AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF THE RABBI'S WIFE

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of the rabbinical wife. I first utilized a number of historical studies to aid in situating the rabbinical wife at different points in Jewish history. Certain general characteristics of their role in the community were noted. Their activities extended beyond those traditionally associated with Jewish women. The differences in this role was linked, to an extent, to the shifting role of the rabbis themselves. Unfortunately, most of the primary historical documents have been written by men, and thus shed limited light on these women's actual experiences.

The contemporary perspective was obtained through interviews. Six women married to congregational rabbis met with the researcher. The wives were asked to respond to a series of questions that addressed aspects of their lives as rabbinical wives. Two interviews were conducted. The initial interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then used in a follow-up interview to clarify issues that arose during the initial interview.

The results from these interviews allow us to hear from the women themselves. The wives of the rabbis expressed ambivalence about their leadership. People approach the rabbi's wife with a variety of questions. She herself has a strong Jewish education, but despite her knowledge she has no official status within the Jewish community. She can respond to only the most basic questions. In her private life, the rabbinical wife is gracious and attentive to the needs of the community and will frequently have people in her home for religious and social events. At the same time, her position inhibits deep relationships with the people around her.

This research provides the detail on the role of the rabbinical wife, and contributes to a feminist re-reading of the history of religious leadership in the Jewish community.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Interviewer and the Interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: RABBINICAL AUTHORITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND THE REBBETZIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rabbinic Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Middle Ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Rabbinic Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations of Wives of Rabbis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approaching the Modern Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hasidic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating into the Host Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only in America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obligations and Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bridging History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>THE REALITIES OF REBBETZINHOOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Interpreters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background: The Early Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Home</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a Rebbetzin</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational Expectations</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbinical Function as Perceived by Wives</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefining the Rebbetzin: The Contemporary Rabbinical Wife</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening One's Home</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Women: Teachers, Educators and Counsellors</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Friendships</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties Inherent in the Position: Impact of Position on Family Life</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with Disagreements</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligations and Intrusions</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebbetzin as Role Model</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebbetzin at the Crossroads</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contemporary Scene</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the First Step</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONS</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Next to her home activities, the chief obligation of the rabbi's wife is definitely to assist in the work of the synagogue over which her husband presides, and to interest herself wholeheartedly in the people he serves.¹

Ruth Wolf Levi, a rabbi's wife, wrote this brief description of her role in 1942. For Jewish women the primary role has always been the care and nurture of the family. For the wife of a rabbi, there has been an additional role: her involvement with the synagogue. This often meant helping to launch the synagogue sisterhood, raise funds for the Hebrew school, and teach the classes.²

In the 1970's the position as described by Ruth Levi received the first of many challenges. Both the Reform movement and the Conservative movement were actively questioning the 'fit' of the rabbi's wife to rabbinical life. In the early 1970's Rabbi Stephen Lerner, acting on behalf of the Rabbinical


² Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood, 1890-1940", The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Cambridge UP, 1987) p.209. In the late 1800's women's groups were forming to assist immigrants in their resettlement. Those groups most often involved in these activities, which centred around the distribution of food and clothing, were associated with a synagogue. The synagogue encouraged their members to participate in these acts of gemilut chasidim, (loving kindness). The groups, called sisterhoods, became a place for Jewish women to associate comfortably with other Jewish women.
Assembly, sent out a series of ten questions to over sixty members of the Conservative rabbinate. At the same time, Dr. Theodore Lenn, acting on behalf of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), mailed out 471 questionnaires to its membership.

Both studies addressed the role of the rabbinical wife. The issues and concerns raised at that time have not changed. The ability to separate the person from the role is critical for dealing with family and congregational commitments. How does marriage to a rabbi redefine the public role of a woman? This thesis is an attempt to examine the context of the life of a woman married to a contemporary congregational rabbi in North America.

There is not a great deal of background historical material. For example, in the summer of 1994, I undertook some research regarding the establishment and structure of various congregational sisterhoods across Canada. During the course of the research the question arose as to the place of the rabbi's

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3 Stephen Lerner, "The Congregational Rabbi and the Conservative Synagogue," Conservative Judaism 29.2 (Winter 1975): 4. It was hoped that feedback from the Lerner study would provide an impression of the Conservative rabbinate. One that could be used to stimulate discussion on the relationship between individual rabbis and how the movement could best meet their needs.

4 Theodore Lenn & Associates, "The Rabbi's Wife," Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism (West Hartford, CT: CCAR, 1972): 369-383. The objective of the Lenn study was to assess the satisfaction levels of the rabbinate in terms of training and the support provided by the CCAR.
wife within synagogue sisterhoods. Did synagogue records link the rabbi's wife with sisterhood or other congregational activities? An examination of the anniversary booklets of various congregations across Canada revealed little about the involvement of the rabbi's wife.

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Stollman, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, in Windsor, Ontario, wrote an extensive overview of his thirty years with that synagogue in the Golden Jubilee Book, written and published in 1981. At the end of his article, he noted that his wife "had not only stood at (his) side, with strength and wisdom, but made her own unsung contribution to the Synagogue and Community." What were her contributions and why were these not listed? The ease with which the skills and talents of Mrs. Debra Stollman were relegated provided the impetus for my search for materials, past and present, that would provide some clarity on the lives of the wives of rabbis.

There is, however, some material. A number of fictional and non-fictional books have been written that ascribe certain skills and characteristics to the rebbetzin, the Yiddish term

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6 Stollman 39. Emphasis is mine.
for the wife of a rabbi." The term rebbetzin conjures up images of an East European Jewish shtetl (village), where the rabbi's wife was the family breadwinner, a role model of piety and learning, and an exemplary wife and mother whose sole concern was the well-being of her husband and his standing in the community. Women married to rabbis are described in terms of their relationships to the males in their lives. No information exists as to the influences they have exerted on the lives of their husbands. These women, however, were central, both to their families, and, to the communities in which they lived. It is probable that the relationship of a rabbi and his rebbetzin has not changed in two millennia.

I have liberally utilized Shoshana Pantel Zolty's *And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* in this thesis. Originally written for her doctoral thesis in education, Shoshana Pantel Zolty has brought together a detailed list of educated Jewish women who lived during the Second Temple period through to twentieth century Palestine. Many of these women, named and unnamed, were the wives of rabbis. As her focus is education, the information

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7 Feminist theory takes issue with the power of naming and describing. For most of known history men have been responsible for naming and this has had a profound influence on women's identity and self-perceptions. It is interesting to note that the wife of a rabbi was given the name rebbetzin by the Ashkenazim and the name rabbani by the Sephardim. By naming the wife of the rabbi she has in effect been set apart from the community of women.

8 Nadich 16-18.
presented is brief. The woman has been acknowledged, but her life lacks context. How a rebbetzin in a contemporary community perceives her public role will augment our understanding of the historical role of the rebbetzin.

The written evidence of Jewish history tends to reinforce the notion that the rabbi and his wife occupied separate worlds. Documents, diaries, and journals that might attest to a rabbinical life other than what is recorded in history are non-existent.

A study of women in possible roles of religious leadership is certainly needed. Jewish history, according to Paula Hyman, has largely been the "secular study and elucidation of classical Jewish texts." The concerns of Jewish history have been twofold: the analysis of documents and treatises written by a male power elite and the descriptions and analyses of male experiences. Not surprisingly, the intellectual and political roles of rabbis have received considerable attention. Studies and writings regarding the attributes of religious leadership in Jewish communities have been incomplete. Historical documentation has examined the changes that have taken place concerning rabbinical authority and leadership primarily within its institutional context. Minimal consideration is given to the

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rabbinical role within its social and communal context. No thought has been given to the personal context.

The religious history of the Jews automatically includes a history of the rabbis of different periods. 'Reading' a woman's life, however, will reveal a different pattern and a different set of priorities from that of men.\(^ {10} \) Writing in 1982, Myra Shoub noted that the standard textbooks on Jewish history and historiography largely ignored the position or activities of Jewish women.\(^ {11} \) Men and women do not share a common historical experience. An honest reading of history requires that the role of the rabbinical wife be more thoroughly explored.

Since Myra Shoub's comments, a number of works by Jewish women about Jewish women have been published. Specifically, Paula Hyman and Tamar Rudavsky have tackled the issues of gender within Judaism.\(^ {12} \) In their writings they have raised questions and challenged the answers regarding the role of Jewish women in the Jewish milieu. Ellen Umansky has written on the religious and spiritual lives of women both within and outside of the

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traditional places of prayer. Jenna Weissman Joselit has researched and written extensively on the immigrant experience of Jewish women in the first half of the twentieth century. In her writings on that unique North American Jewish phenomenon - the synagogue sisterhood, she explores the experience of Jewish women in home and synagogue. There is no mention of the role that might have been played by a rabbi's wife. In her book, Wonders of America, Mathilde Schecter, wife of Rabbi Solomon Schecter, is discussed briefly for her work in "fostering Jewish religious and cultural heritage." The secondary sources available do not support a broader understanding of the role of the rabbinical wife, however, they do provide context for a number of rebbetzins in historic time and place. Naming and reading these women into the context of their communities is a first step in redressing the place of women in Jewish history.

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15 Weissman Joselit 206-230.

In addition, a better understanding of the role of these women will reveal a more precise picture of Jewish communal and social life. Ismar Schorsch, one-time Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, has written extensively about the development of the modern rabbinate. He noted that at the end of the eighteenth century, the traditional Ashkenazi rabbi still functioned primarily in a juridical capacity as an expositor of Jewish civil and religious law.\textsuperscript{17} By the middle of the nineteenth century, legal modifications occurred that diminished the power of the rabbinical office. The rabbinate had its authority grounded in a particular legal status. It became a rabbinate with its authority based on learning.\textsuperscript{18} There is no mention of how this personally affected the individual rabbi. Nor is there commentary that indicates how these changes

\textsuperscript{17} Ismar Schorsch, "Emancipation and the Crisis of Religious Authority: The Emergence of the Modern Rabbinate," Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German Jewish History, eds. Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Paucker, and Reinhard Rürup (Tubingen: JCB Mohr, 1981) 207.

\textsuperscript{18} Schorsch 207. The following paragraph, taken from Rabbi Leon of Modena's History of the Rites, Customs, and Manners of Life of the Present Jews throughout the World, trans. Edmund Chilmead (London, 1650) 69-70, describes the powers held by a rabbi in medieval times.

...The CACHAM, Rab, or Morenu, decide all controversies concerning the things that are either Lawful or Prohibited, and all other Differences; they execute the Office of Publick Notaries, and give Sentence also in Civil Controversies, they Marry, and give Bills of Divorce; they Preach also, if they can; ... they punish those, that are Disobedient, with Excommunication; and there is generally great Respect shewed unto them in all Things.
affected the social standing, duties, and obligations of the rabbinical wives living through these radical times. Was there an expectation that the rabbi's wife would change her style in both behaviour and dress to complement her husband's changed position?

In North America a key concern was the extent to which Judaism could be adapted to fit with the secular American culture. In America, and by extension, Canada, there was no lack of written materials to inform Jewish women of their new roles. The onus was now on the Jewish wife and mother to make her home Jewish, and to educate her children in all matters Jewish.\(^\text{19}\) The challenges faced by the rabbinical wife in trying to adjust to American society are not addressed. Documentation on the early years of American Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Judaism in Marc Lee Raphael's *Profiles in Judaism* has nothing to say about the wives of the men who shaped religious Judaism in North America.\(^\text{20}\)

Two studies have emerged that directly address the role of the *rebbeżtni*. The first study is Carla Freedman's unpublished rabbinic thesis.\(^\text{21}\) Her thesis, "The *Rebbeżtin* in America in the

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\(^{19}\) Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, 70-71.


\(^{21}\) Carla Freedman, "The *Rebbeżtin* in America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1990).
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," is the first exploration of the rebbetzin as subject. Her paper brings together both primary and secondary sources on the North American rebbetzin.22 The second study recently appeared in American Jewish History.23 Shuly Schwartz, in her research on the twentieth century rebbetzin noted that "the successful rebbetzins greatly enhanced their husbands' success in the rabbinate."24 Women who married rabbis between the 1930's and the 1950's saw themselves as professional rebbetzins.25 At that time women could not aspire to careers. Through marriage however they were able to create a position that carried power and influence.

The advent of the women's movement and the changes of the last twenty-five years have had called into question the value of the position of rebbetzin. The position of the wife of the rabbi remains unique. It still exists. In order to clarify the

22 In her research Carla Freedman mentions the Spouse's Support Network. Begun in 1982, the CCAR Spouse Support Group publishes a newsletter called the Spousal Connection. The newsletter is for the use of the rabbinical spouses of Reform rabbis, and reflects their needs and concerns. Its primary strength lies in its lists of contacts. Its letters and articles contain practical advice and encourage the rabbinical spouses to reach out for support when necessary.

23 Shuly R. Schwartz, "We Married What We Wanted To Be: The Rebbetzin in Twentieth-Century America," American Jewish History 83 (June 1995): 223-246. Much of her research is drawn from the pages of Outlook, a magazine published by the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, and as well as interviews.

24 Schwartz 228.

25 Schwartz 238.
role today it would be useful to examine history and to interview contemporary rabbinical wives. As Jewish history has been constructed as if the male experience were normative, re-examining history might reveal a new understanding of the role played by the wives of rabbis. By taking the life history of a rabbi's wife, it becomes a primary source for understanding how these women perceive their roles. Susan Geiger notes that "the personal contextualization of women's lives found in life histories makes them invaluable for ... preventing facile generalizations, and evaluating theories about women's experience."²⁶

The personal narratives of these women allows for a more fully human conception of the social reality that is the rabbinate.²⁷ The use of personal narrative allows the rabbinical wife to respond out of her experience. Through her experience and perceptions of her role one can address the political and social aspects of the position.

In the Lenn study for example, a number of wives expressed concern around the position versus person issue. Shuly Schwartz also comments about the difficulties inherent in separating the


person from the position.  

The following chapters will explore aspects of the lives of the rabbinical wife. Chapter Two will discuss the usefulness of historical research when exploring issues relating to women. In particular, how Jewish historical research has tended to discount women who are in positions of leadership, such as the wives of rabbis. This chapter will also discuss the methodology and techniques used to take the oral histories. Chapter Three will examine the role in historical context. Chapter Four will present the materials that have been gathered through the interviews. This chapter will also examine the challenges facing the contemporary rebbetzin. The last chapter will be a synopsis of the findings and will summarize any questions that have been raised through the study.

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28 Schwartz 239.
CHAPTER TWO: SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

With the Ketubah, [the Rabbi's wife] is not only the recipient of all his worldly goods, but seems to become automatically invested with all his special virtues, and ... endowed with all his 'scholarly degrees.'

On the basis of learning and position, rabbis have instant status within the Jewish community. Shoni Levi, a rabbi's wife, asserts that the wife of a rabbi, through her marriage, attains comparable status. Her comment challenges us to investigate how the role of the rabbinical wife is perceived personally and historically. Her comment raises many questions.

Is the role invested with honour and regard? Did rabbinical wives of previous generations perceive themselves as similarly invested? Did attributes of the position exist prior to the nineteenth century? Is the role of the rabbinical wife a North American phenomena? Is the role of the contemporary rabbinical wife analogous to that of the rabbinical wife of distant times?

Shoni Levi's comment also raises questions for today's rabbinical wife. Can the wife of a rabbi establish her own position within the community? Is there a congregational expectation that the wife demonstrate a certain level of Jewish knowledge? Is it possible to differentiate between individual activities undertaken by these women from the congregational

activities undertaken as a consequence of their role? Chapter Four will present information gathered from the personal narratives to address these questions.

It has been said that oral history thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope.30 Revealing the contemporary experiences of women can enhance our understanding of women's past experiences. According to Sue Middleton,

> When feminist oral histories cover extensive portions ... in an individual's life, they assist in ... illuminating the connections between biography, history, and social structure.31

The narratives of rabbinical wives have the potential to bring this position "into" history and to make their particular experience part of the written record.32 Gathering individual life stories also allows one to consider the broader questions of culture, societal influence, ... relationships and common human experiences.33 Narrative or feminist oral history increases our awareness of all women's lives. David Mandelbaum, a writer of life histories, notes, "life history studies ... emphasizes the experiences and requirements of the individual -

32 Reinharz 134.
how the person copes with society." The social dimension covers such factors as social acts, conflicts, solutions and choices. He also notes that the individual subjective experience is likely to be similar to that of others in the same culture and society.

Daniel Bertaux, a French sociologist, gathered the life-stories of bakers, their wives, and their employees. He conjectured that the stories they told would reveal "patterns of practice" specific to this particular strata of society. He further conjectured that these patterns would be unique and observable in every bakery in France. I was looking for similar "patterns of practice" in the personal narratives of the rabbinical wives. In this instance the "patterns of practice" would refer to the particular set of social relations that are unique to the wife of a rabbi in the Jewish community and to the role a rabbinical wife has within her community.

34 Mandelbaum 177.
35 Mandelbaum 180.
THE QUESTIONS

The set of questions developed for the interviews were divided into three sections: Family Background, Married Life, and Personal Development (Appendix A). Six basic questions arose from preliminary readings of materials about both rebbetzins and the wives of ministers. No non-fictional writings exist in the wife's hand addressing the relationship of a rabbi and his wife. There is, however, a rich literature on the wives of ministers. The stories of ministers' wives, to some extent, address the relationship between the wife and her husband. It seemed appropriate to use these as a resource. Two books in particular stood out.

Ruth Tucker's *Private Lives of Pastors' Wives* treats the roles, issues and challenges that have faced various minister's wives. 38 The book is somewhat historical, beginning with the story of Kate Luther, wife of Martin, who is considered the prototype for wives of Protestant ministers. It covers the lives of wives of notable ministers into the middle of the twentieth century.

The second book, written in 1966 by Marilyn Ogden, a minister's wife, is titled *The Minister's Wife: Person or Position*. 39 Marilyn Ogden discusses how a minister's wife is


able to hide behind the 'role'. She talks about wives who relate
to their congregants on a positional rather than an authentic
level, and she talks about wives who become so involved in their
congregations that they lose their own individuality. The
similarities between the experiences of ministerial and
rabbinical wives in their congregational duties and obligations
assisted in the formulation of the questions. The questions put
forward emphasized the social, educational and leadership
aspects of their role within the congregation.

The basic questions were as follows:
1) Do you recall your thoughts, feelings when you realized you
were going to be a rabbi's wife? For example, in the Lenn study,
Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism, released in 1972, it was
noted,

A group of Reform rabbi's wives were once
asked if they would like their husbands to
choose the rabbinate - "if they had to do it
all over again." Only half - 53 percent, to
be exact - said they would.40

2) Have there been times when you felt a responsibility for your
husband's career? Ruth Tucker, a minister's wife commented that

Because {a wife} is so closely associated
with her husband's ministry, she finds
herself taking a defensive posture where he
is concerned.41

40 Lenn 369.
41 Tucker 109.
3) Have you experienced implicit obligations in the position—in terms of participation? One of the wives interviewed by Joan Behrmann commented "I had to learn that certain areas were his purview and it was very hard to restrain myself." Another wife in the same article had commented that the congregation had never had a rabbi and therefore nobody had any expectations of her.

4) Do you find yourself concerned with how the congregation views you? One rabbi's wife, Esther Bengis, wrote,

... the rabbi's wife, especially, affords a convenient topic for gossip. Little did I know that when making a sick visit I was at the time being picked to pieces ... our every step was watched, we were criticized at every turn, ... sometimes I wondered whether we considered human at all."

5) Do you feel you are able to develop a relationship with the women in your congregation? Anne, a rabbi's wife interviewed by Joan Behrmann, commented that she feels afraid to get too close, as if there is an invisible barrier between herself and the women of the congregation.

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43 Behrmann 51.


45 Behrmann 51.
6) Do you see yourself as a role model? Ruth Tucker noted that besides having such talents and gifts that would be easily observed in public, the pastor's wife was to model a deep spirituality ... and while modelling the ultimate in spiritual maturity she was to dress becomingly and to be as attractive as possible.\footnote{46}

Debra Kaufman in her interviews of Ba'\'alot Teshuva, was told by one woman, "the rebbetzin, she was incredible ... spiritual, learned, capable ... I wanted to be like her."\footnote{47}

THE INTERVIEW

Marjorie L. DeVault has written that the feminist scholar needs to develop "new methods for writing about women's lives and activities."\footnote{48} By taking an oral history the life of the individual being interviewed is reconstructed within a broader social context.\footnote{49}

I utilized a semi-structured interview to draw out the life stories of the women. Although the questions were loosely structured and open-ended, the nature of the study required that the interview to some extent be guided. Gabriele Rosenthal notes

\footnote{46} Tucker 151.


that "within the interactional framework of the interview, [the life story is related] in a thematically focused context, and evolves around a thematic topic, usually established by the interviewer." The women were encouraged to "digress" into details and to recount anecdotes. Open-ended questions such as "Can you elaborate on that?", "What was happening for you at that time?", and "Tell me more about that?" helped to stimulate dialogue.

The specific interview questions allowed the individual to reflect upon and describe certain times in their life more fully. In reconstructing their life histories, the interviewees select and relate those experiences that represent a thematically consistent pattern. Within this framework the investigation took into account the importance of "starting with women's experiences."

Prior to the first interview, letters of introduction were sent to nine women whose husbands held positions as congregational rabbis (Appendix B). The letters were sent out in mid-January of 1996. One week after the letter was mailed a telephone call was made to each rabbinical wife to clarify any questions incurred by the letter and to set up an appointment.

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51 Rosenthal 62.
52 Reinharz 21.
Amongst Orthodox women it is understood that immediately following Purim celebrations preparations begin for Passover. In order to ensure that the interviews were completed properly, the first interviews had to be completed prior to Purim. There was one exception, and this interview took place the week following Purim. At this time several of the wives declined to be interviewed. No reason was given by one of the women. Two other women indicated that they felt compelled to decline due to their position within their communities. Six women agreed to be interviewed about their experience of being a rabbi's wife. With one exception, all interviews took place in the women's homes. In consideration of scheduling difficulties one interview took place in the synagogue library, and one follow-up interview was conducted in a coffee shop.

Of the six women, two were from Eastern Canada, three were from the Eastern United States and one was from the west coast of the United States. All six women are educated, and professionals in their own right. Three of the women have graduate degrees.

Two interviews were conducted. Each of the first interviews lasted approximately one hour to one and a half hours. Prior to the initial interview each woman was asked to sign a letter of

53 The Jewish date for Purim celebrations is 15 Adar. Passover, and the recalling of the Exodus from Egypt takes place exactly one month after Purim, on the 15 Nisan. During this month the homes, cars, and offices of observant Jews are thoroughly cleansed of chometz, leavened bread.

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consent (Appendix C). I also described the format of the interview and briefly described the nature of my research. The first interview required each woman, through her responses to the questions, to describe her life story and her experience of her role as wife of a congregational rabbi.

For the second interview I returned to each woman with the transcribed interview. She was then asked if she had any further thoughts to share and to clarify any salient points. The second interview took place approximately 4-6 weeks after the first interview and lasted between a half hour and one hour. Both sets of interviews were tape-recorded and the transcripts examined for patterns and issues.

The oral history interview illustrates where a woman places herself in her world and how she perceives her place in that world. A large part of the depiction is the interpretation. In commenting on the importance of listening, Dana Jacks notes that "the issue of interpretation becomes critical for data collected through oral interviews." Researchers in the field of women's oral history have emphasized how a shared culture between the one sharing the story and the person listening influences the collection of data. A mutual understanding regarding religious traditions and culture as well as language use diminishes

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55 Jack 113.
concerns that may arise over interpretation. Moreover, the existence of similar backgrounds creates an environment of openness and trust. I have lived in this community for twenty years and have been involved with several congregations. Three of the women knew me personally.

THE INTERVIEWER AND THE INTERVIEWEE

Unlike standardized methods of interviewing, the primary concern in feminist methodology is that the interviewee own their responses. According to the *Personal Narratives Group* the interviewer/interpreter is an active participant in the shaping of the narrative.\(^5^6\) Faye Ginsberg, an anthropologist, uses the term 'interpreter' for the interviewee.\(^5^7\) When the interviewee describes her story it is a process in which the events she has experienced, are shared and interpreted for the interviewer. In this paper the events shared are the experiences of the six women who are the wives of rabbis. At the same time, the stories and anecdotes they present, are in response to specific questions framed by the interviewer. The data collected is edited to 'fit' with the overall discussion. The completed life story represents the collaboration between the two

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\(^5^7\) Reinharz 129.
Directly engaging with women and listening and recording their responses, is a way of both honouring their perceptions, and of writing contemporary history. A woman's perception of her role informs us of her experience of the role. It also adds to our knowledge of what the role in general demands.

The next chapter demonstrates how traditional historical materials have portrayed rabbinical wives. It will also address the problem of using a strictly historical approach. A detailed history exists of the rabbinical role. A similar study does not exist of the role of rabbinical wives. The scarcity of materials, and the nature of the historical documents, limits our ability to give appropriate context to the lives of historical rabbinical wives. Jewish women's history does not fit into the accepted periodization presented by traditional Jewish history, which has tended to marginalize Jewish women. Chapter Three will explore how the role has been portrayed through an analysis of social history.

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58 Reinharz 131.
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:
RABBINICAL AUTHORITY, THE STATUS OF WOMEN,
AND THE REBBETZIN

The historical experience of Jewish women ... has been ignored ... and denied. The
history of Jewish men and their institutions has been taken for the history of the whole society.59

Shulamit Magnus comments that written Jewish history begins with the emergence of rabbinical Judaism, and is then presented in discrete units named, for example, the medieval period, Lurianic kabbalah, and the modern period.60 She questions, "What do we know of women and their religious lives and activities in relation to or apart from these movements?"61

The answer, according to Magnus, is Nothing.62

Chapter One notes the historical documentation of the Jewish people is mainly the history of the rabbis of different periods. Jewish history is concerned with the circumstances in which leadership and rabbinic authority developed, as well as the manifold changes in the rabbinate. The modern rabbi is often called upon to interpret the Law, lead a scholarly discussion,

60 Magnus 29.
61 Magnus 29.
62 Magnus 29.
teach a class, preach, visit the sick and the grieving, and maintain the synagogue schedule. Is the contemporary rebbetzin required to fulfil a similar role?

This chapter sketches the rabbinical role from its inception to the present. These vignettes will reveal a more precise picture of Jewish social life, demonstrating how the changes experienced by rabbis reshaped the role of the rabbi's wife. Are the attributes of this role unique to the present culture? Are these attributes shared by the wives of rabbis past?

Rabbinic culture has been categorized, catalogued, and indexed. The cultural milieu of rabbinical wives has yet to be unearthed. The questions raised could only be addressed by using a method that by its nature excludes women. The secondary sources used follow the known path of Jewish history as laid down by male scholars.

RABBINIC JUDAISM

The period of the development of classical rabbinic Judaism dates from the destruction of the Temple by Rome in 70 CE to the time of the Babylonian sages of the sixth century, known as the

The title "rabbi" was first used to describe the presidents of the Sanhedrin - Gamliel the Elder, called Rabban; his son Rabban Shimon; and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who witnessed the devastation and ruin of Jerusalem. After the destruction the title "Rabbi" was given to those individuals ordained by the Sanhedrin to decide law.

The early rabbi was primarily responsible for the elaboration (translation and interpretation) of the written and oral law. He was also called upon to teach and to be a decisor of the Law. Adin Steinsaltz comments that this innovation of the title "Rabbi" led to an increase in the number of scholars and to an elevation in their status.

Certain rabbinical 'ideals' concerning women and their place in society found increasing prominence in Palestine during the Tannaim.

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64 Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980) 262. The savoraim, holders of opinions, lived prior to the era of the geonim. All that is known of their work is derived from references in the Babylonian Talmud.

65 Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976) 25. Steinsaltz also mentions that it was during the period of the Tannaim that the title rabbi was created for those who received official appointments.


67 Steinsaltz 25.
the first centuries of the Common Era. Aviva Cantor suggests that the rabbinical attitude towards women coincided with the fall of the Second Temple, and the Exile.68 In order to ensure the survival of the Jewish people in the Exile, the rabbis redefined male power and Jewish manhood. Male power would now be centred in knowledge, learning and study.69 In particular, the acme of Jewish manhood was dedication to the study and learning of Torah. As part of this shift in values, social controls were imposed upon women. For reasons of modesty women could not venture alone into public places such as the market, the study hall, the synagogue.

Thomas Friedman raises the report of R. Meir in order to demonstrate the apparent public absence of women in Talmudic times. Rabbi Meir, a Tanna, a prominent second century Mishnaic rabbi and teacher, noted the unusual practice of Papus Ben Yehuda "who, when he would leave his home, used to lock his wife indoors" (Gittin 90a). Ben Yehuda's behaviour suggests that married women, with some exceptions, lived out their lives within the confines of their home.70

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69 Cantor 92.

70 Thomas Friedman, "The Shifting Role of Women, From the Bible to the Talmud," Judaism 36 (Fall 1987): 482. A further reading of Gittin indicates that R. Meir and his colleagues were discussing reasons for divorce proceedings. Part of the discussion was a summary of how different men treat their wives. The reported
This notion that a woman's life was best fulfilled through her role as wife and mother provided the social reinforcement for the restrictions placed on women. Other historians have suggested the negative attitude of the rabbis towards women represents the influence of Hellenistic culture rather than any intrinsic Jewish concern.\(^1\) The question of cultural influences remains unresolved due to the scarcity of documentation for this time period.\(^2\) The fact is that women "conformed to their established roles ... and were away from the centers of power."\(^3\)

The classical rabbinic texts are the only source of information about the lives of Jewish women living in the land of Israel between 200 CE and 400 CE.\(^4\) Anecdotes about the rabbinical wives living in these times can be found mainly in the Mishnaic materials, and in the Palestinian Talmud. Judith Wegner's studies of Jewish women center on their legal status in actions of Ben Yehuda was not a majority response -- general opinion was that "most men do not mind their wives talking with their brothers and relatives" (Gittin 90a).

\(^1\) Leila L. Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994) 17 (Ftnote 4).

\(^2\) Bronner 17.

\(^3\) Bronner 2.

Rabbinic Judaism. In writing about the Talmudic stance on women she has stated that the sages "systematically excluded women from the intellectual and spiritual ... forums of Mishnaic culture."\(^75\)

A reading of the Mishna and Gemara reveals a world where women were concerned almost exclusively with the home. As stated succinctly by Rabbi Yossi: "I have never called my wife 'my wife', only 'my home'" (Shabbat 118b).

Yet Adin Steinsaltz has noted that "the wives and daughters of prominent men wielded considerable influence."\(^76\) He comments that the halachic ruling, "the wife of a scholar is as he" reflected an expectation that the women in scholarly families were assumed to be knowledgable in halacha."\(^77\) Beruria, daughter of Rabbi Hananya ben Teradion, and wife of Rabbi Meir, delivered rulings that became law. Yalta, wife of Rabbi Nachman, and daughter of the Exilarch of the time was not afraid to insult a guest when she thought herself wronged (B.Berakhot 51b). Imma Shalom, wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was consulted about the correct conduct of marital relations.\(^78\)

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\(^75\) Wegner.75. The emphasis is mine.

\(^76\) Steinsaltz 138.

\(^77\) Steinsaltz 141. Unfortunately the English translation of The Essential Talmud does not cite the original texts from which Adin Steinsaltz draws his comments.

Adin Steinsaltz also goes so far as to state that the wider consequences of this particular *halachic* ruling resulted in "the wives of the sages [being] treated with the same respect as their husbands." Thus, close readings of the texts indicate that women were not totally excluded from public forums. Judith Abrams writes that rabbinic teachings to the contrary, women were allowed to testify in court and women were allowed to study Torah.

From the information available, it would seem that the majority of the wives of rabbis mentioned in the Mishna and Gemara came from learned families and had been encouraged in their learning. A number of the anecdotes related in Judith Abrams' *The Women of the Talmud* lends support to the notion that the sages and rabbis were very aware of the influence of their wives on their interpretations and judgements. Unfortunately only three of the wives from these times are named, and then only with reference to the point of law under discussion. This suggests that just as the rabbis of this time period are associated with discussions of the law, their wives also, are associated with points of law and interpretation.

The literature gives no indication of the social and religious lives of these women in their communities. Nor does it explicitly indicate whether classes and discussions were

79 Steinsaltz 141.
80 Abrams xvii.
restricted to the Academies. For example, as early as the second century BCE, Yose ben Yoezer of Tzuredah stated "Let your house be a meeting place for sages" which suggests that the homes (which would allow for the presence of the wives) of the various rabbis also became places of learning (Pirke Avot 1:4-5). Unfortunately, Rabbi Yose's suggestive comment has limitations: only inferences can be drawn from his remarks. What is clear, however, is, that some women, connected to rabbinical families, had what could be considered "para-rabbinical" functions.

THE MIDDLE AGES

This period in written Jewish history begins in the seventh century and takes us to the portals of the modern era in the middle of the seventeenth century. The needs of the Diaspora communities throughout Europe necessitated a new rabbinical response. This section will address how these new demands reshaped both the rabbinical position and the role of the rabbinical wife.

During the early centuries of the common era, Jews were moving out of the land of Israel and settling elsewhere. From the seventh century through to the beginning of the tenth century contact was maintained with the geonim, heads of the yeshivot in Babylon and Israel, for decisions regarding civil,
religious, and criminal issues in Jewish law and practice. The geonim would address questions posed by communities outside Israel and Babylon twice a year: the month prior to Passover, and the month prior to the High Holy Days.

While the yeshivot hosted students the year around, it was during these two specific times of the year that men who were otherwise employed could take time from their work obligations to study. Responding to the questions and concerns of the Diaspora communities was an integral part of their education. Discussions would ensue, and the finalized response would be written down and returned to the individual questioner or community. From the beginning, these questions and their responses were preserved in the communal records. The entire procedure, from submission of the question, to discussion and resolution, might take up to three months or longer if the question arrived after the High Holy Days study period. It became necessary to develop a more effective response system.

European communal leaders began writing to known rabbis in their geographical area. These commentaries also became part of the Responsa. This Responsa literature forms much of what is known about Jewish life during these middle centuries. Since the Responsa dealt with issues of a Halachic nature, the materials reflect the worldview of the men who discussed these issues. The

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lives mainly recorded are those of husbands, fathers and sons. Where a woman's life is mentioned, it is often with reference to the dates of birth and death of her husband or father.

Overview of Rabbinic Functions

The emerging rabbinate of the Jewish Middle Ages was a wholly new entity and bore no resemblance to the rabbinic institutions of antiquity. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson commented that

The major achievements of the geonic period lay in the spiritual field and in the shaping of the Jewish outlook and way of life ... {through} the transformation of the Talmud into the major sourcebook of life ... for the Jews.

History has recorded the activities of many geonim. Individual rabbinic activity, however, is scarcely recorded during the Middle Ages, unlike the situation in Talmudic times. The geonim are known. Few of the wives are known.

By the late Middle Ages the weakening power of the Yeshivot and Geonim in Babylon and Israel contributed to the enhancement of local Rabbis. Several factors had taken place that influenced the nature and function of the rabbinical office in Europe. In

82 Schwarzfuchs 5.
83 Ben-Sasson 436.
84 Ben-Sasson 423.
85 Ben-Sasson 423.
the tenth century various Diaspora communities were demanding the rights and responsibilities of leadership. These new communities created new areas of responsibility for the rabbi. Jewish legal and religious concerns were adjudicated by "seven good men of the city," the notables of a given Jewish community." By the eleventh century new forms of leadership were emerging. Rapid community growth and changing economies compelled these community volunteers to seek out scholars of Jewish law who would act on behalf of the community." Rabbis were now called upon to be teachers, preachers and spiritual heads of their communities."

Jews were established in communities throughout Western Europe. For some 200 years—from the thirteenth century and into the fifteenth—Jews in western Europe endured massacres, forced conversions, and expulsions. At the end of the thirteenth century many Jews had moved east into Germany, and into the western parts of Poland. By the mid-fifteenth century few Jews were left in southern and western Europe.

One factor contributing to the stability of Jewish communities throughout these upheavals was the authority of the

86 Schwarzfuchs 8.
87 Schwarzfuchs 10.

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scholars and sages of Torah and Talmud. Those who were scholars achieved an elevated status, and were accorded positions of leadership within their communities. These positions entitled the scholar to earn his living as "Judge and Decider" for the community. In the second-half of the fourteenth century the ancient institution of semikhah, ordination, was reinstated. It acquired the force of 'hallowed authority.' According to R. Moses Mintz "every rabbi and expert has been ordained a rabbi by a preceding rabbi all the way back to Moses our Master ... and no householder ... may in any way

89 Ben-Sasson 597.

90 Ben-Sasson 597. Ben-Sasson cites the following example from Pesakim u-khetavim, Decisions and Writings. (Warsaw, 1882, #128.p.25) to indicate note that the scholar was very protective of his position because of the money that comes to the pockets of the leaders from divorces and halizah and hearing the oaths of women and the payment for the blessings of betrothal and espousal.

91 Schwarzfuchs 31-33. Semikhah, ordaining through the imposition of hands, originated with Moses, who laid his hands on Joshua and so ordained him as G-D had commanded (Num 27:23). Ordination was usually conferred by a Master upon his disciple. The ordained individual was entitled to judge and decide law.

In the second century of the Common Era the Emperor Hadrian forbade the granting of Semikhah in order to undermine the Sanhedrin. It was finally discontinued in the fifth century (425 CE), when the office of the Patriarchate ceased to exist. Reinstatement of Semikhah in the mid 1300's was considered an attempt to regulate use of the rabbinic title. Granting of Semikhah was now a written document. The qualified individual would now receive a certificate that enabled him to instruct and to judge, and to receive payment for these services. Also, the certificate named the rabbi with whom he had learned.

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question the words of the rabbi." His statement gave rise to the concept of "the chain of ordination" which took on the force of halacha. This provided the rabbi with the authority to maintain a yeshiva, deal with weddings and divorces, control the measures for selling liquor and oil, and restore the social activities that keep a community vibrant.

By the fifteenth century, there was one Rabbi for each locality and this Rabbi was supported by the community.

In *A Concise History of the Rabbinate*, Simon Schwarzfuchs makes two interesting comments about marriage and rabbis. The first concerns the fact that no scholar could receive a title unless married. The second indicates that communities were loathe to hire any rabbi who had married into a local family. What do these comments reveal about married life for the wife of a rabbi? Through the act of marriage, a rabbinical wife was likely to find herself uprooted, leaving her original family and friends, to accompany her husband to a new community. Did she concern herself with his contract negotiations? Did the lay

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92 Ben-Sasson 598.
93 Ben-Sasson 599.
94 Rabinowitz 1447. The notion of *sekhur battalah* - that a rabbi should be compensated for loss of time (to engage in financially productive labour) due to preoccupation with the rabbinical office - was put into place.
95 Schwarzfuchs 54.
96 Schwarzfuchs 56.
leadership concern itself with any skills or talents that she might bring to the community? Did the community hold any assumptions and expectations about the place of the rabbi's wife?

Throughout Europe, the rabbi was now a paid professional, albeit an elected paid professional. As there was, at this time, a surplus of ordained scholars no position was very secure. Some rabbis moved many times before finding a community that 'fit'. Upon being hired, the rabbi received detailed contracts outlining both obligations to the members of the community, and compensation for services rendered. The contracts, however, were not a guarantee of position. The real power was in the hands of the lay leadership who elected the rabbi and negotiated his contract.

Despite the conditions framing his job description, and the tenuousness of the position it was the rabbi's role to provide the community with some kind of judicial and religious authority.\(^7\) Rabbinic authority encompassed all issues of morality, family hygiene, diet, business relations, sexual life, education, dress and the religious elements of ritual.\(^8\) How did the wife of a rabbi accommodate herself to these new requirements?

\(^7\) Schwarzfuchs 12-13.

\(^8\) Carlin and Mendlovitz 169. The origins of this comment are to be found in an article titled "Judaism," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, VIII (1935):431 by Ismar Elbogen.
The Responsa literature provides some information as to status, role and behaviour of women at this time.99

Expectations of Wives of Rabbis

When contrasted to Rabbinic times, the various Responsa, diaries, and written memorials of the Middle Ages portray a different picture of daily Jewish life for the women. These documents establish that women had greater licence to pursue their activities. These activities, generally, ranged from participation in commercial transactions, to undertaking learning for its own sake, to teaching and instructing others.

A reading of some of the historical data seems to emphasize the commercial independence of the women. The economic restrictions placed on Jews in medieval times, and the emphasis on study for Jewish men, together created a unique situation for knowledgeable Jewish women.100 Responsa of the thirteenth century refer to women as storekeepers, trustees, lenders, and borrowers.101 Those women who were active commercially often travelled around their communities on business. Rabbi Solomon


100 Baskin 104. Baskin notes that women were engaged in the practice of medicine, as well as in business propositions with both Jews and gentiles.

101 Zolty 172.
Luria (1510-1574) noted that "our women now conduct business in the house and represent the husband." The role of woman as wage-earner was an established fact by the sixteenth century. The wage-earning role was to become an essential aspect of a woman's life into the nineteenth century, at which time another culture would reshape the domestic life of Jewish women.

In the same way that women had opportunities to develop their business skills so the opportunity also existed for women to make use of their intellectual skills. As the rabbi came to stand for a cultural ideal, so the rabbi's wife also took on a larger than life role in her community. A number of these women were scholars who contributed to the halachic rulings of their husbands as well as being teachers, writers and translators of Biblical materials. It seemed that women from rabbinical families were very involved in the religious life of the community.

While any learned woman could be a precentor, singer of hymns, or firzogen, reader, for the women of the synagogue, this role was often undertaken by the wife of the rabbi. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (1165-1230) praised his wife for her active religious and cultural life in the community: She led the women in prayer and is believed to have given public discourses to the community.

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102 Zolty 192.
103 Zolty 180.
104 Zolty 193-199.
women on the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{105}

Evidence is available that the women of the thirteenth century led an active religious life by participating in their own prayer meetings and learning with other women.\textsuperscript{106} By the seventeenth century Shoshana Zolty notes that "there was a proliferation of women who achieved proficiency in their Jewish learning."\textsuperscript{107} For example, it was known that people in the community of Prague turned for help to the wife of Rabbi Phinehas of Prague (mid-fifteenth century); and in Southern Europe, the testimony of the wife of Rabbi Abraham ben Hayyim (late thirteenth century) assisted Rabbi Samuel of Falaise in deciding on a point of law.\textsuperscript{108} There is also a story told about Pearl Loew, the wife of the Maharal, Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (1512-1609). Upon learning of her engagement to Rabbi Loew at the age of six, she decided to study intensively so that her future husband would never be ashamed of her.\textsuperscript{109}

In this era, then, of enhanced rabbinical authority, there is some perceptible improvement in the status of women. Most important for this study there is evidence that women are involved in public religious life to a somewhat greater degree

\textsuperscript{105} Zolty 181.
\textsuperscript{106} Zolty 174.
\textsuperscript{107} Zolty 202.
\textsuperscript{108} Zolty 183.
\textsuperscript{109} Zolty 194.
than in the rabbinic period.

APPROACHING THE MODERN ERA

The role of the community-supported rabbi (in Southern and Western Europe) was that of a scholar and a spiritual leader, an educator in Jewish law and lore, and a judge in civil matters.\textsuperscript{110}

The communities in which the rabbis served were often defined by their host government through the imposition of social and political restrictions.\textsuperscript{111} The restrictions had the effect of forcing most Jews to reside in a specific area with limited options regarding occupation. These limitations were the context for the maintenance of Jewish religious norms. The majority of Jews lived in communities governed by adherence to Halacha, which also served to bind the distant communities to a common standard, and to custom, a cultural or local adaptation of the standard.

Consequently, throughout the nineteenth century as government decrees and prohibitions against Jews were repealed,


religious orthodoxy was seriously challenged.\textsuperscript{112} The Jewish communities were no longer corporate entities. The Jew as an individual was governed by the laws of the state, and the right of jurisdiction no longer applied.\textsuperscript{113} Previously, in order to maintain Jewish autonomy, all civil and criminal matters were adjudicated by officials elected from the community. The rabbi, as repository for the Halacha, and in his role as Judge, was involved in all aspects of the various cases presented. With emancipation, rabbis had no power to enforce religious discipline, and Jewish identity now had an element of choice.

The Hasidic Movement

The experience of Eastern European and Polish Jewry was somewhat different. After the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648 life for Jews in Poland ceased to be economically viable or secure.\textsuperscript{114} Protection taxes paid to Polish nobility and leadership on behalf of the various Jewish communities were ineffectual. When further taxes were imposed by the Jewish leadership, community members protested the financial burden. In 1764 the Polish parliament abolished all Jewish councils. The decision to collect a new poll-tax directly from the Jews,


\textsuperscript{113} Rabinowitz 1452.

\textsuperscript{114} Seltzer 480-482.
rather than through the official communal organ further undermined Jewish leadership. One example of the disenchantment with both the rabbi and leadership was expressed by the Shavle community,

We, the Jewish residents of Shavle, declare, with tears in our eyes, that we have need neither of rabbi nor of leaders since they ... engage in extortion ... and are destroying us utterly, and since they are connected amongst themselves by family ties... .”

The advent of the Hasidic movement in the eighteenth century coincided with the decline in authority and autonomy of the rabbinate. Initially, the movement was confined to Eastern Europe -- White Russia, Galicia, Lithuania and central Poland. While the rabbi was still considered a teacher and expert on religious law his role within Hasidic communities greatly diminished.

The leadership provided by the Rebbe/Zaddik brought a new dimension to the rabbinical role. The Rebbe/Zaddik was the primary spiritual authority for his disciples, a teacher, a counsellor, and a friend, "and a confessor to whom the Hasid could unburden his heart." The rebbe's duties included pleading to G-D on behalf of his followers, and involving

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115 Ben-Sasson 766.
116 Ben-Sasson 770.
himself in their daily cares and anxieties.\textsuperscript{118}

Like her counterparts in Western Europe, the wife of the rebbbe provided for the financial well-being of the household.\textsuperscript{119} There were instances where the rebbetzin worked as vendor, sugar merchant and pedlar. Aware of the financial hardships of their spiritual leaders, many communities granted rabbis’ wives the monopoly for selling shabbos candles and yeast.\textsuperscript{120}

The differences between the rabbinical wives living in the eleventh to sixteenth centuries, and the women married to rebbes appeared to exist not in their roles as income-earners, but in the types of work undertaken. For example, mention is made in two works that in Western Europe, women and rabbinical wives occupied with business and commercial transactions seemed to be involved with business ventures that required crossing borders,

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{119} Rabinowicz 207. Both Rabinowicz and Brayer mention these working rebbetzins in their discussions on the hasida. Rabinowicz notes what the reality must have been like for some of these women when he comments that the lives of these women were difficult and dangerous (207). Brayer mentions these same women. Unlike Rabinowicz\' acknowledgement of their individual lives, Brayer accords them credit on account of the learning of their husbands (48).

\textsuperscript{120} Menahem M. Brayer,\textit{ The Jewish Woman in Rabbinical Literature: A Psychohistorical Perspective}, 2 vols (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1986) 57.
\end{footnotes}
and working as partners with other business people.\textsuperscript{121} The business ventures of the wife of a rebbe, seemed to be conducted solo, and rarely required travel beyond her immediate community.\textsuperscript{122}

In his book \textit{Jewish Women in Rabbinic Literature: A Psychohistorical Perspective}, Menahem Brayer offers the view that within the Hasidic movement there was an equality of opportunity for women in all areas of life: religious, spiritual and traditional. Thus it was possible for a woman to become a teacher and rebbe within her community.\textsuperscript{123} The latter is true mainly for the initial stages of the movement, as for the former, it was rare for women outside of the Hasidic leadership to obtain these positions.

While the rabbinical wives in Western Europe were, in all probability, very spiritual, the information available centers around their pedagogy and liturgical skills. Their individual spiritual practices differed radically from those of the women

\textsuperscript{121} Both Menachem Brayer and Shoshana Pantel Zolty mention this point. Unfortunately, their focus is not the commercial transactions of Jewish women. The point is mentioned only briefly and in the most general terms.

\textsuperscript{122} Rabinowicz 204. There were several exceptions to this. The wife (unnamed) of Rabbi Jacob of Radzymin became a travelling pedlar and therefore went from village to village in order to sell her goods.

\textsuperscript{123} Brayer 38;42. Brayer notes that the direct participation of some women in Hasidic life sometimes created a situation where the woman rose to the level of an ADMOR (Hebrew acronym for "Our Master, Teacher and Rabbi"), and that she was treated with the same respect due a male ADMOR.
married to Hasidic rabbis. These women took on roles that were influenced by the specifics of Hasidic religious leadership. Even though the activities of the wives (and daughters) of rabbis in the Hasidic communities tended to be focused on their individual spiritual development, these same activities drew followers. Perele, the wife of Rabbi Ezra Zelig Shapira of Magnuszew (d.1849) lived a life of poverty, fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and responded to petitions from her followers.¹²⁴ Stories are told of Eidele, the wife of Rabbi Isaac Rubin of Sokolov (d.1876), who delivered discourses and distributed Shirayim, learned discourses.¹²⁵ Also there was Sarale (1838-1937) married to Reb Hayyim Shmuel Horowitz-Sternfeld, who, during her husband's lifetime and beyond, conducted herself as a full-fledged Rebbe until her own death.¹²⁶ Her daughter, Hannah, wife of Reb Elimelekh of Grodzisk (1892) received requests for blessings from her followers.¹²⁷

By the early nineteenth century, Hasidism was entrenched throughout the towns and villages of Central Poland and Eastern Europe. It had become part of the established religious life of these communities.

Harris Lenowitz points out that many of the women who rose

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¹²⁴ Rabinowicz 204.
¹²⁵ Rabinowicz 205.
¹²⁶ Brayer 45.
¹²⁷ Brayer 45.
to prominence during the early years of the movement were from the nuclear families of the leaders of hasidic sects.\textsuperscript{128} The daughters and grand-daughters of the hasidic leadership seemed to enjoy unprecedented opportunities for full participation in their communities. However by the third generation the same opportunities for a woman "to rise to the rank of a zaddik" no longer existed.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{Integrating into the Host Society}

Throughout Germany, the 1800's gave rise to a burgeoning middle class and to the development of a professional class. Industrialization and urbanization offered the promise of unlimited wealth and opportunities. Despite the pressure on Jews to blend with secular society, integration into the various host countries across Europe was piecemeal.

Shortly after the French Revolution, the French Assembly (September 1791) enfranchised all Jews living within its borders.\textsuperscript{130} In return for citizenship, French Jews relinquished their own distinctive communal political structure.\textsuperscript{131} As Napoleon's armies travelled across Europe equal rights were

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\item \textsuperscript{128} Harris Lenowitz, "Women Saints in Early Hasidism," \textit{Explorations: Journal for Adventurous Thought} 3.3 (1985) 29.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Zloty 248.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ben-Sasson 760.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Goldscheider and Zuckerman 35-36.
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granted to Jews living in these countries. With the defeat of Napoleon and his armies in 1814 the previously cancelled restrictions against the Jews were reinstated throughout central Europe.\textsuperscript{132} In France, however, the various restrictions continued to be dismantled. With the removal of the special Jewish oath in the law courts in 1846, there was no longer any legal discrimination against Jews in France.\textsuperscript{133} It was another twenty years before restrictions against the Jews were removed in central Europe. In 1867 Austria granted its Jews complete equality; in 1869 restrictions were lifted in Germany; in 1870 Italian Jews were granted legal emancipation, and in 1874 Switzerland granted emancipation to its Jews. Legal emancipation did not take place in Russia until the fall of the Romanovs.\textsuperscript{134}

Emancipation confronted the legal and communal structures that had kept the Jews together. Jews were free to move geographically and socially.\textsuperscript{135} They left their small towns and villages for the rapidly expanding urban centres.

Rabbis were being called upon to respond to the challenges

\textsuperscript{132} Ben-Sasson 762. While most of the city states were reverting to discriminatory policies against Jews, Westphalia emancipated its Jews.

\textsuperscript{133} Ben-Sasson 800.

\textsuperscript{134} Goldscheider and Zuckerman 41.

\textsuperscript{135} Goldscheider and Zuckerman 80.
presented by the modern era.\textsuperscript{136} The early Reformers were concerned to stop the flow of conversions to Christianity. These Reform rabbis assumed functions that were alien to the traditional rabbi. The ideal of the Rabbi-Leader "whose claim to leadership consisted exclusively in learning and personal piety" was now a source of embarrassment - a holdover from a less enlightened time.\textsuperscript{137}

Carlin and Mendlovitz labelled these adjustments the Protestantization of rabbinic function.\textsuperscript{138} Reform rabbis borrowed certain functions from the Protestant ministry and incorporated these into a new rabbinic role. This new role required that the rabbi be a strong preacher. Until the early twentieth century Orthodox rabbis did not consider preaching or giving a sermon as part of their synagogue duties. From Reform's beginnings preaching and sermonizing was part of the rabbi's job description. The Reform rabbi was also responsible for conducting the prayer service, and officiating at marriages and burials. Within Orthodox communities the obligation to comfort the mourner, and visit the sick was carried out by the Bikur

\textsuperscript{136} There is an abundance of information on this period in Jewish history. However, unlike the Hasidic literature, for example, which discusses the wives of those in leadership positions, materials about the family lives of those seeking to shape Reform Judaism appears to be non-existent (at least in English).

\textsuperscript{137} Carlin and Mendlovitz 170.

\textsuperscript{138} Carlin and Mendlovitz 186.
Cholim committee. In Reform congregations this function comes under the heading of pastoral counselling and is seen as the bailiwick of the rabbi. Even where a synagogue has a committee fulfilling this function the family of the sick person will often feel slighted if the rabbi does not also come to visit.

Just as adjustments were taking place in religious orientation, so changes were occurring in the public forum as regards occupation and professional status. Previous notions of what constituted public and private spheres were upended as new ideas and behaviours asserted themselves. Earning a living had once been viewed as an extension of the Jewish woman's domestic role.

Now, the major criterion of social status was gainful employment, rather than study, and the responsibility was now with the husband to provide for his family. In previous epochs Jewish men and women had been exhorted not to imitate their gentile neighbours. However, the secular ideology of the Victorian Era known as the Cult of Domesticity or True Womanhood

\[\text{139} \quad \text{Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979): 271-272.}\]

The term Bikur cholim refers to the mitzvah of visiting the sick. The primary purposes of visiting the sick was to make the person comfortable, cheer him/her up, and pray for his/her recovery. This was such an important task that the early rabbinical teachers imbued this social obligation with religious significance. Traditionally the obligation is incumbent upon everyone. Many synagogues have dedicated committees to perform this mitzvah. In today's synagogues these committees often see their mandate as extending beyond physical sickness to include all aspects of healing.
meshed smoothly with the traditional role of the Jewish wife. This shift in roles could be found in both Western and Central Europe as well as Great Britain and North America.

The separation between work and home, male and female spheres coincided with the ascendance of Queen Victoria to the English throne. According to social historian Elizabeth Langland, the cultural model put forth by Queen Victoria emphasized that the role of a single woman was to be married, and the focus of a married woman's life was "home, hearth and heart." The premise being to persuade the wife that her sole responsibility was to make a home happy, raise the children, remain subject to her husband's will and behave as a model of piety, industry, economics, patience, manners and quiet influence.  

In England, for example, when Jewish men took over the economic sphere, women were expected to ... perfect the full-time mother-housewife role already invented by the gentile

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141 Lois A. Boyd, "Presbyterian Ministers' Wives: A Nineteenth Century Portrait," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 59.1 (Spring 1981): 3. I have emphasized the phrase 'quiet influence.' There seemed to be an understanding amongst women that even though they did not participate in any public role - this being the responsibility of the husband - it was not unusual for women to use their powers of persuasion on their husbands in the privacy of their homes. Elizabeth Langland comments that "Queen Victoria contributed to a new feminine ideal that endorsed active public management behind a facade of private retirement." (Langland 33)
middle class.\textsuperscript{142} Oral historian Rickie Burman has published an informative study concerning Jewish immigrants to Manchester, England at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{143} Materials garnered from interviews indicate that unlike their Eastern European counterparts Jewish women in England had moved toward a more exclusively domestic orientation.\textsuperscript{144} This orientation was based on the Victorian assumption regarding women's place. Acceptance into the community required the new immigrant to "emulate the standards and lifestyle of the Anglo-Jewish establishment, which, in turn, followed the standard set by the English middle-class."\textsuperscript{145} Thus, acculturation into society was achieved when the woman could remain home. A working wife was considered evidence that the husband had not successfully integrated.

Among those families striving to be part of the respected middle-class, the Jewish wife was deemed responsible for all Jewish home observances such as Sabbath and holiday preparations that would serve to define the Jewish identity of the


\textsuperscript{144} Burman 33.

\textsuperscript{145} Burman 36.
household. The Victorian lady and by extension the Jewish wife, was expected to engage in charitable works on the behalf of the sick, the poor, and the newcomer.

She was also perceived as the guardian of religion. As early as the 1830's religion was seen to be a special concern of women, and by the late nineteenth century the role of the Jewish woman became completely identified with home and spiritual development. The values of Victorian England had so thoroughly pervaded the Jewish consciousness that North American Jewish scholar and academic Louis Ginzberg (1873-1953), in a speech to the annual meeting of the United Synagogue (1918-1919), was able to state that

to make Jewish life function regularly methodical work must be done by man and woman, each in his or her SPHERE.  

ONLY IN AMERICA

For many Jews the move to America was considered tantamount to leaving Judaism. Traditional religious leaders called America the trayfe medina, the unkosher land, and felt that America


147 Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman," 208. (The emphasis is mine).
challenged their authority. Ann Braude, writing on Jewish women in 19th century American culture, noted that one of the debates among Jews in nineteenth century America concerned the extent to which one could modify religious practice and still be Jewish. Reform Judaism sought to extend woman's religious role into the "public space of the temple."  

Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), spiritual leader of Temple Beth-El (1879) in New York City, was a well-known spokesman for American Reform Judaism. In 1903 he assumed the Presidency of Hebrew Union College, the seminary for training rabbis to serve Reform Jewish congregations.

In adapting Jewish traditions to America, Rabbi Kohler sought to redefine the religious experience of Jewish women. On one level, he felt that the involvement of women in the Reform movement was central to its growth, and to the perpetuation of basic Jewish traditions. On another level, he was not able to fathom "a woman refusing to play her proper role." He

148 Goldscheider and Zuckerman 164. Goldscheider and Zuckerman draw on the works of William Helmreich (1982) and Marshall Sklare (1971) to support their findings.


151 Goldman 492.
ridiculed women who attempted to assume leadership roles within the synagogue. His efforts to present Jewish women as the embodiment of piety and nurturance created a conundrum. As it was now understood that all Jewish women had the knowledge and obligation to create a religious and moral atmosphere in the home, why were the synagogues empty and the home lives of Jews apparently devoid of Jewish content? In Rabbi Kohler's estimation, women "held the 'magic wand' that could restore the blessings of Jewish customs, ethics and education." What was happening to the Jewish woman in America that she was failing in her responsibilities? How did the wife of a rabbi contend with these expectations amongst the members of her congregation? Was there a role for the wife of a rabbi in this new land?

In the early years of mass immigration the perceptions of America as an "unholy land" created a shortage of Orthodox rabbis "to lead the newly forming synagogues in America." By the turn of the century however "America was producing native-trained rabbis" who became for their congregants "visible symbols of those values which American Jews held dear."

\[152\] Goldman 483.
\[153\] Goldman 482.
\[154\] Goldscheider and Zuckerman 164.
Hebrew Union College opened its doors to students desiring to be Reform rabbis in 1875 in Cincinnati. In 1886 the Jewish Theological Seminary formed to counter the Reform influence and was organized with "uncompromising adherence to the tenets of Orthodox Judaism" in New York.\(^{156}\) In 1902, the Jewish Theological Seminary was reorganized under the leadership of Rabbi Solomon Schecter. Henceforth it was committed to the promotion of Conservative Judaism and the training of rabbis for United Synagogue congregations. In 1897 the Orthodox established the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in New York. In 1903 the Union of Orthodox Rabbis recognized it as the only legitimate yeshiva in North America.\(^{157}\) At that time, it did not ordain rabbis. In 1915, a merger of the Etz Chaim High School, and the Rabbi Elchanan Seminary resulted in the creation of the Rabbinical College of America, and the Rabbi Elchanan Seminary became the sole yeshiva for training Orthodox rabbis.\(^{158}\)

Jonathan Sarna has noted that despite the variations that exist between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform the rabbis "functionally speaking, resemble one another far more than they resemble the traditional rabbonim of centuries past."\(^{159}\) There was an overwhelming need on the part of congregational members

\(^{156}\) Raphael 84.
\(^{157}\) Raphael 142.
\(^{158}\) Raphael 142.
\(^{159}\) Sarna 7.
to fuse their religious needs with their needs to "fit" American society. They looked to their rabbi, and by extension, his wife, to help them accomplish this.

Rabbinical wives were adapting to yet another set of circumstances that would find their role tested in new ways. Oral histories, biographies and anecdotes relate the many roles undertaken by a rebbetzin at the turn of the century. Some rebbetzins were at the forefront of many Jewish communal activities, others chose to remain out of the limelight and quietly engage in good works. To what extent was the role and affiliation of the rabbi reflected in the works of the rebbetzin?

One rebbetzin who quietly occupied herself with good works was Dena Slotovsky, wife of Rabbi Slotovsky, the religious leader of the Vishayer community in Baltimore, in the early 1900's. While the rabbi took responsibility for the spiritual and religious well-being of his followers the rebbetzin focused on helping newcomers with their material needs. Ida Porges comments "my mother managed not only the finances for our family but for all the other families in the neighbourhood." She writes that her mother was a traditional rebbetzin who grew into adulthood at a time when the "hallmark of life for the Jewish


\[161\] Porges 332.
woman in the shtetl was to be married to men of learning."

Mathilde Schecter, wife of Rabbi Solomon Schecter (head of the Jewish Theological Seminary) "seemed to have time for everything. ... [She] made the Schecter household a centre ... for many others also." While Rabbi Schecter was involved in staffing and developing the seminary, Mathilde Schecter had undertaken similar obligations. She was involved in the development of a religious and technical school for girls where she was also responsible for the religious activities. After Rabbi Schecter's death she maintained her connection with the seminary and in 1918 she founded the National Women's League of Conservative Judaism. She felt it was important for the League to educate its members as Jewish women. An articulate exponent of Jewish "home observance" Mathilde Schecter maintained that women had to infuse the home with manifestly Jewish qualities ... by joining the image of the

162 Porges 332.


164 Scult 15.

165 Schwartz 230.

166 In 1930, the National Women's League began publication of Outlook. Within its pages one is able to 'hear' how women married to Conservative rabbis, grapple with their assigned status. The publication stresses the positive aspects of the position. Unlike the Reform movements's Spousal Connection, Outlook is available to anyone who belongs to the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

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family ... to the celebration of the Sabbath and holidays.\textsuperscript{167}

To this end she also saw herself as a role model for the younger Jewish women who gathered around her.\textsuperscript{168}

Esther Bengis, on the other hand, took a less public approach to her rebbetzinhood, and rarely acted independently of her husband, Rabbi Bengis.\textsuperscript{169} Orthodox rabbi to an unnamed East coast congregation during the 1920's, ill health forced him into an early retirement. She often uses the first person plural in her biography, which actually centers on her husband and his work in the congregation. She comments on "our congregation", "our services", and "our members". She notes that when there were visitors to their home "it would become [her] function to serve refreshments."\textsuperscript{170} Esther Bengis also recalls that when marriages were celebrated in their home she would help her husband before and during the ceremonies.\textsuperscript{171}

She also accompanied him on social visits as well as visits to those who were sick. While her husband was quite involved

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\textsuperscript{168} Schwartz 230.
\textsuperscript{169} Bengis. One assumes that Esther Bengis is referring to an east coast town only because her book was self-published in Connecticut. The synagogue is not named in her book.
\textsuperscript{170} Bengis 15.
\textsuperscript{171} Bengis 18.
\end{flushleft}
with the Hebrew school, Esther Bengis gives no indication of any involvement on her part. She does mention, however, that children used to visit the rabbi for help with their homework, and that "[she] too, had a share in this work."172 Her congregational participation seems to have taken place through the support she provided her husband. While she comments that Rabbi Bengis was always very supportive of the work of the Ladies' Auxiliary she, herself, seemed to have little interest in their activities. One area which she did seem to share equally with the rabbi was that of confidant. Esther Bengis comments that people constantly sought out her husband for advice and that "some girls and a few women unburdened themselves to me also."173

By the 1930's the prevalent attitude seemed to be that "the greatest part the Jewish woman can play in the future of a healthy American Judaism is through the conduct of her own household."174 In Jewish religious communities affiliated with the Conservative movement the role of the rebbetzin "was primarily that of Jewish wife and mother, [providing] a home

172 Bengis 96.
173 Bengis 21.
rich in tradition and Jewish experience."\(^{175}\)

**Obligations and Expectations**

The modern-day rebbetzin bears little resemblance to her predecessors of the previous thirty years. As representative of the Jewish ideal it would have been inconceivable for the wife of a rabbi to be carving out her own career or using her talents to financially support the rabbi in his career-choice. In a supposedly humorous expose of rabbinical life in the mid-1960's, the question raised in a Placement Committee interview is "[And] will [your wife] play an active role in the Sisterhood?"\(^{176}\) The unwritten expectation was that the rebbetzin would have some involvement with the congregation.

Shuly Schwartz in her research on the twentieth century rebbetzin noted that for the rebbetzin the question did not centre around involvement versus non-involvement, but the extent of the involvement.\(^{177}\) The issue of whether or not a rebbetzin should assume congregational activities that could be performed by a member of the congregation was a potent one for many wives.

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\(^{177}\) Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "We Married What We Wanted to be: The Rebbetzin in Twentieth-Century America," *American Jewish History* 83 (June 1995): 237.
The same issues are relevant today.

In an article by Lynn Heller highlighting women who "helped build American Jewish communities" Bertha Aronson is cited as a model of rebbetzinhood. In the opinion of Bertha Aronson, it was the responsibility of the rebbetzin to be involved in congregational activities. Then, young women emulating the rabbi's wife, would be encouraged (through the rebbetzin's example) to be active participants in the work of the congregation. During her husband's tenure at Temple Beth-El in Minneapolis (1929-1957) Bertha Aronson taught confirmation classes, was involved with the Sisterhood, including the Presidency, and was also involved on the national level with the National Women's League.

In her article Lynn Heller illustrates how the rabbinical wives, who were active in the early years of the Conservative movement, managed to balance their involvement with their husband's congregation and carve out their own area of expertise and interest. Citing Bertha Aronson, she comments how Bertha Aronson obtained her MA, and although she "resumed teaching, ...

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178 Heller 12+
179 Heller 12
180 Heller 12+. The National Women's League is the umbrella organization for the Sisterhoods affiliated with conservative synagogues across North America.
181 Heller 12+
Synagogue activity was never subordinated to her career".\textsuperscript{182} Every effort is made to persuade the reader that a career and a synagogue commitment are not mutually exclusive. The fact that Bertha Aronson had waited twenty-seven years to return to teaching, when her husband was on the verge of retiring from his pulpit is not considered.

In this same article, Lynn Heller quotes a study suggesting that the role of the rabbinical wife is best understood only if one recognizes the nature of the relationship between rabbi and rebbetzin.

Instead of asking what the role of the Rebbetzin is, (one) should enquire, "What is the relationship between the Rabbi and the Rebbetzin?"\textsuperscript{183}

This question presents an interesting commentary in light of the Lenn and Lerner studies that were conducted ten years earlier. The Lenn study examined the life of a rabbi's wife according to her perceptions of her role, the extent to which she helped her husband in the congregation, and her feelings about being a rabbi's wife.\textsuperscript{184} The wives were encouraged to respond separately to these questions. In the Lerner study the responses were written by the husbands alone, and the wives' input was not requested. The tenth question of the Lerner mail-

\textsuperscript{182} Heller 20.  
\textsuperscript{183} Heller 19.  
\textsuperscript{184} Lenn 369.
out dealt with the rabbi's domestic milieu and asked,

Have you found that your position as a congregational rabbi has posed special problems with regard to your wife, your children, and your home life?¹⁸⁵

Of the twenty-eight responses to the Lerner questionnaire, twenty-two rabbis responded to the tenth question. Two rabbis provided rather unique responses to this question. Erwin Schild, noted that

I am fortunate in that my wife is involved in the congregation not as a rebbetzin but as a person. Otherwise there might be severe problems.¹⁸⁶

Another rabbi, Tzvi Porath, commented,

Congregational life does present special problems to the wife, children and home-life. In fact, my wife, who is a family psychotherapist, has been working on this particular area for the past two years.¹⁸⁷

Rabbi Porath does not clarify whether his comment refers to his wife using her skills to help her immediate family or to her skills as a consultant who works with the wives of other rabbis.

One of the findings of the Lenn study indicated that a number of wives had availed themselves of psychiatric treatment.¹⁸⁸ While 53 percent of the female respondents were

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¹⁸⁵ Lerner 3.
¹⁸⁶ Lerner 89.
¹⁸⁷ Lerner 86.
comfortable with their role as rabbi's wife, concerns were raised around feelings of loneliness, friendship, and congregational involvement.  

The challenges experienced by contemporary rebbetzins echoes these studies that were written over twenty years ago. Neither the historical sources nor the fictional sources effectively present the lives of rebbetzins. The research presented in Chapter Four is a step in this direction.

BRIDGING HISTORY

The beginning of this chapter queried Jewish historical knowledge of the lives and activities of women married to rabbis.

In sketching known Jewish history a more precise picture of the social context of a rabbinical wife is presented. It is evident that the changes experienced by rabbis reshaped the roles of their wives. Unfortunately, the quality and quantity of documents available to support this premise are few. Outside of a woman's legal status, little is written from Talmudic times through the Middle Ages. Beginning in the latter part of the Middle Ages more material is available on Jewish women in general. On rebbetzins, the material continues to be anecdotal, until the beginning of the twentieth century, when there is, comparatively speaking, an abundance of oral histories,

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189 Lenn 382.
biographies and anecdotes. These relate the many roles undertaken by a rebbetzin. The role of the rabbinical wife has experienced fundamental changes throughout the past two thousand years.

In Talmudic times, it appears women were restricted from public places. In fact, women were not totally excluded from public forums. The known activities of rabbinical wives seemed to centre around issues of law and behaviour. In the Middle Ages, Resposa literature indicates that women, especially those from rabbinical families, were quite active in the religious life of the community. Not only were they integral to the social life of the community but some rabbinical wives, and women generally were wage-earners. Her role in the commercial life of the community was seen as an extension of her domestic role. The role of the rabbinical wife was that of teacher, and religious leader.

By the modern era, earning a living was now the responsibility of the husband. In the late nineteenth century the role of the Jewish woman became completely identified with home and spiritual development. In the new world especially, Jewish families looked to their rabbi -- and by extension his wife -- to help them integrate, without losing their sense of Jewish identity.

Rabbinical wife as role model represented a radical change. In the past, she had been a leader and educator; her knowledge
was a desired resource, to be utilized by other women in the community. The women with whom she learned, and the women whom she taught, observed the basics of Jewish religious and ritual life.

In twentieth century North America, Jewish identity has become optional. Secular values rapidly replaced religious values. The rabbinical wife assumed a hitherto unknown role. Her activities and her home were vested with a certain 'aura'. Women who no longer remembered the religious practices of their ancestors looked to the rebbetzin for guidance. Rebbetzins took on a variety of roles, engaged in both public Jewish activities and in private good works. The modern role developed its set of unwritten characteristics and expectations. The rebbetzin was no longer just the rabbi's wife. She was expected to be involved with the congregation. Does this same expectation hold for the rebbetzin today?

Moving into the twenty-first century the issues that face women in general also face the contemporary rebbetzin: conflicts around career, home, and children. It is no longer necessary to maintain a traditional Jewish household in order to participate in the life of the Jewish community. Many find the open society in which we live threatening to the long-term survival of Jewish culture and tradition. The woman who marries a rabbi has entered into a relationship with an individual who symbolizes Judaism, and who has made his life's work the support and maintenance of
that Judaism. These factors influence how the rabbi's wife interacts with her community.

In the present study the rabbinical wives come from a variety of backgrounds. Even where affiliation is the same, the expectations, customs, and rituals, within their respective communities is quite different. In the next chapter we hear about their issues and the strategies they have used to balance the various facets of their lives.
[Seeking a rabbi who is] scholar, pastor, youth-worker, preacher, educator, executive, and creative program initiator; and that he have had the wisdom... to have married a woman who would share him with the congregational family and aid him in his work.\textsuperscript{190}

In the mid-1970's this marital requirement was part of a longer list of characteristics that formed a "Rabbinical Profile" used by the search committees of Conservative synagogues.\textsuperscript{191} Congregations assumed the rabbi's wife would be involved with various activities and that she would be supportive of his role even when congregational demands interfered with family life.\textsuperscript{192} The idea that the wife was to provide unquestioning support to her husband reflects the continuation of the values drawn from the secular ideology of the Victorian Era. This ideology, reframed for North American

\textsuperscript{190} Karp 104. The emphasis is mine.

\textsuperscript{191} Karp 104. In almost all congregations, no matter what the affiliation, when the rabbinical position is vacated, the Synagogue Board of Directors strikes a Search Committee. This committee is responsible for drawing up a description of the type of person they feel will match their congregation. Once this is completed, the Search committee contacts the synagogue's affiliate organization, for example, a conservative synagogue would notify the United Synagogue, regarding the position. When resumes start arriving the Search committee is then responsible for choosing the best three or five candidates, and presenting them to the Board.

\textsuperscript{192} Karp 103-104.
Jews, exhorted and encouraged Jewish women to see themselves as custodians of moral values, responsible for the "nursery" of identity, religious expression and culture. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Jewish community supported these values as the model for Jewish womanhood. In 1942 it was understood that a congregational rabbi, needs a light-hearted companion, one with whom he can relax and find recreation, one who can dispel the gloom that envelops him from daily contact with defeat, depression, disillusionment.

In the main, this perception held until the mid-sixties, when avenues previously closed to women opened up. No longer confined to liberal-arts and teaching, women began to enrol in courses with more clearly defined occupational goals such as medicine and law. The possibilities offered through following long-term educational and career goals allowed women to delay marriage and family if they so chose. These new opportunities raised the possibility for a different model of Jewish womanhood.

The wives of rabbis, however, have been defined by their domestic relationships. While the ideal of Jewish womanhood is


considered to have changed radically for Jewish women, there are
congregational members who presumed that little if any change
has occurred in the life of a woman married to a congregational
rabbi. Their stories of what is involved in balancing home,
family and community presents an alternate framework to what is
known about the rabbinical role. Examining the narratives of
contemporary rabbinical wives is a unique opportunity to bring
their role into history.

While the role of a contemporary rebbetzin bears some
similarity to that of rabbinical wives at the turn of the
century, there are differences. It is no longer assumed that the
rebbetzin will be actively involved in the congregation. It is
understood that there are now many possibilities for women. In
some congregations, it is possible to be a rabbi's wife and be
totally uninvolved in the congregation.

This chapter focuses on the experiences and stories shared
by six women presently married to congregational rabbis. The
anecdotes have been shaped by the questions, and the questions
address the circumstances within which these women live.

The interview opens with questions concerning their
childhood and adolescence. In particular, what did it mean to be
Jewish in their family, and what did it mean to be Jewish in
their peer group? The questions also deal with education,
singleness, and marriage. What concerns did they have, if any,
around the position of rebbetzin. Questions addressed issues
such as opening up their home to strangers, dealing with conflicts between the rabbi and the congregation, and creating a place for oneself independent of the rabbi. The interview questions also dealt with community involvement, family life, and maintaining a sense of self. In allowing the interview these six women provide an understanding of the rabbinical family that goes beyond the institutional concept.

THE INTERPRETERS

The six women interviewed ranged in age from early thirties to mid-sixties. All six are Jewish by birth. Two of the six women commented that their families had always been shomrei. One was raised Orthodox, the other Conservative. The other four women recalled that their experience of Judaism was cultural rather than religious prior to adolescence. The present religious affiliations of the women is as follows: two are Orthodox, three are Conservative, and one affiliates with the Reconstructionist movement.

Of the six, only one was born, raised and educated on the West Coast. The other five women were born, raised, and educated

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196 Pseudonyms, rather than initials have been used to represent each of the women.

197 Grammatically the proper term is shomer shabbat or shomer mitzvoth. These terms refer to an adult or family that observes all the Shabbat mitzvoth, and maintains kashrut both in the home and outside the home. In the interviews, two of the women consistently used the shortened term shomrei. Almost a type of slang it implies one who lives their life as an observant (shomer shabbat) Jew.
on the East Coast, three on the eastern seaboard of the United States and two in Eastern Canada. All six women were raised in intact households. The one instance of change that occurred during childhood happened when one of the women experienced a change of neighbourhood. Four of the women are still raising young children. One has grandchildren, and two of the women have teenagers. Three of the women have advanced degrees, two have general degrees and one has teacher certification. Two of the women are in their first pulpit. The rest are all in their second pulpit experience. Between them, they have approximately eighty years of experience within their congregational communities.

BACKGROUND

The Early Years

Each of the interviews opened with questions about family life and Jewish communal activities during childhood and adolescence. Ireta, for example, spoke about the uniqueness of her learning experience.

I happened to have an exceptional opportunity to study and I took it. You know, not everybody took this opportunity so I had a better background than a lot of people ... I went to Hebrew school from the age of seven years old. This was a ... two-hour day class five days a week Hebrew school. So I got an excellent Jewish background there and they had Shabbat services every week which I went to ... but a stronger commitment came when I was about 14 or 15. There was a [youth group] - which
was almost completely led by young people my age and a little bit older - so it was a camaraderie type of thing to do ... we did ... the Dvar Torahs ... we led the services and so forth, not the women of course. So from ... about 14 or 15 on, I was observant of Shabbat as well as everything else, and it was not difficult, because I had, you know, the family, which kept kosher to begin with, and so forth, ... I guess - I guess if you are committed to something you don't find it difficult. ... studying at the Hebrew High School ... - we graduated from by the time I finished my second year of college.198

Toni's experience was somewhat different in that she had become more involved in Jewish activities through communal rather than home resources.

I went two years to a [summer] camp ... the more intense program ... the second year was so successful ... I found the reform synagogue unsatisfying - I guess I was 16 years old then - I walked into a conservative synagogue ... and became very active. I became very involved with the Jewish thing.199

Erin's also became involved in pursuing Jewish education and practice through a source outside her home.

I was about 14 or so, ... I had a really good friend who belonged to a reform synagogue ... and I decided that I wanted to go to that Hebrew school - their rabbi was really engaged with modern Jewish living - this rabbi was very involved in social action ... at college there was a very progressive Jewish student body - I taught at the Hebrew school - I developed a really warm relationship to Judaism ... after I

198 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
199 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
graduated from university ... I wanted to ... go to Israel and spend time in Jerusalem and I did.²⁰⁰

Two of the wives had grown up in religiously observant environments. Ireta commented that her parents were from Europe:

... where everyone was automatically observant. There was no question of kashrut and shabbat or the holidays and so forth. So ... they carried these things to their own homes and so they also had kashrut and Shabbat except that in the new world my father was a labourer and he worked on Shabbat so to that extent - when I decided that I wanted to observe more fully the method was somewhat in place - there was an understanding of what I was doing.²⁰¹

Shoshanna noted that "I grew up in a kosher home - there was Shabbos, went to shul every Saturday morning, all of my friends were Jewish."²⁰² However, for most of the women Shabbat was experienced in a "cultural" rather than religious context. Erin, when speaking about Shabbat recalled:

a home-centred environment, and so the family would gather on Shabbat - mostly just two of the families that would come over and certain things weren't done - like, we wouldn't go shopping, we wouldn't sew ... , but the phone would ring, the television would be on - things like that - it certainly wasn't a strictly Shomer Shabbat home.²⁰³

Two of the women noted that they had experienced a need to

²⁰⁰ Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
²⁰¹ Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
²⁰² Tape #1, January 22, 1995.
²⁰³ Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
take on Jewish rituals and customs as they entered adolescence. They felt that their concerns had influenced their families to make changes. Bette described how her family had gradually undertaken some Jewish rituals.

We didn't have any semblance of Shabbat or any religious objects around the house or any mezuzot - there was no candle-lighting - nothing. That changed though - that slowly changed as the kids got older, and actually started bringing stuff home from religious school. And I think it was from our influence that we actually talked the family into doing things like lighting Hanukiot and having Shabbat.\footnote{Tape #3, January 30, 1996.}

Toni portrayed a similar situation in her home.

We always had Friday night. We always had Shabbat as a Friday evening in our house. Although I think my mother would have liked more ritual - my father liked the idea, but was himself - personally reluctant. ... my mother changed over - also - probably spurred by my enthusiasm - started keeping a kosher kitchen. I think maybe that was also the beginning of her own awakening - being a little more assertive, doing the things that she probably always wanted to ..., but somehow wasn't supposed to if my father disagreed and she ... started doing things [ritually] she wanted to - and you know what - my father didn't complain. He liked it even though it's not rational.\footnote{Tape #6, March 26, 1996.}

Hannah had commented that she was raised in a Conservative milieu, and had a Bat Mitzvah. She noted that while the family celebrated Jewish holidays and went to synagogue for the High
Holidays, "this was the extent of their involvement."206

As young women, beginning to define their own religious and spiritual space where they felt comfortable, it is evident that they were supported by their families in their explorations.

Leaving Home

By the time each of these women had reached young adulthood (18-24) they were fully immersed in a Jewish religious milieu. Two of the women lived and studied in Israel as young single adults. The other four women visited Israel at a later date with their husbands. The period prior to marriage seems to have been pivotal. Their choice as to the level of religiosity they wished to pursue, as well as their desire for knowledge of Jewish ritual and practice, shaped their social milieu. Bette, for example, began to get more involved in traditional practices while attending university.

In the process of getting involved with these women I actually started to study, and learn ... and over the course of a couple of years started becoming more ... in touch with the traditional practices and rituals ... 207

206 Tape #4, February 6, 1996. The Bat Mitzvah ceremony can take place when a girl turns twelve and a day, but often actually takes place at the age of thirteen. It signifies her coming of age in the Jewish community. Depending on the synagogue's affiliation, the ceremony can be purely ceremonial and have no lasting significance for the young woman in terms of her participation in the religious life of the community, or it can be very meaningful and be her introduction to full membership in her community.

207 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
Thus by the time she had graduated and was working,

I had just made a decision to keep Shabbat. I ... essentially decided that I would become religious. I was leaning in that direction ... so ... over the course of the next year, I started keeping tsniut, and keeping Shabbat, and hanging out on Shabbat in the religious community ... over the course of the year becoming dati.208

Hannah commented that after her graduation she travelled, spent some time in Israel, and returned to her home town where:

I had everything someone my age should have. I had an apartment I shared with a girlfriend. I had a job - it wasn't an ideal job, but it was something I could look forward to ... 209

At this time she decided to return to Israel and noted that by the time she had met her husband she had been living and working in ... an Orthodox community for three years. ... By that time I was already quite established as an Orthodox person. I was quite comfortable, and I would define myself as an Orthodox person.210

Ireta stated that

as a young single adult, by the time I finished university I had already met my

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208 Tape #3, January 30, 1996. The term tsniut refers to an entire set of practices regarding modesty. For example, a single female will make sure that her arms are covered to the wrists, and skirts are at least 10 inches below the knee. Also a single female will not allow herself to be alone with a single male. A married woman also observes the laws of tsniut which would include covering her hair. The term dati means to be fully observant in all aspects of Jewish custom, law and ritual.

209 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

210 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
husband and I went to 'East Coast, USA' to live. I taught English and Social Studies in a Day School - by then I was going out with my husband, so - the circle of friends were again those who were observant for the most part.\textsuperscript{211}

Toni was teaching at a Jewish summer camp prior to entering graduate school. Her husband was also involved with the camp. She commented that "at camp we just knew each other," however, when they both returned to the same graduate school in the fall, they had "become an item."\textsuperscript{212} Erin recalled that she

was working as a journalist ... got involved with a chavera that was meeting. And - it was just like coming home - the singing, the davenning was wonderful and I learned a lot - on a very natural level - I was learning by doing it as opposed to, you know, going to school to learn this material. So it was just great. I began to feel very comfortable taking on these observances - keeping shabbat - really making my home kosher.\textsuperscript{213}

These women self-identified as Jews and their social activities took place within a Jewish context. Marrying someone who would be involved intensively in Jewish life was a natural consequence of their lifestyle.

\textbf{Becoming a Rebbetzin}

Four of the six women emphasized they had not knowingly married pulpit rabbis. When they made the decision to marry,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} Tape \#2, January 23, 1996.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Tape \#6, March 26, 1996.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Tape \#5, February 15, 1996.
\end{itemize}

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they did not envision their husbands in their present positions. They had married students, teachers, and academics, but not pulpit rabbis. Hannah, for example, commented:

he was studying in a yeshiva, he wasn't studying to be a rabbi - studying in a yeshiva doesn't mean that you'll be a pulpit rabbi ... when I met him I didn't know, I don't think he knew - that we would ever be doing what we are doing now ... I didn't know that's for sure. It was very difficult at first ... in ___ he was just one of the men in the synagogue ... so first it was very difficult - it was a shock - I sort of grew [into] the role.  

Erin was very emphatic about her husband being a student at the time they met.

So I really want to stress that life was pretty much naïve for me in terms of what rabbinic life meant. Because as a student he was really no different from all the students I had ever known. And basically, the fact that he was becoming a rabbi really didn't hit me - really - its a job - what's the big deal ... .

Toni also emphasized that at the time she and her husband married he was not a congregational rabbi ... nor was he planning to be a congregational rabbi ... he started to think about taking a pulpit - I didn't know what the role was going to mean ... .

Ireta, when describing her husband's decision to go into the

Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
rabbinate, noted:

he was ... majoring in Psychology and ... would go into Psychology on a graduate level ... he decided that his interest in Psychology could best be expressed in his work as a rabbi which involves a lot of psychology. ²¹⁷

Bette and Shoshanna had "knowingly" married men who were intending to be congregational rabbis. Shoshanna met her husband while he was completing his rabbinical training.

I knew I was marrying someone who would be involved in leadership, and never thought like I'll be a congregational rabbi's wife. I don't think I put that altogether. ²¹⁸

Bette discussed how important it was for her to meet someone who had a love of Judaism and a love of learning,

I was functioning in a religious community ... I had been looking for a life-mate ... I wanted someone who was dati, someone who studied ... someone who had a certain amount of knowledge in Judaism ... a certain type of life-style ... I considered myself a rebbetzin looking for a rabbi. ²¹⁹

Bette came of age after the changes and attitudes of the feminist movement, especially the Jewish feminist movement, had largely been absorbed into the public life of mainstream North American Jewry. ²²⁰ Her decision to immerse herself in an Orthodox community, at first glance, is contrary to the choices

²¹⁷ Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
²¹⁸ Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
²¹⁹ Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
²²⁰ Fishman 3.
made by others within her peer group. On the one hand, she is aware of the "limitless" options available to her. On the other hand, as a beneficiary of the women's movement, she is exerting her "freedom to choose her lifestyle." Drawn to teaching and instructing, she rejected the formal aspects of rabbinical study, and consciously sought out a situation where her informal skills would be both valued and authoritative. No matter what the education or skills in Jewish ritual and practice a woman brings to her position, the congregation assumes that because she is a rebbetzin she, like her husband, has religious power.221 This empowerment, by virtue of marriage, grants the recipient influence and prestige far beyond what she could have accomplished on her own.222 She noted:

if I had been less religious I would have considered becoming a rabbi - there was a part of me that would have wanted to take a more proactive role in the community or do more teaching or do something like that and of course, I had friends who went into rabbinical studies - women friends. I knew I didn't want to do that but - so I did the next best thing - is being a rebbetzin.223

One of the questions raised in the interview addressed whether or not they might have had any preconceived notions around the term rebbetzin either prior to the marriage or prior to the taking of a pulpit. Amongst the wives, only Bette was

221 Schwartz 240.
222 Schwartz 240.
223 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
very definite about what the term implied for her.

The fact that he was a rabbi meant I was walking into something that had a very clearly defined job description. ... I knew what was expected of me - and - ah - I felt like a rebbetzin and (laughter), you know, from my years of being, my 2-3 years of being involved with the Jewish women's group, and doing stuff like that, I had a whole repertoire of stuff that I could do with young Jewish women.\textsuperscript{224}

Erin on the other hand commented that

I never knew a rabbi's wife - I never had any real relationship with a rabbi. In the reform synagogue I knew the rabbi a little bit, but I never met his wife. ... And in the ... community there was - there was a rabbi emeritus and his wife - we were just like opposite ends of the pole - she was very traditional - who saw her role completely as an enabler - that's what she used to do - that was really her role in life ... And I knew that wasn't my role ... \textsuperscript{225}

Toni also expressed that she had no real understanding of the role and that it created some anxiety for her.

I can be pragmatic and say I didn't like it - I didn't fancy that role. I didn't know what the role was gonna mean, ... this whole congregational thing, you know it was a little wary. It wasn't something we had experienced together before. Maybe that's why the west was appealing. It wasn't so set in its ways as the eastern congregations were. So I didn't relish it on one hand, the only real model I had of a rabbi's wife -- our [her family's] sojourn at the reform temple, she was not really very much of a fixture, ... she was low profile. And the

\textsuperscript{224} Tape #3, January 30, 1996.

\textsuperscript{225} Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

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Ireta also commented that at the time she had not given much thought to the notion of being a rabbi's wife.

... I don't think I had any pictures of what it was like to be a rabbi's wife. ... at that point - we were still - both of us young and - I don't think I thought too much but - I was comfortable in a religious background ... While I hadn't grown up around any rabbis - somebody organized a group of the potential rabbis' wives to discuss with them things - I think that other rabbis' wives who were already in the pulpit came and spoke to us - but - I didn't really think too much about what it would be ... I just didn't think about it.228

At one time the attributes of scholarship, and an interest in ongoing learning, were part of the basic requirements for

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226 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
227 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
228 Tape #2, February 23, 1996.
marriage among the rabbinical families. This respect for Jewish learning was a common thread that drew these six women to spouses who had chosen a path leading to the rabbinate. As women who are independently learned, they have endeavoured not to define themselves by the career choices of their husbands. However, as their husbands assumed the persona of congregational rabbi, unforeseen demands would be made on the rebbetzin.

Congregational Expectations

Prior to obtaining a pulpit position, congregations normally invite the potential rabbi, and his wife, to spend a weekend with the congregation. Part of this process involves an in-depth interview of the rabbi by the Board. On rare occasions the wife is directly involved in the interview experience. More often than not she is excluded from the process. The wives were asked about the interview process and several wives offered their perceptions. They felt it was expected that they would allow their homes to be available for religious and social activities. Hannah, for example, commented that they did ask about me ... they did want to know how personable I was, I think they wanted someone who was outgoing ... they wanted someone who, I think they anticipated involvement ... I think it was expected that our house would be open - and that I would be involved where I could be. I think that was an expectation of theirs - that I would be involved.  

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229 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
Erin also spoke about her interview experience. From the outset she challenged what she feared would be the prevailing assumption: that she was an appendage to her husband.

When we came for the interview - again I made it really clear hopefully at the outset - that the rabbi's wife had her own name, her own life, and she wasn't coming to be an add on -and was everyone clear on that.\(^\text{230}\)

Ireta also commented that

If I wanted to teach and I wanted to become active in the community it was because I wanted to - it probably was to his benefit because congregations sometimes do look upon the rebbetzin and wonder - what can your wife do? ... I came into the rabbinate at a time when the women ... would probably go along more with what was expected - I think that most congregations do expect you to do something.\(^\text{231}\)

Shoshanna expressed her discomfort with the interview experience. She felt she was being watched and assessed for the position. She commented that

I was asked in the interview here how did I perceive my role not knowing [for myself] what they were looking for.\(^\text{232}\)

She had voiced her concern earlier about the congregation's experience with the wife of another applicant. When the time came for her husband's interview she felt an expectation had been created as to how she should discharge her role. Despite

\(^{230}\) Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

\(^{231}\) Tape #2, January 23, 1996.

\(^{232}\) Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
the conflicts she felt existed within the congregation, Shoshanna maintained her stance.

It's been very clear to me, ... in all the interviews I've been to. Was I a kook? Would I be detrimental to him? On the other hand, I'm not the employee. They [some rabbis' wives] slip into a role. I'm not trying to fulfil a role. It's not what I want to do. I have to figure out what I want to do. I'll do the things that interest me.233

Like Erin, Shoshanna was adamant about finding her own niche within the community. She did not consider her position as the wife of a rabbi to be an automatic indication of her participation.

In regard to the assumed obligations of the position Shoshanna presented a different response from the other wives. She had commented that in their previous congregation she had been very conscientious about attending services. However, when the congregation complained about the noise of her eighteen month old during services, she notes,

I stopped coming. I came to things that interested me. I think I really left it [the congregation]. It was his job.234

She expressed how important it was for her to be clear about establishing herself in her new community as she had been so uninvolved with their previous congregation. Her stance is quite different from the other women. Her self-definition takes

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233 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.

234 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
precedence over congregational expectations.

Aside from the congregational concerns the wives' also needed to be prepared to cope with the demands of what is considered by some to be a twenty-four hour position.

Rabbinical Function as Perceived by Wives

The wives noted that most duties undertaken by their husbands with their congregants emphasized their work as consoler, mediator, teacher, role model, and counsellor. Hannah, for example, saw the rabbinical role as doing "a lot of community work - making sure the whole community feels good about something."\footnote{235}

At the Rabbinical Assembly convention in 1975 Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz noted,

\begin{quote}
In the pre-modern Jewish world the rabbi was a teacher and a sage, knowledgable in Jewish Law. In the contemporary synagogue he is defined as an employee who is a preacher and a pastor ... [his] authority in the synagogue only as strong as his hold on the people's [congregants'] affections.\footnote{236}
\end{quote}

This description points out the need of the rabbi to be constantly in touch with his members. Hannah discussed the availability of her husband to the congregation, and her feeling that the congregation is very possessive of his time,

He's a much more public person - you know he

\footnote{235}{Tape #4, February 6, 1996.}

\footnote{236}{Karp 156.}
wants to talk to everyone... they want to talk to him. They pay my husband a salary. He's much more concerned. He has to work much harder to make sure everyone's happy. ... on Shabbat obviously he's the last one to leave. He's - everyone wants to talk to him - and that happens - that's a very common thing.237

Each woman seemed to be resigned to the intrusiveness of the position. Shoshanna noted that

A rabbi is not just a regular job. He can be called at home at anytime if it's an emergency and it's not a 9-5 job.238

In commenting about Shabbat participation in general Shoshanna stated "he's the rabbi, when he's on he's on."239 Erin made a similar comment on the fact that for a rabbi and his family Shabbat is a work day, "he walks into shul on Shabbat, he's working."240 She further noted that her husband was totally immersed in his position in their community.

They're completely concerned, when they are pulpit rabbis, with the lives of their congregants. He's not home on a regular basis and [he's] out every night during the week.241

In the Lerner study of the early 1970's, twenty-two rabbis (out of sixty) responded to the question concerning their wives

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237 Tape #4, February 6, 1996. (Emphasis mine)
238 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
239 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
240 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
241 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
and family. Responses were similar to those of the six women interviewed. One rabbi, Azriel Fellner, wrote back, "Shabbat is not Shabbat and the hagim are not hagim for me." 242

It is evident that there is a disparity between how the rabbi's wife presents within her home, and how she presents when involved with the day-to-day context of synagogue life.

REDEFINING THE REBBETZIN: THE CONTEMPORARY RABBINICAL WIFE

The "ideal" of Jewish womanhood has been challenged. Is the contemporary rebbetzin choosing to redefine herself? According to Ireta,

My philosophy was I'll do the things that I would do as a Jewish woman not the fact that my husband is a rabbi. I don't think of myself as a rebbetzin but simply as a Jewish woman. I think for the most part - um, I say whatever I'm doing I'm doing as a Jewish woman and I'm not - not because I'm a rabbi's wife and I think that's what a rabbi's wife to some extent is - she's just a member of the Jewish community and whatever Jewish law she's observing is because this is what a Jewish woman observes and not necessarily because you're a rebbetzin. 243

The notion that a rabbi's wife would have a special role or would behave in a manner different from the other Jewish women

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242 Lerner 24. The term hagim means holidays, in particular, Jewish holidays where the rabbi is required to lead special services in the synagogue and ensure that the rituals required for that particular holiday are observed.

243 Tape #2, January 23, 1996. (Emphasis mine)
in her community was unthinkable. Classic thinking in this regard is as follows: every Jewish woman should behave as if she were a rebbetzin and that a woman who is a rebbetzin is behaving as an ordinary Jewish woman. Ireta considered the actions of a Jewish woman and the actions of the wife of a rabbi to be one and the same. As she viewed 'Jewish woman' and 'rebbetzin' as equal parts of an equation she considered the term rebbetzin to be an anachronism. In her opinion the term perpetuated unfortunate stereotypes.

I think the stereotype of what a rabbi's wife is supposed to be have changed ... I think the stereotypes in general have changed. People don't have the same expectations that they used to have. First of all, she always covered her head, and her husband was the rabbi - she - I think that it's the same stereotype that's assigned to the rabbi as well - if the rabbi's wife is doing things outside the Jewish community or taking part in sports or any of the things that a normal woman would do ... He wasn't a man of this world and neither was the woman. She was probably on a higher level in their minds than - or maybe it's only in the minds of certain people who ... never really understood that [they] are simply Jewish - two good Jewish people - hopefully good - who observe the same way any Jew is supposed... .

In Ireta's estimation the stereotypes assigned to the rabbi and his wife allowed the congregation to treat them differently. Ireta commented that in the eyes of the congregation the rabbi and/or his wife were "somehow or other completely unaware of the..."
bad things in the world." She gave the example of a member would swear in front of the rabbi or Ireta, and then apologize. Ireta felt that the world in general had become a more informal place, "the general feeling of the world today is a lot more easy - less formal and more accepting." It was her opinion that the contemporary social climate has contributed to this informality. This detached attitude that is prevalent today has influenced congregational expectations towards the rabbi's wife. In her estimation the rabbi's wife is no longer required to be as involved as in previous years. Furthermore, the congregation appreciates that the woman who marries a rabbi is similar to other woman in the congregation. Ireta noted that many rabbinical wives today have their own professions and are much more selective about their congregational involvements. It was her opinion that each of these factors has helped to consign the rebbetzin image to history. Erin, for example, stated that she did not use the term rebbetzin to identify herself.

I rarely use the term. Sometimes I use it in a folksy kind of way - not as a role - not as a defined role, but as a - something I play with. I don't feel confined by it - it's something I can take on and off.

While the term for some of the wives has strictly historical connotations, their behaviours and activities are

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245 Tape #2, February 23, 1996.
246 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
247 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
quite similar to the behaviours and activities of the three women who view the term as a criterion. The three wives who were serious about the role of rebetzin, viewed the idealized version as an active standard against which to measure their behaviours. For example, one of the wives, Bette, commented that

I definitely played the role of rebetzin ... you have a public role - you have responsibilities to your community and that included inviting people to your home, having large dinners. Inviting people for Shabbat, making sure people were taken care of in terms of their religious needs, providing opportunities for people to explore their ... helping out at synagogue, having a role in the synagogue ...

Bette went on further to illustrate how she perceived the role of the rebetzin in different eastern communities.

the difference between a rebetzin functioning in a religious [orthodox] community to a rebetzin functioning in a non-religious community. Certainly in a religious community ... you were expected to dress a certain way and have a certain thickness of stocking and to, you know, act in a certain way. It's certainly less structured here than [that].

In speaking with the wives all were agreed that the major changes in attitude towards the wife of a rabbi had taken place in the liberal (non-orthodox) congregations. For example,

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248 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.

249 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.

250 When the term 'religious' or 'orthodox' is used, it refers to individuals and/or congregations that maintain a certain modest dress standard, the dietary laws, and are strictly Shabbat observant. Liberal and/or some but not all conservative
Toni noted that in the conservative, reform communities rabbis are married to lawyers, rabbis are married to professional people now, and in fact - there's not as much movement between pulpits anymore ... because women have their own careers now.²⁵¹

Aside from the fact that non-orthodox communities no longer 'expected' the rabbi's wife to be an active participant (unless she chose to) there was also less concern about external appearances. In the religious or orthodox community, however, these factors are still important. Bette further commented that the wife of a rabbi was expected to act a certain way, dress a certain way, and go to certain places to sit - you're expected to discuss everything and not make any decisions without ... .²⁵²

Hannah, for example, seemed to view the term as having relevance to people other than herself.

I don't consider myself like a rabbanit or rebbetzin, although I'm very involved in my community. In my own mind my picture of a rabbanit is very different from what I see myself as ... from my own impressions ... they're always very educated, very capable. As for me I don't see myself in any formal position. I'm here to help my husband and congregations view dress as an individual decision, and are not as strict concerning dietary laws or Shabbat. For example, the decision to maintain kashrut in a liberal congregation reflects the will of the congregation, not adherence to Halacha. Similarly, members of a liberal congregation will not be excoriated for driving to the synagogue on Shabbat.

²⁵¹ Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
²⁵² Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
the community in any way I can ... .

In some ways Hannah had her own stereotype of how a rabbi's wife should appear and did not see herself as fulfilling the requirements. When I discussed with her how she perceived the role, I mentioned Mathilde Schecter (wife of Rabbi Schecter) who always had her home open. People who wrote afterwards about their time with Mathilde Schecter commented on spending time in her presence just to see what she did and how she did things. Hannah responded to this, noting that when she lived in Israel she knew "a woman like that who had a few young women who were by her side all the time exactly for that - to learn from her." She herself did not feel the need to be around this woman, nor did she see herself as taking on this type of teaching role.

Opening One's Home

The expectation exists within the community that the rabbinical wife socializes, reaches out, and is involved in the congregation. The comments of Yose Ben Yochanan, "let your house be open wide" are as valid today as when they were first penned (Pirkei Avos 1:5). For a Jewish woman, who is not married to a rabbi, there is considerable choice regarding who is allowed entry into her milieu. When asked about any concerns they had

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253 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
254 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
around the issue of public and private space, the traditional notion of what is private and what is public space represents one of the glaring contradictions in the life of a rabbi's wife. Generally speaking, this separation of public and private space has been viewed as a false boundary issue that has no relevance in the lives of women. Certainly for the wife of a congregational rabbi, any barriers that might exist between home and synagogue are obscured, especially where congregational members are concerned.

It was Hannah's opinion that bringing people into her home did not change the nature of her space.

The private is really your private area - I find that the home is a private area ... I don't know if it's a conflict because you're bringing people into your home ... in a home I can have fifty people ... because it's my space.\textsuperscript{255}

She further noted "I don't know that it's a contradiction between your private space and having people in it."\textsuperscript{256}

Nineteenth century Reform Judaism, for example, advocated extending the Jewish woman's religious role into the "public space of the temple."\textsuperscript{257} In the life of a rabbi's wife, however, the temple, so to speak, has moved into the private space of her

\textsuperscript{255} Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

\textsuperscript{256} Tape #3, February 6, 1996.

\textsuperscript{257} Karla Goldman, "The Ambivalence of Reform Judaism: Kaufmann Kohler and the Ideal Jewish Woman," American Jewish History LXXXIX (Summer 1990): 477.
home. The boundaries and the space have been redefined to meet the needs of the congregation.

The wives of congregational rabbis often find themselves playing the gracious hostess to a diverse group of people. Several of the wives shared that they felt a responsibility towards the social well-being of the community. Erin noted that

We do a lot of stuff at home, we have many many people over for Shabbos dinner. Shabbos dinner - I don't think we ever have our family alone at our table. ... Our home is opened up to the congregation for Sukkot, we open up to all the new members of the shul and we have them over for Sukkot. I love doing that kind of stuff - I really love bringing people in ... it's an enormous challenge to bring people that are obviously disenfranchised or just skittering around the edges. ... 258

Erin has developed a coping strategy to resolve the tension between the professional obligation and the personal celebration of Jewish holidays. She strives to balance gatherings where congregation members have been invited by also inviting people that "we are really close to ... and that we do socialize with." 259 Like Erin, Ireta was very positive when talking about opening their home to members of the congregation.

[It] was a wonderful way to get to know people - people still remember that - we also had people for Shabbat, and holidays. I think that was another way of getting to

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258 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

259 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

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know people.\textsuperscript{260}

Bette also talked about the importance of providing a place for people to experience Shabbat and other Jewish holidays.

I do a lot of entertaining actually and I almost always try to have someone over for Shabbos - one of the meals. And for - certainly for things like Sukkot or Pesach - um, I always opened up my home and typically I would have traditional meals so that people always knew I had - like I would always have the last Yomtov meal. The type of entertaining where I was inviting congregants ... inviting congregants is a lot different than inviting friends. Inviting friends is enjoyable; inviting congregants is work because ... you're going through the list of congregants and you're choosing different groups of people who work well together and you're making sure that you invite everyone. Certainly its nice - but it's a lot more formal - it's a lot more work - it's a lot more structured.\textsuperscript{261}

This could be reflective of the congregation. In some (not all) congregations it is not unusual for many of the rabbi's congregants to also be friends of the rabbinical couple.

A number of factors such as religious orientation, age, common interests, ages of children and general make-up of the community influences developing friendships. In those congregations where there is an age difference between the rabbinical couple and their congregants, where the religious orientation of the rabbi and his wife differs from the majority, and where the congregation meets a social, rather than religious

\textsuperscript{260} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.

\textsuperscript{261} Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
need, it is likely that friends of the rabbinical couple will be drawn from outside the community. Both Bette and Shoshanna, in commenting on their previous congregational experience, emphasized how these communities tended to de-emphasize the religious nature of life-cycle and other events. In situations such as these having people over takes on the nuance of obligation rather than pleasure.

Hannah described the social role of herself and her husband in terms of obligation.

Somehow we try to help people fulfil their needs ... people look towards the husband, and the family as well, for things that they themselves need or want. And we have that opportunity to give them ..., whether it's a Shabbat dinner that they wouldn't have or they'd be sitting by themselves... It can be ... so very easy to fulfil. There are times when I feel obligated to perhaps invite.  

There was a consensus amongst these women in terms of the use of their home as a social centre. Making one's home available to congregants during certain times of the year, or having one's home accessible every Shabbat afternoon was the result of being married to a rabbi. The various ways in which the rebbetzins described and dealt with their homes being open ranged from complete enjoyment of the experience to developing coping strategies in order to participate.

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262 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
In addition to the rebbetzin opening her home and making Shabbat, it was also assumed that she would be knowledgable and educated. The responses of the wives indicated a willingness on their part to use their skills for the benefit of their communities. Four of the women -- Toni, Ireta, Erin, and Hannah -- are teachers and educators of Jewish history, prayer, customs and culture. Some have taught all age groups, others mainly young children, teen-agers. Except for Toni, all of the wives have been involved in teaching women and encouraging women to become active in their communities.

Ireta viewed her work with her community as the natural outgrowth of her skills and learning.

My contribution to the congregation was something that I did very normally, and very willingly, and very happily, because these were the things I was interested then in doing. So teaching in the school or teaching adult classes, being part of the Sisterhood were not burdensome ... I would be doing these things anyway because there's a need for them.  

Ireta further expressed how her knowledge and expertise harmonized with the needs of the congregation.

I already had a good Jewish background, I already was a teacher which always is a lot easier if you're going to be opening a pulpit, [leading a congregation] when you're interested in things that will benefit a congregation ... Someone just came up with the idea that we should have morning classes

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Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
and they knew that I had a background in teaching so ... it started off being the basic Judaism and over the years ... we covered a wide range of topics ... so it was really an exchange of knowledge - that was to me a very exciting concept ... .

Hannah also commented about her involvement teaching in the community.

I've taught in the synagogue - probably 3-4 years ago - once a week - we had a class. I do official teaching - 4 girls in Grade 8. Once a week I learn privately with someone - we learn together. I'm a teacher and a student - in a chevrusa. Once a week there's a group of us - about five women - we learn together.

Erin also loves to teach.

I have spent a lot of time in helping out at the shul - teaching - teaching adults, mostly teaching people skills, teaching haftara, Torah to adults, to kids, but mostly to adults ... Chanting - I've taught a lot of chanting - really it's a very participatory community - I love to teach, so that's fine ... I do all of this voluntarily ... I'm very involved (with the synagogue) so I do a lot of stuff.

Erin is very clear about the importance of service to one's community and holds the opinion that "we have to volunteer our services, all the time, everyone of us, for all sorts of things." She stated that

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264 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
265 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
266 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
267 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
I never accept money for anything I do in the shul. I've made that a policy ... because I don't want to be an employee in the synagogue, so I do all of this voluntarily ... 

Erin's comments were intriguing. On the one hand she had little use for the traditional 'rebbetzin' terminology and its attendant expectations. On the other hand, she was fulfilling a role that has been prominent since the thirteenth century in which the wife of the rabbi often undertook the role of a precentor, singer of hymns, or firzogen, reader, for the women of the synagogue. Like the rabbinical wives of the thirteenth century who led active religious lives, Erin is also very active. Not only does she sometimes lead prayer but she teaches women the skills for reading and chanting the Torah.

Women are chanting the Torah, the haftara ... women are doing absolutely everything ... there's some wonderful women's voices Women's ways have definitely changed. I think it's been a real wonderful metamorphosis.

Erin felt that her synagogue had undergone some significant changes as a consequence of the participation of women. That participation was assuredly the results of her efforts.

When one considers some of the rebbetzins of previous generations and their work as leaders and educators within their

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268 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
269 Zolty 174.
270 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
communities the wives of today's rabbis are following a well-trodden path.

Several of the wives indicated that it was often assumed they could provide information or answers to a variety of matters. It is not uncommon for a congregant member or an individual who is unaffiliated to assume that the rabbi's wife is "invested with all his special virtues, and ... endowed with all his 'scholarly degrees'". When Shoni Levi (1950) wrote her commentary on the rebbetzin role, the role expectations and the opportunities for self-development were much more rigidly defined. The notion of a Jewish woman carving out her own career, or engaging in serious Jewish learning, would have been considered both unacceptable and preposterous. While three women, Ireta, Erin and Toni, entered adolescence at very different points in the last fifty years, the prevailing social attitude within the Jewish community remained as it had been since the turn of the century. These women entered adolescence making choices that appeared very different from those of their peers. It was rare for women to undertake career training. It was even more unusual for women to pursue any training in Jewish and/or rabbinical studies. Thus while many women at that time had not engaged in any serious Jewish learning it was assumed that through the process of marrying someone who was

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knowledgable, the wife gained the same knowledge. As the women in this study were quick to point out, they often have the knowledge but without the accompanying title (Rabbi) it was not appropriate to share their information.

Ireta mentioned

Yes - sometimes they want to ask me questions. If it's a simple question like what's the parasha this week or what time are services and so forth I'll answer it. If it's a question I may know the answer to, but it's a ritual question, I usually say let me have the Rabbi call you back, I'm not a rabbi, but they will talk to me ... People who don't know me at all might approach me because I'm a rabbi's wife, but when they do know me - I think ask me questions because they've already had classes with me and they know more or less what my background is - but you know with people who will call up on the phone and will ask me questions don't necessarily know me but because I'm a rabbi's wife they expect you to know everything.\footnote{Tape #2, January 23, 1996.}

Bette also noted that women in the congregation often called her about very serious issues.

You have to qualify your answer because you're not "smicha'ed" - right. So some of the questions are pretty intense. I remember this one woman calling and saying she'd found out that - I can't remember the name of the chromosomal problem now - she was like six months pregnant. She had just found out that her child carried this chromosome that was going to make him at the best short stature, but at the worst severely mentally retarded. She didn't know if she should abort - maybe she was 4-5 months I can't remember. There were some pretty serious issues. I would never give a
yes or no answer to something like that - I mean I would just talk to her but ... it wasn't always as simple as whether or not you're allowed to get acrylic nails for your wedding if you're going in the mikveh!  

Shoshanna also commented that she believed her involvement with a woman in her congregation arose solely out of her position as the rabbi's wife.

I've been very involved with her and I believe that since I don't know her well, that her asking me to be involved with her, and I do a lot of spiritual things with her, is perhaps because of this role [as the rabbi's wife] it's like an entree. One of the things that happened with this woman - there was a healing circle, and [a friend] was asked to lead it and [this woman] asked - for me to come and that she would like me there. The reality is, she spoke to me once at a barbecue, and that week of shabbos I saw her crying and I kissed and hugged [her]. I have no relationship with her. ... I know about her - most people know about her who go to shul. So I was invited and I said very little. It was family members - I did little except for the very end - this woman wanted me to come and I think it's because I'm [the rabbi's] wife - she had no contact - very little contact with [the rabbi], but that I was there - it's interesting.

In those situations where the women knew they were being approached on account of their marital status there seemed to be two general responses. In cases where women were seeking support and comfort, as well as a Jewish response to their experience, there was a greater openness on the part of the wives in general.

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273 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
274 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.

106
to the experiences of the women. Shoshanna, for example, stated that "[she saw herself] as a vessel for G-D in that way." In those situations where the wives felt they were being approached in order to be tested or challenged on their role within the community there tended to be feelings of resentment, sometimes on the part of the wife, sometimes on the part of the person doing the approaching. For example, Erin mentioned that

> there were certain people in the shul who probably don't like me...[these people see her at the root of the changes in the shul]. They think the direction is unhealthy for the congregation.276

Similar concerns also arose where friendships were concerned. Bette commented that

> because we had a reputation of being Orthodox, ... I couldn't find a group of women I could have that ... with.277

**Developing Friendships**

In becoming part of a congregational community the wife will often experience social isolation as boundaries are raised between herself and other members of the congregation. Personal social interactions within the community may be affected as a result of being married to religious leaders. One of the questions addressed the type of relationship that exists between

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275 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
276 Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
277 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
the wives and the women in their congregations. Hannah, for example, seemed to be wary of developing close friendships. When asked about her relationships with women in the congregation, she commented:

I think being a rabbi's wife has certain limitations in relationships because there's a certain part that people will be closer to, and then, there's like a fence. There are certain things that people don't talk about with a rabbi's wife - but they might talk about [it] with other girlfriends - and for sure, as the rabbi's wife - there's a lot of things that I'm not going to talk about ... I certainly remember sitting and talking with friends about our husbands in a joking but complaining kind of way. I would never do that now. There's nothing that I would like to say to a congregant about my husband that would reveal something about him ... so there is a loneliness there.\footnote{Tape \#4, February 6, 1996.}

Erin also commented that relationships tended to be approached very carefully.

I'm close to a couple of people but there's a certain issue of trust - there's a boundary because of being - you know - who I am, but I think that's probably I would say - the major issue - certain issues in our family, certain thoughts that I might share with a friend, might you know, just not be shared ... With some people I always will have a certain role and they will have a certain role with me. With other people - yes, there can be a more honest friendship ... with a few people, with a very few people. And other people I have a friendship with ... but it's within the confines of a role.\footnote{Tape \#5, February 15, 1996.}
Bette also noted that it was difficult sometimes to accept a friendship when it was offered.

The only other thing that is kind of difficult when you are in a public position - you feel like you're owned by the public - like your private life - you don't really get a lot of privacy and sometimes you don't always know, when people are approaching you to talk to you, or befriend you, or what their motivations are, cause motivations are a little unclear at times.\textsuperscript{280}

In her estimation there were occasions when individuals (not necessarily congregants) would approach her with concerns or issues that she was not able to address. At these times she felt she was solely a conduit to her husband and that she was not being befriended for herself. Ireta sidestepped the question somewhat.

I'm a little bit of a loner in a lot of ways. I find that I like to do a lot of things with my husband, and I like to do a lot of things by myself - we developed friendships mostly [amongst] those who were about our age when we first came here and we became quite friendly, [with those who] share intellectual interests and Jewish interests ... [although] we don't see [these friends] that often.\textsuperscript{281}

Several of the wives acknowledged meeting their friendship and social needs primarily through their husbands. Hannah, for example, stated:

I'm very close with my husband ... I think that's part of the position ... I have a lot

\textsuperscript{280} Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
\textsuperscript{281} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
of friends but a real heart to heart friend, I was talking to one of them who lives on the east coast. And she said if you only have one in ___ you should be happy, except that when we lived in ___ I was very used to having a very large circle of people that you could really be yourself with - here there's just that little bit that I can be very good friends but not great friends. So it's the position.282

Only Toni saw herself as having close friendships within the congregation and she did not provide any detail as to the quality of these friendships. She noted:

Friendships tend to be amongst other strong educated women. You know, strong women, strong doers - movers and shakers - the people who make things happen - are my close friends. And ah - you know, those are the ones I can really share close stuff.283

Affiliation did not seem to be a factor in how one perceived congregational friendships. The position itself seemed to place limitations on personal friendships. Due to the demands made on the rabbinical couple, it is inevitable that the rabbi and his wife would share a unique relationship. Considering the stress of being in the 'public eye', and the probable lack of recourse to resources, issues arise that may challenge even the most secure relationships.

At a recent Rabbinical Assembly conference one of the sessions for the wives was entitled "Is This the Person I Married: Reconciling Your View of your Spouse with the

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282 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
283 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
Congregational View of the Rabbi. One of the women in the session commented:

Who is my rabbi? ... The rebbetzin is the rabbi's rabbi. Who does the rebbetzin have? She should join another congregation.

DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN THE POSITION

Impact of Position on Family Life

The Jewish wife of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was expected "to make a home happy, and raise the children." These contemporary wives of modern day rabbis are occupied with similar concerns. Unlike the wives of previous generations, however, one of the wives was initially appalled at the lack of shared childcare on the part of her husband. Two of the wives also raised concerns about their children's experiences. For example, Erin noted:

I'm very involved with the home - I'm very involved with my children ... I really haven't worked full-time since we moved here and that's very much because of the fact that I very much want to be with my children. Part of that is because I'm married to a rabbi, not because the synagogue expects me to be with my children, but because of the lifestyle of a rabbi is such - that they're never available to their families ... you have to be ... both parents

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285 Wilkes 202-203.

286 Boyd 3.

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... it took me awhile to come to terms with the fact that he wasn't going to be the father I expected him to be. I think I'd always assumed we'd share childrearing a lot more, I never really imagined I'd be such a full-time mother with a very absent father but ... I've come to terms with that aspect of it ... his lack of time - the time he has for the family - the reality of it.\footnote{Tape #5, February 15, 1996.}

Hannah's concerns focused on how her husband's position affected their children. She illustrated how their pre-adolescent child had felt a sense of responsibility for behaviours that might reflect negatively on the family. In this case the issue centred around the rabbi's lack of punctuality, and how this had affected the children,

[I'm] quite busy in the house with the kids - I'm not out there that much. I think as a rabbinic family, people look at you differently. They expect things from you that they don't expect from other people, and I think even the children feel that. ... this week my husband had to go pick them up [for an event]... he's not always on time, [my child was very concerned and had stated] "I'm embarrassed to be late, I'm the rabbi's [child] and I'm going to be late." [It] opened my eyes. I wonder how they felt being children of the rabbi - it's so - just interesting - a ten year old having to feel responsible. They're influenced by who their father is.\footnote{Tape #4, February 6, 1996.}

Ireta also commented that their children were more affected by her husband's position.

I think my children felt that being rabbi's children was more of a burden than I felt
being a rabbi's wife. Certain of the children it didn't bother them - a few of the other children it did - to always be thought to be the rabbi's children ... I remember one teacher at Talmud Torah saying what - you, a rabbi's son or rabbi's daughter, and you don't know the answer to this. So I think they felt it more than I did.289

Toni also commented that she "never ever told [their children] they have to behave a certain way because their father is the rabbi."290

Several of the wives felt that interviews of the children of rabbis would reveal some interesting comments on rabbinical life. A number of the wives had stories to tell about missed birthdays, and cancelled outings. Several of the women with young children commented that even their pre-school children sensed that "their Daddy was different from other Daddies."291

Despite the initial intentions of these contemporary wives to maintain their independence and create their choices, it is apparent that the position of rebbetzin, like that of the rabbi, has its own set of demands and expectations. Even when the congregation is affirming, and acknowledges the right of the wife to maintain her independence, the all-consuming nature of her husband's position defines her responses and actions. While the role expectations between men and women in terms of family

289 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
290 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
291 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
life has changed as a consequence of the influence of the women's movement. The majority of women are no longer willing to be assigned the role of sole caretaker of the family's emotional and social life. The expectation exists that the husband will share more, if not equally, the work of childrearing. For the rebbetzin, it is necessary for the wife to be always available for their children.

When they also open their homes to the congregation, and are inviting strangers into their home, an incredible burden is placed on these women. Further hardships can occur when conflicts exist within the congregation that place the rabbi and the rebbetzin on opposing sides of a situation.

Coping with Disagreements

Often there are situations where a difference of opinion existed on how an incident should be handled. Most of the wives felt that their responses to certain situations within the congregation had to be tempered somewhat on account of their husband's position. Erin, for example, noted "generally, [we] have always been on the same side of issues." She then went on to describe a ritual matter where her husband and herself were not on the same side, resulting in her decision not to challenge the ritual committee.

And if he hadn't been a rabbi - maybe I
would have taken it on - I don't know? I just feel it's not the right time to make an issue.\textsuperscript{293}

Ireta also acknowledged the conflicts that could sometimes arise.

There have been times when I felt very strongly about something but that when it comes to the politics of the congregation I shouldn't ... I did feel that I had to stay out of politics because of being the rabbi's wife. [For example], every year there is an annual general meeting. I have never attended an Annual General Meeting - sometimes they're very innocuous, sometimes very boring, sometimes they're about controversial issues. So I did feel that I had to stay out of politics.\textsuperscript{294}

Toni commented:

I wouldn't contradict him in public - I would never contradict him in public - not because he's a rabbi ... because that's not a polite or supportive thing to do - there have been lots of things - [that we have] disagreed about, but ultimately it's not my dominion.\textsuperscript{295}

She also noted however that when issues arose that concerned her husband she had been known "to say certain chosen words in front of the right ears."\textsuperscript{296} Bette also commented about the difficulty in refraining from being involved in congregational issues.

People wanting to do a malava malka service and lighting the candles earlier than when

\textsuperscript{293} Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
\textsuperscript{294} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
\textsuperscript{295} Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
\textsuperscript{296} Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
Shabbos actually gets out and stuff like that. It would just drive me insane and I would have to put a lid on it because it wasn't - those were things that were decided by the ritual committee ... I was very verbal - vocal about it ... privately, but I wouldn't make a deal about it with the community.297

It is evident that when such situations arose the wives expressed their concerns to their husbands. These occasions were also a reminder that the wife had no formal influence within the community and was often reliant on her own informal contacts in matters pertaining to the community and to her husband. The six women noted the irony of their situation. On the one hand, they lacked an official position within the congregation, and therefore were restricted in what they could publicly comment upon. On the other hand, they were required to fulfil the implicit obligations inherent in the position.

Obligations and Intrusions

The women commented how the social obligations would insinuate themselves into their overall activities. Ireta, for example, noted:

The demands made on you ... become a little tiresome - having to attend every single affair ... sometimes very boring affairs actually ... I sometimes felt the burden of having to attend things that I wasn't really interested in attending - being active in areas that I may not have been that

297 Tape #3, January 30, 1996.
interested in being active in.\textsuperscript{298}

Hannah, also commented on her feelings towards her social obligations.

I see that if I wasn't a rabbi's wife, I'm not sure that I would get around to every single person. I'd probably say hello to my friends and a few of the other people, but I don't know that I'd actually go around and talk to ... every single person there ... or going to a wedding or Bar Mitzvah that I might not normally have gone to.\textsuperscript{299}

Erin, too, commented that sometimes there are certain things one has to do.

I always go to shul on Shabbos, because I love going to shul. You know, I suppose if I didn't like going to shul, I might feel I should be there, but I like it. The kids come. My friends are there. It's a great experience. I like it.... There's ... once a month a [service] and I've really grown to not like this - it's noisy, the food, the crowd, and ... I don't know if it serves our purpose anymore. [My husband] feels that he has to go and he doesn't want to go by himself cause he feels we should go as a family. So we go to that - so I think that's maybe the only thing I do more out of obligation.\textsuperscript{300}

Bette also felt that her husband's position as a congregational rabbi required her to engage in activities she might not otherwise have considered.

I did feel that being married to a congregant rabbi had certain

\textsuperscript{298} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
\textsuperscript{299} Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
\textsuperscript{300} Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
responsibilities. Yes. I knew even if I didn't feel up to it I was going to show up for *shul*, ... I would go with [him] to visit people that I didn't know at the hospital - I would do stuff like that - yes - there were responsibilities like that.\textsuperscript{301}

Toni also noted that "if I wasn't so involved in the Jewish community and teaching ... I would feel a little more obligated to be involved in the Sisterhood."\textsuperscript{302} Thus, in regard to the "assumed obligations" of the position, each of the wives to whom I spoke mentioned experiencing some feelings of obligation on various occasions. Yet, they each acknowledged that if they felt like staying home on a *Shabbat*, or not attending a particular event, no one would comment. Ireta noted that for the most part I never felt the burden of the community looking down over my shoulder or criticizing me.\textsuperscript{303}

Erin, in discussing her *Shabbat* activities, also mentioned that "it happens on occasions that I don't feel like going [to services] - I don't - I stay home."\textsuperscript{304}

Bette, however, was quite emphatic that her husband's position in the community defined her position, "his job definitely had repercussions - um - to how I lived."\textsuperscript{305} Erin,

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118
when discussing her activities, expressed her concern with maintaining her "own identity". One of the ways she accomplished this was

I think I made that really clear - I made it clear that I had my own profession - I did have my own life I was not sure what I'd be doing at that point but I'd be doing something. ... they were not mutually exclusive and that one could have one's own identity and still feel warmly towards the synagogue.\textsuperscript{306}

Toni also, was quite adamant about her independence, and tried to limit her obligations.

I have a great sense of responsibility for my own ... if there's a shiva that I feel responsible for I'll go to that, not as his wife but because I choose to go. I don't allow myself to get caught up in that... \textsuperscript{307}

Yet, she also felt

I participate a lot in synagogue life and I would anyway ... I don't feel I would be different even if my husband sold shoes for a living.\textsuperscript{308}

Erin and Toni spoke about how one needed to be aware of how easily intrusions of a congregational nature could infiltrate into their family life. Hannah, however, perceived her activities and her choice of activities as unrelated to her position. She commented:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{306} Tape #5, February 15, 1996.
  \item \textsuperscript{307} Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
  \item \textsuperscript{308} Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
\end{itemize}
I think it's part of helping a person. Certainly there are times when I have to help out. Cause so much is on him - somehow the little details - it's not uncommon that I would help to remind him to take care. *I don't feel that his position has affected my choices and what I do.*

Later in our discussion, however, she raised the point that her position as a rabbi's wife requires a certain amount of caution. Hannah began processing out loud her stance towards a women's prayer group and the ramifications this could have for herself (and her husband) if she attended.

There's a way where I see my position as rabbi's wife - that I have to sort of be careful - where I have to be careful of what I do personally, ... I'm not planning [the prayer group] - I hope to go - last time I didn't. I hope to go this time - here's where I have to sort of - as long as it's within the parameters of an Orthodox setting then I'd like to go and participate, but if there are questions of a legalist point of view then I can't go.

Although each of the women explained how their husband's position sometimes demanded certain adjustments on their part, they were each very secure and confident in their own abilities and skills to deal appropriately when required.

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309 Tape #4, February 6, 1996. (Emphasis mine)

310 Tape #4, February 6, 1996. In referring to "a legalist point of view" Hannah means that if the prayer group were to use any prayers in the service that required a *minyan* (ten males) then she could not attend.
REBBETZIN AS ROLE MODEL

Several of the wives felt very strongly about being able to provide their congregants with standards for how a Jewish woman behaves. Erin, for example, noted:

I am seen somewhat as a model I think to some degree - I think people to some degree do - I think you're right. - I try to minimize that - to really just be a human being. I sit on the ritual committee - I feel like I'm a voice for women's concerns on the ritual committee. I really try - I think that's a very important feminist principle - that empowerment of others - so I - live that.\textsuperscript{311}

At the same time Erin commented:

I always get dressed for shul, I don't know if it's because I'm the rabbi's wife or not - but I wouldn't come in pants to shul...\textsuperscript{312}

Erin was the only rabbinical wife who used feminist language to describe certain experiences. At the same time she is very aware of her role as a representative for Jewish womanhood to other women. She did not see the strangeness in speaking about empowerment one moment and dressing according to halachic standards the next.\textsuperscript{313}

\textsuperscript{311} Tape #5, February 15, 1996.

\textsuperscript{312} Tape #4, February 15, 1996.

\textsuperscript{313} Halachically women are not permitted to wear men's clothing. In contemporary society this means that women are not allowed to wear slacks, pants or jeans, even though some of these items are designed strictly for female use. A woman who is concerned about sending the correct messages about form in Judaism would not wear pants to the synagogue.
Hannah also felt that it was important to set a certain standard of behaviour for the women in her community.

I don't know that there are people who are emulating me but it's important ... for me to act in a way that will set a good example. I don't know if there are people actually out there saying gee, I want to be like her when I grow up. But it's important to be me ... and again this is tied to being a rabbi's wife, but I think that's part of our job in this world ... to try to set good examples but I think it's more so, probably because I'm a rabbi's wife, people will see me more than they'll see [someone else] or they'll be looking at me. They won't see me because I'm really a very private person I'm not out there that much but I think [it's important that] what they do see, that it's positive. I think of myself as a role model. I don't know that people are looking at me as someone to emulate but I do think that way.\footnote{Tape #4, February 6, 1996.}

Toni also perceived herself as a role model in her community.

The model I'm presenting is a strong female who is pursuing her own career. ... I don't present an inaccessible model - ... - I'm with the kids. I'm in my jeans and t-shirt. And keep kosher and keep Shabbat - look normal ... but am passionately committed to a Jewish lifestyle and I think that's very important - an accessible kind of Judaism - that you can be a normal person with your dog and the kids and the comic books ... but still be committed to Jewish values.\footnote{Tape #6, March 26, 1996.}

Ireta felt that to be a rabbi's wife was to be a Jewish woman, and that all Jewish women are role models.

Whatever I do - I don't do it because I say I'm a role model, but I do know that people
do look upon me as a role model, because I've heard - Oh! Ireta is doing it - therefore it's OK to do it. I do know people do look upon me as a role model, but I don't look upon myself - in other words whatever I do I don't do because I'm afraid people are going to look at me and say that's not done. There are things that I don't do because of moret ayin - this is a Jewish concept - there are certain things you do that are correct, but they might possibly look as though they're not correct so for the people looking at you, you don't do it because they may get the wrong idea, but that's a Jewish concept it has nothing to do with being the rabbi's wife. I think for the most part - um, I say whatever I'm doing I'm doing as a Jewish woman and I'm not - not because I'm a rabbi's wife and I think that's what a rabbi's wife to some extent is - she's just a member of the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{316}

Although Ireta recognized that other women would look to her for guidance, she emphasized on several occasions, that her actions and behaviours were part and parcel of what it means to be a Jewish woman.

I think it was because I probably would have been the same way if I were a member of the congregation and not a rabbi's wife. ... Chances are I would have done a lot of the same things if I wasn't a rabbi's wife.\textsuperscript{317}

Toni was very concerned about the accessibility of Judaism. She held the opinion that living a Jewish life was not to be viewed as something one did in isolation from the larger community.

When you have a rebbetzin who is more removed from what they perceive as

\textsuperscript{316} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.

\textsuperscript{317} Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
mainstream life, ... it's harder to access that kind of Judaism. I run around Friday afternoons - I'm in my sweatsuit doing all my errands - um - but it's an accessible kind of Judaism - you can be committed. 318

Each of these women took their roles very seriously and perceived themselves as guides to other individuals, particularly young adults and women, in their journey towards Jewish self-hood.

REBBETZIN AT THE CROSSROADS

Four of the wives felt that today's Jewish woman, generally speaking, had made her largest strides in the area of Jewish learning. In their view women who affiliated with a non-orthodox milieu tended to be more active. Ireta saw changes taking place in the responses of those women attending the synagogue in greater numbers. She commented:

The biggest change has been the role of the woman - more responsibility has been given to her in the synagogue and ... she has acquired more knowledge [and is] interested in things Jewish. 319

One of the wives felt that changes were also taking place within some orthodox congregations. For example, it sometimes happens that custom takes precedence over Halacha. Hannah mentioned a situation in her community where her husband was asked to come up with a decision regarding the participation of

318 Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
319 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
women. It was noted that

halachically, there is no reason to say no. However, at this time we're going to say no in our synagogue because it upsets people.\textsuperscript{320}

Hannah felt that within the institution change was very slow.

So I think that we won't see a great deal of change in the synagogues ... in the near future, not the future 10-15 years. I think change is coming and I think it's important that the changes you see coming - women want to be more involved within the parameters of Halacha. I think that the rabbis will - eventually, ... have to address it otherwise they'll lose a great, a significant part of women. I think people will be turned off.\textsuperscript{321}

Hannah was certain that eventually the women in this shul would again challenge the status quo and the time will have arrived for the rabbi to say yes.\textsuperscript{322}

Although individual women were striving to transform their synagogue environment, some felt that little work was actually taking place that involved collective or communal growth. Erin praised the role taken by some of the women within her synagogue. She also noted, however, that change in her synagogue was happening very slowly,

I think there'll be some minor changes, but 5-10 years isn't very long. I've learned that. I think change is quite slow and I say definitely not in 5 years. I don't see any

\textsuperscript{320} Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

\textsuperscript{321} Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

\textsuperscript{322} Tape #4, February 6, 1996.
major changes. Perhaps more inclusive changes in 5 years, but not really very much and not in our particular community I don't think ... change has to really evolve organically. It can't be imposed on a community. And so - it takes - that evolving takes time - takes a lot of time.\(^{323}\)

Hannah and Erin are of the same generation. While their different religious affiliations would seem to demand very different responses, their thoughts and ideas on women are a reflection of the widespread influence of the women's movement. Both view change as occurring slowly, and both agree that change is necessary. Ireta felt that change would eventually occur as women were both attending the synagogue in greater numbers and demanding change. While these women wished to see changes occurring, they were constrained as much by their social position as by their lack of an official leadership position.

In contrast to the activism of women in congregations generally, it was Ireta's opinion that the wives of rabbis were becoming less involved since many of them were often secular professionals in their own right.

A lot of the young rabbis' wives today have their own professions. They [congregational boards] don't necessarily always expect, though they would like that she'll take an active role in the school or in the Sisterhood and so forth. ... they're not necessarily interested in teaching, ..., and join[ing] the Sisterhood and so forth ... just be concerned with their own

\(^{323}\) Tape #4, February 15, 1996.
profession. Toni, for example, commented on the autobiography by Esther Bengis.

Esther Bengis [saw] [the role] as her life-calling - she married into a profession and I don't think that's the case now. She was very emphatic about her work within the community, and commented about how she perceived herself as a resource to her husband, and then, by extension, to the community.

I have a lot of organizational skills and understanding of how to activate crowds and motivate groups ... I'm all the time putting in my 2 cents ... we do a lot of work together and we rely on each other a lot ... absolutely.

The women interviewed saw themselves not as supporting persons but as very much involved in a team effort - in which both partners had an equal responsibility for the success of the venture. Ireta also indicated the importance of being an active and not passive participant. She noted that her training as a teacher and her interest in Jewish activities generally

[These] were a plus for me. Not all of the women who married rabbis had that going for them, some did, but many didn't, so - I think - I think those things were an advantage to me - it made it a lot easier to feel that we were doing a partnership type
Ireta felt that in comparison to the wives of rabbis she had met while her husband was training, her teaching skills had made it a little easier for her to adjust and participate actively when confronted with a new congregation. Several of the other rabbinical wives also had teaching skills that were used for the benefit of their present congregation.

Shoshanna also commented that her and her husband "have a partnership - not that the synagogue is getting more, but that's how we work, and he bounces a lot of ideas off of me ... ." Only one of the wives interviewed, Hannah, referred to herself as "sort of his silent partner." In terms of Hannah's activities within the congregation her response is probably more a reflection of their congregational affiliation than their actual relationship in terms of congregational work.

SUMMARY

There is insufficient historical information available about previous generations of rabbinical wives to permit a comprehensive analysis. The position of rabbinical wife contains certain fixed activities such as teaching, providing support and counselling to women, and knowledge of prayers.

327 Tape #2, January 23, 1996.
328 Tape #1, January 22, 1996.
329 Tape #4, February 6, 1996.

128
The wives interviewed for this study are very secure in their Jewishness. Their Judaism is an integral component of their lives. Each has developed a solid foundation of knowledge and practice that enables them to reach out to others who are not so secure in their Jewish identity. In the process of reaching out to others they have become teachers, educators, and public relations experts within their communities. By opening their homes they become visual advertisements of Jewish accommodation to secular society.

Each of these women, in her own way, is a voice for change. Several of the women have taken upon themselves the practices and rituals of what it means to be a Jew. Where once only men could chant Torah and lead a mixed congregation in prayers, three of the women are modelling the new possibilities that can exist for women within Judaism. These women actively re-defined the role in their image. Just as Bertha Aronson modelled congregational participation in her time to help members become more knowledgable about Judaism, so today's rabbinical wives also models. In their efforts to reconcile tradition with the new roles available for Jewish women, they are able to reach out and encourage women to reconnect in a new way with their history and their community.
Shuly Schwartz, in her research on rabbinical wives, has suggested that there is "a decline in the special calling of the rebbetzin." My research does not support this conclusion: The position is in the process of transformation, but not necessarily decline. By way of conclusion, I will summarize some of my findings, and raise questions that could not be answered in this study.

**Historical Background**

The research demonstrates the paucity of historical materials available thus far on rabbis' wives. While the rabbinical position has been traced extensively, analysis of the wife -- both her role and especially her perspective of the situation -- is rare.

At certain junctures in Jewish history, information surfaces about the activities of rabbinical wives. The historic survey in Chapter Three tells the stories of some of the rabbinical wives beginning in Talmudic times. Thus Talmudic discussions introduce us to Beruria, wife of Rabbi Meir. In the Middle Ages, the writings of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms describe the role of his wife Dulce in their community. The biographies of the Maharal of Prague provide scattered information about his

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Schwartz 246.
wife, Pearl Loew. We know that a number of these rabbinic wives had roles beyond those traditionally associated with Jewish women. For example, they assisted their husbands and fathers in their rabbinic scholarship.

As we move into the modern period, there is comparatively speaking, an abundance of information about the wives of the Hasidic rebbes. Some assisted their husbands in their communal work; several had their own followers. Surprisingly, despite the vast amount currently being published on the history of the Reform movement in the nineteenth century, there is very little discussion of Reform rabbinical wives.

Even for the twentieth century, the amount of material available is uneven. Carla Freedman -- who has hypothesized that one reason we know so little about is because "rebbetzins have been too busy to keep diaries or write books about themselves -- notes that we are particularly uninformed of the early years of this century."  

Over the course of the century, we do have more memoirs.  

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331 Freedman 144.

332 The bibliography lists a number of articles that were published through Outlook, a magazine published through the Women's League of Conservative Judaism for the wives of Conservative Rabbis. As aforementioned, there is the book by Esther Bengis. Also there is Mignon L. Rubenovitz's "The Waking Heart" (Pages from the Journal of a Rabbi's Wife) The Waking Heart: Adventures in Achievement, Authors Rabbi Herman H. Rubenovitz and Mignon Rubenovitz, (Cambridge, MA: Nathaniel Dane and Co., 1967); Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's "Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne," Tradition (Spring, 1978): 73-83.
Conservative movements began to provide space and time at their annual conferences where wives could express their concerns. However, no consistent picture of the lives of these women emerges from even the twentieth century documents.

The aim of my primary research was to provide the opportunity for six women to describe what it was like for them to be married to congregational rabbis. It was felt that the responses to the interview questions as well as the many anecdotes about their experience of the position would generate a new and a balanced perspective of the position of rebbetzin.

The Contemporary Scene

There are currently many communities where wives of rabbis remain aloof from the activities of their respective congregations. Carla Freedman noted in her research that she spoke to a number of women whose husbands were Reform rabbis. A number of these women were marginally involved in their communities, and therefore did not perceive the synagogue as an intrusion in their lives. In contrast, the women who agreed to be interviewed for this study are very involved in their communities. They see themselves involved in a team effort. They each felt required to reach out, and participate in the lives of their congregants. They also seemed very gratified by their work.

The interviews did highlight five areas of contention
within the position experienced by the women regardless of affiliation. These are:

* the intrusiveness of the position;
* availability of their homes for religious and social activities;
* limitations on their responses to certain situations within the congregation due to husband's position;
* the implicit obligations in the position, and,
* how these obligations would insinuate themselves into the wives' overall activities.

At the same time these women attributed their own growth and learning to the fact that they were married to rabbis. Most of the women had a very strong presence in their communities and felt that they gained as much as they gave to their communities. Several of the women had managed to carve out a niche for themselves within synagogue life. As illustrated in Chapter Four a number of the women were active in their congregations in teaching liturgy, in leading prayers, in conducting classes and in general, "making Judaism accessible." Some of the women I interviewed disdained the term rebbetzin; many of their activities and involvements, however, mirrored the characteristics of the position.

Each woman felt that as the role for Jewish women changes within their congregational communities, the expectations on the women who are rebbetzins will also change. Also, it was felt that as more women enter the rabbinate there will be a shift in the expectations on spouses in general. There is a greater degree of informality between the rabbinical couple and the congregation and this perceptual shift of the rabbi 'on the
bima', to rabbi as 'one of us' will also affect the interactions of the rabbi's wife with the congregation.

Beyond the First Step

The research process gave rise to a number of alternate ways of examining the role of the rabbinical wife. This study was restricted by time and funding. The women who were interviewed were accessible by public transportation. Was this study about one unique group of women, or would the same activities, concerns, and issues have been found among the rabbinical wives in other cities? According to Toni, the group profile of these women would have looked quite different if the interview had included women on the East coast. This suggests that there would be advantages to a more extensive series of interviews which would cover a greater number of women and affiliations.

Each of the women was interviewed separately. The interview situation did not allow for comparison of answers amongst the women themselves. Bette had mentioned that in their previous community several of the wives (from various congregations) had arranged to meet together to share and discuss issues common to their position. In this particular study, group discussion would seriously compromise confidentiality. Group discussions do occur at conferences, and it would present an interesting study to field these questions for discussion in a group situation.
This study addressed the world of the rabbi's wife. As more women choose to go into the rabbinate what expectations will develop around the male spouse? It would be most interesting to examine how gender affects the position.

Each of the women commented about their involvement in the community, from hosting congregational members in their homes to filling in when there is a low turn-out for services. Even those women who are unable to participate fully due to young children, continue to provide their husbands with the necessary emotional and intellectual support. This is a benefit to the congregation.

There is nothing in writing that specifies how a rebbetzin is to participate in their community. The women in this study seemed to feel that being involved was part of being married to a rabbi. Not all rabbis' wives feel this way. The time has come to reconsider what it means for a congregation to have an active rebbetzin. The wife should not need to 'guess' how she can best 'fit' herself to the congregation. Shoshanna asserts,

the whole role [of rebbetzin] needs to be redefined... I want to be a role model for myself.  

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Tape #1, January 22, 1996.

135
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Tape #6, March 26, 1996.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

BACKGROUND:

How would you describe your religious commitment during your childhood and adolescence? How would you describe your involvement in Jewish religious and/or other type of Jewish communal activities.

MARRIED LIFE:

Was (......) a rabbi at the time of your marriage... or did he become a rabbi after you married. Do you recall ... your thoughts, feelings when you realized you were going to be a rabbi's wife?

Did this raise any concerns for you at that time .... do you recall any image conjured up by the phrase "Rabbi's wife"?

Traditionally the role of the Jewish wife has emphasized her private as opposed to her public role - can you describe what this has been like for you?

Have there been times when you felt a responsibility for your husband's career..? ie. if you don't look after it, it won't happen. eg. when Ronald Reagan was president of the United States much was made of Nancy Reagan's involvement.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Do you feel the role of "rabbi's wife" has helped or hindered your personal development?

Have you experienced implicit obligations in the position? ..your husband does/does not expect you to participate in certain events..as well as expectations on the part of the congregants?

Do you find yourself worrying about how the congregation views you --- has this changed over time? Are there only certain types of literary or artistic materials that you allow into your home? What about relationships with the women in your congregation?

As greater numbers of women go into the rabbinate do you feel this will influence a congregation's attitude towards the rabbi's wife? What have you find to be the greatest areas of change over the years? Do you see yourself as a role model?