

"Talmid Chachams and Tsedeykeses": Language, Learnedness, and Masculinity among Orthodox Jews

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# **Talmid Chachams and Tsedeykeses: Language, Learnedness, and Masculinity Among Orthodox Jews**

Sarah Bunin Benor

When I asked a group of boys in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish elementary school “What’s the difference between boys’ and girls’ education?” one boy answered: “Boys need to learn how to be . . . the *talmid chachams* [masters of Jewish texts]; girls should learn how to be *tsedeykeses* [righteous women].” This nine-year-old’s response expresses an ideology<sup>1</sup> common in Orthodox communities: men are expected to be advanced scholars of Jewish law, and women are expected to be righteous. Both men and women must know and observe the laws, but men must also spend time each day studying the reasoning behind them. This gender expectation pervades many areas of Orthodox life, from leisure activities to educational policy to language use. In this article, I discuss how Orthodox boys and men construct their masculinity partly through linguistic performances of religious learnedness. Using methods from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, I show how young men use two linguistic features about twice as frequently as young women: loanwords from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish;<sup>2</sup> and word-final /t/ release (for example, *righT*,

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not *nigh*'). The quantitative and qualitative differences in language use help many males to convey the persona of the *talmid chacham*, the wise and learned student of Jewish law.

Previous literature on Orthodox Jews has pointed out the greater importance of traditional scholarship among men than women.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have also highlighted gender differences in language choice, such as men's preference for Yiddish over English or Modern Hebrew,<sup>4</sup> and one paper briefly mentions a gender difference in a phonological feature.<sup>5</sup> The current study is the first to connect language, gender, and learnedness among Orthodox Jews.

This analysis is based on several months of research in an Orthodox primary school in California, including observations, interviews, and recordings of classroom and social speech. The small school is run by the Chabad Lubavitch branch of Hasidism, which dispatches rabbis and their families to cities around the world to provide the infrastructure and incentives for Jews to become Orthodox. The principal is also the rabbi in charge of the local Chabad community, and most of the Jewish Studies teachers are emissaries who grew up in larger Chabad communities. The students in the elementary school are all being raised Orthodox. Some of their parents are native members of Chabad or other Orthodox movements, and others are *baalei teshuvah*, Jews who chose Orthodoxy. A number of the fathers are rabbis working in the area as teachers, *mashgihim* (officials who ensure Jewish dietary standards), or pulpit rabbis. Boys and girls have separate classes starting in first grade, and around age 13 most of the children go away to study in Chabad yeshivahs (religious secondary schools) in other cities, especially New York, Montreal, and Paris.<sup>6</sup>

To place this community on the Orthodox landscape, the outreach-oriented group called Chabad is just one sect of Hasidism, and the mystical, leader-oriented Hasidim make up only part of the Orthodox world. Non-Hasidic Orthodox Jews are often referred to as Litvish, pointing to the Lithuanian origin of the movement opposing Hasidism, or as Yeshivish, highlighting the centrality of institutionalized Talmud study. As Samuel Heilman has explained, the Hasidic and Litvish communities have come to resemble each other on many levels in recent decades.<sup>7</sup> Based on my dissertation research in a non-Hasidic Orthodox community in Philadelphia,<sup>8</sup> as well as visits to Orthodox communities elsewhere, I can state that the linguistic resources and social categories presented in this article are used quite similarly by other (non-modern) Orthodox Jews.

In contrast, many modern Orthodox Jews do not adhere to the same gender norms and exhibit quite different patterns of language

use.<sup>9</sup> Women's study, even of Talmud and other rabbinic texts, is more accepted among modern Orthodox Jews. An example of the difference between modern and non-modern Orthodox values can be seen in reactions to Drisha, a modern Orthodox institute for Jewish women's learning in New York. Many modern Orthodox women and girls spend time studying at Drisha, and some more right-wing Orthodox leaders have criticized its mission. For example, Agudath Israel spokesman Rabbi Avi Shafran was quoted in the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent* about Drisha, "I don't think they're doing the girls a tremendous favor. In the long run they're teaching them something that's at odds with the very thing they promote."<sup>10</sup>

Research on non-modern Orthodox communities often uses the labels ultra-Orthodox or Haredi,<sup>11</sup> but I have found that these terms are rarely used in the community. In addition, the lines between the various factions of Orthodoxy are often blurred; some communities include both "moderns" and "black-hatters," and many people hesitate when asked to categorize themselves. Therefore, I have opted to use the label "Orthodox" throughout this article and hope that the reader will keep in mind that there is a great deal of variation within Orthodoxy.

Orthodox Jews in America speak a variety of English that is influenced by Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic. In addition to the loanwords and /t/ release discussed below, Orthodox Jewish English includes Yiddish semantic and syntactic influences, such as "eating by them" and "if you would have seen it" (as opposed to "eating at their house" and "if you had seen it"), a click hesitation marker from Israeli Hebrew, and final devoicing (such as "goingk" as opposed to "going"). These features are common among both men and women, to varying degrees. There are also several other features that are more commonly used by men and contribute to a masculine, learned style. These include quasi-chanting intonation contours,<sup>12</sup> literal translations of Yiddish phrasal verbs like "learn out" and "tell over," periphrastic verbal constructions like "to be *mekarev* him" (to bring him closer to observance) and "to be *mechalel Shabbos*" (to desecrate the Sabbath), and Hebrew and Yiddish morphology on loanwords (such as *bochurim* [unmarried male yeshivah students] as opposed to *bochurs*, *talmidei chachamim* as opposed to *talmid chachams*, and a *choshuve* [important] man as opposed to a *choshuv* man). Although all of these features are important in Orthodox learnedness, I will deal here only with loanwords and /t/ release.

The theoretical approach in this article is influenced by linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs's model of how gender is connected to linguistic and other practices (Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> According to Ochs's model, linguistic resources index social constructs, such as stances, acts, and

[149]

Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

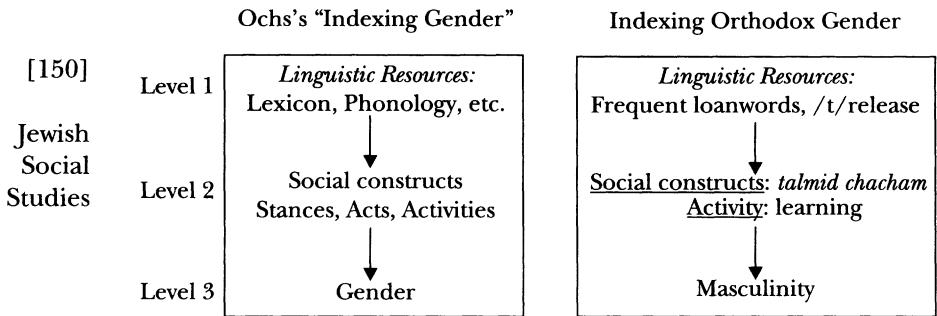


Figure 1. Ochs's model of how language relates to gender

activities, which help to constitute gender meanings. An example is the connection between cursing and masculinity. Using curse words indexes a stance of toughness, which is associated with masculinity. Frequent cursing can help to constitute masculine identity only because a man appears tough when he uses it and because our society associates toughness with masculinity.

In the case of the Orthodox community, the linguistic resources include frequent use of loanwords and /t/ release. These resources are used to index the *activity* of "learning" (used here with its Orthodox Jewish English sense: studying traditional texts) and the *social construct* of the *talmid chacham*. This middle level helps to constitute the gender category of masculinity. I offer various types of data to show how these three levels are connected. I give quantitative evidence that males use the linguistic resources more frequently than females, connecting Level 1 to Level 3. I discuss qualitative evidence that these linguistic features are used in a way that is seen as learned, connecting Level 1 to Level 2. And I present ethnographic data on community activities and ideologies to show how Level 2 is connected to Level 3, how religious learnedness is associated with masculinity.

### Learners as Leaders

An advertisement that has appeared in the popular Orthodox magazine the *Jewish Observer* compares a learned rabbi to a cardiologist. The banner text reads (translations are mine): "It Takes \$450,000 to Train a Cardiologist. What Would You Spend on a Godol B'Yisroel [important Jewish leader/rabbi]?" The ad continues:

It takes nearly 10 years and almost half a million dollars to train the people who work on your heart. But what about the people who work on your Neshoma [soul]—the Talmidei Chachomim [masters of Jewish texts] and potential Gedolei Hador [(rabbinic) leaders of the generation] who will be shaping our Neshomos for generations to come?<sup>14</sup>

[151]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

The purpose here is to promote Mifal Ha-shas, an organization that, according to the ad, “encourages the mastery of ‘Gantz Shas’ [all of Talmud] by administering monthly written tests to committed Talmudim [students] worldwide. Whoever passes the test is awarded a stipend for that month, enabling him to put bread on the table.”

We can learn a good deal about Orthodox values from this ad, which includes a photograph of several men in black yarmulkes writing at desks with rabbinic books at their side. By comparing text study to one of the highest-paid and most respected professions in the wider society, the ad reveals the centrality of learnedness. It assumes that mastering Jewish texts prepares someone to be a Jewish leader, something only males can do (“enabling *him* to put bread on the table”).

These values and assumptions can also be found among elementary students in the Orthodox school where I did my fieldwork. When asked what they want to do when they grow up, all but one of the 4th- and 5th-grade boys said they want to be rabbis. (In line with the notions of prestige in the ad, the other boy wants to be a brain surgeon—or maybe a rocket scientist.) Several of them have fathers who are rabbis, and the expectation is that they will achieve high levels of religious learnedness and perhaps become leaders of the Jewish people—*gedolim be-yisroel*.

The girls are expected to excel not at textual analysis but at motherhood. Although many of them will become teachers, which entails some text skills, or go into other professions, women are expected to devote most of their young adulthood to caring for their families, usually large ones. Males, too, are expected to be involved with *chinuch* (child rearing, education). But, as one rabbi told me, “the focus of the women . . . has been to transmit *yiddishkeit* [Jewishness] to the next generation in terms of the *neshoma* . . . and [among] the men, it’s more in terms of the brain.” The imparting of textual skills and intellectual development are central to being an Orthodox father. In the sections that follow, I show how these ideologies of gender and learnedness manifest in linguistic practice.

## The Lexical Variable: Loanwords

[152] In this section, I present data on loanword use, taken from recorded group interviews of girls and of boys, in which I asked similar questions to obtain comparable conversations.<sup>15</sup> The speakers are all current or former students at the Chabad-run school. I distinguish between “Local” students, those under age 14 who have studied only at this school, and “Yeshivah” students, children ages 14–18 who have spent some time learning at yeshivahs away from home.

Overall, within these controlled conversations, 1.9 percent of the girls’ words were loans, and 4.8 percent of the boys’ words were loans. Of course, the use of loanwords is often influenced by the topic of conversation. Someone talking about Jewish holidays or commandments is much more likely to use words like *Pesach* (Passover), *kashrus* (kosherness), and *shachris* (the morning prayer service) than someone talking about the weather. To ensure that the quantitative difference is not merely due to differences in topic, I compared similar conversations. I asked each group of Local students about the differences between boys’ and girls’ educations. In these conversations, the girls used 1.4 percent loanwords, and the boys used 3.6 percent, over twice as much.

The gender difference in loanword use is not limited to frequency. We also see a difference in the types of words used. In the Yeshivah groups’ discussions about *tsnies* (modesty), the boys used a few words associated with learning, like *lichora* (ostensibly) and names of rabbinic principles. The girls, however, did not use any loans that would be considered “learning words.” Also, while the girls did not mention any rabbis or texts in this discussion, the boys did. In the following excerpt, 14-year-old Boruch (all names are pseudonyms) invokes the *Shulhan Arukh* (a code of Jewish law) even though he is not sure that it is the source of his point. (Loanwords are *italicized*; text mention is **bold**; non-lexical feature is underlined.)

By boys there aren’t so many *halachas* [laws] about—I mean, they’re allowed to uncover their elbows, or whatever. You know there’s a *halacha*, I think it’s **Shulhan Arukh**, there’s a *halacha* that if somebody is wearing shorts. . . . I think you’re allowed to wear shorts, but if you wear shorts you’re not allowed to *daven* [pray], you’re not allowed to be a *chazan* [cantor].

In addition to using different loanwords, boys sometimes pronounce them differently. The Yeshivah boys used elements of Yiddish phonology, while the girls and Local boys did not. The boys’ used a uvular fricative (trill in the throat) in *rosh yeshivah* and *lichora* and an apical tap (short movement with the front of the tongue) in all in-

stances of *Rebe*. However, in all of their English words and in all of their other loanwords, including *kiruv* (outreach), *bochurim*, and *be-tsibur* (in public), the Yeshivah boys used the American retroflex approximant [r]. The Yeshivah girls (as well as both Local groups) used only the American [r] in all of their loanwords, including *Rebe*. This difference in pronunciation is likely due to the greater exposure the boys have to Yiddish at their yeshivahs (see more on this below).

An analysis of comparable conversations—similar not in topic but in heatedness—shows that boys are more comfortable using some loanwords. I asked each Local group to think of a topic to debate, and the 7th- and 8th-grade girls and boys were so enthusiastically involved in these conversations that they seemed to forget my presence. One girl initiated a debate about whether the age of “bar and bas mitzvah” should be changed, and one boy started an argument about the source of a rabbinic principle called *troy kayem* (stipulation that would activate an oath), a detail of a rabbinic text he and his classmates had learned earlier that week. In the following excerpts from these two conversations, I note the use of loanwords (*italics*), the mention of rabbis and texts (**bold**), and the use of hedges, such as “what’s it called” (underlined):

*Local Girls: “Dina” and “Elisheva”:*

DINA: You can’t say that you’re totally mature when you get *bas mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony].

ELISHEVA: You aren’t. You’re starting to get mature.

DINA: Right, so, right but, I don’t know, if *Ha-shem* [God] made you like that, then why change it?

ELISHEVA: Yeah, but who says that, what’s it called, *Ha-shem* made that—you at thirteen and fourteen, twelve and thirteen, you’re supposed to do that? Didn’t what’s it called, um rabbis say that or something? (quietly) Or *rabonim* [rabbis] or whatever?

DINA: Look, the rabbis didn’t make it up just like that.

ELISHEVA: Yeah, I know, cause they, they have what’s it called, *ruach hakodesh* [divine inspiration] or whatever? So, but I’m just saying, wouldn’t you rather like um change it?

*Local Boys: “Dovid” and “Menachem”:*

DOVID: I’m telling you, he taught us at the beginning *troy kayem*. I’m telling you. . . .

MENACHEM: *Troy kayem* is **Rashi** [an 11th century rabbinic commentator].

DOVID: I know, but the second thing was—

MENACHEM: It’s definitely not **Toysfes** [collection of medieval commentaries on the Talmud]. **Toysfes** is *troy batel* [stipulation that would annul an oath].

[153]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

DOVID: Exactly, but this—it wasn't **Rashi** completely either. . . .

MENACHEM: But it's still the same thing. I'm telling you, the first way we learnt it was more according to **Rashi**.

Jewish  
Social  
Studies

A major difference between these two excerpts is topic. The boys chose a very esoteric, technical issue, and the girls chose a more general religious principle that affects their daily lives. The girls do not mention any texts, and the boys are debating textual principles and which rabbis wrote about them. This is an instance of boys' and girls' different relations to Jewish texts and learnedness.

Another difference is the apparent confidence with which loanwords are used. Elisheva surrounds every one of her loanwords with hedges: "what's it called" and "or whatever." Although Elisheva often uses similar discourse markers in her speech, such as "like" and "you know," she uses these two hedges only surrounding loanwords: "Didn't what's it called, um rabbis say that or something?" And then she lowers her volume to say the loanword equivalent of rabbis: "Or *rabonim* or whatever?" It seems that she wanted to say *rabonim* in the first place but either had trouble accessing the word or was not confident enough in her knowledge of the word to say it. Her use of hedges in conjunction with loanwords suggests a lack of confidence and a lack of entitlement to use these words. Although Elisheva's speech is an extreme example among girls, it is worthwhile to note that her younger brother used no hedges surrounding loans.

It is also enlightening to observe which loanwords are *not* used. Although the girls are discussing whether laws come from the rabbis, they do not use the words *de-oraysa* (from the Torah) or *de-rabanan* (from the rabbis), which I have often heard in male learning conversations. Elisheva could have expressed the same thought by saying, "You're talking like *bas mitzvah* is *de-oraysa*, but it's really *de-rabanan*." If she had said this, the other girls would have been quite surprised, as this sentence is not in a style that Elisheva uses. Unfortunately, I did not observe a similar conversation among the boys, as they had no interest in debating the age of bar and *bas mitzvah*. However, I believe that, had they discussed it, they would have used these "learning" words that the girls did not.

After the girls finished their debate, I asked them whether they knew the word *de-oraysa*. They knew it and were able to translate it correctly. I asked, "What's the opposite of that?" and they answered correctly, "*de-rabanan*." Although these learning words are in the girls' verbal repertoire, they did not use them, probably because they would be inappropriate for a girl's speech style.

Another use of loanwords that illustrates the connection between language, learnedness, and masculinity can be seen, surprisingly, in a conversation about sports. I asked a group of 4th- and 5th-grade boys, “Who’s the best basketball player?” and a few of them answered, “Michael Jordan.” One boy then played on this name, saying, “*Michl*,” the Yiddish version of Michael. Another then said, “*Michoel Yárden*,” using the Ashkenazic Hebrew version of Michael, combined with the Ashkenazic Hebrew name of the biblical Jordan River. This exchange was funny because of the incongruity of the non-Jewish basketball star being given a Jewish name. But it also highlighted the centrality of Jewish identity and biblical literature for these Chabad boys.

By using biblical words to play on Michael Jordan’s name, the boys were displaying their knowledge of and affinity for Hebrew and Hebrew texts. This makes for an interesting contrast to the importance of sports knowledge for the construction of masculinity in general American society. If I had asked the same question to non-Orthodox boys—“Who’s the best basketball player?”—the ensuing discussion would likely have included displays of sports knowledge, rather than Torah knowledge. In fact, only one of the boys in this group knew anything about basketball teams, and the other boys had heard only of Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. One boy blatantly revealed his lack of sports knowledge, without any ensuing comment from the other boys. He said, “I only went to one basketball game, and the Giants won that,” apparently not knowing that the only teams called the “Giants” play baseball and football. For these Orthodox boys, Torah knowledge is more highly valued than sports knowledge. The simple act of Judaizing Michael Jordan’s name can be seen as a performance of Jewishness, Orthodoxy, learnedness, and masculinity.

### The Phonological Variable: /t/ Release

The use of Hebrew loanwords is often recognized as part of a learned register of Orthodox speech (see my “Ideologies of Difference” section below). A more subtle way that learnedness is projected is through the frequent release of /t/ when it occurs at the end of English words.<sup>16</sup> In general American English, it is common to glottalize word-final /t/, as in *righ'*, but sometimes people release and aspirate it, as in *righT*, creating a small puff of air at the end of the word. Since word-final /t/ release is not so common in America, it often suggests that the speaker is articulate, intelligent, authoritative, or “nerdy.” There have been sociolinguistic studies of the high rates of /t/ release

[155]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

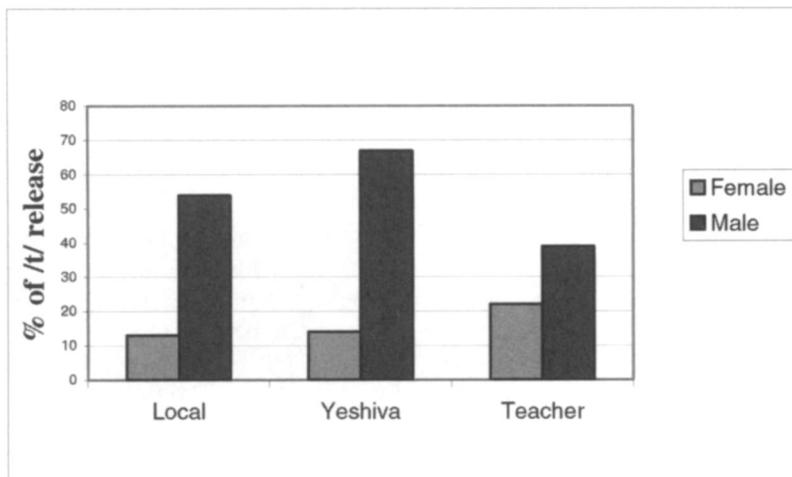


Figure 2. Gender differences in /t/ release by age group

among lawyers, intellectual gay men, science fiction fans, and female high school students who consider themselves nerds.<sup>17</sup> For all of these groups, sounding articulate and intelligent are important aspects of their identity. The same thing holds for Orthodox males.

How does /t/ release help to project an image of learnedness and masculinity in the Orthodox community? First, through sheer numbers. In classroom recordings of male and female students and teachers aged 9 through 22, males release their /t/s over twice as frequently as females. Of all instances of /t/ that occurred at the end of a phrase, I noted which were released and which were glottalized. I then compared the ratio of released /t/s to total /t/s for males and females: females released 19 percent of their /t/s, and males released 47 percent. This gender difference is significant (calculated at the  $p \leq .05$  level using Chi-square tests) in all age groups (as illustrated in Figure 2).

All groups included two to five speakers, except that there was only one male teacher in his twenties. This teacher, Chayim, may have had a lower /t/ release rate than other male teachers, and this is likely because one of his students, Zev, is sometimes more authoritative than he is. If the sample had included more male teachers, the frequency of /t/ release in that category would likely have been higher. These quantitative data show that frequent /t/ release is more common among males, connecting Levels 1 and 3 in Ochs's model. In the next section, I use a close analysis of the recordings to show that /t/ is re-

leased more frequently when the speaker is in a position of authority or learnedness, connecting Levels 1 and 2.

In the following excerpt from a girls' class, the teacher, Nomi, has just asked a question, and the girls have not given the answer she is looking for. She has the knowledge, and she is in a position to impart it to the students. When she does that, she releases both /t/s. Then a student questions something the teacher had said previously, and the teacher does not have a definitive answer for her. In the next response, she is no longer speaking authoritatively, and she does not release her /t/s. (Underline indicates /t/ release; **bold** indicates /t/ glottalization. /t/ is only analyzed at the end of syntactic or intonational phrases or before pauses.)

[157]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

NOMI: They probably did, but (*pause*) olive oil burns the clearest light.

ROCHEL: That's *bal tashchis* [wasting]! (*referring to previous topic*)

NOMI: I'm sure they could have used the rest of it for something else. It doesn't mean they threw it **out**. Doesn't mean they threw it **out**.

In this excerpt, Nomi releases her /t/s when she is in a position of authority and glottalizes them when her authority comes into question. We see a similar pattern among males. In the boys' class, there is a good deal of debate about halachic issues, and one of the students in particular, Zev, often contradicts what the teacher, Chayim, says. And Zev is often right. In this episode, Zev gives the *wrong* answer, and this puts Chayim in a position of authority. After that, Chayim releases three of his four /t/s:

CHAYIM: So what do we say? We say that we—

ZEV: You're not allowed to until after half an hour.

CHAYIM: No. We say that even if you turn—you, you extinguish the fire beforehand, nevertheless you're still *yoytse* [released from obligation], and you don't even have to go and relight it. But the *Ramo* [a famous rabbi] goes on and explains: (*he reads a Hebrew quote*). He says you don't (*end of intonational phrase*) have to go and relight it, because we *pasken* [decide] that the *hadloke* [lighting], the *hadloke* is the *mitzvah* [commandment]. Nevertheless, when you go and relight it, you don't make a *bracha* [blessing].

The use of /t/ as a marker of authority is well illustrated when speakers who normally glottalize have a few instances of release. One Local student, Shmuel, releases only two of his nine /t/s. In one case, he is in a position of authority, because he understands something that the other students do not. In the following example, the teacher has

just read a Hebrew passage, and the students are confused. The teacher begins to clarify, and Shmuel says, “Oh, I get it.” The teacher tells him to explain it to the other students, and at the end of that explanation, Shmuel says, “But if you take out two candles, you’re for sure gonna be using one that’s not.”

The only other time Shmuel releases a phrase-final /t/ is when he is being adamant. He is trying to get his classmates to perform a calculation about candle-lighting time in the way that he suggests. He says, “Nu? Put some zeros on it.” Here he thinks that he is the authority on how to solve the problem, and he expresses this by being adamant—and releasing his /t/.

Another student, Zev, is frequently adamant during class, questioning the teacher’s authority and displaying his own acumen. Often when he contradicts people, he releases his /t/s, as in this exchange:

CHAYIM: Candles, sure you are.

ZEV: No, you’re not. In the *shul* [synagogue] you’re not.

From these excerpts, we can see that /t/ release indexes adamancy, authority, and learnedness. And the fact that males release their /t/s over twice as frequently as females suggests that males are often more authoritative, more learned, and perhaps more adamant than females.

### **Explaining the Gender Difference: Access to Texts and Speaking Styles**

Several community members suggested that gender differences in speech are due to differences in education. One mother said that boys learn more “from the books.” A female student said that boys “learn all the details and like and the complicated stuff.” In fact, boys and girls do have distinct curricula, and these differences likely affect their language.

During my observations at the Chabad-run school, I found that both boys and girls learn “from the books.” Most classes focus on reading and translating Hebrew texts aloud, but in a few lessons—for both boys and girls—teachers merely tell stories and ask questions. The gender differences lie in which texts are used and in how the students study them. For *Tanach* (Bible), both girls and boys study the Bible with Rashi’s commentaries. For *halacha*, boys study Mishnah, Gemara, and Shulhan Arukh. Girls study neither Mishnah nor Gemara, only *Kitsur Shulhan Arukh*, the abridged version of one of the books the boys study. Boys always study their texts aloud in a small group. Girls

sometimes do this, but they also work in pairs to fill out worksheets about the texts.

An example of the different styles of text study can be seen in a comparison of two classes. One day in December, both boys and girls were studying the laws of the Hanukkah candles. Both classes included reading, translation, and discussion of texts, but there were notable differences. First, the girls were studying the laws from the *Kitsur Shulhan Arukh*, while the boys were studying them from the *Gemara*. Second, both teachers asked similar questions, but their expected answers were different. The girls' teacher asked, "Why do we put the *menoyra* [candelabrum] by the door?" The answer she was looking for, and eventually gave herself, was, "Because we copy our *rebeyim* [rabbis]." The boys' teacher also asked a practical question of observance, but the correct answer was: "Because it's in *Toyses* [collection of medieval commentaries on the Talmud]." While both of these responses draw our attention to the veneration of past rabbis, the educational goals are different. The girls are expected to know merely that their behavior should mimic that of their leaders, and the boys are expected to know which rabbis originated the laws and in which books. These differences highlight the greater importance for boys of being familiar with religious texts and the legal reasoning behind practical observance.

What impact might these different relations to text have on everyday speech? Since the boys are more accustomed to discussing details of rabbinic writings, using words that appear there, their everyday conversations are more likely to include textual references and "learning words." And since they are expected to be authorities on these texts, they are more likely to index their authority by releasing their /t/s. Access does seem to affect the boys' and girls' distinct uses of language.

However, as mentioned in the discussion of the bas mitzvah debate above, girls may have knowledge of the textual words but just not use them as frequently. Based on a written questionnaire I administered to the Local students, I found that boys and girls can correctly translate many loanwords. But there were a few loanwords that only the 7th- and 8th-grade boys knew: *nafka mina* (practical difference), *le-havdil* (to distinguish), and *kol she-ken* (all the more so), words common in talmudic discussions. All Local respondents had trouble with *guzma* (exaggeration) and *mistama* (probably), words that the male Yeshivah students know and use. So we see that there is a gradual acquisition of "learning words": between the 4th and 8th grades, the Local boys learn certain loanwords, and when they spend time in a yeshivah, they learn even more. Access to texts has some effect on loanword knowledge, as well as loanword use.

[159]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

Another factor contributing to gender differences in students' language is the different speaking styles of their teachers. In all Jewish subjects at this school, boys are taught by men, and girls are taught by women. The male teachers are educated at advanced yeshivahs, where "Yeshivish" is the primary language of discourse, and the female teachers are trained at seminaries, where they encounter some Yeshivish but not nearly as much as their brothers. (See the discussion of Yeshivish below.) Of course, teachers of 4th graders do not use all of the learning words they would use in a yeshivah setting, but it is likely that even in the elementary school classroom the male teachers use more learning words than the female teachers.

A third area of access that should be considered is spoken Yiddish. Nearly all of the loanwords used in Orthodox Jewish English are also used in Yiddish. As one rabbi said, the use of certain words is conditioned by the amount of Yiddish a speaker is exposed to, such as *dafka* (specifically [no accurate translation]), *mamish* (really [intensifier]), *guzma* (exaggeration), and *epes* (something [discourse marker]). The Local students' exposure to Yiddish is minimal. Many of them hear the child-directed register<sup>18</sup> at home and learn to read the Rebbe's teachings (*Sichos*) in the original Yiddish, but they are not exposed to the Yiddish of text study. But as soon as boys go away to yeshivah (in New York, Israel, or elsewhere), they begin to learn and even socialize partly—or mostly—in Yiddish. The girls' yeshivah classes are conducted solely in English, and they encounter few peers who are proficient in Yiddish. This helps to explain why the Yeshivah boys use more words like *lichora* and why they use elements of Yiddish phonology (such as the Yiddish "r").

The connection between men and Yiddish has also been reported in other Hasidic communities in North America and in Israel. Ayala Fader's research in Brooklyn shows how some Hasidic men speak mostly Yiddish, while their wives are more proficient in English,<sup>19</sup> and Bryna Bogoch's work describes a similarly gendered division in Israel between Yiddish and Modern Hebrew.<sup>20</sup> This is an interesting reversal from the East European discourse that feminized Yiddish and masculinized Hebrew.<sup>21</sup> However, it is not surprising, as contemporary Yiddish has taken on a valence of religious learnedness, which is more associated with men, while English in America and Modern Hebrew in Israel are the languages of secular interaction.

## Ideologies of Difference

As we can see, the boys' and girls' knowledge and use of language are affected by their differential access to texts, teaching styles, and languages. And the gender differences in language are likely perpetuated by an *expectation* of difference. Speakers recognize and discuss distinct gender styles, and these expectations help to maintain and even increase the differences. In this section, I present data on community members' ideologies of gender difference in language. Other research on language variation has shown that ideologies help to maintain differences. For example, John Rickford's comparative study of black and white varieties of American English shows that the differences, which derive from distinct linguistic histories, are perpetuated partly by lack of contact but also by speakers' mindsets that "this is how Blacks *should* talk, and this is how Whites *should* talk."<sup>22</sup>

The word "ideology" has been used in many ways.<sup>23</sup> I am defining it in a neutral sense, as "a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class."<sup>24</sup> In linguistic anthropology, the term "language ideology" is used to refer to speakers' understandings of how language is or should be used.<sup>25</sup> Bambi Schieffelin and Rachelle Doucet explain the importance of exploring this concept: "Language ideology is the mediated link between social structures and forms of talk, standing in dialectical relation with, and thus significantly influencing, social, discursive, and linguistic practices."<sup>26</sup>

Responses given in interviews show that community members do expect women and men to speak differently. Several people volunteered that males use more talmudic words than females, attributing this to their different educational tracks. Some girls mentioned individual words that they hear their brothers say but do not themselves use, such as *le-havdil* and *dafka*. There is also a perception that loanword use increases for males when they go away to yeshivahs in other cities. One 12-year-old said that he hears words associated with learning from his older brothers when they call home and speak "like yeshivah *bochurim*." This perception holds true in the numbers (Figure 3). The Local boys use loanwords about twice as frequently as the Local girls, and the Yeshivah boys use loans about three times as frequently as the Yeshivah girls. During a yeshivah education, males learn to increase the Jewishness and learnedness of their linguistic style more than females do.

One 18-year-old yeshivah *bochur*, Aharon, specifically recalls this process of learning. He told me, for example, that he now regularly uses the word *mistama*, a word he did not even know before going to ye-

[161]

Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

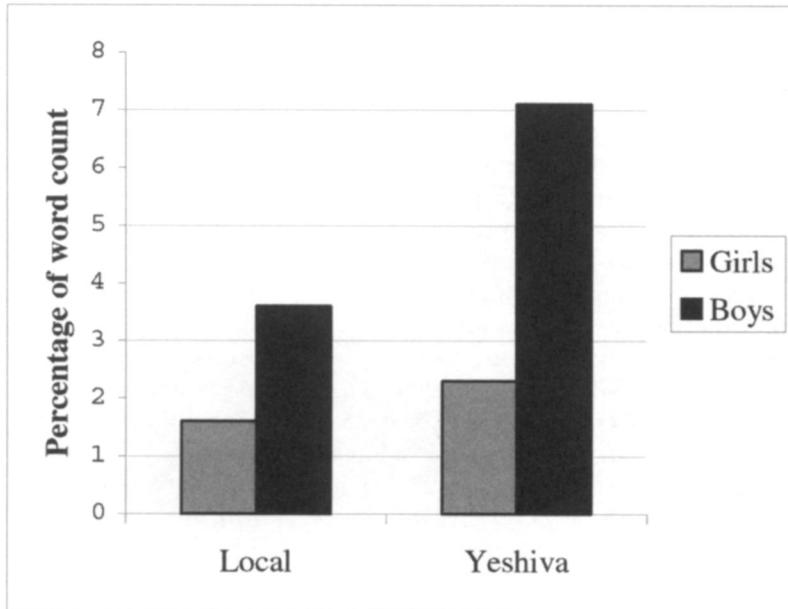


Figure 3. Gender differences in loanword use by most recent type of school attended (which correlates with age group)

shivah. Aharon's 16-year-old sister, Rivka, does not feel her language has changed much since she started yeshivah. She said that she and her friends do use Hebrew and Yiddish words, but not as much as the boys. And she does not use words associated with Gemara learning, such as *mistama*.

There is even a name for the register of Orthodox Jewish English that is common in men's yeshivahs: "Yeshivish." This is the subject of a dictionary by Chaim Weiser, and one of his points is that loanwords from Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic are common not only during text study but also in the everyday speech of the boys and men who spend most of their time studying texts.<sup>27</sup> When I mention "learning language" or "Yeshivish" in Orthodox communities, people often refer to this book. Some also mention a song by the Orthodox band Journeys, called "Yeshivishe Reid":

In the hallowed halls of *yeshivos* [yeshivahs] far and wide,  
Our young men have discovered a new way to verbalize.  
With Yiddish, English, Hebrew—it's a mixture of all three,  
And a dash of Aramaic—a linguistic potpourri!

That's called: *yeshivishe reid* [yeshivah speech], *yeshivishe shprach* [yeshivah language]:

*Takeh* [really], *epes* [something], *gradeh* [in reality], a *gevaldike zach* [remarkable thing].

It's called: *yeshivishe reid*, *yeshivishe shprach*:

It's the tawk of the town, *mamish* [really] *tog un nacht* [day and night].

[163]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

This song clearly portrays Yeshivish as a men's register, as can be seen by the underlined words. The phrase *tog un nacht* in the last line may be an allusion to the biblical injunction to learn Torah "day and night," which is how some rabbis explain that women are exempt from the *mitzvah* of learning (because it is considered a time-bound *mitzvah*).

When I asked Rivka and Aharon to have a "Yeshivish" conversation together, neither thought it was a good idea. Rivka thought it would be better to bring in their younger brother, Boruch, who had just finished his first year at yeshivah. Aharon agreed that having a Yeshivish conversation would be easier with his brother. Rivka called in Boruch, and the two boys had a long conversation about an intricacy of Jewish law they had recently learned in their Gemara studies. This conversation was so filled with loanwords, biblical and rabbinic quotes, chanting intonation contours, and Yiddish-influenced syntax, that it was unintelligible to most English speakers. Here is a quote from Aharon, the 18-year-old:

(begin chanting intonation) Whenever you're *shaych* [connected], then you can be an *eyd* [witness]; whenever you're not, you're not (end chanting intonation). So why does Rashi say—? That's 'cause *dina de-malchusa dina* [the law of the land is the law]. It's because they're—even if not *dina de-malchusa dina*, Rashi says later 'cause *al din hu nitstavu bnei noyach* [all children of Noah, including non-Jews, are commanded to follow this law]. The *goyim* [non-Jews] are *shaych* to *dinim* [laws]; they're not *shaych* to *gitin* [laws of divorce]. That's why it's good.

As this excerpt illustrates, conversations in the learning domain have many more Jewish influences, and the frequency of loanwords can be very high (here it is 35 percent). In my hours of observing (non-modern) Orthodox females in the learning domain, no conversation came close to this in number and type of loanwords and rabbinic quotes.

Not only is there a sense that men and women speak differently, but there is also a belief that this difference should be maintained. Men are expected to use words for talmudic concepts, like *nafka mina* and *kal va-chomer* (all the more so; *a fortiori* argument). They are also expected to use words like *mamish*, *mistama*, and *lichora*, which have come to be associated with learning. These words do not have real-world ref-

erents like *tefillin* and *mikveh* do; they are used as adverbs in sentences like this one, said by a yeshivah *bochur*. “*Lichora* I heard that the *Rebe* wanted everybody should be a *shaliach* [emissary].”

If a female used words like these, she would likely appear too learned, or even masculine. One female teacher said there are some women who do use this type of loanword, and “you say she speaks like a *bochur*.” Another female teacher, who grew up in a yeshivah community where her father is the head rabbi, told me that her use of “learning words” has even been a source of ridicule. “My brothers make fun of me that I use all these words—*mamish*, *takeh* and all of that.” (Of course, this is not the case in some modern Orthodox circles. At Drisha, the modern Orthodox women’s institute mentioned above, women are expected to—and do—use learning words, /t/ release, and other features of Yeshivish. Future research might explore how women at Drisha and similar institutions use language to construct their identity as learned women and how they are perceived by men and less learned women. Similarly, it would be interesting to compare the language use of non-modern Orthodox men with different levels of learning. I would expect that the less learned men would display lower rates of /t/ release and loanword use.)

Although women are expected not to use many loanwords associated with learning, they are expected to use Hebrew words for biblical characters and certain everyday referents. One rabbi, a teacher at the school, told me that his students “should not ever come to a *Pesach seyder* [Passover ceremonial meal] and talk about Moses taking the Jews out of Egypt. It should not be heard. It should be ‘*Moyshe* [Moses] took them out of *Mitsrayim* [Egypt].’”

Sol Steinmetz found a similar statement by an Orthodox educator, quoted from the Orthodox press: “Although students should know how to refer to these items in English, the norm should be *Motzaei Shabbos*—not Saturday night; *daven*—not pray; *bentsch*—not recite Grace After Meals; *Yom Tov*—not holiday.”<sup>28</sup> The notion that Hebrew and Yiddish words are important in talking about biblical characters and certain everyday concepts applies to both males and females (depending, of course, on audience). And everyone is expected not to use English words associated with Christianity, such as “angel” and “Christmas”; *malach* and X-mas (or the humorous *kratsmach*, Yiddish for “scratch me”) are preferred. But the expectation that Orthodox Jews should use Hebrew and Aramaic words associated with learning applies only to men.

Clearly, community members are aware of the gender difference in loanword use, and they feel that males should use more loans than fe-

males. Is there a similar ideology about /t/ release? Of course, people do not talk about this feature overtly—one would not hear “Stop aspirating your word-final /t/s. You sound like a *bochur!*” However, there is a sense that boys speak more precisely than girls. I explained to one mother what I found about /t/ release. She said it does not surprise her that teenage girls “drop their /t/s,” as they are more “sloppy” with their speech, using “like” all the time. One meaning of /t/ glottalization, at least to this woman, is sloppiness. And the converse, /t/ release, would mean precision. Through a sociolinguistic practice that is perceived as sloppiness, the girls are distinguishing themselves from their learned brothers and constructing themselves as young women.

[165]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*

●  
Sarah Bunin  
Benor

### **Recursivity: Differences According to Gender and Religiosity**

The expected language differences between men and women should be viewed as part of the overall understanding of language in the community. This picture is illuminated by Judith Irvine and Susan Gal’s model of recursivity in language ideology. They apply the notion of fractal recursivity to community expectations of language difference, and they define recursivity as “the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level.”<sup>29</sup> In the case of this community, the expected difference between Orthodox Jews and non-Orthodox or non-Jews is projected onto gender categories. Orthodox Jews are expected to be more learned and use more learned language than outsiders. And Orthodox males are expected to be more learned and use more learned language than Orthodox females.

The same recursivity applies in other domains, such as clothing. Although both men and women in this community are expected to dress according to the laws and customs of *tsnies*, Hasidic men are expected to wear the traditional garb of Eastern Europe, including black hats and long black coats. Women’s dress, though quite distinct from that of non-Orthodox and non-Jews, is more influenced by contemporary fashion.<sup>30</sup>

The recursive relationship between religious differentiation and gender is intriguing; it can be interpreted to mean that males are expected to be, in a sense, “more Orthodox” than females. This is not to suggest that women are not pious or do not observe the laws as strictly as men; rather, in this Orthodox community males are, and are expected to be, more distinct from outsiders than females are.

## Conclusion

[166]

In this article, I have presented evidence for a masculine learned style. Boys use loanwords more frequently than girls, even in similar-topic conversations, and they are more likely to use words associated with textual learning. Boys also release word-final /t/ more frequently than girls, especially in situations of authority. Girls are more likely to use an English word, even if they are familiar with its loanword equivalent, and they are less likely than boys to use Yiddish pronunciation. Further evidence of gender difference in language include the Judaization of Michael Jordan's name and one girl's hedges surrounding loanwords.

The gender distributions of these linguistic features show how Level 1 (linguistic resources) in Ochs's model is connected to Level 3 (gender identities). The qualitative data show how the features are used in a way that is considered more learned, connecting Level 1 to Level 2 (social categories and activities). In explaining the gender differences in language, I have described community ideologies that men are and should be more learned than women, connecting Level 2 to Level 3, as well as ideologies that males do and should speak in a more learned way than females, thus connecting all three levels of Ochs's model.

R. W. Connell's book on masculinities finds that technical reason and expertise are among the many ways that men construct masculinity.<sup>31</sup> This is certainly the case in the Orthodox community—in the realm of religious studies. In general American society, however, academic achievement is often seen as the domain of less masculine males. In fact, Mary Bucholtz defines "nerds," a category commonly associated with success in academics, as "those who are socially stigmatized for failing to measure up to conventional standards of American masculinity."<sup>32</sup>

In the United States, young men commonly perform their masculinity through dating and its surrounding discourses, as well as interest in professional sports. Because of community restrictions, (non-modern) Orthodox adolescent males do not have much access to either of these activities. Televisions are not allowed in most homes, and sexual relations are prohibited before marriage. Therefore, these forms of social capital are not as available in this Orthodox community, and it seems that learnedness and Torah knowledge may substitute for them to some extent.<sup>33</sup> When I asked a group of 7th- and 8th-grade boys what they argue about, their first response was "who's smart and [who's] not," not which baseball team will win the World Series. While scholastic achievement is often stigmatized in general American society, it is a main constituent of masculinity among Orthodox Jews, in the religious realm. As Orthodox boys and girls are socialized into the Chabad com-

munity, they strive for the gendered ideals of the *talmid chacham*, the learned man—who releases his /t/s and uses many loanwords—and the *tsedeykes*, the righteous woman.

[167]

*Language  
Among Orthodox  
Jews*



Sarah Bunin  
Benor

## Notes

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Transliterations of Hebrew throughout the article reflect the conventions generally followed in the Orthodox community.

1 I use the word “ideology” here in a neutral, non-pejorative sense (see details in the subsection “Ideologies of Difference,” below).

2 See Sarah Benor, “Loan Words in the English of Modern Orthodox Jews: Hebrew or Yiddish?” in *Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistic Society’s 25th Annual Meeting, 1999*, ed. Steve Chang et al. (Berkeley, 2000), 287–98, where I show how most Hebrew and Aramaic loanwords in Jewish English are influenced by Yiddish.

3 Tamar El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and Their World* (Boulder, Colo., 1994); Samuel Heilman, *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago, 1983); Samuel Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York, 1992); William Helmreich, *The World of*

*the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (Hoboken, N.J., 2000).

4 Bryna Bogoch, “Gender, Literacy, and Religiosity: Dimensions of Yiddish Education in Israeli Government-Supported Schools,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 138 (1999): 123–60; Lewis Glinert, “We Never Changed Our Language: Attitudes to Yiddish Acquisition Among Hasidic Educators in Britain,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 138 (1999): 31–52; Ayala Fader, “Learning Difference: Moral Education in a Hasidic Community in Boro Park, Brooklyn” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2000).

5 Michael Clyne, Edina Eisikovits, and Laura Tollfree, “Ethnic Varieties of Australian English,” in *English in Australia*, ed. David

- Blair and Peter Collins (Amsterdam, 2001), 223–38.
- 6 The term “yeshivah” generally refers to an all-male institution of text study, but girls sometimes refer to their high schools and seminaries as yeshivahs as well.
- 7 Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*.
- 8 Sarah Bunin Benor, “Second Style Acquisition: The Linguistic Socialization of Newly Orthodox Jews” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2004).
- 9 See Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago, 1973), and Samuel Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago, 1989).
- 10 Sara Isadora Mancuso, “A Little Unorthodox: A Movement Leans Slightly to the Left When It Comes to Women,” *Jewish Exponent*, May 8, 2003.
- 11 See, e.g., El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, and Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*.
- 12 See Samuel Heilman, “Sounds of Modern Orthodoxy: The Language of Talmud Study,” in *Never Say Die*, ed. Joshua Fishman (The Hague, 1981), and Heilman, *People of the Book*.
- 13 Elinor Ochs, “Indexing Gender,” in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, ed. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge, 1992), 335–58.
- 14 *Jewish Observer* (Oct. 2000): 48. The *Jewish Observer* is published monthly in New York by Agudath Israel of America and distributed around the English-speaking Orthodox world, especially in the United States, Israel, and Europe. The magazine includes articles on many aspects of Orthodox life, including family, health, holidays, Israel, *hashkafa* (translated as “Torah philosophy”), and retrospectives of recently deceased rabbis, both Hasidic and Litvish. It is filled with advertisements for charities, books, wedding bands, flights to Israel, schools, and *shadchones* (matchmaking) services.
- 15 I was present during most of these conversations, and some of the speakers—boys and girls alike—may have tempered their use of loanwords for my benefit, assuming that since I am a non-Orthodox Jew I have less knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish. In one conversation it seemed that the Yeshivah girls were making an effort not to use loanwords that they would have used in their private conversations. It is likely that I would have obtained a different sample of men’s and women’s speech if I had drawn my corpus from speakers’ self-recordings of their everyday interactions. However, my method of using group interviews allowed me to obtain speech on similar topics for purposes of comparison.
- 16 For linguistic details, see Sarah Bunin Benor, “The Learned /t/: Phonological Variation in Orthodox Jewish English,” in *Penn Working Papers in Linguistics: Selected Papers from NNAV 2000*, ed. Daniel Ezra Johnson and Tara Sanchez (Philadelphia, 2001), 1–16.
- 17 Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, Robert Podesva, and Sarah Roberts,

- "Sharing Resources and Indexing Meaning in the Production of Gay Styles," in *Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*, ed. Campbell-Kibler et al. (Stanford, 2001); Mary Bucholtz, "Geek the Girl: Language, Femininity, and Female Nerds," in *Gender and Belief Systems*, ed. J. Ahlers et al. (Berkeley, 1996), 119–31.
- 18 See Fader, "Learning Difference," chap. 4.
- 19 Ibid., chap. 3.
- 20 Bogoch, "Gender, Literacy, and Religiosity."
- 21 Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley, 1997).
- 22 John Rickford, *African American Vernacular English* (Oxford, 1996), 106–7.
- 23 See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, 1991), chap. 1.
- 24 Ibid., 1.
- 25 For various treatments of language ideology, see Bambi Schieffelin, Kathryn Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Oxford, 1998).
- 26 Bambi Schieffelin and Rachelle Charlier Doucet, "The 'Real' Haitian Creole: Ideology, Metalinguistics, and Orthographic Choice," in Schieffelin et al., *Language Ideologies*, 286.
- 27 Chaim Weiser, *Frumspeak: The First Dictionary of Yeshivish* (Northvale, N.J., 1995).
- 28 Sol Steinmetz, *Yiddish and English: A Century of Yiddish in America* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1987), 84.
- 29 Judith Irvine and Susan Gal,

"Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*, ed. Paul Kroskrity (Santa Fe, N.M., 2000), 38.

30 For more on gender, clothing, and language among Hasidic Jews, see Fader, "Learning Difference."

31 R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, 1995).

32 Bucholtz, "Geek the Girl," 119.

33 According to Michael C. Miller, "Stop Pretending Nothing's Wrong," *Newsweek*, June 16, 2003, women are twice as likely as men to report depression. As a side note, Miller mentions that, in some Orthodox Jewish communities (and some Amish communities), men and women report depression at about equal rates. He believes that men and women in general actually have similar rates of depression but that our society's notions of masculinity and toughness prevent many men from seeking help. Miller attributes the higher rates of depression among Orthodox and Amish men to the fact that alcohol, drugs, and violence are more stigmatized in these traditional communities and cannot serve as the emotional outlet that they do for American men in general. That difference may play a role (although alcoholism is certainly not absent from Orthodox communities), but I would argue that the higher rates of reported depression stem more from different perceptions of masculinity. If Or-

[169]

*Language Among Orthodox Jews*



Sarah Bunin Benor

[170]

Jewish  
Social  
Studies

thodox men construct their masculinity partly through learnedness and do not have to convey a stance of toughness as

much as non-Orthodox men, perhaps they are more likely to seek help for emotional disorders such as depression.