A Social History of Women in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish Community, 1865-1972

Jennifer Creese

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History at the University of Queensland.

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given. I also declare that I am familiar with the rules of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics and the University relating to the submission of this thesis.

Jennifer Creese

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Introduction

A mother watches from the gallery as her son read out a Torah passage at the bimah below. A bride smiles radiantly beneath an ornate huppah as she sees her groom approach. Two women laugh and joke as they fry up batches of latkes for their neighbourhood Hannukah party. A lady Council president meets with her local member of parliament to hand over a ceremonial fundraising cheque.

All these activities formed part of the everyday experience for Modern Orthodox Jewish women in Brisbane, from the earliest days of the community’s history to the present day. And all represent women living within the rules of Halakhah, the scriptural guidelines by which Modern Orthodox Jews live their lives. Across many different facets of life, Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women have performed a wide variety of roles crucial to the operation of their congregations and community, and have done so with full acceptance of halakhic limitations on their activities.

My thesis investigates the roles and experiences of women in Modern Orthodox Jewish communal life in Brisbane, the capital city of the Australian state of Queensland. Using Modern Orthodox religious literature and research from the field of congregational studies, I establish a framework of the nature of typical activities and behaviours for Modern Orthodox Jewish women within their faith communities. This framework is based on the four branches of Jewish communal activity outlined in the 2010 book Sacred Strategies: transforming synagogues from functional to visionary by Isa Aron, Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman and Ari Y. Kelman.¹ For each branch, I explore the activities of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women and the contributions they made to their congregations and the wider community, and examine how their behaviour fits within halakhic guidelines for women’s conduct.

¹ Isa Aron et al., Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010).
There is a small but thriving field of scholarship on Australian Judaism, and on Brisbane’s Jewish history specifically. The Australian Jewish Historical Society, under the direction of Professor Suzanne Rutland, publishes a journal and supports a strong pool of historical researchers. Rutland herself is one of the foremost scholars on Australian Judaism, particularly her book *Edge of the diaspora: two centuries of Jewish settlement in Australia*. Scholarship on Australian Judaism tends to focus on the larger southern populations of Sydney and Melbourne, but local historians have published a few small histories of the Brisbane congregations. Morris Ochert’s series of articles on the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, and Sol Stedman’s early work on the South Brisbane Jewish community, are both key works on Brisbane’s Jewish history. However, within the scope of my work, there exists a significant gap in research. Works on Australian Judaism discuss women, but give little attention to Brisbane. Works on Brisbane’s Jewish community provide the detailed coverage of Brisbane’s Jewish history that more general works lack, but women are largely overlooked. As historian Paula Hyman says of Jewish history generally, “the Jewish community was male in its self-presentation and, in the eyes of the historians, so was modern Jewish identity.” With the focus of existing research on male and interstate communal history, my work fills an important gap in the story of the Australian Jewish experience, and employs a wide variety sources beyond traditional published histories. I make use of oral histories to provide much of the material to illustrate the experience of Modern Orthodox Jewish women in Brisbane. Judaism has a rich oral culture and religious imperative to curate and share memory. Likewise, oral history plays a significant role in women’s history, encouraging uniquely female approaches to telling history. I use oral histories taken from interviews I conducted personally with several older women of the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community. I also use

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5 Rebecca Aizen, "Like Gefilte Fish out of Water: Constructing Jewish Femininity in Australia" (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2005), 156-159, provides a good overview of scholarship on both Jewish and women's oral history.
a series of oral history interviews taken by local historian Jason Steinberg in the 1990s of older Brisbane Jewish women.\textsuperscript{6} Thirdly, I use local Jewish and mainstream newspaper press and archival material in my research, to create a detailed picture of Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s communal lives.

In writing this thesis, I have two goals. Firstly, I aim to bring to light the untold stories and experiences of women in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, to demonstrate that within the halakhic guidelines at the foundation of their faith, women have made significant contributions to the history of the Jewish life in Brisbane. Secondly, I hope to use this record of women’s past activity in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community to provide guidance and inspiration to the current generation of local Jewish women, as “to know the past of one’s communal life is a great help in building the future.”\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6} Jason Steinberg, \textit{Remembering the Past}, (Brisbane: Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies, 2004), DVD.  
\textsuperscript{7} Solomon Stedman, "From Russia to Brisbane 1913", \textit{Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal} 5, no. 1 (1959): 20.
Background

It is important, before commencing an exploration of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, to provide some background on both the Modern Orthodox movement and on the Brisbane community. Many of the traditions, practices and values of Modern Orthodox communities can be better understood with some knowledge of the history behind the movement and its key characteristics. Likewise, many of the singularities of Brisbane’s Jewish community can be better understood with some knowledge of the history behind the community’s establishment and divisions.

Modern Orthodox Jewish practice was established in Europe in the mid-19th century during the height of the Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah movement. Modern Orthodoxy differs both from traditional, strict Sectarian Orthodox Judaism and from more liberal Conservative and Reform Judaism which also grew out of Haskalah. Sectarian Orthodoxy calls for withdrawal from the secular world and a strict Torah-based lifestyle, whereas Modern Orthodoxy allows for accommodation of the surrounding national culture, and for the synthesis of Torah and secular culture. Modern Orthodox Jews live a bicultural existence; living, working and socialising outside the faith community, but partaking in a rich program of Jewish religious activities and values. Unlike Reform and Conservative Judaism, where Jewish religious practices are reinterpreted by modern social practices and values, Modern Orthodox Judaism’s principles and practices are derived literally from the Torah and Talmud, and are considered binding divine law, or Halakhah. These halakhic guidelines dictate the way a Modern Orthodox Jew should live and act, both at home and communally. Of particular importance are the elements of Halakhah which govern the lives of

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8 Sectarian orthodoxy is commonly referred to as “ultra-orthodox” Judaism, or by the name of specific sects, for example Hasidism or Lubavitcher.
women; Judaism is a matrilineal religion, and therefore the religiosity of Jewish women is strictly governed and maintained.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish communal life consists of congregants and families from two synagogues. The first, Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, was established in 1865 by a handful of British and German families who moved to the colony from Sydney together. They founded their congregation in Brisbane’s central business district, and as the city grew, attracted many British and Western European Jewish families, professionals and business-owners.10 The second, South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, was established in 1914 by a group of Russian Jewish refugees, recently arrived in the city fleeing from Russian repression. They initially worshipped with the rest of the community at Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, but chose to form a breakaway group as they faced language difficulties and found the Anglicised practices very different from their own experiences in Eastern Europe. They founded their congregation in Deshon Street, South Brisbane, where most of the original congregants had homes, and as the city grew their shul attracted many Russian, Manchurian and other Eastern European Jewish families, tradesmen and workers.11 The two congregations thus had, at least initially, significant variances in their populations; different backgrounds, economic circumstances, languages, family situations and forms of religious expression. These differences are often apparent in their experiences of various facets of communal life, and I have attempted to highlight and explain them where they arise. I examine the period from the establishment of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation in 1865, until the establishment of the first Liberal Jewish Congregation, Brisbane Liberal Jewish Congregation, in 1972.12 Whilst the Jewish community continued to participate in many cultural activities together, the establishment of a Liberal congregation in the city introduced new religious tensions in the city which have somewhat

11 Stedman, "From Russia to Brisbane", 27.
changed the nature of the community. The period between 1865 and 1972 represents a stage where the Brisbane Jewish community was centred on only Modern Orthodox congregational structures, and this makes it easier to assess the community's practices against a halakhic model.

With this history of Modern Orthodoxy and of Brisbane’s Jewish congregational arrangements established, I will examine the four areas of congregational activity set out in Aron et al within the specific context of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, and explore the specific activities of the community’s women to consider their both their adherence to halakhic guidelines and their contribution to the life of the community.
Women’s experiences in worship, study and spiritual growth in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community

Picture a young family making their way down Margaret Street on a Saturday morning; a father, mother, teenaged boy and girl and a younger son. The family is dressed in their best; frocks, hats and gloves for the mother and daughter, suits and kippot for the father and boys. The group make their way through the front entrance of the Brisbane Synagogue, and pause at the foot of the stairs to the women’s gallery. With a quick kiss on the cheek for her husband, the mother guides her daughter and youngest son up the steps to the gallery above, while the father and older son take their assigned seats below in front of the bimah. At the top of the stairs, the mother kisses her fingers and lays them on the mezuzah mounted on the wall, for which her Women’s Guild has just helped to pay. Upstairs, the mother greets several other women and chats briefly before finding her seat. A visitor arrives in the women’s gallery, and the mother rises to welcome her, introduces her to a few other women, and helps her find somewhere to sit. The service begins, and the women upstairs watch the men at prayer, following along with the liturgy and mouthing the prayers, occasionally quieting a small child or shushing a group of gossiping teenagers. The mother sometimes whispers to her daughter, pointing out parts of the service she will need to study in preparation for her upcoming bat mitzvah. When the service is over, the women upstairs socialise briefly before descending the stairs again to meet up with their men.

This vignette describes an everyday Sabbath worship on any given Saturday morning at one of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox synagogues, and could be any time from 1865 to 1972. Whilst the fashions, the sermons and the topics of conversation would be different year-to-year, the role of the woman – attending Synagogue with the family, sitting in the gallery, greeting friends and visitors, and encouraging religious study – stays constant according to Halakhah. Women contributed greatly to the worship activities of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish communal history, just as they did
its family, social, cultural, charitable and political activities. I examine the theoretical background to Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s approach to worship and spiritual growth. I compare this theory to Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s experiences, to demonstrate how the women participated in worship and religious study within halakhic structures to contribute to their community.

Typical Jewish faith communities around the world participate in a variety of spiritual activities which Isa Aron and his co-authors label tefilla. They join together in worship at regular Sabbath services and at designated holy days and celebrations. Communities care for, and take pride in, the liturgical paraphernalia they use for worship, and it is considered an honour for an individual to dedicate items to the Synagogue. Holders of specific religious roles support the rabbi in holding worship services, performing rites of passage and tending to the community’s needs. Brisbane’s two Synagogues, for example, have hazzanim, bachorim and other office bearers. Worshipping through music is vital to connect worshipers on an emotional level to religious ideas and identities, as well as cultural traditions.

Communities perform activities concerning the spiritual growth of adult congregants through torah study and education. Adult Jewish education is very important to the activities of the kehilla, and it is one of the few areas organised and directed by rabbis themselves, rather than delegated to lay

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volunteers. Many communities provide libraries, conduct adult education programs, and teach the practical application of religious learning in secular life.

The traditional female role in tefilla activities is complex and seemingly contradictory. Modern Orthodox Jews have always praised religiosity in women; among the ideal Jewish woman’s qualities “the Jewess and religiosity should be interchangeable terms... [Religion] is her inheritance and it should be her pride.” Modern Orthodox women cannot train as rabbis or hold liturgical offices. Women are expected to attend worship services and enforce Synagogue attendance for their children and husband. If an individual breaks the mitzvah of keeping the Sabbath, the woman of the household bears the shame and judgement of the community. Women in Modern Orthodox Synagogues are seated separately from the men, either upstairs on a balcony or behind a mehitza and should remain silent so as not to distract the men from worship. While attendance is required, active participation in ritual is not facilitated or supported. Women do not count in the calculation of a minyan for worship, so play no role in facilitating the congregation’s devotions. Women are not invited to read the Torah as part of the service, deliver prayers within the liturgy, sing or play in liturgical music, or to actively participate in some holy-day celebrations. Instead, Synagogue time is used for personal and family prayer, and while women are still instructed in the Torah to pray daily,

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17 Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 82. Conversely, children’s religious education is delegated to volunteers from within the community, and only nominally supervised and occasionally visited by the rabbis.


19 David Philipson, "The Ideal Jewess", American Jewess 4, no. 6 (1897): 257.


22 Cantor, Jewish Women/Jewish Men, 103; Haut, "Women’s Prayer Groups and the Orthodox Synagogue", 137-138.
women’s prayer should be private rather than public. Women and women’s groups are allowed and encouraged to purchase, sponsor and care for holy liturgical objects within the Synagogue, and organise decorations for the Synagogue.

In their religious studies, women have traditionally been excluded from any comprehensive and scholarly Torah study, on the basis of the Talmudic declaration that “whoever teaches his daughter Torah teaches her tiflut [impropriety].” However, women and adolescent girls are allowed to undertake basic Torah studies in preparation for the coming-of-age ritual of the bat mitzvah. Study for girls emphasises the home-based laws, particularly dietary laws and mandatory daily tasks, required to run a kosher home, pass traditions on to their children and support their husband’s religious practices.

How did Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women measure up to these ideals? Out of necessity, Australian Jewish communities have historically had many different approaches and priorities to traditional Anglo-Jewish and European Jewish models of Modern Orthodox practice. The period from the first establishment of Jewish communal life in Australia to the Second World War was characterised by an emphasis on social integration into British, then Australian, mainstream culture rather than religious observance. Judaism in Brisbane, as in the rest of the country, suffered from relatively small and static populations in comparison with European communities. The city was also relatively isolated by the vast distance it stood from large southern cities and from religious leadership in Britain and Europe. A Melbourne rabbi wrote back to the British Chief Rabbi in 1845

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24 Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman", 212.


that for Australian Jews “so far distant as we, Reverend Sir, are from your guidance... you cannot expect we are very orthodox in all matters relating to our faith.”27 This rang true for Brisbane, especially at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, many years after the original statement. Numerous aspects of Modern Orthodox Jewish religion and culture in Brisbane vary from traditional halakhic models, but the women of the community endeavoured to fill the roles required of them at worship, and leave a positive impact on their community in their faith development.

Jewish women in most Western countries have always been “the most enthusiastic of shul goers”28 in the family, despite the halakhic restrictions on their participation in worship rituals. “Women were not the decision-makers or spiritual leaders but they were the ones who filled the pews and classrooms.”29 This was true in Brisbane’s two Modern Orthodox Synagogues; while often there were barely enough men to form a minyan, the women’s section was always lively and populated.30 “It was always crowded – you couldn’t get a seat up the back.”31 Even when families did not go to Synagogue regularly, women were keen to attend and bring their children on festival days, especially Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur.32 Brisbane’s women took seriously their responsibility for guiding husbands and children to worship. Tova Blumberg recalls that her mother always arranged for her to attend Synagogue with her father, even forgoing attendance herself to facilitate this at times.33 Carolyn Goldsmith recalls attending in the 1970s to bring her son along for services in preparation for his bar mitzvah.34 Many mothers were not above a little bribery to get children along; Pamela Huppert recalls the special treat of visits to the Brisbane Botanic Gardens Zoo as an incentive her

27 Quoted in Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 49.
28 Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman”, 211. *Shul* is the Yiddish term for a synagogue.
31 Conversation P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
33 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
34 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013.
mother promised to get her to attend Yom Kippur services. Attending Synagogue in Brisbane was, for many people, a social event and not just a religious duty. Women took care to ensure that the whole family looked their best. Women would wear hats and gloves: “it was very proper.” Mothers took care to dress their children formally; Tova Blumberg recalls that as a little girl “when I got a new dress, I didn’t wear it anywhere else until I had worn it to Synagogue.” Carolyn Goldsmith also remembers her mother sewing special new dresses for Carolyn and her younger sister to wear every year to Yom Kippur services at South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.

The social element of worship attendance could get somewhat out of hand, and religious authorities reprimanded disturbances harshly. David Trigger recalls the following from his attendance at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in the 1970s: “The prayers are often nearly drowned out by the murmuring of voices that continually reverbrates [sic] from wall to wall and floor to ceiling, and which at times assumes such proportions among the women sitting upstairs that energetic banging and annoyed looks emanate from the bimah.” Women were not unaware of the disruptive nature of their behaviour; Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky recalled sitting in the women’s gallery at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Synagogue as young girls, throwing balled-up paper off the balcony onto the hats of the men below. Pamela Hupertremembers that “as girls we used to sit up the back on the left hand side and ogle all the boys underneath.” She also recalls a particular rabbi who was particularly strict with young mothers when their children were noisy in Synagogue. Evidently from these accounts, while the halakhic requirement for women to remain silent and separate in Brisbane was physically imposed by the building of a gallery or mehitza, and was

35 Conversation P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
36 Ibid.
37 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
38 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013.
40 Interview with Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
41 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
expected by the rabbi and worshipping men, in practice it was not strictly followed by the women of the community, coming in second to community social unity.

On special occasions, women were not only encouraged to participate in ritual, but could even organise and conduct it. During the Second World War, women’s societies of multiple faiths across Brisbane conducted special prayer services for the women in their congregations. The National Council of Jewish Women in Brisbane ran the service for Brisbane’s Jewish women on the Friday evening of 26 July, 1940 – proud to be the first congregation in the city to do so. The National Council of Jewish Women ran an annual “Council Shabbat” at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation for many years, where the regular Friday evening service would be replaced by one organised and conducted by the women. Similar services were attempted by Council branches in other states but were not always supported by their religious authorities. Sydney’s rabbis opposed the Council Shabbat and the Great Synagogue refused to run them for many years. Brisbane’s women were lucky to have a supportive rabbi and an active rebetzin at the time when the services were first proposed, Rev. and Mrs Nathan Levine (1925-1936). By the time the Levines had moved on from Brisbane these services had become a regular part of the annual worship calendar.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox women were noted for being welcoming at their services, especially to visitors and newcomers. A non-Jewish female visitor to Brisbane Hebrew Congregation during the Yom Kippur holy week in 1887 was so impressed at the welcome she received from the other women in the gallery that she commented “the admonition to Israel to be good to strangers ‘for that thou wast a stranger in the land of Egypt’ is certainly not forgotten here.” When Brisbane became the focus of American military activities in the Pacific during the Second World War, many American

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43 Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 158. The Council Sabbath was still running as recently as the 1970s – see “NCIW Report”, Shalom, March 1970, 6.
44 “At the Synagogue”, Brisbane Courier, 26 September 1887, 5
Jewish servicemen and women attended services at the city’s two Synagogues, especially on Jewish festivals when they were given leave. At times when the influx of visitors on major holidays filled the men’s stalls downstairs at the Margaret Street Synagogue over capacity, the assembled local women arranged for the men to sit on the stairs up to the gallery for the service. They also extended their caring duty to the elderly and infirm within their own community; as teenagers Pamela Huppert and her girlfriends used to walk the elderly Rev. Fabian home to New Farm from the Margaret Street Synagogue every Sabbath after services.

Traditionally, services at Modern Orthodox Synagogues are conducted in formal Hebrew; Judaism in the diaspora tends to view Hebrew as a men’s language, and Yiddish or other vernacular languages as women’s. However, Brisbane’s two Modern Orthodox Synagogues have altered some of their methods of conducting worship at various times during their histories. From the early years, services at Brisbane Hebrew Congregation were conducted in English. South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation services were conducted in a mixture of Yiddish and Russian, and were quite different and less formal than the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation’s English services. In 1885, the community was criticised by interstate Jewish authorities for refusing to change the liturgy to Hebrew. The Brisbane Hebrew Community rabbi of the time, Rev. Phillips, wrote an open letter in the Australian Jewish press to defend their practice. One of the core reasons given for conducting an English service was to facilitate the understanding and engagement of women in the worship process, as girls and women did not then study Hebrew. “Our mothers, sisters, wives and daughters are equally responsible in the eyes of God as ourselves”, Phillips wrote, and “these [women] should be enabled to join with the male portion of the congregation in a public and united service.” This statement

45 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
46 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013
48 Stedman, "From Russia to Brisbane", 27; “Jewish Synagogue in Deshon Street”, Brisbane Courier, 28 March 1919, 10.
recognizing women not only as a part of the congregation’s worship process, but indicating their equal role in a united service, is striking and exceptional in Jewish religious practice of that time.

Although women could not conduct the service, read Torah passages or act as hazzanim, at certain times in the history of both congregations women played a role in the service by providing music. On special occasions and holidays, choirs provided liturgical music from the women’s section for the service.⁵⁰ A description of a service from 1887 reported that the Margaret Street Synagogue possessed “a fine American organ in the gallery, and the organist is a woman.”⁵¹ Installing the organ in the women’s gallery upstairs seems a clear indication of the community’s efforts to facilitate women’s contributions to the service, whilst staying within the boundaries of Halakhah. When the old organ fell into disrepair, the Women’s Guild at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation raised the money to install a brand-new electric organ in the gallery in 1971, and dedicated it in memory of Mrs Pauline Max, who had been renowned in the community for giving exquisite vocal performances at the community’s weddings and festivals.⁵²

Women in Brisbane often dedicated ritual items to the Synagogues for use in services. As part of Jewish tradition, women receive naches from facilitating the experiences of others, particularly religious experiences. By donating or dedicating liturgical items to the community, women could receive naches when the items were used by men and male religious officers in the service, though they would not be able to use these in services themselves. They could also donate particularly expensive and treasured items which the community would value and cherish for years to come. Then their own sons or grandsons would use in services, and the women would receive naches fun kinder which honour the women expressly in their maternal roles.⁵³ Women’s groups usually took on

⁵¹ “At the Synagogue”, Brisbane Courier, 26 September 1887, 5
⁵³ Trigger, ”Jewish Identity in Brisbane,” 175.
several projects every year to fundraise or make specific ritual items for their Synagogues. The Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Women’s Guild took responsibility for various repairs and additions to the Synagogue vestments and equipment each year.\textsuperscript{54} Individual women also became benefactors of ritual items for their congregation. Miss H.E Moses presented the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation with its first \textit{Sepher Torah} in 1871.\textsuperscript{55} Mrs G. Benjamin made and dedicated an embroidered curtain to be drawn in front of the \textit{Torah} ark; she initially donated this to the Toowoomba Synagogue, but brought it back for the opening of the new Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Margaret Street in 1886.\textsuperscript{56} Mrs J. Smith, who attended Brisbane Hebrew Congregation with her family, became known as the “Fairy Godmother” of the newly-established Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation when she dedicated a set of \textit{Torah} scrolls to the new Synagogue in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{57} While they are not allowed to perform public ritual mourning or remembrance for their parents or husbands, women often honoured the memory of their loved ones through donating to their Synagogue or community on their behalf. For example, in 1923 Mrs M. E. Myers paid to have the bells of the \textit{Sepher Torah} at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Synagogue repaired and resilvered as a memorial to her late parents.\textsuperscript{58} The National Council of Jewish Women later donated £10 to the maintenance of the Margaret Street Synagogue facilities in Mrs Myer’s memory after her death in 1937.\textsuperscript{59}

From the mid-19th-century, Jewish authorities across the British Empire called for Jewish women to receive more religious education and study in adulthood, largely to combat the efforts of Christian conversionists.\textsuperscript{60} One of the major ways this was attempted was by the widespread adoption of the \textit{bat mitzvah} service for girls at this time, where young women in their early teens mark their coming-

\textsuperscript{54} For example, “Jewish Women’s Guild Successful Year”, \textit{Courier Mail}, 11 December 1935, 21.
\textsuperscript{55} Ochert, “History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation: Part One”, 459.
\textsuperscript{56} “At the Synagogue”, \textit{Queensland Figaro and Punch}, 24 July 1886, 33.
\textsuperscript{58} “Jewish Ladies’ Guild”, \textit{Brisbane Courier}, 5 December 1923, 18.
\textsuperscript{59} “Council of Jewish Women”, \textit{Courier Mail}, 5 May 1937, 27.
of-age to become an adult within the community. While it does not involve the strict study of Torah and Talmud that young men’s preparation for bar mitzvot entails, girls still get the opportunity to learn the sorts of religious knowledge suited to women in their roles as wives and home-makers, modelled on the women of the Bible. In Brisbane, the Modern Orthodox congregations were in theory very supportive of the bat mitzvah concept, as they “showed that the female sex does not suffer in religious knowledge when compared to their male counterparts.”61 Board meeting reports from both South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation and Brisbane Hebrew Congregation show that there was discussion and approval for bat mitzvot from the earliest days of the community, but the first recorded bat mitzvah in Brisbane was only conducted at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation’s Synagogue in 1935. Beginning the practice in this period is likely part of a larger Australian trend in the late 1920s and early 1930s in extending Synagogue facilities and programs to increase religious awareness and overcome the problem of growing religious apathy in Anglo-Jewish congregations.62

The practice went into hiatus in Brisbane during the Second World War as children were sent to the country for fear of Japanese bombing, and did not resume until 1948.63 In Brisbane, girls undertook their bat mitzvah as part of a large group of girls at a ceremony held once a year; boys’ bar mitzvot, on the other hand, were celebrated independently on or around the thirteenth birthday of each individual young man. Pamela Huppert remembers making her bat mitzvah when she was fourteen, in a group of eight other girls of similar ages. “We used to go up to Rabbi Fabian’s house and have lessons.”64 On reflection, she suspects their training was probably far less advanced than the boys’ was, as they had a big group class where the boys received individual training. The young women of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation appear to have been more involved in the bat mitzvah movement than the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation girls. Carolyn Goldsmith recalls many

62 Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 153.
64 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
friends whose families went to the Margaret Street Synagogue making bat mitzvah, but she herself
and most of her Deshon Street Jewish friends did not. This is probably due to the ritual’s lesser
popularity in the Eastern European traditions, which most of the South Brisbane Hebrew
Congregation’s families of Russian Jewish background would have followed. Many Brisbane girls
opted to participate in the secular ritual of the debut in their late teenage years instead of, or as well
as, bat mitzvot. Pamela Huppert remembers undertaking both her bat mitzvah and debut with
several friends at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.65 Brisbane’s Jewish community usually held
their debutante balls in prominent Brisbane function locations, such as Lennon’s Hotel or the
Trocadero Ballroom.66 The community’s women’s groups played a significant role in organising,
sponsoring and running balls for the community’s young women, publicly declaring their support for
the promotion of traditional feminine values.67

Traditionally Jewish women shared religious education amongst themselves, translating Talmudic
and biblical texts and prayers, writing and recommending novels, and writing religious
commentaries and essays for women.68 When Dr Fanny Reading, the founder of the National Council
of Jewish Women (NCJW), visited the Council’s Brisbane group in 1929, she called for the members
to form women’s lecture and study circles, and move beyond purely fundraising, to better develop
the city’s young Jewish women into ambassadors for the community and the faith.69 Over
subsequent years, Brisbane’s Jewish women’s organisations answered Dr Reading’s call with
enthusiasm. Brisbane’s Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) groups ran annual Bible
Study conferences for the women of the Jewish community, usually with a theme or topic of
particular women’s interest. The 1969 Bible Study, for example, was on “Women in the Bible”, and

65 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
66 Interview with Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
67 “Five debutantes for Jewish ball”, Courier Mail, 26 July 1939, 35.
69 “Council of Jewish Women, Brisbane Courier, 20 April 1929, 29.
was led for the attending women by the rebbetzin at the time, Mrs H. Kustanowicz. There was enthusiasm amongst the women to present at these events, and lectures were always taken seriously and thoroughly researched by the presenting women. The women’s groups were also active in establishing study programs for young ladies which not only taught domestic skills but appropriate Jewish female models of behaviour and tradition, including cooking, festival practices, and family purity. With the rise of Nazism in Germany, large groups of European refugees began arriving in Brisbane in the 1930’s, many of whom were Jewish by descent but did not practice the religion or customs. The Brisbane Hebrew Congregation Women’s Guilds ran a group for the young immigrant women who arrived in Brisbane under the Jewish Welfare Association’s refugee scheme, training them in basic skills for gaining local employment and teaching Jewish practices and religious traditions.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women positioned their approach to worship activities within the bounds of Halakhah, as much as was possible in the wider Australian and international Jewish climate of the time. They managed both to fulfil their own spiritual needs and make an impact on the worship of their congregations. They also assisted their fellow women in the local Jewish community to participate in spiritual activities and milestones. Some factors outside their control, like Synagogue politics and ethnic distinctions, affected the degree to which women could do this. However, the support of the close-knit local community and its leaders helped women to gain significant personal satisfaction in religious expression, to a degree that was not always seen in other Modern Orthodox communities.

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70 “WIZO Reports”, Shalom, June 1969, 6.
Women’s experiences with marriage and motherhood in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community

Picture again our Jewish family from the previous chapter; this time, we are in their spacious home in the early evening. The mother is in the kitchen, preparing a traditional meal of chicken broth and lockshun, awaiting the father’s return from work. While the children were at school for the day, she attended a Women’s Guild meeting, planning Purim festivities for the community’s children and fundraising opportunities for a new mother’s clinic in the inner city. The children had gone to Talmud Torah classes at the Synagogue straight after school, and now the oldest son is out at a Betar group meeting. The mother approves of this activity as it gives him a chance to spend time with the daughters of several of their friends from their congregation, and they are hopeful a romance will blossom. The youngest son is at his weekly Judean Scouts meeting. Their daughter, recently returned with a gold medal from the national Judean Sports Carnival, is being interviewed by a journalist from the local Jewish press at the dining room table. The journalist asks the young woman what her life’s ambition is. She glances over his shoulder to her mother, humming as she cooks in the kitchen. Her gaze travels around the dining room, where the walls are hung with pictures of the three children at festivals, Scout and Guide camps, sporting carnivals and playing with friends, and her parents’ wedding portrait proudly in the centre. She smiles at the journalist and exclaims earnestly “I want to get married and have three children.”

Just as the first vignette, this describes an everyday family setting in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, this time focusing on the experiences of childhood, family and marriage. The

73 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013; the daughter’s words are Pam’s own when interviewed by a journalist at the age of sixteen, although the family described does not necessarily represent hers.
experiences of both mother and children here are typical of the traditional halakhic model of women’s responsibilities in running their household and bringing up their children. Women contributed greatly to this area of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish communal history, just as they did its religious, social, cultural, charitable and political activities. I examine the theoretical background to Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s approach to marriage and family life. I compare this theory to Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s experiences, to demonstrate how women participated in family traditions within halakhic structures to contribute to their community.

Modern Orthodox Jewish faith communities perform many activities which celebrate, promote and facilitate family life. This facet of congregational activity is the one in which women have the greatest role to play and, equally, the most rules to follow. In Judaism, the role of wife and mother is upheld as the ideal state of womanhood. Isa Aron and his co-authors use the term Midrash in their work, and deal mainly with the education of children and parents in their discussions on this theme. Using the work of other theorists, I have examined a much wider suite of activities associated with raising children, supporting family life and promoting family values.

Kehillot involve themselves in many activities promoting and enabling family life and values. Marriage is of great importance in Modern Orthodox Judaism, and most roles and interactions within the community involve participation of a man, wife and children. Jewish marriage rates have always been consistently higher than the general population’s. 74 Kehillot promote the institution of marriage and family, celebrate weddings and blessings for babies, encourage couples to have children, and provide marital counselling. The kehilla also functions as a safe place to meet potential spouses with shared values and views to monogamy and family. Although the days of the shaduchan (professional matchmaker) are long past, informal matchmaking often takes place within the group,

with older people introducing younger single members. Kehillot provide programs or focused on family life and values, like mothers’ groups or playgroups, and communal activities and events.

As Judaism is passed on through the mother’s line, pressure for Jewish women to marry and bear children is great, and women are guided by their family and community towards this end. When sociologist Laura Davidman surveyed Jewish women about their perceptions of womanhood, one remarked “Judaism has this very strong bias... [Women] are seen as being almost incomplete when they’re not married.” The key reason for the promotion of marriage is to encourage the community to have children; most Jewish brides expect that they will become mothers. Susan Starr Sered quotes the views of one elderly Jewish lady: “A woman without children is the same as dead.” Although according to Torah scholars only men are bound by the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply”, Jewish women are instructed to fulfil niddah laws regarding fertility cycles for better chances of pregnancy. While marriage itself is important in Modern Orthodox Judaism, the idea of “marrying in” is important to families, where a Jewish young person selects a Jewish spouse. The idea of a child “marrying out” or undertaking an interfaith marriage is archetypically concerning to Jewish parents, particularly in smaller communities. There is often significant pressure on non-Jewish wives of Jewish men within the kehilla to convert so that their children can be considered Jewish.

77 Quoted in Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World, 154.
78 Fishman, "Triple Play", 257-258. In Fishman’s survey, over 90% of women expected they would have at least one child.
80 Sassoon, The Status of Women in Jewish Tradition, 81, 83-85. It is also a mitzvah for a couple to engage in intercourse every Sabbath night for this purpose.
81 Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, "A Journey of the 'Straight Way' or the 'Roundabout Path'", 256; Fishman, "Triple Play", 260.
The members of a kehilla aim to socialise and educate their children within the cultural groups and traditions of Judaism. The main Jewish education program for children within kehillot is the Talmud Torah, where children are taught Torah, Hebrew language, and the cultural practices and values of Judaism. Since a connection is apparent between childhood attendance at religious education programs and adherence to faith in adulthood, over 90% of congregations across all faiths run religious education programs for their youth.\textsuperscript{82} Some kehillot are involved in formal school education, supporting religious day schools and yeshivot.\textsuperscript{83} Kehillot run activities which engage and socialise their children in faith-based social groups, and promote entertainments for the young which are appropriate to the community’s values; a wide variety of activities in this area are mentioned in the literature.\textsuperscript{84} In Nancy Ammerman’s survey, a majority of congregations formally offered youth social groups and programs.\textsuperscript{85}

In Modern Orthodox Jewish families, the responsibility for raising and educating children traditionally falls on the mother. One of the key tasks of the Modern Orthodox Jewish mother is to make her home a model of Jewish religious life, and to transfer her practices and values to her children. Women’s writer Mrs Abraham Simon instructed her readers in 1915 that “the home…is the fountain source of Judaism” and that it was women’s efforts in culturally educating their children which would ensure the survival of the Jewish race.\textsuperscript{86} When Laura Davidman surveyed Jewish women about what they felt was their most important task, the majority indicated the instilling of religious traditions and values in their children; as one woman put it, “Raising my children to be a little more Jewish than I was, so that...Judaism won’t die out.”\textsuperscript{87} This includes ensuring children

\textsuperscript{82} Ammerman, \textit{Pillars of Faith}, 35; Davidman, \textit{Tradition in a Rootless World}, 73, 84; Kaldor \textit{et al.}, \textit{Shaping a Future}, 6.

\textsuperscript{83} Ammerman, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation", 79, 87; Aron \textit{et al.}, \textit{Sacred Strategies}, 56, 79-80.

\textsuperscript{84} Ammerman, \textit{Pillars of Faith}, 43, 64, 87; Aron \textit{et al.}, \textit{Sacred Strategies}, 93; Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, "A Journey of the ‘Straight Way’ or the ‘Roundabout Path’", 246; Davidman, \textit{Tradition in a Rootless World}, 74; Kaldor \textit{et al.}, \textit{Shaping a Future}, 22. Scouting, cadets, arts or sporting groups, summer camps and service organisations are a few of the types of activities mentioned.

\textsuperscript{85} Ammerman, \textit{Pillars of Faith}, 60.

\textsuperscript{86} Quoted in Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman", 208.

\textsuperscript{87} Quoted in Davidman, \textit{Tradition in a Rootless World}, 112.
attend Synagogue and undergo coming-of-age rituals, socialise with other Jewish children, undertake appropriate religious education, practice Jewish home-based traditions and enjoy Jewish food.\textsuperscript{88}

How did Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women measure up to these ideals? Brisbane’s Jewish community has always been considerably smaller than those in other Australian state capitals. On one hand, this drew the community closer together and formed stronger bonds within and between families. On the other hand, it severely limited the pool of potential local marriage partners for young Jewish people, increasing the likelihood of their marrying out or moving interstate. Australian Judaism has always been traditionalist in matters of marriage and family, and did not share in the decline of this conservatism in the wider Australian community from the 1950s onwards.\textsuperscript{89}

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish congregations shared this traditional approach to sex, marriage and family life, despite the limitations of a smaller community. Brisbane’s Jewish couples tended to stick with traditional approaches to family and marital issues rather than stretch the boundaries of \textit{Halakhah}, due to the difficulties in working on reinterpretations of Jewish law, as the nearest \textit{Beth Din} (court of religious law) was in Sydney, almost 1000 kilometres away.\textsuperscript{90} In terms of education and socialising children, the lack of a Jewish religious day school in this time period made for both difficulties and benefits. The relatively small size of the Brisbane Jewish community, in comparison with Perth, Sydney or Melbourne, meant that many activities for Jewish children and youth, lacking a large base of members from which to take off, often folded without sufficient numbers or support. However, it also made many activities more accessible for children, as groups had more open membership policies to try and increase numbers. Regardless, the women of the Brisbane Modern

\begin{footnotes}
\item[88] Aizen, "Like Gefilte Fish out of Water," 8, 194, specifically discusses the centrality of food to the Jewish feminine experience.
\item[89] Ibid., 69.
\item[90] Rutland, \textit{Edge of the Diaspora}, 73-74. Brisbane’s distance from the two national \textit{Bettei Din} in Sydney and Melbourne still creates difficulties for local Jewish women today, particularly in matters of conversion and divorce.
\end{footnotes}
Orthodox Jewish community endeavoured to fill the halakhic roles their families and communities required of them as wives and mothers, and leave a positive impact on their community in the promotion of Jewish family values and development of the next generation of Jewish young people.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox women embraced their roles as promoters of marriage and motherhood in the city’s Jewish community. Their foremost concern was the appropriate marriage of their own children, especially daughters, to Jewish spouses, and preferably keeping them in Brisbane. As in other Australian Jewish communities, Brisbane’s Jewish mothers tried to bring up their children with the sense that their prospective partner “may be someone they meet in kindergarten… [children] are sent to Jewish school in order that they marry someone Jewish – and this is inculcated from the age of three.”91 The close connection between children socialising in Jewish circles and marrying Jewish was viewed humorously in the community. David Trigger remembers of his childhood in the 1950s and 1960s that “the women are inclined at times to light-heartedly match up their children with one another.”92 Sophia Earley married Jack Briner, “the boy next door” with whom she had grown up in the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.93 Sylvia Eshensky, likewise, married her best friend’s cousin, as the two Jewish families had grown up together.94 Pamela Huppert remembers how her family regularly socialised with another family from their congregation, whose sons were regularly paired up with Pam and her sister for social events and recreational activities. “I think everyone expected that [the older son] and I would get married.”95 Parents, particularly mothers, were strict about their teenage daughter’s romantic relationships. Tova Blumberg remembers her mother encouraging her to date Jewish boys and disapproving of friendships with non-Jewish boys.96 Pamela Huppert recalls “I didn’t go out with any

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91 Aizen, "Like Gefilte Fish out of Water," 68-69.
93 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013.
94 Interview with Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
95 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
96 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
non-Jewish young man. Ever. I don’t think I would have been allowed.”

97 Mothers made sure their daughters kept to the traditional halakhic model of the virginal bride; Tova Blumberg remembers that any time she went out on a date “my mother would sit at the window waiting until I got in the house.”

98 Mothers actively sought and supported opportunities for their teenagers to meet other Jewish young people, particularly those of the opposite sex. One such opportunity popular with the Brisbane community was organised sport. The Australian Judean Games, later known as the Maccabi Games, were established in the 1920s. These were an offspring of the early twentieth-century European movement of Muskeljudentum, or “Muscular Judaism” which was developed to combat anti-Semitic views of the weakness and effeminacy of the Jewish male. In a sporting nation like Australia, the Judean Games were initially designed for young men to combine Jewish identity with the mainstream cultural significance of sport.

99 However, Jewish sport also became a valuable pursuit for young women. It not only promoted physical health, important for childbearing, it provided an important avenue for meeting other young Jewish people outside their own congregation, and was considered an added incentive for the participation of young men. The Jewish press played up the romantic possibilities the games afforded participants, and profiled the engagements and marriages that developed out of Games relationships.

100 Many young women from Brisbane’s Jewish community represented Queensland at the Games, and some did indeed meet their future husbands at carnivals. The host community for each carnival would provide numerous social events like dances and dinners to accompany the sporting events, offering young local spectators a chance to develop relationships with the visitors.

97 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
98 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
101 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013. Pam was one of those who met her future husband, Keith, at a carnival.
Outside of their immediate families, women participated in many community-based activities which promoted traditional halakhic family models and values. In 1927, the Ladies’ Guild of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation purchased a new huppah for the community to use at wedding ceremonies. The money for this was donated by Mrs M.E. Myers, and at £7/7/ was a significant sum at the time. The huppah itself was ornate and quite stylish for the time, in the hope that it would be desirable for young brides, who would arrange a traditional Jewish marriage in the Synagogue, rather than a secular setting, so that they could use it.102 The National Council of Jewish Women had a “Young Matrons” chapter, with membership open to young married women, which offered special social events and opportunities for married women.103 These “young marrieds” were the most glamorous representatives of Brisbane’s Jewish society, a view perpetuated by the local Jewish press and mainstream newspaper society pages. These ladies were noted in the press as socialising together with their husbands at venues like Cloudland and the Trocadero each weekend, and their fashions described in great detail.104

Women ran and funded Jewish festival celebrations and parties for the children of the community. The National Council of Jewish Women ran regular children’s parties for the Jewish children of both local congregations.105 Mrs D. Blumberg donated money to pay for the community to provide Hanukkah gifts to all its children in 1923, and the National Council of Jewish Women raised funds annually to purchase holiday gifts for children in the Mater Children’s Hospital.106 Women’s groups ran parties for the children of the Jewish community at the festival of Purim, and sponsored prizes for the best children’s’ costumes.107 The Ladies’ Guild ran a baby show as part of their annual fetes, a pageant into which the women of the community were invited to enter their babies and toddlers for

102 “Jewish Ladies’ Guild”, Brisbane Courier, 9 November 1927, 22.
103 Newton, Making a Difference, 188.
104 Interview with Anne Lieberman, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
105 Newton, Making a Difference, 188.
prizes. Later, WIZO held “baby parties” to which mothers of the community would bring their little daughters, up to the age of two. These functions not only had food and music for both the mothers and children, but the WIZO executive also presented every little girl with a gold Star of David necklace. Women represented the Jewish community on the governing Committee of the Lady Bowen Lying-in Hospital in Spring Hill, the state’s premier maternity hospital, until it was disbanded in 1924.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish mothers actively involved their children in leisure activities which socialised them with other Jewish children. In this they were guided by their rabbis, who were increasingly concerned with the Jewish community’s assimilation into mainstream culture and loss of traditional networks and practices, and hoped to develop a new sense of communal Jewish identity in the newer generation. In the early days of the Brisbane community, before the growth of the population further out into the suburbs, most Jewish families lived together in close proximity. There were several small Jewish enclaves in the city suburbs where one street had a number of Jewish homes. Deshon Street, in South Brisbane, was the most prominent of these: the street housed the South Brisbane Synagogue, and most of the congregants all lived on the same street. Other areas with multiple Jewish families included Church Street in Fortitude Valley, Trinity Lane in Woolloongabba, and the suburbs of Spring Hill, Hamilton, Clayfield, and New Farm, jokingly referred to as “Jew Farm” by its many Jewish inhabitants. Mothers involved their children in both formal and informal leisure activities with other Jewish children. This was easy for women in the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, where most congregants lived in very close proximity to each other and their Synagogue. A lack of English language skills among the East European immigrant Deshon Street mothers also meant they were more likely to socialise their children with their Yiddish-

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110 Minute Books, 1868-1924, Papers of the Lady Bowen Hospital Committee, Queensland State Archives, Brisbane, QLD
111 Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
speaking neighbours than with outsiders. It was slightly more difficult for families from the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, whose congregants moved progressively further from the central city location of their Synagogue as years passed. However, this congregation’s slightly larger numbers and wealthier professional demographic gave their children more opportunities to participate in social activities with each other. Children participated in Judean sporting clubs, Judean Scouts and Girl Guides, the young Zionists’ group Betar, and the Boomerang Club, a Jewish children’s social group started by Brisbane teenager Pamela Hoffman in the late 1940s. Many women who participated in Jewish charitable groups brought their young children along with them to meetings and functions, providing another avenue for children to socialise.

As well as socialising the community’s children, women were responsible for ensuring the continuation of Jewish knowledge and tradition by encouraging Jewish education from a young age. Talmud Torah classes were an important part of this education, and were an area of Jewish communal life where women had considerable power and responsibility. There were several female teachers on the United Board of Hebrew Education Queensland at its establishment in 1865. This board began the Sunday Talmud Torah program at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation; one of the first principals was Miss Flo Myers, who had almost forty years of teaching experience. For creating the programs, administering the students and running the classes, Miss Myers was paid an honorarium of 4 guineas a year. The South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation at Deshon Street did not initially run formal Talmud Torah classes; instead, the rabbi would visit families at home and

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112 Aizen, “Like Gefilte Fish out of Water,” 182, explains how this occurred in the Eastern European Jewish communities in Melbourne; the same would have held true in East Brisbane.

113 Ochert, “Further History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation”, 28; interview with Mena Solomon in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.; conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013; conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013

114 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.

115 Ochert, “History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation: Part One”, 459

116 Ochert, “History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation: Part Two”, 510. For the sake of comparison, the average salary in 1900 for a female housemaid in Queensland, for example, was about 17 guineas a year. See Queensland Registrar-General’s Office, Statistics of the Colony of Queensland for the Year 1901, compiled from Official Records in the Registrar-General’s Office, Brisbane Government Printer, 1901.
teach the children there. This reflected the more localised nature of the South Brisbane congregation and a more Eastern European tradition of religious education. By the 1950s, South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation’s children were sent to the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation’s *Talmud Torah* in the centre of Brisbane city. Sunday *Talmud Torah* classes were attended by almost all the children in the Jewish community, and some families also sent children to additional classes at private homes on other days of the week. This was popular earlier in the community’s history, but dropped off as children became increasingly involved in extra-curricular activities in later years. Classes for very young children were taken jointly, often by untrained volunteers rather than teachers. Tova Blumberg remembers that when she was a child “there were two older ladies who read Bible stories to the little ones after the Sabbath morning services.” As boys began approaching *bar mitzvah* age the students were split up by gender for separate classes. Girls were taught Hebrew, and learned about Israel and various Jewish traditions, but did not learn Torah.

In their secular education, Brisbane’s Jewish girls appear to have been given the same opportunities as the boys. In other Australian states where Jewish day schools were available for families to educate their children, Modern Orthodox parents often sent their sons to the Jewish school so they could learn to lead a service, bringing *naches* to the parents, and to say *kaddish*, ensuring the parents were mourned and memorialised appropriately under Jewish law. As Modern Orthodox Jewish women could do neither of these things, girls were relegated to government schools if families had to choose, and in times of financial hardship were often pressured to leave school and enter the workforce to support brothers at Jewish studies. However, with no Jewish day school in Brisbane in this period, boys and girls had (with the exception of individual family preferences and

117 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013.
118 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013.
119 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013; Interview with Bill and Rose Steinberg in Steinberg, *Remembering the Past*.
120 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
122 Rutland and Encel, "Major Issues Facing the Jewish Community", 178.
circumstances) equal chances to education. South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation girls attended
local high schools and colleges, and many went to the nearby State Commercial High School on
George Street, Brisbane, or to Brisbane State High School in South Brisbane, and later to suburban
high schools like Salisbury or Yeronga High Schools.123 Brisbane Hebrew Congregation girls also went
to inner-city schools, but many came from wealthier families who could afford private education for
their daughters at schools like All Hallows, Brisbane Girl’s Grammar School or Sommerville House.124

Mothers educated children, particularly daughters, in the home-based rituals of Judaism. Girls in
large Jewish families often had to help raise younger siblings or care for grandparents, and
experienced a large multi-generational family experience. Before the mass immigrations of the
1930s which swelled both the Brisbane and South Brisbane congregations, men would typically
immigrate individually at first, and then wives and children would follow. Sometimes men would
take work as travelling salesmen upon arriving in Australia, and continue to work and travel after
their families settled in homes in Brisbane. Women were left at home to manage at home alone with
young families, often for months at a time, and many Jewish families were hit hard by the
depressions of the 1890s and 1929-1932. This developed among the first-generation immigrants a
resilient, independent and capable group of women, watching their mothers struggle to work and
raise families with little money and only older children or grandparents to assist them.125 Despite
their hardships, women endeavoured to continue the most important Jewish home traditions for
their families, and teach them to their children. Tova Blumberg was born in 1932 to parents whose
income had been severely affected by the depression, but Tova remembers her mother taking great
pains to ensure the family ate kosher foods and followed traditions. “She was brought up to
that...she wouldn’t have dreamed of anything else.”126 All the women I interviewed agreed that their
knowledge of Jewish practices and traditions had been gathered by observing and assisting their

122 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013; conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013;
125 Aizen, "Like Gefilte Fish out of Water," 181.
126 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
mothers with traditional tasks. They had also taught their own daughters Modern Orthodox traditions through everyday home-based activities.127

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women did indeed follow halakhic guidelines for the expectations of women as wives and mothers, and actively assisted other women to do so as well. They brought the traditional maternal values they expressed with their own children to the communal activities they performed for the rest of the community. The close-knit nature of the community offered both benefits and challenges for women in their pursuit of opportunities to develop the community’s children and ensure the continuity of Jewish traditions. However, the conservative environment of Brisbane assisted in the retention of traditional values and family models, particularly in the years following the Second World War. Brisbane Jewish women experienced less friction between Halakhah and wider community values than those in other Australian cities did.

Women’s experiences with community and culture in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community

Picture again our Jewish family from previous chapters. It is a warm and sunny Queensland Sunday afternoon, and the whole family are out at a picnic at “The Y” in Clayfield to celebrate the return of the victorious Queensland Team from an interstate Judean Games. The mother and daughter have put together an excellent hamper of traditional Jewish foods – kosher chicken, bagels, carrot candy and Israeli salad. The mother has made up a chicken soup to pass on to a fellow congregant who has recently been widowed. The family arrive at the centre and spend a while greeting friends – almost everyone knows one another – and the mother introduces a newcomer to the congregation to plenty of other families. The picnic begins and the family feasts, entertained by traditional Israeli music performed by a local girls’ choir. The athletes are introduced onto the stage, to wild applause, and the family stands to sing the Jewish anthem Hatikvah. A band strikes up traditional Jewish music, and the all the assembled families come together to dance, splitting up into separate men’s and women’s groups. The sounds of laughter and music, and the smells of Jewish cooking, rise up into the warm afternoon air and fill the suburban streets well into the evening, when our family makes their tired way home.

Again, this vignette describes an everyday family setting in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, this time focusing on its social and cultural activities. Women contributed greatly to this area of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish communal history, just as they did its religious, family, charitable and political activities. I examine the theoretical background to Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s responsibilities for fellowship within their community and cultural promotion to the outside world. I compare this theory to Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s experiences, to demonstrate how women participated in communal social and cultural activities within halakhic structures to contribute to their community.
Jewish faith communities around the world participate in activities which foster a sense of fellowship or “ethno-religious identity” amongst the members of the community. Isa Aron and his co-authors label these sorts of activities Knesset, encompassing all the activities members of the kehilla do for and with each other. Jewish communities aim to present an atmosphere where the community is like a large and supportive family towards one another. The Yiddish word heimische, or “homely”, is used favourably to describe these sorts of welcoming, familial activities. They undertake initiatives for the integration of newcomers and visitors into the cultural traditions and social networks of the local religious community. Communal activities collectively known as gemilut hesadim (“acts of loving kindness”) involve members’ assistance of each other in major life events like marriage, bereavement, death and illness. Kehillot care for the elderly, mediate disputes and relationships, help fellow congregants in times of distress, and assist in the ritual of funerals and burials.

Particular emphasis is placed on bikkur holim (care for the sick), visiting and praying for ill community members and supporting their families, and running activities which promote the health and healing of community members. For example, the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community has a Chevra Kadisha, to which community members pay a small subscription fee, and which arranges for traditional funeral and burial rituals when a subscriber passes away.

Other activities in this area focus on enabling special cultural practices and traditions. Examples include organising access to kosher food, running activities which fit the strictures of religious holidays, or hosting other community members for Sabbath meals. Kehillot celebrate these

128 McGuire, Religion, 58.
129 Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 27.
130 Ammerman, Pillars of Faith, 52-54; Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World, 123; Kaldor et al., Shaping a Future, 125-128. The Yiddish word heimische, or “homey”, is used favourably to describe these sorts of welcoming and familial activities.
131 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation”, 88; Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 129-133; Chatters and Taylor, “Religion and Families”, 520, 525; McGuire, Religion, 72.
132 Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 130.
134 Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation”, 81; Chatters and Taylor, “Religion and Families”, 532-536; Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, “A Journey of the 'Straight Way' or the 'Roundabout Path'”, 245; Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World, 64.
tradions together at shared social events, including festival celebrations and communal meals after worship (Kiddush). Sharing food is a key social binding element within the community and has a highly ritualised and symbolic cultural function.\textsuperscript{135} Kehillot celebrate shared values and social bonds through non-religious events, like sporting pursuits or dances and balls.\textsuperscript{136} They bond through the public promotion of their religious culture, like a public Hanukkah candle lighting ceremony, or a Jewish Pride march on Sukkot. These sorts of activities also help promote participation in a global cultural community.\textsuperscript{137}

Women play a significant social role in the creation of Jewish cultural communities, despite their exclusion from most formal community leadership positions. Susan Starr Sered notes a general experience of “relationship-oriented religiosity” for most Jewish women. This involves promotion of religious and cultural life for their husbands and children, their extended family, congregation and community.\textsuperscript{138} Women are encouraged to cultivate a communal and friendly atmosphere at worship and cultural events, and provide friendship and guidance to newcomers and visitors.\textsuperscript{139} Jewish women are encouraged to host guests, particularly religious students or leaders, at their homes for meals and celebrations as often as possible, to honour their households.\textsuperscript{140} Women are encouraged to take care of other members of the Jewish community, especially the sick and the elderly. One elderly Jewish woman interviewed by Susan Starr Sered stated that “taking care of your friends and neighbours and the people in your community is the most important mitzvah.”\textsuperscript{141} Women are

\textsuperscript{135} Ammerman, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation", 87; Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 136-138; Cantor, Jewish Women/Jewish Men, 67; Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, "A Journey of the 'Straight Way' or the 'Roundabout Path'", 246.
\textsuperscript{136} Gurock, "The Orthodox Synagogue", 57; Kaldor et al., Shaping a Future, 46.
\textsuperscript{138} Starr Sered, "The Religion of Relating", 310.
\textsuperscript{139} Haut, "Women's Prayer Groups and the Orthodox Synagogue", 143; Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman", 212; Starr Sered, "The Religion of Relating", 320. According to Haut, female newcomers in particular remain invisible within the community until “adopted” by another woman and her family.
\textsuperscript{140} Remy, The Jewish Woman, 132.
\textsuperscript{141} Anonymous respondent in Starr Sered, "The Religion of Relating", 320.
involved in the Chevra Kadisha for their community, as only women can prepare a woman’s body for burial according to *halakhic* requirements. However, women are not permitted to perform *kaddish* (mourning prayers), for their family members, as this can only be done by a man.\(^{142}\)

Women are expected to display pride in Jewish culture, and be actively involved in supporting public events promoting Jewish religion and culture. Women are not only responsible for ensuring their household abides by Jewish cultural practices and traditions, but should also help others to do so. For example, women’s groups often source and wholesale kosher goods for the community, serve festival meals and provide religious paraphernalia for holy days.\(^{143}\) Women are involved in cooking, decorating, cleaning or candle-lighting for community celebrations and festivals, while required rituals, and financial and organisational oversight, is done by the men of the community.\(^{144}\)

How did Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women measure up to these ideals? For most of the period studied, mainstream assimilation rather than cultural assertion was the standard for most Australian Jewish communities, especially smaller ones. As Rebecca Aizen suggests, “Australia in the era of the White Australia Policy was not an environment that lent itself to the assertion of difference.”\(^{145}\) Certainly the small size of the Jewish community in Brisbane, in comparison to other Australian capitals, made it more difficult to support a large, strong and vibrant Jewish cultural tradition within the general public. This was reflected, for example, in the absence of all-Jewish teams in local football leagues, which were present in both Sydney and Melbourne at various

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\(^{142}\) Beecher, "The Treasure Chest of Diversity", 270; Brisbane Chevra Kadisha, "Brisbane Chevra Kadisha"; Fishman, "Triple Play", 266.


\(^{144}\) Beecher, "The Treasure Chest of Diversity", 270; Haut, "Women’s Prayer Groups and the Orthodox Synagogue", 145; Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States", 329. This is true even for events which are only attended by women.

\(^{145}\) Aizen, "Like Gefilte Fish out of Water," 188.
times. Brisbane’s Jewish community was felt, even by its own constituents, to be less frum (culturally orthodox) than other Australian Jewish communities. The southern Jewish press commented on the perceived weakness of Jewish culture in Brisbane. In 1907 the Sydney-based Hebrew Standard of Australasia commented that “it seems as if the climate has made the people lethargic and caused all feeling and sentiment to be lost.” However, the small size of the community created a significant degree of cohesion, and inter-relation meant that the sense of fellowship and familial obligation within and between the two congregations was strong. As Carolyn Goldsmith remarks, “the community has always supported each other, it’s a close community.”

Brisbane’s Jewish community had to overcome more hurdles to practice cultural traditions, and be seen as part of national Jewish culture, than those in other Australian cities. However, Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community actively created opportunities to strengthen community bonds, practice gemilut hesadim and embrace Jewish culture and identity publicly. The women of the community played significant roles in these developments, embracing their halakhic commandment to promote Jewish culture and values through care of their community and its traditions.

Helping fellow congregants was one of the central ways Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish congregations created a feeling of community amongst themselves. Gemilut hesadim were a crucial part of the operations of the Modern Orthodox Jewish congregations and community in Brisbane, and an area where Halakhah both permitted and encouraged women to be publicly active and assertive. Women were central to many activities which created community spirit and supported community members. NCJW past president Carolyn Goldsmith puts it bluntly; “any time someone in the community wants something done they come to [NCJW] Council.” The other women’s

146 Hughes, "Sport in the Australian Jewish Community", 387-388.
147 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013; Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
148 “Brisbane Congregation”, Hebrew Standard of Australasia, 12 April 1907, 8.
149 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013.
150 Quoted in Newton, Making a Difference, 195.
communal organisations, like WIZO and the Women’s Guilds, were equally as active in providing assistance to the community and its members. The Women’s Guild would discretely drop off a basket of food and provisions if a family was experiencing hardship, especially in the Depression.\footnote{Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.}

The women of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox congregations performed bikkur holim duties for the Jewish community, caring for the sick. In the 1920s, the Ladies’ Guild of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation had members of their group appointed as representatives to the city’s major hospitals, to visit and comfort any Jewish patients there and make arrangements with rabbis for Jewish last rites to be performed.\footnote{“Jewish Ladies’ Guild”, The Brisbane Courier, 9 November 1927, 22.} Although they were not allowed to participate in burial rituals for men, or to publicly offer mourning prayers for male relatives, women contributed to men’s funerals by sewing burial shrouds for the Chevra Kadisha. In the Brisbane Jewish Community, the National Council of Jewish Women coordinated this activity, and continues to run it to the present day.\footnote{Brisbane Chevra Kadisha, "Brisbane Chevra Kadisha"; Newton, Making a Difference, 186.; Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.}

Refugees fleeing to Australia from Nazi, Russian and Japanese persecution in the 1930s and 1940s met with a cold reception in Sydney and Melbourne, from both the local Jewish and non-Jewish community and communal leaders.\footnote{Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 185-188; Hughes, "Sport in the Australian Jewish Community", 36, 39.} However, the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish congregations were more hospitable to refugees than those in the southern states, perhaps mindful of the small size of the community and the need for fresh faces to swell dwindling numbers, as Morris Ochert suggests.\footnote{Ochert, "History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation: Part Two", 512.} The women of the community were active in welcoming and assisting the new arrivals. The wartime rabbi of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, Rev. Wolman, instructed WIZO members that greeting and relieving refugees who arrived in Brisbane was “one of the most important missions they had to perform.”\footnote{“Synagogue Fete to Aid Refugees”, The Courier Mail, 27 July 1939, 38.}
refugees’ transition to their new homes, and extended invitations to communal social activities. Local Jewish woman Olga Bar-David befriended many refugee women and gathered them into her WIZO group to help assimilate them into the community and develop Brisbane’s ties with the post-war international Jewish presence. The NCJW actively assisted Jewish wartime refugees and immigrants arriving in Brisbane, following the directive of their movement’s founder, Sydney’s Dr Fanny Reading. The Women’s Guilds of the Modern Orthodox congregations were closely affiliated with the Traveller’s Aid Society, and made contact with new Jewish immigrant families, helping to establishing them within the Jewish community. Women extended the hand of friendship to visiting American servicemen and women during the Second World War, when the United States had a significant military presence in Brisbane to combat Japanese military activity in the Pacific. Earlier I touched on the welcome women gave to Jewish American service personnel at worship. Many women took this further and invited the visitors for Sabbath meals, or entertained them at social functions with their family and friends. Many women recall their mothers inviting servicemen home to join family dinners after services, even though this stretched wartime ration budgets for families already under pressure. The Women’s Guild at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation organised dances in the Synagogue hall for off-duty servicemen to come and enjoy the company of local Jewish girls.

Although Brisbane’s Jewish community was both small and geographically spread out, its communal groups took pains to ensure there were plenty of activities on offer to bring the community together socially and create a sense of closeness and fellowship. Jewish women, with a reputation as highly social beings, played a significant role in creating fellowship and social cohesion within their local

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158 Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
159 Newton, *Making a Difference*, 79.
160 “Synagogue Fete to Aid Refugees”, *The Courier Mail*, 27 July 1939, 38.
162 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013; Conversation with T. Blumberg, 13 January 2013.
community. Many Jewish women in Brisbane had their own friendship groups which were almost exclusively Jewish; “We only ever socialised with Jewish people... it was with the Jewish community all the time.”¹⁶³ Even families who did not keep exclusively Jewish social circles were keen to attend Jewish social events. Many Jewish women often found that they immediately felt comfortable and connected with other Jewish people, whether from their own community or visitors. As one woman from David Trigger’s survey of Brisbane Jews put it, “I can feel a difference when with Jews ...I've tried to explain it to non-Jews and they just don't comprehend -- they can't accept it.”¹⁶⁴ Women’s groups actively arranged a large program of social events for their community, some of significant scale. Women were active within the Young Men’s Hebrew Association, established in 1951 at a property purchased by the community in Clayfield, known communally as “The Y”. Women’s groups arranged most of the organisation’s social program, including dances and picnics which were attended by large numbers of the community.¹⁶⁵ Sophia Earley and Rose Steinberg both recalled the packed hall every Saturday night at the Deshon Street synagogue when the Women’s Guild ran a weekly dance.¹⁶⁶ Pamela Huppert remembers that the picnics run by the Women’s Guild of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation were always popular and very well-attended by the city’s Jewish community; “there’d be a hundred people, maybe more.”¹⁶⁷ When events were organised by men’s groups in the community, the women’s groups were involved in assisting, providing kosher catering and crockery hire.¹⁶⁸

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women, as well as caring for and socialising with their community, actively promoted their Jewish culture and traditions in public. They organised and ran events celebrating their faith and culture within their congregations, helped their families and

¹⁶³ Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013.
¹⁶⁶ Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013; interview with Bill and Rose Steinberg in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
¹⁶⁷ Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
¹⁶⁸ Advertisement in Shalom, June 1971, 8; Newton, Making a Difference, 185-186.
friends follow cultural traditions and trends, and promoted Jewish culture to the public. Often, they invested significant time, energy and even their own funds into preparation for these activities, with no recognition or even participation in the events themselves. Their active involvement in Jewish culture in Brisbane, sitting within halakhic guidelines for women’s activities, was a crucial part of the operations of their congregations and community.

Women assisted in the organisation and preparation for festival celebrations, even though they could not perform the public religious rites for the festivals. For example, a large group of women from the Ladies’ Guild of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation made, erected and decorated the synagogue’s sukkah for the Sukkot festival in 1927, even though they were not included in the rituals performed inside the tent during the festival. Aelsie Magnus remembered decorating the Communal Hall at the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation synagogue with her Women’s Guild friends for a visit by the Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth in the 1950s, although women would not be at the function welcoming him; “I spent hours [decorating it] with frangipani.”

Women played an important role in providing traditional Jewish and kosher foods and goods to the Brisbane Jewish community. Brisbane’s women had a harder task of this than their counterparts in the Southern states did; there were only a few approved kosher butchers or grocers in the city, and many goods had to be imported from interstate or overseas. The complex preparation of kosher food drove prices higher than those of non-kosher equivalents. This became taxing for Brisbane’s Jewish families in times of economic depression, particularly in working-class South Brisbane. In Brisbane, women would buy kosher meat once a month from a designated butcher with whom the congregations had made arrangements. Some would bring their own animals, particularly chickens,

169 “Jewish Ladies’ Guild”, The Brisbane Courier, 9 November 1927, 22.
170 Interview with Aelsie Magnus, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
with them to the butcher for kosher slaughter. Anne Lieberman recalled walking with her chicken to
the butcher in Fortitude Valley and then back to her New Farm home: “you’d have to wrap the
blooming thing up and take it home, and pluck it and clean it.”172 The Women’s Guild founded a
delicatessen in 1973 at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation hall, to sell kosher goods and specialist
festival foods. This service was used by Jewish families across Brisbane and the nearby Gold Coast.173
Women collected and shared kosher recipes to support each other in providing a faithful but rich
menu at home, as the difficulty of getting ingredients from Sydney or Melbourne could discourage
Brisbane women from keeping a kosher kitchen.174 They also ran cooking classes for girls and young
women to learn traditional recipes to serve when they had their own families. Several rebbetzins of
the congregations offered kosher cooking classes at home for all the community’s brides-to-be.175
Many girls, particularly after the Second World War, found the traditional Yiddish recipes less than
appealing to their typical Australian palates. When interviewed, Pamela Huppert recalled the food
from cooking classes with a grimace; “The matzoh balls... if you dropped them they’d probably have
gone through the floor, they were that hard.”176

From the 1940s onwards, Jewish communities all over the Diaspora, including Australia, directed
concentrated efforts at philosophically and financially supporting the new state of Israel. Support of
Israel increased in the mid-1960s, especially following the Arab-Israeli War in 1967 which deeply
affected Brisbane’s Jewish community.177 Women did the shopping and food provision for their
families, and in this role were vitally important to both supporting Israel’s growing foreign trade
economy, and connecting their families with Jewish culture from Israel. Advertisements in Brisbane’s
Jewish press from the Arab-Israeli War period encourage women to “Promote Israel Trade” by

172 Interview with Anne Lieberman, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
174 “Jewish festival dishes: rich and tasty”, The Courier Mail, 10 November 1948, 2.
176 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013.
177 Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 358.
buying Israeli foods and wines, clothing, books, tyres and fashion for their families. In the same way, the local Jewish press urged Brisbane’s Jewish women in the 1930s to boycott German goods in protest of that nation’s treatment of its Jewish citizens. Before the establishment of the state of Israel, the Women’s Guild of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation would run a Palestine stall at fetes, featuring religious products, artworks and souvenirs imported from Palestine. Women brought Jewish culture to life in the community through the sensory experience of food, especially in the largely Yiddish area of South Brisbane. Locals called the area “Little Jerusalem” from the early 1900s to the mid-1930s, and vividly identified the area by the smell of Jewish cooking from women’s kitchens during the day. The women of the Modern Orthodox congregations hosted public events showcasing Jewish traditions, music and food, to raise interest and awareness of Jewish culture amongst the general population. The most popular of these was the annual “Fantasy Flight to Israel” event, begun in the 1960s by the NCJW. The event was held at the synagogue and hall at Margaret Street, in the centre of Brisbane, and demonstrated Sabbath meals and candle ceremonies, traditional festival meals, Jewish delicacies and crafts to the public. Women from the NCJW and WIZO cooperated to run the stalls and displays, make and sell the food and model costumes and dances. The “Fantasy Flight” became a central part of the annual calendar of events for Brisbane’s Jewish women’s groups, popular with both the Jewish and wider Brisbane communities.

Women used music as a vehicle for the promotion of Jewish culture to the wider community. Several women from Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community stand out for their efforts to represent the Jewish community to non-Jewish neighbours through music. The Women’s Guild of the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation held annual public concerts where the women performed

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178 “How can you promote Israel trade?”, Shalom February/March 1968, 3.
181 Stedman, “From Russia to Brisbane”, 27.
182 “NCJW Reports”, Shalom, August 1971, 1; Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January 2013.
183 Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 128.
music and plays to raise money for the synagogue building fund.\(^{184}\) Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky remembered acting in Yiddish plays and singing Yiddish songs in reviews at local venues in South Brisbane when they were young women.\(^{185}\) Rosetta Diamond, who attended Brisbane Hebrew Congregation with her family, represented the Jewish community with vocal performances at events for Christian congregations in the 1930’s.\(^{186}\) Operatic soprano Ruth Portrate attended Brisbane Hebrew Congregation as a child and young woman from the early 1900s through the 1920s, and performed regularly in Brisbane as a representative of the Jewish community until she left in 1930 to pursue a career in London. She later returned to Brisbane to teach music to the children of the community.\(^{187}\) In the 1960’s, Brisbane’s WIZO groups sponsored Israeli soprano Netania Davrath to perform a series of concerts for the public, including a gala in City Hall.\(^{188}\)

The Judean games, mentioned in the previous chapter for their role in socialising and matchmaking Jewish young people, also played a part in fostering Jewish cultural pride and pride in the local Brisbane Jewish community. Sporting victories over New South Wales and Victoria made a statement against the southern states’ views of Brisbane’s “lethargic” Jewish youth.\(^{189}\) In the early stages of Queensland’s participation in the Judean Games, it was the women’s teams who brought home the bulk of the victories. Queensland women, most of who were from Brisbane, dominated the gymnastics, debating and table tennis events in the 1940s and 1950s.\(^{190}\) The local Jewish community’s pride in these victories was great: in 1947 the Judean News proudly announced that “the glory of the Jews of Queensland is in the hands of the Judean Sports Club.”\(^{191}\)

\(^{184}\) “Annual Concert”, *The Brisbane Courier*, 1 August 1931, 22.
\(^{185}\) Interview with Violet Briner and Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, *Remembering the Past*.
\(^{186}\) Letter, Kurilpa Protestant Hall Committee to Mrs J. Diamond, Papers of the Diamond family, UQFL394, Box 1, Folder 2, Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library.
\(^{189}\) Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 May 2013. Pamela remarks that it was always particularly satisfying to defeat Victorian teams at the Games.
enthusiastic in its support. Women were especially active in support roles, and organised the billeting system for athlete accommodation, hosted the social functions, and supplied kosher foods for guests staying with local families.192

*Halakhic* guidelines for Modern Orthodox Jewish women encourage caring, kindness and cultural pride, and Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women actively followed *Halakhah* in their community activities. The women performed important activities of *gemilut hasadim* which displayed the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community’s caring and familial nature, and drew the community closer together. Women helped promote Jewish culture for local Jewish residents, national Jewish population and the wider Brisbane community through their activities in many areas, including food, music and sporting pursuits. Despite the restrictions of a small population and distance from the rest of the Australian and world Jewish community, Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community did indeed enjoy a “tremendous togetherness of people”193, due in significant part to the efforts of its women.

193 Interview with Aelsie Magnus, in Steinberg, *Remembering the Past*. 

Women’s experiences with social services and political activities in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community

For a final time, picture our Jewish family from previous chapters. The mother and daughter are both attending a meeting of the National Council of Jewish Women, held at a member’s home in New Farm. The mother chairs the group meeting, while the daughter, along with several other teenaged friends who have accompanied their mothers, take charge of the young children who have been brought along so their mothers can attend the meeting. As first order of business, the mother and several other women report in on projects the group has been involved in over the past month. They have contributed to the Red Cross, the opening of a new local kindergarten and a maternity hospital in Israel; they have taken a petition about childcare support to a local politician; they have run a charity screening of a new Israeli documentary film. The mother nominates her niece, whose mother is the Women’s Guild secretary, as the Council’s “Queen Esther” annual pageant entrant. This resolution is passed, and is met with good-natured laughter, as the WIZO entrant this year is the Council secretary’s daughter. Many are grateful that, in all the confusion, all the funds raised will go to the one children’s charity. As the mother ends her report, she graciously receives the applause of the committee for her hard work of the previous year, and the children re-join the women for a social afternoon tea.

Once again, this vignette describes an everyday family setting in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, this time exploring the field of women’s social service and political efforts for the community. Women contributed greatly to this area of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish communal history, just as they did its religious, family, social and cultural activities. I examine the theoretical background to Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s participation in social services and political activities. I compare this theory to Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s
experiences, to demonstrate how women dedicated themselves to both charity and activism within halakhic structures to contribute to their community.

Typical Jewish faith communities perform many different activities to assist in areas of need within the wider community. Isa Aron and his co-authors label these sorts of activities Avodah, encompassing all the activities members of the kehilla undertake in the areas of social service, social justice and activism.\(^{194}\) The Hebrew concept of tikkun olam, “healing the world”, is a key religious value, and as such charity is a core function of most congregations.\(^{195}\) Although religious and lay leaders play a role in organising and facilitating charity opportunities, the majority of physical work is done by volunteers.\(^{196}\) Jewish Modern Orthodox communities have traditionally engaged in social activism on behalf of issues affecting the international Jewish community, such as concerns regarding Israel, other overseas Jewish populations, anti-Semitism, or on values-based local issues like political decisions and movements. Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, for example, participates actively in programs run by the local arm of the Jewish National Fund.\(^{197}\) Activism behaviours can take the form of political lobbying, marches, peaceful protest or written letters and petitions. Often, activism within a kehilla is strongly driven by its younger members.\(^{198}\)

Modern Orthodox Judaism sees compassion and charity as a biblically-based virtue and a core part of Halakhah for women. Jewish women are traditionally seen as emotional, tender and sympathetic,

\(^{194}\) Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 28.
\(^{195}\) Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos, "Congregations and Social Services: What They Do, How They Do It, and with Whom", Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 30, no. 4 (2001): 668. Chaves & Tsitsos’s study indicates that over 80% of congregations participate in charitable activities.
\(^{196}\) Aron et al., Sacred Strategies, 118.
\(^{198}\) Ammerman, Pillars of Faith, 124; Eiesland and Warner, "Ecology", 66-67; Kaldor et al., Shaping a Future, 110. Around 20% of congregations in Ammerman’s study participated politically in social justice activism; Kaldor’s congregational survey counts activism as a measure of congregations’ vitality.
and as natural agents for the community’s fulfilment of mitzvot relating to charity.\textsuperscript{199} While some wealthy women become significant individual benefactors, most women in Modern Orthodox Judaism undertake charitable activities within volunteer organisations, especially those with strong Jewish identities. Women participate both in mixed and women-only organisations, and their efforts account for a significant component of overall Jewish charitable works.\textsuperscript{200} Charity is seen as an extension of women’s natural home-maker role, and it is common for married women with small children at home to also participate in volunteer organisations and efforts. Charity is also often performed on behalf of family members, particularly on behalf of one’s children or deceased parents.\textsuperscript{201}

Despite their substantial role in Jewish charity endeavours, women do not usually play a corresponding significant part in Jewish political activism. Women’s groups which affiliate with political movements usually do so in a support capacity, either as fundraisers or in other auxiliary roles, and individual women who seek to undertake significant political activity usually do so under the umbrella of a women’s group. Zionism, involvement in protest against anti-Semitism, and support of Israel, are areas of political activity where women’s input has been well-established since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. This reflects Jewish society’s expectation of women to be publicly proud of their faith and culture.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{199} Philipson, "The Ideal Jewess", 257; Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism", 16. Modern Orthodox ideas regarding the suitability of charity pursuits for women have clear roots in nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish and Eastern European models of feminine behaviour; see Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman", 209, and Hyman, "East European Jewish Women in an Age of Transition, 1880-1930", 283.

\textsuperscript{200} Madeleine Tress and Barry A. Kosmin, "Tradition and Transition in Jewish Women’s Philanthropy", in \textit{Contemporary Jewish Philanthropy in America}, ed. Barry A. Kosmin and Paul Ritterband (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 78. This survey of Jewish philanthropy found that women’s organisations raise around 12% of total Jewish philanthropy, but donations across all Jewish organisations given by women account for around one third of the total funds these groups raised. The majority of volunteers across the entire Jewish philanthropic sector were also found to be women.


\textsuperscript{202} Philipson, "The Ideal Jewess", 261. For more regarding gendered approaches to Zionist politics, see Michaels, "Dreamers of Great Dreams", 159-193.
How did Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women measure up to these ideals? Brisbane’s Modern Jewish Orthodox women appear to have been drawn to charitable pursuits just as those in larger Australian Jewish communities. They established and participated in most of the same types of groups and initiatives, albeit on a smaller scale than Sydney or Melbourne. Many of the families in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community were comfortably middle-class, particularly at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, and women were not required to work to support their families, so were able to dedicate much of their time to charity activities. The close-knit nature of the small community meant that charitable activities were supported enthusiastically, and Brisbane’s women’s efforts were comparable with those in much larger cities. In her historical survey of Australian NCJW groups, Marlo Newton comments that “strong leaders and remarkable results in fundraising and activity are encouraging signs that the NCJW is flourishing up north.”203

Politically, Brisbane’s Jewish community has always been a conservative population in a conservative state, which in turn sits within in a conservative country. The public and impassioned Jewish political activism of North American and European Jewish communities was rare in Australia, and virtually unknown in Queensland. When political statements were made, these were usually delivered formally by rabbis or community officials, rarely by women’s groups. Global Jewish issues such as Zionism and Israel were supported by Brisbane’s Jewish community and its women’s groups. However, as a small community, Brisbane’s Jews had a national reputation for being less politically affiliated with Israel than communities in other capitals were, and preferred a focus on local community issues.204 Nevertheless, when the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community did take a political stand, the local women stood firmly behind it, ready to assist. Generous in charity, caring in social services and proudly Jewish in politics, Brisbane’s Jewish women conducted themselves within halakhic guidelines yet made significant contributions to their community’s service and political activities.

203 Newton, Making a Difference, 208.
204 Rutland and Encel, "Major Issues Facing the Jewish Community", 176.
Women’s charity groups have been significant actors in the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community since its earliest days. The earliest recorded Jewish women’s charity group in Brisbane was the Jewish Ladies Dorcas Society, founded in 1891 by wives of prominent congregants at the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation. Most Jewish Modern Orthodox Women’s charity in Brisbane was directed by three major groups; the Women’s Guilds of the two congregations, the National Council of Jewish Women (established in 1927) and the Women’s International Zionist Organization (established in 1935). Congregational Women’s Guilds were made up of women from individual congregations, but NCJW and WIZO attracted women from both the Brisbane and South Brisbane Hebrew congregations. Brisbane’s Jewish women saw charity as one of the halakhic duties of their roles as Jewish women; Adele Goldman, past WIZO president, replied in 1968 when interviewed about her group’s charity work “our work is not charity. It is synonymous with being Jewish!”

Women also tried to develop a love of charitable work in their children. Many middle-class Brisbane Jewish women did not participate in the workforce after becoming mothers, but dedicated time to charity work. Women who had young children at home would bring them to group meetings and events with them, and give them duties when they were old enough to help. Violet Briner recalled working with her mother on Women’s Guild activities from the age of seven: “I was educated into it.” Tova Blumberg, Carolyn Goldsmith and Pamela Huppert all accompanied and assisted their mothers in charitable activities from a young age, and spoke fondly of their participation in their mothers’ tasks.

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206 Newton, Making a Difference, 185.
207 "To the Ladies", Shalom May-June 1968, 3.
208 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2013.
209 Interview with Violet Briner & Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
Many of Brisbane Modern Orthodox women’s Jewish charity efforts, just as Madeleine Tress and Barry A. Kosmin observed regarding North American women’s Jewish charities, focused on pursuits which emphasise feminine traits and behaviours.211 The National Council of Jewish Women’s Brisbane branch financially supported the Queensland Spastic Centre and Montrose Home for Crippled Children, Meals on Wheels, The Royal Flying Doctors, the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Australia, and similar facilities and programs in Israel.212 WIZO’s initial work was in assisting children and teenagers to relocate from war-torn Europe to Palestine, and one of the early campaigns Brisbane WIZO took part in was the 1944 “Year of the Refugee Baby”. WIZO also ran talent quests, personality quests and many child-focused charity initiatives, such as the aforementioned baby parties from Chapter 2.213 Sophia Earley remembered her mother working with the Women’s Guild of the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, running annual fetes in New Farm Park to raise money for the Mater Children’s Hospital which was to open in 1931.214 Even in cases where women fundraised for comparatively masculine causes, they did so with approaches which highlighted and applied their own feminine strengths. Following the example of the Sydney Branch of the Jewish National Fund in 1939, the Brisbane Junior WIZO Ball the following year featured the inaugural “Queen Esther” charity pageant, where Brisbane’s young Jewish ladies competed to raise the most money to be crowned queen. This event, playing on feminine models as a fundraising apparatus, was to raise money for the Comforts Fund in support for Australia’s Second World War efforts.215 The National Council of Jewish Women was a core member of the Comforts Fund throughout the war, and several members performed volunteer work in a local military

212 “Is the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (Queensland Section) living on past glory?” Shalom, October 1967, 8.
214 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013.
215 “Queen Crowning at Ball”, Courier Mail, 5 April 1940, 13; Interview with Mena Solomon, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past.
garment factory once a week for the entire six years of the conflict. Modern Orthodox Jewish women’s charities in Brisbane took advantage of the local Jewish community’s strong social bonds, and social events were the most prolific, and often the most profitable, fundraisers. Sophia Earley ran regular card nights at home with the house profits of games going to WIZO fundraising projects.

In their collaboration for charity activities, Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women demonstrated that common cultural identification won out for women over congregational segregation. At the inaugural NCJW fundraising event in November 1927, the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation rabbi Rev. Nathan Levine commented that the fundraisers’ successful efforts “symbolised the unity of the Jewish women of Brisbane”, bringing women together to work successfully towards a common goal. Unlike the men’s charity groups, which tended to work largely on individual projects, the various women’s groups often worked together on projects and events. Many women would hold membership to several different groups at once, as well as participating in non-religious charity pursuits. When asked about her mother’s charity activities, Pamela Huppert commented “she was Guild, she was Council, she was WIZO... JNF, B’nai Brith, Maccabi Carnivals...she was into everything.” At Queen Esther Balls, although the National Council of Jewish Women, WIZO and youth groups each nominated and raised funds for their individual queens, the three groups joined their funds together at the conclusion of the ball to all donate to the same cause together. Due to the small size of the community, competing candidates would often be close family friends, as Carolyn Goldsmith and her best friend were in 1963, or a candidate for one

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216 Newton, Making a Difference, 188; conversation with P. Huppert, 27 June 2013. Pamela’s own mother was a member of this group of factory volunteers.
218 Conversation with S. Earley, 12 February 2013.
221 Conversation with P. Huppert, 27 June 2013. The B’nai Brith is an international Jewish branch of Freemasonry.
organisation might be the daughter of an executive member of another organisation, as was the case for NCJW candidate Pamela Hoffman in 1953, whose mother Jess was WIZO president.222 Brisbane’s women’s charity had a particularly local focus, more so than groups in other states did. After the establishment of the state of Israel most NCJW groups around the country shifted their focus to support for Israeli ventures, but Brisbane retained a reputation for “solid work for local causes.”223 The Brisbane women’s charity groups were highly dedicated to fulfilling their obligations to serve their local congregations and community.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women dedicated themselves to their community’s political interests and activities, though not at the same scale as interstate communities. Brisbane, conservative by nature, was not an environment in which political activism of any nature flourished as it did in the southern state capitals. The Jewish press in other countries published women’s journals and pamphlets with information on political issues, the labour movement, and the international women’s movement, and encouraged their readers’ knowledge of political issues.224 There is a lack of evidence of locally-produced political journals specifically by and for Jewish women in Brisbane. There is some dissemination of highly edited political information aimed at female readers in the general Jewish press, particularly in Shalom journal, edited by George and Fay Frey from Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.225 The premier political cause for Jewish communities for much of this period was Zionism and support of British Palestine, later the state of Israel, from the first Zionist congress in 1897 to the Arab-Israeli conflicts of the 1970s. Australian Jews were encouraged towards Zionism not only out of Jewish affinity, but also out of allegiance to the British Empire, which would benefit from the political security of a grateful Jewish controlling majority in Palestine.226 Zionism proved to be extremely popular amongst Jewish women, as the movement

222 Conversation with C. Goldsmith, 12 February 2103; Newton, Making a Difference, 189.
223 Newton, Making a Difference, 187.
224 Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States", 320.
225 For example, “How can you promote Israel trade?”, Shalom February/March 1968, 3.
226 Michaels, "Dreamers of Great Dreams", 177.
provided an acceptable vehicle for Jewish women to voice independent political thought.\textsuperscript{227} Brisbane’s Jewish women were keen to participate in activities supporting Zionism, and were drawn in great numbers to the Women’s International Zionist Organisation. Founded in 1935, WIZO was initially established as a rival women’s charitable group after a falling-out between high-ranking members of the NCJW in Sydney. However, it grew to be a significant national organisation in its own right, focusing its charitable efforts on funding projects in British Palestine and Israel, and drawing women to the Zionist cause.\textsuperscript{228} WIZO’s highly political and militant conception of Zionism appealed to women who were deeply affected by Nazi actions in Europe and angered by Britain’s withdrawal from the Balfour declaration of protection for Palestine as a Jewish state. Many Brisbane women had family connections to Palestine, and were attracted to WIZO through these ties. Tova Blumberg remembers her mother’s commitment to WIZO stemming from her grandfather’s Zionist political leanings, and her childhood in Palestine.\textsuperscript{229} Memberships skyrocketed after Australia joined the Second World War in 1939, and Australian WIZO groups, including Brisbane, achieved massive fundraising quotas as European nations suffered under German aggression.\textsuperscript{230} National WIZO leaders were concerned that the movement might suffer a loss of momentum after the 1948 Israeli declaration of independence, but Brisbane proved its dedication to the longevity of WIZO by becoming the first city to establish a “Younger Set” WIZO branch for teenage girls in 1952.\textsuperscript{231}

One of WIZO’s key goals was Zionist education, just as much as fundraising. Brisbane’s WIZO women were keen to pursue and sponsor Jewish academia and public political education. WIZO in Brisbane ran a Zionism Discussion Group, and elected a Chairwoman for Education and Information to arrange political education for WIZO members and pieces for the local Jewish press.\textsuperscript{232} When

\textsuperscript{227} Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, 305.
\textsuperscript{228} Michaels, "Dreamers of Great Dreams", 176.
\textsuperscript{229} Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January, 2013.
\textsuperscript{230} Hyams, "Women in Early Australian Zionism", 444; Michaels, "Dreamers of Great Dreams", 178.
\textsuperscript{231} Hyams, "Women in Early Australian Zionism", 447.
\textsuperscript{232} Conversation with T. Blumberg, 15 January, 2013. Tova herself acted in the role of Chairwoman for Education and Information for many years.
American Zionist lecturer and activist Bella Pevsner came to Australia in June 1923, Brisbane was the first stop on her tour. Brisbane’s Daughters of Zion arranged for her not only to lecture to their group at the Synagogue, but also to hold a public lecture at City Hall with the Governor in attendance.233 Some women took their action for Israel further than purely political campaigns; many visited British Palestine and Israel to see conditions for themselves, and reported back to their organisations in Brisbane.234 Two Brisbane girls, Eva Aufferber and Rosa Pelc Keneret, flew to Israel to volunteer as nurses and carers in June 1967 in the aftermath of the Six Day War.235 As the two girls were a significant proportion of the Brisbane contingent of seven volunteers, clearly Brisbane’s women were as dedicated to political causes as men were.

Just as Jewish politics has a much wider interest than in purely Israeli affairs, Jewish women were also involved in political activities for international Jewish political concerns. Brisbane’s Jewish community were mindful of anti-Semitism occurring overseas, and were active in condemning international anti-Semitic actions. The South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, many of whom were Russian Jews, was politically vocal regarding Russian atrocities towards the Jewish population in the years after the First World War.236 One of the major anti-Russian communal activities of the Brisbane Modern Orthodox Jewish community was through the medium of theatre, performing Yiddish-language plays in communal halls around South Brisbane. This not only encouraged Yiddish traditional cultural expression in the Jewish community, but also served as an eye-opener for the local non-Jewish Russian community into the experiences of Jews in their homeland, which was covered up and distorted by propaganda by Russian authorities.237 Women acted and worked backstage on many of these productions, and provided Yiddish coaching for the actors who had no

234 “Mrs P. Frankel honoured”, Courier Mail, 19 February 1930, 20.
236 “Jewish Synagogue in Deshon Street”, Brisbane Courier 28 March 1919, 10.
237 Stedman, "From Russia to Brisbane", 29.
knowledge of the language. When anti-Semitism threatened Brisbane, Jewish women were proactive in opposing it. In 1968, there was growing concern in Brisbane over the public activities of youths claiming affiliation with the Nazi party, under the direction of Sydney socialist Eric Wenberg. After the first abortive public rally of the Queensland Nazi Party in April 1968 was broken up by Jewish protestors, the community gathered the following week to blockade the rally’s second attempt. Amongst the gathered protestors were many young women, and a group of Jewish girls staffed a first aid tent in case of violent clashes. Jewish women’s organisations were involved in campaigns for indigenous affairs. When the 1970 NCJWA conference was held in Brisbane, one of the key projects the local groups put on the agenda was assisting Australian indigenous people with self-determination. Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women were politically savvy on issues concerning both their own faith and their wider community, and worked within traditional halakhic models to contribute to politics through awareness, education, fundraising and support roles.

Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish women clearly followed halakhic guidelines for the expectations of women in providing charity and social services, and participating in politics. The close-knit nature of the community, and the comparatively conservative nature of the Brisbane political scene during the period, offered both benefits and challenges for Modern Orthodox Jewish women in their charitable and political pursuits. However, the women’s organisations of the local Jewish community were very successful in both their charitable and political groups, and provided an excellent vehicle for women’s participation and development within the community. For Brisbane

238 Interview with Violet Briner & Sylvia Eshensky, in Steinberg, Remembering the Past; “Brisbane Judeans”, Hebrew Standard of Australasia, 30 September 1932, 10.
240 “Near riot as Jews stop Nazi rally”, Canberra Times, 1 April 1968; Ochert, “Further History of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation”, 33. The planned Nazi rally never eventuated; according to Ochert, Wenberg cancelled the event, stating “these Brisbane Jews are too bloody tough!”
241 Newton, Making a Difference, 257.
Modern Orthodox Jewish women, voluntary groups taught skills and conferred public authority on women members, and “expanded the range of appropriate female behaviour”\textsuperscript{242}, allowing them to work within \textit{halakhic} boundaries to grow into a strong force to guide their community forward.

\textsuperscript{242} Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States", 330.
Conclusion

Despite the limitations of size, geographic isolation and historical events, Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community led a rich, active and convivial communal life. From the first days of congregational activity in 1865 to the early years of its second century in 1972, the community united in a vast spectrum of pursuits. Congregants joined together in worship and religious learning, the promotion of marriage and family, the development of young people, the fostering of community spirit and cultural pride, the provision of social services and the defence of communal political ideals. Many of the typical and traditional activities and attitudes explored by religious literature and congregational theorists were practiced in Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, although often with a specific local flavour to them.

In the midst of this congregational activity, the women of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community were a definitive presence in each area, and made significant and lasting contributions. They valued and embraced Halakhah in their behaviour and activities, and took up roles as mothers, wives, supporters, helpers, carers and teachers with passion and dedication. Although it is the names of men inscribed on the honour boards as past Congregational Board presidents, past rabbis and past State Executive Council members, nevertheless the legacy of the community’s women is silent but strong. It can be found whenever the Sepher Torah comes out of its embroidered case, whenever a child borrows a book from the Talmud Torah library, whenever the community sits down to a Kiddush meal after a service, and whenever someone walks through the doors of one of the city’s women’s or children’s hospitals. Women’s experiences form a significant part of the history of Brisbane’s Modern Orthodox Jewish community, and their contributions have bestowed lasting benefits on both the Jewish community and the wider world.
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Glossary

Note: Judaism uses both Hebrew and Yiddish as mother tongues, and also transliterates words into the Roman alphabet, Anglicises spelling and features regional variations. Therefore, individual words can have a wide range of spelling and pronunciation variants. In writing this thesis, I have not embraced any particular spelling tradition, but have striven mainly for consistency and to retain the existing spelling formats used in the works consulted.


**Avodah** – literally “service”; generally, charity or social service and activism activities which faith communities participate in together

**Bachor** – Literally, “Firstborn Sons”, young single religious scholars who read specific portions of the liturgy in synagogue services; Plural *bachorim*.

**Bar Mitzvah** – The ceremony at which a young man, upon turning thirteen, becomes an adult member of the community for ceremonial purposes. Celebrated individually with a public reading of *Torah* in the Synagogue by the boy, and a party for his congregation, invited guests and non-Jewish friends. Plural *bar mitzvot*.

**Bat Mitzvah** – The ceremony marking a young woman’s majority, usually undertaken in her early teens. Celebrated together in groups, girls deliver an address on Jewish home customs or women’s bible stories in a secular venue, and celebrate with invited guests. Plural *bat mitzvot*.

**Betar** – Worldwide youth Zionist movement, involving Jewish children in social and charitable activities and developing ties with Israel.
**Beth Din** – a court guided by the principles of recognized *Halakhah* in dealing with matters of religious law. Plural *Bettei Din*.

**Bimah** – a raised platform in the centre of the *Synagogue*, on which is situated the desk for reading the Torah scroll.

**Chevra Kadisha** – a communal organisation responsible for conducting traditional religious burial preparations and funeral services for Modern Orthodox Jewish communities.

**Frum‡** – Devout in practice of Jewish religious and cultural traditions.

**Gemilut Hesadim** – acts of kindness, consideration and benevolence, usually involving personal service to another rather than just financial charity.

**Halakhah** – Traditional aspects of Judaism and Jewish laws, rulings and practices, derived straight from the *Torah* and other holy texts. In adjectival form, *halakhic*.

**Hannukah** – The “Festival of the Lights”, where eight candles are lit across eight nights. One of the most observed of Jewish holidays, celebrated at the end of the month of Kislev (just before the Christian festival of Christmas).

**Hasidism** – a religious renewal movement, begun among eastern European Jews in the mid-18th century. Promotes an ultra-orthodox lifestyle, rigorous religious study and separation from the secular world. Adjectival form *Hasidic*.

**Hatikvah*†** – anthem of the Zionist movement and the state of Israel, written in the late 19th-century and popularly sung worldwide at Jewish events and festivals.

**Hazzan** – Director of all musical aspects of Jewish liturgy, and performer of sung prayers. Also known as a cantor, plural *hazzanim*.

**Heimische‡** – a Yiddish term meaning familiar, unpretentious and homely.
**Huppah** – the canopy under which a wedding ceremony takes place.

**Kaddish** – Prayers of mourning for parents and ancestors, performed at the end of every synagogue service by male family members.

**Kehilla** – Community. *Kehilla Kedosha* is sometimes used for a congregation, literally a “sacred community” Plural *kehilot*.

**Kiddush** – a blessed meal including wine and bread consumed on the Sabbath; often congregations take *Kiddush* together in the form of a communal lunch after a Sabbath service.

**Kippah** – skullcap worn as a covering of the head by men in accordance with Orthodox Jewish custom. Yiddish form *yarmulke* also used. Plural *kippot*.

**Knesset** – literally, “community”; generally, activities of a social and cultural nature, rather than religious, which a congregation or community do together.

**Kosher** – Objects ritually fit under Jewish law. Particularly used of food prepared in accordance with the dietary laws.

**Lockshun** – hand-made wheat noodles.

**Lubavitch** – A popular form of *Hasidism* in many Western countries. Also known as *Chabad*, its adherents are very active in their endeavours to return non-practicing Jews to orthodox practice.

**Mehitza** - Partition in the synagogue separating men from women during public prayer.

**Mezuzah** – Small parchment of *Torah* text rolled tightly and placed in a small case, affixed to doorposts in synagogues and Jewish homes and communal buildings. Ritually kissed upon passing in through the doorway.
Midrash – Literally, “Study”; generally, activities surrounding Jewish education and development, particularly of children.

Minyan – the number of adult Jews necessary for a quorum for various liturgical purposes. Modern Orthodox Halakhah defines a minyan for communal prayer as ten Jewish men who are aged thirteen or older.

Mitzvah – Divine commandment or obligation under Halakhah. Plural mitzvot.

Modern Orthodoxy – Style of Jewish observance developed in the 19th century, promoting Orthodox Jewish traditions from the Torah in harmony with secular culture. Also known as Neo-Orthodoxy.

Naches – Yiddish term for the joys and pleasures derived vicarily from others.

Naches fun kinder – Naches parents derive from their children’s activities and achievements.

National Council of Jewish Women – Women’s charitable organisation, established in Sydney by Dr Fanny Reading in 1926. Often abbreviated to NCJW.

Niddah – ritual purity laws for women, based around the menstrual cycle, which govern the timing of sexual intercourse, childbirth and women’s participation in particular rituals.

Rabbi – Ordained minister in a Jewish congregation, in charge of religious, educational, pastoral, social, and interfaith activities within the congregation. Often abbreviated to Rev. in the Anglo-Jewish tradition.

Rebbetzin – Wife of a rabbi.

Rosh Hashonah – The New Year festival of the Jewish calendar, at the start of the month of Tishrei.

Sepher Torah – a scroll that contains the first five books of the Bible—the Torah – for use in synagogue services.
Shabbat – weekly day of rest and reflection, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Includes many home-based rituals, attendance at synagogue and strict prohibitions against performing many tasks. Often anglicised to Sabbath.

Shaduchan – in Jewish folklore and tradition, a professional marriage broker who arranged courtships and marriages for young Orthodox Jews.

Shidduch – Traditionally, the term for an arranged marriage agreement or betrothal; in modern times, used for a couple’s engagement. Plural shidduchim.

Synagogue – Jewish place of worship and meeting. In Eastern European/Yiddish tradition, known as a shul.

Talmud – The teachings of the major Jewish scholars from the classic period of rabbinic Judaism (200-500 CE). In adjectival form, Talmudic.

Talmud Torah – institution providing elementary Jewish education for children, teaching Torah, Hebrew Language and Jewish history and customs. Also called a cheder.

Tefilla* – Literally, “prayer”; generally, the acts of worship and religious ritual Jewish congregations and individuals perform

Tiflut** – Literally, “foolishness” – in the Talmud, when used of a woman’s Torah study, denotes unfeminine behaviour and impropriety.

Tikkun olam – literally “healing of the world”; a catchall term for social action, volunteerism, or political movements working toward social justice.

Torah – A term applied both to the entire corpus of sacred Jewish literature and to the first of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible.
Women’s International Zionist Organisation† – Worldwide women’s charitable organisation, formed in Britain in 1920 and focused on fundraising for Israeli causes. Often abbreviated to WIZO.

Yeshiva – a tertiary-level institution for higher learning in Judaism, devoted primarily to study of the Talmud. Plural yeshivot.

Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement in the Jewish calendar, the most solemn of the Jewish festivals. It is common to fast and attend synagogue in repentance for the sins of the previous years.

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† Aron et al., Sacred Strategies.
§ Newton, Making a Difference.
** Sassoon, The Status of Women in Jewish Tradition.