, if you do not use your skills outside the home by working, will you (or do you) feel angry, resentful or guilty? How do you justify the time you spent in CEGEP? Do you feel the time was wasted why or why not?
- 49. Do women who continue their education beyond high school learn things that would be contrary to the Hassidic women's way of life? Please give examples.
- 50. Does your advanced secular knowledge "open the door" for you to rebel, to criticize, to feel conflicted as you try to remain true to the traditional values of domesticity (child rearing, housework, keeping a traditional home)?
- 51. Will the higher secular education that you are receiving (or have received) change the different roles of husband and wife and if so, how?
- 52. Is higher secular education for women valued by Hassidic men? Why or why not?
- 53. Do you think that there exists a notion or feeling from men in the Hassidic community that women's higher secular education is unnecessary? A waste of time? Meaningless? Have you experienced this personally from men in your life? (father, brother, grandfather, husband, son).
- 54. Does your higher education pose a threat or a concern to the men in your

life?

EDUCATION AND MEANING-MAKING OUTSIDE OF FORMAL SCHOOLING

- 55. How would you describe how you learn best? (in addition to CEGEP studies), if applicable?
- 56. Where and how do you learn about what is going on in the outside world (e.g., politics, news)? Why is it important to learn this or why not?
- 57. What you read something or watch TV without your husband's knowledge (or permission)? If so, how and why? Do you listen to the radio? If so, what kinds of programs?
- 58. If you do not read material relating to what is happening in the outside world, is this a problem for you? What would you like to know (learn) and how do you think you might learn it?
- 59. What do you read on a daily basis? On a weekly basis? From time to time? Do you use the computer? Do you use the internet?
- 60. What do you think is most important for Hassidic women to learn? What do you need to learn?
- 61. What do you think your daughter needs to know that you think was not as important for you to know? How will she access this knowledge?
- 62. Is there anything that you think a Hassidic woman should not learn? Why should she not learn it?
- 63. Looking back over your whole life, can you tell me about a really powerful learning experience that you've had, in or out of school? In your learning here at CEGEP, have you come across an idea that made you see things differently... or think about things differently?

THE HASSIDIC WOMAN AND HER THOUGHTS, DREAMS, GOALS ABOUT HER LIFE

- 64. What stands out for you in your life over the past few years?
- 65. What kinds of things have been important? What stayed with you?
- 66. Besides your friends and family, what do you care about, think about?
- 67. Having talked a bit about your life, now I would like you to think about yourself. How would you describe yourself to yourself? If you were to tell yourself who you really are, how would you do that?

- 68. Is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself in the past? What led to the changes?
- 69. Have there been any other turning points? How do you see yourself changing in the future?
- 70. If you think ahead, what will you and your life be like fifteen years from now?
- 71. A fantasy question...
 - If you were a non-Hassidic woman for one week, what would you want to do? What would you be? That is, if you could totally be someone other than a Hassidic woman with no laws or traditions at all, what might you be doing? What career might you be in?
- 72. If you were conducting a study about Hassidic women in Outremont today, what do you feel are the key issues, concerns that you would want to focus on?
- 73. How do you think you are viewed by non-Hassidic Jewish women? By non-Jews generally?
- 74. What would you like the non-Hassidic world to know about you, (i.e., what message would you want to convey)?
- 75. What can non-Hassidic women learn from you? What can I learn from you?

Appendix H

Respect For Your Parents

Name:

KOSHER SPEECH CHART

Children:

Each day rate yourself on a scale of 1-3 points (daily average) for answering enthusiastically to your parents' requests.

1 = I listened (e.g. "yes") 3 = I listened EAGERLY (e.g. "surely!", "gladly!", "of course!")

Note.

If you have to disagree, it may be done in 'QUESTIONING FORM' as though asking for information; e.g. "Mommy, isn't it possible that ...?" "Father, could it be ...?" (If mistakenly accused, you may ask: "Father/Mother, may I explain what happened?")

WEEK	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SHABBOS	WEEKLY
#1	·					-		
#2								
#3								
#4								

GRAND TOTAL

DAILY GOAL: WEEKLY GOAL: MONTHLY GOAL: maximum 3 points maximum 21 points maximum 84 points

If you made a mistake (e.g. direct contradiction, interruption, raised tone of voice), it may be corrected through a verbal or written apology.

PRIZE AWARDED UPON ACHIEVING

POINTS !!

MOMMY jT THAT...?

Prize: _____

Parent's Signature: ____

Data of Award.

1

Please review these with your children. Preferably, have each child write the answers, then question the children in turn around the cinner table. $-s^{2m}$

WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY ???

I. SPEECH RETRAINING EXERCISES: OBEDIENCE

HALACHA: A CHILD SHOULD OBEY AND NOT CONTRADICT A PARENT/TEACHER'S WISHES; however, should the need be *essential*, he may do so tactfully in 'QUESTIONING FORM', as though asking for information or clarification - so that the elder may correct himself without being embarrassed. (Yorah Daiah 240:11)

The proper form is: "Father, doesn't it say that ...?", "Mother, is it (not) possible that ...?"

Example:

Your father tells you to go to sleep now, but you still have ten more minutes of homework to finish. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY? "Father, may I please stay up ten more minutes to finish my homework?"

 Your father asks you to buy a book for your sister Rachel, but you think it's too easy for her. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

" Father.

 Your father wants to study with you now, but you promised to meet a friend at this time. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

<u>"Father</u>

3. Your mother tells you to wear your navy sweater, but you think your green one matches better. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

"Mother.

4. Your mother wants you to wash the dishes now, but you are exhausted. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

"Mother.

5. Your father tells you to play outside, but you were enjoying an indoor game. WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

"Father.

DID YOU SHOW KOVOD AND YIRAH TODAY?

HILCHOS "KOVOD"

DID YOU . . . Stand up when you saw your parent (at least twice today)? Serve your parents cheerfully? Greet your parents when they came in? Accompany your parents when they went out?

HILCHOS "YIRAH"

DID YOU' Sit in your parent's place? Call your parent by first name? Leave your parent's presence without permission? Eat first in the the presence of your parent? Walk in front of your parent? Wake up your parent when he/she wouldn't want you to? Speak to your parent in a gentle and pleasant tone of voice? Interrupt or interfere in your parent's conversation? Answer first instead of your parent? Contradict or disobey your parent? Embarrass your parent in any other way, *chas v'shalom*? Confirm your parent's opinion in his/her presence (during dispute, saying "I agree")? Apologize for wrongdoing or being *oiver* (transgressing) any of the above?

Ideally, a child should always agree with his parent. He may not contradict a parent in a direct manner. However, should the need to disagree be IMPORTANT, it can be done CAREFULLY using a 'questioning form' (in private when possible). The correct form is: "Tatty/Mommy, isn't it possible that ...?" "Could it be ...?" "May I please explain?"

Where a correction is not important, a child should practice "shtika" and remain silent!

The following questions will help to protect you from speaking in a *chutzpadik* manner:

- 1. Am I addressing my parents CAREFULLY, as a "king and queen"?
- 2. Am I careful not to say "no", "won't", uh-uh", "can't"?
- 3. Is the correction or contradiction absolutely necessary?
- 4. Am I "asking" or "telling" my parent?

REMEMBER: THE REWARD FOR HONOURING PARENTS IS . . . "ARICHAS YOMIM"!!

COMMON FORMS OF CONTRADICTION

DISOBEYING PARENTAL REQUESTS

Mother:Yoni, please go to bed in five minutes.Child:No! I have too much homework left!Father:Yoni, we learned that it is assur (forbidden) for children to contradict or disobey
their parents. If there's a problem, you may ask about it respectfully in a
'question form'. Now, please apologize to Mommy and try it again-
Child:Child:Sorry, Mommy. May I please stay up a little longer to finish my homework?
That's much better. When you speak respectfully, it makes us want to listen.

CORRECTING 'WRONG' INFORMATION

Father	The <i>brocho</i> on rice is ' <i>mezonos</i> '.
Child:	No, it's not! It's 'shehakol'!
Father:	Dovid, that's not how one corrects a parent. Please apologize and rephrase it properly (al pi halacho).
Child:	Sorry, Abba. Isn't it written that the brocho on rice is 'shehakol'?
Father.	Miriam, it's your turn to set the table tonight!
Child:	Uh-uh! It's Yoni's tum!
Father	Miriam, are you asking me or telling me?

- Father. Miriam, are you asking me or telling me?
- Child: Sorry, Abba. Is it possible that it's Yoni's turn to set the table tonight?

CORRECTING UNFAIR ACCUSATIONS

Mother: Eli, please don't fight with your brother!

Child: I'm not! He started it!

Mother: Eli, contradicting a parent is not respectful. If you were mistakenly accused, you may ask: 'Mommy, may I explain what happened?' Now, please apologize and let's try it again.

ASK YOUR CHILD!

- 1. You disagree with your parents or teacher. What should you say?
- 2. You want to make a suggestion to your parent or teacher. How can you say it?
- 3. You feel wrongly accused. How can you express yourself?

Included in this manual are exercises for children for the purpose of reinforcing proper speech patterns. It is important that parents review the completed exercises with their children. Consider family discussion.

* More common expressions might be: "Isn't it ...?" or "Could it be ...?"; however, the phrasing "Is it (not) possible that ...?" is generally a more respectful format. Rather than disagree, a child should imply that he did not <u>understand</u>.

COMPLETE THE SCENARIOS: WHAT WOULD BE THE RESPECTFUL PHRASING?

. . .

An exercise for children







The following questions will help to determine whether you are

MODELLING AND REINFORCING

KOVOD, YIRAH AND DERECH ERETZ

MODELLING

- 1. Do you speak to your spouse and others in an appropriate manner?
- 2. Do you speak to and about your children's teachers with the respect and gratitude that is due them?
- 3. Do your children witness the honour and esteem in which you hold your *rav*, *rebbe* or *poisek*?
- 4. Do you model *kovod* and *yirah* for your own parents and in-laws -(e.g. accompanying them, serving them, not sitting in their seats, not contradicting unless essential and in a tactful manner)?
- 5. Are you careful in the halachos of derech eretz?
 - When you make a request of your children, do you say 'please'?
 - Do you express appreciation when a child does something for you?
 - Do you remind your children to thank the carpool, bus or taxi driver; the storekeeper; the cleaning lady; the babysitter; the waiter or waitress?

REINFORCING CORRECT BEHAVIOURS: DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE OR PRAISE YOUR CHILDREN WHEN THEY . . .

- 1. Fulfill the *halachos* of *kovod* and *yirah* for parents (e.g. serve you or your spouse, use a questioning format or remain silent in case of disagreement)?
- 2. Show kovod towards grandparents (e.g. rise, serve or phone them)?
- 3. Show respect towards their teachers?
- 4. Offer a seat, open a door, or carry parcels for elders?
- 5. Speak kindly or show consideration to one another?



Appendix I

Letter to Students

Dear Boys and Girls:

Some recent comments from a few of your parents reminded me of the following little story:

At breakfast one morning eleven year old Yanky gave his mother a note. It read: What mothe owes Yanky. Itemized were a list of services rendered: for sweeping the walk, for cutting th grass, for bringing home the milk from the store, for cleaning up my room, for staying with littl brother: and the total \$14.82. Yanky's mother gave him the money and he sent off to school. The stunned and saddened, his mother sat down to think about what had happened to her family th things had come to this. The next morning she placed a note at Yanky's place for breakfast. It, to was an itemized list headed: "What Yanky owes Mother."

Yanky took the note, read it slowly, folded it into his pocket and silently sent to school. C returning home, he immediately went upstairs to bed and called his Mother. She came into the room and he pretended to be asleep. Beside his bed she found an envelope. It contained \$14.82 at a note which read. "I love you." Yanky being an eleven year old boy, pretended not to cr Mother, being a mother, didn't try.

We parents do not expect you, our children, to continually express your thankfulness for all the things we do for you. All that is part of being a parent. As this little tale indicates, there is a lot hard work and effort in bringing up a child and alot of sacrifice on the part of every mother and father. But we want you to regard us as people, not just bill payers and allowance providers and car-pool drivers. We have feelings and moods and problems, and we want you to be sensitive them.

We want you to respect us because we are your parents.

"Honour Your Father and Your Mother." You see, we have learned alot about life through t years. We don't know everything, but give us a chance to teach you the best of what life h taught us.

And we want you to talk to us. Don't shut us out of yourselves, especially as you grow older. V can't live your life for you and we don't want to, but we want to share it and only you can ma that possible.

We want you to help us. Life is not always easy. Making a home a happy place means that eve member of the family has to cooperate and sacrifice a little for the good of all. You are old enou to understand that.

And most of all, remember this. We want you to grow up to be a good human being, to be beauti person inside. But that won't happen by accident. We want to guide you along the way a encourage you to fulfill your own wonderful potential.

We love you and you owe us nothing for our love. Just let us walk beside you for awhile.

Appendix J

Course Listings at TAV

ATTESTATION D'ÉTUDES COLLÉGIALES



Type of sanction

ATTESTATION D'ÉTUDES COLLÉGIALES

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

This program is designed for students interested in working with young children. The curriculum includes professional courses related to the observation and understanding of young children. Field work will be an important component of the Early Childhood Care program. Students will be placed in a field work agency and will be supervised by a stage coordinator and administrator.

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Graduates of the early childhood education program work with infants and young children in garderies in Quebec. This attestation together with three years of work experience in a garderie will allow graduates to be included within the personnel for which cartification is required by the government's "Office des Services de Garde a l'anfance."



Early Childhood Care (500.00

PONDER ALCH

CREDITS

Required Courses

PROGRAMS

322-102-85	Gardorie in Queboo	3-0-3	2	
322-107-87	Elaboration of Educational Programs	2-1-3	2	
322-144-85	Observation & Methods	1-2-3	2	
322-613-84	Prevention & First Aid	0-1-0	1/3	•
322-713-84	Child & Health	1-1-3	1 2/3	
322-733-82	Development of Expression & Creativity	1-2-3	2	
322-783-82	Integrational Seminars	0-3-3	2	
322-793-82	Stage	1-16-1	6	
350-704-82	Child Development I	3-0-3	2	
350-705-82	Child Development II	3.0.3	2	

Plus three of the following courses (chosen by the College) with a minimum of two from Bloc A and a maximum of one from Bloc B (shaded courses are being offered in the W-00 semester).

Bloc A				· · ·
322-103-87	Child in Gardenie	1-2-3	2	
322-104-87	Literature and media for Young children	1-2-3	2	,
322-105-87	Child and Learning	2-1-3	2	
322-333-87	Child and Play	1-2-3	2	
322-403-87	Development of Language	2-1-3	2	
322-753-82	Motor Skills	. 1-2-3	2	
322-773-82	Animation and Group Work	1-2-3	2	
322-791-82	Child and Animator	1-2-3	2	
322-794-82	Arts in Garderic	1-2-3	2	
322-795-82	Child and Music	:-2-3	2	
Eloc B				
322-110-85	Garderia in Nursely Environment	1-2-3	2	•
322-115-85	Garderie in School Environment	1 2 3	2	
322-503-85	Nutrition in Garderic		2	

Appendix K

Jewish Youth Library

Announcing our 20th Anniversary of good readings, good listening and good research. Of course, we are referring to:

THE JEWISH YOUTH LIBRARY OF MONTREAL

Good Reading: Books in four languages (English, Yiddish, Hebrew and French) by the very best contemporary authors in the Jewish publishing field. Also books of special interest to educators, children and etc. Also novels for relaxation that are suitable for a frum reader.

Good Listening: Audiotapes - the very best children's music, tapes based on hashkofo, Parenting and Educating, halachos, Chumash, Gemara and etc. by the greatest names in today's Torah world.

Good Research: We have the latest Artscroll research books, e.g. stone Chumash and Nach, holocaust diaries and etc.

We have expanded our premises to serve you better.

Hours: Sunday - 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. FOR ALL Friday - 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. BOYS ONLY

You have dealt with us for a score of years. You know that you can trust our library with your Yiddish neshomalach. Appendix L

Ahavas Chesed Newsletter



NEWSLETTER

Fall 5761

A Message from the Director

VAS CHESED is all about working with unique challenges.
 ie past seven years, our job has been to help the community
 o necessary services. We have have done so by easing the of the client who faces cultural insensitivities, bureaucratic
 or language difficulties at a vulnerable moment. Our ork of Rabbonim and professionals continues to expand, ng all our efforts more comfortable.

VAS CHESED is a valuable tool. With Hashem's guidance, 2main committed to helping you meet life's challenges. He grant us the strength to continue working together.

Carol Polter

lewish Community Ezras Foundation Noshim соно Auberge Shalom Cumming Jewish Centre Rabbonim for Seniors **Regie Regionale** Bikur Cholim Batshaw Youth Jewish Family Services and Family Services AHAVAS CHESED Montreal Children's Montreal Rehabilitation Hospital Centre CLSC's **Project Genesis** Department of Health Hatzoloh Federation CJA Jewish General Hospital Schools Tomche Shabbos

ose with whom we link...

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Staff

Rabbi Y.M.Katz President

Ephraim Rudski Vice-President Professional Consultant

Carol Polter Director

Elly Gestetner Coordinator of Senior Programming

Pam Russ Coordinator

Rochelle Moskowitz Staff Member

Solange Miller Office Manager and Graphic Designer

HIGHLIGHTS

Kosher **MEALS ON WHEELS** will soon be available for those who need long term home care. This AHAVAS CHESED service, in conjunction with the Cummings Jewish Centre for Seniors, will be provided to the community on a sliding scale fee.

"**NAVIGATING THE SHIDDUCHIM QUAGMIRE**", a workshop on issues of shidduchim, is scheduled for November 26th, with NECHAMA MINTZ as facilitator.

Our **BOARD** has recently met to look at issues in the community as well as how to enhance the work of AHAVAS CHESED. Thanks to each of the members: Baila Aspler, Bella Berzon, Hetty Pfeiffer, Lea Steinlauf and Charlotte Zeitz.

URGENT: NEED FOR FOSTER HOMES FOR JEWISH CHILDREN.

וויכטיגע פונקטן און נייעס

THE WARNER

- עס וועט באלד זיין צו באקומען כשריע מאלצייטן פאר די וואס דארפן
 הילף פאר א לענגערע צייט (meals on wheels). די פרייזן וועלן זיין
 צוגעפאסט צום קליענטיס פינאנציעלן צושטאנד.
- עטלעכע איינגעלערנטע היימישע פרויען זיינען יעצט פאראן צו העלפן
 עלטערע מענטשן און די וואס געבן אכטונג אויף זיי. איר קענט אנקומען צו די וואלונטערן דורך אהבת חסד.
 - Manoir de l'Age d'Or א נייע עלטערו-היים: די

אויף 3430 Jeanne Mance, טוט איינפירן בעטן פאר אידישע פאציענטן וואס נויטיגן זיך פאר א לענגערע טערמין, מיט כשריע מאלצייטן אונטער די השגרה פון ועד העיר. מען בעט די וואס זיינען פאראינטערעסירט זיך צו מעלדן צו <u>אהבת חסד</u> כדי צו העלפן איינצוארדענען דאס פלאץ אז עס זאל האבן אן עכטע היימישע אטמאספערע.

COHO (קאעלעציע פון חסידישע <u>COHO</u> (קאעלעציע פון חסידישע אהבת חסד צוזאמען מיט <u>COHO</u> (קאעלעציע פון חסידישע ארגעניזאציעס) האבן צוזאמענגעשטעלט א נייע באדינונג צו העלפן די איבערגעשטרענטע יונגע מאמע מיט איר משפחה. די וואלונטערן וועלן צייגן די מאמע ווי אזוי זיך בעסער איינארדענען איר צייט און איר ארבעט.

דערמאנוג : די יערליכן טיי פון <u>אהבת חסד</u> לעילוי נשמת חיי בת רי משה יצחק גרוען זייל Martha Gruen z"l אייה November 20, 2000. כייב חשון, תשסייא



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VAS CHESED 00 Cote des Neiges Suite 250 Montreal, Quebec