

Perhaps the main reason for the success of this type of festivity lies in the behavioral play. In any case, the formal grammar reconstituted here from a festive experience is worth comparing with studies of other more or less similar festivals. It should also be compared with other kinds of phenomena for which a Goffmanian analysis is likely to prove heuristically valuable in describing and explaining experience. In particular, the concepts used here should give impetus to an interesting analysis of photographic material concerning ethnographic situations.

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Do You Really Know How They Make Love? The Limits on Intimacy with Ethnographic Informants

Tamar El-Or

The article is based upon two years of field work among ultraorthodox Jewish women from the Hassidic sect of "Gur" in Tel-Aviv Israel. It deals with the question of possible intimacy between a woman ethnographer and a woman informant. On the theoretical level, the paper presents a predicament between the opportunities for intimacy — anticipated from ethnographic theory — and the obligations that such relationships might impose upon the research. The article describes how both women have learned to recognize the limits of intimacy with each other and what happened when they decided to go beyond those limits. On the narrative level, the paper is a portrayal of everyday reality of ultraorthodox woman and women who live within a nonorthodox society.

"They, that sounds great, living with an orthodox family. How did they let you in? Isn't this type of Hassidism kind of closed? Do they know you're an ethnographer, or are they hoping you're a newly religious Jew? Tell me, is it true they have intercourse through a hole in a sheet? I bet you it's only stories. I wonder if their women are happier than we are, knowing their position in life and accepting it, are they?"¹

Conducting field work five minutes from my home in a small community of Gur Hassidim in a suburb near Tel Aviv, I heard these sorts of questions very often. Bearing in mind the history of "deep penetration" into the field in the craft of ethnology, I was frustrated when

Address correspondence to: Tamar El-Or, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978 Israel.

¹Conversations in this work are either direct quotes or reconstructions of dialogues from different times telescoped for the sake of brevity.

I had no answers to these questions. As time went on, the frustration grew. I knew that good ethnographers were supposed to deliver authentic and exotic material. I also knew that the women I was observing are considered by my people — my family, friends, and most colleagues — as primitive, similar to people from the lower classes, the third world and deviants. The anticipations of revelation and "hot" information was taken for granted.

My remoteness from this attitude, coupled with my desire to learn in a modern society, complicated the task. A research study of a known, observable and much discussed community demands a fresh analysis, or the treatment of a new or hidden problem.

The community of Gur Hassidim I studied is physically observable and fairly accessible, since Gur Hassidim is a major sect of ultraorthodox Jews that dominates the orthodox political parties of Israel. The sect originated in the town of Gur near Warsaw and today some 7000 Gur Hassidic families live in Israel. Unlike other fundamentalist groups, Jewish ones do not live in isolation in remote places, but prefer to live in communities in large cities. While they play a significant role in Israeli politics and culture, they are deeply prejudiced and are integrated into the larger society through limited channels. The sect is largely absent from the media. The self-segregation of the orthodox communities — an isolation they maintain on a daily basis within the fairly open society of Israel — serves their need to preserve their lifestyle and particular view of Jewish law and tradition, but at the same time intensifies curiosity about their private lives. This "magic circle" they draw around themselves denies the researcher both the treatment afforded a more exposed society, and the classical holistic approach taken to an unknown one.

HOW CLOSE CAN ONE GET?

The present article addresses the potential for a woman ethnographer who presented herself as a nonreligious Jew, and an ultraorthodox woman informant who was a member of an ultrareligious Hassidic sect, to become close: to bridge the distance between their different cultures within a mutually accepted context; to traverse the gap separating them without having to violate the other's beliefs and boundaries of intimacy. The work follows the dynamic development of their relationship over a two-year period, with visits to the field 2-3 times a week. It focuses on several methodological problems inherent in the situation. It examines how close the ethnographer need get in order to deliver the sense of "being there" (Geertz, 1988), how close the ethnographer may get without creating a gap between him/herself

and family, friends, and everyday reality. How close will one get before turning the work into a personal adventure?

These methodological questions are approached through the topic of intimacy. While intimacy is not the central issue in the study, the different meaning it holds for the researcher, her audience, and the informant will emerge.

On the theoretical side, the meaning of intimacy during field work, and its impact on possible ways of working within one's own society, joins a broader set of methodological debates that have always occupied ethnographers, and is currently receiving fresh treatment in the literature (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fishcher, 1986; Sangren, 1988; Shokeid, 1988).

THE ILLUSION OF INTIMACY

Novels (Bar-Yoset, 1985, 1989) and magazine articles have distorted the image of orthodoxy, and strengthened prejudices. Journalistic research (Harris, 1985; Levy, 1988) and academic studies (Berger-Sofer, 1979; Friedman, 1982, 1986a, 1986b; Jayanti, 1982), which could correct some misconceptions, are rare and less accessible to the public. Torn between the expectations for peeping that ethnology sometimes satisfies, and our major task to deliver a clear, well-founded description, I remember very clearly the first conversation I had with Hanna, my main informant.

It was two weeks before Passover and Hanna was preparing the house for the holiday, which includes removing all traces of food containing yeast. Hanna's daughters, 5 and 9 years old, were already home from school for the holiday, while the boys, 3 and 7 years old, would stay in school until the holiday. Boys and girls go to separate schools in the Gur Hassidic sect, and in fact in all orthodox groups. Boys attend a heder and then a Yeshiva, religious schools; one-third of them remain in the Yeshiva after their mid-twenties and two-thirds eventually drop out and go to work. Girls go to separate schools through the 12th grade and, unlike the boys, learn secular subjects in addition to religious ones. Many go on to attend two-year teacher training seminars.

Hanna's daughters' women teachers needed time to clean their homes, and the daughters were expected to help in this task. It was a busy morning. Hanna was washing the plastic toys and cleaning the children's bedrooms. At that time she had 5 children, ranging from 12 months to 9 years old, and was pregnant. The children were ordered not to enter their rooms with any kind of food. I followed her around the tiny flat, trying to be useful. I had so much to ask, but only a vague concept of what, how, and when.

One of my teachers, a modern orthodox man, had told me beforehand that the *mikva*, the public ritual bath where women purify themselves following a menstrual period, would be a good place to start. He assumed that there I would be able to see women in the company of other women, sharing some private or intimate moments. Taking his cue, I asked Hanna whether she too thought it would be a good place to start. She led me to a bookshelf-lined living room, with a large dining table in the middle of the room. She closed the door behind us, leaving the noise of the children on the other side, didn't offer me a seat and didn't take one herself, and said:

I always do that when I talk about family purity or other matters they shouldn't hear. They're used to it. Look, the women of this community tend not to go to the *mikva* next door. They see it as a very private act and prefer to go some place where no one will recognize them. Especially us in Gur. We treat these matters very modestly. The Sephardim [Jews of Asian and North African origin, as distinguished from Ashkenazic Jews of European origin] are completely different. With them it's natural. The other day I went to see my Sephardi friend. I called her from the street below her flat, and her daughter came to the window and shouted down that her Mom was not home because she had gone to the *mikva*, and would be back soon. I was shocked. To yell out loud that a woman went to the *mikva* as if she had gone to the supermarket. On the other hand I admitted it. They treat it so naturally. There's no shame in going there — it's a *mikva* [a religious commandment or good deed], and after all what can someone gather by knowing it? That you're not pregnant? Some women need to go even when they are, if they have a heavy discharge. That you are permitted to your husband? Well, everyone knows you are two weeks every month, so actually there is nothing to hide. Still, the women do hide it.

Men are much more open about it, so they use the *mikva* next door. Still, they are ordered not to look at each other when they bathe — it is forbidden. Men bathe communally in a large pool, whereas women bathe privately in a smaller one. These matters of privacy and intimacy are more problematic for men. They are taught from an early age to refrain from looking at girls. At the age of 13 a boy goes to the *yeshiva* and lives only with boys. At home he stops playing with his sisters, and he won't play with girls in the playground at that age or even younger. So, when he is about to get married, usually between 20 and 24, there are a lot of difficulties to be overcome. He has to accept the idea that he is going to live with a woman, that he will have to take the lead and be the initiator, and that it can be done. Well, this is very complicated, but now, thank God, we have special counselors who take care of it. They talk with the young men before the wedding and explain their duties. They are such experts they make everything clear to those young men, and they do it gently. With girls it's altogether different. They get this guidance at home from their mothers. They don't need it at school. Thinking about it, maybe it isn't so good, because my mother never told me anything. I was lucky to have had an older sister, and when I got my first period I ran to her and she told me all about it. For sure I will talk to my girls when the time comes, I definitely will.

A knock on the glass door interrupted our conversation. It was Hanna's youngest daughter. Hanna went out to her, and I was left in the living room, quite surprised. I never expected this kind of intimacy in the first conversation. It seemed too easy. A talk like that should have taken

place, according to my professional calculations, much later. I left that room satisfied, like a successful hunter. I had something solid in my notes, facts that everyone would like to hear, information that came out of deep storage. Although a slight blush covered Hanna's cheeks once or twice, she seemed rather calm during this conversation. I took it as a hint, a promise of a very intimate future.

REDEFINING INTIMACY: AWAY FROM MY PERCEPTION AND INTO HANNA'S

Months went by and Hanna and I saw a great deal of each other. I visited her two to three times a week, helping her with the laundry, the house cleaning, and baby care. We went to town together to do errands, and took several religious classes in and outside the neighborhood together. The deeper the relationship between us grew, the farther we got from those "hot" intimate subjects. Most of the conversations centered around topics of everyday life: what to do about Yitzhak's thumb sucking or Rebecca's loneliness and lack of suitable girlfriends, and where to have the leaking water tank repaired.

Sometimes, usually on Wednesdays when her mother visited, we shared opinions and feelings about family ties. Being the same age and married for a similar period, we found much in common, although at that time she had five children and was pregnant, and I had two children and no plans for more. Topics like religious beliefs, the status of women, fulfillment of the Jewish commandments, and relations between men and women were hardly mentioned as such. We built our friendship very much like most other relationships I knew, and felt very close. On the intellectual level, women's literacy emerged as an interesting issue, and brought me much further into the study of the intellectual sphere and the access of women to "men's knowledge" in today's orthodoxy.

My entry into Hanna's home was not driven by curiosity about the women's intellectual life. I went there wanting to know "how they actually live," and while pursuing and developing those almost normal, personal contacts and stimulating intellectual discussions, everything was accompanied by a sense of failure. By that time I already knew that Hanna had not gone through any emotional conflict when she spoke with me about personal matters in our first conversation. In fact, she hadn't said anything personal at all. The information I took to be intimate was technical for her. She cited books or certain religious precepts and *Halakhot*, a translation of the Jewish laws and commandments into practical do's and don't's, and parroted her teachers from school, the Rabbi's wife, or other

important women to whom she listened. An important woman is one valued by the community. She can be the wife of a well-known Rabbi, an outstanding teacher, a successful charity worker, or an active volunteer in social organizations. Knowing that she is accustomed to meeting newly religious women from time to time, I realized that she had already delivered this kind of information many times before. The significance attributed by me to that first talk rested solely on my perception of intimacy as a nonreligious woman, and on my expectations as an ethnographer. Later, on, I heard other women talk pragmatically and quite freely about these subjects, and I slowly came to realize that intimacy might lie elsewhere. I couldn't free myself from the desire to observe a young couple at home when no one else was there to watch them, when they would be free of the critical eye of the orthodox community. I wanted to know "what is actually going on," to use Berger's and Luckmann's terminology (1966). In my own society, literature, media, and art satisfy this kind of curiosity. In primitive societies and among deviants, anthropology is counted on to do this for us.

I never led a conversation with Hanna towards the topics that dominated our first one till the very end of my field work. Then, as it will be clear later, those topics reemerged on a different level. On the one hand, I presumed that there must be a real intimate level to these themes, while on the other hand I was afraid to get more proclamations, pamphlets, and impersonal views. As time went on, I experienced several events in which some of the deeper levels emerged. I became resigned to the idea that the only information I would get would be indirect, and that no frank and open discussions would take place between us about what I define as intimate. I settled for what was there in our intense ties: I didn't take it as less than it was, and didn't try to manipulate the dialogue. Rather, I simply went along the way with Hanna, her female neighbors, her family, and her everyday reality. Amongst these, I found what I was looking for. It came in bits and pieces — as slips of the tongue, in talks in the hospital shortly after she gave birth to her sixth child, and in a rare loss of temper like she had the other night.

It was late September, a week before the Jewish New Year and the High Holidays, a time of feverish activity and preparations in the Gur community. Hanna was expecting her sixth baby any day. Her husband was studying in a *yeshiva* in Tiberias, a town in northern Israel about two hours from Tel Aviv on the sea of Galilee, and came home only on the weekends. Studying far from home is not unusual among Hassidim; it is, however, a sign of recognition of a man's intellectual prowess that he will choose to study in a more advanced *yeshiva* far from home.

At that time Hanna had no telephone at home and important messages were left for her at the neighbor upstairs. The end of a typically hot, humid, summer night brought a fresh breeze, and Hanna and I were strolling home from a class she had given to some neighborhood women on the laws of festival meals. She was heavy and restless, as women tend to be in her situation.

So Hanna, where are you planning to be this New Year? Are you going to your in-laws in Bnei-Brak or will you stay home?

Eh, I really don't know yet. My husband was supposed to call and tell me, but he hasn't called yet. I really don't know what to do. Should I shop for the Holidays? Should I start cooking? It's going to be a long holiday because it's followed immediately by Shabbat. I really don't know where I'm at.

Then why don't you call him and ask? You must have his phone number at the *yeshiva*, don't you?

Well, yes I do, but he ordered me not to call him there unless it's an emergency.

Well, isn't it?

He said he'll let me know what he decides, and I'm sure he will. But here I am, six days before the holidays, expecting any minute, and knowing nothing. I can't figure out whether to start packing the kids' clothes for a long stay at my in-laws, or to prepare Rebecca to run the house in case we stay home and I go to the hospital. Shall I leave food for them here, or will it all spoil because we won't be here? Oh . . . I wish he would call.

Knowing Hanna's forms of expression, I could tell that she was pretty mad at her husband. I also knew that she wouldn't express it, but in that moment of intimacy I tried:

Are you mad at him?

Sure I am! How could I not be? Here I am with 5 kids at home, expecting a baby any moment, and I'm paralyzed. He should know better, at least he could have called and said he hasn't decided yet.

Hanna got very red — she tended to blush in certain situations. I could tell she was quite ruffled, as if she had come close to a boundary she usually tries to stay away from. It didn't take her long to regain her composure and she quickly added:

I'm sure he has good reasons for not calling, he knows what he's doing. It's me, I'm too tired, I have no patience, things are just a little too much for me now. I must rely on his good sense and let it be the way he planned. Ooh . . . see when I'm tired I talk too much.

Hanna was embarrassed. It appeared that she wasn't at all used to this sort of emotional outburst. The society in which she lives, and her social position as a very strict orthodox woman among ultraorthodox people, do not permit a wife to complain about her husband to an ordinary member of her community. She may, and does, in indirect ways, like jokes, double entendres, or small gestures. When a Gur woman suffers from a serious

problem in her marriage or family, she will turn to a confidant. She might bring her troubles to a Rabbi, a counselor, or a teacher she respects. Hanna's little outburst, which she presumably did not treat as a minor one, in my presence illustrated the paradox in our relationship. On the one hand it showed that she felt quite open with me, pointing up our closeness. On the other hand it indicated that she allowed herself to do certain things around me that she wouldn't do in front of someone from her own community, pointing up the gap between us. In my eagerness for shreds of intimacy, I took what would be considered in my society as trivial anger towards a life partner, to be a glimpse of a suppressed feeling in Gur and therefore a kind of intimacy.

Other events of this nature strengthened these fragile bits of intimacy. I learned to listen to unspoken words, to look for hidden gestures, the slight blush on the cheeks, to understand intimacy the way Hanna experiences it. A visit to the nearby town of Bnei-Brak one morning deepened this understanding. It was a sunny winter morning, one of a few that year. Most mothers hurried outside with their small babies and sat on the stone fences that surround the houses of the Hassidic neighborhood. When I reached Hanna's flat she was ready to leave to catch the first bus to town. She held Frieda-Lea in one arm and tried to put Tzirale to bed with the other.

Will you leave her asleep here all by herself?

Oh yes, no problem. I just fed her. She'll be fine until we come back. It'll only take us a couple of hours.

Come on, Hanna, how can you do that, aren't you afraid? What if she cries? What if no one hears her?

She'll do all right, she can't get out of her bed, so she'll cry for a while and fall asleep again.

I already knew that Hanna had her own methods of child-rearing. Some of them were irregular or even bizarre in the eyes of her community. A few of the women (who felt close enough to me) tried several times to engage me in gossip about Hanna and her husband. They all criticized her child-rearing methods. Most of them thought she was Spartan, rough and merciless. The more delicate ones said she was obeying her husband's orders, and since this is a basic role which can't be disputed in public, they saw her as a sufferer along with her children.

Hanna's marginal position in the community, her status as "the most orthodox woman around," and her relationship with her husband deserve a separate discussion. With regard to the question of intimacy, Hanna knew she was criticized. She knew that the women downstairs on the fences stopped talking when she approached because they were gossiping (not necessarily about her), and she is a reminder to them that they are violating

the rule of the community against gossip and small talk, a rule especially directed towards women. She had no one to share her feelings with, and no means of reacting or explaining herself to her community. Her compensation was her high status on the religiosity scale, and the greater freedom her extreme religiosity gave her within the confines of the community.

Hanna's and her husband's extreme orthodoxy allowed them to do things others were not permitted. Hanna's husband consulted people other than the Gur Rabbi, attended a *yeshiva* outside the community, and worked to convert Sephardic Jews to orthodoxy whom others in the sect were not interested in or were even alienated from.

Hanna's husband is among the one-third of Gur Hassidic men considered talented enough and ready to continue studying in the *Yeshiva* beyond his twenties. Hanna and her husband and family are supported by the *Yeshiva*, and their ultraorthodoxy is further signified by Hanna's choosing not to supplement their meager income by working. Hanna knew and worked with women from neighboring communities, with whom the other Gur women had no contact. She was the only one who could let me into her home without threatening her reputation.

On several occasions Hanna justified her methods of child-rearing to me. They were based on the idea that most people treat their children according to the expectations of society, whereas she tries to ignore some of these so her children would go beyond those expectations. During the scene in question, she wanted to prove to herself that a well-fed baby can stay at home alone and that, with God's help, nothing will happen to her. Hanna used to "play games with God" to check how much love and attention she and her family receive for their religiosity. The reasons for and implications of these games can not be analyzed here, but leaving the baby alone at home is an example of such behavior.

Bearing all this in mind, I gave up the warnings about possible dangers of such an attitude and took another strategy:

Look at the beautiful morning outside. Isn't it a shame to leave her inside after so many days of rain? I'll take Frieda-Lea in the stroller and you carry Tzirale in your arms. I bet you we'll manage.

O.K. we'll do that. That way I'll be able to take care of some more errands and won't have to rush back home. See Tzirale, you've gained a trip to town, you are lucky today.

I followed Hanna in town. We had to change some dollars her husband received in the *yeshiva* into Israeli currency. This is not done in the bank where one gets the legal rate, but through dealers who give a higher one. Hanna tried several before she found a rate that satisfied her. Later we entered a bank where her husband maintains a saving account. The

bank had notified him by mail that he must either withdraw the money or renew the account. Hanna's husband asked her to withdraw the money. We waited in a long line and the girls began to get restless. The little one wanted to nurse, and the older one kept trying to climb out of the stroller.

I'm sure they won't let me withdraw the money, only he can do it, it's in his name, they'll never let me withdraw it.

Did you tell him that?

Of course I did, but he still said I should go.

When our turn finally came the clerk said it couldn't be done. Hanna told him that her husband studies in a distant *yeshiva* and can't come to the bank himself. He said the only way to withdraw the money in his absence is to obtain a written order signed before a lawyer. Outside the bank, after a wasted 40 minutes, she said:

I knew it, I told him so, but he wouldn't listen. He put it on my list anyway [every weekend, Hanna and her husband prepare a list of things he wants her to do while he is away, She writes down the outcome of her activities and they discuss it the next weekend]. I was sure they wouldn't let me draw the money out, but he wanted it. I did it and now it can be marked off the list.

For some time I had the feeling that Hanna was treated like a child. She was given orders to obey, and had to report her movements. Her own common sense and knowledge didn't count. The rumor of the "list of tasks" circulated around the neighborhood. People were critical of the way her husband treated her, pitying her for having to put up with him, thereby minimizing the resentment she aroused as the "perfect obedient wife."

Coming out of the bank that morning I saw it all differently. Hanna treated her husband like a child. It reminded me of a child asking for sweets he claims are "up there." The mother keeps telling him that "there is nothing up there," but he won't take her word for it. The mother, recognizing the child's limitations and knowing that they can not be changed right now, and seeking peace of mind, lifts the child up to see that "there is nothing up there." She doesn't feel beaten, because she recognizes the laws of child development. She might be tired of it, and as an authority figure will usually add: "Didn't I tell you? When Mommy says there's nothing there, there's nothing here. Remember that for next time honey."

Hanna was going through a similar process, although the last part of the scenario was, of course, quite different. On the street in front of that bank, I shared with her an intimate moment in which she expressed some of her true feelings towards her situation as an ultraorthodox wife.

That the orthodox Jewish wife is inferior to her husband is a commonly held view, and one that is confirmed in the academic literature

(Koltun, 1976; Heschel, 1983; Schneider, 1984). While this is generally true, a glimpse into the orthodox woman's emotions and inner world provides a mixed picture of this inferiority. One comes to see the social and psychological means by which women live with this unbalanced situation. The technique described above is ancient. Every traditional Jewish mother bestows it on her daughter as part of her marriage dowry. "Men are like children," and satisfying them buys women their relative freedom. The possibility to experience inferiority in this "emic" manner, *vis-à-vis* the feminist "etic" way, was extremely valid.

Hanna never complained openly about her husband. That would have been unacceptable for a woman of her status. She did, however, lead me gently and subtly to her painful zones—the peripheral areas where she kept her anger, sadness, worries, and hopes. I knew from our conversations that she hardly ever opened the doors to those zones for others to come through. She had few girlfriends, and one sister she liked. All of them were orthodox, and not one was suitable as a confidant, at least as she saw them.

After ticking off most of the day's tasks, we went to the home of one of Hanna's girlfriends. We all needed a rest, and Hanna wanted to breast feed her baby. The building was on a main street, and while only about 30 years old, it was quite dilapidated. We climbed a dark dirty staircase to the apartment of Rachel, who was glad to see us.

Hanna introduced me as a friend. Rachel had her wig off and wore a scarf as women tend to do when at home. She kept pushing it forward on her head as orthodox women do. Rachel was 26 years old, 4 years younger than Hanna and me. She had 4 children, the eldest 6 and the youngest 3 months old. The flat was dark, the night smells still prevailed, and it seemed that Rachel had not yet declared it daytime although it was already noon. We sat in the living room on an old sofa, and she brought us cold water. Rachel's husband went to the same *yeshiva* Hanna attended, which had brought them close for the last two years. Her eldest daughter went to school with Hanna's third child. It was a small school and fairly new. The language of instruction was Yiddish, unlike most of the other orthodox girls schools in the town, where Hebrew was spoken; this characterized it as a more religious school than the others since today Yiddish is considered more sacred than Hebrew. The school enrolled girls from all orthodox streams, and promised the parents that all groups would be respected. Hanna and Rachel discussed a violation of that promise.

Rivke came home crying. I couldn't get it out of her. I hoped it wasn't something to do with her learning because we'd already been through that at the beginning of the year. At that time the teacher said Rivke didn't concentrate, and dreamt and played with the things on her desk while she was telling the girls the Torah

portion, anyway, this time Rivke finally told me that the teacher won't let her pray in her way. Well this was too much. Picking on her for not listening when she's only in the first grade is one thing, but telling her how to pray is an altogether different story.

Well, the other Friday, when my husband came home, he went to talk to the headmaster. He was so mad. First of all he says that Rivke is a good girl. She helps me a lot at home, takes care of the little ones and has good *midot* [the moral and ethical traits considered important for girls]. Isn't it what a girl should strive for? He claims that schools nowadays push the girls too much towards learning. When he went there I was a bit worried. I didn't want him to have an outburst or to embarrass Rivke. He can forget himself every now and then when dealing with important matters. Before leaving the house I reminded him to try and remain calm, so he started to heat up right here.

Rachel had a shy little smile on her lips. She bent her face down and pushed the scarf forward again. She spoke quickly, as if this was the only way she could get the story out. Hanna turned red. She knew that Rachel was sharing an intimate feeling with us. Rachel talked about her daughter's problems, and revealed a clash with her husband. She also revealed his short temper, which is generally an intimate subject, and is not viewed positively among the orthodox.

Hanna kept quiet for a while, smiled, and said:

Well, same here. When Rabbi Liberman came to talk us into sending our children to the new school, he too said that the girls would be free to pray their own way. For you it's all new because Rivke is there for the first year, but our eldest had this conflict last year. She too was deeply hurt when the teacher told her she should change. Well, you know her, she wouldn't say anything, until one Saturday my husband hears her singing differently. He couldn't wait for the following Friday, called Rabbi Liberman during the week, and then went there. You know him when he gets angry.

Hanna became very red, and a large embarrassed smile covered her little face. She felt more mature and experienced than Rachel, both in child rearing and in marriage, yet she wanted to be open with her and give her the feeling that she was not the only one to have these kinds of problems. Rachel had opened the intimate stage, and Hanna didn't want to leave her there all by herself. Hanna too could use a short performance on that stage.

In that stuffy flat, on an old sofa, Hanna and Rachel shared some emotions, opinions, and stress which in my surroundings would never be considered particularly intimate. For those two young women, married to ultraorthodox men who spend the week away from home furthering their careers as scholars, this was pure intimacy. Listening to their voices, looking at their cheeks, watching their eye movements, one could discern the boundaries of intimacy.

Hasidic women are not supposed to criticize their husbands' behavior, and they avoid comments about their personality traits, whether

positive or negative. The women evade direct references to conflicts with their husbands. In a casual conversation one might catch a glimpse of conflict through double entendres, deliberately unclear comments, laughter, blushes and the like. An intimate conversation might go a bit further. In such an exchange one might hear a fuller portrayal of a couples' disagreements, an admission of the difficulties encountered in the orthodox way of life, an awareness of one's status within the community which is accepted but as an underestimation of oneself as an adult.

These topics and feelings are suppressed most of the time, but sometimes, with certain people, they emerge and reveal the depth of the oppressing mechanism. Being "normal" means not talking about intimate issues, as if they do not exist at all. Avoiding intimacy indicates a recognition of the community's social and mental boundaries, which is, in a sense, sanity. The women I knew had to be very careful any time they exposed their hidden worlds. Doing it at the wrong time, in front of inappropriate people, or in an unsuitable place, might present them as fragile, bewildered, or even crazy.

The information conveyed in the scene described above and the context in which it was exposed indicate the delicate skin overlaying intimacy, separating the overt and the covert, the normal and the abnormal, and maintaining the dichotomy drawn by the orthodox between a "weak woman" and "strong woman." In the first category the orthodox community puts women who find it hard to manage their large families, women who are not involved in any activity outside the house such as classes, charity, and volunteer work, and women who act "weird" with regard to the above-described limits. At the other end of the continuum, in the respected category, are the strong women. They are recognized for managing the never-ending housework and limited assistance with ease, speed and accuracy. They are the ones with extra time for activities like volunteering, but never boast about it.

Strong women help weak women, thereby strengthening the dichotomy between them. Hanna was known for her strength. She had five children, a husband on weekends only, a meager income, and a tiny flat. Yet she stood as a paradigm of steadfastness. She wore a scarf while the other wore elegant wigs, giving up beauty for modesty. She sent her children to schools that were more orthodox than others of her sect. She never spent time chatting outside with her neighbors, and she kept her flat empty of unnecessary objects like kitchen accessories, pictures, house plants, superfluous furniture and extra toys. Hanna was isolated in her milieu as a strong woman, and had few opportunities to express her stress, fatigue, uncertainties and complaints. The few incidents witnessed and described here all centered around the themes of marital relationships, familialities and the

status of women. The rarity of these incidents in which Hanna shared her despair, worries, anger, and hurts gave them great significance.

ADJUSTING THE LIMITS OF INTIMACY

Being so close to someone who strives to be perfect, who does what she says she is going to do or should do, who sets an example for her peers, was very complicated for me. I could learn from being around her what all ethnographers have learned from their marginal informants. Hanna was my age, she lived five minutes away from my house, spoke Hebrew, and was Jewish like me. We shared a similar sense of humor, similar opinions on certain topics, and similar ways of dealing with children's problems. But, the enormous distance between us on the topic of religion could never be bridged. Added to this was the prohibition against talking about "everything," in deference to her boundaries of intimacy.

Thus, I always suffered from the feeling that I didn't really know Hanna. I wanted to see her naked, free of the obligations one is able to put aside in my society. I wanted to see her in the flesh and blood, human, not an example.

Being so close to her for two years, and yet always somehow apart, I drew her into my world. I did it through dreams I had during the fieldwork. In those dreams, Hanna and her husband were sinners, liars, inconsistent and uncertain. Giving up the expectations of intimacy I had at first, the dreams served as compensation. In them I saw Hanna in a short skirt with no wig covering her long dark hair. Her husband wore jeans and both of them watched television — strictly forbidden in their community. One time I dreamt he was having an affair with a young man.

Certain expectations I had about our relationship were not being met. Being "there" and at home at the same time drove me to share my frustrations with friends. Such a remote alternative way of Jewish life was a kind of threat to them. They filtered this cultural alternative through their attitudes towards "the black ones [reference to the black coats worn by Hassidic men]," with no interest in altering those prejudices. One of the most popular teases revolved around Hanna's husband's absence from home, and the comments ran something like this: "That's what he tells her, I bet you he's fooling around." "Tiberias? I'm sure he's somewhere around Tel Aviv having a good time." "Those blacks in their *yeshivot*, all they do is talk about girls. I know this guy who was once orthodox and he told me all about it." I met these provocations with smiles, sometimes playing along and only rarely becoming angry. The perception of orthodoxy as a forgery, religious life as a sham, and deep resentment towards religious people is

part of the socialist-Zionist education of which I was also a product. Subconsciously I too wanted to strip them of their perfection, but on the professional level I went on accepting their borders while probing their inner world. The dreams reflect this ambivalence.

Patience, delicacy and sensitivity were required to carry this burden without letting it come between me and Hanna, and towards the end of my two years of research they enabled Hanna to come back to the topics we discussed during our first conversation, but on another level.

It was after a particularly stimulating lesson about the writings of the Jewish scholar, Maimonides. The lesson had been given by a bright rabbi who was broadly educated and treated the material in an academic manner. Hanna saw that I was intellectually stimulated, and a few minutes after I arrived home the telephone rang: "I can't let it wait until our next visit. I have to talk to you. When are you planning to come next?" Throughout the research I was in constant fear of being excluded from the community, and an unusual phone call made me nervous. "Well, if necessary I'll come tomorrow."

She had no intention of telling me not to come anymore. She was standing in her living room, rolling up some of her husband's religious paraphernalia he had left for her to put away. I told her how my husband had escaped many attempts by orthodox men in the bus station and airport to persuade him to don them and pray. She was shocked to hear that he never had, and that he had not celebrated his *Bar mitzva*, the ceremony conferring adulthood on a 13-year-old Jewish male. "But," she said, "I wanted to talk to you about something else. Yesterday you were so alert and excited. How come you get like that only when it's on a theoretical level. Why don't you try to do a simple thing and see if it moves you too."

I could feel the thin ice, on which I was walking for the last two years, cracking. Hanna had never asked me to follow any of the commandments she and her family observed. She never asked me to bless food, or wash my hands in the special way they do before eating. She never inquired about my habits at home concerning keeping kosher, or observing the Sabbath and holidays. She respected my efforts to be frank with her, and avoided subjects that would embarrass me and force me to be untruthful. Just as I learned to avoid subjects that evoked canned answers from her, she avoided subjects that I could handle only by politeness or deception.

This mutual recognition of impersonal spheres granted us the special but restricted intimacy we had shared for two years. The tiniest fracture in this delicate balance would have exposed the deeper feelings on both sides, and Hanna was about to create such a fracture. The crack she opened

up would uncover hidden untouchable layers, and create a hole that in time we would both fall into, finishing our relationship as ethnographer and informant.

I have here two booklets which tell you how to maintain family purity. Why don't you read them and tell me whether you can practice any of it. This is the most important thing to start with, even if you don't do anything else. Read it and talk about it with your husband, don't say anything now, just think about it.

When I left Hanna's I knew that the end was near, but at the same time I saw the opportunity for a frank dialogue about purity, and remembering the one we had at the beginning of our relationship, I couldn't let this chance slip by. I wasn't afraid, as most of my family and friends were, that I would become one of "them." I wasn't afraid to try to obey some laws. My only concern was the loss of honesty. My conviction that this experience was mostly for the purpose of the research equalled my conviction that it signalled the end of the research.

ONE STEP TOO FAR: THE DEMISE OF A FIELD WORK

And so, a few days later I returned to Hanna's home. It was Friday and the stairwell smelled clean. Behind the doors one could detect the Sabbath cooking. Friday is a short day and many things have to be done before the Sabbath brings everything to a stop. Hanna was in the kitchen washing the dishes. She boiled some water for that favorite of Israeli drinks, instant coffee, and cut me a piece of cake. I asked her if one is supposed to make a blessing before eating such a small portion of food. She said, "Yes, and since you ask, why don't you repeat after me." After two years I found myself blessing the food she offered, mainly out of politeness but with no feeling of dishonesty.

Nu? have you read the booklets? What do you say, is it going to be hard? What does your husband say?

It doesn't seem so difficult, and my husband and I are very open with each other. He won't be the trouble. It's me. I have to see if I can do it. Don't you ever run into technical problems?

Hanna blushed and smiled. Being married for ten years — half of it pregnant and almost half of it breast feeding — left her very little time for menstrual periods. Still, she had unshared memories about her bathing in the *mikva*, confusion and distress because she couldn't tell for sure whether she was pure and allowed to have sex. That Friday morning, while the fish were waiting to be stuffed, she let some of these feelings out.

It's been six months since I stopped breast-feeding Tizrale, and I haven't gotten pregnant yet, so now after a rather long time all those rules are relevant for me.

There were times when I was pregnant, fed the baby for a year, stopped feeding, and got pregnant again without even having my period once. With God's help I hope it won't take much longer now. The most annoying thing is blood during your seven clean days, when you already started to count the clean days [the time between the last day of the woman's menstrual cycle and the day she goes to the *mikva* to purify herself; following these 7 days she is allowed to have sex with her husband], and suddenly — blood! This has to be carefully checked because you can't be forbidden more than necessary. I remember one time when I found blood on my underwear and it was way into the fourth day. Oi, I was so nervous. I knew it couldn't be. Finally I spotted a little sore on my back that was bleeding. The other time it was a bleeding finger. Anyway, there is no one to talk to or show your body to — it took me forever to spot this sore on my back. The daily check is very important during those days. [Hanna dashes off to the bathroom and comes back with a small package in which she keeps square pieces of white cloth.] See, you put one leg up on the bathtub or on a chair. You wrap the cloth around your finger, stick it you know where, and twist the finger around. It has to come out with no blood stains. Some women when they first hear it think it's disgusting — do you?

She looks at me and she is blushing again. I try to keep the subject on a practical level and equate the finger with an ordinary tampon. Hanna takes my silence to mean that I have no qualms about either the esthetic or religious aspects, and adds:

Well, according to your calculations you should be bathing this Sunday and so should I. Why don't we go together?
Sure, why not.

Driving home, the scarf lies on the seat next to me, my fingers work rapidly through my matted curls, and loud rock and roll music is playing on the radio. In my world this last step, to which I had agreed, looks like a risk. It doesn't feel like hypocrisy because I'm ready to do it, to bathe in the *mikva*. It just seems like this ethnographic work which I've tried to respect for 24 months as work has turned into an adventure.

Saturday night Hanna called and I told her my calculations show Monday. I didn't want to skip the matter entirely since I had promised I would try, but neither did I want to do it with her. Monday evening, when it turned dark, I took a towel and shampoo, evaded the hostile, worried looks of my husband, and went out. The *mikva* is very close to my home, near the community center and the family care clinic where my babies are checked and treated. A ring of the doorbell brought out a short lady: "Yes dear, please come in honey." I recognize her, she lives in the Gur community. She doesn't know who I am, but she gathers I am new. "Here honey, call me when you are ready."

The little stall I am in has a bathtub, some clothes hangers, and a chair. The bathing regulations are posted on the wall. I fill the clean tub with warm water, settle in, and hear voices through the wall. How strange to know that there is another woman who will be allowed to have sex

from today. The bath feels so nice. I can see Hanna sitting here quietly, enjoying herself. No one knocks on the door, no one cries for her attention, and the place is physically nicer than her's. How nice, "a bath of her own."

When I call the lady she comes right in, checks my body to see that no loose hairs are clinging to it, no open sores, and tells me I can keep my towel on if I am shy. "Well, some are you know. Where are you from? Oh, from here, I see. Ah, Hanna sent you, Oi our Hannele, such a saint. How many times did she say you have to dip? She didn't? Okay, then seven."

We leave the bathing room and enter the *mikva* room. I descend the steps into the middle of a small pool. She makes sure I submerge completely, and each time I come out she signifies the dip as *kosher*. "Mazel tov," she says, and looks at me with pleasant green eyes, and after I say the blessing she happily repeats "mazel tov." I look at the short old lady, and she is really happy, delighted to have purified another woman.

"Wasn't that horrible," I think to myself while dressing. "Disgusting," says my husband when I tell him about it at home.

Tuesday Hanna calls:

It's not that I'm keeping checking up on you or anything, but I wondered whether you had gone to the *mikva*. You did? Oh, thank goodness, bless the Lord. I can't tell you how happy I am. Each dip purifies this filthy world. I am really pleased. May the Lord bless your home and family, and may you enjoy purity and good luck.

Forget about this time, I say to myself, sharing her happiness, what about the next time?

There was no next time. I was trapped. It was clear that if I go on seeing Hanna, I would have to go to the *mikva* every month, because I promised her I would try. If I can't go to the *mikva*, I won't go to her.

What is the natural ending for a field work? My teachers used to say that one has to work for at least a year, to experience a full round of seasons, holidays, cycles of agriculture, and so forth. Some talk about an inner feeling signaling the right time to withdraw. Others have financial restrictions, like a limit on grant funds. Some say that, in a sense, most ethnographers never really leave their field.

It seemed like it took two years for a relationship to be built between two incongruous people: 24 months to realize that we would never be able to be more than informant and ethnographer as long as we remained within the confines of those roles.

One can not afford the luxury of treating an ethnographic work as an adventure when studying modern societies, and probably any other

group of humans. The post-modern ethnographer must take into account that he or she is working in an open culture-market which gives meaning to the work, and that the subjects are a vital part of that market. They read, discuss, and challenge the products of ethnography and by doing so give it new value. Thus ethnographic research demands solid working relations which can offer only a limited amount of intimacy. Breaking the rules and redefining the terms of the working relationship intensifies the intimacy, and might even lead to the revelation of how they actually make love. I'm glad I never found out.

Intimate relationships between researcher and informants, blur the subject-object connection they actually maintain. Being able to communicate on equal levels of everyday life, sharing feelings and thoughts, revealing anxieties, dreams or desires — obscure the working bond they've agreed to preserve. Intimacy thus offers a cozy environment for the ethnographic journey, but at the same time an illusive one. The ethnographer wants information, this information happens to be someone else's real life. The informant's willingness to cooperate with the ethnographer might arise from different motivations, but it usually ends when the informant feels that he/she has become an object for someone else's interests. So it seems that intimacy and working relationships (if not under force or fallacy) go in opposite directions. Wishing to preserve the sociological endeavor through ethnographic methods, not via force or fallacy, puts a heavy burden on the depth and endurance of intimate and reciprocal relations.

"Do you still see Hanna a lot?" people ask me. "Do you keep in touch?" they wonder. "We only talk on the phone, I visited her when she had her new baby, we talked a lot during the Gulf war," I answer. We can't be friends because she was my object and we both know it.

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Social Relations and the Definition of Work: Identity Management in a Low-Status Occupation

Marcia J. Chidina

Work is an important source of self-definition in our society. Many low-status occupations, however, do not offer a definition of self that is agreeable to the worker. In these cases, workers may seek to manage the relationship between work and identity in a manner which enhances, rather than threatens, their self-conceptions. To examine this process of identity management, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-seven custodians. It was found that the social relations between custodians and building occupants were important to this process in two ways: First, relations with clients, as well as other selected facets of work, were embraced as a fulfilling and humanizing aspect of their work on which definitions of work were based. Second, it was in the context of social relations that these selected definitions of work were asserted, negotiated, and maintained. While members of all occupations may tend to stress the silver lining of their work, for those in a non-professional position this is a continuous process, because a publicly recognized ideology which elevates the image of the occupation does not already exist.

In American society, the occupational role is usually accorded greater importance in defining social status than ethnicity, religion, or political ideology alone. Because our society has ascribed varying levels of status and prestige to different occupations, the occupational role provides a link between the individual and the social structure and is thus a basis of self-definition and definition by others (Khleif, 1985:1010). There is, then, a close link between work and identity, role and self, the person and others.

Address correspondence to: Marcia J. Chidina, Department of Sociology, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire 03824.