Female emigres from the 'shtetl' and their interpretations of the past: An oral history.

Karen Melissa. Glaser

University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/2092
NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilming. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.
FEMALE EMIGRES FROM THE SHTETL AND THEIR
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST:
AN ORAL HISTORY

by

Karen Melissa Glaser

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of
Sociology and Anthropology in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1990
Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

ABSTRACT

FEMALE EMIGRES FROM THE SHTETL AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST:
AN ORAL HISTORY

by

Karen Melissa Glaser

Within this study, I present some of the experiences that occurred in the lives of fifteen Jewish women who grew up in pre-World War Two Eastern Europe. Using oral history as my methodology, I show how they either embraced or shunned learning about and/or practicing traditional customs and rituals at a time when traditional society was facing many modern changes. Moreover, I show their past experiences with and interpretations of their education, male/female interaction and female dress, the marriage process, a married woman's responsibilities and a married woman's commandments.

In reading the literature on this topic, I learned two important facts. First of all, the first third of the twentieth century was a time of intense social change for the Jewish people of Eastern Europe. New ways of thinking and behaving which came with the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) were gaining acceptance among many people, especially the younger generations. I also learned however, that only a few studies had been undertaken on how these changes were manifested in actual customs or rituals. In most cases, the literature was either focused on the traditional way of life or did not go deep enough into how
modern experiences were expressed, especially with regards to women. So I concluded that by researching this area, I would be contributing interesting and necessary information on shtetl life.

The theoretical framework that I used in my research, from the composition of my interview guide to the analysis of my data, was phenomenological sociology. Specifically, I used certain concepts and principles which enabled me to discover what my informants’ experiences meant. I looked at what motivated them to behave as they did, how they typified themselves and others, what they believed was expected of them by their family and/or community and any feelings they may have recalled experiencing. I then looked for commonalities among my different informants’ experiences and created typologies of the various ways of behaving, thinking or feeling. These typologies, which I either categorized as modern or traditional, had their basis, to varying degrees, in the studies which I had reviewed and outlined in Chapter Three.

What I found was that in each of the areas of their lives that I examined, most of my informants usually faced traditional influences such as their parents or other religious community members and more modern influences such as their peers, the organizations with which they were affiliated and their own desires. The effect of these polar forces in their lives was that most of my informants chose to lead their lives according to the modern directives of
the times. However, some of their experiences had also been tempered by more traditional influences. Usually they had at least one type of experience where traditional values had clearly guided their actions or influenced their ideas. In most cases though, their traditional experiences were represented in the learning or practicing of religious rituals as opposed to traditional customs where modernity had made strong inroads.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of zeide Eli, grandpa Pip, great-grandpa Izzy and great-grandma Jenny, each of whom passed away while I was either too young to inquire about or too young to appreciate their stories about the past.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of my committee members, Dr. Faber, Dr. Adam and Dr. Milne for the time that they spent reading, correcting and suggesting ways that I could improve my thesis. I also would especially like to thank Dr. Faber for his patience while listening to me express each and every concern that I had about my thesis.

I am grateful to my parents, brothers and grandmothers for their encouragement when I became discouraged. I am also grateful to my husband, Gianni, for his suggestions and support. I would also like to extend an extra thank-you to my hubby Helen for helping me find women to interview, for explaining certain Yiddish words and expressions to me and for offering her personal insights into my research topic. Additionally, I must thank Joe Eisenberg for suggesting the names of some women to interview.

Lastly, I am indebted to all of my informants, for without their help I could not have undertaken this research. I thank them for welcoming me into their homes and for taking the time to talk to me about their lives in Eastern Europe. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to them and learning from them.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>XI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION

- Statement of the Problem ........................................ 1
- Historical Background ............................................. 3

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Phenomenological Sociology ...................................... 14
- The Structure of the Life World ................................. 15
- Analysis ...................................................................... 23

III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- Education .................................................................... 25
- Male/Female Interaction and Female Dress .................... 28
- Marriage ..................................................................... 30
- Married Women: Commandments and Responsibilities ........ 34

IV. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Oral History .......................................................... 42
- The Sample ................................................................... 43
- The Interview ......................................................... 46
- Memory, Bias and Validity ......................................... 48

V. REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN THE SHTETL

- Education .............................................................. 53
- Male/Female Interaction and Female Dress .................... 64
- Marriage ..................................................................... 73
- A Married Woman’s Responsibilities ............................ 85
- A Married Woman’s Commandments ............................... 100

VI. CONCLUSION

- Summary and Contribution to the Literature .................. 131
- Social Significance .................................................. 141
- Suggestions For Future Research ................................. 142

APPENDIX A .................................................................. 144

APPENDIX B .................................................................. 147

APPENDIX C .................................................................. 150

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................. 155
VITA AUCTORIS ........................................ 160
LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish Words</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A Biographical Sketch of My informants' Lives Before Immigrating to Canada</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my thesis is the reconstruction of specific aspects of the everyday lives of women who grew-up in the pre-Holocaust Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. More specifically though, my research is based on interviews that I conducted with fifteen women who were either born and raised in what is today Poland, Romania, Hungary, or the Soviet Union. These women came from all different kinds of families, including poor and rich, Zionist, Socialist and apolitical, religious and nonreligious as well as families that fell in between some of these divergent classifications. I will be presenting some of their past European experiences and their interpretations of those experiences as they remember them today.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem, and thus one of the reasons behind why I chose this topic, is the kind of research that presently exists on women and the *ashetl*. Some books are autobiographical accounts by men or researched by men. These works contain views of women’s roles which might be considered biased or which women might want to supplement. Some of these same accounts, as well as others, present mostly an idealistic or romantic view of traditional female roles. But the biggest problem, for the most part, is that life is presented as being monolithically traditional and/or the works do not go deeply enough into how traditional life
was experienced by the enlightened or 'modern' women. Jewish culture in Eastern Europe was far from being experienced the same way by everyone, especially during the first part of the twentieth century. Each woman by virtue of being an individual had her own unique experiences and attitudes and beliefs. They may or may not have held them in common with other people of their generation with whom they shared certain ideological beliefs. One purpose of my research was to discover what everyday life was like for different women who grew up in a shtetl during the first third of the twentieth century. I wanted to examine the meaning that past experiences has for these women as individuals, as members of certain ideological groups and as members of the larger Eastern European Jewish community. I believed that a phenomenological sociological understanding of the structure of the social world and the application of certain phenomenological concepts and principles would allow me to grasp better the meaning that an individual attributed to her experiences.

The second problem and reason for carrying out this research was that there were few factual sources on shtetl life in general and women of the shtetl in particular. I felt that the paucity of information was regrettable considering that a vibrant Jewish culture had been thriving in Eastern Europe for approximately one thousand years. The people who grew up in a shtetl are now at least in their sixties. Before they passed away, I wanted to make a
contribution to the research and existing knowledge on
shtetl life. As Barbara Allen said so well in her book From
Memory to History:

With the passing of each one of these store-
houses of local historical knowledge, we are
reminded anew of the prophetic urgency of an
African proverb that says "When an old person
dies, a library burns to the ground" (Allen 1981:
xi-xii).

Moreover, I wanted to make a contribution to the history of
the Jewish experience. Most North American Jews have roots
that extend back to the shtetl. In defining who we are
today, it is necessary to understand fully where we came
from. Jan Zaborowski, a Polish Catholic journalist summed
up my feelings exactly when he wrote:

The history of Polish Jews is a closed chapter.
Their annihilation changed the composition of the
Polish society which had gained its shape for near-
ly a thousand years. At the same time, it altered
the image--and--future of the whole world Jewry.
What will the Jews be in Israel and the galut
without the Galician shtetl? It seems doubtful to
me that present-day Jews--whether in America or in
Israel--would remain the Jews of the Old Testament.
It is to be asked whether the extermination of
Polish Jews does not mean in the long run the
annihilation of "prophetic Jewishness"? This is
one of the reasons why the salvage of the heritage
of Polish Jews and the cultivation of their memory
are tasks...crucial for the Jews...no matter where
they live today (Zaborowski 1987:21).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before I describe some of the structural and cultural
forces which influenced the more recent history of the
shtetl, I must first discuss an important point of conten-
tion and a few facts concerning the shtetl.

To begin with, I will be using the term shtetl
interchangeably with the term 'Jewish community,' although there is controversy surrounding this term. Some researchers have employed the term when referring geographically to small-town Jewish communities in Eastern Europe (Stahl Weinberg 1988:3; Zborowski and Herzog 1952:22; Howe 1976:10). Some have used the term to describe the Jewish neighbourhoods in larger cities (Schoenfeld 1985:1). Still others, like Barbara Meyerhoff (1978:283-284), have used the term to mean the Jewish culture (Yiddishkeit) of Eastern European Jewish communities regardless of the size of the community. Like Meyerhoff, I will be using the term to mean a Jewish cultural entity regardless of the size of the community that my informants came from.

Secondly, the development of the Eastern European shtetl began with the exile of the Jews from ancient Israel and their subsequent expulsions from countries like Spain, Portugal, England, France and Germany. The culture of the shtetl developed out of the Jewish religion with its many rules and laws. Thus, no matter where in Eastern Europe they came from "...Jews had in fact a living culture, which was essentially all of a piece whether they paid their taxes and marketed in Polish or Ukrainian or Hungarian, or were ruled by Czar or Emperor " (Mead 1952:16). However, these communities, the people and their way of life, were completely destroyed during World War Two.

In what follows, I will give a general description of the Jewish communities like the ones my informants came from
by discussing the religious forces of stability and the
economic and ideological forces which brought change to the
_shtetl_.

Traditional Life

For centuries, and even up until its destruction, the
world of the _shtetl_ could be characterized as being "colored
throughout by religious emotion" (Howe 1976:9). In his
memoirs, Joachim Schoenfeld (1985:68) described life in his
_shtetl_ of Sniatyn as being guided by and based on religion
and tradition. According to others who lived in a _shtetl_,
their communities’ social structure and values were created
on and flowed from Mount Sinai (from G-d). To these people,
the _Torah_ and _Talmud_ (oral law and rabbinic interpretation
of the oral law) were a code of law, a code of ethics
and a handbook of daily behavior (Zborowski and Herzog
1952:105,111,112). As Irving Howe explains, the religious
commandments, some of which pertain to men, some to women
and some to both sexes, structured every aspect of daily
life.

At the peak of its development the _shtetl_ was
a highly formalized society. It had to be.
Living in the shadow of lawlessness it felt a
need to mold its life into lawfulness. It sur-
vived by the disciplines of ritual. The 613
_mitzvot_, or commandments, that a pious Jew must
obey, which dictates such things as the precise
way in which a chicken is to be slaughtered; the
singsong in which the _Talmud_ is to be read; the
kinds of food to serve during the Sabbath; the way
in which shoes should be put on each morning; the
shattering of a glass by the groom during a mar-
riage ceremony—these were the signs of an inner
discipline. In so heavily ritualized a world
there was little room for individuality, as we
have come to understand it... (Howe 1976:13).
However, beginning in the nineteenth century, traditional shtetl life began changing for some Jews as a result of governmental decrees intended solely for Jews and as a result of the many new philosophies and movements to which Jews turned.

The Government

During the early nineteenth century, the Jews of Galicia, Congress Poland and Russia, the regions in which most East European Jews lived, were restricted in their place of residence and occupation. Jewish children were allowed to attend state schools, although very few did because of the Christian content and the abuses the children received at the hands of teachers and fellow classmates. At this time most Jewish children were still educated in chederim and yeshivot (Jewish elementary schools and schools of higher learning respectively). Life was hard for the Jews, but it only got worse with the accession and thirty year reign of Czar Nicholas I in 1825. During his reign, 600 anti-Jewish decrees were issued. These included the expulsion of Jews from villages, higher taxes, modernizing their dress, abolishing their 'governmental' councils, closing most Hebrew presses, censoring Hebrew and Yiddish works, twenty-five years of forced military service for children and forced conversions (Davidowitz 1967:28-30). In dealing with what it perceived to be a Jewish problem "The Russian government had a firm policy of extermination: let one third of Jewry be converted, another third die, the
final third emigrate, and the problem is solved" (Trepp 1973:262).

Nicholas I died in 1855 and Czar Alexander II ruled Russia from 1856 until his assassination in 1881. His policy towards Jewish people was less severe than Nicholas I. He decreased the number of years Jews were to serve in the military, making it equivalent to the number of years served by non-Jews. Jews could now print more freely, those Jews with higher education could live in areas restricted to Jews, and Jews could hold office and engage in previously restricted professions. As a result of this policy of 'liberalization,' more Jews were entering state schools at all levels (Davidowitz 1967:35-37). But all this changed with the assassination of Alexander II, for which the Jews were blamed. With the accession of Alexander III in 1881, it became difficult for Jews to go to elementary schools and to enter gymnasium they needed to have excellent grades (Shomer Zunser 1978:241). Furthermore, the Jews were now excluded from the legal profession, confined again to the Pale of Settlement and faced pogroms which left 20,000 homeless. The result of this oppression, which also characterized the first third of the twentieth century (and culminated in the Holocaust), was that some Jews converted to Christianity and thus escaped the restrictions on Jews, over 1,000,000 Jews immigrated abroad, many Jews remained as they were, traditionally pious, and many Jews became involved in new social movements (Davidowitz 1967:48-50).
Social Movements

As a result of the official policy of anti-semitism, many young Jews became committed to Zionism, a movement which gained increasing acceptance among Jews with time. Fundamentally, the Zionist movement was nationalistic and struggled for a Jewish homeland. It was against the 'present' Jewish way of life and even saw this as the cause of anti-semitism and the oppression of the Jewish people. The Zionists wanted to destroy the old ways and build a new society. However, like all movements, Zionism was not monolithic. Some Zionists, like Dubnow and Birnbaum, saw a place for traditional Judaism within Zionist goals. Others believed that the political situation of the here and now should be dealt with by Zionists instead of the future. Zionists also differed with regards to where they wanted a future Jewish state to be located. Some Zionists wanted a Jewish state anywhere in the world, while others insisted that it be located on the same land where the ancient state of Israel once was (Davidowitz 1967:51,54-57). For the most part, the traditional Jews and Hasidim did not accept Zionism. They saw its members as being one step away from assimilation and as a threat to Judaism since they were lax in their observances. Also, for the devout, the idea of mere men and women re-establishing the Jewish state was an impossible and impious intervention in the divine process (Davidowitz 1967:85; Schoenfeld 1985:119).

Another force which challenged the authority of
traditional Judaism and actually opened the way for the development of the other social movements by the Jewish people was the Haskala (Enlightenment). The Haskala, which emanated from Germany and German Jews in the late eighteenth century, first reached the city-dwelling Jews of Russia and 'Poland' and later spread to the Jews in the towns and villages. One of the goals of the movement was to refine the Jews so that they could fit into Gentile society. They wanted Jews to change their traditional leadership, speech, dress and manners. They believed that by becoming more like non-Jews, Jews would be treated as equals. The 'enlightened' Russian Jews tried to persuade their government to emancipate them. However, only conversion to Christianity would guarantee a Jew equality, since the anti-semitic laws and pogromists did not discern a difference between enlightened Jews and the Jewish masses (Davidowitz 1967:14-18; Schoenfeld 1985:118). Joachim Schoenfeld (1985:118) claims that when the Maskilim (enlightened Jews) realized this, many turned to Zionism as the solution to the Jewish problem.

Like Zionism though, the Haskala was not a monolithic movement. While Galician adherents were violently anti-Hasidic (Orthodox sect of Judaism), the Russian Maskilim, although critical of Rabbinic and Hasidic Judaism, tried to join European culture and Jewish traditions. Nevertheless, the Haskala mainly attracted the middle class. Attacking Orthodox Judaism and promoting secular education and
modernity, it alienated the Jewish masses who resisted its influences along with the Rabbinic and Hasidic leadership (Davidowitz 1967:19,21,23-26). Eventually however, the Enlightenment reached future Jewish scholars as they studied in the Yeshivot. Here the boys who were curious about the larger world smuggled in books on geography, history, poetry and novels and newspapers. Some of these boys hired tutors to teach them such secular subjects as algebra, Latin and physics, which they learned after studying their religious subjects. As they brought the ideas back home to their friends, groups of boys would secretly meet in the woods or in attics to discuss such subjects against the wishes of their parents and community who saw this as leading to assimilation (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:158-165; Schoenfeld 1985:118).

Lastly, many Eastern European Jews became involved in the various socialist/workers movements as their ability to make ends meet grew more difficult. "All through the last third of the century, the economic situation of East European Jews kept growing worse. In a four-year period, 1894-1898, the number of Jewish paupers increased by almost 30 percent" (Howe 1976:21). A report undertaken by the Russian government in 1888 shows that ninety percent of Jews in the Pale of Settlement were proletarian. Even as the number of Jews emigrating increased, so did the number of Jewish artisans and industrial workers (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:77; Davidowitz 1967:58).
In Grodno, a typical example, Jews 17 percent of the population in 1897 were 61 percent of the artisans. In Galicia in 1890, 26 percent of Jews were industrial workers, compared to 9 percent of Poles and 1 percent of Ukrainians (Davidowitz 1967: 58).

Jewish workers, and/or their supporters, who tried to improve the workers' situation took either one of two approaches: They either tried to escape from their Jewishness and became involved in Gentile social movements, as Trotsky did, or they joined Jewish workers' movements like the Bund. The Bund was founded in 1897 and in its early years did not stress Jewish culture. Later, the Bund's language of communication became Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses and the Bund began to recognize its Jewish character and support the idea of a Jewish national culture. By World War One, this organization had set up Jewish secular schools where Yiddish was the language of instruction. As a group, the Bund was anti-religious and sought to remake Jewish society. Bundists were also against the traditional Eastern European Jewish value of non-violent resistance and set up self-defense groups after the 1903 Easter pogroms (Davidowitz 1967:59-61). Other Bundist activities included organizing strikes (Davidowitz 1967:80; Stahl Weinberg 1988:55). The Bund was very successful in attracting members from the poverty stricken Pale of Settlement, whose downtrodden residents were not already committed to Hasidism. (Hasidim promoted the cause of the common man in the religious realm) (Davidowitz 1967:61). Although the Bund embraced its own
form of traditional Jewish culture, its anti-religious stance caused many rifts between parents and their Bundist children (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:84). A similar rift was mentioned by Schoenfeld (1985:120-121) when he discussed the Russian Jews who fled to his shtetl after the 1903 and 1905 pogroms. He said that many of those fleeing were socialists, Zionists, revolutionaries and Maskilim. Many of them rejected Jewish customs and went as far as eating pork. In reacting to their 'un-Jewish' ways, the community gave them money to continue on to America.

Thus during the nineteenth century many internal and external forces began effecting changes in traditional Jewish life. Sydney Stahl Weinberg (1988:63) concludes in her study of East European Jewish women that by World War One girls were growing-up in surroundings marked by a state of flux. However, change and chaos were met with resistance by the many Jews who were still committed to their traditional/religious way of life. Sanctions to counter these currents of change included shunning and shaming, but never physical force (Stopincka Rosenthal 1955:180).

Rabbinic Judaism, which once accommodated change, now fought against it as never before.

The relentless spread of modernity had compelled Orthodoxy into a posture of obstinate resistance to all change and innovation. Before [the] haskala...rabbinic Judaism had been more worldly, more tolerant, and more responsive to social change. After the haskala, rabbinic Judaism became conservative, inflexible and repressive; hasidism, too, followed suit (Davidowitz 1967:81).

Although my introduction mainly focused on Russian and
Polish Jewry, the Jewish people in other parts of Eastern Europe also faced similar discriminatory laws, the wrath of the local people and changes in traditional life (Stahl Weinberg 1988:43; Davidowitz 1967:34). How exactly new ideas and commitments, as well as the old, were manifested in everyday life will be shown in the Review of the Literature chapter as well as in the chapter on my own findings.
CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

Phenomenological sociology is an area of social science in which researchers examine the meanings experiences have for individual actors. Its founding father was Alfred Schutz who created this theoretical perspective so as to be able to comprehend just how people's understanding of social life is constituted and organized. Phenomenologically, experiences are not intrinsically meaningful. Meanings are attached to experiences by the actor or others who reflect back upon the act after some time has elapsed (Løvesque-Lopman 1988:28). Thus the attachment of meaning to an experience involves the present character of our 'stock of knowledge' and its "currently operative interests and typifications" (Rogers 1983:43). A phenomenological sociological analysis of an individual's or group's experience of certain events requires the researcher to make

...things whose meanings seem clear meaningless and then discover...what they mean. The goal of a phenomenological analysis is to describe what the total, systematic meanings of social events are to people who participate in them. Thus it describes the 'reality' of events in terms of the frames of mind of the participants (Blumenstiel 1973:189).

But before I describe how I am going to use phenomenological sociology, I will further describe the principles of Schutz's phenomenological sociology and other researchers' interpretations and expansions of his ideas.
THE STRUCTURE OF THE LIFE WORLD

According to Mary Rogers (1983:51), phenomenologists have discovered that it is the natural attitude, the stock of knowledge and social action which constitute the structure of the life world. Moreover, it is the interplay of these three elements through which everyday experiences are structured. Turning now to a discussion of these concepts, I will reveal their definitions and the nature of their interdependence.

The Natural Attitude

Unknowingly and without intent, individuals in the natural attitude suspend doubt about the outer world and its objects. 'Standing' within the natural attitude, an individual also believes that others experience the same objects of the world similar to him or herself (Rogers 1983:52). Individuals accept that the social and natural world are similar for other individuals because the objects of the world "...are only 'knowable' through the mediation of the social" (Smart 1976:96), that is, through social interaction, the natural attitude enables an intersubjective reality to emerge. From their own subjective vantage points, people experience the objects and events of the world. Through interaction and communication they can mutually understand a common situation (Wagner 1970:31). This mutual understanding is also made possible by what Schutz termed the reciprocity of perspectives, whereby persons involved in a common environment believe that
"...were he [or she] in the other's place, he [or she] would experience the common situation from the other's perspective, and vice-versa" (Wagner 1970:34). Thus in the natural attitude, the world is presented to us as coherent and intersubjective or in common to all of us (Schutz 1970:73).

In addition to the world being given and taken for granted, the cultural interpretations of the world's phenomena are also adopted by a society's individuals (Wagner 1970:16). People are born into a social/cultural and physical world that is preorganized, preconstituted and that existed before they were born. Its present structure is a result of historical factors. People take for granted their society's social relationships, signs, symbols, social organizations, systems of status and prestige. Cultural interpretations are used by people to guide them through normally occurring situations which they are faced with daily because they appear clear and consistent (Schutz 1970:79-81). But these cultural elements do not comprise an all-powerful superstructure which programs people to behave as non-thinking beings. Instead,

...they are accepted, interpreted, redefined, [and] modified by the individual who gives collective thoughts his [or her] personal note, and who subtly changes, enlarges, or reduces their 'meaning for him [or her]' in the ongoing accumulation of experience (Wagner 1973:64).

The relationship between the world's objects and our interpretations of them then, is a dialectical one. We work within and upon the world and we change its objects and
relationships. But they offer us resistance to which we yield or overcome. People’s interpretations of the world and its objects are based upon their previous experiences or stock of knowledge (Schutz 1970:72-73). It is to that concept to which we turn our attention to next.

The Stock of Knowledge

Social interaction is only possible because people have a stock of knowledge on hand. A stock of knowledge is composed of an individual’s unique biography of experiences and their personal interpretations as well as the individual’s experiences of the intersubjective social world (Rogers 1983:54).

Every individual’s stock of knowledge consists, in sum, of the fundamental elements common to all human beings, the habitual knowledge common to members of a given society and sub-societies and the specific knowledge of a unique biography, all always on hand, along with the immediate knowledge the individual has at hand in the current situation (Rogers 1983:56).

The stock of knowledge is a system of know-hows which every individual builds up over a lifetime and which is used to assess different situations. Situations are then recognized to be of a certain type and dealt with as such. Hence, the stock of knowledge allows for individual problem solving and provides socially objectivated solutions for commonplace problems (Rogers 1983:55,56).

A small part of a person’s stock of knowledge is based on individualized interpretations of personal experience. Rather, most knowledge is socially derived as it is handed down from parents, friends and teachers through the medium
of language (Schutz 1970:96). Primary socialization is the starting point from which individuals build their stock of knowledge. During this stage children are taught by their significant others selected aspects of the social world (Berger and Luckmann 1967:131). "The child takes on the significant others' roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them and makes them his [or her] own" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:131-132). The child also internalizes the world of his or her significant others as the only world and learns legitimizing formulas for the 'appropriate' behaviors he or she has internalized. Later, these roles and attitudes of the significant others that the child has learned are abstracted and generalized by the child and extended to many people. At this point, the concept of the generalized other has been established and primary socialization ends and secondary socialization begins. During secondary socialization the individual learns that the 'world of his or her parents' is not the only world that exists. However, the secondary reality is harder to internalize because the primary reality is already in place. Likewise, an internalized secondary reality is easier to dislodge (Berger and Luckmann 1967:132-143). Therefore, it is through primary socialization and a lifetime of secondary socialization experiences that a person's stock of knowledge is created, expanded and changed.

Although an individual's stock of knowledge is in a state of flux, its range and structure change with the
situation. That is, we access our stock of knowledge during an emerging experience to see if the experience is familiar, pre-experienced or strange. Through our stock of knowledge, we are able to interpret the experience (Schutz 1970:75). And it is with this information that individuals negotiate encounters with other people.

In any face-to-face encounter, the actors bring to the relationship a stock of 'knowledge in hand,' or 'common-sense understandings'—that is social recipes or conceptions of appropriate behavior—terms of which they typify the other, are able to calculate the probable response of the other to their actions and to sustain communication with them (Levesque-Lopman 1988:30).

Social Action

Social action is predicated upon an acceptance of social reality as is, which is a function of the natural attitude, and upon previous experiences which are contained in a person's stock of knowledge. In turn, social action changes a person's stock of knowledge (and even sometimes the accepting nature of the natural attitude). Social action can be purposeful and directed at the future or short of purposiveness. In discussing purposeful social action first, we can further describe it as being based upon a conscious experience related to another and projected by the 'actor' as an act completed in the future and beset with imagined consequences (Rogers 1983:60-63). Thus purposeful social action is first based upon conscious action. According to Schutz (1970:141),

I have to visualize the state of affairs to be brought about by my future action before I can draft the single steps of my future acting from
which that state of affairs will result.
In consciously planning and projecting an act, a person's anticipations are supported by typical expectations which are drawn from typical previous experiences (Schutz 1970:1410142; Wagner 1970:26-27). Another characteristic of purposeful social action is that it is precluded by motives. "Projecting is motivated phantasying, motivated by the anticipated supervening intention of carrying out the project" (Schutz 1970:141). Schutz identified two types of motives, in-order-to-motives, to which the above quote refers, and because motives. In-order-to-motives cause people to act toward future goals. "From the actor's viewpoint the in-order-to-motive for carrying out the action is the state of affairs being phantasized as completed in a project" (Rogers 1983:62). Conversely, because motives are only grasped in retrospect, an actor is not aware of them while acting (Wagner 1970:26).

As already mentioned, social action can also be free of purpose; "...habitual knowledge, knowledge of recipes, and other formula-like elements of the stock of knowledge at hand condition the individual to truncate action short of purposiveness" (Rogers 1983:61). Habitualization is the process whereby certain actions, of say two people, are repeated often and in the same manner and subsequently become part of the actors' general knowledge. Habilitated actions allow the same actors to carry out these actions in the future with a minimum of decision making (Berger and
Luckmann 1967:52-54). Within each person's stock of knowledge also exist recipes for "...institutionally appropriate rules of conduct" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:65), that is, people involved in everyday social situations use ready-made socially objectivated recipes in interacting with other people so as to attain the best results from the interaction. The more typical the actors, behaviors and/or problems, the more efficient the recipes for action will be (Schutz 1970:80-81,91; Rogers 1983:154). However, this is the 'ideal' situation. People have different stocks of knowledge which vary according to their place in the stratification system and this affects just how standardized recipes and their outcomes will be among interacting individuals (Rogers 1983:154).

Mentioned quite often above is the word 'types,' with reference to people, behaviors, situations, problems and solutions. Types, or the process of typification, is an important element of a phenomenological sociology of social action. In order to understand a situation and act 'properly' a person applies an interpretive scheme or typifications. For example, in typifying the other as a certain type of person we accord them typical motives, behaviors and attitudes on which we base our actions and in turn predict the other's reactions (Jehenson 1973:221; Levesque-Lopman 1988: 77). Typification involves synthesizing many objects, actions or persons and extending their general meaning to other objects, actions or people.
By naming an experienced object, we are also relating it by its typicality to pre-experienced things of a similar typical structure, and we accept its open horizon referring to future experiences of the same type, which are therefore capable of being given the same name (Schutz 1970:117).

Typifications are formed by others, our predecessors and contemporaries, and are grounded in every individual’s stock of knowledge. The more shared and standardized typifications are within a society, the more successful human interaction will be (Schutz 1970:119-121). However, an individual’s typification of another person as a certain type may be contradicted by immediate experience or by observation. This results in the individual modifying his or her typification scheme (Jehenson 1973:222). On the other hand, the typification process may instead suppress atypical elements (Rogers 1983:40). Another characteristic of typification is that,

The process of typifying others...has its counterpart in a process of self-typification. I must typify myself, that is, assume a typical role and perform it in the way I assume my partner expects me to perform it (Jehenson 1973:222).

All types are anonymous although they vary in their degree of anonymity. Very anonymous types have few details and can encompass a large number of objects. The typification process is halted by the individual when familiarity is established. Familiarity is established when the individual gains enough knowledge to master the situation and any similar future situations (Rogers 1983:40-41).

Thus, according to Schutz and his successors, the
social world is constructed by interacting individuals or
groups who stand within the natural attitude 'equipped' with
biographically determined stocks of knowledge.

ANALYSIS

Absent from the books and articles that I read was a
specific description of the components of a systematic
phenomenological sociological analysis. Under these
circumstances, what ironically struck me as 'helpful' was
George Psathas' (1973:17) comment that there are no cookbook
recipes for doing phenomenological sociology. What did
exist was Schutz's complex theory on how the social world is
constructed, interpreted and maintained by interacting
individuals, although Schutz and Schutzian theorists did not
explain how to apply this theory universally to real people
and real situations.

What follows is an explanation of how I utilized
certain Schutzian principles to suit my research purpose,
which was to describe the rituals and other specific events
that occurred in the lives of Eastern European Jewish women
and to examine the meaning the experiences had for the
different women. I was not only interested in how meaning
or social reality is constructed, which Schutz thoroughly
explained, but also in what that meaning is for people
interested in a destroyed way of life. I wanted to know
what matchmaking, celebrating the Sabbath, going to school
etc., meant to women who either observed or participated in
these 'everyday events' in Eastern Europe. What was their
experience of self and of others? To facilitate my analysis of meaning, I employed the following concepts, most of which have been discussed above: because motives, typification of self/typification of other, and attitudes. Furthermore, I wanted to see how the phenomenological/sociological principle that a dialectical relationship exists between ‘collective thoughts’ and an individual’s interpretation of those thoughts related to my informants descriptions of their past experiences. Phenomenologists have also argued that since emotions are part of a person’s interpretive process as he or she becomes accustomed to a social situation, they should be studied too. As for whether or not a person can recall specific feelings that have occurred in the past, it is possible when those feelings have arisen out of a crisis situation (Meisenhelder 1982:197,199,201). Thus, I also looked at some of the feelings my informants recalled having during some of their more indelible experiences. From there I categorized my informants’ different types of experiences and their interpretations as either modern or traditional.
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through reading my sources, I learned much about all aspects of shtetl life. However, I will only review those topics which deal with the areas of women's and girl's lives that I will be discussing further in my findings chapter. Sometimes, however, I felt it necessary to illuminate the position of females in the shtetl by comparing their roles with those of men and boys. In this section, I will be discussing the female's role with regards to education, male/female relations, marriage, and responsibilities and commandments. As suggested in the statement of the problem, this section will reveal the paucity of information available on the lives of shtetl women, especially where non-traditional experiences and values are concerned.

Education

In the traditional shtetl, the ideal position that a man could achieve was that of scholar. By becoming a scholar of Judaism, a man brought himself and his family status, prestige and joy (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:84). Through prayer and study, a scholar also believed that he was guaranteeing himself and his family eternal life, for this is stated in Halakah (Jewish Law) (Meltzer 1974:110). From the time that a boy was born, his parents hoped he would become a scholar. Boys were always encouraged to study by their parents, some of whom made great sacrifices to give their boys a proper Jewish education. At the age of
three, a boy began going to school and spent eight to ten
hours a day studying Torah, Talmud and other religious
works. For many, this was the beginning of lifelong
studying (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:85,88; Baum, Hyman and

By contrast, a girl’s education in these traditional
Jewish communities was mostly centered around the home.
Here she would learn how to keep a kosher home and raise
children by watching and helping her mother (Stahl Weinberg

The formal education of a girl had no importance
in the orthodox scheme of things, for girls re-
quired training only in the principles of Judaism
and in responsibilities, upon marriage, to keep
a Jewish home in accordance with those principles
(Davidowitz 1967:83).

But most girls also went to school, albeit for a short time.

In school they learned to read and write in Yiddish and they
learned some Hebrew (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:124).

Jewish education concerned the menfolk only, and no great importance was attached to the
education of girls. A girl was sent to cheder
[school] for two or three years where she learned the avelh bayes [a,b,c’s] and how to read the
siddur [prayer book]. Later she was taught to
write and read Yiddish. That was all that was
asked of a girl (Schoenfeld 1985:46).

Besides, a girl’s most important education was what she
learned at home, and a woman who was scholarly in Jewish
education was considered unfeminine (Zborowski and Herzog
1952:80,128,346). Lifelong learning is an important Jewish
value, but it traditionally applied to men. That this value
was practiced was attested to by Harry Rotstein, a Jew born
and raised in the Lithuanian town Niewicz. According to Rotstein, there was an absence of illiteracy among the Jewish men of his town, whereas the women "didn't read adequately" (Gaffin 1966:20,36-37).

However, beginning in the late nineteenth century many girls (as well as boys) were not satisfied with their level and/or type of education and tried to change their situation. Girls wanted to know more than just to be able to read the Bible or write a simple letter. Some turned to a secular education in Polish, Russian or German, while others strove to learn more Hebrew or Yiddish. Some girls added to their knowledge by listening-in while their brothers were being tutored; some taught themselves, while others were permitted to attend state or Jewish schools. Some women recalled that their fathers were not anxious to give them more than a basic education, while their mothers insisted on giving them the kind of education that they were denied. The first young women to attain higher levels of education were the daughters of the Maskilim (enlightened); they were educated mostly in secular subjects (Stahl Weinberg 1988:44-49; Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:61,72). In Poland during the German occupation of 1915-1918, Jews of different ideological affiliations established three different school systems which girls attended. There were the Yiddish schools built by the Bund and the Labour Zionists, the modern Hebrew schools built by the Zionists and the religious schools built by the Orthodox who also
established the Beth Jacobs school for girls in 1917
(Davidowitz 1967:77-78,89). Thus with the new schools
and the girls’ desire for education, more and more Jewish
girls were attending schools in the twentieth century,
including the Orthodox, and attaining a more diversified and
higher level of education than ever before.

Male/Female Interaction and Female Dress

For centuries, males and females from young adulthood
on were kept separate during social gatherings in the
shetel. That is, during synagogue, weddings and social
visits men and women socialized with their own sex. The
purpose behind this custom was to prevent sexual liaisons
from occurring outside of marriage, as in the case of pre-
marital sex and adultery, both sins. Within Judaism sex is
deemed healthy and as something that is supposed to be fully
enjoyed, but only within marriage. Women were considered to
be a potent source of attraction that could lead men into
the above-mentioned sins, as well as disrupt their
concentration while they studied, so women were supposed to
be avoided by men. For their part, women had a role to play
so as not to attract or rather distract men. They had to
alter their appearance. Upon her marriage a woman had her
hair, a great source of distraction, cut off and wore a
sheytel (wig). Girls and women were also not supposed to
Bella Chagall (1983:334) remembered how, as a girl, she was
surprised that the dress her mother had bought her for her
brother's wedding had no sleeves. "My own new dress was buttercup yellow. It left my arms and neck bare, but as my skin tones blended with the hues of the material, this didn't appear too improper." For his part, a man was to prevent temptation by not directly speaking to or looking at a woman. He was also not supposed to touch a 'strange' woman, as in shaking hands (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:134-138).

As the times changed though, so did the extent of the observance of the above customs, especially among the free thinkers. In the small Polish town Stoczek in the 1930's more and more girls were wearing short sleeves. Additionally, by 1938, most young married women did not cover their hair (Stopincka Rosenthal 1955:179). Young Jewish girls all over Eastern Europe also got together to discuss romantic novels. They met with boys, went for walks and sang and danced together at parties (Stahl Weinberg 1988:49-50). "In the old days it was unthinkable for men and girls to dance together, but in later years this prohibition broke down among the 'liberal' and the advanced" (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:137). Young women even began going on dates with boys (Stahl Weinberg 1988:50), something which was unheard of and unnecessary in the days of arranged marriages. The acceptance during the twentieth century of these new Western ideas and practices prompted one observer to say, "They are the children of our period and therefore quick in accepting modern ideas" (Stahl Weinberg 1988:57).
Nevertheless, we cannot generalize and say that Jewish women during the twentieth century quickly replaced old traditions with new practices because the degree of observance varied with the age and religiosity of the individual as well as with the type of family or community that she came from (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:137).

Marriage

A marriage was considered a most joyous occasion in the shtetl. It symbolized the completion of an adult and the perpetuation of the Jewish people in accordance with the commandments of G-d. Conversely, people believed that it was a sin and a shame for a person to remain single (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:270,291). Miriam Shomer Zunser (1978:198-199), who grew up in Pinsk, discussed how her family feared that one of her aunts was destined to become a spinster; her age and past behavior made her an undesirable match. The degradation associated with the status of a spinster can be seen in the double meaning of the Yiddish word Shomer Zunser used for spinster, ‘farzesseneh’.

‘Farzesseneh’ is also the word for dehydrated fruit. There was no place in the traditional shtetl for an unmarried woman, and a woman in this state was thought to have befallen the greatest misfortune (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:62; Zborowski and Herzog 1952:129).

Getting married was an important time in the lives of young men and women. For a young woman, it was her only rite of passage since she was born and named (Zborowski and
Herzog 1952:308-351). In describing her family to her children, Miriam Shomer Zunser (1978:128) stated that:

None of the girls in your great-grandfather's house attained any notice or importance until they were ready to be married. At that point, you see, they became important because they could bring more glory to the family in the form of a man and they were in a position to extend the life of the tribe.

The making of a marriage was also a highly ritualized process. Young women and young men from traditional families were coupled together by their parents and a shadchen (matchmaker). Before the late nineteenth century, marriage was thought to be too important to just be left up to young people (Stahl Weinberg 1988:23). Matchmakers were male and female specialists who travelled from town to town watching the young people as they grew-up. Notes on them were taken and compared with the notes of other matchmakers. Matches were made on the basis of vichus (status), education and dowry size. When a matchmaker thought they had a good match, they would go to the parents of the prospective couple and present their case. Sometimes, mothers went to the matchmakers to express their desire for a certain son or daughter-in-law (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:275).

Although this tradition was centuries old, it began to change. To begin with, some women wanted a greater say in who they were going to marry. More radical were some female members of the Bund who challenged Jewish values by choosing to remain single (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:88). In between these more and less radical challenges to tradition
were the *Maskilim* who discovered the Western concept of romantic love in the novels that they read and consequently rebelled against arranged marriages altogether. But it was the poor masses who first abandoned arranged marriages out of necessity, since they did not usually have enough money for a dowry (Stahl Weinberg 1988:51; Davidowitz 1967:27; Howe 1976:13). Celia Stopincka Rosenthal (1955:178) explained that in the town of Stoczek Poland in 1938, the eve of its destruction, there were no more arranged marriages among the lower class. Marriages based on "love" were now the 'norm' among the lower class and they were facilitated by the Zionist organizations whose meetings provided a purpose and a place for boys and girls to meet.

A family's reaction to their children's announcement of the 'arrangement' of a love marriage depended on their social class, religiosity, commitment to tradition and what year it was. When Bella Chagall's brother Aaron announced that he was engaged, there was an uproar. His family wanted to know who she was and what kind of family she came from. When they found out that her family was not *Lubavitch Hasidic* (a Jewish religious sect) like they were, they refused to consent to the marriage unless the Rabbi of Bobrysk consented, which he did (Chagall 1983:332-333). In Miriam Shomer Zunser's family, there was a forty year age difference between the first and last born of her grandfather's children and thus a difference in how each of the ten surviving children married. The oldest son was
Mayshe and his marriage was arranged by a shadchen who found a girl from a family of scholars. Other than for this fact, no one cared to know anything more about the girl. The first time that Mayshe saw her was at the wedding when he dropped the veil over her face. Although she was a very unattractive girl, Mayshe stayed married to her for many years until her death because this was his family’s choice and accepting it was the custom. The oldest surviving daughter violently rejected her match and only agreed to marry him after having a family friend meet with him, after which he gave her a glowing review of the boy. Of course, her parents did not know about this. Likewise, the boy only agreed to marry her after he met with her. These demands were unheard of at the time and so were the romantic letters that the boy wrote to his future bride. The seventh child, a daughter named Fraydel, found her own match which was considered the ‘modern’ way at the time. Finally, the last surviving child, a son named Joshua, did not listen to his parents with regards to anything let alone marriage. This type of behavior was more common among Joshua’s contemporaries than among, say, Mayshe’s peers (Shomer Zunser 1978:49-55, 70-87, 196-197, 239-240). Thus, Bella Chagall’s family and Miriam Shomer Zunser’s grandfather’s family were microcosms of the changes in traditional marriage arrangements that were taking place in Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe beginning in the late nineteenth century.
Married Women: Commandments and Responsibilities

Even until their communities' destruction, the lives of many Eastern European Jews were guided by Halakah and Jewish traditions. Many of these laws and traditions are gender-specific. Most men's religious commandments and duties were communal and centered around prayer and the synagogue, while women's responsibilities were based in the home. The commandments that married women were supposed to carry out in the shtetl included performing niddah (ritual separation from husband during menstruation), hallah (ritual act and blessing when bread made) and the lighting of Sabbath candles. In addition, the proper Jewish married woman was also responsible for keeping a kosher home, raising her children correctly and earning a living if necessary. It was also mentioned in the literature that it was a mother's responsibility to teach her daughters how a proper Jewish woman should keep house (Stahl Weinberg 1988:16,34-35; Zborowski and Herzog 1952:130-131,366). However, no mention was made as to whether or not mothers taught their daughters about the commandments they would be expected to follow once married.

The commandment of niddah requires a woman to remain apart from her husband sexually for a maximum of fourteen days, inclusive of menstruation. Some Ultra-Orthodox women of the shtetl even refrained from casual contact with their husbands during menstruation and the remaining days of separation (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:285). A woman's state
of niddah (impurity) ended when she immersed herself in the mikveh (ritual bath).

...a wife went once a month to the mikveh. During the menstrual days she didn’t touch a man, and if for some reason she was not able to go afterwards to the mikveh, she stayed away from her husband until she could go. Usually the beds were placed at some distance from each other so that they wouldn’t be together when the wife was impure (Schoenfeld 1985:60).

Joachim Schoenfeld (1985:7) remembered that since his city did not have a natural stream which a mikveh must be built over, his city’s mikveh had to be built far away in a valley. Regardless of this distance, the women of his city regularly went to the mikveh. Bella Chagall recalled that when she went to the mikveh with her mother, she was afraid for her as she watched her mother walk down the slippery steps and go into the water up to her neck. However, after her mother dunked under the water three times and was declared kosher, Bella also recalled the smiling delighted look on her mother’s face as she was now clean and purified (Chagall 1983:20-21). Although many women went to the mikveh, many, beginning in the twentieth century, did not go on a regular basis (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:286-287).

Hallah, the ritual act of throwing a piece of dough into the oven and saying a blessing when making bread, is another commandment that the women of the shtetl followed. If this ritual was not done, the bread would be considered unfit for consumption (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:39). This act symbolizes the tithe paid to the priests back in the days of the Temple (Biale 1984:40). There is not much else
written about Eastern European Jewish women and this ritual.

The lighting of the Sabbath candles is a married woman's third commandment. Friday evening at sundown,

The woman of the house lights the candles, praying as she does so, 'Blessed art Thou, oh Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has hallowed us by His Commandments and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath light!' She says her prayer in Hebrew, which she may or may not understand, for Hebrew is the language of religion. Her prayer is almost inaudible to earthly ears. Men say some prayers aloud but a woman usually moves her lips and barely murmurs the words. Having lighted the candles she moves her arms over them in a gesture of embrace, drawing to her the holiness that rises from their flames. She draws the holiness to herself, but not for herself only, for she represents her household...[She then] covers her eyes with her hands, and now she says her own prayer, dictated by heart. This prayer is not in the language of ritual but in Yiddish, her own vernacular (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:43).

But in addition to fulfilling this commandment, the traditional married woman had many other duties to perform for this 'holiday' which lasts from sundown Friday until nightfall Saturday. She had so many things to do that her preparations began Thursday evening. The Sabbath, the most important day, was like a queen coming to visit, so everything was to be cleaned until it shined. Shoes were polished, floors washed and silverware cleaned. But first the special Sabbath meal was prepared. Fish were scaled, chickens plucked, vegetables chopped and breads and cakes baked. And always more than enough was baked by a woman because her husband usually brought guests or strangers home after Friday night prayers as was the custom. The special Sabbath meal, cooked by the female members of a family, was
remembered by all those who had ever lived in traditional homes in Eastern Europe (Chagall 1983:24-36; Shomer Zunser 1978:33-35; Schoenfeld 1985:85-90). Remembering the delicious Sabbath meals in her home, Miriam Shomer Zunser (1978:34) exclaimed that "Nothing else in the world can smell that way." Even poor women managed to create a 'feast,' or a meal out-of-the-ordinary, for the Sabbath holiday (Stahl Weinberg 1988:14). Preparing for the Sabbath, the day of rest, was a big job for women, many of whom also had children and an outside job to attend to as well. But for the women who prepared for and celebrated the Sabbath, only happy and joyous memories were recalled.

There were men and women in the shtetl who did not celebrate the Sabbath, but their numbers appear to have been small. Even those 'modern' women who refused to cover their hair after marriage and who read modern books kept the Sabbath, along with other aspects of Jewish tradition which they regarded as essential and did not want to abandon (Stahl Weinberg 1988:57-58). People have remembered that in Stoczek during the 1930's, some male communists violated the Sabbath by smoking and walking with uncovered heads in public. They were greatly disliked for boastfully defiling the Sabbath in public (Stopincka Rosenthal 1954:179). However, with regards to women, only their observance of the Sabbath has been written about (Stahl Weinberg 1988:57).

As mentioned above, women were also expected to keep a kosher home, bear many children and raise them properly and
earn a living if necessary. Keeping a kosher home was expensive, time consuming and involved a woman’s full attention. It involved taking your fowl to a 
*shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and then checking the meat for irregularities afterwards. If something appeared to be wrong with the meat a rabbi was consulted. He would decide if the meat was kosher or not. If not kosher, the meat was thrown away or given or sold to a gentile. If it was kosher, the koshering process continued. The meat was then soaked in water and salted for hours until all the blood was drawn out. Keeping kosher also meant never mixing milk and meat. Thus three sets of kitchen utensils, dishes and pots and pans were needed. One was for food declared meat, milk and parve (neither meat nor milk). And a rabbi was always consulted if any of these utensils pots or dishes became contaminated, as in the case of using a meat fork for eating a dairy meal (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:369-370). Like keeping the Sabbath, Sidney Stahl Weinberg (1988:57-58) found that even ‘modern’ Jewish women still kept kosher.

Bearing and raising many children was also a woman’s duty and her status was determined in terms of how good of a wife and mother she was. While birth control and abortion are allowed by Jewish Law under certain circumstances, there is not much reference to them in the literature. In fact, the only reference was made by Schoenfeld (1985:60) who stated that, “Contraception or abortion was unthinkable.” Instead, most authors emphasized how important children were
to the people of the shtetl. Under Jewish Law, men are commanded to procreate and as a result, people were expected to have a child per year. No adult was thought to be whole without children and having only two children was like having no children. Children were the pride and joy of each household and women, whose status depended on their children, feared infertility because being infertile was a shameful state (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:129-132,308-310; Landes and Zborowski 1950:45). Miriam Shomer Zunser’s grandmother bore twenty-four children, of which only ten survived into adulthood (Shomer Zunser 1978:1). In Joachim Schoenfeld’s shtetl, families with twelve children were not rare (Schoenfeld 1985:60). And as for the kind of mothers they were, Eastern European Jewish women were known for the care and attention they provided their children. "Love and caring for children was a characteristic quality of Jewish mothers, who usually applied it, exaggeratedly—the 'Yiddishe Momma'" (Schoenfeld 1985:63). Nevertheless, as times changed so did the emphasis on having children among some Jews. Some women who had joined the Bund, as mentioned above, did so because they wanted to break out of the secondary role of mother and wife to which they perceived Judaism confined them and play more of a leadership and political role. Through becoming active in the Bund, many women began to question certain female-specific Jewish values. For example, some women who married decided against having any children (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:84-88).
Contrary to Schoenfeld’s sweeping generalization that birth control and abortion were not practiced, this must have meant that at least among some Bundist women, they were practiced. This new option of choosing not to have children was taboo under the tenants of Orthodox Judaism.

Although not their most important role and one that did not bring them status, many Jewish women in Eastern Europe also had to earn a living. In the shtetl, Jewish women usually worked in the market places as buyers and sellers, ran their own shops or helped their husbands in their stores. But the kind of work that a woman did depended on the size of the community that she lived in because there were fewer job opportunities in smaller communities. Thus, in smaller communities women had to take the initiative in creating their own jobs (Stahl Weinberg 1988:8-10; Zborowski and Herzog 1952:65,131-132).

In the small town of Sonik, there were a matchmaker, folkdoctor, bath-house attendant, an advisor to those cursed by the evil eye, a chicken seller, pearl stringer, baker, pretzelmaker, knitters, girdlemakers, sausagemaker, yeast seller, pickle vendor, herb vendor, seller of rags, honey and date sellers, a sponge vendor, cracker maker, and finally, ‘the Holy One,’ an enterprising woman who sold crosses and prayer beads to the peasants (Stahl Weinberg 1988:9).

In some middle-class Jewish families where they tried to emulate the Russian or Polish aristocracy, the women had servants to help cook, clean and raise the children. Usually these women did not work outside of the home (Stahl Weinberg 1988:4-5). Otherwise, for centuries Jewish women were expected as part of their responsibilities
contribute to supporting the family by earning a living, if need be. However, this paid work was traditionally ranked second in importance behind a woman’s role as a wife, mother and homemaker (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:129).

Thus, as shown above, the women of the shtetl were not of one mind and did not all behave the same way, especially since the late nineteenth century. Although they were all culturally East European Jews, they were also individuals with different biographies and consequently different ideas and experiences. How my informants felt about experiencing the types of customs and traditions like the ones mentioned above, will be discussed in my findings chapter where I hope to make a contribution to the literature concerning the different ways shtetl life was experienced.
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ORAL HISTORY

The methodological standpoint which guided the collection of my data and its analysis is oral history. Oral history research is based on spoken documents. It is a collection of orally related memories that individuals have of other people and of events that they participated in or observed (Hoopes 1979:5,7). Through oral history accounts, a researcher can acquire an understanding of how his or her informants felt about a particular event and thus add a human side to an existing lackluster written account. Sometimes though, oral history accounts become the only record concerning a certain event or way of life (Allen 1981:14,15,19,58). Thus, "...it can also mean a body of knowledge that exists only in people's memories and will be lost at their deaths" (Allen 1981:23) if left untapped.

I employed the oral history methodology in doing my research because I wanted to know more about the lives of Eastern European Jewish women than that which exists in the literature. I wanted to learn about the experiences of individual women and the beliefs that they attach to those experiences as well as the cultural ideas that they shared. In interviewing people from a particular cultural group, an oral historian can learn more than just about a collection of individuals. By comparing their accounts, a general picture of their culture will emerge (Hoopes 1979:44-45) as
well as themes relating to how they reconstructed it. Therefore, the principles of oral history combined with the state of the existing literature on my topic made oral history the best methodology for me to utilize.

THE SAMPLE

My sample consisted of fifteen Jewish women who came from Eastern Europe. Using the modern terms for the geographical locations where these women were born and raised, I found that nine were from Poland, three were from Romania, one was from Hungary, one was from Lithuania and one was from the Ukraine. These women came from villages, towns, small cities and large cities with most coming from towns and small cities. A few of them spent a varying number of years in a combination of these geographical entities because of changes in their fathers’ jobs and/or changes in their own marital status or schooling. All of the women were born between the years 1898 and 1921. They came from all different types of economic backgrounds, from poor to rich. Ten of these women are survivors of the Holocaust who spent World War Two in labour camps, concentration camps, hiding in the woods, and/or in Siberia. Most of these women were in their twenties when their families and communities were destroyed. Three of them were married before the war. The other five women were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three when they left Europe and they did so before the Second World War. All of them were single. Thirteen of my informants can be said to have
come from religious families which they have characterized as Orthodox, Hasidic or very religious. However, the actions, self-typifications and attitudes of twelve of these informants indicated to me that at times they preferred more modern ways to traditional customs or rituals (some more strongly and more often than others). One woman seemed to mainly extol traditional practices. Of the remaining two women, one said that she and her family were not very religious while the other woman, whose family's way of life was 'less than Orthodox,' swung from being very religious to totally secular around the age of twelve or thirteen. With regards to their affiliation with a particular social movement, one informant was a Bundist, twelve informants were Zionists, one informant belonged to a Zionist organization for educational purposes although she did not agree with them ideologically and sympathized more with the socialists, and one informant was not affiliated with any social movement while she lived in Eastern Europe. All of my informants presently live in Windsor, Ontario.

In choosing my sample, I selected women whom I knew, who were suggested to me by the director of the Jewish Community Center in Windsor and who my bubbly (grandmother) suggested. Most of the women that I interviewed were suggested to me by my bubbly and in initially contacting them I told them of my relation to my bubbly and that she had recommended them for the interview. Sometimes my bubbly contacted them first. In most cases, I believe that it was
her recommendation of the informants that encouraged them to be interviewed. Paul Thompson, a greatly accomplished oral historian, said of procuring an interview that "It will always be much easier if you can say that somebody else in the informant's social network has recommended them" (Thompson 1988:206). Of the women contacted and willing to be interviewed, only one was excluded because of her hearing difficulty. The other fifteen women were all capable of being interviewed and fit my criteria of being Jewish and having lived in Eastern Europe at least until their teen years. Of all of the women contacted in total, only five were unwilling to be interviewed. Most were unwilling because of the inconvenience, but one woman was afraid of the sad feelings it would conjure up because she lost most of her family in the Holocaust. (Talking about the past was hard for most of my informants since the great majority of them lost family and friends during the Holocaust).

My sample might be criticized for being biased. However, choosing a random sample was not appropriate considering my research topic. I am not going to generalize my findings to all Jewish Eastern European women of years past. While I personally believe that their feelings, beliefs and experiences are representative of many of their contemporaries, it cannot be proven scientifically because choosing an accurate random sample is impossible to achieve when doing an oral history. This is because random samples cannot take differential mortality or migration into account.

The contingencies of death, emigration, and untraceability of the entire historic population would ensure that not all of the participants stand an equal chance of being selected for interview (Lumis 1987:33).

Thus, it would have been aimless and disadvantageous for me to have excluded any capable and willing prospective informant from my study, especially since there are so few Eastern European Jewish women living in the Windsor area or any area for that matter.

THE INTERVIEW

The type of interview that I used is the topical interview which deals with a single theme or related themes (Reimer 1984:18). In designing my interview guide, I chose certain topics to discuss with the women. More specifically, I chose certain rituals or customs for which the role of girls and women is defined in Halakah and/or by Jewish traditions. I wanted to see how these rituals and events were actually lived-out in the past, in "the old country". I used a standardized interview guide with opening open-ended questions for each topic which asked the informant to describe or tell me about a certain experience. I then probed for the additional information that I wanted. To build comparability into the interviews without using a structured questionnaire, I tried to formulate and ask similar questions when probing each respondent for additional information so that the meaning of each question would be the same for each respondent. The topics were
ordered so that they could be discussed in a certain sequence. However, the guide was flexible in that some women went on to discuss topics when they were ready, although not in the same order as my guide, and I followed their lead. Some oral historians argue that totally free flowing interviews are best to use when a researcher wants to analyze how people look back on their lives (Thompson 1988:199). However, others say that if you want more than just a collection of biographies, if you want to construct a general picture of a way of life, then the researcher should ensure that each informant discusses the same areas of experience. Thus, to do this, the researcher must give direction to the interviews (Lumis 1987:44-45). Although I wanted to see how people reconstructed their past, I also wanted to compare descriptions and interpretations of the same subjects, so for the most part I directed the interviews.

The interviews always took place in each informant’s own home. This is usually the best place to hold an interview as respondents feel most comfortable in their own surroundings (Thompson 1988:205). One interview was conducted with each informant. The interviews lasted approximately between one and three hours. In most cases, after each interview I stayed and talked with each woman and was given something to eat.

To record their descriptions of their experiences, I always used a tape recorder. Although Schwartz and Jacobs
(1979:43) claim that a tape recorder can be intimidating and distracting to a respondent and may even bias his or her account, I found that all of my respondents were quite comfortable with it. As Thompson suggests, my respondents quickly forgot about it. It also actually had the effect of keeping them to the point and discouraging curious family members from joining us for more than a few minutes (Thompson 1988:204). I transcribed the recorded interviews both during and after the few months in which I conducted the interviews.

**MEMORY, BIAS AND VALIDITY**

Since the age of my informants ranged from sixty-seven to ninety, some may question the accuracy of my informants' accounts. My general feeling is that for the most part their memories were good, as they described their experiences in detail. When a woman could not remember something, she told me so. I did not make her feel inadequate. I told her not to worry and that someone else would fill in the details that she forgot. In fact, as tests have shown, interviewing the elderly is no more problematic than interviewing in general and that the memory of all informants is best when they are interested in the topic of the interview (Thompson 1988:113-117). I believe that all of my informants were interested in my interview topic and that as a result, the great majority of them were eager to detail their experiences for me. Also, they were quite pleased as well as curious that I found their past
lives interesting. Another reason for their detailed and seemingly accurate accounts is what Thompson calls the process of life review. This process begins in old age with a traumatic experience like retirement or widowhood. What it is exactly is a sudden emergence of memories and of desire to remember, and a special candor which goes with a feeling that active life is over, achievement is completed. Thus in this final stage there is a major compensation for the longer interval and the selectivity of the memory process, in an increased willingness to remember, and commonly, too, a diminished concern with fitting the story to the social norms of the audience. Thus bias from both repression and distortion becomes a less inhibiting difficulty, for both teller and historian (Thompson 1988:116-117).

Another area of possible bias concerns the fact that I would be considered an insider in my relationship with my informants. However, I did not find the fact that I know or know of many of the women that I interviewed and am myself a member of their community (Jewish) disadvantageous. The women were very candid with me when discussing all topics. I also believe that they told me as much as they knew without shyly holding anything back. And although some claim that outsiders may delve deeper into areas that would be familiar to an insider (Allen 1981:12), I believe that in my case it would be more a matter of time constraints and researching too many areas if some subjects were treated too lightly. (I had interviewed for much more information than that which was used in my analysis).

Another possible problem which can confront any researcher is the validity or truthfulness of their
informants' accounts.

What the qualitative researcher is interested in is not truth per se, but rather perspectives. Thus the interviewer tries to elicit a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:98).

Sometimes though, informants purposely distort and exaggerate their experiences or even substitute popular memory, what they learned through books or the media, for their own experience (Taylor and Bogdan 1984:99; Lumis 1987:127). To combat this problem, I conducted internal tests of validity during each interview. Basically, when there were inconsistencies in a woman's testimony, which can signal distortions, exaggerations or popular memory substitutions, I asked her about it. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984:100) this is the best way to deal with questions concerning the authenticity of an account. By employing this method, it cleared up any doubts I may have had concerning the above mentioned problems, in most cases. However, in one case after I gently confronted a woman concerning the truthfulnes of her account, she kept supplying me with information which I believed to be popular memory. Only after the interview did she admit to distorting her experiences with regards to certain topics, the topics that I was suspicious about anyway.

In addition, I also compared their accounts with other sources which dealt with Eastern European Jewry. In conducting this external test of validity I did not find any glaring contradictions between my informants' accounts and
other written sources. However, most of the sources that I compared the women's testimonies with were other oral histories or autobiographies and it is only natural for all of these different 'informants' to have differing experiences, attitudes and beliefs. In any case, validity checks on other oral histories have shown that when interviews are conducted by an interviewer of the same sex and of a different age than the informant's and when the past is the topic of discussion (as was the case with my interviews), more frank and less exaggerated testimonies are acquired than when the opposite occurs (Lumis 1987:52-54). All in all, I was satisfied with the honesty of the women's accounts.
CHAPTER V

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN THE SHTETL

Within this large findings chapter, I will be presenting my informants' recollections of past experiences that took place in what were the shtetlach of Eastern Europe. I will be dealing with specific vignettes of their lives in the areas of education, male/female relations, marriage, married women's responsibilities and commandments. My purpose in presenting this material is threefold. To begin with, I hope to show how meaning is construed when people reflect back on past life experiences. For my informants, explaining the relationship between their personal lives and structural and cultural influences was important when discussing their past experiences. As we will see, each informant at some point explained how their personal life was affected by and intertwined with a lack of power (as a Jew and/or a Jewish female), the stratification system (being rich or poor) and ideology (as a member of a social movement and as a member of a religious or nonreligious family). Secondly, to explicate further meaning from their recollections of their personal histories, I look at the relationship between their experiences with and interpretations of cultural prescriptions, self-typifications, typification of others and their feelings and attitudes. From their explanations of their experiences and relationships, in conjunction with the existing literature on my research topic, I categorized
and will present their interpretations according to whether they were modern or whether they were traditional. Finally, I hope to add to the literature on what it was like to grow-up Jewish and female in the shtetlach of Eastern Europe just prior to the Holocaust. In this chapter I present individuals' quotes on their past experiences taken together with similar quotes from others and counterpoise them against contradictory quotes. The quotes are representative of some of the different ways life was experienced by Jewish females as members of different socio-economic groups during the last few decades of what once was a strong Jewish presence in Eastern Europe.

EDUCATION

All of my informants had some kind of formal education. Usually, they had both a religious and secular education. However, I divided my analysis into two sections and treated separately women who focused mainly on their religious education from women who focused mainly on their secular education. Inherent in their discussions, regardless of whether they described their religious or secular education, was that they believed that they faced cultural or structural barriers, respectively, in the pursuit of their education. As we will see, nine women were motivated to overcome these barriers, while three accepted and legitimized their limited education. (I did not obtain enough information from my three other informants to include them in this analysis).
Religious/Hebrew Education

As explained earlier, the formal education of girls in the shtetl was traditionally minimal, especially when compared with the education of boys. In addition to being different in content, the education of females was not lifelong as it was for males because being educated was not considered a desirous quality in a woman. But as the ideological climate changed and more choices were available in all areas of their lives, some women chose to further their religious (and Hebrew) education.

From six of my informants' descriptions of their experiences, I was able to identify two different types of interpretations of their religious/Hebrew education. The first interpretation, I labelled "Limited Religious Educational Opportunities--Acceptance and Legitimation." These three women recalled that, typically, a girl's education was limited in where it took place and in content. They also saw their own education as being an offshoot of this, but in reflecting back on their education, they saw it as being proper and correct. The other type of interpretation I called "Limited Religious Educational Opportunities--Taking Control." The three informants in this category saw the educational opportunities of girls in the communities they grew-up in as also being typically limited. Girls were just not expected to have an in depth religious education. Although they were given varying levels of formal education, from none to learning in a
cheder, each woman recalled wanting to know more. Motivated by feelings of interest, shame or a love of learning, they took control of the content of their education. As we will see, all of my informants believed that traditional cultural prescriptions concerning the limited religious education of girls were in effect in their communities. Where they differed however, was in their interpretation of their own educational experiences in relation to the traditional prescriptions for a girl’s education.

LIMITED RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES—ACCEPTANCE AND LEGITIMATION

In describing their religious education, these women pointed out that it was confined. It was interpreted as confined to the extent that there was not a special school for them as there was for boys and because they did not learn as much as boys.

Frieda: Girls didn’t go to cheder.

We [she and her sisters] had a teacher [tutor]...[He taught us] Hebrew [and] Yiddish.

Naomi: ...I didn’t have much schooling...I went to...like a rebe [learned man/teacher]...we used to go for Hebrew...But they weren’t so strict with us [girls] see. But a boy should know Chumish and Gemara [Torah and scholar’s commentary on the oral law, respectively]. But we don’t have to know that.

However, these women did not interpret their separate and restricted education in a negative manner. Instead, it was viewed as normal. They saw themselves as girls and deemed the education that they had as typical for a girl. In fact they legitimated their education by claiming that its content was set by parents and therefore unquestionable
and by stating that an expanded education was not necessary for a girl's future.

**Frieda:** We knew that we are girls and the other are boys and they have a different way of doing things... That was the rules and nobody could question it. The parents decide.

**Naomi:** ... We [girls are] not supposed to know anything. We supposed to be housewives and good mothers and raise the families and that's all, but they [boys], they supposed to know *Chumish* and *Gemara* and all right, we know history like, but they, they have to know more... We knew that a boy's got to know more. He's got to know a *bar mitzvah*. Look at the *Maftir* [the last portion of the bible read on the Sabbath and holidays] they have to say... a girl doesn't have to.

Looking back on their religious education, these women deemed it as limited because they were girls. Nevertheless, they interpreted it as acceptable for girls because it was in keeping with 'the rules' and was all that was necessary for a girl to learn. Thus, they had a traditional education and reflected on that education in a traditional manner.

**LIMITED RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES― TAKING CONTROL**

These women described their religious education in terms of the cultural definitions for appropriate behavior which were supposed to structure it. They described what type of education their community deemed appropriate for girls and what was deemed appropriate for boys. In their own way, they each explained that not much was expected of a girl in the way of her religious education in comparison to what was expected of boys. This was born-out in their explanations of their own educational experiences.

**Golda:** Just what I grabbed at home in the surroundings, that was my Jewish education.
There wasn’t such a thing that a girl should go to a religious school. Very few were even in the Hebrew [day] school, mostly were boys, you see. Girls weren’t looked upon as [though] they had to go through this education.

**Bella:** I was gone to Jewish school for one season just to learn the alphabet [Hebrew] actually.

Everything was put on the boys. The boys had to go to cheeder and then they had to go to Yeshivah when they were [all]ready twelve years old. And the girls just had to be pretty and know how to cook and clean and get married young.

**Nina:** [The girls could learn]...Chumish and Rashi [eleventh century French rabbi and commentator] if we wanted. We are not excluded but we can be included. This is special. We have to read only to daven [pray] and Chumish [and] Rashi we don’t have to do it...because a girl not supposed to know so much about it. It was a rule.

Unlike the other women discussed earlier, these women did not follow the traditional prescriptions which would have restricted their education if they had accepted them. Rather, they ‘side-stepped’ these ‘obstacles’ in the way of a more complete religious/Hebrew education. Motivated by an interest in the subject material, a love of learning, or feelings of shame, these women undertook to give themselves more of an education than their parents were willing to give them.

**Nina:** Parents were not especially satisfied what the girls were learning. Even my parents they were not satisfied [that] I was learning Chumish [and] Rashi...they didn’t feel good about me.

...But in my case, I was interested a-.] I was learning...because I wanted!

**Golda:** ...We [she and her sisters] learned from [my brothers] when they came home...to sit down and make their own, especially me. I always liked to learn...I’d watch them what they were doing...And I put one and two together and I
learned how to read Yiddish and the same in Hebrew. I saw what they [had] written and they taught me how to write.

[Then when I was older], I gathered a few of my friends, there were eight or ten of them, and I went to the principal of the Hebrew Academy... and told him that we would like to take night classes [and asked] what he would charge us. And he told me. So each one chipped in with the same amount of money and that's how we attended Hebrew school twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays... And that was such a big thing for me to sit down and be taught [Hebrew] by somebody and make lessons [and to prepare for it...because I never had it.]

Bella: ...I remember [on Yom Kippur] father was staying with me too and [I] should say the bracha [blessing] and I couldn't say the bracha. He said "How come from one season [of school], one winter?" And I remember I was crying. I was ashamed that I couldn't say the bracha. And then from myself I learned...to daven. I knew the alphabet and I learned to daven and...the Friday night davening I used to know by heart and I used to know almost a half of it from Saturday morning.

So for these women too, traditional cultural prescriptions which restricted a girl's education were part of their educational history. These restrictions took the form of no schools, a limited curriculum and an education condensed into one season. However, in an untraditional move, these women initiated their own religious/Hebrew education which was only bounded by the fulfillment of their own interests, desires and needs.

Secular Education

Before modernity took root in the shtetl, Jewish girls living in Eastern Europe did not have a secular education (aside from some Yiddish). But with the advent of forced attendance at public schools and/or more 'enlightened or modern' attitudes towards a secular education, parents were
more willing to have their daughters educated in subjects like history, math, geography and the local language.

As for my informants, most of them had an elementary-type secular education. Some were taught in state schools, some in Jewish schools, some were tutored and one was taught in church schools. A few went on to high schools run by the state, while others went on to high schools run by different Jewish organizations. None of the women attended university. One woman did not have any formal secular education. All six of my informants who focused on their secular education shared a common interpretation of it. They saw it as being prematurely truncated because they were Jewish or they did not have enough money. However, motivated by a desire to be educated, these women undertook to get an education on their own. Aided by mainly Zionist organizations and in one case the Bund, they women had access to libraries, books, debates and those who were ready to help them learn. Because of the characteristics of their interpretation, I categorized it as "Limited Secular Educational Opportunities—Taking Control."

**LIMITED SECULAR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES—TAKING CONTROL**

In each of the communities where my informants grew-up there had existed at least an elementary school. Some also had high schools and universities. For each educational institution, I had at least one informant who desired to attain that level of education, but could not because she was Jewish and/or did not have enough money.
Anti-Semitism

Miriam: First in the other schools they didn’t take Jewish people, [in] the elementary normal school...Then my mom went to the Reformed [priest]...They taught five girls [and] five boys but we can’t stand it, the anti-semitism, because they are kicked us. We tell the parents we not want to go because we didn’t learn nothing.

Devorah: The anti-semitism was terrible. Young people not having nothing to do when you finish public school...No jobs, you just a dressmaker, a shoe-maker, a carpenter. Was university too...But you [are] Jewish, [so] you needed to have money and later you needed to be a genius.

Lack of Money

Leah: ...to college I want [to go] so much...but this I couldn’t afford.

Nehama: [In post-revolutionary Russia]...the taxes were so high it was ridiculous even for rich people...they were not interested that rich people should study. For me the fee [for public school] was too much of a drain and my parents were too busy to be interested [so I was pulled out of school].

For Ruth the lack of money was manifested in a different way. It was not that school was expensive, but that her labour was needed by her mother in running the house and by her dad in running the family business.

Ruth: I have no education in Polish...Nothing what-so-ever...When my sisters left [home], I was the oldest in the house...I had a big responsibility in the house helping my mother...and...[running] the mikvah [ritual bath]...it was on my shoulders to do all those things [so] I didn’t had time to go to school.

So these women saw their formal secular education as being limited because of certain structural constraints.

These informants however, had a strong desire to learn and a great love of learning that ran very deep. Like the
women who strove for a greater religious education, these informants' feelings and attitudes embodied what was traditionally a male-specific emphasis on continued study (religious). Now though it was females who were measuring their secular education against this norm. It was this desire to be educated that motivated these women to start or continue their secular education, even after facing the structural barriers mentioned above.

**Nehama:** Somehow I always thought I’ll become some useful person... [so] when they stopped [my education] this was a very big shock... And when I say shock, when I [saw] a student from my class, I used to... [feel] a shock.

**Leah:** I loved to learn. I could read a book three-hundred pages, a big size, and I could remember [the] next day in class to tell everything... I used to read till three o'clock [in the morning] ... And I could remember every word... I had a good memory and I wanted so much to learn.

When they could not study in the educational institutions of the larger society, these women initiated their own education and became self-taught. Accommodating their needs, during this period of great social change, were mostly the Jewish organizations which were products of this period, the *Bund* and the Zionist organizations. They provided the wherewithal which enabled these women to continue learning.

**Deborah:** ... You have Jewish libraries, lots of library and everybody have a book and everybody educated. And later you go in [the] street and you have discussions mit everybody... Everyday you go with young people and this is a Bundist and this is a Zionist... and everybody know and you have big discussions and later fighting too. It was very interesting and from these discussions your mind start to work better. You start [being] more
educated. You have books. You are self-taught.

Nehama: ...Then they had debates. I used to go to their debates [and] symposiums. The pioneers [Zionists] had em, but I had my own opinion, you see. If I agreed, I agreed...and if I didn't, you know, whatever was logical. For instance, they had a question about Jesus being a revolutionary in his times. That interested me. Now for a Jewish person, Jesus? And then they had a question, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to go to heaven. These things I remember from them. You see, I wasn't with them, but I appreciated [them].

Ruth: ...I learned [to read] from the [Zionist] organizations which...I belonged. So every Saturday after dinner, around one o'clock, we had a place...and down there you had like a library and there were people which they handed out the books to you and if you needed to know something you asked them and they explained everything to you. And when I took the book[s] and start reading them, hardly I knew how, [but] I put together the words, an aleph, a vid...a bet [Hebrew letters]...and when you talk Yiddish, the Yiddish writing [with Hebrew letters] and the Yiddish speaking it's the same thing. And then I used to read a lot of Jewish books, a lot of them.

Lastly, the one woman discussed above who could not attend elementary school because she was Jewish continued her secular Hungarian education at home. She was able to do this because a teacher at the school would lend her books and give her assignments to do, but at home.

Miriam: After the cheder...finished...I went to the elementary school...but I didn't [attend]...over there. I just went for the book[s] and always the teacher give it to me the good mark...[but] I didn’t attend the school because I couldn’t.

Because they were not allowed for various reasons to start or continue their education, these informants sought-out a secular-type education on their own. They became literate in the Jewish vernacular Yiddish, attended debates,
went to libraries and continued to learn what their non-Jewish peers were learning in elementary school. In other words, they became self-educated.

In summation, we can see that growing-up in a culture that had traditionally emphasized continued education, although for men, had differing affects on my informants. For some in this modern period, it ignited a desire to learn and set a standard against which they measured their own religious or secular educations. For others these traditions served to justify their own limited religious education.
MALE/FEMALE INTERACTION AND FEMALE DRESS

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century in what could be termed the traditional shtetl, certain rules of modesty were followed by females (and males). As discussed in the Review of the Literature, the following of these rules was manifested in how females socialized and dressed when in the company of males. More specifically, a woman, young or old, would not socialize with men, would wear long sleeves and would cover her hair with a shawl [wig] if she were married. As the times changed though, so did the practices of many women who began to choose not to implement these traditional cultural definitions of proper behavior and dress. This was the case with seven of my informants who discussed this topic in an in-depth manner. (I did not ascertain enough information from my eight other informants to include them in this discussion). They chose not to structure their daily lives according to these traditional prescriptions, although others they knew did including most of their mothers. On the other hand, in some specific situations, they would observe some of these rules as well as others. In analyzing their descriptions of their experiences concerning this topic, I found two general motivating factors for the contrary nature of their behavior. First of all they usually did not follow the prescriptions because they believed it was not appropriate behavior for the type of person they were. Secondly, the women sometimes chose to follow these and other traditional
cultural definitions of proper behavior when they believed that they were in a situation where it was correct for them to do so. Such instances included: When their parents made them, when they were showing respect for a more observant or traditional person or when they believed that it was expected of them. Basically, they chose to fulfill another person's expectations concerning how they should dress or behave when it would lead to smooth social relations. Under such circumstances, the following of the rules did not negate their view of themselves as 'modern' people. This understanding of their divergent behavior was the only type of interpretation I could discern on this subject. I called it "Balancing Self-Expectations With the Expectations of Others" because it describes the dichotomous nature of their interpretations of their behavior.

**Balancing Self-Expectations With the Expectations of Others**

**Traditional Cultural Prescriptions Not Followed by Informants--Male/Female Interaction**

Among the many prescriptions for traditionally correct behavior, my informants discussed how unrelated men and women were not supposed to spend time socializing together. They described how men and women who implemented this rule would not sit next to each other and how some very religious men would not talk to or even look at a 'strange' woman. However, the women explained that these were prescriptions for behavior which they did not apply in how they conducted their personal lives. Some indicated rather, that they were the rules of those they typified as fanatical or so
religious. Others explained that these rules did not guide their lives because they were modern, free or more advanced already. In any case, this custom of separation was one that was practiced by others.

**Nina:** Men and women didn’t sit together, [they sat] separately...If neighbours they’re coming in [to my parents house] they know where they have to sit. She knows that she is not going to sit near a man, you know. We don’t have to show her the place...But so when we’re visiting each other, we were together. We were at friends we were together...[This is] my generation...we were modern already. We were Zionist.

**Golda:** Mostly when they came together, the majority that I remember, men sat together, sat separate, [and] women sat separate. Most of them. In the house even [they were] sitting separate. Men had jokes and stories to tell among themselves separate and same thing women. It was never so that women and men should spend time together...But lets say on a holiday, on Shabbes or some evenings, boys and girls we gathered together in my house. Boys and girls got together [and] we went out on hikes. We went out bicycle riding...together. But by my uncle and aunt [her guardians] it wasn’t considered anything wrong that we did go, like boys and girls. ...It was different. It was a little bit more advanced, you know, than the other generation.

**Rivka:** It always came company to us. My mother was [a] very well known woman. People liked her very much. So...it came like a Friday night [and] to her came women [and] she was always sick and [to] my father came men. They used to come men and sit by the table and my mother was lying in bed and the woman sit around her. And he was with the men and they were talking about Talmud [and] they were talking about Israel.

[And my father]...didn’t look at a woman...Because ...he was so religious he didn’t look at a strange woman...and even when he speaks [to one] he looks on the wall...I didn’t like it...It was my father’s custom.

...I was free, free thinking...I was already changed in Europe because I had friends and we got together boys and girls and we changed already. We were not like our parents.
**Deborah:** The religion men and woman have a separate life. You not can talk together. It's a different life. He not looking [at] the other woman, just the wife.

I not like these people. [They are] too very religion [and] fanatical.

So to my informants, this traditionally proper behavior of the separation of the sexes was correct for some people, but not for them.

**Dress**

To the religious Jews of Eastern Europe a female properly dressed was one who was dressed modestly and modestly meant covered-up. More specifically, a female person was supposed to cover her arms in long sleeves and if she was married she was supposed to cut her hair off and wear a **sheytel**. As discussed earlier, hair (and bare arms) were thought to be a great source of distraction for men. The majority of my informants did not follow this dress code most of the time, but as we will see later some did occasionally as a show of respect for others. One woman who was single prior to World War Two and who never wore long sleeves as a matter of religious conviction typified herself and her manner of dress as that of a free person. To her being a free person in these matters meant she could dress as she pleased. By contrast she typified the religious people as those who had to cover-up and as those who by implication were unfree.

**Deborah:** ...the religion people have black dresses most time and the long sleeves. But the free people, they have sleeveless dresses and have [a] different dress...[just] before the war we start
[wearing] pants [too].

In turning now to the covering of a married woman's hair, I learned from my informants that a majority of their mothers wore a *shevitz*. However, of the three interviewees who were married before the destruction of their communities, none of them chose to wear a *shevitz*. To each of them the *shevitz* meant different things, but all of those things had a negative connotation. To them the *shevitz* was worn by the religious or was not attractive or was something those who typified themselves as modern would not wear.

**Frieda:** ...the religious group had to put on a *shevitz*. I didn't. I never wore a *shevitz*.

**Nina:** [We didn't wear a *shevitz*], not me [and] not my sisters...Some were [wearing them], but not me. We were modern already...The *shevitz* my mother didn't like, but she wear it. You know it's nothing to like. It's not the *shevitz* of today--they're so beautiful and everything. The *shevitz*, it was big-like.

**Miriam:** ...When I saw my mother when they cut the hair down and always the *shevitz*, it never looks good... and I thought when I get married [I will] ...never cut my hair. And my aunt after the marriage, [the] next day, they come [and] they want to cut my hair. I said "...Aunt Z...my hair nobody going to cut." Not just one, everyone want to make a *mitzvah* [good deed] [and] cut my hair. Three or four came...I said no. Everyone have the scissors. I [said] no, no *mitzvah*...My husband [also] didn't want [me] to cut my hair. If [he] want, I didn't marry him!

Thus, some informants explained that there were certain rules single and married women were supposed to follow regarding dressing modestly, however, for varying reasons, they explained that they chose not to follow these rules.
Traditional Cultural Prescriptions Followed by Informants

There were certain traditional customs with prescriptions for appropriate behavior that my informants did enact. Some were more reserved in their 'public' relations with the opposite sex, while others were more modest in how they dressed. So for each woman there were ways of behaving that were sometimes off-limits to the affects of modernity. These limits were set by their parents and/or themselves. For example there was a woman who refused to wear a shevit but who covered her hair when she met with her father and a woman who dressed as she pleased but acted in a reserved manner when she was with her boyfriend and in the company of her parents.

-Male/Female Interaction

Some women explained that they observed modest behavior when in the company of those who expected it from them as a matter of respect or reverence. Under certain circumstances when in mixed company they did modify their behavior and believed that it was proper to do so. Such circumstances included walking on the same street as a famous rabbi and being with their boyfriends while in the company of their parents or 'the public'.

Rahel: We had this rabbi, I told you, a very famous [rabbi]...When we would be on the street and he would come with the whole Hasidim after him...the Hasidim would tell [us girls that] we shouldn't be one girl here and one girl here [on each side of him that] he should go in the middle [of us]. We should all go on the side. He shouldn't walk between [us]. He shouldn't even if it was here and there [pointing to a great distance]...I didn't
think that it's...wrong. Who am I to say. He is the big rabbi and this is the custom. This is the religion. I didn't think bad, but we were so like afraid.

Deborah: [If] my boyfriend give me a hug and my parents see? Oh I am ashamed. I never do this one. Have respect, very much. You have lots of respect...You not sit down in one chair. You just talk when the parents is in [the] room...It's not the style. When a girl kiss mit a boy oh everybody talk for a year. When nobody see, you kiss and you hugging. When nobody see.

Nina: ...when I met my first husband, we...made [an] engagement party and he left and I didn't kiss him and he didn't kiss me. It was very hard for me this. It was very hard for him, so he came next time later a week too, to get a kiss from me and I got from him...in private. It was a kiss or holding hand [in public?] My gosh, no, never, never, never!

As shown above, some women who earlier had described themselves as modern or free had limited the encompassing effects of modernity on some aspects of their behavior.

Dress

There were also women who said that there were some rules of modest dress which they followed. Like the women who observed the cultural definitions of modest behavior under certain circumstances, these women explained that they were modest in their dress when in the company of those who expected them to dress in this manner. They agreed out of respect and/or they agreed because they did not have a say in the matter.

Miriam: 'My father...wanted [me to wear a shevet], but I didn't...When I went to my father's house [though]...I put something on my hair [to cover it].

Rivka: In the summer I wear short sleeves [and] in the winter I wear long sleeves, [but never sleeveless], not in our house. I have no choice.
Frieda: If they [females] had to meet with men, they wouldn’t go with naked arms. They would dress according with whom they will meet and not to embarrass the parents or themself.

Golda: Well in the summer time we wore short sleeve dresses. But of course in the winter time long sleeve dresses. But it wouldn’t make any difference that we have to cover-up. But [for] the religious [it] did...They were very careful about that...[My girlfriend B.] because of her family, of her [religious] father, she had to be dressed that way. When I went to their house, I observed the same thing.

So here too were women, who had earlier described themselves as free or as advanced, following more traditional prescriptions for proper behavior when they believed they ‘had’ to.

In conclusion, we can see that some traditional cultural prescriptions for modest dress or behavior were not followed by my informants while other ones were observed by them. If they typified themselves as advanced, modern or free or as not so religious or fanatic, they usually socialized freely with the opposite sex and/or dressed according to their own desires. However, these same women placed limits on some of these behaviors and/or modified their dress when they believed it was appropriate for them to do so. This meant that while modernity, in the form of socializing with the opposite sex and doing away with long sleeves and the shevtl, had affected how they led much of their lives, respect for others more observant sometimes influenced them to behave more modestly or traditionally. One interviewee’s interpretation of her behavior as that of adjusting to different people emanates from all of the
interviews on this topic. Thus, a final quote from her will help further explain what my informants' past actions or inaction meant to them.

Rahel: ...I had three categories [of] girlfriends. Some were very religious. If I came into the house and the father was there, I had to leave, you know, or go away to another room. And I had girlfriends who were a little more modern. And I had even Christian girlfriends...And I had all kind. I was adjusting [my behavior] to all of them.
MARRIAGE

In the Review of the Literature section, I discussed how in the traditional shtetl parents wanted their daughters to marry young so they would not become 'old maids' and that they wanted a say in who they would marry. Before the mid-nineteenth century, parents had control over who their children would marry and usually consulted with a matchmaker to find them just the right spouse. However, as I pointed out, by the twentieth century children began to take control over who, when and if they would marry away from their parents. From my informants' depictions of their past experiences, I learned that some of them interpreted the making of a marriage as a struggle between traditional parents and their more modern children, while others believed they and their parents more or less concurred that the modern way of falling in love was the best way to find a spouse.

Of all of my informants, only three were married before World War Two. The others did not marry before the war because they said they were too young. However, eleven of them had experienced the planning and celebration of marriages, whether their own or that of their siblings, neighbours and/or friends. (I did not obtain enough information from the remaining four informants to include them in this discussion). From their detailing of their lives in Europe, I discovered three different types of experiences with and interpretations of the marital process.
The first interpretation was what I termed "Challenging Matchmaking." The three women in this category had watched as their siblings were matched with a spouse by their parents or were themselves the object of an arranged marriage. In recalling this situation, the women explained that their parents were motivated to arrange their siblings' or their own marriage because it was the preferred custom, although under varying circumstances. Nevertheless, this arrangement or traditionally appropriate prescription for making a marriage was usually challenged by the defiant object of the match who was unhappy with the custom. The next interpretation of the marriage process I labelled as "Parental Influence--Acceptance and Disagreement." The four women in this category described their parents' prescription for choosing a marital partner as one where the children were free to choose whomever they liked. However, they recalled that the scope of their choice was limited by at least one of their parents. The women believed that their parent(s) were motivated to limit their choices because they were wealthy and wanted their children to marry wealthy people. Furthermore, three out of four of these informants' parents wanted them to marry (and to begin with, be friends with) males from families that were just as religious as their own. To cope with what was deemed as unwanted interference, these women took control of when they would choose to marry. Lastly, I identified a type of experience and interpretation which I categorized as "Free to Choose."
These four women described others as being under the influence of their own parents when it came to getting married. However they remembered being free from such influences as they and their parents belonged to the part of the community where dating and falling in love was believed to be the only prerequisite to marriage. This was born-out in their descriptions of their actions and subsequent interpretations.

CHALLENGING MATCHMAKING

The women in this category when dealing with the topic of marriage focused their discussions on matchmaking. They saw it as the traditional method for making a marriage that was preferred by their parents and others, although for different reasons. For example, my informants told me that it was considered the only way to be married, the last resort in marrying-off a 'defective' child or the best way to secure a religious and wealthy spouse.

Miriam: Almost everyone in the town [was matched-up]...Always they are matched.

Frieda: ...everyone looked different on things and they tried to match to their own taste...by themselves...But if [they couldn't] they had to depend off the parents and the parents tried their best they could to match with some [one] from other town or something...[My parents matched my sister] because...she lost her hearing as a child [although not completely] and my parents would do everything for her not to feel injured [and]...they thought she didn’t have anyone [a boyfriend] and [that] it would be hard [for her to find a husband]. It was [considered] a defect.

Rivka: [My father chose my brother’s wife because]...she come from a good family. She come from a rich family and her father was a learned man...They [her family] prefer matches.
So within these women's families and communities matchmaking was still considered a proper way to bring people together for marriage.

Nevertheless, as we will see from my informants' descriptions of their own and their siblings' actions and feelings regarding matchmaking, it was a custom in demise. Concomitant with the description in my Review of the Literature, children demanded and later were given the right to reject their parents' choice of a mate for them. As one woman recalled:

**Nina:** ...in my time we got a no and a yes. I can say I don't want the boy. I don't like him... Now [in] my parents time, maybe not.

In examining these women's actual descriptions of how and why they or their brothers or sisters rejected their matches one can detect that they felt uncomfortable with the custom. To generalize, it was deemed that the matchmaking process caused unhappy feelings which was a motivating factor in why most of the following matches were rejected.

Miriam was the only woman in my study who was repeatedly being approached by her parents and matchmakers about fixing her up. In reflecting back on this experience, Miriam described how she always refused any attempts at arranging a spouse for her because the custom made her feel like an animal being looked over for purchase, she did not like any boys in the town and she thought that she was too young to be married.

**Miriam:** ...lots of shadchen [matchmakers] talk to my father, but I didn't like it...one time...a
shadchen fix [me] up and when I heard somebody [was coming]...to look at me over I told my parents "I am not a cow. I am nobody...to look over." [So] I went to the train station. I went back to a city and I went to the cousin and [the] next day [I] went home [when the boy left].

And there was another attempt to arrange a spouse for Miriam.

One people in the town came to my mother. They are talking in the store...and I [was] inside the store and [overheard]. "You know C., if you want your daughter married...give with her three thousand forint [Hungarian money]"...and he can match me over with a boy...I said "mother, don't say a word. If he give me the three-thousand!" [Anyways] I didn't want to go married him. Why? Because I don't like him or any one in the town. And everyone told me I keep my head very high. I don't want to married. Why should I? I am too young for it.

Rivka, who said she was too young to be concerned with marriage while she was still living in Europe, watched as her father attempted to arrange the marriages of his older children. But nowadays, Rivka looks back on those attempts as failures. She saw her father as never completing a successful match for his children because of the will and determination of his daughters and the unhappiness of his sons.

Rivka: The free ones fall in love...my older sister was in love [and] my younger sister was in love before I left...My sister[s] didn't want to listen to my father.

My brothers got married from a match-up...[They married girls] from a different town. Most of this match marriages comes from different towns.

[To arrange my older brother's marriage] my father went to see the mekhut [relatives through marriage]...her father and he wants to hear if...he's a good learn[ed] man and he was a good learn[ed] man. He didn't have to see the girl [and] he didn't see the girl...My father never looked at a strange
woman.

[Anysways], my older brother wants to go home right after he got married...one brother make peace with himself. Both of them was not happy. They didn't marry the right girls...they married the girls [who were] very homely...When my older brother got married, my mother was fainting when she saw the girl...the older [brother stayed] for ten years [in the marriage] and finally he could get out with a divorce.

In Frieda’s case, she observed as her older sister went through the matchmaking ritual. She remembered that it was a trying emotional experience for the whole family as her sister refused to meet, let alone, marry her parent’s choice of a husband for her.

**Frieda:** I was in the store in [the] shite[1] watching the business and they [parents] went to Plotisk or wherever and I didn’t expect that they will come home and tell us that R. [was] engaged.

[They had made] a deal between friends and she [R.] had already her boyfriend [and we didn’t know] and she cried and she cried and she got the hic- coughs, a nervous hic- cough to a point that you could hear on the other side of the city...And my father was very upset about this and mother [too] of course.

...she [R.] didn’t want to see him [her fiancee] and she didn’t want to come to the table to eat with us [when]...he come to visit with a ring for her, a diamond...My father tried his best to calm her down, but it didn’t work. So he said to her "Listen, I promise you as soon [as] he will go home, I will write a letter [to his parents to break off the match]." [But] they make this deal that if somebody break up [the match they] has to be punished financially [because]...it is embarrassing for the [other party]...it is a bigger sin than not to marry at all. That’s what they told us at the time. [So my father] promised that [as] soon [as] he will go out, as long he is in our home he’s our guest [and] we have to treat him as a guest,...I will write to the father that it is [off]...And that’s what he did...And then ahhh what a relief, what a relief, he went home. But my father lost the money.
From these three women's descriptions of their experiences with their own possible arranged marriages or that of their sibling(s), we can see that there was a battle of the wills between the children and their parents. Although the parents chose this as the proper way to get their children married, the children rebelled. Motivated by intense feelings of anger, unhappiness and even trauma, the children usually refused attempts to have their marriages arranged or left the marriage when they were able to. Thus from their descriptions of their immediate experiences, we can see that my informants interpreted this custom as one that was promoted by parents and challenged by children.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE--ACCEPTANCE AND DISAGREEMENT

Most of the women in this category were aware of people who were fixed up by a matchmaker, but believed it to be a method for creating marriages that was not for them. In fact none of these women nor their siblings had an arranged marriage. They recalled being free to 'date' and marry a person of their own choosing.

**Raezl:** I got it so many friends when we go out, you can find it [a boyfriend or husband]...when you stupid than you take it to a matchmaker...I no got trouble about mine parents matching me...The city's a small one and everybody got their own group [of friends] and everybody not stupid, [they] got their own mind.

**Bella:** I think my parents [father] believed...that someec, you find somebody that you like and you get married. I know my father used to say..."When you like somebody it doesn't matter what profession he has. The main thing is that you love somebody, then you will be happy."

However, they believed that there were limitations
placed on them and their siblings by at least one of their parents with regards to what type of person they were allowed to date and marry; limitations they disagreed with but obeyed. These women described their parents as being successful in business and as being well-off and said that when it came to marriage at least one of their parents wanted their children to marry people from a similar economic background. Likewise, most of them were expected to marry men from religious families as well. In reflecting back on their ‘dating’ experiences and this related norm, these informants described how they felt about barriers in finding a marital partner in a negative manner.

Raezl: Listen, when I going with friends mine parents need to know whom I going [with]...they [would not let me] go in a place where the parents [were] not lighting [Sabbath] candles and not going to synagogue.

[Also] In our city is three kind [of] group[s] and that is not good...I belonged to a good group, but myself I don’t like it. This is nice person, a nice girl [or] nice boy, but you not good. You’re a shoemaker, you are a dressmaker. That is classes and you got a little bit more money then you first class and that is the worst thing what you can do...mine parents [said], you no can come with this girl, you no can come with the boy and ok I not going. They tell me [no and] no is no. And the boy’s a nice boy and the girl’s a nice girl, but not fit in [my] group and that is the worst thing what you can do...[My brothers] they’d going [with] the group that mine parents wanted. That is the whole reason [they liked their wives].

Bella: ...Mother was thinking differently. [To her my husband would have] to be from the right family with the right profession. Like the man I married [after World War Two], he was after me before the war...and just because he was a tailor she was very much against him...Just she used to say "I don’t want you to get married to a tailor." [Anyways], he married...He got married in 1940 to
A cousin of mine what he was gone out [with] for years...She was a very rich girl, very, very rich girl. And they got married and I used to say to mother "You see, she married [him]!"

Nina: First we were only looking for the family. First came the family [and] the[ir] vichus [status based on religious scholarship and/or wealth]...And after we were looking for the children...I have to know who his father was [and] who his mother was... Everything was checked thoroughly...very good... [I] have to checked out the parents...[Then] I can go out with the boy if it fits...[What] stupidity [she says laughing].

Nevertheless, while these women believed that they and their siblings were restricted in what type of person they could date and marry, they saw themselves as asserting control over when they would marry. Although they recalled being pressured by their parents to marry young, delaying that prospect was a ready way for them to take charge of the marital process, especially since their parents didn't use matchmakers.

Raezl: ...when mine sister married, mine parents ask me "What happened mir you?" I said "When I'm ready, I tell you."...they'd no want...[me] to be a old maid...[I was] seeing the same boyfriend [of] mine...[but] I never dreamed to [be] married...[I thought] I got time, two, three, four years to think about marriage.

Bella: ...I used to go out with a lot of boys [and] mother used to say "This boy is not for you. I wouldn't like you should marry this boy." And I always said "I don't want to get married young." ...It was nothing how you could protect yourself, you know [birth control] not like today. I said "and I don't wanna have twenty-four kids." I said "I had enough. I grew-up all my sisters and brothers. I feel like they're mine kids."

So in their reflections on marriage and the influence of their parents, we can see that these women obeyed their parents with respect to whom they should not be friends with
or marry, but coped with this loss of control by taking charge of when they would marry.

FREE TO CHOOSE

In discussing the traditional custom of matchmaking, these four women pointed out that it did not have an affect on their past lives. Instead, they explained that matchmaking was a custom that was used by others to marry their children. The others they typified as those who were very religious or parents trying to marry-off daughters so they would not become 'old maids'.

Leah: ...at the...hasidisha families, I'm sure they were still matching. I mean they wouldn't let [someone] marry their child from a home [that] was not so religious. So they tried. They tried but you know not every time it happened. I know a rabbi. He was the greatest rabbi in our city.... He had two daughters and imagine he wanted them to marry not just rabbis but from rabbinisha family or yiddishah families. And you wouldn't believe that one daughter...used to go to go to make dates with officers from the Polish army...This was a sensation really...and he [the rabbi] couldn't do anything.

Faegl: ...next door...[a] rabbi used to live there. Their children were all fixed-up with shadchens and some, they didn't even know the boy...They just met at the chupah [marriage canopy]...we weren't that religious like those girls.

Devorah: ...in our place it was not nice when you're [an] old maid. It was the worst thing a old maid, people looking of you different[ly]...[So] sometime when the girl is older [she's matched-up]. ...when you [are] ...twenty-five [it's]...a different story.

As for themselves, they believed that they were members of families and the part of the Jewish community where falling in love was thought to be the only prerequisite to dating and marriage (one was a Bundist and the others were
from Orthodox families, but Orthodox families on the poorer end of the economic scale. And as they explained, they had dated, went on outings and fell in love, all free from any parental pressure concerning with whom they should socialize or marry.

**Devorah:** Most time its you meet people and you fall in love. You go in organizations...and you meet people.

I liked to go with young people and have a good time and my parents never tell me not to go, no--just be careful, go. It was a different world. I was sometime [out] Friday in the evening and Sunday...o Saturday I come home. I was with young people in the winter time...[in] the snow...[We slept] in the farms. Oh yah, was a good time...I was free! My mother and father never tell me not to go.

[Also] I have a boyfriend...I didn't know [if my parents liked him]. I never ask [if] they like [or] they not [like him]. A very nice boy, Y. The name was Y.

**Leah:** When I grew-up, many young people fell in love. They met, they started going [together]...meeting each other, going to movie[s] [and] going just for walks. People met each other and they fell in love...and they got married.

I remember I met a boy and he was crazy about me...He was so good, he...always brought gifts for my family when he came to see me or take me out to a movie. And he was a wonderful young man and like I say after work he walked more that five miles to my house to pick me up...to take me to a movie...Then once he asked me to kiss and I said "I can't." Yah after a year, I can't. I didn't feel it. I felt like a friend, you know...But once we went to a high school...dance and then he introduced me to his friends...[and one friend] ask him if he can have a dance with me. And he says yes...so I danced...And this gentleman lived in my section so he [my date] asked him if he can take me home. He said yes...I went to the house and say good-bye and that's all. You know I didn't sleep all night...just thinking oh how could I meet this person again...After months we met...and he stopped me and we talked. And he said "can I take
you out?" [Then] he said to me "You know since I saw you I wanted always to meet you." But he thought that...[me and the other fellow are sweethearts. [I said]..."we're just friends." And he couldn't believe it. And he said "The minute [at the] dance I met you, I didn't stop thinking about you." [So]...about love, then you felt something. To me this is love, when you felt something in your heart...That's the way to meet a person and fall in love and get married, but not [by] arrangements...[And my parents] never talked [about] you have to marry from this and this family.

*Faegl:* Well he [father] wanted I should meet somebody on my own...It's better to fall in love or to know who you marry.

The women who I categorized as "free to choose" remembered others as being under the influence of their parents and a matchmaker when it was 'time' for them to marry. However, they recalled being free to date whomever they liked without feeling pressure from their parents that they were dating a person who was not 'marriage material' or that they should hurry-up and get married.

By virtue of their different types of experiences, the marital process meant something different to the women in the three above-mentioned categories. For the first two groups it represented a clashing of traditional and modern cultural definitions of the preferred way to find a marriage partner. For the third group though, it meant the existence of peace and harmony between parents and their children who shared modern ideas about how marriages should be made.
A MARRIED WOMAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Traditionally, within religious Judaic thought and culture, a married woman's most important role was the one she played as a homemaker. More specifically, she was supposed to be a good wife, mother, cook (following the rules of kashrut) and housekeeper. She was also supposed to teach all of these things to her daughters (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:347; Baum, Hyman, and Michel 1976:62). Unlike a man, her role was to be nurturing and home-centred (Hyman 1976:105-106; Meiselman 1978). That is not to say that Jewish women had not undertaken paid work throughout the centuries, because in Eastern Europe many had to earn a living either as the sole supporter of their families or to supplement their husbands' income. However, traditionally, they acquired their status for how well they worked managing their homes and not for the paid work they did outside of their homes (Stahl Weinberg 1988:10; Zborowski and Herzog 1952:129). Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, some authors have pointed out that modern women who lived in the shtetl during the twentieth century sought to gain their personal rewards through acquiring leadership roles in Jewish political or labour organizations. As a result, some of these women decided against devoting time to the harbingers of female status, like bearing and raising children (Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:84-88). As we will see, modern ideas were manifested in some of my informants' discussions of the past when they stressed how their 'professional'
training or paid work was just as important to them if not more important than their domestic training or unpaid work.

From eleven of my informants, I learned of two different interpretations of a married woman's most important role; there was a traditional interpretation and a more modern or enlightened one. (Four informants were not included in this analysis because I did not ascertain enough information from them). In the first interpretation, which I labelled "A Traditional Interpretation of a Married Woman's Responsibilities," I found that nine informants typified married women as cooks, bakers (at home), faithful wives and mothers. This was what they believed typical married women were supposed to do and did. Women who also worked outside of the realm of the home were typified as 'helpers' to their husbands if they worked in business together. Only one woman recognized poor women as workers in their own right. Thus work which women did for money was usually seen as of secondary importance when compared to their unpaid work as homemaker. However, in examining the relationship between their ideals and their own actions, I found a) five women who followed their interpretation of the cultural prescriptions and were motivated by duty and/or interest to learn about their domestic responsibilities as future married women (or regretted not doing so), b) two women who did not follow their definitions of appropriate behavior and had few children and stressed the importance of their paid work while they were married, and c) two women.
who followed their definitions by learning about their domestic duties, but later learned a skill so they would also be able to undertake paid work in the future and possibly when they were married. The two other informants held an interpretation which I labelled "A Modern Interpretation of a Married Woman's Responsibilities."
These women had typified ideal married Jewish women in Eastern Europe as cooks (at home), mothers and homemakers, but they also typified them according to their paid work. They recalled some storekeepers, factory workers, bakers and dressmakers. To these women, a married woman's paid work, if she worked, was just as important as her domestic work. Nevertheless, their own actions were somewhat contradictory to this view as they were not motivated to take an active part in learning their domestic duties in preparation for when they would be married women, but were inclined to learn a skill which would earn them some money. As will be shown, contradictions between my informants' ideal typifications and their own actions were often propagated by what they perceived to be as uncertain socio-economic circumstances which influenced how they behaved.

A TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF A MARRIED WOMAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES

a) Following Their Definitions

To these five informants, performing traditionally home-centred unpaid domestic duties such as having and raising children, taking care of a husband, cooking (following the rules of kashrut) and cleaning made a female
a proper married Jewish woman. This was the proper and most important job a good married woman could have. If a woman worked in such a capacity where she earned money, she was typified as just being a 'helper' to her husband (unless she was poor, then one informant did see her as a 'worker'). These women who came from religious homes, some of which were poor and some rich, based their typifications on the women they knew and loved best, their mothers or guardians.

**Leah:** [Women were supposed] to cook and bake and take care of children. [A] Woman didn't go out to work...If they went [to work], they just helped the men. If somebody had a store or some bakery...they helped, just they helped. They lived in the same house where the bakery was and they helped. But not to go special [and work]...You know, to have and take care of children, it was lots of work. Some had six children, some had five, some four [or] three. It was their duty.

**Sheyna:** ...Well [a married woman was supposed] to be a good mother [and] to keep a kosher house in Europe.

[And] my mother did it. My mother was [doing] the cooking...[and] I know that we never brought in something what is not kosher. We didn’t know any other way how to live. My father was in favor of that and my mother was in favor of that.

[Also]...We had a store together with the house, so my mother used to help out my father too...In our town everybody has something like a little store or what[ever] [and] a woman helped out. You know its was important, another pair [of] hands. To somebody [else] you [would] have [had] to paid them...[But] It was enough to look after three or four children. Some people had five children, some has six. So it was enough. Believe me, her hands were full, to cook and then to keep clean and dress up the kids and to send them out to school and bake and to wash the clothes and to iron the clothes.

**Raazl:** [Keeping kosher was the responsibility] for the wife...Her responsibility [also included]...to take care [of the children]...and husband and of the house. They’d never dream to go working and
especially in our country the women not working and the women not ‘wearing the slacks,’ you know, to tell you what to do...[But] the people that got stores... sometime [the wife] come and helping out, [but] that is not to work someplace else...The husband working and they make a living and the woman got a job in the house.

My mother...[was] baking. My mother...[was] a good housekeeper and a good mother.

Naomi: [A married woman had]...The responsibility to be faithful to her husband [and] to raise a family, to have children no matter how many children. My grandmother had thirteen children. You have to have children.

[Also]...All my family kept kosher...[And] This was the woman[’s] [responsibility]. Women were taking care of those things.

...if they [woman’s husband] had a store, they helped out the husband...running the store...My aunty didn’t work...But poor ladies they used to sit in the market to sell food and sell everything.

In detailing the responsibilities of a married woman, these informants also discussed how they, as female children, were supposed to learn how to become good homemakers. Moreover, most recalled being motivated to learn because it was their duty as a female and future wife and mother and because they were interested in learning. Only one woman regretfully recalled not learning what her mother had tried to teach her because she was not interested at the time.

Leah: ...I always was with her [mother] in the kitchen. I always helped her. What was hard for her, I helped her. I just did it. I wouldn’t let my mother on...[her] knees on the floor [to] scrub the floors. I did it. I wanted to do that. She didn’t have to tell me what to do, because I saw myself how hard she’s working and I wanted to help her, that’s all. If she ironed, I had to iron...I remember we used to live in one room and a
kitchen, [the] whole family, but when I washed the curtains and ironed them and hanged them up, I had so much pleasure from it. [And] I washed the floors...I saw what she’s doing, so I learned. I just looked and I saw and I know what I have to do...[because] I know what I gonna do [in the future]. I knew what I have left to do, just keep house and take care of everything.

Naomi: I saw the way she [her aunt] was doing [things]...[and] I wanted to learn everything. I wanted to know how you twist a challah [ritual bread]. Naturally when you get born you’re just dumb, you don’t know anything, but you learn...It comes so natural. I was in a house like that, a balebatish [respectable, proper] house. They baked, they cooked, they bentshan lecht [lit and said blessing over Sabbath candles]...I saw those things.

...I even know how to do kosher meat. You got to soak it a half an hour. You keep it in salt an hour...This I remember...You grow [up] in a family which you see that [and] you know about it.

...Whatever my aunty done, it was our duty to learn...those things...[and] I wanted to know things, even how to sew.

Raezl: ...my mother tell [me] I [should] learn how to [be a homemaker]...[She said] "I like it you to see what I [am] making and what I’m doing." I tell her I no got time. That is mine answer. You know the time when my mother [was] ‘working’ and baking...I need to go out mit mine friends. [I was] all day in school and you come home from the school [and] you need [to do] the homework and I tell her I like a little bit freedom...Mine parents spoil me. My mother tell me, "Don’t worry, when you [are] older, you ask me." That what I got from my mother but every time I tell her no, no. [Her parents perished in the Holocaust].

That is my trouble and I feel today bad. When I [was] married with mine husband [for] more than a year I no cook nothing. I don’t know what to do...[So] I went to a...neighbour and I tell her...[She said] "Oh come my child, I show you one time [and then] you [will] know."

As shown, these informants held a very traditional view of what was expected from a proper married Jewish woman. To
them her most important duty or 'job' was decisively home-centred. Concomitant with this belief were their own attempts to prepare themselves for their future as married women by learning their mothers' or guardians' methods of keeping house (or regretting not doing so).

b) Not Following Their Definitions

These two informants, who were married before World War Two, also described a married woman's most important role in traditional domestic terms. The typical married woman was supposed to have children and take care of the kitchen and the home. And if she worked outside of the home, she was just seen as a helper to her husband in his business.

Miriam: [Women were supposed to] keep house and born children [and it] didn't matter [if it was] one, three or ten or twelve. They are just [supposed]...to keep house...they didn't work outside [the home]. They all worked [at] home and all help in the store. They couldn't [work elsewhere] because [there was] nothing to do. [Even] If they want to [there was] nothing to do...[unless one] want to go cleaning somebody[']s house, but [otherwise] nothing to do...[But to] cook and...raise children, that's...very important.

Nina: The man was more in business. The woman took care of the house. Richer people, they got a help.

[And women] Helped out in the business...It worked out.

[Also] mother [was responsible for kashrut]. Father no, oh no. Fathers were not doing nothing [in the house]...Fathers were learning. Fathers were keeping business, but...helping in the house, never [she says laughing]...Man were not involved in the kitchen.

Nevertheless, when these informants discussed their own responsibilities as married women in their shtetlach, they
focused on aspects which contradicted their earlier more traditional typifications of a woman’s role. These women were motivated to structure their lives in a less than traditional manner because they wanted a better economic life. Thus, they explained that paid work was integral to their lives as was limiting the number of children they had. They saw themselves as more than just mothers or their husbands’ helpers.

**Miriam:** ...I learn[ed] sewing in the town...A lady who was [a] very good sewer taught me...You know how I learned sewing? I measured you and [in] the magazine you showed me a dress...you wanted. I measured you and I make it the dress the same.

[When I was married and lived in Budapest]...I work over there in a furrier [shop].

[Also]...I didn’t want lots of kids...because the anti-semitism was very high always and when I went [to] Budapest to live [it was] no use because we didn’t make too much money because even [for] a Jewish boss [it was] better [if he] hired not Jewish people...[It was] Very hard to get a job.

[So I used ‘birth control’]...my mother have a sister and [when] she came to my wedding...she told me [how to protect myself]...she told me, "Always after [sex] right away wash yourself so your can’t get pregnant...Right away you wash out [with] vinegar water."...Maybe [it] worked [for me] for I washed myself.

**Nina:** ...We were both in business...And after we got a baby, I got a maid. We were not poor people at home [in Europe]. My husband was a teacher, but when he married [me]...we were in business...We got a drygood and readywares, jackets and shoes, [busi-ness]. And we got also...wheat. This wheat we were buying and we were selling.

...[And] In my time, when I married already, we knew already about [birth control]...[and] we use it...I was thinking that it was a good idea...because some people cannot afford to have child-ren...[Children are] such a big expense...When I got married, I got one child and the other ones
they got already three children [during the time what I got [one]. If I can have one child I can have also three children. So they [others] were not satisfied with my idea and I was not satisfied with their idea...I remember my husband went to the rabbi...and we [were] married [at] the same time [as he was]. He [her husband] came home and he told me, "You know, three children are sitting there on the toilets, one, two [and] three [years old]." Every year it was a baby.

So to them, the ideal role that married women should play was in their homes. However, because of intervening factors like anti-semitism, a desire not to be poor or a desire to work, these women interpreted how they led their own lives in a manner that was more modern than their traditional typifications of the most important role married women in general played.

1 Following Some of Their Definitions But Not Others

In recalling the duties of the married women they knew in Eastern Europe, these two women only discussed their traditional nurturing roles. A woman was supposed to take care of her children and her husband. This was their definition of what made one an ideal married women. And being from wealthier families, these women did not know of too many 'working women' and therefore did not include paid work in their typification of what comprised an ideal woman.

Rahel: [A married woman was] first of all [supposed to be] faithful to her husband [and] take care of the husband and children...and take care of the house. Some woman would have help, like maids for the houses.


Bella: To be a good married woman, the meal should be ready when their husband comes home. The home should be clean. The children should be taken care
of and that’s all.

[Also] mother [took care of kashrut]...father never had the time to do this. First of all by us the man never did anything in the kitchen. It was not the style...The man didn’t know from where to take teaspoon. This is how far they were not coming in in the kitchen. Not in our place.

[And of the] married women [I knew] very few [worked outside their homes].

As female children who were expected to one day become married women, they recalled being taught by their mothers the homemaking duties they would need in the future. They were motivated to learn these responsibilities because they wanted to help their mothers and because they knew that they were supposed to learn them. This was the message conveyed to them by their mothers and they were agreeable to it. So they learned how to keep kosher, cook and take care of children, just as Jewish girls had done for centuries.

**Rahel:** ...mother would teach the girls...how to kosher meat. She would say stand around and [she would] show [us]. Now each piece of meat has six sides. You have to half hour soaking and an hour salting and not too much salt, but every piece should be salted [on] all six sides...She would [also] teach us...[how] you used to make your noodles and all the farfel [baked noodles]...and we would have to stand around her and see how she’s doing it...You had to role out a [piece of dough] big, big as big as the table...I had to stand up on a little stool...[And] she said, "Every girl has to know how to keep house...[so to] make happy the husband." You have to do that [and] even [learn] embroidery [and] other things, like I remember my sisters doing.

**Bella:** Friday I had to cook for Shabbes [Sabbath] because I should know how to cook because I will get married and I should know.

...like she [her mother] used to wake me up [at] one o’clock in the morning to make the dough for the challah and I used to be so sick because [at]
five o'clock she already was baking it [she says laughing]. Because she said [to me], "You will get married and you will have a mother-in-law and you have to know all this things." Because she had a mother-in-law and she gave her a lot of troubles... [only] I never had a [mother-in-law]. I always wished I would of have a mother-in-law because I was never afraid...So [anyway] this is why I had to know all the things.

[Also]...I felt sorry for my mother because almost every year she had a child and I took [at] very big part [in] her life...[so that] myself sometimes I even felt oppressed...I could never say no to anything my parents told me to do. I remember I was playing like a little girl in my backyard with my friends and it came twelve o'clock [and] my mother wanted to go to have a little nap...[so] I was gone in to wiggle the baby. You...have a cradle and they should be quiet [so] you have to wiggle em. The maid was busy...and I was sitting there with a book...and...rocking that thing...[so] mother should be able to sleep. I would never say no.

But in addition to learning how to care for a home and family, these women also learned a trade, sewing. They were motivated to do so by signs that their economic well-being in the future was uncertain. So whereas the majority of married women that they knew did not undertake paid work, they prepared themselves in case they would have to support themselves, their family at the time or if they married, a new family, by learning a trade.

Rahel: When I went to learn [how to sew] it was during wartime. It started the bad time. My mother had passed away and everyone were thinking they have to stand sometimes on their own feet. And about later, you didn’t know what the future brings.

Bella: ...I had a cousin in Sighet [Romania]... and I was staying with her and I said to her, "You know, I don’t want to go home. I want to come into Sighet and I wanna learn a profession because how far I look I can’t see that one person should be able to make a living for ten people." But my father, he was the only one who made a living for ten people...[So] I couldn’t ask for anything [from
him] and I had high hopes on my mind...And I was
gone home...and in the evening we were sitting by
the table and I said to my parents, "I wanna earn
my own money. I wanna be independent." My father
cried like a baby...because it was a shame then
that from a better family the girl should go and
have a profession...[But] it start already the
Jewish problem in our country...[I thought] I don't
know how long father will be able to keep his job
...[so] I make brassieres and corsettes. It was a
very very big profession [and a] very very good
profession and this you could learn in three
months...[So] When it came in 1938 [and] they put
out my father from his position...and I supported
the family, my father kissed me and embraced me and
he said, "Mine daughter, how could you see so [our]
fate that you had to go to learn a profession years
before. What would we do [if] you wouldn't have
been able to support the family?"

So these women held a very traditional understanding of
what a married woman's most important responsibilities were
in Eastern Europe and what they, as girls, were supposed to
learn about this role from their mothers. But in addition
to these responsibilities, they described the added
importance of their 'professional' training. With
encroaching bad times, they prepared themselves for an
uncertain future by learning how to be self supporting.

A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF A MARRIED WOMAN'S
RESPONSIBILITIES

-Following Only Part of Their Definition

The two women in this category presented a somewhat
different picture of what they considered to be the typical
married woman's most important role. While they described
cooking, cleaning, and raising children as important duties,
they also described paid labour as being equally important.
With their experience of coming from families on the poorer
end of the economic scale, religious and nonreligious, they
understood the working woman to be an integral part of the
economic well-being of a family and not just in the role as
a 'helper'.

Devorah: The woman [was responsible for kashrut]. The kitchen belonged to the woman. The husband
never have [anything] to do with the kitchen...[My
mother] raised the children and she cooked and she
prepare everything.

She was [also] a dressmaker...You buy material and
my mother sew a dress...[She worked because] she
needed the money.

[Of my girlfriends' mothers] Somebody was in a
store. [They] have a small store. Somebody was
a baker, make it bread [and] somebody salt the
bread.

Faegi: [Married women were doing] the same thing
as [what]...women's [are] doing here, preparing...for
the home and some of em were working too...My
mother used to sew...[and other women] were sewing
or...had a trade...or they were working in stores
or in factories...[A married woman's most important
responsibility] if they had to work was both. Some
of em were doing both and some of em didn't had
[it] as hard and they...just did...shopping and
cleaning and cooking.

Unlike most of the women mentioned above, these
informants remembered shunning or not having time to
thoroughly learn what they defined as the work involved in
keeping house. Instead, they placed a greater importance in
and spent more time on learning their trade. They were more
motivated to learn this aspect of what they considered to be
the other half of a woman's responsibilities because it was
deemed more pertinent to their survival at the time and/or
in the future.

Devorah: [My mother used to say to me] "Devorah
...[come]...help me [with] something." And I used
to tell her "mother, I not have time [now]. I have
lots of time [later]." [So] I go...with the boys
and girls in [the] street...I like better to have a good time and go in [the] street and play. I was not a too good girl, no.

[But]...I work[ed]. I was a dressmaker and I helped my mother, [but] just for two years [because] the war start[ed] in 39...[I thought when] I [get] married, I go to be a dressmaker [too]...because my boyfriend not make too much money. He make the books [bookbinder].

**Faeq**: ...I had to start and work when I was very young...I was thirteen [and] already I was working in a factory...[because I had] to make a living...for...[myself] and the family too.

...then I went and learned mine trade. I made men’s shirts and beddings and nightgowns [and] pijamas...So I wasn’t really home most of the time...I was out working. But even when I was... at the house, I had to do my work and she was doing, my step-mother was doing, the cooking. But...I helped her sometimes, when I had time.

So working for money and caring for the home were both deemed typical adult female roles by these informants. However, in their own training for this role, they accorded their ‘professional’ instruction a greater importance than their domestic instruction because it was seen as more necessary to their survival.

Thus, when reflecting back on the typical responsibilities that married women carried out in the shtetl, all of my informants described traditional female-specific nurturing roles. Five of my informants also described how they were eager to help their mothers or guardians and learn these responsibilities as young girls (or regretted not doing so). Their typifications and actions exemplified the forces of stability and continuing tradition in this area of life. However, the discrepancy between my six other
informants' descriptions of the ideal married woman's responsibilities and their own actions with regards to this role were representative of the struggle between stability and change or tradition and modernity. To them, growing-up during the socially and economically turbulent first third of the twentieth century meant that the economic value of their own labour gained as much importance if not more than their domestic value.
A MARRIED WOMAN’S COMMANDMENTS

Married Jewish women, whether living in today’s modern world or the world of the shtetl, are supposed to perform three mitzvot (commandments) in accordance with Jewish Law. As discussed in the Review of the Literature, these commandments are niddah, hallah and the lighting of the Sabbath candles, about which not much has been written. Most of the women whom I interviewed were introduced to these commandments when they were young girls. They watched as their mothers or another relative carried them out and, depending on the ritual, sometimes they helped. In my informants’ homes, all of their mothers or guardians lit Sabbath candles, nine of them performed hallah and fourteen of them observed the mikvah (and niddah). As for my informants who were married before World War Two, two of them performed all three commandments, while just woman one did not perform hallah.

From two of the written sources that I read, I learned that traditionally, a girl’s home-centred education was based mostly on observing what her mother did. A characteristic of this type of education was that very few questions were asked and in turn very few explanations were given. This was true, for example, when a girl was learning the rules of kashrut. While a boy would study sacred texts on the subject and learn why it was kept, in cheder, a girl would just learn how to keep kosher; she was not given any explanations as to why she had to keep it, just that it had
to be kept (Zborowski and Horzec 1952:347-366; Baum, Hyman and Michel 1976:61-62). In analyzing my informants past experiences, I found that they were educated in the commandments of niddah and hallah in this traditional way. They learned by example and/or were told what to do, but they were not given a theological understanding of the rituals they would be expected to observe as married women (with one exception). So when reflecting back on what these rituals meant to them in Eastern Europe, they either discussed the mechanics involved in performing these rituals and offered a self-deduced interpretation or they only explained the ritual procedurally without much if any interpretation. Whereas the first group of women coped with their traditional education in niddah and hallah by accepting their "how to" knowledge as an understanding or by formulating an understanding, the second group of women accepted and even sometimes legitimated not understanding why these rituals had to be performed. Only one informant had, what was for a girl, a more modern/theological understanding of the hallah ritual because she attended a cheder with boys and learned what they did. As for my interviewees understanding of the commandment to light Sabbath candles, I examined it within the more general context of the Sabbath as a whole. Here most of my informants held a traditional interpretation of this day and its rituals, but in a different manner than what was discussed above with regards to niddah and hallah. To most
of them, their Sabbath experiences had traditional/religious or spiritual meaning and were generally positive. On the other hand, I had a minority of informants who interpreted their past Sabbath experiences in more modern/secularist terms. They either saw many of the Sabbaths religious rituals as too restrictive or enjoyed the Sabbath just for its practical qualities. In any case, as we will see, regardless of variations in customs, continuity or interpretation, the three female commandments were practiced in the majority of my informants’ homes in Eastern Europe and were an integral part of Jewish female life there.

**Niddah And The Mikvah**

The laws of *niddah* require a husband and wife to refrain from sexual relations during the wife’s menstruation plus an additional seven days. During this time she is considered impure and, to avoid the temptation of sex, does not sleep in the same bed as her husband. She only regains her ritual state of purity and is ‘permitted’ to have sexual relations with her husband again once she has immersed herself in the *mikvah* (ritual bath) and said the appropriate blessing.

Depending on the author one reads, one could get the impression that during the twentieth century, the laws were not so strictly followed in the *shtetl* (Zborowski and Herzog 1952:287), that they were strictly followed (Schoenfeld 1985:60) or that they were not important enough to be given more than a passing mention (Stahl Weinberg 1988:10,17,53).
Most of my informants told me that the mikvah, the most 'public' aspect of this ritual was used by many women. In fact, eleven of fifteen of them indicated this. All of my informants' mothers or guardians went to the mikvah, except for one woman's mother who was a Bnadiat. Likewise, all of my married informants went, although one did not go regularly. In trying to understand these women's past experiences with regards to niddah, I focused mainly on the mikvah since it was the most 'public' aspect of a very private ritual and since most of my informants were not married women in Europe.

Of all of my informants, eleven of them had recalled specific experiences with regards to mikvah use and had what could be considered a traditional education in the observance of this religious practice. (The remaining four informants did not have any experiences with the mikvah while in Europe, although they recalled being aware of it). They learned about the mikvah (and niddah) by watching its use and by being taught about it and/or using it themselves once married. In reflecting back on what this ritual meant to them in Europe, all of these eleven women held an interpretation that was concomitant with a traditional education. In my first category, I had five informants whose interpretation I labelled "A Traditional Procedural Understanding of the Mikvah--a)." Their education was traditional in that they learned what niddah and using the mikvah involved and that the mikvah was supposed to be used.
It was also traditional in that they were not given an academic understanding of why these rituals had to be followed. To cope with this 'known unknown,' these informants developed what they considered to be an understanding of these rituals. Although still basic and procedural, it enabled them to be satisfied that they understood this ritual which was either directly or indirectly a constant in their lives. For the two married informants, their own theories regarding the mikvah motivated one woman to use it and another to shun its use. In my other category, I had six informants whose recollections of the mikvah were also in keeping with their traditional education concerning its use. These women recalled how the mikvah was used and that it had to be used by married women but not why it was used. However, their reaction to not understanding this monthly ritual in Europe was feelings of fear, amusement, dislike (changing to like) and curiosity as opposed to figuring out why it was practiced. I typified their interpretation "A Traditional Procedural Understanding of the Mikvah--b)."

**A TRADITIONAL PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIKVAH--a)**

The five informants in this category recalled different reasons for why they went (or did not go often) to the mikvah. The women who went when they were not married, usually did so to get a bath because the building that housed the mikvah also had bathtubs. One unmarried woman had experienced the mikvah from the vantage point of being a
worker there. On the other hand, I had two informants who were married in Europe, one of which used the mikvah because she liked it and felt community pressure to use it, while the other woman seldom used it and did not feel under pressure to use it. From the different vantage points of the women who had been at the mikvah, we can see how their recollections of the ritual at the mikvah was in keeping with their traditional education in that they were procedural.

-Bathing at the Mikvah

Faegl: I remember when my sisters went and I even went with them sometimes because at home we didn’t have no bathtub [and no] bathroom like we have here... But I was just like in the bathtub and they went to the mikvah [she says laughing]. But we could see it sometimes, yah... They had a woman there and they cut their fingernails and checked everything, not to be dirty underneath the fingernail[s]. And then they had to do the dipping.

-Working at the Mikvah

Ruth: We had a mikvah... in our house, but it was a big building. And he [her father] took care of that. All the people from the town came to us. I used to do a lot of cleaning in the mikvah, everyday taking out the water from the day before... With pails I cleaned it... I still remember how many bathtubs we had... We had five bathtubs...[And] At home [Poland], not everybody has baths. The only time you make yourself real clean, I don’t have to tell you, is when you go to the mikvah. You take a bath [and] from the bath you go down to the water, to the mikvah and make yourself kosher. This is the main thing. The bath what you take... its necessary to make yourself clean in order to go in in the mikvah, but the most important thing is the mikvah...[Also], you can’t go in the mikvah if you don’t cut your nails and [cut them] as far as... you could cut it and I used to do that. I used to talk to them [too and] of course I was very young... But as far as the mikvah [was concerned], I knew everything and we talked about it. A lot of them were afraid to go in... special [the]
brides were very afraid the first time...So many times I used to go in with them and show them and take their hands and put them down in the water. I was just behind them so in case they get frightened they shouldn't remain there. So I heard when they said kosher [and if she didn't come up by herself]...so I picked her up.

-Married and Observing the Mikvah

Miriam: When you go...[to] the mikvah, they have a bathtub. Over there you use soap [and] wash your hair [and] everything...you have to clean so hard...That time when I was there lots of woman have dirt all over [their] knees and [everywhere]...Anyway the rule [was] you go to the bathtub [and then] in the mikvah...[which is] like a swimming pool [but] a little smaller. And [once in] you go down three times under the water...over the hair...The woman over there tell you which bracha [blessing] you say and that's all...[After I went] I felt relieved...I [was] clean inside [and] outside.

[Also]...if you don't go to the mikvah, then right away they said that [you]...didn't go...then all the town, [the] Jewish people...know.

Frieda: I went there, but I didn't like it...[So I went] very, very seldom...[I] didn't need it. We made for cleanliness [in our bathtub]...[And] My father didn't mix in in that...He was a religious man according to him, but what I did, he didn't butt-in because I have my reasons. I could like it or not.

Beyond recalling the procedure one went through at the mikvah, these women recalled what it meant and its relation to the laws of niddah. However, the interpretations of the three women who were single while living in Europe were vague and mechanical in that they still discussed the how behind the ritual and not the why. This was because their education concerning the mikvah and niddah, whether by observation or a teacher, was traditionally more practical than theological. As a result of this type of education, my
two married informants came to their own conclusions about what the mikvah and/or niddah meant, conclusions which either motivated them to use or not to use the mikvah.

-Basic Interpretation of the Young Bathers at the Mikvah

Faegl: ...I don't know if they [her sisters] really did [explain it to me], but...I know what's the situation when you get to that age and when you get married...My sisters [and their husbands] had single beds. When they were clean [not menstruating], the bed[s] [were]...together and when they weren't, the bed[s] [were]...taken apart, like pulled apart [until after they went to the mikvah].

...that was natural...[We] grew-up like that...[with] religion, so it was natural.

Rahel: We knew somehow what's all about, you know...I tell you we were a big family, ok...and we [she and her siblings] would always later on talk about that we never saw our mother and father in the same bed, never.

-Basic Interpretation of the Mikvah Worker

Ruth: I read [about] it. Mine teacher which she taught me davening...[also] taught me about [the mikvah]...and a lot of things my mother told me...[such as] there was no such thing as sleeping with a husband...in one bed. You had to have two beds, because while you're menstruating you can't even touch your husband...until you go to the mikvah.

-Theoretical Interpretation held by the Married Women

Miriam: When...[I was] married, I [would have] hated always, always [if I had to have sex]. You know, you have a rest because you don't sleep together because [you] have the period. You have ten or twelve days before you go to the mikvah for yourself. That's how I felt and...the Jewish husband who is grown-up [in] the same village...they didn't force themself [on you] because they have to waiting...They don't make a fuss about it. And I...was so glad because I was [all to] myself [she says laughing] [for approximately] ten days...[And after I went to the mikvah], Inside I was clean [of the blood]. You know, I...[wouldn't] like...to make love with it. I think if I clean inside,
I don't have inside some tumor or something...I feeled I [can't] catch a sickness [she says laughing]. I always was afraid of some sickness inside.

Frieda: I didn't like the mikvah to tell you the truth because it...gives you a distaste...It looked to me like all the men are coming in and [then] the women come [in] and say their prayer because they hope to get pregnant. With me it was the other way. I was trying not to [get pregnant]. You understand? [Men also used the mikvah whenever they wanted to purify themselves; they usually used it just before the Sabbath].

[Besides]...we had our own way to keep ourself clean. We had [a] bathtub in the factory, in the building, and there we took baths. And to keep myself purity was only...[to be] clean [and] to stay away from...the mikvah.

Concomitant with their traditional education in the ritual of mikvah and the laws of niddah was my informants knowledge that these rituals were a 'must'. They believed that they were culturally prescribed and that married women were expected to observe them. Although they were not given an academic education in why they had to be followed, they knew how to carry out these rituals and they knew that they were supposed to be done. And even if they were not old enough to observe the mikvah ritual, or chose not to, they remembered that many woman did practice this custom.

Miriam: You had to go [to the mikvah] because that's the law, that's the Jewish law...[And] in the village everybody went to the mikvah, even when...one time [it] was so cold that it is frozen, the mikvah inside. They hire[d] a train with a horse [so we could go] ten kilometers in the next town for the mikvah.

Rahel: Most of them [went to the mikvah] and they would go late at night...it's a must, today too supposedly, [but]...not everyone keeps it.

Ruth: ...after their period...they couldn't live with their husband...[until] they go to mikvah.
I'm sure that the people here don't do that, but at home you had to do it...[And] We knew whose not coming regularly and whose coming regularly...[So] we thought [that if they didn't come to the mikvah] that maybe, you'll excuse me, but maybe they're not together with their husbands, [that]...they don't sleep with them or something.

Thus these informants' mothers, sisters, friends and acquaintances had used the mikvah along with my two married informants in accordance with the laws of niddah. They all knew how these rituals were followed, but could not recall being taught what they meant, which satisfied some of them but led my married informants to create their own unique meanings. In any case, procedural knowledge was acquired by my informants when they were 'educated' in the mitzvot of niddah and mikvah, as was seemingly the tradition.

A TRADITIONAL PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIKVAH--b)

These six women learned about the mikvah strictly from watching a relative use it or by using it themselves. Five of these six women went there to bathe or accompany their mothers, while the sixth woman used the mikvah monthly ever since she was introduced to it by the rabbi's wife just before she got married.

-Bathing at the Mikvah and/or Accompanying Mother

Naomi: ...before you go into [the mikvah, you]... have to take a bath. She [her aunt] used to take me along and give me a bath too, otherwise we wouldn't have [one] at home. We [only] used to have a basin [and we] washed in the basin.

Bella: ...We had a bathtub, like from wood, and it was so heavy and all the kids took turns and [would] take baths at home. Just when we were already older, we used to go with mother to have there to splash a little bit [in] more water in
the mikvah...[Also] I remember I used to go with her [when I was a] child. She used to take me because they used to go in the evening...[when] it was dark...[so] she shouldn’t have to come home by herself...I used to wait in the house by that woman what she took care of the mikvah.

-Married and Observing the Mikvah

Nina: [We had] One mikvah [in our village] and it was not nice...[It] was not a mikvah like here, you know...But...[it didn’t matter] how it was, you have to go...[And] Always [the] rabbi’s wife was involved with the brides...She took me [my first time]...It was [an] old custom.

While a constant presence in their lives in Eastern Europe, the mikvah (and niddah) remained a ‘known unknown’. They learned about some of the steps involved in practicing this ritual by being taught about it or by watching its use, but they never were explained what it meant. Its theological purpose remained a secret to them. So unlike the other informants who believed they had figured out what the mikvah (and niddah) meant, they remembered experiencing certain feelings they had regarding this ritual such as amusement, fear, dislike (changing to like) or curiosity.

-Amusement

Sheyna:...when my mother used to go [to the mikvah]...[I] used to go [because] there was a special bath for us...I was young so I didn’t quite understand the meaning of the mikvah...[So] it used to be a woman who used to take care of [the mikvah]...and each time they [married women] took a dip, she used to say kosher. We were young girls so we used to laugh. To us it sounded like fun[ny].

Nehama: ...I once went with...my mother to the mikvah and I heard them say kosher v’yosher...when they used to come out of the mikvah...that she’s kosher [now]. I didn’t know [what it meant]. I was small and I kept on saying kosher v’yosher [she says with a mimicking voice]...and they criticized
me for saying it. You're not supposed to announce it.

-Fear

Naomi: And once when I was real young, I got scared because I thought she's [her aunt] getting drowned... You know how you have to go down... and she went down... and I thought she [drowned] and I started to cry... I remember going there and being afraid that my aunty's drowning... I didn't even know why... she's going there, but I remember going.

-Dislike Changing to Like

Nina: ...I didn't like it [the mikvah]. Nobody liked it. But it was a must...[And] we didn't know [any] other [way]. This is it [whether] it's good or no good or dirty or clean or what. You know in the kleine [small] cities how the mikvah was?! Hah!... it was nothing to like. It was not electricity. It was a few women [and] together we came in. Every woman knew that I'm going today and she's going tomorrow and so on... But in the other city like Buczacz [or] Czortkow... it was nice, like here in Windsor, beautiful... [So if] We didn't want to observe our mikvah, we went to the big city [where]... it was modern. It was electricity already and everything... [But] I... [didn't] know [what it meant]. It was no questions [asked] [she said laughing]... You got married [and] you have to go to the mikvah, that's all.

-Curiosity

Raez: ... They'd show me [the mikvah]... father showed me... They'd need [me] to call... mother out from there... I see the mikvah and you know sometime I make so with the hand [disgusted gesture]. Sometimes I no like it... everybody going in the same place and I think g-d, my g-d what is there. My mother tell me, "You better be quiet. When you grow-up, you do it the same thing!"

Bella: You see mother never talked to us about this [mikvah and niddah]. You know they were so religious [that]... sex... was never discussed in our house, never.

... I was already twenty-seven [or] twenty-eight years old when I got married. I didn't know a lot of things because books I couldn't read about sex because the books what I brought from the library father was reading too and I was ashamed[ed]
to read a book about sex...[And] I have never seen my mother and father in one bed, in the same bed, always [they were] in separate beds and was a night stand in between.

Even though they did not understand the meaning behind the ritual, these women recalled knowing that the observance of the mikvah by a married woman was a culturally prescribed 'must'. Moreover, they recalled that in their communities, many married women complied with the commandment requiring them to immerse themselves in the mikvah.

Bella: A lot of mother’s friends was the same way. To the mikvah almost everybody had to go at that time.

Nina: ...I didn’t know people what they didn’t [go to the mikvah]. Even low people, not so high Orthodox, but this they observed...It was a must. This was a must.

Sheyna: ...I knew that every Jewish woman [was] supposed to go to the mikvah...[and] all the married woman, they used to go.

These six informants, whether married in Europe or not, had experienced the mikvah and therefore the ritual of niddah in some manner. Being made aware of the mikvah and knowing that it had to be used by married women was the extent of their education in this ritual though. As a result, their interpretation of the mikvah was through recalled feelings as opposed to meanings, theological or otherwise.

Thus, both categories of informants had a traditional female education in the mitzvot of niddah and mikvah in that it was based mostly on observation or practice. Although these informants learned that these rituals must be observed
by married women, they were not given a theological explanation of why they had to be practiced or what they meant. Where these informants differed was in their reaction to their traditionally vague teachings about these mitzvot. While one group either accepted their procedural knowledge as being meaningful or developed their own basic unique interpretations in order to cope with these 'known unknowns,' the other group accepted not understanding these mitzvot and dealt with them in terms of the feelings that developed concerning their use.

Hallah

One of the three components of a married woman's commandments was called taking hallah. This ritual is supposed to be practiced whenever a woman bakes. It involves taking a piece of dough from what one is baking and throwing it into the oven as a symbolic offering to the priests of the ancient Temple. As stated earlier, this seems to be the least written about ritual where Eastern European Jewish women are concerned.

What I discovered from my informants was that six of them had not experienced this ritual in Europe, while nine of them had been familiar with it. Those who did not experience it said it was because they did not watch their mothers bake, their mothers bought most baked goods or as one woman said, her mother did not practice this ritual (she was a Bundist). But of those women who were familiar with it, eight out of nine of them were educated about it
traditionally and only one woman was educated in a modern way. This one woman learned about the ritual and its religious symbolic meaning in the *cheder* she attended with boys. Consequently, when she married in Europe, she always 'took *hallah*’ when she baked. I labelled her interpretation as "A Theological and Procedural Understanding of *Hallah.*" The next category I labelled "A Traditional Procedural Understanding of *Hallah*--a)." Within this category were two women who learned how to take *hallah* from watching their mothers or guardians as they baked. They learned that this was a ritual that should be done by women when they baked, however, they did not remember being taught precisely why it had to be done. Instead, they recalled being taught about the punishment for not performing *hallah*. They were satisfied with this level of understanding and knowing that this ritual had to be done. The last category contained six women who were traditionally educated about *hallah* in that they learned how to perform this ritual from their mothers or guardians and they learned that it had to be carried out; but they never learned why it had to be done, were content not knowing why and legitimated not knowing why. I labelled their category "A Traditional Procedural Understanding of *Hallah*--b)." Whether or not the women in these last two categories of interpretation thought they understood *hallah*, their procedural knowledge was in line with the type of education that Jewish mothers traditionally gave their daughters.
A THEOLOGICAL AND PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDING OF HALALAH

Not only did this one informant know the procedure for how hallah was taken, she also understood the religious purpose behind why this ritual was practiced. As my informants stated earlier, girls usually did not attend cheder or if they did, they usually did not learn everything that boys learned; Nina though, did go to cheder and did insist on learning what boys learned. As a result, when she baked she knew it was mandatory to take hallah and she knew what this symbolic act represented.

Nina: It's [for the]...Kohen [priest]. It's a law. Like the Kohen has to eat the first fruit and the first bread and the first everything. So when I am baking...I am taking a piece of dough and I am giving this to the oven and I am making a prayer...it's no question [about taking hallah for]...whatever we are baking.

...This is what I learned in school, in cheder. This is Orthodox learning.

A TRADITIONAL PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDING OF HALALAH—A)

Being taught about hallah was a procedure that occurred naturally as these two informants watched their mothers bake. They saw their mothers pull off a piece of dough, recite a blessing and throw the piece of dough into the oven. They also recalled learning that as Jews they were supposed to perform this ritual whenever they baked or they could not eat what they baked for fear of becoming sick. But although they learned that this ritual must be done, how to do it and the supposed penalty for not doing it, they never learned the religious reasons for why a woman had to perform this religious ritual. For them, their knowledge of
the sanctions for not carrying out hallah sufficed as an understanding of what this ritual meant. Thus, how they learned this ritual and their satisfaction with the knowledge they had was typically traditional.

Miriam: [When] I made it [bread]...[I...take a piece of dough and I say [the] blessing and [then] ...burn just [that]...little piece. [From] everything we bake we take it...I asked the teacher [what it meant]. But I forgot, something [like]...you can't eat it because you get sick so maybe you have to burn it...[But] I know that we have to do it because we are a Jew.

Bella: You take a little piece [of dough] and you make the bracha and then you had to burn it because not even an animal should eat it because, I don't know why. They said something could happen to the animal when it will eat it. Just probably...it will die or go crazy or whatever so they throw it in the oven and burn it...I never questioned this. Just this was the custom. This is what they did.

A TRADITIONAL PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDING OF HALLAH—(2)

Like the two women discussed above, these six interviewees were given a traditional education in the mitzvah of taking hallah. What they recalled about this ritual was procedural. They knew the steps involved in taking hallah and that it had to be done. Where they differed from the other two informants though was in that these six women did not have any idea what this ritual meant. And according to them, not understanding this ritual was legitimate because they were not expected to understand it. Asking questions or expecting explanations was not the custom when a girl was learning about the religious rituals that she would practice in the future.

Naomi: ...When you make the dough, you take a
piece of dough, challah or whatever, and you make a little thing and...you put it in the oven. You burn it. That was the custom...[and] I never ask why because I knew my aunty was doing it because it's got to be done. See, you don't ask so many questions...in Europe like over here the kids [do].

Ruth: ...when it start[ed] raising, you have to take off a piece [of dough]...you roll it in your hands and you make the bracha and you throw it in in the oven...I didn’t understand so much, after all I was young [and didn’t]...ask...questions...She [her mother] only used to tell me that when you bake bread [and challah]...you have to do it.

Leah: This was the custom, when you start baking challah, you cut off a piece [of dough] and it was like [used] for [a] bracha. I don’t know why she did it]...she [her mother] didn’t talk about that [but]...I saw what she did.

Sheyna: I know she [her mother] used to cut a little piece [of dough] and she used to say a bracha...[Then] she used to turn [it] around I don’t know how many times and she throw it in the oven in the burning wood...she said that a Jew [was] supposed to do [this] otherwise [you are]...not allowed to eat...whatever you bake. In general, even when you bake bread you have to, they used to say...take hallah, even when you bake matzos for Passover.

For eight of my informants, being educated in taking hallah was an experience in observation. They learned this ritual by watching their mothers or guardians as they baked. Even as late as the 1920’s and 1930’s, when these women were growing-up, their verbal instruction was limited to being told that taking hallah must be done and/or the penalty for not doing it. As seemed to be the tradition, they were not instructed in the symbolic/religious meaning of this ritual and they usually did not ask for any explanations. Only one woman, who was given a more modern religious education where she learned what boys learned, was instructed in the meaning
behind taking *hala\th*.

**THE SABBATH**

The Sabbath is the most important holiday within Judaism. This weekly day of rest begins Friday at sundown and ends Saturday at nightfall. In religious homes, its celebration is marked by joy, spirituality, prayer and rest. For a woman, it is also marked by one of her three commandments, the lighting of the Sabbath candles which ushers in the holiday. Unofficially, she is also required to prepare for the Sabbath by cooking and cleaning, domestic duties which abruptly end when she lights the candles. In pre-World War Two Eastern Europe, this was generally what a married woman did for the Sabbath.

In the homes of all of my informants, the Sabbath was a special day that was set apart from all other days of the week. The mothers of my two informants who said their families were nonreligious still lit the Sabbath candles and prepared a special meal Friday night, even though their husbands did not do as they were 'commanded' and pray. While the Sabbath was special to all of the women whom I interviewed, I had nine women who typified their Sabbath experiences in a traditional/religious manner and four women who typified their experiences in more modern/ secular terms. (I did not obtain enough information from two informants to include them in this analysis). Although my first group of women also enjoyed the practical side of the Sabbath, like free-time, visitors and going for walks, it was the
spiritual side of the holiday that they stressed. To these nine women the Sabbath meant religious singing, the studying of Jewish history, culture and religion, lighting the Sabbath candles, refusing to work and praying. The day was associated with religious rituals, objects and customs. Specifically, it was a day they observed in a religious manner either with their parents or guardians or as they were taught by their parents or guardians. I categorized these nine women's interpretations as "Typifying the Sabbath in a Traditional/Religious Manner." In the other category, I labelled my informants' interpretation as "Typifying the Sabbath in a Modern More Secular Manner."

The four women in this group reflected back on their past Sabbath experiences in a positive way, but in a way that lacked much or any religious significance. To two women it was deemed important because it was a day of family togetherness or a day off of work, but it did not gain any importance as a holiday 'decreed by G-d'. A religious, spiritual side was absent from their interpretation and was replaced by a practical secular interpretation of 'the day of rest'. But how they had observed the Sabbath was deemed proper by them because they had come from a family or community that they had typified as not so religious or fanatic, respectively. The other two informants in this category said they had a parent or came from a home they had typified as too religious or very religious, respectively. This was reflected in the restrictions placed on their
actions during the Sabbath. Although they had enjoyed some activities imbued with religious content, they reacted to those rules they interpreted as too strict by reluctantly submitting to them or secretly 'side-stepping' them. But no matter how any of the twelve informants typified the Sabbath, it was deemed by them as a day unlike all others. TYPIFYING THE SABBATH IN A TRADITIONAL/RELIGIOUS MANNER

These nine women defined a married woman's responsibilities on the Sabbath in terms of the lighting of the Sabbath candles and cooking and cleaning. These actions were carried out weekly without question. In fact, the cooking and cleaning were elevated to a more important and more vigorous level than usual, and as such they were begun Thursday night.

Golda: ...It's the woman of the house that lit the Shabbos candles...[And] I remember my aunt once expressed herself, like people that came back for a visit from the United States, friends or family and they started to describe that they can't do this [custom] and they don't do this [ritual] because they have to work for a living, so my aunt said, "If I would...emigrate to America would anybody come in and knock my windows out if I lit the candles?...It's up to me to continue."...[Because] people used to say this one doesn't light the candles or this one doesn't do [such and such].

...But Friday was a very busy day for women because they were busy preparing...[for] Shabbat. No matter [what] one didn't have during the week, sometimes even what to eat, but it came Friday [and] the preparation for Shabbos was something extraordinary. I remember our neighbours, they were very poor people...and you came into the house [and] there was sometimes not many things what to eat, but it came Friday afternoon...[and] it was turned into a different house. Everything was cleaned up. Everything was in order...[a] white table cloth [was] on the table no matter what. It especially was kept for the Shabbos. And of course
the Shabbes candle and the challah on the table made a beautiful scene.

Leah: Who didn’t light Shabbes candles?...We cut ...potatoes and we...[put the halves] on ...a little plate and we put [in] the candle[s]. And I made it. My mother said I [should] understand already, you know, [the] Shabbes candle.

You prepared for Shabbes Thursday night, [but] not just my mother, all the Jewish women...Thursday night you started baking, all night if it was a big family. [We were] kneading and kneading...and baking. Friday you cooked and cleaned. That was preparation for Shabbes...but I always helped...my mother. I don’t know, I loved my mother and I always helped her with everything. I helped her cook.

Sheyna: She [her mother] used to light for every person a candle. We used to light six candles, cause four children and my mother and father...it was nice. I enjoyed it. She used to put a babushkah [head covering] on her head. She said the bracha and after that she said Gut Shabbes [good Sabbath].

[On] Friday we baked challahs and we baked cookies...She started to prepare at Thursday in the evening because you have to prepare yeast and...the dough...[But] she used to get up Friday [at] three o’clock in the morning [to start baking]...challahs and...cookies. Then she used to make, when the blueberries started in season, a blueberry pie...So my mother was busy the whole day.

In conjunction with describing the rituals and customs that women performed for the Sabbath, these informants also described what the Sabbath meant to them. Basically, this approximately twenty-five hour period was unlike all other days of the week. It was a time for socializing and taking walks, but most of all it was a time of religious significance. The candles, the white accessories, the songs, the praying, the stories and even resting were all symbolic of the spirituality and holiness which enveloped
the Sabbath and its celebrants. These women recalled the Sabbath with a great fondness and typified the practices on this day as holy, spiritual, soulful, different, holiday-like, and loved.

The Religious Rituals: Objects and Customs of the Sabbath

-Singing, Praying, Reading, Learning and the Sabbath Table

**Leah:** ...we were poor people, but Friday night I would never leave the house and I had friends [and] we were playing always...[But] I would never go out from the house [Friday] because when I looked at this table Shabbes, even it was hard sometime...to buy the food to prepare for Shabbes, just to see the table, no matter how much food it was and the candles, I would never leave the house...It was a clean table cloth, the plates were [out]...the Shabbes candles and the spirit was there, the spirit...The spirit, you don’t have it here, no.

**Naomi:** ...It was a beautiful thing really. I remember my aunty used to put [on] a white shawl and a white little apron and they would look so bright. And the way she was making the *bentshen lecht* and it was so quiet. It was something holy to us. I think it was beautiful.

**Ruth:** [On the Sabbath I felt] Good inside, very good. You know, it... was like a holiday. The *challah* was on the table covered with those [special] bread covers...The candlesticks [were] on the table...the table was set with the dishes. When my father came home from *shul*, he used to make *kiddush* [blessing over the wine; consecrates the Sabbath] and we all sat by the table nice...dressed [up] and my mother used to be dressed nice and it was just like a holiday...[but] it’s not like here, [where] you eat up and you go. Down there, you used to *daven* [pray] in the *mittin* [middle] [of the courses]. We [then] *bentched* [prayed; said grace] [at] the end [of the meal and] ...all the kids helped cut.

**Golda:** Friday night when uncle used to come home with the boys, the cousins, from *shul* [synagogue] so we sang *Shalom Aleichem* and in between meals [courses] of course we sing *zmirot* [poems; have a religious or spiritual theme] which were very nice. We all participated.
[On Saturday]...I used to get together with one of my girlfriends at one time and read...from Sholom Aleichem or [I.L.] Peretz or Sholom Asch...and we sat for a few hours and read...[Then] we used to gather the family and sing songs which was very very pleasant and very very nice. It usually expressed the spirit of the holiday. [They were]...Jewish songs...like Hasidic melodies we used to pick up because where we lived at the same...building there was a hasidic shul; that means like a hall that the Hasidim did their prayers [in] and did their services there...The songs that they sang were just amazing...So we sat in the room together [and sang] and of course my uncle had a beautiful voice. He could have been the greatest chazan [sings prayers in synagogue] if he would have...trained[ed] his voice...[And the songs we sang] they got in just deep inside the soul. They were so penetrating [and] deep that you just felt like...a different person.

Sheyna: [On Shabbat] there was gatherings because during the week...we were busy. We had to go to school [and] we have to make our homework. And Shabbes was more [all] time for our fun activities and something to learn. You [would] be surprised what we learned from the organizations. [We learned about]...all the Jewish poets and...all the Jewish heroes who gave their life for Israel. We [also] used to come together and sing all kinds of songs, Jewish and in Hebrew. [And for Shabbat we had]...this private teacher...We learned the Tanach [Torah, prophets and sacred writings] and we learned from the books of Moses [about] the journey from Egypt and...how we received the ten commandments...Even later on when I was already a big girl when it was organized already a Hebrew school, the Talmud...so the teacher organized Tanach classes on Shabbat in the afternoon and every Shabbat he was reading a different chapter...even my parents went. Everybody went because it was very interesting.

-Refusing to Work

When the Sabbath is ushered in with the lighting of the candles, the mundane world of toil and work is supposed to be left behind. In fact work is forbidden on the Sabbath and work has been defined as paid labour or physical exertion. In the Torah, the prohibition against work is
extended to include such activities as cooking, washing
clothes, carrying (outside of the home), pushing etc.
Rabbinic Law also includes prohibitions against playing a
musical instrument, handling money, riding an animal,
switching on or off electrical lights or appliances etc.
(Donin 1972:89-96). The Sabbath is a holy 'gift from g-d'
that is supposed to be observed in a holy manner. As
children, my two informants in this sub-category observed
the Sabbath in a religious manner. On the Sabbath their
activities included resting and socializing as well as
reading or listening to stories with a religious content,
singing amirat, learning to pray and being blessed by their
fathers. The enjoyment they received from the Sabbath as
children encouraged them to keep its tenants as adults which
meant they would not be able to work from Friday evening to
Saturday evening. Although they could have used the
additional income, keeping the Sabbath meant more to them
than the money.

Rahel: ...I would work all night Thursday...if I
was very busy, but Friday afternoon I would put
down [my work]. And I [knew]...a specific [non-
Jewish] woman who was a lieutenant's wife and she
came in...and she saw that and she says, "You know,
I admire you so much for this because...you keep
the Sabbath...If...my stocking gets torn, I would
see it up Sunday, but you don't do that."...We
would start [working again] Saturday night, but
never, never would we work Shabbes. I didn't even
want to go to big cities because I was afraid...I'll have to work and I won't be able to keep
Shabbes and this I didn't want. I loved the
Shabbes. I loved it.

Miriam: When I work[ed] over there [in Budapest]
in a furrier, I never went working Saturday.
Friday night [at] three o'clock I step up...[to
leave], even when almost the Hitler era come in and one man said [to] me, "I am going to be a Jew. We [are] working here [and] Friday [at] three o'clock you quit working."...I said, "How come you want to be a Jew? Look what say the radio. Hitler is in Austria." [I felt] why should I do working Saturday...I need the money, I know, but not that much...[I thought] Tomorrow maybe Hitler [will] come here...The other workers was angry with me. I was alone Jewish over there. And they said...we work through Saturday night to Sunday morning because in November/December was the furrier season and I just stand up, I ask [for] the money and I'm out. [It would be] double [or] triple for me the pay [if] I stay the night.

Whether or not other events in their lives concurred with Jewish religious traditions, the way these eight women described their past experiences with some Sabbath rituals showed that the Sabbath was of religious importance to them. While some used key words to describe their feelings, others actions implied how they felt. Six women reflected back to the time in Europe when they were children and two women reflected back to their childhood and young adult life, but both groups of women described how they happily enjoyed the Sabbath rituals the way their religious families had taught them.

**Typifying the Sabbath in a Modern, More Secular, Manner**

The four women in this category also enjoyed the Sabbath and believed it to be a special day. Likewise, their mothers lit Sabbath candles and prepared a special meal for this day. But the Sabbath had more of a secular importance to these women than to the eight women described earlier. And while two of these women and their parents had concurred on how the Sabbath should be observed, the other
two women in this category had at least an ideological conflict with their parents because their parents held a stricter religious interpretation of the Sabbath than they did.

A Secular Celebration of the Sabbath

The social or practical side of the Sabbath was what the two women in this sub-category liked best about 'the day of rest'. Although their families had observed some religious rituals, like the lighting of the Sabbath candles, these rituals were not considered by my informants to be the most important part of the Sabbath. Instead, the Sabbath was cherished because it was the only day their family ate together or because it was a day off of work and a day of socializing. Cultural prescriptions for the religious observance of the Sabbath belonged to those they typified as fanatic, extreme Orthodox or as very religious. But because they were members of a community or family that was not like this, their past Sabbaths were not spent performing religious rituals.

Nehama: [On Shabbes the] candles were lit and [we said] the motzi [blessing] on the bread...My father did very little [religiously] and that's it...I didn't know what emirat [were] and I didn't know about [rules regarding] turning off lights... [But it was different] because other days we didn't eat together.

...we [only] used to eat once a week with my father [on] Friday night...We didn't eat every day with my father [because]...he was very busy with other different businesses. He had a theatre with partners. He had a fur business with partners. He had about three, four [or] five things going.

[In our city in the Soviet Ukraine] there was
business [on Shabbes], like the stores were open
and in general it was not a fanatic; it wasn’t a
extreme Orthodox [community]. There were [only]
a few.

Deborah: [On Shabbes]. You have the family [and] young people, my friends, come to our house. We spent a nice evening together. Later young people [were] going in the street...You feel like it’s a holiday. On Shabbas you [were] not working, nobody [was working] Shabbas...[It was] Just natural...you [were] used to this...[It was] not special just you have the day (to) rest...[We were] not so religion, my family. Some people was very religion. Oh [they] not can [do anything Shabbas] just pray and go to the synagogue [and] not take the light [off]. [In our house] not too much [was religious], just the candles.

-Parental Strict Religious Sabbath Rules

As was discussed, people are not supposed to engage in work on the Sabbath. Work has a broad definition which includes many weekday activities lacking in religious content. Two of my informants who reflected back nostalgically on many Sabbath rituals and customs that they participated in, also thought that some of their parent’s rules about what could or could not be done on the Sabbath were too strict. They typified their parents or their parent’s home as too religious and either submitted reluctantly to their rules or secretly broke them. Although modern in their ideas, they did not want to openly violate traditions which were sacred to their parents.

Rivka: ...girls didn’t light candles. It was just for a married woman...Just my mother [lit Sabbath candles in my home]....[And] That was no question...they [married women] had to do it [and] they used to do it...[Also] My father had a habit every Friday night when we was eating...all the children, young or old, we had to sit by the table...[When] we finished eat[ing]...my father took out a seyfer [Hebrew book with religious content] and he was
reading to us. [He] told us history stories... about what happened with [the] Jews [and] what happened with the Beit Hamikdash [House of Holiness; Jerusalem Temple]. [He] told us what’s going on [and] different things. One little story I still remember [was]... that there was... a young rabbi and he was sick. So two other rabbis came to visit him. He was living in a basement [and he was] very poor... when he took off the cover from his sickbed, so it got light in the room... because the holiness was shining out of him. So the rabbi said to [the other rabbis]... "Look how light it got in the basement... What good is it if the body has to be in the ground when I’ll die."

[But after the stories]... I went to my girlfriends to sleep.

I couldn’t even comb my hair on Saturday... Because it was [a] very religious [home]... My mother couldn’t make the bed... [But] I had two girlfriends [and] they didn’t have no parents... so every Friday night I used to sleep in this girls’ house so I could go listen to a lecture... my father didn’t know [this]... He just thinks I went to the girlfriends and I was sleeping there.

**Bella:** ... Shabbos, it was a big veynvey [holiday]. Everybody was happy. Everybody put on nice Shabbes clothes and prepared for Shabbos like here you prepare for Rosh Hashanah [Jewish New Years]... [I was] very happy that the family came together... Saturday sometimes the family came for Kiddush to our place... it was like... a festival... like a real veynvey. You don’t have it here. It’s not the same... [And the candles], even the ones what they were not so religious, they used to light the candles... I’m pretty sure of this...[But] we were brought up religious... you couldn’t write on Shabbos. We were allowed to read... [but] we couldn’t go to the beaches on Shabbos.

[So]... Just in my mind I always said [about]... mother, too religious. Like Saturday we couldn’t comb our hair. You couldn’t find a comb to get hold of it... till after... Havdalah [religious ceremony which concludes Sabbath] Saturday night.

[When I was older]... I was not so religious minded like my mother was. I was more modern, like more like my father. [But] Just to please mother, not to aggravate her, we did the things what she wanted
us to do.

So the Sabbath was described here as an enjoyable holiday. Although a religious holiday infused with many rituals, for the four women discussed above it was enjoyed more for its practical qualities like free-time or family togetherness. This secular interpretation of the Sabbath was either part of their nonreligious upbringing or an example of children 'rebelling' against a strictly religious upbringing.

Whether or not my informants typified the Sabbath according to traditional/religious or modern/secular qualities, it still was interpreted as a day set apart from the other days of the week. In all of their homes, the Sabbath was marked by their mothers or guardians preparing a special Friday night meal and lighting the Sabbath candles as well as by other religious and/or secular customs. Thus, for my informants, religious and nonreligious, Sabbath celebrations in twentieth century Eastern Europe were an essential part of their lives as Jewish females.

There were some signs that modern influences had affected the transmission of female-specific commandments to my informants. But those women who did not learn about the mikvah or hallah from another woman or who had an in depth understanding of hallah from their cheder education or who preferred a less religious celebration of the Sabbath were in the minority. In most cases my informants were given a traditional education in niddah and hallah and had enjoyed a
traditional celebration of the Sabbath. Consequently, their knowledge of the rituals of niddah and hallah was generally procedural and their mood or actions on the Sabbath religious. So, most of my informants had learned about and experienced all of the female mitzvot in the same manner that Jewish Eastern European females had done for centuries.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

Based on the reconstructions of my informants' personal histories that took place in Eastern Europe, I found that life there for them was characterized by great social change. These changes, which had begun during the mid-nineteenth century, had peaked during the twentieth century when my informants were growing-up. But I also found that along with the forces of change, the forces of stability were still being felt. While change or modernity were spurred on by my informants' peers, the Jewish organizations to which they belonged, unstable economic pressures and by their own desires, parents and guardians usually tried to maintain the traditional status quo. So as products of the modern period, my informants usually described their pasts in terms of modern ideas and practices, however at least a small part of their discussions of their experiences were punctuated by the success of traditional influences. Only one woman described how she led her past life in wholly modern terms and only one woman described her past ideas and experiences in mostly traditional terms. Otherwise, the majority of my informants described how they vacillated between fighting or sidestepping traditions and embracing them, depending on the topic. This finding was a reaffirmation of how Glanz and others had characterized the general culture of the shtetl, especially during the
twentieth century.

Even a merely descriptive attempt to categorize Jewish women in Russia [Eastern Europe] at the time that emigration was creating a new destiny for them in a new world, reveals the traditional aspects of the times side by side with new situations and new ideals on the march (Glanz 1976:9).

As for how I defined what a traditional or modern practice, experience or interpretation was, I used the definitions already outlined by other researchers and presented by me in the Review of the Literature. From there, I compared those definitions to the ideas, practices or experiences described to me by my informants and looked for either a modern or traditional congruence. Sometimes I enriched an established modern or traditional experience or interpretation by giving further examples of its expression. I believe this was the case with my description of how some of my informants had sidestepped traditional standards in order to receive a more complete religious/Hebrew education. At other times, however, I took an existing characterization of a modern or traditional experience from the literature and saw how its meaning could be applied to a similar way of behaving or feeling, thus adding new examples of types of experiences on a specific topic to the literature. For example, it has been established that while many modern women kept certain religious rituals in their lives, they discarded the practice of traditional customs. More specifically, many modern women kept the Sabbath and the laws of kashrut (Stahl Weinberg 1988:57), went to synagogue on Yom Kippur, had their sons circumcised and sent them to
cheder, yet they refused to wear a shetyl, have their marriages arranged or always wear long sleeves (Stopincka Rosenthal 1955:179-180). Likewise, I had many informants who recalled traditional limiting customs with disdain, yet for the most part, this was not the case when they recalled their education in or observance of niddah, hallah and the Sabbath. And the literature on Jewish Eastern European women really did not contain much on these religious rituals, especially niddah and hallah.

To arrive at what a feeling or experience meant, I first had to see how it had progressed and what gave rise to it. To do this, I used certain phenomenological-sociological concepts as a guide. I found out what my informants believed to be their communities' or families' cultural prescriptions for proper behavior and whether they viewed those definitions in a positive or negative manner. Sometimes though, I just discovered what they as individuals believed to be proper behavior and examined this in relation to their own actions. I learned about what motivated my informants to behave as they did and how they recalled feeling regarding specific experiences. From there I deduced what their experiences meant to them, whether they had embraced the traditional life or invited modern ways into their lives. Although their experiences were diverse, I was able to find some common experiences and interpretations and categorize them using phenomenological-sociological concepts. And so, this theory/methodology was
used by me as a guide to what to look for in my transcribed interviews. It gave structure to my descriptive analysis and the presentation of my findings. We will now turn to a summary of those findings.

Education

Most of my informants recalled growing-up in a traditional cultural milieu as far as their education was concerned. Even in the twentieth century, the cultural prescriptions for a girl's religious/Hebrew education was that it should be limited. But while three informants were willing to accept their meager education, three were motivated by interest or shame to either demand a more thorough education or acquire the wherewithal to seek this type of education on their own. The same was true of women who recalled not being allowed or able to attend a specific level of secular education because they were Jewish or lacked the funds, respectively. They were so motivated by a love of learning and a desire to make something of themselves, that they found a way to keep on learning, although it was usually not within the formal institutions of the larger society that had originally excluded them. They mostly turned within their own society to the Jewish organizations, Zionist or Bundist, which had organized debates, opened libraries, and had members willing to help educate women who had been deprived of one level of education or another. So at least for the majority of my informants, being satisfied with a limited religious/Hebrew
or secular education was not how they recalled their past educational history. Even when facing cultural and structural barriers, most desired and acquired a more in depth education than was formally available to them. Such an interest and persistence was characteristic of girls who had held a more modern outlook on life in the shtetl. I believe that this information makes an important contribution to the literature on female education in three ways: It shows that in the twentieth century barriers were still in the way of a girl’s education, it shows how motivated girls were to keep on learning even after facing traditional barriers and it shows the important role that the newer Jewish organizations played in this education for my informants.

Male/Female Interaction and Female Dress

My seven informants who thoroughly discussed this topic explained that traditionally modest behavior and dress was still common within their families and/or communities. However, these cultural definitions of proper behavior and attire did not play a large role in their lives. This was because they had typified themselves as being modern, free thinking, more advanced or as not religious or fanatical. In other words these prescriptions were not proper for the type of person they were or were not. So they socialized in mixed company, did not wear a sheytl if married and dressed as they pleased. However, because of the respect they had for those more observant than they were, such as their
parents or neighbours, they usually modified their modern
dress or behavior when in their presence. Their behavior
was of a dual nature which is an important supplement to the
literature on this topic which described a woman's dress and
behavior as either traditional or modern. For my
informants, who hailed from many different parts of Eastern
Europe, their modern ways were sometimes buffered by more
traditional parents or community members who expected them
to observe certain centuries old customs in how they behaved
and dressed.

Marriage

From most of my informants, I learned that parents,
with or without the help of a matchmaker, still tried to
play a role in the marriage of their children. If from
wealthier and religious families, they tried to make sure
their children married into families with at least as much
yichus (status based on family wealth and/or education) as
their own. So, they either arranged a match for them or
made sure that their children knew from which group of
people they would be allowed to choose their spouses.

However, these informants described how they and/or their
siblings rebelled against their parents' interference in
whom they should marry. Some women refused to be matched,
while others insisted on deciding when they would marry. In
any case, they did not agree with their parents' traditional
methods for how a man and woman should be brought together
for marriage. In addition, a large minority of my
informants described how they believed that they were given complete freedom by their parents to meet and marry the man of their choice. These women were from mostly working class families, both religious and non-religious. And while it has been remarked upon in the literature that arranged marriages were rarely being used by the lower classes in the twentieth century, two other trends are reaffirmed by my research: First, that traditional parental involvement in the marriage process was usually met with rebellion, if it took the form of matchmaking, and at least with disagreement if it was a matter of having their choices limited; and secondly, that choosing one's own spouse, no matter what type of family a woman was from, was in the end ultimately the child's choice. Thus according to my informants, the modern prelude to marriage, falling in love, had firmly taken root in their minds and/or that of their siblings as the only method for bringing together a couple for marriage.

A Married Woman's Responsibilities

Within the literature on women and the šhitot, it is mentioned how in the modern period some women decided to look outside of their traditional roles as wives and mothers for their personal satisfaction. However, with regards to their chosen alternative, all that is discussed is how women began to take positions of leadership within the newer Jewish organizations and how some decided against having any children. I believe I will be contributing two new angles on this topic, one being how girls perceived their domestic
training for their future role as wives and mothers and the other being the use of birth control among married women. Among most of my informants, I found that they generally perceived a married woman’s unpaid domestic duties as being most important. And yet, when they were describing their own work or training in a trade, as married women and unmarried girls respectively, they described it as being just as important if not more important than their domestic work or training. My married informants even described how necessity and/or interest had motivated them to devote their time to paid work over being a mother to many children. To fulfill this desire, they practiced ‘birth control,’ something which has not been written about at all with regards to women of the shtetl. In any case, this two-sided recollection of what made up a married woman’s most important job and their own training or execution of these duties is representative of the tension between tradition and modernity that was present in the shtetlach in the twentieth century. It also represents, in most cases, their recollections of their mothers as traditional and themselves as modern.

Commandments

The different experiences that girls and young women had while learning about the commandments they would be expected to carry out as married women was not discussed in the literature. Likewise not much was written about the experiences married women had while performing niddah and
hallah. What I discovered was that at least for my informants, the manner in which they learned about or practiced these commandments was traditional. Like when learning about their domestic duties, the traditional custom for learning about these rituals also involved the observation of their mothers or guardians as they practiced them. Girls were shown what to do and told that these rituals must be observed. Many girls and observant women were satisfied with this procedural knowledge and did not seek a religious-theological explanation. If not satisfied, they coped with this education by developing their own explanations or they experienced certain feelings concerning these rituals. In the case of the Sabbath customs and rituals for women, their recollections are also concomitant with traditional experiences with these female-specific observances. For most women the whole day and all its rituals and customs were regarded with religious/traditional significance. Modern influences were noted in a minority of my informants' experiences in this area in three different ways: Some women were not taught about niddah and hallah, one woman was given a theological understanding of hallah and some women had stressed the significance of the Sabbath in secular terms or criticized their parents' religious restrictions on this day. But, that most of my informants were still taught about the importance of their future commandments in a traditional manner and that most observed the Sabbath in a religious sense contributes to our
knowledge concerning some of the religious traditions that remained strong at least in their shtetlach during the twentieth century. Thus unlike most traditional customs which were successfully being challenged by modern women, the transfer of knowledge concerning female-specific commandments appears to have been successful, in the case of my informants. Although we cannot say how most of my informants would have carried out these commandments if they had been married in the shtetl, we do know that they were recalled by my informants as important and as a part of everyday life even in the twentieth century. Furthermore, we do know that two of my married informants who had challenged the traditional definition and/or practice of most other customs had fulfilled all three tenants of their commandments.

Thus I showed how my informants lived as females in mostly traditional/religious families during a time when the modern ideas of the the Haskalah had been accepted by much of the younger generation. In most cases, their experiences with education, interaction and dress, marriage and a married woman's responsibilities could be labelled modern for the times, even though some of their experiences were marked by the partial success of a traditional upbringing or by reaching a compromise with their more traditional parents and/or townspeople. However, the area of my informants' lives that seems to have been least affected by modernity was the practice or learning of religious rituals.
SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Thinking back to life in Eastern Europe brought back many bittersweet memories for my informants. Some recalled problems born out of poverty or the religious fanaticism of their parents or the discrimination they faced from the larger society. And even when they recalled the good times they had with their grandparents, parents, siblings, husbands, boyfriends, fiancées, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends, most of them recalled how the majority of their family and friends went to untimely deaths, and then again the good was punctuated by the bad. However, much about how enjoyable life could be did shine through and it was basically related to how very rich life was socially and culturally. Even in the modern period, relationships were marked by closeness and membership in organizations was marked by a high level of enthusiasm. As my informants' discussions of their experiences have shown, Jewish life was different in the shtetl, spiritually, emotionally, and culturally.

Today Jewish women are facing many similar and different changes to traditions. While some women are returning to old customs and religious traditions, many more are disregarding them or trying to restructure them so that women can participate as equal partners. While change cannot be stopped, the past should be known before the future is entered. Thus, keeping alive the memories of life in the shtetl and the changes that women living there faced
and promoted could be more than interesting, it could be useful. A lot could be learned from how and why they embraced certain traditions and discarded other ones. Although beyond the scope of this study, a lot could also be learned from additional research into the consequences of the discarding of centuries old traditions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The Eastern European Jews who are today living scattered around the world are really the last remnants of a thousand year old culture. They are the last generation of native Yiddish speakers and the last generation of people who experienced Jewish life at what I believe was its cultural peak. Because this style of Jewish life was not really studied while it was thriving in Europe, I believe it is important to write about it today, in all its vicissitudes, while those who are able to describe it from first hand experience are still alive. Thus oral histories should be taken on various topics. If enough people could be found, studies could be undertaken solely on the following groups of people: Ultra-Orthodox Jews, assimilated Jews, Bundists and Zionists. More specifically, further research on the females of some of these groups of people would complement my research, since I only had one informant who was a Bundist and no informants who were Ultra-Orthodox (although some had Ultra-Orthodox parents). I also believe the area of birth control and abortion should also be examined thoroughly. Just touching upon this area
in my interviews leads me to believe that their absence in the literature or blanket statements that they were not practiced are not correct. It seems to me that although they were not discussed much, they were practiced. The extent to which they were practiced and the different implications that their practice had would make for an interesting study. Likewise, I would like to see further research undertaken on how males growing-up in the modern period of the shtetl experienced traditional male-specific customs and rituals. How did they feel and what was their relationship with their parents like?

Some survivors of the Holocaust published rememberance books in Yiddish and in Hebrew about their own particular shtetlach. They recalled and recorded many different facts about what were their different home towns. They tried to list the names of the Jewish families who made up their shtetlach and wrote about their different fates when the Nazis marched into town. They also tried to describe what life was like before the Holocaust by listing the various societies, schools and organizations that had existed. Accompanying these facts were any surviving pictures of the members of the societies and organizations and some class pictures. But I believe that oral histories taken on various people about their experiences in these many facets of life would be a good supplement to these books as well as to other literature on this topic.
APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Before each interview began, I told my interviewee that she would be asked about her experiences while growing-up in Eastern Europe. I also told each woman that what she told me was confidential and that her identity would be hidden when I used her experiences in my thesis because I would be giving her a fictitious name.

1) What was the name of the shtetl that you were born in?
2) Was your family Hasidic (religious sect) or Mispagid (anti-Hasidic)?
3) What year were you born?
4) How many years did you live in the shtetl in which you were born?
5) Did you live in any other shtetlach? If so, for how long?
6) Did you belong to any organizations while living in your shtetl?
7) How old were you when you immigrated to North America?
8) Have you ever been married?
9) If you have been married, did you get married while living in your shtetl, while in North America or somewhere else?
10) Did you have any brothers or sisters? If so how many?
11) Who raised you?

******************************************************************************

12) Tell me about the extent to which you kept a kosher home while living in the shtetl.

PROBE FOR: - all that was done (or not) by respondent or her mother
- difficulties
- motives for keeping kosher (or not)
- sanctions 'enforcing' kashrut
- mood accompanying experiences of kashrut
- role of most women
- community's perception of women's proper role
- role men played if any
- role of rabbis

13) Describe how you observed Shabbat while living in your shtetl.

PROBE FOR: - information on lighting Sabbath candles and taking hallah
- meaning of rituals and symbols for her
- mood during preparation
-motives for carrying out (or not) these women’s commandments
-sanctions
-what other women did to prepare
-what women were ‘supposed’ to do
-men’s role in preparing for Shabbat
-felt like insider/outside

14) Describe the extent to which you observed the laws of niddah (family purity) while living in the shtetl. (if applicable)

PROBE FOR: -mikvah attendance
-where was the mikvah, who ran it, how was it kept up
-what practice involved
-extent of separation from husband and other men
-meaning of this practice for the respondent
-mood
-motivations
-sanctions
-did other women practice these laws
-what did the community expect of women with regards to the laws of niddah

15) Tell me about the schooling you had received while in the shtetl.

PROBE FOR: -Jewish education
-secular education
-self taught (philosophies of Socialism, Haskalah, Zionism)
-education as wife, mother and homemaker
-sanctions against certain types of education
-motives surrounding each type of education
-how were most women educated
-community’s idea of the proper education of a girl
-difference between male/female education and how felt about this at the time

16) Tell me how you and/or your friends and relatives met and married your husbands while living in the shtetl.

PROBE FOR: -how matches were made
-was there a proper way
-use of matchmaker
-family involvement
-role played by those to be married
-feelings during process
-motivations for marrying
-sanctions against alternate life styles

17) Explain for me the role you as a married woman, or other married women you knew, played in the shetel.

PROBE FOR: -responsibilities at home
-types of work done by women outside of the home
-motives for types of work done
-feelings of religious duty
-role of women married to scholars
-work done by married men inside/outside of the home
-women's most important 'job'

18) Describe the extent of male/female interaction during everyday life and social functions like weddings, synagogue services and house visits.

PROBE FOR: -respondent's experiences
-mood surrounding experiences at the time
-difference between religious and secular people and their actions
-generational differences
-displays of affection between married people in public/at home
-displays of affection between unmarried couples
-motives for behavior
-sanctions
-proper dress for women/men

19) Tell me about the access you had to birth control when you lived in the shetel.

PROBE FOR: -knew about it
-use of birth control
-motivations
-how felt about using/not using birth control--why?
-sanctions
-respondent's idea about general attitude surrounding the use of birth control
APPENDIX B

Glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish Words

These translations and spellings were either taken from the glossaries of Life is With People, Yesterday, The World of Our Mothers or discussions with Helen Glaser.

Balebatisheh - Respectable; proper

Bar Mitzvah - A religious ceremony for a boy at age thirteen. He is now considered an adult and takes on adult male religious responsibilities.

Beit Hamikdash - House of Holiness; Jerusalem Temple

Bentshen Lecht - Lighting and saying the blessing over the Sabbath candles

Bracha - Blessing

Bubby - Grandmother

Bund - Jewish workers movement

Challah - Ritual bread for the Sabbath

Chazzan - Leads prayers in song during synagogue services; a cantor

Chederim - Religious elementary schools (cheder - singular)

Chumish - Torah

Chupah - Marriage canopy under which a couple is married

Daven - To pray

Farfel - Baked noodle

Farzesseneh - Spinster; dried fruit

Gemara - Talmudic commentary on the Mishnah (oral law)

Hallah - Ritual act and blessing when baking

Hasid - A member of the Hasidic religious movement which was founded in the seventeenth century

Haskala - A philosophy which promoted the secularization of the Jewish people; the Enlightenment
Havdalah - A religious ceremony which concludes the Sabbath
Kashrut - The Jewish dietary laws
Kleine - Small
Kiddush - The blessing over wine which consecrates the Sabbath and holidays
Kohen - Priest
Maftir - The last portion of the bible read on the Sabbath and holidays
Maskilim - Followers of the Haskala (maskil - singular)
Matzos - The unleavened bread eaten during Passover
Mekhutn - Relatives through marriage
Mikvah - The ritual bath used for purification
Mine - My
Misnagid - Anti-Hasidic
Mit - With
Mittin - Middle
Mitzvot - Commandments; good deeds (mitzvah - singular)
Motzi - The blessing over bread
Niddah - A menstruating woman; one who is excluded
Parveh - A food that is neither milk nor meat, e.g. fruit
Rashi - The eleventh century French rabbi and commentator
Rebe - A learned man or teacher
Seyfer - A Hebrew book with religious content
Shabbes - The Sabbath (Hebrew - Shabbat)
Shadchen - Matchmaker
Sheytl - A wig that is worn by married women
Shoichet - A butcher; ritual slaughterer
Shtetlach - Towns (shtetl - singular)
Shul - Synagogue; school

Siddur - A prayer book

Talmud - The oral law and the rabbinic interpretation of the oral law

Torah - The Jewish law

Yeshivot - Schools of higher religious learning (Yeshivah - singular)

Yichus - Status which is based on family wealth and/or education

Yiddishkeit - Jewishness; the Jewish way of life

Yontev - Holiday

Zionist - Prior to 1948, one who supported the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland; a supporter of Zionism

Zmirot - Poems; religious songs sung after the Sabbath meal
APPENDIX C

A Biographical Sketch of My Informants’ Lives
Before Immigrating to Canada

"Golda"

-born in the town of Plonsk Poland in 1909
-she had three sisters and two brothers
-family was Hasidic inclined
-her parents died when she was young and she and her
brothers and sisters were raised by her mother’s sister and
her husband
-she belonged to a Zionist reading group
-she immigrated to Canada from Plonsk in 1927

"Frieda"

-born in the town of Sierpc Poland in 1908
-father was Hasidic, mother was not
-she had three brothers and two sisters
-she was raised by both her parents
-belonged to a Zionist reading group
-she was married in Poland before World War Two
-escaped to Russia in 1939 and immigrated to Canada in 1948

"Nina"

-born in the village of Jazlowicz Poland in 1911
-she lived in Czortkow for three years when she went to
gymnasium
-lived in Jazlowicz until World War Two
-family was very Orthodox
-she had three sisters and one brother
-she was raised by both her parents
-belonged to a woman’s Zionist organization and reading
circle
-she married her first husband in Poland before World War
Two
-after World War Two she immigrated to France in 1945 and
then came to Canada in 1950

"Rivkah"

-born in the town of Staszow Poland in 1898
-family was Hasidic
-she had four brothers and three sisters
-her mother died when she was fourteen and her father re-
married
-she secretly belonged to the Halutzim (Zionist) (her father
would not have liked it had he known)
-she immigrated to Canada in 1921
"Raezl"
-born in the city of Cieszyn Poland in 1920 and lived there until World War Two
-family was very religious
-her mother had three children from her first marriage and her father had five children from his first marriage and they had four children together of which Raezl was the youngest
-she was raised by both her parents
-she belonged to the Shomrim (Zionist)
-immigrated to Canada in 1951

"Naomi"
-born in the town of Biale Poland in 1915
-family was very religious, but not fanatic
-she had no siblings
-she was orphaned when young and was raised by her aunt and uncle
-did not formally belong to any organizations but described herself as a Zionist
-immigrated to Canada when she was eighteen years old

"Ruth"
-born in Luck Poland in 1913
-grew up in the town of Apt (Opatov) Poland
-family was Hasidic
-she had three sisters and five brothers
-she was raised by both her parents
-belongs to a Zionist youth group
-immigrated to Canada when she was fifteen and a half years old

"Leah"
-born in the city of Rovno Poland in 1915
-family was religious but not Hasidic
-she had one brother and four sisters
-she was raised by both her parents
-belongs to the Shomer Hatzair (Zionist)
-escaped from the city in 1939
-immigrated to Canada in 1948

"Deborah"
-born in the city of Vilna Poland (today Lithuania) in 1921
-family was not very religious
-she had one brother and no sisters
-she was raised by both her parents
-she belonged to the Bund
-lived "normally" in Vilna until the Germans occupied it in 1940
- after the war she lived in Paris for one year
- immigrated to Canada in 1948

"Miriam"

- born in the village of Porcsalama Hungary in 1907
- in 1928 she moved to Budapest Hungary
- family was Orthodox
- she had three sisters and two brothers (she had one other
  sister and brother, each of whom died of natural causes
  when they were children)
- she was raised by both her parents
- did not belong to any organizations
- married in Hungary before World War Two
- immigrated to Canada in 1952

"Bella"

- born in Romania in 1917
- moved to the town of Stromturo Romania in 1917 and lived
  there until 1930
- lived in the small town of Ronosik for a few months and
  then moved to Sighet and lived there from 1930 until 1944
- her mother was Hasidic and her father was modern
- she had three sisters and four brothers
- she was raised by both her parents
- she belonged to Mizrahi (Zionist Orthodox organization)
- after surviving the war she moved to Hungary, Germany and
  Israel before immigrating to Canada in 1952

"Faegl"

- born in the village of Somosd Romania in 1917
- lived in Somosd until 1930
- lived in three other Romanian villages before moving to
  the city of Targu Mures Romania in 1931
- lived in Targu Mures until 1944
- family was Orthodox, but not fanatic
- she had three sisters and four brothers
- her mother died when she was seven and a half years old and
  her father remarried
- belonged to Mizrahi (Zionist Orthodox organization)
- after the war went back to Targu Mures, then lived in
  Germany
- immigrated to Canada in 1948

"Nehama"

- born in Kumenctz Podolsk Ukraine in 1910
- family not Hasidic (not religious)
- she had one brother and four sisters
- she was raised by both her parents
- at thirteen she joined the Shomer Hatzair (where she lived
  it was a left-leaning Zionist youth group because of the
Soviet influence)
-immigrated to Canada in 1926

"Sheyna"

-born in the town of Ludvipol Poland in 1920
-family was very religious
-she had three brothers and no sisters
-she was raised by both her parents
-belonged to the Shomer Hatzair when was young and joined the Halutzim when she was older
-she fled Ludvipol in 1941
-immigrated to Canada after World War Two

"Rahel"

-born in the city of Viso Romania in 1920
-lived one year in Sighet Romania to learn sewing
-family was Orthodox
-she had four sisters and six brothers
-she was raised by both her parents
-at eighteen she joined Mizrachi (Zionist Orthodox organization)
-she immigrated to Innsbruck Austria after the war and came to Canada in 1949

Note: There is a gap in the information given above for the women who were trapped in Europe during World War Two. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some had been in labour camps, in concentration camps, in hiding etc. The reason that I had not given further details here on that part of their lives is because I did not intentionally seek to acquire that information. I did not want to start off my interviews asking questions that would immediately require them to recall horrible memories. As it happened, most women had briefly and generally told me where they were. But I did not probe for further information about those experiences nor did I question any woman who did not volunteer this type of information. Because
I am not able to present an 'in depth picture of this time of their lives for every woman, I decided to leave this period of their lives blank for all women. I direct anyone interested in the experiences of Holocaust survivors to any library where autobiographies and historical accounts are readily available.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Stopincza Rosenthal, Celia. "Deviation and Social Change in the Jewish Community of a Small Polish Town." *American


VITA AUCTORIS

Karen Melissa Glaser was born January 18, 1962 in Windsor Ontario. She graduated from Centennial Secondary School in 1981. She then attended the University of Toronto where she specialized in Canadian and European History and majored in Social/Cultural Anthropology. She received her honours Bachelor of Arts degree in 1985. From there she entered the University of Windsors Master of Arts program in Sociology, from which she will graduate in 1990.