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**THREE GENERATIONS OF ITALIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN NASSAU
COUNTY, N.Y., 1925-1981**

Lehigh University

PH.D. 1985

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THREE GENERATIONS OF ITALIAN AMERICAN WOMEN
IN NASSAU COUNTY, N.Y., 1925-1981

by
Mary Jane Capozzoli

A Dissertation
Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

This study of three generations of Italian American women in suburban Nassau County, N.Y., uses interviews, questionnaires, censuses, and historical sources to examine women's work, education, religion, sexual morality, and household and leisure activities. Being Italian was important in the lives of these women. Although there were changes over time and adherence to Italian patterns weakened, differences were more in degree than in kind. Italian traditions of male superiority and familism were evident when compared to other Nassau women. Italians tended to live closer to kin and to keep in closer touch with family. Their parents tended to control their work patterns, dating, use of cosmetics, and selection of marriage partners. Consequently Italian women were less apt to seek self-fulfillment in their jobs and to pursue higher education, as compared with comparable females. Religion tended to be less important to Italian women than to other Catholics, as reflected in church attendance and organizational activities. But

Italians did practice certain ethnic religious traditions and displayed religious objects in their homes. These women, more sheltered, envied their brothers' greater freedom to come and go and to avoid household chores. Finally these women received less information on such things as career choices and sex, including menstruation. They were therefore less likely to discuss such questions as birth control or abortion with either family or friends. But this is changing as the third generation find themselves reduced to the ethnicity of food recipes and Italian family names.

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of the "new social history," the study of women, the family, and ethnic groups have become commonplace. But these subjects have usually been examined individually rather than collectively. Studies of women usually focussed on the middle classes and often ignored ethnicity. Students of our urban past have generally directed their attention to the migration and mobility of men in cities. And research on ethnic groups has often neglected women and the family. Studies of Italian Americans, for example, have generally investigated first-generation city-dwellers and men's work patterns and social mobility.

Recently, however, scholars have begun to examine the role of women in terms of family, ethnicity, and social class. Thomas Kessner, for example, comparing Italian and Jewish mobility in New York City, discusses the differences in work patterns between Italian and Jewish females.¹ A more complete picture of Italian women's lives is found in Virginia Yans-McLaughlin's study of Italian families in

¹ The Golden Door (New York, 1977).

Buffalo from 1880-1930.² Gender and class are paramount in Leslie Tentler's analysis of the lives of working-class women in the early twentieth century.³ Elizabeth Ewen applies ethnic and social-class variables in her study of Jewish and Italian immigrant women on New York's Lower East Side.⁴

A crucial issue in many of these studies is the significance of ethnicity in determining a woman's role as wife, mother, or daughter. Yans-McLaughlin emphasizes the unique importance of Italian culture, particularly the traditions of male superiority and familism, in shaping women's lives.⁵ Elizabeth Ewen, too, stresses the protective and restrictive nature of the Italian family in determining the behavior of Italian females.⁶ These scholars as well as Elizabeth Pleck and John Briggs found that the work habits of Italian American women have been largely molded by their

² Family and Community (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977).

³ Wage Earning Women (New York, 1979).

⁴ "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, SUNY at Stony Brook, 1979).

⁵ Family and Community, pp. 260-265.

⁶ "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars, 1890-1920," pp. iii-vi, 283-311; Louise Odencrantz (Italian Women in Industry [New York, 1919], p. 203), Caroline Ware (Greenwich Village, 1920-1930 [New York, 1977], pp. 185, 216), and Bertram Cohler and Henry Grunebaum (Mothers, Grandmothers, and Daughters [New York, 1981], p. 22) have also emphasized sheltering and supervision of Italian females as culturally distinctive.

cultural background.⁷ The former notes, for instance, that Italian women were less likely to work than black women despite the family's economic need, the composition of the household, and wage rates. The latter found that Italian wives almost totally avoided domestic service while favoring the garment industry and homework, which limited their social contacts.⁸

Conversely, Leslie Tentler, Miriam Cohen, and Lillian Rubin deemphasize the importance of ethnicity in shaping women's roles.⁹ According to Tentler, gender and class influenced women's lives more decisively than residence or nationality. In particular, the working women's experience in the labor force (e.g., the type of job, the conditions of work) reinforced submissiveness, dependency, and passivity, and fostered acceptance of one's traditional role.¹⁰ Cohen considers New York City's changing employment structure (as

⁷ Pleck, "A Mother's Wages: Income Earning among Married Italian and Black Women, 1899-1911," in Heritage of Her Own, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York, 1979), p. 381; Briggs, An Italian Passage (New Haven, 1979), p. 116.

⁸ Pleck, "A Mother's Wages," p. 381; Briggs, An Italian Passage, p. 116.

⁹ Tentler, Wage Earning Women, p. 5; Miriam Cohen, "From Workshop to Office: Italian Women and Family Strategies in New York City, 1900-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978), p. 12; Lillian Rubin, Worlds of Pain (New York, 1976), p. 9. Also see Louise Tilly, "Comments on the Yans-McLaughlin and Davidoff Papers," and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Yans-McLaughlin and Davidoff Papers," in Journal of Social History 7 (Summer 1974): pp. 455ff. and 449ff.

¹⁰ Wage Earning Women, pp. 5, 7, 8.

well as changes in its social and political life) and family needs more important determinants of women's work patterns and education than differences in ethnic values.¹¹ Class (as reflected in education and occupation) is of paramount importance to Rubin in her discussion of the working class versus the middle class family. Hence, working class wives have different marital, sexual, educational, and work experiences than their middle class counterparts. While also giving more weight to social class, Herbert Gans rates ethnicity a close second in discussing the Italian heritage as an integral part of working-class subculture.¹²

Since Gans's pioneer study of second-generation Italians in Boston's West End, others have examined generational change among ethnic groups.¹³ While Gans predicts that third-generation Italian American women will have a less traditional role than their foremothers and will be less hesitant about leaving the house to work, Richard Gambino's personal interpretation of the Italian experience in Brooklyn¹⁴

¹¹ "From Workshop to Office," p. 12.

¹² Rubin, Worlds of Pain, p. 10; Gans, The Urban Villagers (New York, 1962), pp. 229-230.

¹³ E.g. Bertram J. Cohler and Henry U. Grunebaum, Mothers, Grandmothers, and Daughters (New York, 1981); Sharon Strom, "Italian American Women and Their Daughters in Rhode Island: The Adolescence of Two Generations, 1900-1950," The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America, ed. Betty Boyd Caroli, R. F. Harney, and L. F. Tomasi (Toronto, 1978), pp. 191-204.

¹⁴ Gans, The Urban Villagers, pp. 215-216; Gambino, Blood of My Blood (Garden City, N.Y., 1974), p. 375.

discusses the waning of Italian culture over three generations. Corinne Krause shows the persistence of ethnicity in comparing the attitudes and values of three generations of Italian, Slavic, and Jewish women in Pittsburgh. For example, despite generation, Italian women reported sex distinctions within their families more often than Slavic or Jewish women.¹⁵ A discussion of generational change is also integral to Cohen's analysis of Italian women and family in New York City from 1900-1950. That second generation women attended high school and generally became white-collar workers, for example, did not significantly change their roles as wives and mothers when compared to the first generation.¹⁶

This study will analyze the changes that occurred in the lives of three generations of Italian women from 1925 to 1981--changes resulting primarily but not exclusively from assimilation.¹⁷ Suburban Nassau County forms the arena where their Italian heritage, particularly familism and male superiority, is pitted against the forces of assimilation and generational stress. It is one of the largest suburban areas in the nation and its Italian population is larger

¹⁵ Grandmothers, Mothers, and Daughters (New York, 1978), p. 53.

¹⁶ "From Workshop to Office," p. 321.

¹⁷ Ware (Greenwich Village, p. 175) argues that the breakdown of Italian culture can be traced in the changing position of Italian women.

than that of any other ethnic group.¹⁸ That this important area has also been neglected by researchers is lamented by Edward Smits, Nassau County historian:

It is quite deplorable that so little definitive scholarly work has been performed about a community the size of Nassau County with such a [diverse] and significant population.¹⁹

Such a setting, because it is not the classic ghetto, is perhaps instructive in questioning the influence of the neighborhood alone in the assimilation process. I wish to emphasize the role of the family in helping to maintain Italian traditions.²⁰

Being Italian was of paramount importance in shaping the lives of these three generations of women. While there were changes in the years between 1925 and 1981, and although adherence to Italian patterns weakened over time, the changes were ones of degree rather than of kind. The suburban factor is not very significant since residence seems to have had little effect in masking a woman's ethnicity. Evidence of her Italian heritage becomes apparent in this study of women's work patterns, educational

¹⁸ People of Italian descent predominate in 74 of 110 communities in Nassau: Frank J. Cavaioli, "Ethnic Population Patterns on Long Island," in Ethnicity in Suburbia, ed. Salvatore La Gumina (1980), p. 24.

¹⁹ Nassau Suburbia U.S.A. (1974), pp. ix-x.

²⁰ See Kathleen N. Conzen, "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods, and Ethnic Identity," Journal of American History 66 (December 1979):603-615.

experience, religious upbringing, sexual morality, and organizational involvement. Although Italian and non-Italian women might have shared equally in some of these experiences, the Italian woman's overall pattern was unique.

Since Italian women lived almost all their lives within the family--as daughters, wives, and mothers--the family's goals and needs largely determined their behavior. As a repository of culture and primary agent of socialization, the Italian family played a more important part in shaping the woman's role than did any other institution. Yet, changes in a woman's perception of herself also shaped her position within the family. Her attitudes, values, and behavior resulted from inner forces--her self-perception and inculcated family values--as well as outside forces: the changing economic, social, and political life of the county from 1925 to 1981. In other words, this study considers changes that resulted not only from shifting circumstances but also from the reordering of individual and family priorities. Behavioral changes gradually incorporated the new with the old, so that ideas may operate in changing contexts. Using questionnaires and oral histories from both Italian and non-Italian women, I have tried to discern how attitudes both influence behavior and also change over time.

The effects of class, ethnicity, and generation on the roles of women are considered in relation to their religious upbringing, work experiences, sexual morality, household

duties, and leisure activities, in order to discover how the Italian family affected women's behavior and how assimilation influenced their lives.

However crucial Italian cultural values may have been in shaping these women's educational and work experiences, they had even greater influence on their individual behavior. Feeling restricted, sheltered, and overprotected, Italian women tended to believe they were treated differently from their brothers, especially with respect to household chores and freedom of action. Similarly, family attitudes affected their chances of leaving home and/or going away to college.

Grooming, dress, and contact with young men were also heavily regulated by the family. Parents preferred their daughters to date and marry Italians. These Nassau women were also less likely than non-Italian females to have received adequate information about menstruation and sex before marriage. Such parental overprotection of daughters often stifled their individualism and limited their experience of the world. Many women naturally resented such treatment. Added to the sexism of American society, such familial controls probably delayed the Italian woman's self-awareness and identity apart from her family. Her aspirations and ambitions may also have been limited by the family's control over her.

The importance of Italian mores is also seen in matters

of religion. Families encouraged religious instruction, church-going, and sharing in the sacraments, but with less fervor than other Catholic families and often only until adolescence. While these women, as adults, practiced certain Italian religious traditions and displayed sacred objects, they apparently found church attendance and membership less important than it was for other Catholics.

Attitudes toward work and school also had an Italian flavor. Italian parents more often than those of non-Italian women indicated that certain types of employment were unsuitable for females. These parents were also more likely to hold conventional beliefs regarding women working outside the home. Despite such attitudes, however, Italian women did hold jobs similar to those of other Nassau women and were found in the work force in similar proportions.

Italian parents were more likely than others to express negative opinions about education, which helps to explain why Italian women received fewer years of formal schooling than other women, and why they were more often employed in blue-collar rather than in white-collar jobs.

In the following essay, the influence of ethnicity is studied through the use of questionnaires and interviews from over four hundred Nassau County women. Ninety-four interviews, averaging three hours each, were conducted with women whose parents were either Italian or of Italian descent; an additional eighteen interviews were held with

non-Italian women. Copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule are included in the appendix.

From information gathered regarding family income and job status and from personally visiting over one hundred of these women at home, I would characterize the women of this group as middle class. By and large, these families live in a style that leaned heavily toward Gans's definition of middle class subculture with its child-centeredness and its orientation around the nuclear family, although some elements of what Gans terms professional upper-middle-class culture are also evident, e.g., adult-directed family and emphasis on individual development of family members.²¹ Other similarities between the Italian and non-Italian women as well as more specific information regarding each generation are detailed in the chapters ahead.

This is not a scientific sample. Women were recruited in a variety of ways in 1981 and 1982. At first, I contacted friends in the county, who in many cases referred me to other women. I placed advertisements in local newspapers, such as the Massapequa Post, and put announcements in many of the county's libraries. I spoke before senior citizen groups and contacted religious, civic, ethnic, and political organizations having large numbers of women. I also called Lehigh and Adelphi University alumni in an attempt to

²¹ The Urban Villagers, pp. 246-249.

recruit interested participants. Hence, such a sample is probably more educated and affluent than a random one.

The information gathered from these women is supplemented by data from the 1925 New York State Manuscript Census, a sample of 681 families, as well as printed censuses. Together with accounts of the first and second generations regarding their parents, the manuscript census was especially useful in providing information on work, household structure, and intermarriage. Sources regarding the county's history and the work of other scholars in the field was also used. The first chapter gives a brief history of Nassau County, in order to place Italians in the county's socioeconomic and political structure. The characteristics of la contadina, the peasant's wife in southern Italy, are then studied as background for discussing the influence of Italian culture on the immigrant woman in America. The persistence of Italian culture in the lives of the first, second, and third generations is traced in subsequent chapters. At the same time, the lives of these three generations are compared and contrasted. In the final chapter, the experiences of these Nassau Italian American women are matched with those of other Nassau women in order to underscore the influence of their Italian heritage.

CHAPTER 1
NEW YORK CITY'S BEDROOM

Of the nearly two million inhabitants of Nassau County about one-fourth are Italian Americans.¹ But such a substantial proportion of Italians was not characteristic of its early history. In 1899, when Nassau dissociated itself from Queens County to become independent, it was a semirural area populated by native-born residents of north European stock. The largest foreign-born groups in 1910 were English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and Germans, but by 1930 Germans, Italians, Polish, Irish, and English were the largest (table 1).² Among native whites of mixed or foreign parentage those nationalities were also the leading groups, although the Irish now ranked third (table 2). Proportionally, the Italian and Polish were more prominent than they had been twenty years earlier. The combined foreign-born and foreign-heritage population outnumbered the native-born (table 3).

¹ Jean Schindler, "Long Island Found to Lack Ethnic Mix," Newsday, April 28, 1979, p. 19.

² Edward J. Smits, Nassau Suburbia U.S.A. (Garden City, N.Y., 1974), p. 162. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census (1930), Population (Washington, D.C., 1932), 3:299.

TABLE 1
LARGEST FOREIGN-BORN GROUPS IN NASSAU COUNTY, 1930

Country	Number	Foreign-born Population (%)
Germany	11,558	18.2
Italy	9,145	14.4
Poland	5,923	9.3
Ireland	5,666	8.9
England	5,563	8.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census (1930),
Population (Washington, D.C., 1932), 3:299.

TABLE 2
LARGEST GROUPS OF FOREIGN OR MIXED PARENTAGE
NASSAU COUNTY 1930

Country of Parents' Birth	Number	Foreign or Mixed Parentage Population (% of total)
Germany	24,851	24.0
Italy	15,507	15.2
Ireland	12,019	11.8
Poland	9,646	9.4
England	8,586	8.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census (1930),
Population (Washington, D.C., 1932), 3:301.

TABLE 3
COMPOSITION OF NASSAU'S POPULATION, 1930

Group	Number	Percentage of Total
Native American	129,652	42.7
Mixed or foreign parentage	101,658	33.5
Foreign born	63,437	20.9
Negro	7,960	2.6
Other races	346	--
Total	303,053	99.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census (1930),
Population (Washington, D.C., 1932), 3:281.

Along with such changes in the ethnic make-up of the population came changes in religious affiliation. In 1910 the chief Christian denominations were Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist, while twenty Roman Catholic parishes had been established. By 1930 the number of the latter had doubled, Jewish synagogues had been built in six communities, and the Lutheran denomination was approaching the size of the leading Protestant sects.³

The county's altered ethnic and religious composition was a by-product of its growth from 55,000 in 1900 to 303,000 in 1930. This was a transitional period as the county's rural atmosphere began to wane: for example, in 1908 the village of Rockville Centre had to number its houses when postmen could not remember every house. The 446 telephones in the county in 1900 had increased to 34,000 by 1925; while 9,000 motor vehicles were registered in Nassau in 1916, by 1930 there were over 112,000 ⁴

Until 1941, when the golden-nematode worm destroyed the potato crop, most of the county was farmland. In addition to its famous potato, Long Island was noted for its truck market gardening, dairying, and horticulture. Fishing, especially oystering, thrived, but by 1930 it had almost died out. At the turn of the century a typical waterfront

³ Smits, Nassau, pp. 33, 163, 164.

⁴ Preston R. Bassett, The History of Rockville Centre (1969), p. 152; Smits, Nassau, pp. 49, 152.

community had a marine and rope store, oyster-packing houses, seafood and retail businesses, such as feed, ice and coal, general stores, a livery stable, insurance agent, carpenter, mason, dressmaker, and shoemaker.⁵

In such a rural atmosphere one store often served several purposes. A cigar store in Hempstead, one of the larger villages, housed a real estate and insurance business.⁶ The slow country pace of the south shore allowed a Freeport policeman to read a newspaper while directing traffic.⁷ On weekends, however, as the roads began to be clogged with automobiles from the city, visitor-watching became a local pastime. This "invasion" symbolized the erosion of small-town life, where everybody knew everybody else and they all went to the Sunday afternoon baseball game and the Saturday night dance in the old firehouse.⁸ Population growth, the introduction of electricity and telephones, the improvements in transportation, along with the new industries, signaled the demise of this rural lifestyle.

⁵ Smits, Nassau, pp. 17-19, 25, 176, 260. The county also had 35 nurseries in 1930.

⁶ Harry DeBeau, "Early Years of Hempstead Village," Long Island Forum 6 (July 1943):129.

⁷ Tom Smith, "The Actors' Colony at Freeport," *ibid.*, 10 (Oct. 1947):183.

⁸ Patricia Tunison, Looking Back on Syosset (1975), p. 18. Interview with Margaret Duffy Stolz and James Stolz, #10; interview with Sarah Huettner, #13, Hicksville Public Library Oral History Project.

Although industrial development was on a small scale until World War II, local industry gradually increased in importance in the county's economy. In 1900 Nassau had 321 manufacturing establishments, including a brick factory, the Heinz pickle factory in Hicksville, a dress factory, toy factory, hammock factory, iron works, and an ice company. Larger employers included the sand-mining pits in Port Washington, a leather- and canvas-belting factory in Glen Cove, and Doubleday and Paige Publishing Company, which moved to Nassau County in 1910. By 1915, 3,282 people were employed locally as industrial wage earners. In 1930 the automobile, printing, publishing, iron and steel, clothing, textile, lumber, and electric industries employed 14,263 workers, while the construction industry engaged another 15,905 (table 4). It was in this transitional period also that the aircraft industry got its start in the county, becoming a major employer of local residents during World War II. In addition to industrial occupations, however, indicative of a thriving suburban area, there were others in the service category, such as retailing and wholesaling, banking and real estate, transportation and communication, and domestic service.⁹

⁹ Smits, Nassau, pp. 16, 27, 108-113, 178-180, 185; Bassett and Hodges, Rockville Centre, p. 202. Retail and wholesale stores included 71 building-material suppliers, 82 plumbing concerns, 123 hardware stores, 78 coal and ice yards, 356 gas stations, and 14 general stores.

TABLE 4
OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF NASSAU COUNTY WORK FORCE IN 1930

Type of Work	Number	Type of Work	Number
<u>Agricultural & Related</u>		<u>Transportation & Communication</u>	
Agriculture	5,977	Construction & street repair	1,530
Farmers	1,049	Garages, greasing stations	1,114
Farm managers & foremen	114	Steam & street railroads	1,899
Farm laborers	4,732	Telephone & telegraph	2,821
Fishing & forestry	262	Other, including postal service	4,141
	Total	Total	11,505
<u>Light and Heavy Industry</u>		<u>Service</u>	
Extraction of minerals	510	Amusement & recreation	2,206
Building	15,905	Hotels, restaurants	2,785
Chemical & allied industries	1,305	Laundries, cleaning & pressing	1,058
Clothing & textiles	2,193	Domestic & personal service	16,352
Independent hand trades	793	Other professional & semi-professional service	9,829
Lumber and furniture	687	Public service	3,781
Paper & allied industries	194	Total	36,011
Printing & publishing	3,455		
Shoe factories	140	<u>Trade & Commercial</u>	
Other leather industries	113	Wholesale & retail	18,393
Bakeries	642	Automobile agencies & gas stations	1,538
Slaughter & packing houses	60	Other trade industries	1,226
Other food & allied industries	437	Real estate & insurance	4,678
Automobile factories & repair shops	480	Banking & brokerage	5,403
Electrical machinery	596	Total	31,238
Iron & steel	3,100		
Other metals	529	Industry not specified	4,856
Other industries	3,452		
Total	37,581		

Source: Long Island Almanac & Yearbook (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1932), p. 30;
U.S. Census (1930), 3:307.

That sectors other than industrial and agricultural furnished much local employment is not surprising since real estate promoters and developers actively encouraged local growth during the 1920s. For example, between 1925 and 1929 Frank Cryan, Peter Colleran, and Michael Brady bought land on the south shore and developed it under the name of Massapequa Gardens. Selling for \$8,000 each, these English-Tudor, Colonial, and Spanish style houses were promoted through newspaper advertisements, and interested individuals were given free transportation on the Long Island Railroad.¹⁰

In the twentieth century, although many newcomers of both native and foreign parentage came directly to the county from outside, it was primarily an area of second settlement for families from New York City. Even at the turn of the century, promoters advertised Nassau's recreational opportunities and superior moral atmosphere in order to spur the growth of its communities.¹¹ In 1912, for example, the Amsterdam Development and Sales Company purchased about 150 acres of farmland, which became a suburban community within three years. Later in the decade new communities sprang up

¹⁰ Ira L. Cahn, ed., Illustrated History of Massapequa (1968), pp. 46-47. Many land companies were formed to develop housing: e.g. the O.L. Schwencke Company built up Seaford Harbor in 1921. Nassau Daily Review Star, June 3, 1936, p. 15.

¹¹ Smits, Nassau, p. 184.

in Great Neck and Roslyn.¹²

In 1910, the opening of Pennsylvania Station in New York City, along with the electrification of the Long Island Railroad's central line to Hempstead in 1918 and that of the Montauk division to Babylon in 1925, was largely responsible for stimulating the county's growth. Moreover, three new bus companies began operation in the twenties, greatly facilitating travel to and from the City. By 1930, 30,000 commuters rode the Long Island Railroad daily and the elevation of its tracks had begun in some communities.¹³ While vitalizing local retail sales and services, these new residents, mainly industrial and business workers, shifted the county's economic base to a dependence on New York City.¹⁴

Before the railroads, buses, and parkways facilitated the movement of large numbers of people into Nassau County, vacationers, who were mainly middle-class businessmen, had built homes for their families in the county during the 1890s. Likewise, the county became a haven for the wealthy,

¹² Henry I. Hazelton, The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, Counties of Nassau and Suffolk, Long Island, New York, 1909-1924 (New York, 1925), 2:873; George R. Van Allen, "The Rise of Malverne," Long Island Forum 18 (March 1955):45; Marilyn Weingold, The American Mediterranean (Port Washington, N.Y., 1974), p. 91.

¹³ Smits, Nassau, pp. 155, 158, 187; M.H. Smith, History of Garden City (1963), p. 82; Bassett and Hodges, Rockville Centre, p. 210.

¹⁴ Smits, Nassau, p. 187.

as families such as the Whitneys, Tiffanys, Guggenheims, Morgans, and Pratts chose to build their mansions on the north shore after the turn of the century.¹⁵ While the building of new estates or the improvement of existing ones continued into the 1930s, most of these mansions were built between 1905 and 1915. By 1920 some 600 had been created, each with at least 50 acres of land and some with a hundred rooms. The extravagant F.W. Woolworth estate in Glen Cove, with its 62 rooms and solid-gold doorknobs and bathroom fixtures, boasted a 14-carat gold ceiling in the dining room. Many mansions also had such facilities as swimming pools, golf courses, polo fields, and hunting preserves.¹⁶

These new wealthy residents fostered auto races on Long Island's Motor Parkway, as well as yachting, hunting, polo, and golf clubs.¹⁷ In the Port Washington area alone were found the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, the Knickerbocker Yacht Club, the Port Washington Yacht Club, and the North Hempstead Country Club.¹⁸ The prestige of the north shore with its opulent lifestyle attracted more wealthy residents to what was called the "Gold Coast." A sense of social, family,

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-12, 121-123.

¹⁶ Dennis P. Sobin, Dynamics of Community Change (Port Washington, N.Y., 1968), pp. 4, 36, 53; Robert A. Caro, The Power Broker (New York, 1974).

¹⁷ Smits, Nassau, pp. 127-131.

¹⁸ Hazelton, The Boroughs, 2:902.

or business obligations also brought many others to the north shore.¹⁹

By 1930 these estates, containing more captains of industry than any other section of the country, occupied much of the land in the towns of North Hempstead and Oyster Bay. Robert Moses characterized this as "the wealthiest, most snobbish, and most reactionary community in the United States."²⁰ Nevertheless, these Gold Coast mansions helped the local retail economy and provided employment for many local residents, particularly the foreign born, who served as butlers, stablemen, cooks, maids, laborers, gardeners, and superintendents. The typical work force on a 100-acre estate comprised between 25 and 50 people. The superintendent and butler were often English, the gardeners Scottish, English, or Irish; maids and cooks were usually Irish, French, or English, laborers generally Polish or Italian.²¹

Between 1900-1930 the north shore also became a haven for literary and theatrical people. For instance, during the 1920s old Anglo-Saxon families of the Great Neck area were displaced by wealthy families of Jewish intellectuals: Raoul

¹⁹ Sobin, Community Change, pp. 35, 37.

²⁰ Smits, Nassau, p. 124; Stuart Rotkowitz and Carla Epstein, "The Dynamism of Robert Moses," Long Island Forum 32 (Sept. 1969):173.

²¹ Monica Randall, The Mansions of Long Island's Gold Coast (New York, 1979), p. 19; Sobin, Dynamics of Community Change, pp. 47-48; "Oral History Tells It Like It Was," Port Washington News, June 3, 1982, sec. 2, p. 1.

Fleischman, first president of The New Yorker who moved to Plandome Manor in 1927, is just one example. Other literary figures who resided in this area included Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of children's literature, Kathleen and Charles Norris, Sinclair Lewis, Ring Lardner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose Great Gatsby depicts Gold Coast life.²²

At about this time a show-business colony flourished in Freeport on the south shore. Playwrights, songwriters, and actors spent summers there, often performing locally for charity. They included Leo Carillo, Billy Gould, Victor Moore, Charles Mack, and Ernest R. Ball, who wrote "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling."²³

The not so wealthy or famous also came to Nassau in the 1920s. Edward Corsi claims that 30,000 Italians moved to Westchester and Long Island from East Harlem and 60,000 from the Lower East Side in the decade 1920-1930.²⁴ Many of these immigrant families were able to make the move by using their

²² Hazelton, The Boroughs, 2:924; A. Peracchio, "A Proud Peninsula," Newsday, May 14, 1979, p. 5; B. Tusiani, "A Complete History of Plandome Manor," Long Island Forum 44 (July 1981):138, 170; Smits, Nassau, p. 125-126; M. Haller, "Main Street Port Washington," Journal of Long Island History 5 (Spring 1965):17.

²³ Smits, Nassau, pp. 126; Paul Baily, "Nassau's South Shore," Long Island Forum 22 (Nov. 1959):212-213.

²⁴ "Italian Immigrants and Their Children," Annals of the American Academy 223 (Sept. 1942):103; Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," p. 34.

children's savings for payments on a house on Long Island.²⁵

Both working- and middle-class residents contributed largely to Nassau's growth from 126,120 in 1920 to 303,053 in 1930.²⁶ With the intensified growth in home building as new villages appeared and older ones expanded, realty values in the county increased fivefold during the decade. Several estates sold to developers helped in this suburbanization process. The construction of department stores and supermarkets, as well as schools and hospitals, was a part of this growth process; paving and improving major roads was another.²⁷ In the late 1920s three major thoroughfares were opened on the south shore: Sunrise Highway and the Southern and Wantagh State Parkways, the latter two orchestrated by Robert Moses. Many of the county's villages were incorporated through the efforts of civic groups, which, together with other nonreligious organizations, had grown consider-

²⁵ Ware, Greenwich Village, p. 74; Marie J. Concistre, "The Italians in East Harlem," in The Italians, ed. Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni (Clifton, N.J., 1947), p. 238; "Going to Long Island," New York Times, Oct. 13, 1929, XII, p. 14.

²⁶ U.S. Census (1930), vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 758. The New York Times noted (Jan. 4, 1931, XII, p. 15) that the county had a higher percentage of population increase (about 140%) than almost any other county in the nation.

²⁷ "Public Projects Aid Long Island," New York Times, Jan. 4, 1931, XII, p. 15; Bassett and Hodges, Rockville Centre, pp. 176-182; John E. O'Shea, "History of North Hempstead," in New Hyde Park Historical Bicentennial Journal, (1976), p. 6; Smith, Garden City, pp. 112-115; Weigold, American Mediterranean, p. 107; Sobin, Community Change, p. 51.

ably since 1900. Whereas church groups had provided the primary source of social life at the turn of the century, by 1930 there were numerous civic, community, fraternal, business, and cultural associations, which, in addition to fostering social relationships, also had educational, charitable, or community-betterment goals.²⁸

From the end of World War I to 1930 Nassau's school population increased by 300 percent. Before the war a few local libraries existed, while some high schools with departmental organization, improved curriculums, and athletic programs were operating in new buildings. During the 1920s, however, construction expanded as schools became overcrowded. Like others across the country at this time, the schools in Nassau introduced music instruction, vocational training, home economics, and commercial courses, as well as expanded science curriculums. In the 1930s also the county had two four-year colleges and twenty-one public libraries.²⁹

In spite of the Depression, Nassau's population increased by about one-third during the 1930s and, considering the nation's economy, the county also fared quite well in other ways. The Long Island Chamber of Commerce declared that the county was less affected by the Depression than any

²⁸ Smits, Nassau, pp. 34, 138-139, 143-145; Clark et al., Three Generations in Twentieth Century America, p.204.

²⁹ Smits, Nassau, pp. 33, 165-169, 172. By 1930 there were 19 Catholic elementary and three high schools.

similarly sized area in the country. By establishing the Nassau County Clearing House to advise and assist financial institutions, Nassau bankers provided a stable fiscal climate for businesses and residents. In 1931, for example, only four out of 347 banks were forced to close. Because of this banking strength, there was a smaller percentage of financial failures and less hoarding on Long Island than elsewhere. In the same year eight new industries were established in Nassau, and building activities exceeded those of other similar areas. Two years later the New York Times noted that in 1932 retail sales were high on Long Island. Such sales accounted for one fourth of all those in New York State.³⁰

Nevertheless, Nassau did not completely escape the effects of the Depression, since by 1934 one-sixth of its population was out of work. The county's Lot and Block work project, which involved revising Nassau's file of taxable property, provided employment for many white-collar workers. Unemployed artists were enlisted to beautify the area while the Nassau Collegiate Institute was set up as a relief college to employ teachers. National Youth Administration workers aided in preparing books for loan at the Oceanside

³⁰ Bassett and Hodges, Rockville Centre, p. 188; Smits, Nassau, p. 186; Weigold, American Mediterranean, p. 120; O'Shea, "History of North Hempstead," p. 17; "Long Island Strength," New York Times, Apr. 3, 1932, XII, p. 15; "New Industry List," ibid., Apr. 10, 1932, XII, p. 3; "Retail Sales High on Long Island," ibid., Aug. 7, 1933, p. 21.

Library and reconditioned a small building in the area.³¹

Other projects helped the construction trade, which had slowed down during the 1930s. A county-wide sewage system was initiated and under the Public Works Administration, a new Nassau County Court House was erected in 1938. Many county parks were improved or created, such as the three new golf courses and the clubhouse at Bethpage State Park. This work relief project employed 1,800 men. Other projects included the Jones Beach restaurant and theater, Meadowbrook State Parkway, and Bethpage State Parkway.³² In order to provide more lasting employment opportunities, many school districts established adult education programs which offered technical training. These programs, continued during World War II, helped to train many war plant workers.³³

During the war Nassau played an important role with the expansion of its aircraft industry. Men and women, many of whom had to be retrained, took jobs as sheet-metal workers, draftsmen, riveters, and mechanics at the Grumman, Republic,

³¹ Smits, Nassau, p. 245; Smith, Garden City, pp. 122; Oceanside Aleph Zadek Aleph, History of Oceanside (1975), p. 80.

³² Smits, Nassau, p. 136; Smith, Garden City, pp. 122; "New Areas Opened in Nassau County," New York Times, Feb. 7, 1932, XII, p. 2; "Building Decline in Nassau County," ibid., June 26, 1932, XII, p. 2; Chester R. Blakelock, "History of Jones Beach State Park," Long Island Forum 21 (June 1958): 112; Caro, Power Broker, pp. 485, 577; "\$64 million Ready for Long Island," New York Times, Dec. 10, 1933, XII, p. 1.

³³ Smits, Nassau, p. 215.

Sperry, Liberty, and Fairchild plants.³⁴ At the war's peak, Republic Aviation employed 25,000, Grumman Aerospace 21,000, Fairchild Camera and Instrument 4,400, and Sperry Gyroscope 32,000.³⁵ Subcontractors and suppliers were also part of the war effort, producing propellers, flares, and guidance instruments. Mitchell Field became a center for military aviation activities and a base for aviation development and experimentation. In addition, a Special Services Division of the Navy was located on the county's north shore at Sands Point.³⁶

With the exception of the Sperry Gyroscope Plant, there was little construction from 1938-1945. New housing, in particular, was virtually unavailable until the postwar growth and population explosion.³⁷ Thereafter numerous housing developments appeared in the center of the island and on the south shore, in addition to smaller developments built from time to time as estate lands on the north shore were sold between 1946 and 1965.³⁸ For example, 7,000 new homes were

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 114, 193; Smith, Garden City, p. 127.

³⁵ Smits, Nassau, pp. 113-115; Bernice Marshall, The Rest of the Story, 1929-1961 (1961), p. 10.

³⁶ Smits, Nassau, pp. 101-102, 115, 193; O'Shea, "The History of North Hempstead," p. 17.

³⁷ Smits, Nassau, p. 190; Thomas K. Smith and Thomas Newman, Inventory and Use of Industrially Zoned Land in Nassau County (1979), p. 33; Marshall, Rest of the Story, p. 13.

³⁸ Sobin, Community Change, pp. 55, 73.

erected in Hicksville in 1950-1951. But the most dramatic housing project was Levittown, covering a 7.3 square-mile area near the center of the county. Appearing in what was once potato fields, the Cape-Cod (three models) and ranch-style houses (five models) built by William J. Levitt from 1947 to 1951, offered a refuge for returning war veterans and their families. Mass construction techniques, which were innovative at the time, lowered costs and made possible the construction of over thirty houses per day. About 17,500 homes were eventually constructed, ranging in price from \$6,990 to \$9,500.³⁹

The Nassau County Planning Commission characterized the period 1951-1970 as the industrial-development boom years. While the bulk of new construction was single-family houses, plants, offices, shopping centers, libraries, schools, and hospitals were also constructed to meet the needs of over one million people who moved to Nassau after the war. It was only during the 1960s, when land was becoming scarce, that multiple housing units were constructed.⁴⁰

Edward Smits, Nassau County historian, asserts that the main stimulus to live in suburbia, besides the need for reasonably priced houses, was its superior school system.

³⁹ Richard Evers, The Story of Hicksville Yesterday and Today (1948); John T. McQuiston, "If You're Thinking of Living in Levittown," New York Times, Nov. 27, 1983, VIII, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Smith and Newman, Inventory, pp., 18, 80-82, 84; Smits, Nassau, pp. 196, 198, 204, 208, 222, 251-253.

But as a result of the baby boom, public school expenditures skyrocketed and the number of Catholic schools increased as well. In 1956 a Nassau vocational and technical school was established, and the county also initiated educational services for physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped children. Nassau's offerings in higher education increased and by 1970 there were eleven colleges enrolling 70,000 students. Fifty-three public libraries were also made available in the same year. In addition to these educational facilities, the postwar period was marked by the formation of many more community organizations which served children as well as promoting charitable, cultural, civic, and social needs.⁴¹

The county sought to serve its citizens in other ways. New parks were established offering a variety of recreational facilities. Roads were widened and extended and new highways built. The Long Island Railroad, by means of which many travelled to New York City jobs, was improved and then bought from the Pennsylvania Railroad by the Metropolitan Transit Authority in 1968. However, bus and rail transportation failed to compete with the automobile in a county where two or three cars per family was not uncommon.⁴²

At the beginning of this postwar period most county

⁴¹ Smits, Nassau, pp. 143, 209, 213, 222, 227-229; Gans, Levittowners, p. 287. Prosperity and postwar housing policy enabled lower-middle classes to move to suburbia.

⁴² Smits, Nassau, pp. 226, 241-244.

residents worked outside of Nassau. But by the end of the 1960s more than half were employed in the county. Employment opportunities available locally also changed during this time. After the war, light industry flourished, with 2,271 industrial plants in Nassau by 1967. By 1969 production of electrical equipment was the county's primary industry. The wholesale and retail trade ranked second in local employment in 1970, with service establishments third. But since 1970 the rate of industrial development has declined with an escalation of the nonindustrial use of industrially zoned land: office buildings and shopping centers were being built in lieu of manufacturing establishments. Clerical and service occupations were becoming increasingly important, although manufacturing was still the top employer.⁴³

Not only did Nassauites change their place of work after the war, but the population itself changed. As in the 1920s, a new wave of city folks invaded the county after 1945. As a result, the ethnic makeup of the county, while containing groups similar to those of 1930, had shifted. Of the 30 percent born of foreign parents and 9.3 percent foreign-born in 1970, 24 percent were Italian, 11 percent German, 14 percent Russian, 9 percent Polish, 7 percent English, and 7 percent Irish. Since the turn of the century,

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 252, 258, 261, 286; Nassau Planning Commission, Aspects: An Analysis of Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics of Nassau County, N.Y. (Mineola, 1963), 2:1; Smith and Newman, Inventory, pp. 37, 84, 166, 195.

Nassau's religious makeup has also shifted: Roman Catholicism is now predominant. In 1960 about 30 percent were Protestant, 20 percent, Jewish.⁴⁴

Since the beginning of the century, the Italian population of Nassau County has grown steadily. But while the numbers have increased, the role Italians have played in the county is less readily discernible. Scattered evidence indicates that before World War II they were a struggling immigrant group which had not yet grasped the reins of political power. In addition, they lacked social prestige and significant economic mobility. Then, in 1938, Albert DeMeo and Frank Gulotta were appointed assistant district attorneys. As Frank Gulotta put it,

Nobody of Italian extraction up to then had been approached for an important job within the County. The image was that we [Italians] carried stilettos with our picks and shovels.⁴⁵

Italian Americans finally became prominent in county politics in the 1940s. In 1947, for example, the first Italian American ran for mayor of Glen Cove. Although not elected, other Italian Americans became increasingly involved in local and county politics until, in 1970, Nassau citizens

⁴⁴ Smits, Nassau, pp. 199-202; Frank Lynn, "The Island Takes a Look at Itself," New York Times, April 25, 1976, XXI, p. 1. Harold L. Wattel, "Levittown: A Suburban Community," p. 203.

⁴⁵ Quoted in "Italians," Newsday, July 4, 1976, p. 26.

finally elected an Italian American as County Executive.⁴⁶

While discrimination offers some explanation for the modest political involvement of Italians before the 1940s, their limited economic mobility and lack of social prestige were also factors. At the turn of the century Italians, along with Irish and Poles, supplied the labor force that built the Belmont Race Track.⁴⁷ Italians also worked on the Gold Coast estates and in the sand-mining pits of Port Washington.⁴⁸ The village of Westbury, where many Italians lived, provided numerous workers for estate maintenance.⁴⁹ Other Italian residents were employed by Hicks nursery, where they and other laborers received an average wage of from \$9.00-11.00 for a six-day week. Such wage levels are comparable to other laborers of the prewar I period.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Dick Zander, "The Rise of Power," Newsday, July 4, 1976, p. 16. The New York Times Index for 1920-1970 supports this: only after 1938 do Italian names appear with any frequency in county politics. Cf. Lopreato, Italian Americans, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Richard A. Winsche, "Echoes of Belmont Park," Nassau County Historical Society Journal 15 (Spring 1964):18. These immigrant workers were held in such low esteem that a newspaper reported the death of one of them as "Laborer No. 2398."

⁴⁸ Sobin, Community Change, pp. 28-29, 47. Irish, Italian, Russian, and Polish people worked in the sandpits: interview with Albert Marino, Port Washington Oral History Project, Port Washington Library, November 1981.

⁴⁹ Sobin, Community Change, pp. 28-29, 47.

⁵⁰ Interview with C.P., Westbury, N.Y., July 11, 1981. La Gumina, "Westbury's Italian American Community," p. 48.

With the movement of Italians as well as other immigrant groups into the county came attempts to Americanize them. The means used for this reflected national trends for all "new" immigrants. In the village of Westbury a Neighborhood Association House opened in 1916. Sponsored by the Episcopal Church, it was a charitable organization which promoted the general welfare of Italian immigrants by providing a public health center. Little-mothers' leagues were established to give instruction in infant care. The association encouraged home gardening, introduced a lunch program for children, and helped to get school nurses assigned to the local elementary schools.⁵¹

It was at this time (1917) that Glen Cove's Orchard House settlement was founded by upper-middle-class native American women. It had a kindergarten and a circulating library, along with women's needlecraft classes and instruction in domestic arts, civics, and hygiene. Afternoon and evening activities also included musical performances and plays as well as baseball and basketball games. Club dances, social evenings, spaghetti suppers, summer outings, and picnics were planned to involve whole families. The house also opened its doors to local community groups. The Glen Cove Echo noted that the Italian Alliance, Sons of Italy

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 54; Arlene R. Wilhelm, "Quaker Women of Westbury and Jericho," Senior Project, SUNY College at Old Westbury, SUNYCOW Archives Collection, Old Westbury, N.Y.

Junior Lodge, San Marina and St. Rocco Society held its meetings there.⁵²

Attempts to Americanize the immigrants continued during the 1920s with Americanization classes offered at night in the county's schools.⁵³ As in other communities across the nation, the Ku Klux Klan was quite active in Nassau during this period. Jews and Catholics, who were entering the county in numbers, were the targets of rallies, cross-burnings, and marches.⁵⁴ But acts of discrimination did not result solely from the Klan. During the same period, for example, the Knights of Columbus, whose membership was largely non-Italian, refused to rent its hall to Westbury's Dell Assunta Society, because of anti-Italian discrimination.⁵⁵ Instances of discrimination can also be found before and after this period. A Westbury resident noted that before World War I her father was unable to buy a piece of property because of his ethnic background. Likewise, anti-Italian feeling during World War II prompted Westbury's Village

⁵² "Orchard House Settlement," Glen Cove Echo, n.d., in scrapbook dating from the 1930s, Glen Cove Public Library.

⁵³ Charlotte E. Merriman, "The Port I Remember," Journal of the Cow Neck Peninsula Historical Society, 1:10; Richard Match, A History of the Great Neck Public Schools (Great Neck, N.Y., 1964), p. 42.

⁵⁴ Frank Cavaioli, "The Ku Klux Klan on Long Island," Long Island Forum 42 (May 1979):100-106; The Tablet, 46, No. 37 (Oct. 31, 1953), supplement, p. 109.

⁵⁵ La Gumina, "The History of Westbury's Italian American Community," pp. 52-53.

Board members to refuse to grant the Dell Assunta Society a permit for its procession.⁵⁶

Other evidence from the 1920s further illustrates the Italians' low level of social prestige. Of approximately 4,700 individuals and couples listed in the 1926-27 Long Island Society Register from Queens, Brooklyn, Nassau, and Suffolk counties, only eighteen Italian surnames are found: ten resided in Nassau, one of whom was a count and two others belonged to local country clubs. This elite group of Italian extraction did not constitute even one tenth of one percent of the register's entries.⁵⁷

The small part Italians played in the political and educational hierarchy of the county, either because of choice, economic circumstances, or discrimination, is exemplified in the 1929 Long Island Almanac. There were 394 county employees who served in political, judicial, and service occupations. Four, or about one percent, had Italian surnames. Three worked in low white-collar positions as clerks. The last was employed as a laborer in the County Court House. However, among the County's police force of 40 men, four, or 10 percent, were Italians.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 56; interview with C.P., Westbury, N.Y., 7/11/81.

⁵⁷ Long Island Society Register, 1926-27 (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1926), pp. 1-224.

⁵⁸ Long Island Almanac and Yearbook (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1929), pp. 46-50, 57-58, 62-67, 73-78, 87-95.

Within Nassau's three townships, neither the Town of North Hempstead with 27 employees nor the Town of Hempstead with 29 employees had workers of Italian extraction, and only one of the 23 employees of the Town of Oyster Bay had an Italian surname.⁵⁹

At a more local level, the City of Glen Cove, with an Italian population of about 8 percent in 1930, had no employees of Italian descent; neither did the government of the City of Long Beach. The largest number of Italian employees was found in the county's forty incorporated village governments: Italians were represented in eight of these, or 20 percent; one was a clerk, another a building inspector. In Saddle Rock two of the trustees had Italian surnames. Given the association of Italians with the construction trades, it is not surprising that Matinecock's street commissioner was Italian. The remaining four were patrolmen in Lynbrook, Garden City, Freeport, and Rockville Centre.⁶⁰

According to the Almanac, few Italians were to be found in Nassau's school system: none were found in North Hempstead's eleven school districts. The second supervisory district, covering the south shore, also had no Italians. None were found in the eighteen village superintendencies. The twenty-four school districts in the Town of Oyster Bay

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-50, 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 57, 62-67, 73-78.

had the best record: District 20 had a female clerk with an Italian surname, while the president of the school board in District 23 was Joseph Andreini.⁶¹

The Almanac also indicates that by the end of the 1920s Italians held few offices in village societies and associations or in clubs. In about 1,700 organizations listed, only twenty-five (1.5%) had officers with Italian surnames. Only two associations had ethnic connotations: an Italian American Civic Club and the Italian American Republican Club. Four were civic or politically oriented: the Theodore Roosevelt League for Political and Benevolent Unity, the Alfred E. Smith Women's Democratic Club, the North Side Civic Association, and the Businessman's Association. The rest of the groups were sex-typed: eleven men's groups, such as the Loyal Order of the Moose. The women's groups, in addition to the political one mentioned above, included two religious societies, an auxiliary of the American Legion, two Orders of the Eastern Star, a Women's club, and a PTA.⁶² It is, of course, remotely possible that, because of name changes, men as well as women might not be readily identifiable as Italian. Since such Italian organizations as the St. Rocco Society, the Dell Assunta Society, the Durazzano Society (founded in 1929, and perhaps therefore not included), and Port Washington's Sons of Italy Lodge were not listed in the

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 87-95.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 139-192.

Almanac, one may wonder if ethnic associations were under-represented.⁶³ Discrimination or possibly an unwillingness of these groups to be included in the Almanac are other explanations for their exclusion. In addition, suspicion of group or political leadership as well as the passive nature of Italians are factors which probably influenced participation in politics and in organizations.⁶⁴

Similar to the Italians' political and social position in Nassau County was their economic status. A sampling of 681 families from the New York State Manuscript Census of 1925 (a one-percent sample) shows that 81 percent of Italian male heads of households were blue-collar workers, although their predominance in that sector varied (table 5). Two-fifths of Italian workers were skilled, one-third unskilled. A little less than 3 percent were agricultural workers. Figures compiled from a count of Italian men, including first and second generation, in the Glen Cove City Directory of 1923-24 indicates that 80 percent also held blue-collar positions. More than half of these men were unskilled; 27 percent were craftsmen, and 17 percent were employed in semiskilled occupations.⁶⁵ But the differences in the pro-

⁶³ La Gumina, "History of Westbury's Italian American Community," pp. 52-53; Carol Canter, "Cow Neck Grass Roots Traces Ports People," Port Washington News, Aug. 9, 1979, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Briggs, An Italian Passage, pp. 15-16. Gans, The Urban Villagers, pp. 109, 173.

⁶⁵ New York State Manuscript Census, 1925; Polk's Glen Cove City Directory, 1923-24. The latter provides the only infor-

TABLE 5
 OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF ITALIAN MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS
 (NON-FARM) IN NASSAU COUNTY, 1925

Status	Number	Percent
High white collar	5	3%
Low white collar	24	13
Skilled	73	40
Semiskilled	16	9
Unskilled	59	32

Source: One-percent sample of 681 families from the
 1925 New York State Manuscript Census.

portions of Italian men within these blue-collar categories suggests that Glen Cove Italians were more likely to hold lower-status jobs than other Nassau Italians.

Among Italian-born men sampled from the 1925 manuscript census, certain jobs were predominant. Twenty percent were laborers, 8 percent gardeners, 7 percent barbers, followed by masons, tailors, truck or automobile drivers, cement workers, and shoemakers. Laborers also formed the single largest group among men listed in the Glen Cove City Directory. Gardeners were the next largest group in Glen Cove, then came truck drivers and chauffeurs, carpenters, barbers, masons, shoemakers, and plumbers. According to the 1925 Suburban Long Island Classified Telephone Directory, Italians, identified by their surnames, accounted for 63 percent of the county's barbers, 36 percent of its ladies'

mation on one particular Nassau community having an Italian population of 8% or more.

tailors, and 34 percent of its masons.⁶⁶ Such blue-collar occupations are representative of the typical jobs Italian men held as evidenced in other studies.

Although a minority (16%) of Italian men from the manuscript census sample did white-collar work, they clustered in certain jobs, most being either contractors or merchants, proprietors, and peddlers. This is not unusual; many studies of mobility have shown proprietorship to be the fastest route to economic security. Likewise, those in Glen Cove, where one-fifth were employed in white-collar positions, owned their own businesses or were merchants or peddlers. Salesmen and contractors ranked second and third. Such petty bourgeois activities, according to Briggs, were consistent with Italian culture, which emphasizes mobility, proprietorship, and the accumulation of property.⁶⁷

Other evidence indicates that owning one's business was a goal among Italians in Nassau County. For example, Charles Cella, a sandbank worker in Port Washington, later opened his own restaurant.⁶⁸ Albert Marino's father, also a laborer in the sandbanks, eventually opened a bar and grocery store

⁶⁶ Ibid.; Long Island Suburban Classified Telephone Directory, November 1925, pp. 1-63. My census sample indicates fifty-one different types of jobs held by Italian-born men.

⁶⁷ Manuscript Census, 1925; Glen Cove City Directory, 1923-24; Briggs, Italian Passage, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Carol Canter, "Cow Neck Grass Roots," p. 2.

nearby.⁶⁹ Anthony Mercandante of Glen Cove owned a dray cart with horses and hauled debris from construction sites. Giuseppe Negro owned a coal and lumber company in the same city.⁷⁰ After working several years in a pickle factory in Syosset, Gasper Puccio opened a barber shop.⁷¹

The Italians' enterprising nature is also apparent in an examination of the 1925 Classified Telephone Directory. Not surprisingly, 84 percent of the junk dealers had Italian surnames. Fifty-two percent of the fruit and vegetable markets were owned by Italians, while among grocers only 17 percent were Italian. Over one-fourth of the variety stores were Italian-owned. Finally, Italians accounted for 18 percent of the county's 163 contractors.⁷²

While most of these white-collar people owned businesses, a small number were in the professions. In the 1925 census 3 percent of Italian-born men were in high white-collar positions.⁷³ The telephone directory of that year lists one Italian architect, one chiropractor, one dentist,

⁶⁹ Interview with Albert Marino, Port Washington, N.Y., Oral History Project, Port Washington Library, Nov. 1981.

⁷⁰ "Italians," Newsday, July 4, 1976, p. 27.

⁷¹ Tunison, Looking Back on Syosset, p. 29.

⁷² Classified Telephone Directory, Nov. 1925, pp. 1-63.

⁷³ Manuscript Census, 1925. They included two manufacturers, two druggists, and one engineer.

two lawyers, six druggists, twelve physicians, and five undertakers. In Glen Cove in 1923-24 the only professionals were one chemist and one music teacher.⁷⁴

The predominance of Italians in laboring and construction, besides the fact that a substantial number of those in white-collar positions owned their own businesses, reflected to some extent Nassau's changing economy. The Gold Coast estates, numbering five or six hundred in the 1920s, provided employment for laborers, gardeners, and chauffeurs. These wealthy residents also contributed significantly to the local retail business.⁷⁵ Since the single greatest source of local employment in 1930 was construction, opportunities were available for Italians in this industry. That wholesale and retail trade also flourished created a climate favorable to small business.⁷⁶ Italians were thus able to exercise their job preferences in these areas too. One may surmise that discrimination, on the one hand, and level of education, on the other (although I have no data on this), also shaped their choice of employment.

For these laborers and construction workers employment was often seasonal. Sobin reports that day laborers working

⁷⁴ Classified Telephone Directory, Nov. 1925, pp. 1-63; Glen Cove City Directory, 1923-24; Blood of My Blood, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Sobin, Community Change, p. 4.

⁷⁶ L.I. Almanac and Yearbook, 1932, p. 30; U.S. Census (1930), vol 3, pt. 2, p. 307.

on the "Gold Coast" from March to October received from \$3.00 to \$5.00 a day between 1920 and some time in the 1930s.⁷⁷ In the Port Washington sand pits, where 400-600 men worked in shifts before World War II, work was also seasonal. When it slowed in the fall, families made wine, dried fish and salami in their cellars, and chopped wood.⁷⁸ For southern Italians such seasonal work patterns were normal. Life in southern Italy, where men often worked in other industries during slack periods, had prepared families to accept and deal with irregular male employment in America.⁷⁹

In spite of seasonal employment and their predominance in blue-collar jobs, unemployment among Italian males was low. In a sample from the 1925 census only 0.5 percent were unemployed, although the rate is slightly higher (2.5%) in the Glen Cove City Directory. These figures compare with 2.8 percent for native American males and 3 percent for foreign born, excluding Italians, in Nassau County.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Community Change, p. 48.

⁷⁸ Cantor, "Cow Neck Grass Roots Traces Port's Peoples," p. 2.

⁷⁹ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 90.

⁸⁰ Manuscript Census, 1925; Polk's Glen Cove City Directory, 1923-24. These figures are probably low since the census was taken in June when Italians were most apt to be employed.

TABLE 6
 OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS (NONFARM)
 IN NASSAU COUNTY, 1925 (in percentages)

Group	White-Collar			Semi- skilled	Un- skilled	Num- ber
	High	Low	Skilled			
Italian born	2.7	13.2	40.1	8.8	32.4	182
Native born of Italian parents	8.3	33.3	41.7	0.0	16.7	24
Other foreign born	7.8	19.4	38.0	13.2	17.8	129
Native American excl. Italians	18.7	36.2	23.9	6.7	10.1	268

Source: Sample of 681 households in Nassau County from the New York Manuscript Census, 1925.

The job status of Italians in the interwar period was not stagnant. Limited evidence suggests that even in 1925 Italians exhibited a measure of occupational mobility by generation. Between the first and second generation the percentage of unskilled workers dropped from 32 to 17, while the percentage of skilled workers remained at about 40 percent for both generations (table 6). The white-collar category increased from 16 percent for the first generation to 42 for the second. Much of the increase took place in the lower level of the white-collar group. Proprietors, merchants, and peddlers accounted for the majority in this group. Such movement by the second generation into white-collar positions approaches that of the native Americans represented in the table. However, the heavy concentration of the second generation in the skilled category, which is quite characteristic of Italian American men, and the 17

percent who continued to perform unskilled work more nearly approximates the job status level of the foreign born.⁸¹

This movement away from unskilled occupations is borne out by the findings of other scholars. Bayor notes that white-collar and skilled manual occupations were the expanding fields for Italians in New York State at this time. According to another study, between 1916 and 1931 the number of Italian-born laborers in New York City decreased from 50 to 31 percent.⁸² Among the second generation this decrease was from 32 percent in 1916 to 10 percent in 1931. In these 15 years the number of clerks, salesmen, bakers, plasterers, painters, and small-business jobs tended to double. The number of electricians, painters, plumbers, and contractor foremen first appeared in significant numbers.

There is also some evidence that Italians moved into the professions. Table 7 shows the number of Italians in certain professions in the county telephone directory. From 1925 to 1945 Italians showed a small increase in the number in most of the professions. While the percentage of architects, funeral directors, and chiropractors decreased, all other professions increased from 2 to 8 percent.⁸³ Most of

⁸¹ Manuscript Census, 1925.

⁸² Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, pp. 8-9; Italian Americans, p. 148.

⁸³ Suburban Long Island Classified Telephone Directory, November 1925, pp. 1-63; Nassau County Telephone Directory, Classified, 1945-46, pp. 1-311.

TABLE 7

SELECTED NASSAU COUNTY PROFESSIONS, 1925 AND 1945

Profession	Numbers in 1925	Italians in 1925: Number	Percentage	Numbers in 1945	Italians in 1945: Number	Percentage
Accountants	10	0	0	25	2	8
Architects	31	1	3	11	0	0
Chiropractors	34	1	3	72	0	0
Dentists	204	1	--	431	17	4
Lawyers	155	2	1	206	9	4
Pharmacists	205	6	3	237	13	5
Physicians	662	12	2	715	68	9
Funeral directors	84	5	6	130	7	5

Source: Based on surname identification in the Suburban Long Island Classified Telephone Directory, Nov. 1925, pp. 1-63, and in the Nassau County Telephone Directory Classified, 1945, pp. 1-311.

those in the 1945 group were probably second generation. Such modest mobility in the professions, whether by the first or second generation, was a development which, along with the entrance of Italians on the political scene after 1940, presaged improved social status and rising political fortunes for Nassau's Italian Americans.

Throughout this century, then, Italians have played an increasingly significant role in the growth of Nassau County. Italian/families have moved up the economic ladder and more and more Italians have become active in local politics. Such findings are not markedly different from those in other localities. But while evidence has shown the place of Italian men in the county's development, evidence on the role of Italian women has been noticeably absent. Their position, particularly that of the foreign born, is not evident in almanacs, telephone directories, and censuses, even less so in local histories. Women generally and Italian-born women in particular--because they tend to be more home-oriented--constitute an important, if invisible, component in Nassau's past. Hence oral histories, along with materials such as the 1925 Manuscript Census, are used to present a more complete picture of the Italian woman and her family. But because she brought her values and attitudes concerning work, education, sexual morality, and family life from Italy when she came to the United States, discussion of these women begins by explaining the role of women in Italy.

CHAPTER 2

LA CONTADINA: CENTER OF THE FAMILY

When discussing the role of the Italian woman, scholars of the Italian immigrant experience focus on that of la contadina (the peasant's wife). She is generally depicted as an ideal type, a stereotype of the Italian immigrant woman who arrived on these shores between 1880 and 1920. Although the various sources used here also present a somewhat idealized version of the southern Italian woman, the evidence provides at least a starting point from which to examine the role of the Italian woman who made her way to Nassau County. One would expect, however, that both the ideal and the real images of the southern Italian woman would be less applicable to women from other classes and regions of Italy. In short, the Italian peasant culture is characteristic of rural, southern families. Central and northern Italians as well as southern urbanites are generally more affluent, more educated, more cosmopolitan and less religious than those in southern agricultural villages.

In order to investigate the lives of Nassau Italian

women, generalizations about a woman's role, from the literature were coupled with twenty-eight oral histories and eleven anonymous questionnaires. From such evidence a picture emerges of these Italian women which both conforms to and deviates from the image formulated by historians and sociologists. These interviewees ranged in age from 33 to 85, with a mean age of 65. Almost half of them were married, one more than once. Thirty-eight percent were widowed, one divorced, three single. All but three were Roman Catholic: one Protestant, one Jewish, and one with no religion.¹

TABLE 8
GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN OF ITALIAN-BORN WOMEN IN SAMPLE

Locality/Region	Number	Percentage
<u>North</u>	2	6%
Emilia	1	
Piedmont	1	
<u>Central</u>	7	20
Latium	5	
Tuscany	2	
<u>South</u>	26	74
Abruzzi	1	
Apulia	2	
Basilicata	2	
Calabria	4	
Campania	6	
Sicily	11	
<u>Unknown</u>	4	

Source: Interviews and questionnaires from Italian-born Nassau County women. See Appendices for interview schedule, questionnaire, and list of interviewees.

¹ Interviews and questionnaires from the first generation.

Like their male counterparts, the majority of wives, mothers, and daughters who emigrated between 1880 and 1920 came from southern Italy. Almost three-fourths of the Nassau women also arrived here from southern Italy (table 8). The largest number were from Sicily, followed by Campania. Central Italy accounted for one-fifth of the number, northern Italy for only a minority. The remaining ten percent merely indicated that Italy was their birthplace.²

Most southern migrants have been depicted, before arriving in the United States, as residing in class-conscious, preindustrial rural villages, where families subsisted on the land with home-based production.³ Of the first generation who specified exact place of birth, over one-half were born in towns of less than 50,000 people (table 9). Fourteen percent of these women came from places numbering between 50,000 and 250,000 people. Almost one-third came from major cities, such as Rome or Naples. When locality in Italy is taken into account, more southerners resided in small towns than did women from central and northern Italy.⁴

Although many Italian-born women had lived in small towns in the south of Italy, most of their families did not

² Ibid.; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 3.

³ E.g., Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child (Leiden, 1967), p. 87.

⁴ Interviews and questionnaires from the first generation.

TABLE 9
 SIZE OF BIRTHPLACE OF ITALIAN-BORN WOMEN IN SAMPLE

Size of Town	Number	Percentage
Up to 50,000 people	19	54
50-250,000	5	14
Over 250,000	11	31

Source: Sample data.

make a living from the land. Six of their fathers were land-owning farmers.⁵ John Briggs indicates that it was not unusual for men to be fishermen, artisans, small merchants, construction workers, or workers in excavation or manufacturing, if they were not engaged in agricultural pursuits as small landowners, share croppers, truck farmers or day laborers.⁶ The fathers of this group exhibit such occupational diversity: there was a hunter, a shepherd, a merchant seaman, a tax collector, and a man who earned his living by making fireworks for the village. The tax collector also owned a grocery store and a farm which his son managed for him.⁷ There was also a sculptor, a factory worker, a lawyer,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ An Italian Passage, pp. 5, 8; Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 26.

⁷ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, N.Y., 4/30/82; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82; C.P., Merrick, 1/15/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Miss I, Freeport, 9/17/81; M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82. Questionnaires #254, 505. In my sample I found no men who performed several types of work in the year, despite Yans-McLaughlin's Family and Community, p. 29.

a cabinet maker, an executive secretary, and a grocery store owner.⁸ Indeed, such a profile indicates that these southern Italians were not necessarily laborers or peasants.

In contrast to the stereotype of the poor struggling peasant, these southern families, by all accounts, were quite affluent. Livia, whose father was a sculptor in Naples, characterized her family's economic status as "very comfortable, [but] we're not the typical Italian family." Blanche described her family as "upper middle class"; they and their father, a lawyer, lived in a villa in Palermo during the early 1920s. A cabinetmaker's daughter whose home was in the back of her father's shop characterized her family as "not poor, not rich, middle class." Another Sicilian woman, whose father was an executive secretary, also claimed to be middle class: besides being one of the first families to have electricity in their home at the turn of the century, they enjoyed other privileges, such as: free travel throughout Catania, free admission to movies, a servant who did the household shopping, and an escort who took her to school. Although less well off than this family, Rose said that during the 1920s her folks lived in an attached house with indoor plumbing. The land they owned was used for three purposes: one part truck farming, another part vineyard, and

⁸ Questionnaires #310, 374; interviews with: L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; V.S., Baldwin, 2/28/82; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81.

a third for raising wheat, figs, olives, and walnuts.⁹

The job status of fathers from central Italy, although akin to that of their southern counterparts, also indicates that they were less apt to till the soil. Their occupations were: tailor, policeman, telegraph technician, manufacturer, railroad clerk, store owner, and a landowner who rented his farm to others to be worked.¹⁰ During the interviews two women judged their families to be middle class. They also said their households had had hired help.¹¹

Finally, the two north-Italian women came from families that were probably the most affluent. Madeline's lived in a large house on 200 acres outside of Turin. Her father was the chief metallurgist at the Fiat plant. "I lived very well [in Europe]," she said. Rose, whose family owned a chain of bookstores in Bologna, described her neighborhood as a "very uniform upper middle class community."¹²

Women of the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy) did not generally work as part of a paid labor force, although there is some evidence that a minority of peasant wives did

⁹ Interviews with: L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82.

¹⁰ Questionnaires #252, 326; interviews with: A.D., Baldwin, 3/2/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82.

¹¹ Interviews with: T.S., S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82.

¹² Interviews with: M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81.

domestic work or worked as harvesters. Wives of artisans could be found as seamstresses, ladies' tailors, midwives, and petty merchants. It was more likely, though not prevalent, that unmarried women could be found at work in textiles and in garment manufacturing or as domestics, cooks, nurses, and laundresses.¹³ Women usually worked with family members in the fields at harvest time. But this practice also varied, since in Sicily and Apulia, according to Covello, females did not generally work in the fields.¹⁴

These generalizations tend to parallel the experiences of the mothers of Nassau women. Eleven southern Italian mothers were housewives. Only five worked: one owned a dress shop employing twenty-five females, another worked her husband's farm with the help of her mother and daughter, since her husband was in America. The other three reported that their mothers were dressmakers working at home.

¹³ Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," pp. 35. In 1901, of women employed outside agriculture, 18% were domestics in Campania, 24% in Basilicata, and 34% in Sicily. There was one female domestic for every 10 households in Sicily; in Sambucca 5% of all married women worked outside the home (Gabaccia, "Houses and People: Sicilians in Sicily and New York, 1890-1930" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1979], pp. 37-38). But Yans-McLaughlin finds southern women rarely working outside of agriculture (Family and Community, p. 183n.). In L'Aquila Briggs found domestic employment to be uncommon (An Italian Passage, p. 117).

¹⁴ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 183; Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 37; Covello, Social Background, p. 230. Phyllis Williams indicates that Neopolitan women worked in the fields (South Italian Folkways in Europe and America [New York, 1938], p. 81).

Eugenia's mother, who had been a teacher before marriage, assisted the doctor in town as a volunteer after she married.¹⁵ Farmers' wives, along with their children, often worked in the fields at harvest time. Rose recalled going to the fields with her mother to help out during the summer months in the 1920s when school was not in session. Another woman remembered that the whole family picked oranges, figs, and tangerines during the harvest season on their farm, which, like Rose's, was in the Basilicata region. But some families did not rely solely on family assistance. Mary's father, whose farm was in the Apulia region, hired a man to help with the farm work.¹⁶ Perhaps the practice of not having women work in the fields was operating here, since women from Sicily and Apulia did not recall that they or their mothers ever performed chores outside the household. But one woman's mother fed the farm workers, in addition to her other household tasks.¹⁷

From the preceding it appears that the nature of female occupations and their location (with one exception) preserved the husband's position as chief provider. Being a

¹⁵ Interviews with: C.P., Merrick, 1/15/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; L.P. Seaford, 12/3/81; B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81. Questionnaires #310, 374.

¹⁶ Interviews with: R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; M.C., Merrick, 4/30/82.

¹⁷ Interview with M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82.

dressmaker was respectable and, in addition, was an extension of one's female role in that it was part of a girl's preparation for womanhood.¹⁸ Working within the home was in keeping with southern Italian mores; a wife's presence at home insured her sexual respectability. In discussing her mother's volunteer work for the doctor, Eugenia noted that her father would not allow her mother to work, but assisting the doctor was an acceptable substitute for "real" work. Yans-McLaughlin contends that women who worked were not looked upon, nor did they think of themselves, as independent wage earners. Instead, their work contributed to the family income. Such was probably the case with the women mentioned above, since their husbands' occupations were not especially lucrative. Finally, Rose's mother, who ran her husband's farm while he was in the United States, typifies the conception of helping out for the good of the family.¹⁹

In examining families from central Italy one finds again that women did not generally work. Only two of seven women worked and, significantly, both as dressmakers. Of the two northern Italian women interviewed, Madeline's college-educated mother did not work, while Rose's mother operated a

¹⁸ Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," p. 42; Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, pp. 158-159.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 182-183. Interviews with: E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82.

chain of bookstores with her husband.²⁰

Yans-McLaughlin emphasizes that peasants from the South looked down on women who left the home to work. Such sentiments were also expressed by a woman born in Rome. Tosca explained that "from a good family women do not go to work [outside the home]. If they did, people would say, 'What's the matter with her husband [father]?' " These comments parallel those of Anton Blok who indicates that a Sicilian man who allowed his women to work would show that he was not capable of supporting his family. In addition, his dominant role would be jeopardized; he would also be less able to control their sexual behavior.²¹ Tosca and another woman from central Italy told me that, while they had worked in clerical positions when they were single, such behavior was permissible because their fathers had died. To be acceptable for them work had to be respectable. A menial position such as a domestic was definitely unacceptable. These statements bear out Yans-McLaughlin's explanation of the kind of work

²⁰ Interviews with: Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; A.D., Baldwin, 3/2/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81. Questionnaires #252, 326.

²¹ Interview with T.S., Massapequa, 4/26/82. Anton Blok, The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960, pp. 49-50, quoted in Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 182.

that an Italian woman might do and when she might do it.²²

Since few women were employed, the Italian father, as head of the family and its representative before the public, was responsible for making a living, making decisions, and arbitrating disputes affecting the family's relations with the community. His power was shared with his respectful, obedient, and faithful wife, who carefully managed the earnings of husband and children, arranged marriages for her progeny, and, of course, supervised the household to meet the needs of daily living. Hence, within the private arena, a wife and mother, through her daily chores, her ability to bear and raise children, and her dowry, exercised considerable power in the family setting.²³

The sexual division of labor left la contadina in charge of the household. Women were responsible for preparing the food, making and washing the clothes, gathering the fuel and drinking water, cleaning the house, and even selling produce in the marketplace. Many of these never-

²² Interviews with: T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82. Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, pp. 159, 182, 203.

²³ F.X. Faminella and J.s. Quadagno, "The Italian American Family," in Ethnic Families in America, ed. C. Mindel and R. Halberstein (New York, 1976), p. 65; Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 77; Cornelisen (Women of the Shadows [New York, 1976], p. 219) indicates that marital roles have changed little in 100 years. Except in family crises, the father's role is passive. Gans (Urban Villagers, p. 199) finds relatively little change in the economic and social structure; conditions existing from the turn of the century still hold.

ending and arduous chores were carried on outdoors in the company of female neighbors. Washing clothes and bathing, for example, were done with other women at near-by lakes and streams.²⁴ Sources indicate that la contadina, when not occupied with such tasks, was likely to be engaged in either visiting, sleeping, praying, or conjugal sex.²⁵

In my sample, not all southern Italian fathers were decision-makers nor did the mothers always handle the money. No real consensus can be discerned from the results. Six out of sixteen said that the father made the decisions; five women indicated that their parents decided matters mutually, and five that the mother was the decision-maker. In one case a woman who said her mother respected the father's judgment and deferred to male supremacy, added, "My father thought he [made the decisions] but mother made them," thus indicating how shrewdly the mother manipulated the father. This mirrors Gambino's point that, while the Italian woman possessed real power in the family, she "neither displayed it nor sought any public sign or recognition of it." ²⁶

²⁴ Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," pp. 40-41.

²⁵ Covello, Social Background, p. 211.

²⁶ Blood of My Blood, p. 27; Cornelisen, Women of the Shadows, p. 219). Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 4/30/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82; C.P., Merrick, 1/15/82; B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81. Questionnaires #254, 310, 374, 505. To help the interviewees, I suggested different types of decisions, distin-

Similarly inconclusive was an examination of decision-making by the parents of women from central and northern Italy. Three recalled that their mothers made the decisions, three that their fathers did, and one did not know.²⁷

Also rather inconclusive was the question of controlling money. From the south, eight of fifteen daughters said their mothers did it. "Mother was the boss with the money," said Rose. Six indicated that their fathers handled the money, and one that it was done mutually. Among families from central and northern Italy, mothers were unlikely to control the purse by themselves. Three reported that the money was controlled jointly, two that it was done by their fathers, one that it was done by her mother, and one that she did it herself because her mother asked her to.²⁸

In addition to performing her marital role, including the practice of her household skills for the family's benefit, the Italian woman was entrusted with raising of children. Southern Italian families generally had from six to ten children. With no effective birth-control methods, not to mention the fact that the Catholic Church frowned on

guishing between those concerning children and home and those pertaining to the man's position outside the home.

²⁷ Interviews with: A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81. Questionnaire #326.

²⁸ From interviews and questionnaires #254, 505, 310, 274, 326.

them, such large families were to be expected. In addition, children were viewed as an economic asset.²⁹ Tables 10 and 11 indicate that these southern Italian women tended to have larger families and a longer childbearing span (mother's age at her last birthing minus age at her first) than those from central or northern Italy. The figures suggest that the women from southern Italy in my survey had fewer children than the norm noted above for the region,³⁰ perhaps because my sample tends to be more affluent, including fewer farm families than a random sample.

TABLE 10
AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER FAMILY BY REGION

Region	Mean Number of Children Per Family	Standard Deviation
North	1.5	0.5
Central	3.1	1.3
South	5.0	2.5
All areas	4.5	2.4

Source: 28 interviews and 11 anonymous questionnaires from Italian-born Nassau County women.

TABLE 11
MOTHER'S CHILDBEARING SPAN BY REGIONS

Region	Mean Childbearing Span (in years)	Standard Deviation
North	1.5	0.5
Central	7.0	3.8
South	10.7	6.0
All areas	9.3	5.4

Source: Sample data.

²⁹ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 85; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 179.

³⁰ Interviews and questionnaires from the first generation.

The Italian mother transmitted the family value system and the traditional pattern of family life to the next generation. Each member of the household had duties and responsibilities. In raising a daughter the family's goal was to see her married and to know that she was accomplished in the role of wife and mother.³¹ A girl's training in housewifery began at about age 10, emphasizing orderliness, cleanliness, and thrift. She was often taught spinning and weaving in the home, while a village seamstress usually taught her sewing or embroidery. Female members of the family normally made cloth, but dressmakers cut the patterns and the women of the family finished the garment.³²

Girls were also taught to look after and care for younger brothers and sisters. As future decision-makers regarding the household earnings, daughters learned the importance of being sharp, practical women. Hence, they as well as their brothers were taught the importance of work. Working was visible evidence that one had become a full family member and had thus reached manhood or womanhood. Although permitted to engage in play, boys, unlike the

³¹ Humbert Nelli, "Italians," in The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, ed. Stephen Thernstrom (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 555; Covello, Social Background, p. 254; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 4, 151.

³² Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 159; Gambino (Blood of My Blood, p. 155) reports that her apprenticeship began at age 7. Williams, Italian Folkways, p. 47; Ewen, "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," p. 42.

girls, were responsible for watching the sheep and helping their fathers in the fields.³³ This was preparation for their futures roles as breadwinners and heads of families.

The learning of household tasks, sewing or embroidery tended to be prevalent among southern Italian women. Seven of eleven women who spent part of their childhood in Italy reported doing household chores. As mentioned previously, those on farms sometimes helped in the fields, too. A woman from the Campania lived nine years with her childless aunt, who taught her to sew and cook. Likewise, Michelino recalled cooking, washing, ironing, and knitting when she was a youngster in the 1910s. Rose's job was to tend the fire that slowly cooked the beans for supper. However, the more affluent daughter of the tax collector was excused from chores since the family had a housekeeper.³⁴ Likewise, those women who grew up in central or northern Italy were not required to assist with household tasks; only one in six mentioned having done so. Three of these families had housekeepers,

³³ Covello, Social Background, pp. 87, 230-231; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 80, 165-166. Living in an Italian village in the 1950s, Edward Banfield describes a daughter's role in similar terms (The Moral Basis of a Backward Society [New York, 1958], p. 151, n.6).

³⁴ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 4/30/82; C.P., Merrick, 1/15/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81. Questionnaires #310, 505.

which of course made such duties unnecessary.³⁵

For many southern girls, their training for womanhood did include learning to sew or embroider. Six of eleven southern women indicated that they had learned such a skill. One woman was taught by a village dressmaker. Michelino recalled that her sister gave sewing lessons to local girls. Venera said she had learned needlework in a convent school. Two other women mentioned having learned embroidery, while another said that her mother had been taught it in Italy.³⁶ By contrast, none of the women from central or northern Italy mentioned having learned to sew, which was apparently not deemed important for them. In discussing her work in a factory finishing men's jackets when she came to the United States, Sandre remarked, "I [had] never held a needle in my hand; a pen and a pencil, but never a needle."³⁷

Another aspect of the ben educata or properly educated female was learning the accepted style of womanhood, besides

³⁵ Interviews with: T.S., Massapequa, 4/26/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82.

³⁶ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 4/30/82; C.P., Merrick, 1/15/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; J.C., Merrick, 3/10/82; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82. Questionnaire #505.

³⁷ Interviews with: T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M., Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82.

the economic and social roles. This included cleanliness and neat appearance, including brushing one's hair daily, carefully combing and pinning it. Young girls wore gold earrings and later on gold bracelets on holidays. This cultivation of the natural look also entailed learning to stand straight. Women of all ages avoided cosmetics which implied that the wearer was camouflaging deep blemishes in her character.³⁸

Only three southern women were able to give their parents' views regarding personal appearance. Rose, who spent her adolescence and young adulthood in Italy, before she came to America in 1925, remembered that she was supposed to look neat and clean. She was not permitted to use lipstick or smoke. Michelino also recalled that her family did not approve of lipstick. Another woman, who came to America in 1922 at age 14, could not remember any rules about dressing and grooming when she lived in Italy.³⁹

The experiences of two of these Nassau women who grew up in central Italy in the 1930s and '40s mirror much of what has been said above concerning la contadina's personal appearance. For example, Sandre was advised to wear modest clothing and she could not cut her hair. Makeup was unacceptable. "Only loose women wore makeup," she said, citing an Italian proverb: La donna e bella di natura, più spettinata

³⁸ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 170-172.

³⁹ Interviews with: R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81.

mai più bella sembra (A woman is naturally beautiful, the more natural she is, the more beautiful she appears.)

Regarding clothes and grooming, Tosca said she could wear only two colors, blue and gray, and her clothing also had to be modest. Makeup was taboo and, like Sandre, she did not shave her legs. Finally, Tosca mentioned that she started to smoke secretly at 14. On the other hand, Sandre's stepfather taught her to smoke for social reasons. But another woman, who lived in Lucca until 1938 when she was 27, reported that she did as she pleased regarding personal appearance. At 15, for example, she wore lipstick and shaved her legs, although her parents were not happy about it.⁴⁰

While the behavior of both males and females was closely supervised by their elders, girls were especially guarded and protected by all the men in a family. Females generally spent most of their time in the company of other females. Their outside contacts included visits with relatives, attending religious services and processions, going for water, bathing or washing clothes with female neighbors. Such supervision was the way in which the family protected the female's chastity and fidelity. The sexual impulse had to be controlled, since existing outside the family as an unwed mother was difficult, shameful, and unacceptable. Supervision of women was also necessary since

⁴⁰ Interviews with: S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82.

abstinence was the only method of birth control in the contadino society.⁴¹

Beginning at puberty and continuing even after marriage, sexual as well as marital questions were discussed between girls and female relatives, in contrast to boys, who received information from their peers, older males, and some even from prostitutes. According to Gambino, inhibitions about nakedness were inculcated in children very early.⁴²

As her children matured, the Italian mother sought suitable marriage partners for them. The father, who had the right of veto, was responsible for publicizing the engagement. Females were usually in their late teens at marriage, boys in their twenties. For a daughter the family provided a dowry, which remained her personal property, while the son received a marriage gift.⁴³ Sometimes the mother used a female matchmaker as an emissary to try to work out a marriage that would be advantageous socially and economically. Romantic love and sexual considerations played little or no part in these arrangements. The important marital qualities in a man were industry, health, and so-

⁴¹ Covello, Social Background, pp. 217, 133, 135, 161, 185, 187. There is evidence that birth control was used in rural areas (Leonard Moss and Walter H. Thompson, "The South Italian Family," in Human Organization 18 [Spring 1959]:40).

⁴² Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 193.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 197-198, 190; Covello, Social Background, pp. 206-207; 199; Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 82.

briety. Hence, the couple did not expect much emotional gratification from the marriage.⁴⁴ However, depending on the parents' attitudes and the circumstances, a son's or daughter's right to refuse a match was usually recognized.⁴⁵

A woman generally married a man from the same village. However, by the turn of the century this closed marriage system was deteriorating somewhat as southern Italian villages experienced heavy emigration. This loss to America of men of marriageable age forced many women to look beyond their villages for suitable mates.⁴⁶

Once the couple was engaged, the family attempted to control the courtship patterns. For example, the bride could see her fiancé no more than three times and then always in the presence of a chaperone. They were not supposed to hold hands or kiss. But in practice, most couples probably deviated from such customs. Even after marriage, public displays of affection were virtually nonexistent. After the wedding night, the groom's mother, accompanied by the emissary, inspected the sheets of the nuptial bed for evidence of the

⁴⁴ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 198; Lydio F. Tomasi, The Italian American Family (Staten Island, 1972), p. 13; Williams, South Italian Folkways, p. 83.

⁴⁵ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 189, 197.

⁴⁶ Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," pp. 46-47. On southern Italy in the 1970s Ann Cornelisen writes: [A girl] "does not meet young men with whom she has not grown up unless a brother introduces a friend There are no dances, no cafés where young people meet or even family parties that include outsiders" (Women of the Shadows, p. 170).

bride's virginity as well as the groom's potency. Although divorce was illegal, two grounds for annulment were the groom's impotence or the bride's nonvirginity. Considering the spouses' low expectations of fulfillment in marriage, however, the likelihood, need, or legitimacy of separation was probably minimal.⁴⁷

The Nassau women were asked how they were treated in relation to their brothers, if they received sexual advice before marriage, and how their parents controlled their relationships with young men. Besides having to do housework, Michelino said she was not treated any differently than her brother; her father was strict with all of his children. Rose stated, however, that her "brother was king in the house because he was a boy. He got everything he wanted, everything he wanted, yes sir." She went on to say that, in addition to being the only boy in the family, he was also the youngest. Two women from central Italy had differing views concerning their treatment compared with that of their brothers. Tosca explained that in her family sons and daughters were treated alike. But because she was

⁴⁷ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 187, 199, 205; Tomasi, Italian American Family, p. 13; Williams, South Italian Folkways, pp. 84, 93; Yans-Mclaughlin, Family and Community, p. 95. Changes are evident: Moss and Thompson mention that divorce, separation, and desertion "are not rare" in the 1950s ("Southern Italian Family," p. 40). But Ann Parsons notes the continuing importance of chaperoning women in Naples in the late 1950s (Belief, Magic, and Anomie [New York, 1969], pp. 85, 139).

the youngest and sickly, she believed she was probably given more attention than her siblings. Another woman, from Lucca, asserted that her parents were stricter with her and her sisters than with her brothers. She noted that she was corrected more often for doing things wrong.⁴⁸

Although Gambino mentions that sexual questions were discussed with girls by female relatives, only two of nine Nassau women who grew up in Italy reported having received any information at all regarding sex before marriage. One woman from the south said her mother gave her sexual information, and another from Formia said one of her relatives suggested that she see a doctor.⁴⁹

Experiences with the opposite sex, however, conform more closely to the traditional contadino patterns discussed above. Of the four southern women who were of marriageable age while still in Italy, two kept company with the man they later married. However, the other two had more than one boy friend. Rose mentioned that during the 1920s she and her fiancé were chaperoned, adding that he gave her a gold ring and a necklace as a wedding gift. None of these women supplied information indicating that their marriages were

⁴⁸ Interviews with: M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M., Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82.

⁴⁹ Interviews with: T.S., Massapequa, 4/26/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Mrs. M., Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82. Questionnaires #505, 310, 374, 254.

arranged. But three of the nine reported that their mothers' marriages had been. Only Rose brought out the fact that her parents expected her to marry someone from the same village. One of the four mothers of these interviewees married a local man.⁵⁰

Scant information from four women from central Italy indicates that parental constraints regarding relationships with men were not much different from those in the south. For instance, Sandre explained that she "was not allowed to fraternize with boys." During the 1940s she and her sister could not attend dances held in a hall of the villa where they lived in Venice. She recalled that when the son of the owner of the villa came to ask them to attend the dances, her stepfather would say, "Yes, go ahead." But prior to the man's coming to ask them, her stepfather said, "Don't you dare say yes." So she and her sisters would have to say, "No, thank you." But she did manage to socialize with young men at the beach when she was with a group of girls. But if a young man wanted to take her out alone, he had to ask her stepfather's permission and then they could go out only in the daytime. Her stepfather would check the young man's family background, and if it was satisfactory, he would allow them to go out. Ann recalled that her mother, who was

⁵⁰ Interview with R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81. Questionnaires #505, 254, 310. A 57-year-old Sicilian woman said her mother told her she was not kissed by her husband until after they were married (M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81).

very strict, would not allow her to date. But she explained that she was quite young in Italy. Likewise, Tosca said,

I didn't have a boy friend because I was too young, anyhow--16 years old. We didn't date at that age in Italy. There was no such thing as dates."

The one woman from central Italy, who also married there, did not date anyone. She met her future husband through a close friend of her brother's. Like Rose, while keeping company she was chaperoned.⁵¹

Limited information concerning age at marriage suggests that although women were almost always younger than the men they married, they did not necessarily marry in their late teens. Of the women mentioned above who married in Italy, only two of five were under 20, the other three in their late 20s. Even among the mothers of these Nassau women, only a minority (6 of 20) married while in their teens. The mean age at marriage for the southern mothers was 22.7; for those from central and northern Italy, 21.7. In general, though, men married in their 20s. The husbands of four of the women mentioned above were 20, 22, 22, and 27, at marriage. The mean age for fathers of the women interviewed (calculated from available figures) was 27.3 years.⁵²

⁵¹ Interviews with: S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82.

⁵² The age difference between mates in the south, in my sample, ranged from 0-11 years, with a mean of 5.3.

The duties and responsibilities of Italian mothers, described above, involved instilling values, habits, and skills in children. Such obligations derive from Italian traditions perpetuating l'ordine della famiglia, a complex system of rules governing one's relations to his family and others. The family's needs and interests fashioned its members' attitudes toward the state, the Church, and the school. Social institutions beyond the family were generally viewed with indifference, suspicion, or contempt. To the family of the contadino, formal schooling was not deemed important in training its youth. Indeed, education was feared because it might challenge or contradict what was taught at home. It kept girls and boys from more important lessons they could learn from working or from practical experience. In short, schooling and freedom of mobility, especially for girls, could sever one's ties to home and family. Any aspirations to go beyond the home, for males or females, was viewed as disloyal and shameful.⁵³

Although Italy's Coppino law of 1877 made formal education compulsory for six- to nine-year-olds, 25 percent of children in this age group in 1901-1902 were not enrolled in school. Even by 1911 only 40 percent of Italian children between the ages of 10 and 15 attended.⁵⁴ Of those who did

⁵³ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 3, 36, 39, 225.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 247, 250-251. According to Ianni, compulsory school age was raised in 1923 from 10 to 14 ("The Acculturation of the Italo-Americans in Norristown, Pennsylvania,

have some schooling, many often lapsed into illiteracy, since peasant homes lacked reading material.⁵⁵ For these children the typical schoolroom was small, dirty, poorly illuminated, and inadequately ventilated. Yet, before World War I a minority from the south managed to attend secondary schools.⁵⁶ Boys attended more frequently than girls, and until recently illiteracy rates for southern Italian women remained much higher than for men.⁵⁷

The educational experiences of the southern-born women generally matched those outlined above. Of twelve women who had attended school in the south, nine completed only a few years of grammar school. Among those who went beyond elementary school, two were from more urban areas, while the other woman completed high school and went to college after coming to the United States. Boys tended to go further: four of the five women who volunteered this information said their male siblings received a bit more schooling than they did. Mary, for example, finished only four grades of grammar school,

1900-1950" [Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State College, 1952], p. 120). Banfield indicates that in the 1950s a child in the south usually completed his education at age 12. In 1953, 30 percent of the 10-40 year-olds of the village he studied were illiterate (Moral Basis, pp. 22-23).

55 Emiliana P. Noether, "The Silent Half: The Contadine Del Sud before the First World War," in The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America, ed. Betty Boyd Caroli (Toronto, 1978), p.4.

56 Briggs, Italian Passage, pp. 40-42, 50.

57 Noether, "Silent Half," p. 4.

whereas her brother attended high school. Rose, who cannot even write her name, said she never went to school although her brother did: "By the time I was a young girl [in the early 1900s], if your mother pushed you to go to school, all right; if not, the government don't care." During the 1910s, even Mrs. I., whose aunt was the village school teacher, completed only four grades, while her brother finished high school. In recalling her school days in the 1920s, Rose, an only child, stated that boys rather than girls would be sent to school. Her description of her grammar school is instructive because it mirrors Briggs characterization, mentioned above. There was no heat, light nor toilet. A blackboard and map of the world were the only visual aids. Students wore shawls to keep warm. But because of the American money her father sent, she was able to wear a coat to school.⁵⁸

Even though most of these women did not go very far in school, their parents' attitudes toward education were not necessarily negative. For example, Josephine mentioned that her father "wanted an education for the children, especially me."⁵⁹ Rose said, "My father was determined to send me to school. He felt it was the only way to get ahead." She believed that his attitude was unusual, however.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Interviews with: R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82, Questionnaire #505.

⁵⁹ Interview with J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81.

⁶⁰ Interview with R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82.

Of the other five out of eleven women who answered this question, two came from families who were indifferent to education; one said her mother favored education but her father did not; and the remaining two said their families had no money for school. That money was the limitation which held them back educationally seems plausible. Briggs notes that most villages in the south lacked high schools, so that pupils would have to be sent away--an expensive proposition.⁶¹ Rose and Mrs. I. stated that only children of affluent families received a high school education and beyond. In addition to the expense, Italian mores may have affected whether women went beyond grammar school. As mentioned earlier, leaving home to attend school was not generally acceptable or prevalent, especially for girls. This is apparent in Mrs. I.'s comment that her parents believed children should go to school only in their own town. Josephine, while not knowing how her family would react, attended high school close to her home in Sicily.⁶²

Unlike women from the south, almost all of those from central and northern Italy had university educations. Only one of seven had stopped after receiving a high school diploma. Two others who had gone to high school and college

⁶¹ An Italian Passage, pp. 62-64. Interviews with: R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81. Questionnaires #254, 505.

⁶² Interviews with: R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; Mrs. I., Freeport, 9/17/81; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81.

in the United States had attended elementary school in Italy. Both Sandre and Tosca attended the University of Venice in the 1940s; another woman attended the Conservatory of Lucca in the 1930s. In contrast to their southern counterparts, these women tended to have an education comparable to that of their brothers. Of four women who provided information, only one had received less schooling than her brothers.⁶³

Parental opinions concerning education were generally positive, although two of seven women reported negative views. Rose said that her family believed education was "extremely important." Ann said there was "never any doubt that I was going to school." To the parents of Madeline and those of Mrs. M., education was necessary and important for both men and women. Sandre, although attending college for almost two years, recalled that her parents did not encourage her to go to school. Tosca indicated that her father did not approve of education for women. "They don't push girls, they discourage girls; girls get married and have children," she said. Of the three women who attended college in Italy, she was the only one who went to an institution far from home. When asked if it was unusual and frowned upon for a woman to go away to school, she replied, "In Italy you don't

⁶³ Interviews with: R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82.

do things like that, you stay [near-by for college]." Sandre agreed. The fact that Tosca did not follow such conventions she attributed to being a rebel, being "born unusual."⁶⁴

Unlike formal schooling, religious education was entrusted to the older females in the family. Children were taught prayers and stories concerning the Virgin Mary and the lives of the saints. They were encouraged to go to church, where the sexes sat apart, and to receive the sacraments. Their folk religious beliefs, which included magic and its influences, such as the evil eye, were also communicated to the younger generation by word of mouth. But, like formal education, religious training was considered less important than the mores and values of the contadino. Although the peasants regarded themselves as Roman Catholics, few of them understood or had any formal training in Church doctrine. Illiteracy contributed to their ignorance. Men rarely attended mass; usually women and children would go. However, feasts which celebrated a village's or a town's patron saint were well attended by all. As with other outside influences in the contadino culture, the Church as an institution was distrusted. Rather, their folk religion (which included elements of Catholicism) and folkways served

⁶⁴ Interviews with: R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; M.K. Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; Mrs. M, Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82.

as guides to behavior.⁶⁵

It is difficult to discern the place of religion in the families of these women. Their comments describing the influence of religion in their lives represent a wide range of opinion. Venera stated that her family was "not very religious," while Rose maintained that hers was "very religious." Josephine, who was also from the South, simply said that she was "brought up Catholic." Livia depicted her family as being "Catholic but not strong." A woman from central Italy described hers as a religious family, while Ann noted that hers was "not overly zealous." The two women from northern families had been raised in a nonreligious atmosphere. Madeline said there was "no religious upbringing in my background at all."⁶⁶

There were, however, more concrete experiences regarding religion which reveal the influence of religion in their lives. Nine of twelve women from the South mentioned that they had received communion and confirmation, whereas only two of six women growing up in central or northern Italy indicated that they had received those sacraments. In gen-

⁶⁵ Covello, Social Background, pp. 130, 129-140, 145; Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 86. Banfield found people had little religious training and most homes no religious literature (Moral Basis, p. 124).

⁶⁶ Interviews with: V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; Mrs. M., Roslyn Heights, 5/12/82; A.C., Massapequa, 4/19/82; R.S. Garden City, 4/17/81; M. K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81.

eral, whole families attended church in both the North (four out of five) and in the South (seven out of twelve). One-third of the southern women reported that the mother and children were the most frequent church-goers. In one southern family and one from central Italy only the children attended mass. "We could not sit at the table if we did not go to church," Tosca said. Only Venera supported the generalization above concerning Italian men and their relationship to Catholicism:

You know the Italian men are not very religious, but they are Catholic and they expect you to be a good religious daughter. You know. But they don't go [to church].⁶⁷

In addition to emphasizing church-going and receiving the sacraments, women also talked about going to feasts. Six of eight southern women attended them while living in Italy, but only three of six women from central and northern Italy had experienced them. Almost all southern homes (seven of eight) contained religious articles. Two of these women recalled their mothers' lighting candles to a saint once a week. But statues, crosses, and pictures tended to be less common in the homes of the women (two of six) from central and northern Italy.

This group was also more likely to deny knowing about

⁶⁷ Interviews with: T.S., Massapequa, 4/26/82; V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82.

the evil eye⁶⁸ than those from the south. Of the latter, seven of eight had heard about it and two said they believed in it. Michelino described having gone to a woman in the village in the 1910s to see if someone had put the "evil eye" on her. Mrs. I. said, "My brother died and my mother thought someone put the eye on him that is why he passed away." Rose remembered wearing a little red horn when she was a toddler in the 1920s and being prayed over by her mother and grandmother when she had a headache. Although none of the women from central or northern Italy admitted to believing in the evil eye, two of the six said they knew about it. Sandre, Tosca, and Madeline said they had become acquainted with it after arriving in the United States. After telling about an American friend who used to call on her mother's knowledge of the evil eye to cure headaches, Sandre said, "If I have a headache, I take aspirin."⁶⁹

The families of the women discussed here represent a range of economic, educational, and religious backgrounds. Although the number of women studied was small, the image of the Italian peasant woman and her family presented here best applies to those who came from the South. The differences between northern and southern Italians emphasized by most

⁶⁸ Alleged power to harm another by looking at him or her.

⁶⁹ Interviews with: M.D., East Meadow, 3/10/82; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/82; R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; S.Z., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82.

scholars are primarily evident in the economic, educational, and religious sphere. In general, southern families tended to be less affluent and more religiously oriented. They had the largest number of children and, though most women did not marry while in their teens as the literature suggests, they were a bit older at marriage than their central and northern sisters. A look at the fathers' occupations reveals that fewer heads of households were farmers than one might expect.⁷⁰ These southern fathers held a variety of occupations, most of them coming from the middle ranks of society. The mothers did not usually work outside the home, but if they did they chose occupations that were respectable and that were extensions of their household skills. Many even worked within the home.

It is unclear whether the southern fathers made all the decisions as heads of families: wives alone or wives and husbands together were just as apt to be the decision makers. But women usually handled the family's money. Other aspects of the woman's role fit the generalizations discussed earlier. Learning to do household chores and sewing or embroidery was most prevalent among southern women.

These women usually received the least number of years of schooling compared to their brothers and compared to

⁷⁰ Such a profile, however, reflects the time factor, since Italian-born daughters whose average age was 65 indicated their fathers' occupation in the 1920s and 30s.

women from other parts of Italy. The religious experiences of these women's families also tended to fit the patterns presented in the literature: most children received communion, were confirmed, and attended church services. However, whole families, not just mothers and children, went to mass. Italian feasts were family events enjoyed by almost all of these families. Crosses, saints' pictures, and statues graced most of the homes. Finally, the evil eye was a well-known superstition which only a minority adhered to or practiced.

Besides such differences, however, there seemed to be certain similarities among these women which transcended locality. There was some suggestion, for example, that a negative view of the independent working woman was not confined to the South. The nature of these women's jobs also supports the contention that only certain types of work were acceptable for Italian women, and not simply southern women. Whether she came from the North or South, parental views regarding the woman's physical appearance, especially the use of makeup, were generally similar.

Although it has been asserted that sons were not as closely supervised as daughters in the South, this practice also varied despite the region in which a family resided. Sexual questions were not discussed, regardless of the region, and parental restraints regarding relationships with men were similar for most of these women. Socializing was

kept to a minimum: the girl had few boyfriends and chaperoning was common. Finally, positive parental attitudes toward education did not appear to be regionally distinct: negative attitudes were not confined to the South. The idea of keeping females close to home for their formal education was also not typically southern.

My discussion of the role of the southern peasant woman and its applicability to the role of this group of Italian women as a whole has shown the characteristics, attitudes, and mores that would distinguish them from their American counterparts after their migration. The persistence of Italian cultural norms, despite the many changes and choices confronting these women in America will become apparent in the discussion of the role of first-generation Italian women as wives, mothers, and daughters.

CHAPTER 3
THE FIRST GENERATION
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, PARENTAL CONTROLS

The role of the Italian immigrant woman has been shaped largely by her native traditions, such as familism and male superiority. Both protective and supportive, the family has generally remained exclusive and restrictive, rather than becoming a vehicle for movement into the outside world. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin found that Italian families in Buffalo were more adult-centered, more familistic, more insistent on sex differences than American or Polish working-class families.¹ Compared to Slavic and Jewish women, more Italians reported having been treated differently from their brothers, according to Corinne Krause. Italians also held more traditional views concerning gender roles. Referring to New York City at the turn of the century, Elizabeth Ewen found that Italian women had less access to street life than

¹ Family and Community, p. 259. See Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American Child, p. 356.

Jewish women.²

Some of the ways in which traditional mores have affected Italian-born women and their families are examined in this and the succeeding chapter, using information gathered from questionnaires and interviews with thirty-nine first- and 181 second-generation women. The mean ages of these generations were 65 and 56, respectively, and information about their mothers and fathers was also obtained in order to paint a more complete picture of their upbringing. The difficulty in finding Italian-born women who came here in the early 1900s and who were willing to be interviewed means that my sample is skewed toward the more affluent and educated. Along with such first-hand accounts, a sample of 681 Nassau County families from the 1925 New York State Manuscript Census provided data on familial and occupational structure. The Glen Cove City Directory was used for women's work patterns.

Italian mores prescribed that women should not go to America alone. When Italian women, unlike the Irish, migrated to these shores, most of them came in family groups.³ Tosca, arriving in New York in 1947, said it was "very un-

² "Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars," p. 414. According to Mark Zborowski, "Italian behavior patterns in pain are characterized by a feeling of security, and this feeling of security can be traced to a great extent to the family structure" (People in Pain [San Francisco, 1969], p. 178).

³ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 70.

usual" to come alone as she did.⁴ Among Italian immigrant women in Nassau County, almost three-quarters came to America as children with one or both parents. More than half of them had fathers already here.

Since most of these women grew up in the United States, their experiences were similar to those of the second generation. Of twenty-nine women who specified age on arrival, 14 were 8 or younger, ten were 12-18, and five, 21-31. Half of this first generation can be classified as belonging to the "new immigration," since they came here before the National Origins Act of 1924; nine arrived in the '20s and '30s, five during the Second World War or after.

As was true of other immigrants, the economic motive was paramount. Most of the interviewees cited hopes for better economic opportunities as the family's reason for emigrating. One woman, conceding that she had come to find a better life, said she "wanted freedom" too. Another's father had traveled to New York to visit his ailing sister and the family followed later. One woman came to be reunited with her husband. Three joined their married sisters who were homesick and wanted the company of another family member. Two emigrated with their families for political reasons; as Madeline put it, "We were Socialists.... Mussolini went

⁴ Interview with T.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82. Susan E. Kennedy, If All We Did Was to Weep at Home: A History of White Working Class Women in America (Bloomington, 1979), p. 55. Ewen, "Immigrant Women," pp. 69-70.

gunning for my family and he shot quite a number of them."⁵

As shown in other studies,⁶ kin played a significant part in the immigration and settlement of these families. Seventeen of twenty-eight first-generation interviewees said they had kin in the United States, and many of them moved in with relatives or near them. Three women reported that their parents had had friends from Italy in the New York metropolitan area. However, a substantial number of these women were virtual pioneers: eleven (including the latter three) had had no relatives in America.⁷

The migration patterns of these families indicates that an initial settlement in the city with later relocation in the suburbs was not the only route they followed. Data from the Manuscript Census for 1925 shows that families were almost as likely to settle in New York City as in Nassau during the early twentieth century: about 45 percent of Italian male heads of households were naturalized in New York City, as compared with 42 percent in Nassau County: it appears that a majority lived in the city before migrating to the suburb.⁸

⁵ Interview with M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81.

⁶ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 57; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 74.

⁷ The figure for "No relatives in America" is actually a bit higher: three women had relatives in the States who had died shortly after settling here.

⁸ Five percent naturalized in New York State, 8% elsewhere.

In my sample of the families of Italian-born women, 77 percent first set up housekeeping in one of the City's boroughs, while among the Italian-born parents of the second generation, 84 percent did so. However, Nassau County was the initial destination of 23 percent of the first generation and 16 percent of the second generation.⁹

Wherever they settled, they brought with them certain values and attitudes which shaped their lives in America. The resilience of Italian family life and mores is evident, for example, in female work patterns. In studying female employment in Buffalo, Yans-McLaughlin asserts that even into the interwar period the Italian ideal was to keep women at home.¹⁰ At the same time, however, the men resigned themselves to their daughters' working, since by contributing to the family income they were fulfilling one function of good children, posing no threat to the father's prestige and control. And when and if the wives worked, their choices of employment were influenced by Italian culture. Caring for boarders (at least up until 1920) and doing homework were prevalent among Italian women and were acceptable because they were an extension of a wife's role in the home and kept her at home with the children. Likewise, part-time or seasonal employment, as in light industry, was acceptable since

⁹ Two of the Italian women had resided briefly in Hartford, Connecticut., and Brooklyn before moving to Nassau County.

¹⁰ Family and Community, pp. 53, 164, 206, 210, 213-215.

it did not challenge the husband's role as the chief breadwinner. Other jobs that maintained the sexual and familial controls over women were also permissible, but not domestic service, which Italians generally avoided. Hence, although Italian men normally disapproved of women working, they perceived their wives' and daughters' work in such a way as to make it palatable.

In the interwar years, most wives and mothers, including the foreign-born, were the least likely family members to obtain employment. Until World War II, most working women were single, widowed, or divorced.¹¹ But Italian wives and mothers in Nassau, as in Buffalo, were even less likely than others to work outside the home. In 1925 only 3.3 percent of them were so employed, as compared with 4.6 percent of married native-born women and 10.6 percent of foreign-born.¹² Among my sample of second generation families, 4.2 percent of wives were employed in 1925.¹³ Of 256 married women and eight widows having Italian surnames who were listed in the Glen Cove City Directory for 1923-24, only five were work-

¹¹ Kennedy, If All We Did, p. 95; Carl Degler, At Odds (New York, 1980), pp. 138, 140, 384, 416; Carol Humowitz and Michaele Weissman, A History of Women in America (New York, 1978), p. 303; Tentler, Wage Earning Women, pp. 59, 165.

¹² Percentage for all wives in the Manuscript Census for 1925 was 6.1. Briggs found 13% of Italian wives in Monroe County worked outside the home (Italian Passage, p. 116).

¹³ One out of 24, that is. Among second-generation families Yans-McLaughlin found 12% had working wives (Family and Community, p. 213).

ing. Such figures suggest that cultural prohibitions against wives' working seemed to be operating among Nassau's Italian families.

Since most of these women did not work outside the home, were other forms of income-earning acceptable, such as taking in roomers (lodgers) or boarders (those who also receive meals)? This was not a common practice among Italian families in Nassau County in 1925. Neither was it common at that time in areas of Buffalo that were heavily populated by Italians.¹⁴ According to the NYSCM for 1925, 10 percent of Italian families had roomers or boarders; 3 percent had boarders. Of second-generation Italian families none had roomers or boarders. In contrast, 17.5 percent of foreign-born families in Nassau housed roomers or boarders. Only 8.5 percent of native American families had roomers or boarders.¹⁵ While Italian families were less likely to house roomers or boarders than other immigrant families, they were not alone in their avoidance of housing lodgers and boarders when compared to the native born.

Homework was a more popular option, according to Nassau women, especially in view of the continuing availability of

¹⁴ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 212. Cinel (From Italy to San Francisco, p. 187) found only 15% of Italian families had lodgers in the interwar years; in Pittsburgh, only 5% (Bodnar, Lives of Their Own, p. 212).

¹⁵ Degler (At Odds, p. 138): "At no time and among no social class did more than 25% of families" house boarders.

such work in the metropolitan area in the 1920s and '30s. Ten of twenty-one of the interviewees reported that their mothers had performed such part-time work, almost all during the 1930's. Ten of thirty-three Italian-born mothers of the second generation also took in homework between 1920 and 1945. Millie and Mary helped with the homework after school; Josephine recalled that her mother and sister did beading at home. A New Hyde Park woman said her mother used to go to Manhattan to pick up her homework.¹⁶

Besides homework, several of these Italian women did other acceptable types of work which perhaps indicates their choice to conform to Italian mores. For example, after Mary's father was injured driving a sanitation truck, her mother opened a grocery store in part of her home in Queens. Livia, while making it clear that her husband would not allow her to take a job, said she had worked in her husband's hat factory for several months during World War II because he had had trouble getting help. Carmella assisted her husband in his shoe store and did the bookkeeping in the interwar years. Six of thirty-three daughters of Italian-born parents also reported jobs that were in some way tied to the home. Three remembered that their mothers had helped in their fathers' stores; two of these mothers had also had

¹⁶ Interviews: M.F., Massapequa, 7/7/81; M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; M.M., New Hyde Park, 9/3/81.

additional jobs: one took in ironing and did domestic work, while the other served as landlady for the apartment building the family owned in Queens. Another woman recalled that her mother did the cooking in her father's restaurant. Ella's mother opened a nursery school in their Bronx home rather than leave her youngest child and work outside the home. Jenny said that during the early 1940's her mother did laundry for the servicemen stationed near their Port Washington residence. Although her father would not allow her mother to work, Jennie said that doing laundry was acceptable because she did not have to leave the house.¹⁷

As was true of other female workers, the jobs that Italian women got were mostly low-income, low-status, and sexually segregated.¹⁸ Among mothers interviewed or responding to questionnaires, about three-fourths were blue-collar workers: sewing-machine operators, seamstresses, dress-makers. A similar proportion of mothers of second-generation women also worked in the garment industry. Two women indicated that their mothers had done housework for local Nassau families. Only three mothers of Italian-born women could be

¹⁷ Interviews with: M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81; P.F., Bellmore, 6/6/81; K.K., Great Neck, 7/13/81; E.W., Bellmore, 6/22/81; V.B., New Hyde Park, 7/20/81; J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81. Italian women in Pittsburgh said they did not work, they just helped in the family business 20-30 hours/week (Colecchia, "Women, Ethnicity and Mental Health," in The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America, p. 254).

¹⁸ Tentler, Wage Earning Women, pp. 142-144.

classified as white-collar workers, all of whom owned businesses. Similarly, the largest white-collar category among mothers of the second generation owned their own businesses. The rest were clerical workers: secretaries, sales people, clerks, or typists. Two were teachers, one an accountant.¹⁹ The 1925 Manuscript Census indicates five Italian wives working out of 138 in the sample: four domestics, one dress designer. My sample shows one wife working (also as a domestic) out of twenty-five from the second generation. The Glen Cove City Directory shows five Italian wives working (out of 256): two sewing-machine operators, one seamstress, one stenographer, and one sales person.²⁰

That some Italian wives cleaned other people's homes challenges the notion that Italian mores discouraged such work. However, these women did not live in the homes of their employers and none of them were servants, which may be a reason for the acceptability of such work. These findings lend support to those of Cohen, Tilly, and Gabaccia, who maintain that instances of domestic service were not so unusual among southern Italian women.²¹

¹⁹ My sample also included one beader, one needleworker, one garment examiner, three dress designers, one milliner, and six factory workers.

²⁰ NYSMC, 1925; Glen Cove City Directory, 1923-24.

²¹ Cohen, "Workshop to Office," pp. 35, 37; Tilly, "Comments on the Yans-McLaughlin and Davidoff Papers," Journal of Social History, 7 (Summer 1974):453-454; Gabaccia, "Houses and People," pp. 37-38.

Even though most wives were not gainfully employed, thereby conforming to the south Italian tradition of keeping women at home, what was the prevailing attitude on this issue? Italian daughters as well as those of the second generation were asked about their parents' opinion on this question. Most (54%) favored unconditionally the idea of a woman's working; indeed, 16 percent of these said their parents expected it. Rose recalled that her mother believed, "If I can make a few dollars, why not [work]?" After she was married, her father told her, "You get out and work and help your husband." Mrs. I.'s parents thought it was all right for her to work because "everyone comes over here to make money." Martha said a woman's working was tolerable because it helped the family. But 18 percent said their parents opposed women's working, while 13 percent had no opinion. The remaining 16 percent reported that their parents accepted the idea of women's employment under certain conditions, such as working until marriage or until there were children at home or in order to supplement the family income. For instance, Mary said her father thought she should not work after marriage.²²

Among the second generation, a similar proportion (58%) replied that their parents had had a favorable opinion of

²² Interviews with: R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; Mrs. I, Freeport, 9/17/81; M.P., Bellmore, 6/10/81; M.A., Massapequa, 5/19/82/ I should have asked about fathers' rather than parents' opinions, since the former is crucial.

women's working; only about 15 percent indicated an unfavorable opinion and 9 percent no strong feeling or no opinion at all on their parents' part.²³ About one-fifth said that work for women was satisfactory under certain circumstances, mainly if a woman did not have children. One might also work up until marriage or in order to assist the family financially. Two indicated that work should not interfere with taking care of the home.

Attitudes reflecting Italian mores surfaced when women were asked if there were any jobs that their parents believed unsuitable for them. Parents cautioned daughters not to become domestics, sewing-machine operators, actresses, singers, models, or nurses -- because of contact with men. Such occupations were considered either menial or not respectable because they threatened a woman's chastity. One woman explained, "Anything sexy or exhibitionist -- dancing, acting, modeling were unacceptable." Mary's mother tried to steer her away from a theatrical career because she thought she "would be a loose woman by the time she got out." Millie said,

I sang in a band once and Papa thought that was the worse thing a girl could do. The Italian strict background of a girl ... held you back from doing the things that you really wanted to do.

Similarly, Gloria, whose father wanted her to have a "normal safe job," said, "For a while I did modeling and my father

²³ Of the 58%, 8% said they were expected to work.

was up the wall. I had to stop that. He thought [models] were all tramps."²⁴

Aside from the question of morality, some parents expressed concern over the menial nature of certain jobs. Eugenia's father said, "Don't you dare go to work in a factory. If you can't get a good job, don't work." According to Carmella's father, picking beans or potatoes was acceptable, but working in a factory was not. Marie said she could not be a domestic because by cleaning someone else's house, she would be demeaning the family. Conceding that such work was beneath her, Alice remarked that "only the poorest of the poor" became waitresses or domestics. When Mary began cleaning a neighbor's house after she was married, her father was "outraged, absolutely outraged. It was beneath me," she said.²⁵

Such negative advice, rooted in their Italian background, outweighed the positive advice and encouragement mentioned by a minority of the first- and second-generation women. Overall, parental guidance concerning job choices seems to have been lacking.²⁶ One woman said, "Ours was a

²⁴ Interviews with: M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; M.F., Massapequa, 7/7/81; G.D., Merrick, 8/19/81. Questionnaire #337. Respondents may have misinterpreted this question and the percentage therefore smaller than might be expected.

²⁵ Interviews with E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81; M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81; A.D., Merrick, 6/9/81; M.M., Merrick, 5/7/81.

²⁶ Ware writes that Italians "recognized little social advantage in one job over another and showed slight interest in

necessity for survival--any honest living was O.K." Since many of the men had seasonal jobs as laborers or construction workers, the contributions of their sons or daughters were vital to the family. Several women said they had left school to help the family. "I went to work at 14," said Martha, "because my mother had a large family and we all had to help."²⁷

During the Depression the family unit was especially important for economic survival. Judith Smith indicates that Jewish and Italian families in Providence at that time had an average of two wage-earners per family, usually father and child.²⁸ Earlier figures calculated from the 1925 census indicate that Nassau families had an average of 1.6 contributors to the family income, usually father and son.²⁹

While some Italian women expressed opinions concerning work which mirror the Italian outlook detailed earlier, there seemed to be few inhibitions about single women working outside the home. Of the women interviewed only one

steering their children into any particular line of work" (Greenwich Village, 1920-1930).

²⁷ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81; F.S., Seaford, 6/19/81; M.P., Bellmore, 6/10/81; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81. Questionnaire #364.

²⁸ "Our Own Kind," p. 207.

²⁹ NYSMC, 1925. The census also suggests that Italian sons tended to be firm adherents of the work ethic. In comparing the proportion of boys 16 and over to other groups, Italian families had 27% employed while both the native and foreign-born had only 20%.

mentioned that she was not permitted to work during the summers when she was a high school student. Her father said she was needed at home to do chores. However, after graduating in 1941 she was expected to earn money and took a job as a clerical worker. Another recalled picking beans during the summer as the only work she did when single. None of the second generation mentioned having had the opportunity to stay home without working. In fact, almost one-fourth of the first generation and nearly half of the second were employed as part-time workers before they were married.³⁰

Italian mores may have been operative for those daughters of Nassau families included in the 1925 census. Italian families had the lowest proportion of working daughters of those who were aged 16 or older. Ten percent of native American daughters were employed, while 12 percent of foreign-born daughters worked, but only 7 percent of Italian daughters were in the work force. This discrepancy may be accounted for if we remember that many of the women in this study were working during the 1930s and '40s, as compared with women in the 1925 census. Given Yans-McLaughlin's findings³¹ that attitudes about working daughters were beginning to change in the 1920s, perhaps the result of such change is reflected in the experiences of my interviewees.

³⁰ Interviews with: M.A., Massapequa, 5/19/82; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81.

³¹ Family and Community, pp. 208, 212-213.

In other words, by the time most of them and their next generation entered the job market, changes in attitude had become widespread.

Like other single working-class women of the interwar period, most first- and second-generation Italian women were temporary or supplementary wage-earners. They saw marriage and motherhood as their ultimate goal. Like their mothers, they found that their work experience did not liberate them. Personal autonomy and life options were limited by a woman's sense of family obligation. They were working to serve the family, not to achieve personal independence. Their roles as women and their dependence on the family were not significantly changed by their working. Only Tosca and Sandre, of those interviewed, lived outside the family when they worked. Another second-generation woman lived in nurses' housing while attending nursing school. A sample from the 1925 census indicated that no Italian woman lived apart from a nuclear family, whereas among all women, 9 percent were servants and 2 percent boarders or roomers. Among interviewees of both generations, most indicated that it would have been financially impossible to live away from home. In addition, they said it was considered improper for a woman to live apart from her family.³² Compared with other women

³² Cohen ("From Workshop to Office," pp. 64, 164) found under 5% of Italian female immigrants in New York in 1905 lived outside nuclear families. See Degler, At Odds, p. 384; Churchill The Italians of Newark (New York, 1975), p. 88.

who concurred in this belief Italian women were emphatic in giving their parents' views about women living alone. Lina said, "Only tramps did that years ago. Maybe one out of a million did that." And Connie: "In those days [1940s] it was considered a disgrace for a young woman to live by herself and away from her family." Explaining that the prohibition against living away from home applied to sons as well as daughters in her family, Lena said, "You didn't have a say. He [their father] would not have allowed it." When asked what would have been the family's response if she had raised the question, she replied, "My father would have killed me. He immediately would have thought, 'She's pregnant.'"³³ For the majority of these women the thought of living on their own never crossed their minds, and only a few of them knew any women who ever did it.³⁴

Besides being under the protection and surveillance of the family, Italian women routinely turned their wages over to their mothers--or sometimes their fathers--so that they were not economically independent either. As with other working-class women, such a custom was prevalent for about 90 percent of the first and second generation. "That was the way it was done then," said Concetta. In exchange, women

³³ Interviews with: L.L., Floral Park, 9/8/81; C.C., Wantagh, 6/30/81; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82.

³⁴ M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

were given money, an "allowance" some called it, for carfare (to go to work), for lunch, or sometimes for clothing. Only Ann and Madeline and four second-generation women kept all the money they earned.³⁵ In several families a woman's wages were returned to her as a gift at marriage, but this practice was more frequent among second-generation interviewees. Such money was not intended to make the woman economically independent, but rather to help meet the expenses of married life.³⁶

Dependency was also fostered by the fact that working women usually sought jobs close to home, frequently among their own kind through family and neighborhood networks. Such a "strategy" in choosing a job was found to be typical of Italian men seeking to protect their women in the workplace.³⁷ Among those interviewed, approximately one-third of both the first and second generation had obtained work through a friend or relative at some time in their lives. Over two-fifths of the Italian-born and one-quarter of the the second generation had worked for or with relatives or

³⁵ Interviews with: C.M. Bayville, 2/25/82; A.C., Massapequa, 4/9/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81.

³⁶ Tentler (Wage Earning Women, p. 75); Ware states that paying board was becoming customary among Irish and Italian families in the 1920s (Greenwich Village, p. 416).

³⁷ Wage Earning Women, p. 105; Odenrantz, Italian Women in Industry, pp. 60, 74; Cohen ("From Workshop to Office," p. 151). Over 80% of women in the garment industry worked in shops of less than 50 employees.

friends. Half of both the first and second generations had held jobs that were close to home. Working mothers of these women tended to conform more closely to this pattern since 69 percent of second-generation mothers and 75 percent of those of the Italian-born had been employed locally, often in their immediate neighborhood.

Women of the first generation usually held unskilled or semiskilled jobs, generally in the garment industry: lining clothing, sewing buttons, trimming threads, pulling bastings. Before World War I large numbers worked in the artificial-flower and feather industry; others in paper-bag, candy, or tobacco factories. Cohen reports that by 1925 70 percent of Italian women who worked in New York's garment industry were Italian and 15 percent were found in consumer-goods factories.³⁸ For Italian women, jobs in the garment industry utilized their household skills brought from Europe. About 40 percent of Italian-born women and 60 percent of their mothers had been workers in the garment industry. Four-fifths of the mothers of the first generation and one-fifth of the second generation were similarly employed.

Although Nassau did not have anything like the garment industry of New York City, there were still opportunities in clothing and textiles. In fact, except for domestic

³⁸ "From Workshop to Office," pp. 81, 151; Odencrantz, Italian Women in Industry, pp. 60-74.

service, it was the leading employer of women in the blue-collar sector. Of single Italian women listed in the Glen Cove City Directory for 1923-24, three-quarters of those who worked had blue-collar jobs, the largest numbers being sewing-machine operators, seamstresses, and embroiderers. There were also two domestics, one dressmaker, and one milliner. Study of the NYSMC for Nassau reveals that only Italian-born women, those of Italian descent and native American women were sewing-machine operators and dress-makers; and no women with Italian names were servants, which was the largest occupational category in the sample. Of the interviewees in my sample, one-third (36%) had held blue-collar positions before they were married, and all were employed in the garment industry as sewing-machine operators, garment examiners, and hat trimmers.

Of the single working women of Italian descent in the NYSMC of 1925, over half (58%) were blue-collar workers. The largest number were in the garment industry; others worked as bindery workers, laundresses, and factory workers. Among the second-generation interviewees, only one in six had held blue-collar positions when single, mostly in the clothing industry.

By 1930 clerical work had come to be the largest category of female employment in New York City, accounting for

about 30 percent of women's jobs.³⁹ In Nassau the percentage was about 20. In the Glen Cove Directory, for example, white collar work accounted for a little more than a third (36%) of the jobs of single women with Italian surnames, the largest number being clerks, followed by stenographers, sales persons, bookkeepers, and grocers. In a sample of women of Italian descent in the 1925 NYSMC, two-fifths were employed as white-collar workers; others were bookkeepers, clerks, salesladies, stenographers, one dental assistant and one music teacher.

Among interviewees of the first generation, two-fifths had held clerical jobs when they were single; almost one-fourth had held high-level white-collar positions, such as teachers, auditors, librarians, nurses, and social workers. Among the second generation the proportions in the white-collar category were even higher: three-quarters in clerical positions, one-tenth in professional (teaching, nursing).

However, Italian-born women and their American-born daughters rarely achieved social mobility through their work experiences. Once they were in a certain type of job, factory work, clerical, or other, they did not tend to move up. The few who did so did it through education. Rose, for example, while attending library school, worked as a clerk in the 1940s, and, then after receiving her certificate, she

³⁹ Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 282.

was able to work as a librarian. But a third of the Italian-born women studied had only a grammar school education. Several (one in six) mentioned discrimination as a possible explanation for their lack of mobility. Mary, in her book-keeping job with Burlington Mills, remarked that men were given the top jobs. Eugenia, advancing from biller to auditor at Sears, claimed that she did not receive the same salary as the men; in fact, after she had trained men to do her job, they would be promoted over her. Mary also commented that a woman at that time "had no opportunity to become an executive."⁴⁰

A more powerful force for discrimination was the sexually segregated labor market.⁴¹ Women did not enter the work force in competition with men; rather, they took positions in those areas that had been carved out for them. Both their education (commercial courses, training in fashion design, for example) and their socialization experiences channeled them into traditional women's occupations. When she was going to school in the late 1930s and '40s, Rose said, "There was not much open to women except teaching." Mary agreed that girls became either secretaries or teachers. Frances and Jennie agreed that in those days women had few options: "It was ingrained," said Jennie, "Italian girls became

⁴⁰ Interviews with: R.S., Garden City, 4/17/81; M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81.

⁴¹ Mary Ryan, Womanhood in America (New York, 1979), p. 191.

secretaries."⁴²

But there was mobility in the sense that younger women usually held clerical positions that were considered more prestigious than the factory jobs held by their mothers and older sisters when they were single. In examining the surnames of all nurses listed in the 1925 and 1945 Nassau telephone directories, there was an increase from 1-4 percent in the number of Italian-named women who were nurses.⁴³ Information from questionnaires and interviews also shows this trend: two-thirds of Italian-born women held white-collar jobs, whereas nine-tenths of second-generation women held such jobs.

Because they were more educated than their immigrant mothers, these women, like their female counterparts, were able to take advantage of clerical positions resulting from the expansion of this sector of the economy in the interwar period. The educational profile of both the first and second generations illustrates this improvement.⁴⁴ Perhaps these women had better education, higher mobility, and more success, than other Italians because they had all the

⁴² Interviews with: R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/81; M.M., New Hyde Park, 9/3/82; F.G., Merrick, 8/12/81; J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

⁴³ Suburban Long Island Classified Telephone Directory (Nov. 1925), pp. 1-63; Nassau Directory for 1945-46, pp. 1-311.

⁴⁴ These women, being persisters, had higher mobility, more success, and better education than most Nassau Italians.

advantages of suburban Nassau (chap. 1, above). In comparison with their parents' educational background, table 12 suggests considerable parental support for schooling. Among women who supplied information on their parents' education, 14 percent of the first generation and 9 percent of the second said their mothers were illiterate. As for the fathers, almost none were illiterate. These figures tend to agree with Briggs's assertion that the emigrants were better educated than those who remained in Italy; many came here with a positive attitude toward education for themselves and their children.⁴⁵

Italian-born women were more likely to have had only a grammar school education compared with the second generation (table 12). It is with the second generation that completion of high school or trade school becomes important and acceptable as the norm. More than one-fifth of each group had attended college or received a college degree. Italian-born women were somewhat more likely to have advanced degrees or at least to have taken graduate courses than second-generation women.

These figures (along with parental attitudes to be examined later) challenge the view that Italian immigrants brought with them an antischool bias.⁴⁶ Italians have been

⁴⁵ Italian Passage, pp. 10, 64.

⁴⁶ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 252.

TABLE 12
 WOMEN'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION: FIRST VS. SECOND
 GENERATION (In Percentages)

Level	Italian-born	Second Generation
Grammar school	31%	5%
High school: Some	5	7
Graduate	10	38
Business/trade school	13	17
College: Some	18	12
Graduate	5	11
Graduate Courses	8	2
Degrees	10	8

Source: Interviews and questionnaires from first and second generation.

characterized as ambivalent toward what they deemed unnecessary schooling with its "useless" subjects. Like many other working-class people, Italians favored education that was practical: domestic arts for daughters, industrial arts for sons.⁴⁷ Better yet was on-the-job training, since children could be earning money while learning. Italians thought that schools and teachers were generally threatening and hostile to family mores, holding the Italian culture in contempt. This is really the crux of the matter: familial concerns usually took precedence over others, including those of the child. Hence, if education suited their purposes, Italian families encouraged their children to pursue it.⁴⁸ Briggs

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 87; Maxine Seller, "The Education of Immigrants' Children in Buffalo, N.Y., 1890-1916," New York History 57 (Apr. 1976):196.

⁴⁸ Lopreato, Italian Americans, p. 160; Sister Mary Fabian Matthews, "The Role of the Public School in the Assimilation of the Italian Immigrant Child in New York City, 1900-1914," in The Italian Experience in the United States, p. 141:

noted, for example, that Italian parents did not sacrifice their children's education in order to gain income from them any more readily than their neighbors might have done for their own children.⁴⁹ When Italians made a commitment to stay in America, they used education to advance themselves. At last, schooling became relevant. Covello also asserts that favorable attitudes toward schooling occurred during the early 1920s, after repatriation had lost its appeal.⁵⁰

According to Sharon Hartman Strom,⁵¹ most Italian daughters in Rhode Island graduated from high school during the interwar period, in part because their parents wanted them to have the educational advantages they themselves lacked. Such schooling, they believed, would help their daughters get better jobs. Cohen, analyzing the Italian woman's experience in New York City, presents a more complex picture.⁵²

Sister Mary Fabian maintains that for the Italian child the New York City school was an effective agent of cultural transmission but "its penetration in the area of social assimilation was negligible. Schools did not significantly increase the generation gap, nor did they severely disrupt family relations."

⁴⁹ Italian Passage, pp. 64, 191, 229, 238, 243. Briggs found Italian children were not much different from non-Italian in measures of success in school. Using attendance reports and court records, he concluded that truancy of Italian children resulted from poverty and parent-child tensions, not from a desire to profit by their labor.

⁵⁰ Italo-American School Child, pp. 218ff., 287.

⁵¹ "Italian American Women and Their Daughters," p. 197.

⁵² "From Workshop to Office," pp. 218-220, 287.

She emphasizes the city's employment structure and the state's more active role in making sure all children attended school. Also in the 1930s homework was abolished in major industries and under-age students found it more difficult to obtain employment certificates. Finally, since the second generation had by now established their own businesses, there was less prejudice against hiring Italian women in offices. By the mid-1930s, then, family support of education for Italian women came because "the economic advantage in keeping girls away from school had declined and the risk of legal sanction was greater than it had been before."⁵³

Cohen's analysis seems to apply to many second-generation Italian women of Nassau County, most of whom grew up in New York City. In spite of the influence of economic factors on support for education, in those families where the women did not complete high school the traditional Italian attitude toward education may have been operating, while women who attended college may have come from families who displayed their "commitment to literacy and self-improvement," as Briggs puts it.⁵⁴ The attitudes of the Italian parents toward education, as expressed by their daughters, lend support to both of these hypotheses. Besides those factors cited by Cohen (above), Italian upbringing and background

⁵³ Ibid., p. 287.

⁵⁴ Italian Passage, p. 191.

formed an important component in framing educational and vocational aspirations.

Over half the women of both generations reported that their parents had had favorable attitudes toward women's education. Although it may be risky to determine parents' attitudes by asking their children, responses to questionnaires were supplemented by personal interviews in which those attitudes were more fully explored. Venera said her parents believed in education; Marie said her parents thought "it was essential." Frances and Sistilia also stated that their parents believed education was important, while Vincenza said, "[My father] was very much for education ... he was very modern that way."⁵⁵

Another measure of parental support for education is the number of families who provided music lessons for their children. Almost one-third of women interviewed of both generations reported that they or their siblings took lessons. Most of them took either piano or voice lessons, while their brothers learned the violin, accordian, trombone, cornet or banjo. Piano lessons generally meant more of a financial investment than the cost of instruction, including the possible purchase of the instrument. Fourteen percent of the first generation and 21 percent of the second

⁵⁵ Interviews with: V.S., Baldwin, 1/28/82; M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; F.G., Merrick, 8/12/81; S.M., Wantagh, 6/13/81; V.M., Bellmore, 6/29/81.

stated that their families did indeed own a piano.

Favorable attitudes toward education, however, did not necessarily mean that a woman would continue her schooling. In some cases an older child worked so a younger brother or sister could finish school. Although Frances, for example, left the eighth grade in the 1920s, her sisters and one brother, aged 8, 9, and 11, all finished high school. A 57-year-old woman of the second generation said, "During the Depression, to work was a necessity. My sister wanted to go to college but had to work."⁵⁶

Some, even when given the opportunity, chose not to accept it. In the late 1930s Frances's older sister refused a scholarship to attend Adelphi College because she hoped to go to Middlebury instead. (She did not.) Mary, after winning a scholarship to an acting school gave it up in order to raise a family in the 1940s. Ann and Edith, although encouraged by their parents to attend college, chose not to. While Louise could have gone to any local college, she went to secretarial school instead. If she could not go away to college, she said, she would not go at all.⁵⁷

One out of every twelve parents of both first and second generation interviewees had encouraged them to attend

⁵⁶ Interview with F.S., Seaford, 6/19/81; questionnaire #287.

⁵⁷ Interviews with: F.G., Merrick, 8/12/81; M. G., Garden City, 9/10/81; A.G., Merrick, 3/5/81; E.P., Massapequa, 9/10/81; L.B., Wantagh, 6/23/81.

college. For those who did attend, however, few went away from home. Among Italian-born women, one of four who had attended college in Italy went away from home. One Italian-born woman mentioned that her younger sister had attended Temple University in Philadelphia. A small minority (1 in 20) of the second generation also went away to college. For these women their Italian mores kept them close to home. Such a feeling existed among the women of both generations. According to Marie, going away to college in the 1940s "just wasn't done." Norma said she did not know anyone who went away to school at that time. When Joanne was ready for college in the late 1940s, she was not allowed to go to Italy and live with her aunt near the University of Padua. Instead, she enrolled at St. Joseph's College near her home in Brooklyn.⁵⁸

"You had to be home at night," explained Concetta, who attended Barnard College on a scholarship in the 1920s, "[There was] no question about going away to college."⁵⁹ And Blanche, speaking about the 1930s,

I don't think in those days that women were really sent away and even if they did, I don't think Mama was in that financial position to do it or she wouldn't do it anyhow.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Interviews with: C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81; M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; N.D., Merrick, 6/15/81; J.N., Massapequa, 6/11/81.

⁵⁹ Interview with C.M., Bayville, 2/25/82.

⁶⁰ Interview with B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82.

In some families, however, this way of thinking proved to be flexible over time. For example, Eugenia's younger sister wanted to attend nursing school in Manhattan during World War II, but her parents were upset about the girl's sleeping away from home. By talking to her parents, Eugenia got them to accept the idea and grant the sister's wish.⁶¹ In other cases, however, parental restrictions went beyond the question of simply attending a local college. Mary, a clerical worker, began attending CCNY at night in the 1940s. But soon she had to give it up because, she says,

When the time changed, of course, it was dark and my father was terribly upset that I was coming home from the Bronx. He didn't want me to go to school at night.⁶²

Given the emphasis in Italian culture on the careful supervision of women, it is not surprising that almost all of those who attended college went to local institutions. The emphasis on attending local colleges also applied to men. Among brothers of Italian-born women, only one in nine went away to college, while three in five of second-generation males did so. Hence, unlike their sisters, the choice of where to go was more a matter of desire than decree.

Did Italian families choose, as Cohen claims,⁶³ to

⁶¹ Interview with E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81.

⁶² Interview with M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82.

⁶³ "From Workshop to Office," pp. 238, 250. By pulling daughters out of school earlier than sons, Italian parents followed the pattern of immigrant groups in America.

invest in their sons' education rather than their daughters'? The answer is not obvious from our study. More than half of Italian-born women with brothers received less education than the men. But one in eight women actually received more education and one in three, the same amount.⁶⁴

For the second generation the pattern was a bit different. Two-thirds had received an education equal to that of their brothers, one sixth more, and one sixth less. These figures seem to indicate a trend toward equalization of opportunity between the sexes. But for women born in Italy, at least, Cohen's assertion seems justified.

In addition to relating what actually happened in male-female education, the women offered a variety of responses about parental attitudes. Italians put their money into educating boys, said Mary; only her brothers received a college education. Lena went to work while her brothers went to college.⁶⁵ A 57-year-old Massapequa woman complained, "Homework was the last thing I would do at night," after the household chores; that is not the way it was for her brothers.⁶⁶ One woman said that, according to her parents,

. . . if females really wanted college, they should pay for it themselves. The male was supported through college, he did not have to pay for

⁶⁴ Although my questionnaire did not ask for information on the education of siblings, I did obtain it from interviews.

⁶⁵ Interviews with: M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82.

⁶⁶ Interview with M.A., Massapequa, 5/19/82.

it himself [nor was he] compelled to get a job while a student.⁶⁷

But in other families--Concetta's, Madeline's, Eugenia's, Josephine's, Marie's--educational opportunities did not depend on gender.⁶⁸

While more than half the respondents from each generation indicated that their parents favored education for women, the rest of the replies were negative or qualified. Only 7-11 percent of first- and second-generation women characterized their parents' attitude toward women's education as unfavorable. One correspondent wrote that she had had to fight "tooth and nail" to go to school. Because she was also expected to help support the family, she had to work at the same time, besides paying for her own education. Another woman from the second generation replied, "Department, social graces, and basic knowledge of running a home, which were important, were best taught at home."⁶⁹

Such a view is consonant with the Italian ideal of womanhood discussed in chapter 2, above. In some cases, even a personal plea by a teacher could not convince an Italian parent to allow a daughter to continue her schooling. The father told the teacher the girl had to go to work at 16, so

⁶⁷ Questionnaire #290.

⁶⁸ Interviews with C.M., Bayville, 2/15/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81; M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81.

⁶⁹ Questionnaires #337, 240.

Genevieve had to leave school in Freeport in the 1920s. A decade later, the female principal of Connie's elementary school in Queens talked to her mother about putting the girl in the college preparatory program, to which the mother replied that that was impossible because Connie was going to go to work as soon as she finished high school. Likewise, Jennie's sixth-grade teacher visited her home to try to get her parents to consider sending her to college. They did not send her, but Jennie recalls that they did at least listen to the teacher's request.⁷⁰

Fewer than one in ten women of either generation indicated that their parents insisted on a high school education only. Alice and Jennie both said they felt lucky to have been able to finish high school. Finally, 15 percent of the first generation and 7 percent of the second responded that their parents were indifferent to education for women. Mary Louise's parents never "pushed" education and they let her brother make his own decision. Another woman noted:

[They] did not care if I went on to college or not, truly. However, they didn't try to dissuade me when I said I wanted to go on. They paid my way without any complaint and helped wherever needed.⁷¹

In an attempt to discover whether Italian families favored education that was directly applicable to employ-

⁷⁰ Interviews with: R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82; L.V., Massapequa 4/28/82.

⁷¹ Interview with M.M., Merrick, 5/7/81; Questionnaire #294.

ment, interviewees were asked if their schooling had prepared them for a specific job. Half of the first generation and three-quarters of the second said that it had. Among Italian-born women, the two largest groups consisted of those who took a commercial course in high school and/or went on to business/secretarial school, on the one hand, or became teachers, on the other. Similarly, most of the second generation had followed a commercial course in high school and/or attended business school. During the early 1920s, Angelina recalled having switched, after two years in Southside High School, Rockville Centre, to Freeport because her father wanted her to take the new commercial course in that school. Later she attended Brown's Business School in Queens.⁷² The next largest group was made up of teachers, followed by those who went to trade school for dressmaking.

Most Italian children of either the first or second generation did not attend Catholic schools. Gambino points out that only 17 percent of Italian American children attended Catholic schools in 1910.⁷³ Briggs puts the figure at 33 percent for Rochester and Utica in 1920,⁷⁴ while Churchill found 22 percent attending parochial schools in

⁷² Interview with A.D., Merrick, 6/4/81.

⁷³ Blood of My Blood, p. 255.

⁷⁴ Italian Passage, p. 202.

Newark in 1940.⁷⁵ The Italian women in my survey also did not attend Catholic schools in any significant numbers: one in five for the first generation, one in six, for the second. Most of them went to Catholic elementary schools, a few to Catholic high schools, and still fewer to Catholic colleges.

In focussing on Nassau women of the first-generation family, it is evident that Italian mores were important in shaping their lives. The family, restrictive and protective, discouraged female independence. Although Italian-born wives were less likely to work than others, they did earn money at home or by other work acceptable to the mores, such as helping in family-owned businesses. Although these families had few objections to their daughter's working, the experience was not a liberating one. Rather than becoming financially independent, they contributed to the family income and lived at home. Italian parents viewed living apart from one's family as improper. The family work ethic also limited their career options, certain jobs being unacceptable as menial or dishonorable. Although less likely to work locally than their mothers, a substantial minority got jobs with or through friends or relatives. These women, especially the American-born daughters, were more likely than their mothers to be employed as white-collar workers. But those in blue-collar jobs usually worked, like their mothers, in the

⁷⁵ Italians of Newark, p. 154.

garment industry.

Most Italian-born parents, being literate, favored women's education, but economic circumstances sometimes limited a daughter's opportunities. Most attended public schools and while a grammar school education had been the norm for daughters of the first generation, high school was for the next. But the curriculum they chose was often technical or commercial, looking to future employment. Among the minority who attended college, most went to local institutions, which were not often Catholic, so they would remain close to home.

In the continuing attempt to assess the changing roles of tradition, familism, and male superiority in the lives of Nassau Italian American women, the place of religion will be examined in the sequel, along with dating, courtship, and marriage.

CHAPTER 4
THE FIRST GENERATION (Continued)
RELIGION, DATING, MARRIAGE

Religious instruction and training for Italian American women was gained primarily in church rather than in school. Except for a small minority of the women interviewed in this study, they had all taken First Communion, been confirmed, and later married in the Catholic faith. However, while they and their families considered religion important, their religious convictions varied greatly.

The church was not a major influence, however, on Italian family life in this country. Most Italian immigrants were nominally Roman Catholic or had no religious affiliation.¹ According to Rudolph J. Vecoli, they "neither frequented churches nor exerted themselves to erect others."² For most of them, religion consisted of folk beliefs and pagan superstitions syncretized with such Christian rituals

¹ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 120.

² "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," Journal of Social History (Spring 1969):237, 268.

as the celebration of feast days, the worship of saints, and the veneration of the Virgin Mary.³ Their basic distrust of the institutional Catholic Church stemmed from their belief that it was controlled by the upper classes in Italy and by the Irish in America. As a result, the church was not able to exercise effective control over most Italian Americans. Nevertheless, within this context Italian women were expected to be guardians of religion, to attend services regularly, and to make sure the children received the sacraments and followed the teachings of the church.⁴

A majority of first- and second-generation women, 90 percent of whom were Catholic, said that religion had played an important part in their early years but they were not very specific as to what they meant by that. They generally equated religion with attendance at church services, including communion and confirmation. Some said religion provided lessons in morality. Hence, questions about church going, religious traditions, and church activities helped to clarify the role of religion for some of these women.⁵

In answer to the question of who in the family attended church when they were growing up, two-fifths (42%) of the

³ Child, Irwin, Italian or American? (New York, 1970), p. 34.

⁴ Odencrantz (Italian Women in Industry, p. 206), writing about Italian women before World War I, finds that church was not an important factor in their lives.

⁵ In the first generation, only 3% were Protestants; in the second generation, 4%.

first generation and one-third of the second said that the whole family attended church services. Another third of the Italian-born and a similar proportion of the second generation reported that only the mothers and children attended. In one out of eight families (16%) of both groups, it was not unusual for the children to go to church alone. From these reports it appears that the men went to church more frequently than the literature suggests.

Those women who attended mass said they went regularly, meaning once a week, although many said their children went to mass at a different hour, usually later than the parents. In a few cases the grandparents took the children to church. On saints' days and at other times, such as Lent, the children and/or their mothers attended mass on weekdays, in addition to Sundays.

Three-quarters (76%) of the first generation and three-fifths (62%) of the second, having grown up in Greater New York, attended churches which they considered to be Italian: churches usually offering a mass in that language and served by a priest of Italian origin. But women who had spent a good part of their lives in Nassau County were less likely to attend Italian churches. None of the Italian-born women and less than one in ten of the second generation attended Italian churches in the interwar years, which is not surprising since, of twenty-five Catholic churches listed in the Long Island Almanac for 1929, none were served

by priests having Italian surnames; half the priests were Irish; the others had English or German surnames.

Whether in New York or Nassau, Italian families kept alive certain religious traditions. About 65-70 percent of the women of both generations recalled going to feast days celebrated in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, as well as in Nassau. Such feasts, usually family outings, formed a uniquely Italian part of the family's leisure activities. Held to commemorate the patron saint of one's home town in Italy, such feasts were usually organized by an Italian American society. After mass, a large statue of the saint would be carried through the streets, while people pinned money to it as it went along. During the festivities, continuing into the evening, bands played and booths were set up in the street to sell Italian foods and religious objects. Colored lights adorned the neighborhood after dark.

One-third of the first-generation mothers and one-fifth of the second incorporated Italian customs into the celebration of St. Lucy's, St. Anthony's, or St. Joseph's Day. Because St. Joseph saved farmers from famine in Sicily, he was honored by food heaped on the altar. Families held open house, where friends and neighbors came to dine and give thanks. Christmas Eve was celebrated by the preparation of many different kinds of fish after traditional Italian recipes, holy days being meatless. A few of the women also mentioned that, in keeping with Italian custom, lamb was

served at Easter, along with grain pie or Easter bread.⁶

Superstitious beliefs, such as the "evil eye," brought from Italy also played a part in the religious life of these women. Certain individuals, aside from saints, were thought to possess supernatural powers. When asked about these notions, a fourth to a third of the first and second generations said their mothers or some other family member believed in the evil eye, or sought to detect it. To protect their families from it, they often had the children wear the Italian "horn." This power was commonly assumed to cause headaches. Mary recalled having heard her mother sing songs to her sister to exorcise the wicked spirit, which could also cause other ailments: Rose recalled having taken her sick son to her friend's mother, who dispelled the curse by reciting a prayer over the boy.⁷

The majority of the women interviewed, however, did not seriously believe in the evil eye. "We only laughed over it," said Anna. Madeline's northern Italian family learned of the superstition only when neighbors in Bay Ridge came to ask her mother to dispel it. And Marie said people "were out of their minds" if they believed in it.⁸

⁶ Interviews with: M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; V.M., Merrick, 6/29/81; G.B., Seaford, 8/25/81.

⁷ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 214, 219. M.G., Garden City, 9/10/84; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81.

⁸ Ibid., A.D., Baldwin, 3/2/82; M.K., Sea Cliff, 10/19/81; M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81.

Women were asked if any members of their families were involved in church activities other than going to services and observing religious traditions. Half (53%) of the Italian-born women and three-fifths of the second generation replied that one or more family members was a regular member of some church group. In both generations, daughters were more likely than their mothers to belong to such groups as the sodality, and both were more likely to belong than the men were. But when fathers did join a group, it was most likely to be the Holy Name Society. It seems, however, that church organizations and activities were less important to these women and their families than the school, the neighborhood, and the workplace, which were sources of recreation and companionship.⁹ Of the men in these families, 30-40 percent belonged to such lay groups as the Sons of Italy and the St. Rocco Society.

Such evidence tends to support the generalization that Italian Americans were family-oriented, spending more time at home or with friends than in outside social activities. According to some sources, Italian men usually discouraged their women's involvement in organizations. Besides, child-

⁹ As of 1981, among first generation women, 59% were group members. Such a high figure (compared to their mothers) may be explained by the fact that two-thirds of these women were white-collar workers, more likely to be middle-class and group-oriented. Crispino (Ethnic Groups, p. 76) points out that Italians, being "joiners," were frequently found in social, recreational, or patriotic clubs.

rearing, homemaking, or working at a job left little time for group activities. When asked about joining groups, Mrs. I. replied that she was "too busy working and taking care of the kids."¹⁰ Another reason for the relatively low proportion of joiners among Italians of the first generation is their working-class status.¹¹

While several women reported having gone to the movies or to picnics occasionally, more of them recalled visiting relatives, usually grandparents, aunts and uncles. Other times, relatives came to visit them for Sunday dinners. Marie recalled that her family in the '20s visited her aunt on Sundays, at which time various relatives played the piano, the violin, and the mandolin. In the '30s Mary's father either played cards under the grape arbor or bocce with Italian friends in a lot across the street from their home in Queens. Meanwhile, Mary's mother would be talking with her friends in the parlor. During the Depression Rose recalled her husband's spending time at home on weekends, playing cards and drinking wine with men from the neighborhood; at other times her Italian neighbor would sit outside his house and play his guitar while others joined in the singing. Few of the men frequented bars or went "out with the boys." Instead, when not playing cards, they read Il

¹⁰ Interview, Mrs. I., Freeport, 9/17/81.

¹¹ Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, pp. 135-136, 148; Crispino, Ethnic Groups, p. 76.

Progresso or listened to Italian radio stations.¹²

In literature discussing Italian Americans, Italian men have been characterized as authoritative and domineering husbands and fathers. Some interviewees concurred with such a portrayal. Emily said her father "could never be wrong." Carmella: "Whether he was right or wrong, he was [always] right."¹³ But these reports were far from unanimous. Among first- and second-generation women, 40 and 27 percent, respectively, named their fathers as the decision-makers. But mothers were named in 34 and 24 percent of the families of Italian-born and second-generation women. Half the second generation said their parents made decisions jointly; so did one in four of the Italian-born.

Ewen and Cohen point out that some Italian families modified the traditional sexual division of labor, once the men no longer felt threatened by it.¹⁴ Although most of the Italian men would not do housework, considering it demeaning or "women's work," one-third of the second generation reported that their fathers had done shopping, cooking, or other

¹² Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81; M.G., Garden City, 10/10/81; R.D., Freeport, 6/30/81; M.A., Massapequa, 5/19/82.

¹³ Interviews with: E.W., Bellmore, 6/22/81; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81.

¹⁴ Ewen, "Immigrant Women," p. 199; Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 194. Jerre Mangione (America Is also Italian [New York, 1969], p. 57) points out that in southern Italy shopping was almost always done by the men.

chores. The same percentage of Italian-born women recalled their husbands' or fathers' helping with housework and childcare. One woman said, "[He] would do most of the shopping and buy the children's clothes." Alice's father read stories to the children; Norma recalled her father's having washed the floors and bathed the children.¹⁵

While fathers were nominally the chief disciplinarians, mothers were often left with the job while the men were away at work. Physical punishment was common. Carmella said the children were all afraid of her father because he hit them. Discipline and obedience were valued in most of these families. Jennie felt that fear, respect, and obedience were thoroughly instilled in her: "I was afraid of my father.... When he said something I just did it."¹⁶ However, Lena said, "Mother really disciplined us 'cause we were with her most of the time."

The Italian mother, as in most other working-class families, was frequently responsible for more than discipline; for example, she usually managed the budget for the family's limited resources. Half the women of both the first and second generations reported that their mothers had

¹⁵ Interviews with: M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82; A.D., Merrick, 6/9/81; N.D., Merrick, 6/15/81.

¹⁶ Interviews with J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81; E.D., Bellmore, 6/22/81. See Tentler, Wage Earning Women, p. 60. Parsons (Belief, Magic, Anomie, p. 30) describes the handling of children as rough and unsubtle, including a large component of aggression.

handled the money; one-third said their fathers did, and one in five (22%) said mother and father did it together.¹⁷

Making ends meet, especially in the Depression, required skill, intelligence, and even creativity. She usually took over the husband's and children's wages (except allowances for lunch, carfare, and recreation) out of which she had to buy clothes, food, and all other necessities.

Then there was her role as culture-agent: passing along the attitudes, values, and customs of the heritage. Home- and family-oriented, she discouraged any separation and individuation of family members. Not having been educated in America nor worked outside the home, she was apt to be the least assimilated member of the family. Her traditional values and attitudes, therefore, often affected the children adversely; as they matured in the outside community, they often tried to challenge her ways, but since she controlled the finances, she also tended to control the behavior of husband and children, especially daughters.¹⁸

Large Italian families provided mothers with plenty of work, cooking, washing, and caring for children. The mean

¹⁷ Interviews with: L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82; Tentler, Wage Earning Women, p. 177; Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 194; Kennedy, If All We Did, p. 229.

¹⁸ Hymowitz and Weissman, History of Women, p. 206; Ewen, "Immigrant Women," pp. 114, 117; Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 195; Parsons, Belief, Magic, Anomie, p. 257. From the NYSMC of 1925, Italian-born men became citizens more often than Italian-born women by a ratio of about 10:8.

number of children in 1925 was 3.2 per Italian family in Nassau. The mothers of first- and second-generation interviewees had 4.5 and 4.7 children, respectively. The lower figure for Nassau is due to the fact that most of those families were not yet completed.¹⁹ Using completed family size for women 45 years and older provides a crude measure of the woman's child-bearing span. For Nassau Italian women in 1925 this was 9.7 years. For first- and second-generation interviewees in 1981 it was 9.3 and 9.5, respectively.

In answer to the question: How were you raised? these women said that respect, obedience, and working for the good of the family were the values drilled into them, over and over. In talking about her childhood during the 1920s, one 69-year-old woman replied,

I could never live for myself. Anything that I ever wanted to do I had to weigh the pros and cons: Would this be all right for my mother? How would it affect my brother? What about my sisters? I was always concerned about the welfare of my family.²⁰

Respect for elders, parents especially, was a constant refrain: "He was my father and I should never forget that he was my father," said Jean. Several women mentioned that by Italian custom they had to address their parents' close

¹⁹ Ware's sample showed that 36.7% had more than two children, 12.4% five or more (Greenwich Village, p. 410). Cohen's sample of New York City women from the 1925 census indicates that Italian-born women could expect to have 4.5 children in the completed family ("Workshop to Office," p. 101).

²⁰ Interview with F.S., Seaford, 6/19/84.

friends as "aunt" and "uncle," even though unrelated.²¹

The importance of obedience is reflected in Lina's remark: "My father and mother used to look at us and we knew what to say, what not to do, when to do it, when not to say it." Alice said, "All I needed was a look from my father." That obedience was highly valued is shown by the large number of interviewees who said they were very dutiful and compliant daughters. "I was given a long rope and never abused it," said Ann. "I don't want to say I was a Goody-two-shoes," said Edith, "but I never gave my mother any trouble."²² Although many resented the strictness, the household tasks, the preferential treatment of male siblings, few of the women were rebellious, despite occasional circumventions of authority. Martha aptly summarized her upbringing, which seems typical: "We were brought up respectable, we were brought up to hard work, and we were brought up to hold on to the dollar."²³

Almost without exception, girls were expected not only to do chores but to care for younger siblings as well. "They used me as a workhorse," said Frances; Marie complained, "I

²¹ Interviews with: M.M., Merrick, 5/5/81; M.G., Garden City; J.G., Merrick, 8/22/81.

²² Interviews with: L.L., Floral Park, 9/8/81; A.D., Merrick, 6/9/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/9/82; E.P., Massapequa, 9/10/81.

²³ M.P., Bellmore, 6/10/81. See also Strom, "Italian Women and Their Daughters in Rhode Island," in The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America, p. 194.

wasn't allowed to do this and I wasn't allowed to do that; for housework I was allowed." Second-generation women, however, were less likely to perform such chores. There seemed to be less coercion; several said their tasks were self-imposed. Still, housework did help prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers. More importantly, by easing the mother's burden, these girls made a major contribution to the well-being of other family members.

Boys almost never did household chores. Occasionally they might scrub a floor or run an errand for their mothers or do masculine-type jobs such as repairwork, house painting, taking out the garbage, mowing the lawn. Many Nassau women resented such a sexist division of labor. Mary told her father she would no longer work as a scrubwoman while her brothers remained idle. Her mother thought her complaint was valid and thereafter the brothers helped with the dishwashing and cleaning. Consider the following comment by a woman from a family of four sisters and one brother:

My mother would stand and iron my brother's socks and shorts, and my sisters always resented the fact that the boy in the family was always looked up to, catered to. The boy was the prize.²⁴

Another complaint about male siblings, mentioned repeatedly in the interviews, often with bitterness, was that the boys received preferential treatment and enjoyed greater

²⁴ Interviews with: M.G., Garden City, 9/10/81; F.S., Seaford, 6/19/81.

freedom. This has been emphasized in the literature on the Italian family. Millie complained that, besides being catered to, her brother was allowed to come in late at night. Among the majority of interviewees who felt that males were treated differently, several indicated that, because of their gender, females needed closer supervision. "I was more protected because I was the girl," said a Merrick woman. Ann explained that her parents were more strict with the girls because "boys could take care of themselves, but girls needed watching."²⁵

Interviewees also pointed out the distinctiveness of an Italian girl's upbringing when measured against that of her peers. Gertrude said that she was protected more than other girls in the neighborhood. Lena and Norma recalled that Jewish girls were allowed certain freedoms that they themselves did not have, and Sistilia thought Irish girls had more freedom than she and her sisters. Another woman remarked, "It always seemed that my girlfriends could do more than I could, no doubt about it."²⁶

Varying degrees of supervision and restriction centered around courtship and dating. Italian mores also governed the way a young woman should be groomed and dressed, in-

²⁵ Interviews with M.F., Massapequa, 7/7/81; M.M., Merrick, 5/7/81; A.G., Merrick, 3/5/81.

²⁶ Interviews with: G.B., Merrick, 6/12/81; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82; N.D., Merrick, 6/15/81; S.M., Wantagh, 6/24/82; I.S., Plainview, 6/25/81.

cluding, for the southern Italian woman, cleanliness and neatness, with no cosmetics. Cultivation of this "natural" look often clashed with American custom and style.

The majority of Italian-born and second-generation women grew up in homes with rules on grooming, dress, and dating. Like many of the moral codes discussed below, these prescriptions were not always consciously and deliberately stated; sometimes they were merely tacit. As Lina and Millie pointed out, they were "sensible" girls and knew how their parents expected them to act. "If I knew," said Alice, "that my parents did not like a certain boy, I would not talk to him." And Ann: "Some things I guess I did not have to be told. You just kind of knew."²⁷

Restrictions concerning teenagers' dress tended to be minimal. Being neat, clean, and modest were the chief considerations. Most interviewees indicated that their mothers had bought their clothes. Only a minority of both generations reported that their mothers, fathers, or sisters chose "suitable" clothes for them. Although Ewen²⁸ states that it was unusual for immigrant mothers to make clothes, two-fifths of Italian-born and one-fourth of second-generation women said their mothers had made their dresses. Gertrude's mother patterned clothes for her from ads in the Saturday

²⁷ Interviews with: L.L., Floral Park, 9/8/81; M.F., Massapequa, 7/7/81; A.D., Merrick, 6/9/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/9/82.

²⁸ "Immigrant Women," p. 218.

Evening Post and Collier's.²⁹ Sewing skills learned in Italy, therefore, were utilized in clothing the family.

On the question of smoking and drinking, one-fourth of both generations agreed that while smoking was forbidden, a few of them had smoked in secret. For most, however, alcohol was not a problem since wine was customarily served at home. Few women expressed any interest in drinking hard liquor and, as with other women their age, going to a bar was not considered respectable.

In keeping with Italian mores, parental control and supervision was more evident in the use of makeup, mainly lipstick. About three-fifths of the first generation and over four-fifths of the second said their parents forbade them to wear makeup at all or at least until a certain age, usually 16. When asked why the prohibition, many said that only prostitutes wore cosmetics. Carmella reported that her father threw a lipstick in the stove, and Sistilia recalled her mother's having struck her for wearing lipstick to high school. Said Mary's father, "Why are you trying to make yourself attractive? Why do you want to attract men? You'll get into trouble." Knowing her father's feeling in the matter, Mary would wipe it off before coming to the dinner table even after she had graduated from high school in 1941. But several interviewees defied their parents and

²⁹ Interview with G.B., Merrick, 6/12/81.

either eluded or evaded these taboos. Lena, for example, recalling that wearing makeup was "a struggle," said she had started using it without her parents' consent during the 1940s.³⁰

Most stringent were regulations for socializing, especially with boys, but supervision of young women often extended to socializing in general. Angelina said that when she attended church events with other teenagers during the 1920s, her father would call the church if she was not home by 10 o'clock and say, "It's time to go home." This was a great embarrassment for her. Also, proper women did not go away from home overnight. Josephine, for example, reported that going away for the weekend, even with her girl friends, was prohibited. When one of Ella's boyfriends invited her to go to Maryland in the 1940s, she could not persuade her mother to let her go.³¹

Young women usually divided their time between their home -- or a relative's or a girl friend's home -- and a job, if they worked. Among the Italian-born, one-third reported visiting friends or relatives as a major activity in their youth. Another third mentioned rollerskating or going to the beach, usually with groups of girls from the

³⁰ Interviews with: C.M., Bayville, 2/25/82; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81; S.M., Wantagh, 6/13/81; M.A., Massapequa Park, 5/19/82; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82.

³¹ Interviews with: A.D., Merrick, 6/4/81; J.N., Massapequa, 6/11/81; E.A., Massapequa, 6/8/81.

neighborhood or from work. Another common recreation was going to the movies.³²

On the whole, the second generation got out more and had more time for leisure activities. Visiting friends or relatives was mentioned by one-fourth of this group, but a good half of them spent time with groups, usually young women, from the neighborhood or from work. As they grew older and began earning money, their horizons expanded: their favorite pastime was to go into Manhattan to see a Broadway show or movie and/or to have dinner. Such groups also went roller-skating or bowling. One in eight interviewees mentioned giving parties at home or going to parties at a friend's. For some families, like Genevieve's, house parties were one means by which parents maintained supervision over their daughter's social life.³³

Parents were especially vigilant in controlling dating, which was foreign to their experience.³⁴ Most, like Blanche's mother, were reluctant to see their daughter's go out. Others, like Concetta, were categorically forbidden to date; in fact, she was not even allowed to attend social functions

³² Interview with C.M., Bayville, 2/25/82. See Seller, "Protestant Evangelism and the Italian Immigrant Woman," p. 132; Ware, Greenwich Village, pp. 264-265; William F. Whyte, Street Corner Society (Chicago, 1943), p. 279.

³³ Interview with G.B., Seaford, 8/25/81.

³⁴ Williamson claims dating did not begin in America until the 1920s (Marriage and Family Relations [New York, 1972], p. 172).

at school or college. Lena offered an explanation:

The big thing was that I was shielded from the opposite sex. It was not an uncommon thing. [My parents] were trying to maintain me lily white until I met Prince Charming and married.³⁵

Traditional Italian families did not allow a daughter to date. Rather than permit her to have several boyfriends, a family would introduce her to a suitable prospect, and then the two of them would visit each other in order to get acquainted, always with at least one family member present until their marriage.³⁶ Such restrictions were less common among Nassau interviewees. One-third were not allowed to date and never met anybody but their husbands. They were always chaperoned and had to respect a curfew. Of the majority who were allowed to date, half reported that they were chaperoned by a sister, brother, or even the whole family. They also had a curfew. Marie said that when she was engaged in the late 1920s, she and her fiancé could not sit side-by-side and were chaperoned by her sister. When Carmella rode in a car to go for her marriage license in 1920, her fiancé was not allowed to sit beside her; instead, her father sat in back with her, and her future husband rode in front. When she went to a movie with her fiancé, Josephine

³⁵ L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82; also interviews with: B.S., Massapequa Park, 4/26/82; C.M., Bayville, 2/25/82.

³⁶ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 195-196; Odenrantz, Italian Women in Industry, p. 203; Ware, Greenwich Village, p. 182; Strom, "Italian American Women," p. 194.

said, her whole family went along and sat between them.³⁷

These practices were evaded in some cases. Almost one-fourth of the Italian-born women, including Marie, Ann, and Lena, met secretly, in spite of parental restrictions. Ann simply told her parents she was "going out." All of which suggests that the chaperone system was unworkable in America. Livia recalled that her younger sister, a reluctant chaperone, ran away from her charges.³⁸ Among second-generation women, these old-world customs were followed even less, although parents were still apprehensive about their daughters' going out. Only 4 percent said they had dated their husbands exclusively, and fewer than one in five had had chaperones. But among the majority of families who permitted dating, over half the parents set up age requirements, varying from 15 to 21, with 18 the usual minimum. About three-fourths of these women had curfews, ranging from 10 o'clock to half past midnight. Nevertheless, Ella vividly recalled that on her first date she had had to call home every hour, even in 1940, when she was 18 years old.³⁹

A minority of the second generation, like some of the Italian born, were able to meet young men even before having

³⁷ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81; C.P., Westbury, 7/11/81; J.C., Merrick, 11/2/81.

³⁸ Interviews with: M.C., Merrick, 10/24/81; A.C., Massapequa, 4/9/82; L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/82; L.P., Seaford, 12/3/81.

³⁹ E.A., Massapequa, 6/8/81.

reached the prescribed age.⁴⁰ Others failed to tell their parents about every man they dated. Ann said her mother never found out that she had dated several Jews and one Englishman.⁴¹

One reason for not admitting how many men a woman dated was that it called into question one's chastity. Witness Lena's comment: "Mother's [Italian] ladyfriends said 'Don't let your daughter see too many men because no man will want to marry her.'" Several women of both generations recalled that their parents did not want them to date more than one man at a time. Emily's father did not like her "going out with every Tom, Dick, and Harry." And Louise, who went out with three different men on one weekend, said her father was "fit to be tied." "You can marry only one," he said, "why do you have to go out with three!" Said another:

Pop did not let us go out with very many men. He did not think it looked nice for nice girls to do that. He said one man ought to be enough.⁴²

Among one-third of second-generation interviewees, parents encouraged their daughters to invite young men to the home in order to meet and talk with the family. Thus, they could size up the youth and exercise a kind of super-

⁴⁰ E.P., Massapequa, 9/10/81, and E.W., Bellmore, 6/22/81.

⁴¹ A.C., Massapequa, 4/9/82.

⁴² Interviews with: L.V., Massapequa, 4/28/84; E.W., Bellmore, 6/22/81; L.B., Wantagh, 6/23/81. See Eileen Jordan, "A Sense of Family," Long Island Newsday, Magazine, 6/4/72, p. 22.

vision that was unnecessary in the traditional way. Such meetings gave Louise's father a chance to tell each suitor, "Don't forget where she lives."⁴³

While some women recalled that their parents preferred men who were Italian or at least Catholic, the majority of the first and second generation said they could date men of any ethnic or religious background. These assertions are supported by evidence from the questionnaires and interviews. Almost half (45%) of the Italian born indicated that they had dated men of various nationalities, and the ratio in the second generation was almost identical. However, half of both first - and second-generation women said they had dated only Italians or Italians primarily. While these figures indicate a preference for Italian men, they also suggest something else: namely, that subtle pressures from parents, peers, and others were not particularly effective in deciding whom Italian women chose to date. Even regional and provincial prejudices were not operative, since only three interviewees (out of 33) said their parents preferred Italians from particular provinces. Only two Italian-born women said their elders would not have approved their dating non-Italians. Fewer than one-third of the second generation said their parents wanted them to date Italian men.

Compared to those of other ethnic groups, the marriages

⁴³ L.B., Wantagh, 6/23/81.

of Italian Americans are highly endogamous. Despite their dating experiences, these Italian women regularly chose marriage partners from among their own people. Four out of five first-generation and two out of three second-generation women married Italians. "Years ago," said Mrs. I., "you pick your own kind, you know."⁴⁴ Figures compiled from the 1925 manuscript census show that in households where the male head was born in Italy, three out of four men were married to Italian-born women.⁴⁵

Although Gambino⁴⁶ describes how some young men and women were locked in their homes or sent away to relatives to keep them from marrying non-Italians, no such instances were found among Nassau women. At times, however, parents made known their feelings about prospective sons-in-law. But exogamous marriages were accepted without great fanfare. In fact, less than two-fifths of first-generation interviewees and only about one-quarter of the second generation said their parents would have wanted them to marry an Italian. Another two-fifths of the Italian born reported that their parents would have accepted anyone they had chosen. One-

⁴⁴ Interview , Freeport, 9/21/81.

⁴⁵ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 201; Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community, p. 257. Lopreato (Italian Americans, p. 135) found 98% of Italian marriages endogamous in 1900; by 1950 the figure was 80%. Yans-McLaughlin found that three-quarters of Italians married Italians in Buffalo in 1930.

⁴⁶ Blood of My Blood, pp. 229-221.

quarter of second-generation interviewees concurred.

Briggs found that preferences for mates from the same commune existed in only a minority of the Italian populations of Rochester, Utica, and Cleveland.⁴⁷ Interviews with Nassau women tended to support his findings. While no attempt was made to discover whether spouses came from the same village, the Nassau women seemed not to be particularly concerned or informed about that question. Martha, for example, could not remember where in Italy her husband's family came from. Mrs. I. said, "It did not matter that [my husband] was not from the same region." Most women simply mentioned whether their husband was Italian and whether their husband was American or foreign born.⁴⁸

According to Andrew Greeley, when Italian women chose non-Italian mates, they usually chose Irish or German Catholics.⁴⁹ Similarly, Nassau women chose German, Irish, or Polish mates if they did not marry Italians. Thirty-six of the thirty-nine Italian-born women in this study were Catholic and thirty-four of them married Catholic men. Nineteen of twenty in the second generation were Catholic; seventeen of nineteen married Catholics. When asked if their

⁴⁷ Italian Passage, pp. 81-94.

⁴⁸ Interviews with: M.P., Bellmore, 6/10/81; Mrs. I., Freeport, 9/17/81.

⁴⁹ Why Can't They Be Like Us?, p. 90; Barton, Peasants and Strangers, p. 167; R.J.R. Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting Pot?" American Journal of Sociology 49 (1943-44):331-339.

parents considered Catholicism important in their choice of a husband, one-quarter of the Italian-born and half the second generation said Yes. This suggests that "marrying Catholic" was more important to the second generation, "marrying Italian" more important to the first.

Italian-born women usually met their future husbands at work. The next largest group met their mates through friends or neighbors. Only one in ten met her mate through the family. The remaining four married men they had seen at a social function -- wedding, church, dance. Only one in five of the second generation had met their spouses in those traditional ways; four out of five of them met at school, a dance, a skating rink, a bowling alley, even at the A & P -- all of which points up the expanded opportunities of these women to go places and do things, as compared with the first generation, who tended to stay closer to home.

The age at marriage of these two generations, while lower than the Italian norm, tended to be quite similar. For those born in Italy the average age was 24.8, as compared with 24.3 for the second generation. The husbands of both generations averaged 27 years at first marriage, which was closer to the Italian norm.

Despite subtle pressures from family and friends, tending to work subconsciously in mate selection, most women were convinced that their decisions about marriage and mate selection were their own. Only a few remarked that, as in

dating, their parents frequently, subtly, but often overtly, encouraged or discouraged their relationships with certain suitors. The women's conviction that their decisions were their own may indicate that this was one area in which they exercised some independence, that love was their main reason for marrying, and that sentiment plays a larger role in American than in Italian marriages. Or it may indicate that these women, like many of us, tend to believe what gratifies our ego rather than what is objectively true.

What about sex education? In southern Italy, according to Gambino,⁵⁰ mothers, grandmothers and other female relatives discussed sex and other marital questions with women before and after marriage. In America, however, this system was rejected by the younger generation, who dismissed their elders' knowledge and advice -- or who were frequently turned away by elders who for various reasons were too prudish to discuss such questions. Most Nassau interviewees (60-65%), whether of the first or second generation, indicated that, while they had received information about sex before marriage, it was usually not from their mothers, but from female friends at school, at work, or in the neighborhood. Only as a poor second were relatives (sisters, cousins, aunts) mentioned as sources of this kind of information;

⁵⁰ Blood of My Blood, pp. 192-195.

other sources included books and courses in school.⁵¹ On the other hand, half of the Italian-born and two-thirds of the second generation said that no one had ever told them about menstruation; only after the fact did mothers or sisters attempt to explain it, and then inadequately. The typical parental advice seems to have been that given to Frances: "Don't let a boy touch you. Stay away from boys."⁵²

Young people usually found divorce, contraception, and abortion taboo subjects among their elders, although divorce was not unknown to these women, since a third of both generations knew one or more relatives who divorced in the '30s and '40s. As for birth control, three of the Italian born and four of the second generation admitted having used contraceptives. As for abortion, five of the first generation and two of the second had had one or more; another 20-25 percent knew friends or relatives who had had them, and the subject was not taboo in the family, either: Joan had talked with her mother and sister about having an abortion in the 1940s; Josephine discussed the matter with her husband in the '30s; and Eugenia recalled her mother's having accompanied Italian women and others when they left Baldwin to go

⁵¹ Strom ("Italian American Women," p. 194): Most Italian women in Rhode Island had no knowledge of sex before marriage; the others got it from sisters, cousins, or co-workers.

⁵² F.S., Seaford, 6/19/81.

for an abortion.⁵³ That husbands might be less than cooperative is indicated by Rose's comment:

Abortion was condoned among the women. They would seek doctors ... and I know people that had illegal abortions. It was almost like a closed clan, where they would support each other. They had nobody else. The husbands were evidently unreasonable. They couldn't expect any help from them.⁵⁴

The unspoken nature of such issues as abortion, contraception, and divorce emphasizes the restrictive and protective upbringing of Italian children. But a minority of the women interviewed, overcoming their inhibitions, had taken control of their own lives and violated the traditional mores, aided in part, perhaps, because they knew others who had done so.

In conclusion, once again, the role of Italian mores in the lives of women of the first-generation family is apparent. In their religious upbringing, daughters received First Communion and confirmation under their mother's supervision and usually attended an Italian church with the whole family. Italian feast days and other holidays were regularly observed by most of these Nassau families. While such superstitions as the "evil eye" were not taken seriously by most, it was a well-known aspect of their religious culture. Members of these families were probably closer to the church than to any other organization and the clubs they

⁵³ Interviews with: J.G., Merrick, 8/4/81; E.D., Baldwin, 9/28/81.

⁵⁴ R.T., Massapequa, 5/26/82.

joined were usually church related.

In decision-making, only the first generation depicted their fathers as the chief one in the family. The second generation pictured their parents as making decisions together. However, as shown also by other studies, mothers were generally the money managers. In the raising of the children both parents tended to be involved. Respect, obedience, and loyalty to the family were stressed. Girls were taught to avoid the use of cosmetics -- the tool of prostitutes -- to defer to their brothers, the "preferred" offspring, and to avoid the opposite sex unless properly chaperoned, even after formal engagement. What irked girls especially was the greater freedom and the preferential treatment accorded their brothers. Any sex information daughters received was almost never from parents but rather from other relatives or friends, and it was frequently "wrong." Divorce, contraception, and abortion were taboo subjects in the family, although divorce and abortion were not unknown to the second generation.

These dutiful, home-oriented women spoke of Italian protectiveness as embarrassing and oppressive. Parental restrictions frequently hampered their enjoyment of life, their relations with the opposite sex, and their self-fulfillment. Still, conflict and rebellion were rare among them. Whereas some women sought to circumvent the rules and regulations, in the end they conformed to parental expecta-

tions by marrying Italian, or at least Catholic, men and assuming traditional roles as wives and mothers in suburban Nassau during the postwar-II period.

CHAPTER 5
THE SECOND GENERATION

The values, attitudes, and behavior of second-generation women concerning work, education, religion, and family life have less of an Italian cast than those of their immigrant mothers. On the whole, the life styles of these suburban, middle-class women were different from those of their urban, working-class mothers. The following examination of the second generation and their families will illustrate this contention.

This discussion is based on 181 questionnaires and interviews with second generation Italian American women supplemented by information gathered from seventy-seven third generation women about their growing up in an Italian American home. The average age of these second generation women in 1981 was 56 years; 75 percent were married, 11 percent widowed, 5 percent divorces and 4 percent separated. Another 4 percent of this group had remarried and 2 percent had never married.

While most Italian and Italian American Nassau women grew up in the boroughs of New York City in the interwar

period, they spent much of their married lives, beginning in the 1940s and '50s, in suburban Nassau. They and their families were part of the mass exodus to the suburbs which took place in America after World War II. Between 1950-1960, for example, about two-thirds of the nation's population increase was the result of a "baby boom." Several factors shaped such expansion in the suburbs.¹ The postwar period was a prosperous one that put suburbia within reach of the lower-middle and working classes. Hence, the majority of Americans were able to attain a middle-class life style. The Government encouraged home ownership through the tax system and GI mortgages. Widespread automobile ownership and a massive highway program also facilitated the suburbanization of America. Finally, there was the "suburban vision," the postwar version of the American dream of owning one's home in the quiet, safe suburbs and of raising a family there.²

The postwar suburbanization of Nassau County was a typical example of this nationwide trend. As mentioned previously, Nassau's peak growth took place in the 1950s; in fact, the migration of people into the county, rather than

¹ Sheila Rothman, Woman's Proper Place (New York, 1978), p. 224. In my sample, only 13% of second generation women grew up in the county or settled there before 1940. The majority (87%) migrated after that, especially between 1945-60.

² Ernest R. Mowrer, "The Family in Suburbia," in Dobriner, ed., Suburban Community, p. 149; Gans, Levittowners, p. 287; Clark et al., Three Generations, pp. 407, 475.

the birthrate, accounted for most of the increase in Nassau's population. Two-thirds of the county's housing units were built in the 1940s and '50s. By 1960, five out of six Nassau families owned their own homes. Among the many housing developments in 1945-1960, Levittown, described earlier, was probably the largest and best known. Referring to the postwar boom in housing construction, a New York Times journalist wrote:

An economic and sociological shift on a scale and a tempo such as this country has seldom seen since the closing of its western frontier is now taking place on Long Island under the very nose of New York City.³

As with most Americans who joined the trek to suburbia in those years, people moved to Nassau for many reasons. Smits states that better schools and housing led most to settle in the county. Levittowners indicated that they sought to escape their city apartments and obtain an affordable house. Other motives included seeking a good place to raise children and wanting to live the suburban life.⁴

³ David A. Adelman, "Long Island Growth Rate Lowest in 20 Years," New York Times, March 16, 1972, p. 52. "Suburbs Grow While New York Rests," Business Week, June 12, 1954, p. 70; Nassau County, Aspects, 6:2-3; Smits, Nassau, pp. 196-198; E. Larrabee, "Six Thousand Houses that Levitt Built," Harpers, 197 (Sept. 1948):80-82; F. Graham, "Long Island Opens Frontier Homes in Urban Revolt," New York Times, June 30, 1949, p. 1.

⁴ Wendell Bell, "Social Choice: Life Styles and Suburban Residence," in Suburban Community, p. 234; Samuel Kaplan, The Dream Deferred (New York, 1976), pp. 207-108; Smits, Nassau, p. 209; Harold Wattel, "Levittown: A Suburban Community," in Suburban Community, p. 290.

But did Italians have reasons for migrating that were different from those of other Americans? Crispino indicates that among Italians, the desire to live near other Italians was a major factor in selecting a neighborhood. Gambino suggests that wanting fellow Italians and other family members nearby was also a motivation for moving to the suburbs. He contends that Italians leaving the city after the war usually moved in groups of "two or three generations of one family sharing one- or two-family houses on a street or a section of a suburb with other Italian Americans."⁵

Much of the literature on Italian Americans emphasizes the cohesiveness and stability of Italian communities. For instance, several generations of families, siblings, and relatives usually lived in close proximity. Greeley maintains that, compared to other ethnics, Italians most often lived in their parents' neighborhood and were most likely to visit both parents and siblings. Kobrin and Goldscheider assert that among people of similar ages and educational levels, Italians migrated the least. Krause found that generations of Italian and Slavic women in Pittsburgh lived geographically closer to each other than did Jewish women.⁶

⁵ Crispino, Assimilation, p., 161; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 112-113.

⁶ Greeley, Why Can't They?, pp. 77-78; Calvin Goldscheider and Frances Kobrin, The Ethnic Factor in Family Structure and Mobility, pp. 187ff.; Krause, Grandmothers, p. 149. Lopreato (Italian Americans, p. 53) notes the tendency of first and second generations to live near each other.

When asked why they settled in Nassau, the replies of second-generation women conformed to the reasons given by other suburbanites. One-fourth said that Nassau was the place where they could buy a reasonably priced home. Another fourth replied with phrases in line with the suburban vision. But only one in eight women said that a desire to be near family -- seemingly characteristic of Italians -- was their major reason for moving to the county. Ida, Joan, and Ann, for instance, each bought a home near relatives. The latter chose a home which was one block from her sister's. Other women, such as Genieve and Jerre, who grew up in Nassau, decided to remain near their family and friends. Additional reasons cited were: to be near her husband's or her own job, to escape a bad neighborhood, and because the county had good schools.⁷

In spite of Crispino's findings mentioned earlier, none of the women contacted for this study expressed the desire to live near other Italians. When asked about the ethnic makeup of their neighborhoods in Nassau, only two of thirty-three second-generation interviewees characterized them as heavily Italian. My results also challenge Gambino's contention that two or three generations of one Italian family migrated to the suburbs together. Among Nassau women interviewed, parents generally stayed behind in Queens, Brooklyn,

⁷ Interviews with: I.S., Plainview, 6/25/81; J.G., Merrick, 8/4/81; A.G., Merrick, 3/5/81. "Other reasons" came to 10%.

or the Bronx, while the married daughters settled in Nassau. These women were more apt to follow family members, a sister for example, or other relatives to the county than parents. Of course, while living in Nassau these women were still in relatively close proximity to their parental home. In some cases, however, parents did follow their children to the suburbs. Almost one-third of second-generation women had relatives, most often their mother, father, or mother-in-law living with them after they and their families had been living in Nassau for some time.⁸

The above generalizations concerning the tendency of Italians to live near kin agree with findings among Nassau women. Participants were asked, "Where do most of your relatives live?" Their responses were compared with those of forty-six non-Italian second-generation women whose mean age (56) and Nassau residency (34 years) were similar to those of the Italians (56 and 32, respectively). One-fourth of Italian American women indicated that most of their relatives lived in the County; for non-Italians the figure was only 12 percent. Half of the Italians reported that most of their relatives lived in New York State; for non-Italians, the figure was 43 percent. Finally, whereas only one in six

⁸ Before moving to Nassau, most second generation women lived in apartments in the City boroughs; some even bought their first home there; 36% were living with parents at this time. This is consonant with Cohler and Grunebaum's studies (Grandmothers, Mothers, and Daughters, pp. 26-27).

Italian American women said that most of their relatives lived outside the State, one in three non-Italians said that that was the case.⁹

On the whole, the trek to the suburbs for the second generation mirrored the experience of other Americans. Their reasons for the move matched those given by scholars of suburbanization. They did not plan to live near other Italians nor did two generations migrate together. However, these Italian American women were twice as likely to have relatives living in Nassau as other second-generation women. Such a finding gives credence to those whose research has emphasized the tendency of Italians to live near kin.

But what was life like for these second-generation suburban women in the postwar period? What vestiges of their Italian heritage are apparent in their experiences at home and at work? Despite the postwar literature urging women to return to the home, as well as the perpetuation of the "feminine mystique," more and more women, especially married women, entered the work force. In 1950, for example, 52 percent of working women were married. In addition, mothers of young children now began to work outside the home; one-fourth of women with school-age children were employed.¹⁰

⁹ Percentages for relatives in the neighborhood are also similar: 7.5% for Italians, 9.5% for non-Italians.

¹⁰ Degler, At Odds, p. 417; Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, p. 229.

These trends were also evident in Nassau County. Between 1950 and 1960 the proportion of Nassau women over 14 in the labor force increased from 26 to 31 percent. This percentage was lower than that of women in New York State (37% in 1960). The proportion of Nassau's married women who were employed in 1960 (54%) was similar to the national figure but higher than that in the State (46%). Women tended to work to supplement their husband's income, especially during the early years of marriage; but only 7.5 percent of Nassau County women who had children under 6 years of age were working.¹¹

The work experiences of second-generation Italian women both conform to the trends among American women and contrast with the experiences of their Italian-born mothers. More likely to be working after marriage (whether or not they had children), they were also more likely than their mothers to have held white-collar jobs. Cultural prohibitions against second-generation Italian women working outside the home did not seem to be operating, although they were revealed in husbands' attitudes about their wives' working. Like other American women, they took up positions in the sexually segregated labor market and, while difficult to gauge, it appears that most did not achieve upward mobility. Instead, the majority remained anchored in clerical positions.

¹¹ Nassau County, Aspects, 2:3. The State average was 6.7% of married women employed who had children under 6.

While only 3 percent of Nassau's Italian-born wives and mothers were gainfully employed in 1925, almost 60 percent of the second generation worked outside the home after marriage. Third generation women reported that 40 percent of their mothers were employed. Most second-generation women, like their immigrant mothers, did not see themselves apart from their families as independent, wage-earning women. About three-fourths of them said they worked for financial reasons, while the other fourth said that a sense of independence and self-fulfillment prompted their working. A woman's income was needed to buy home furnishings, children's things, and education, or to pay for vacations and other luxuries.¹²

As important as the proportion of working women is the entry, departure, and reentry of the wife into the labor force. Only three of thirty-three interviewees worked throughout their child-bearing years. Connie, for instance, said her mother looked after her daughter while she worked in the business she and her husband had started. Of the 55 percent working full-time when married, 70 percent were employed until their first child was born, whereas 45 percent went back to work after their children entered school. Forty-five percent of these women never worked after marriage or were employed only sporadically, usually in part-

¹² Two-thirds of the second generation said they had worked part time at some point in their lives.

time positions. Phyllis, for example, was a cashier and cafeteria worker for one year; Gloria, a teacher's aide for three years.¹³

The nature of women's jobs, as well as their moving in and out of the work force, makes it difficult to assess their social mobility. But among those who indicated their first and last full-time job, 68 percent held the same type of job throughout their working lives. In other words, a teacher remained a teacher, a clerk remained in clerical positions. But 31 percent achieved a modest measure of upward mobility, usually by obtaining a promotion within their line of work. One woman, for example, started out as a floor nurse and later became a supervisor; another began as a clerk and eventually worked as an executive secretary. However, the minority in this group achieved mobility by moving from blue- to white-collar jobs or from low-level white-collar jobs to higher ones. But in most cases women received education or training which enabled them to attain such positions. They did not, that is, earn a better position simply because of their work experience. Joan, for example, first worked as a salesperson, but after marriage she took college courses and became a recreational therapist.¹⁴

¹³ Interviews with: C.C., Wantagh, 6/30/81; P.F., Bellmore, 6/6/81; G.D., Merrick, 8/19/81.

¹⁴ Questionnaire #323, 238, 294, 243; interview with J.G., Merrick, 8/4/81.

Compared to their mothers, these women were more likely to work in clerical occupations. Almost 90 percent of second generation women were white-collar workers. Third generation women reported that 52 percent of their mothers were white-collar employees. Within the white-collar category 15 percent of second generation women were teachers and 5 percent were nurses. Secretaries (18%) and clerks (8%) accounted for the largest single number of workers in the clerical field, although other related jobs were also represented. Likewise, 16 percent of mothers of the third generation were secretaries. Even though fewer second generation women were blue-collar workers than those who were designated as such by their third generation daughters, the types of jobs they held were similar. Sewing machine operator, dressmaker, seamstress, and garment examiner --jobs in the garment industry--were prevalent among both groups.¹⁵

Aside from their concentration in blue-collar jobs in the garment industry, the types of jobs second generation women performed in the white-collar category resembled those of a group of forty-six second generation non-Italian women, the largest number of whom were clerks and teachers. And, despite the restrictions on female work outside the home among the immigrant generation, according to figures

¹⁵ Other professions included: writer, school principal, lawyer, artist. Office manager, bookkeeper, and salesperson accounted for 6.5% of this group. Among mothers of the third generation, 13% were factory workers.

recorded in 1981, these second-generation women were as likely to work after marriage as the non-Italian group (table 13).

TABLE 13
EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF SECOND GENERATION WOMEN IN 1981

Status	Italian (#)	Non-Italian (#)
Employed	52% (70)	51% (20)
Housewife	43 (58)	44 (17)
Retired	5 (7)	5 (2)

Source: Questionnaires and interviews with 181 second generation Italian and 46 non-Italian women.

However, modest differences between the two groups surface when a husband's attitude about his wife's working is examined. Although husbands in both groups were in favor of their wives' working, husbands of the Italian women seemed to be more reluctant in their support (53%) compared to the others (64%). The half-hearted acceptance of some is evidenced by one who said that his wife's working was "no problem as long as all housework, meals, etc., are tended to." Another woman said he "keeps telling me to [go to work] but would never allow it." Furthermore, more Italian women reported that their husbands voiced opposition to their working (25% vs. 15%). Edith said her husband "made her" quit her job after she married in 1954. Ann indicated that she left her job during the 1950s because her husband did not want her to work when there would be children at home. Finally, 18 percent of the Italian group and 20 percent of

the other group reported that spouses had no opinion or left the decision up to them whether to work or not.¹⁶ Such contrasts in attitude suggest that while the rate of participation in the labor force is no different from their non-Italian sisters, cultural values toward work can be evident without necessarily affecting actual behavior. One may also assume that many of these Italian American women were working without their husband's approval and perhaps the extra income they provided tended to soften the opposition.

Most second generation Italian American wives worked to supplement the family income; few had careers. Hence, although many shared in the financial support of the family through full- or part-time work (as their mothers did), the husband remained the major breadwinner. But unlike the Italian born, over two-thirds (69%) of these women's husbands were white-collar workers. On the whole they performed less strenuous work and had more leisure. The largest occupational categories of white-collar work included salesmen (7%) and proprietors (7%), followed by teachers (5%) and engineers (5%). Similarly, most fathers of young third-generation women were also white-collar workers (55%). In this group, owning one's own business included a larger proportion (22%) of the sample than among the former group.

¹⁶ Questionnaires #288, 228; interviews with E.P., Massapequa 9/10/81; A.M., Merrick, 6/22/81; 4% of women replied that husbands thought work was acceptable only if family needed money.

Contractor (6%) and clerk (6%) were the other major occupations.¹⁷

These men do not exhibit the heavy blue-collar employment patterns that have been thought characteristic of first and second generation Italian men. Only one-third of the husbands of the second generation and not quite half (45%) of fathers of the third generation were employed in blue-collar jobs. No particular types of blue-collar occupations seemed to be prevalent among these two groups.¹⁸ Such figures show the progress Italians have made since 1925 in moving from blue- to white-collar positions.

As was the case with their immigrant mothers, most husbands of second generation women were also Italian (65%) and second generation (63%); 5 percent of husbands were part Italian. Like the Italian born, these men were an average of 27 years old when they married. But unlike the immigrant fathers of second generation interviewees who were about six years older than their spouses, husbands of second generation women were closer to them in age, about three years.¹⁹

¹⁷ Since only 65% of spouses of the second generation were Italian, figures from third-generation women about their fathers' occupations more accurately reflect Italian men's representation in the white-collar sector.

¹⁸ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 90; Femminella and Quadragno, "The Italian American Family," p. 71; Cohen, "From Workshop to Office," p. 289.

¹⁹ Glick (American Families, p. 125) reports that for couples married between 1947-1954 (as most of my sample were) the median age difference between spouses was three years.

Because these women and their spouses had been raised in America and because there was less of an age gap between them compared to the Italian born, their roles as husband and father appeared to be less authoritarian than the Italian born. The limitations on male authority are suggested by the family decision-making process. Over four-fifths of second generation women indicated that they and their husbands decided things together. Only 10 percent stated that their husbands were the major decision makers. More than half of third-generation women reported that their parents made decisions mutually and about one-fourth of the fathers of the third generation were dominant in decision making.²⁰

Although the traditional sexual division of labor within the home was still prevalent, husbands seemed more likely to share household tasks than Italian-born men. Second generation women indicated that their husbands helped with household tasks in almost half (45%) of the cases. One in four (27%) would do housework occasionally. Similarly, almost half of third generation women interviewed recalled that their fathers would help once in a while, especially if their mother was ill. Jean related that her husband generally went food shopping for the family, while Lillian's

²⁰ One-fourth of the third generation indicated mothers as dominant, as did 7% of the second generation. See Michael Lalli, "The Italian American Family: Assimilation and Change, 1900-1950," Family Coordinator 18 (Jan. 1969):48.

husband would often cook Sunday dinner. But despite such assistance, male chores almost always consisted of taking out the garbage, painting, repairing, taking care of the car, and doing the outside work.²¹

In asking interviewees to compare their roles as husband and wife with that of their parents, other qualitative differences between the generations emerged. Over one-third of the women mentioned that their husbands had a greater role in childraising -- either by helping care for the children (feeding, diapering, etc.) or by being home more to spend time with them -- than their fathers. For instance, Gloria's husband helped the children with their homework; Ella's read stories to their three children.²²

Many women also remarked that they were more affectionate with their husbands than they had observed their parents' having been with each other. They recalled that their parents rarely if ever displayed affection in front of them. Jennie, for example, never saw her parents "hug or kiss one another." But this practice, according to Gambino, was common among the Italian born. By mentioning the display

²¹ One-fourth (28%) of the second generation said their husbands never did housework. See Rubin, Worlds of Pain, pp. 101ff., 228n., for discussion of the slow change in husband's assumption of household tasks. Interview with L.A., Baldwin, 7/22/81. Half (57%) of second generation women stated their husbands had "male chores."

²² Degler (At Odds, p. 466): men's share in childrearing not widely developed on any class level. Interviews with: G.D., Merrick, 8/19/81; E.A., Wantagh, 6/8/81.

of affection, these women have communicated that emotional gratification (through romantic love) in marriage was perhaps a more important consideration in their marriages than it had been for their mothers.²³

Being able to communicate better with one's spouse was also judged to be an important difference for many. They hinted that their mothers were not always open and honest with their fathers and were often afraid to assert themselves. Gertrude remembered that her mother would go out and buy things without telling her father. Joan explained the difference in communication between the two generations:

I'm more open with my husband. If I don't like something, I mean, I'll stand up for my rights. I would tell him exactly how I feel about it and if I feel I'm right, I will tell him.²⁴

Although family-oriented like the first generation, these women remarked that they, their husbands and children engaged in more recreational activities and saw more of the world than did their parents. Of course they were in better circumstances, with more paid-leisure. Popular culture had broadened their horizons, whetted their appetites, and chal-

²³ Six women said they were as affectionate as their parents were. Only one said she and her husband were less so. Interview with J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81. One woman said, "He always gave me a home to live in, food to eat; he helped my children grow up. What more would I want? What would kissing have to do with that?" (Jordan, "A Sense of Family," Newsday L.I. Magazine, 6/4/72, p. 12.

²⁴ Interviews: G.B., Merrick, 6/12/81; J.G., Merrick, 8/4/81.

lenged the immigrants' aversion to play. In short, they had greater desire for recreational activities as compared to the Italian born. "They never played a day in their lives," Jennie said of her parents. In discussing their family's leisure pursuits, a majority of second generation women mentioned travelling either to New York City or Europe. In a few cases, doing things as a family continued even after the children were grown. Vivian related that she and her husband had gone on a cruise with their son and his wife.²⁵

Husbands were generally home-oriented, like the Italian born. Unlike the second generation Italian men in Gans,²⁶ two-thirds of second generation interviewees reported that their husbands never went out with male friends. Of the one-third who did, most engaged in bowling or other sports. Less than one-third of second generation interviewees indicated that their husbands belonged to formal groups or organizations, including the Elks, Moose, and the V.F.W. Religious organizations like the Knights of Columbus and ethnic groups such as the Sons of Italy were the most popular. About one-third (36%) of the daughters of the second generation said their fathers were members of groups.²⁷

²⁵ Interviews with: J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81; V.B., New Hyde Park, 7/30/81. See Valletta, Study of Americanization, p. 221, concerning families doing things together.

²⁶ Urban Villagers, p. 80.

²⁷ My questionnaire asked: Did your mother belong to any groups or organizations? What groups or organizations are you a member of? Arlene Mancuso ("Women of Old Town," in

As was the case with Italian born, second generation women and their families were not very involved in church activities. When questioned, one-third of the second generation indicated that they belonged to some church-sponsored group. None reported that their husbands or children participated in such organizations. When asked about their childhood, one in eight of the daughters of the second generation recalled that their fathers were members of church organizations, such as the Holy Name or Knights of Columbus, and about the same proportion (15%) mentioned that their mothers were in the Rosary Society.

Most second generation families avoided sending their children to parochial schools, as did the Italian born. Over one-third (39%) of the second generation had sent their children to Catholic schools. Within this minority, nearly all had attended Catholic elementary schools. Two-thirds attended a Catholic high school, and one-fifth reported going to a Catholic college. This increase in attendance at parochial schools supports Gambino's assertions regarding such enrollments in the suburbs.²⁸

That more second generation families chose to send their children to parochial school was an attempt, according

The Italian Immigrant Woman, p. 319) finds that women tend to be involved primarily in church organizations.

²⁸ Blood of My Blood, pp. 240-245.

to Gambino,²⁹ to maintain traditional Italian American values in the suburbs, which, unlike Little Italy, were ethnically heterogeneous. Religious fervor was not the motivation. Rather they believed that they could protect their values by sharing in the founding of new parochial schools and molding them to their ethnic value systems.

While only a few interviewees indicated why their parents had sent them to Catholic schools, none agreed with the above assessment. According to Ann Marie, Joann, and Camille their parents believed Catholic schools provided better education. Discipline and religious training were additional reasons given by Joann and Camille. Thirty-five-year-old Ann Marie remembered that her parents thought a parochial school would provide a protective, disciplined environment, which would not expose her to drugs, for example. So one's impression from these interviews is that religious training was not a high priority, which does conform in part with Gambino's findings.³⁰

That more Italians attended Catholic schools would seem to indicate that they were more involved with the church as part of the assimilation process. However, the church, rather than the parochial school still provided religious training, especially preparation for communion and confirma-

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 239ff.

³⁰ Interviews with: A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82; questionnaire #263.

tion. Almost all the women mentioned having received First Communion and confirmation, and most were also married in the church. As was the case in the immigrant family, these sacraments were an integral part of their upbringing.

When asked about religion in their homes, few of the interviewees, who were 95 percent Catholic, described their families as religious: "Moderately religious" or "not very religious" were the terms frequently heard. For the most part, these women, like those mentioned by Gambino,³¹ were products of second-generation parents who were nominally Catholic. Although one-third (37%) of these women said religion was an important part of their childhood, they were hard put to it to explain how. They were most articulate when it came to discussing church-going, religious symbols, or the "evil eye."³²

Most women continued to carry the family's religious burden as they had in the first-generation families. They were primarily responsible for seeing that their children attended church services, received religious instruction, and took the sacraments. But, according to Gambino, one can expect changes in the traditional religious roles among suburban Italian Americans.³³ One of these changes is more

³¹ Blood of My Blood, p. 239.

³² Asking how religion had affected their childhood proved to be a fruitless question in view of the answers elicited.

³³ Blood of My Blood, pp. 233-234.

church responsibilities for men. In answer to the question: Who usually attended church when they were growing up? one-third of the third generation said they went along with their parents. Jo remembered that her father was a church usher and a member of the Holy Name Society. Another third (29%) of this group followed the traditional pattern of mother and children attending church, while 17 percent indicated that only the children attended. This pattern seemed prevalent among interviewees who noted that as teenagers their attendance dropped off, often with their parents' approval. "They insisted we go in for all the religious training that was required," said Loretta, "but that was the end of it." These figures being similar to those reported by the first and second generations when they were growing up, there appears to be no increased church attendance among Italian men of the second generation.³⁴

A crude measure of change over time is the second generation's response concerning current church attendance. Compared to the attendance of the first and second generations in the interwar years, fewer family members were attending church. Almost one-fifth (18%) said that no one attended services -- a figure that is three times that reported by women raised in immigrant families. Of those who did attend, four-fifths (as opposed to nineteen-twen-

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 234, 241-242. Interviews with: J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81.

tieths of the first generation) went regularly. One-fourth (27%) of these women said they were the only church-goers in the family. In another fourth of this group, everyone attended church. Husband and wife were sole attenders in 20 percent of the cases. These figures may indicate, as Gambino contends, that future generations will continue the de facto secularism of their parents.³⁵

In contrast to most Italian families, these of the second generation frequented churches which were not Italian parishes. Although none of the interviewees described their churches as Italian, one-fifth noted that their church did contain many Italians in the congregation. Of those third-generation interviewees (36%) raised in Nassau after the war only one had attended an Italian parish (in Inwood). Three of the twelve Nassau-bred interviewees reported that Italians formed a substantial portion of the ethnic makeup of their church's congregation.

Although an Italian parish was not part of their suburban experience, these families still practiced certain Italian religious traditions. Four-fifths of the third generation recalled having attended feasts with their parents, usually in Brooklyn; but the younger, Nassau-bred women also mentioned feasts held in Lynbrook, Westbury, and Inwood.

³⁵ Blood of My Blood, p. 239. The high proportion of women church-goers may be accounted for in part by the fact that 11% of this groups are widows.

Three-fifths of the third generation also noted that their mothers had crucifixes, statues, or saints' pictures in their homes, as did the same proportion of the second-generation women themselves. One 35-year-old woman said her parents' home contained a holy-water font. A few mothers of the third generation, as well as four of the second, observed St. Joseph's Day. Ann remembered that a neighbor of her family in Brooklyn used to have open house on that day. Jennie's mother always invited her and her family for dinner. But the celebration of Christmas Eve by preparing fish according to Italian recipes was more widespread. In keeping with Catholic tradition about half of the second generation served fish on that night, as did half the mothers of the third generation. Several women also continued the custom of preparing lamb, grain pie, and the traditional bread at Easter.³⁶

Superstition in the form of the evil eye was less important than it had been to the Italian born. Only one second-generation and two older, third-generation women stated that they were inclined to believe in the evil eye. One-fourth of third-generation interviewees recalled that they had seen a family member attempt to dispel the curse during their childhood. In Reyna's case, it was her grandmother who performed the ritual. Almost half of this group

³⁶ Interviews with: A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; A.W., Seaford 3/7/81; J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

had only heard about the evil eye; one in five admitted to having no knowledge of it.³⁷

In addition to their duties as guardians of religion, second-generation women were also the family's money managers, as was the case among the immigrants. Three-fifths (59%) of the second generation said they handled the money, while 53 percent of third-generation mothers did so. For each group the father or husband was most likely to control the purse, while mutual control of the finances seemed to be the least likely alternative for both groups.³⁸

These women were still primarily responsible for child-rearing, although the men sometimes helped, especially with discipline. In comparison with their Italian-born mothers, however, these women had smaller families, on the average between two and three children, so they spent less time bearing children than their mothers had. The mean child-bearing span for the second generation was 5.9 years; second-generation women had their first child at about age 26 and their last at 32.

But how were their children raised? Although second-generation women were not questioned directly about how they raised their children, among twelve Nassau-bred interviewees under age 45, who were raised in second-generation homes in

³⁷ Interview with R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81.

³⁸ Percentages for husband and father were 22% and 30%; joint control, 17% of third generation women, 20% of second.

the 1940s and '50s, most noted their parents' emphasis on respect, obedience, and family. Regarding the importance of family, a 30-year-old Elmont woman, mother of two, wrote:

I think my Italian upbringing has given me, I really can't say hangups, but I think it's too much at times to swallow. You know, being with the family all the time. The family this, the family that. You know how Italians are. They overdo sometimes. They expect you to be there for everything. I think you have to have a life of your own but that's the only thing.³⁹

As noted earlier, the importance of the family was usually mentioned in reference to ritual Sunday gatherings, usually in Brooklyn at the grandparents', on holidays or birthdays:

The importance and respect for the family was always emphasized [said Debbie]. You had to go see your grandparents every week. God forbid if you missed a birthday or a holiday....⁴⁰

Reyna, 40, remembered that at age 16 she was required to stay home on New Year's Eve because her parents believed it was a family holiday. Gloria said that, unlike her friends' families, her mother and the children would wait until her father came home, no matter how late, so they could all eat dinner together.⁴¹

A 29-year-old woman, in discussing obedience, said it was an integral part of the importance of the family:

³⁹ Interview with N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

⁴⁰ Interview with D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81.

⁴¹ Interviews with: R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; G.M., Uniondale, 9/2/81.

"I always felt that if I do something wrong it's not only going to affect my mother and father but I have to worry about my aunts, my uncles, my cousins, grandparents." Minding one's parents was a given, mentioned with reference to what almost all of them called their "strict upbringing." About her mother a Garden City woman said, "To have her mad [at me] was terrible." Connie said her father was "a very strict disciplinarian." Jo: "When [my father] said something, you damn well better do it!" She came home 15 minutes late from a date one time and he dislocated her jaw.⁴²

These interviews suggest that the women believed their Italian American parents were stricter than their contemporaries' parents. Hence, these women appear to be not only more resentful and uncomfortable with such restrictions but also to be either breaking away or wanting to break away. One second-generation mother said she is stricter with her children than the parents of her children's friends, "I guess that is a carryover from my upbringing," she added. Both Reyna and Loretta judged that they were raised more strictly than their friends. Reyna said her brother left

⁴² Interviews with: D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81. Colleen Johnson ("The Maternal Role in the Contemporary Italian American Family," in Italian Immigrant Woman, pp. 238, 242, 236) states that in the contemporary Italian American family, although children are loved and protected, they are expected to behave and show respect. Parents frequently use physical punishment and strict discipline. This tight cohesive family can stifle growth and prevent their children's achieving independence.

home at 17 to attend college primarily to get away from their strict home discipline.⁴³

Like the children in an Italian household, daughters in the second generation were also expected to do chores around the house. About three-fourths of second-generation interviewees reported that their daughters performed such tasks. Unlike the daughters in an immigrant home, however, these women were not overburdened with housework nor did they have the added responsibility of looking after their siblings. Housework was less arduous than it had been when their mothers were young. As Loretta put it, "We didn't have to do too much." Chores usually included cleaning one's room, washing and drying the dishes, and setting and clearing the table. A few, such as Jo, received an allowance for doing chores. One-fourth had no household responsibilities except caring for their room. Lucille explained that her mother believed "that my time would come when I would have to do household chores, so she handled everything."⁴⁴

Like the second generation, most of their daughters complained that their brothers rarely did household tasks. In a few cases brothers cooked, washed floors and windows, and did the dishes. But in general, young boys usually just

⁴³ Interviews with: I.S., Plainview, 6/25/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; L.W., Merrick 5/6/81; J.B., Westbury 9/24/81.

⁴⁴ Interviews with: L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; L.P., Merrick, 1/5/82. See Joann Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework," Scientific American 231 (1974):116.

took out the garbage and were expected to keep their rooms clean. One second-generation woman cited her Italian background to explain why her sons never did housework: "It's a terrible thing, but when you have boys, an Italian mother does not expect her boys to do the things that she does."⁴⁵

While acknowledging this sexual division of labor, many daughters, like some of the first and second generation daughters mentioned earlier, expressed resentment and a few sought to change the situation. Loretta characterized her brother as "a typical spoiled son -- he didn't have to do a damn thing." As a teenager, Joann had many discussions with her mother about this unequal distribution of household chores. She did the laundry on Saturday in addition to helping her mother with the preparation of meals, while her brother merely took out the garbage. Despite these discussions, however, each continued with their respective duties. A 39-year-old Westbury woman said she had threatened to run away from home, so her parents tried to divide the chores between her and her brother more equitably. She had had to clean his room as well as her own, along with her other responsibilities.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Two-thirds of the third generation said their brothers did not do chores; for daughters of second generation, the figure was similar. Interview with S.M., Wantagh, 6/13/81.

⁴⁶ Interviews with: N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81.

A brother's exemption from housework was only one of the reasons why almost two-thirds of these daughters believed that brothers received preferential treatment. Many asserted that this situation was common in Italian families. "Men were on the pedestal," said Nanci, "It was the typical Italian upbringing." Jo recalled that while her brother received a new car as a graduation present, she got a used one. Male children generally had more freedom, they could stay out later, and parents were not always correcting them for every little thing. Nanci said her brother was "not as watched over as we were." Jo said that unlike her brother she was not allowed to go off the block or go alone to the candy store by bicycle until she was 12 years old.⁴⁷

In addition to their being overprotected and sheltered, compared to their brothers, many of these women asserted that their lives were also more restricted than those of their girl friends. Ann Marie, Jo, and Judith recalled that their non-Italian friends all had more freedom than they did. When she was in junior high school, Jo thought, "Why can these other girls do things I'm not allowed to do?" Ann Marie and Rayna remembered that their curfew was earlier than that of their friends. "It crimped my style!" said Rayna, jokingly. Debbie commented that she always felt her

⁴⁷ Interviews with: A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81.

mother was overprotective. Thus, second generation parents continued to value highly their daughters' supervision.⁴⁸

Life for most second-generation families differed from that of their parents. The second-generation Italian American family migrated to the suburbs in the postwar period as did many other Americans. Their reasons for moving were similar to those of other Americans with the exception of wanting to be near family or relatives. Unlike many members of the first generation, most moved to neighborhoods which could not be characterized as Italian. In comparison to non-Italian women, the second generation was more likely to live geographically closer to kin.

Second generation women were more likely to be working after marriage and even after having children than the Italian born. They were also more likely to have held white-collar positions than the first generation, although few had careers. Those who did hold blue-collar jobs generally worked, like the first generation, in the garment industry.

These wives and their husbands, who were closer in age than first-generation spouses, generally made decisions together. Their husbands were more apt to share household tasks and take a larger role in childraising than the Italian born. These women believed that they and their

⁴⁸ Interviews with: A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81.

husbands were more openly affectionate than their parents; they also felt that they could communicate better with each other. When they discussed leisure and organizational activities, it was also apparent that they had engaged in more "play" than had the immigrant couples.

A study of organizational activities revealed that, like the Italian born, husbands of second-generation women were generally home-oriented. Although second generation women were more likely to be members of groups than their mothers, most chose church-related organizations, as had their mothers.

For the children of the second generation, communion and confirmation were still important parts of their religious upbringing. Most daughters attended mass at non-Italian parishes, especially when young. Evidence also indicates an increase in non-church-attendance among second-generation families when compared with the first. But as in Italian households, most second-generation families attended feasts and displayed crucifixes and representations of saints in their homes. But belief in the evil eye was less frequent than in immigrant families.

Second-generation wives continued to be the money managers and still shouldered the major responsibility for childraising. Although families were smaller, parents still emphasized respect, obedience, and the importance of the family in bringing up children. Interviewees believed that

they had experienced a stricter upbringing than their non-Italian friends. Chores, while less burdensome than those their mothers had performed, were an expected part of their youth. These daughters complained, as had their mothers, that sons received preferential treatment because most of them were exempt from housework and because they were more independent than their sisters. Although not with the same degree of intensity as shown by the first generation family, protectiveness, sheltering, and supervision were still a part of how these daughters were raised.

This account of the second-generation family is crucial because it points to trends which portend growing individualism for the third generation. With more mothers working, their daughters more often had them as role models. In contrast to the immigrant family, daughters of the second generation were raised in families where fathers were more likely to share household tasks and take more responsibility for childraising. These parents were also more lenient regarding their daughters' personal behavior and relationship with men. Other indicators of a movement toward personal independence include the third generation's increased level of education, their decreased financial contribution to the family (compared to the first and second generations), as well as entry into professional positions. Such factors and others that contribute to the growing individualism of the third generation are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6
THE THIRD GENERATION

Although almost all scholarly work concerning Italian Americans concentrates on the Italian born and some research has focussed on the second generation, the third generation has received little attention. It is difficult to pinpoint this generation by using conventional sources such as the census, since prior to 1970 there was no way to indicate ethnic origin beyond the second generation. Gambino provides his readers with some information regarding the grandchildren of immigrants, but most of it is speculative.¹ Through interviews and questionnaires from seventy-seven third-generation women whose background was Italian on both the mother's and father's sides, one gains an insight into the life and work of the third generation. The average age of these women was 46 years in 1981; 75 percent were married, 13 percent single, 5 percent widowed, 5 percent divorced, and one of the seventy-seven remarried. While the following profile shows some continuity with the lives of the second

¹ Blood of My Blood, pp. 241-242, 159, 270, 273.

generation, it is with the third generation that a relative departure from the more repressive aspects of an Italian American woman's existence is apparent.

Like their mothers before them, these daughters of second generation families were subject to close supervision in their social relationships, especially with men. Yet, in contrast to the first and second generation, controls were less stringent. Guidelines for proper grooming and dress were mentioned by a majority of third generation interviewees. For some, the codes governing their conduct in these areas were not always clearly defined. For instance, regarding herself and her siblings, Nanci (30) indicated that they all knew what their parents did not like.²

Parents set minimal prescriptions regarding how a young woman should be dressed. Modest attire that was clean and neat was of paramount importance. Clothing was supposed to cover the "sexy parts" of one's body according to Jo. Judith remarked that as a teenager she was "a more conservative dresser" than her non-Italian friends. Ann Marie mentioned that her skirts had to be a certain length. Joann asserted that she was not permitted to wear a two-piece bathing suit.³

² Interview with N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

³ Interviews with: J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81; A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81. Four of 33 interviewees said there were no rules concerning grooming and dressing.

Besides dress, women were asked about their parents' position concerning smoking, drinking, and hair-dyeing. Although three women colored their hair (two with their parents' blessing), most never thought to do it. They were not interested in drinking. In only one case did a woman, 32, mention that as a teenager she and a friend drank Scotch on the sly and were terribly sick afterward. A few women, but fewer than in the second generation, recalled that wine was served at home. Two-fifths of these parents frowned on smoking, but unlike the second generation, about one-third of these women smoked or had tried it while in their teens. Two (of 33) of these women even received their parents' permission to smoke.⁴

The use of makeup, particularly lipstick, was a more important issue for these women than those discussed earlier. About one-fourth reported that their parents expressed negative feelings about lipstick or makeup. But unlike the Italian born and the second generation, third generation women were not forbidden to use it. Joann, who used makeup secretly, explained this negative view by saying that a woman "did not need to put paint on [her] face." Her mother believed that by using makeup she would be "looking for trouble" trying to attract the opposite sex. Jo recalled that her father frowned upon makeup, especially eye

⁴ Interviews with: J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81; A.Z., Valley Stream 9/15/81.

shadow, which he thought made any woman (even his wife) look like a tramp. When she was 16 her uncle bought her a lipstick and convinced her father to allow her to wear it. In fact, over one-fifth of these women indicated that they had first used lipstick without parental consent. Rayna remembered that at 14 she put lipstick on at the bus stop; Debbie first used makeup on the sly when she was a grammar school student. Half reported that they were permitted to wear lipstick at a certain age. For most, this was 16, although it ranged from 13 to 16, which was a bit younger than the second generation.⁵ Thus, the wearing of makeup seems to have been a less important issue for the third generation as compared to the second.

Like the latter, the leisure activities of most of the third generation did not revolve around formalized groups. Only about one-third of interviewees were group members when they lived at home. Except for religiously affiliated associations, no particular organizations were prevalent. Aside from visiting relatives on Sundays with their parents, this group's social life usually included attending parties, dances, and school functions. About one-fifth mentioned bowling, roller-skating or ice-skating as their favorite activities when young. Almost half said that they generally

⁵ Interviews with: J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; R.P., Garden City 8/4/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81. Three older (40+) third generation women said no restrictions were put on them regarding makeup.

socialized in groups with other girls. Unlike the second generation, four women also mentioned frequenting discos or nightspots with female acquaintances during the 1960s. Two women had even taken out-of-town vacations with female friends. And when these women went out with young men, movies, dances, parties, or dinner-dates were their favorite activities.

Several of these young women, who were under 40 in 1981, complained about being restricted socially before they were 18. Joann recalled that her mother was especially conscientious about checking out house parties which she (Joann) attended. This meant making sure that the parents were home and that they knew when her daughter was expected to come home. If by chance she was late, Joann noted that her mother would come out looking for her! Jo, Nanci, and Debbie stated that they often went out with their brothers while they were in high school. Jo's brother was "encouraged" to go with her to school dances. Until she graduated from high school, Nanci could not go out unless her brother accompanied her. Debbie recalled that her parents believed her brothers would protect her and she enjoyed going out with them because it freed her from having to explain where she was going or what she was doing. The most restrictive case was Loretta's, who began dating in college. At 39, she summed up her youth by saying she was "not allowed to date young men or go to parties -- anything to do with the

opposite sex."⁶

Although these women were not chaperoned and most of them did not meet the age requirement for dating, their relationships with young men were subject to other types of control. For example, 85 percent reported that they had a curfew, usually midnight. As Ann Marie remarked, "There were always some limitations up until the day I married and left home." In another case, Rayna recalled that her mother believed that her reputation had been ruined because she had been out on a picnic in Suffolk County with a young man from 7 A.M. to 8 P.M. "You don't even do that when you're engaged," her mother told her. On the second date, he wanted to go to Bear Mountain and "that was the end of Larry [because] there was no way I would be able to go. . . . She was really old-fashioned in that respect," Rayna said. Like the second generation, one-third of these interviewees reported that their parents had to meet the young men they dated. Loretta indicated that her dates had to come into the house and meet her parents.⁷

Dating usually began for the third generation at age

⁶ Interviews with: J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81; L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81.

⁷ Interviews with A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81. Only one woman mentioned being chaperoned and two older third-generation women dated secretly. One-fourth, almost all over 40, indicated that they had to be a certain age to date. One in six, mostly under 40, said they had not dated very much.

17, although it varied from 15 to 19 -- not much of a difference from the second generation. Over half (58%) of these interviewees indicated that they could date anyone. However, results from questionnaires as well as interviews indicate that this group, which included 59 percent of Catholics, usually dated Catholics, but not necessarily Italians. When examining the religious background of prospective mates, half reported that the young men they dated were either all Catholics or mostly Catholics. At the same time 56 percent of this group indicated that the men they dated came from various ethnic backgrounds.⁸

From my interviews, only 27 percent of second-generation parents preferred their daughters to date Italian men: Gerri recalled that her mother's habit of asking, "Is he Italian?" referring to her date. Nanci said her father would say something if she or her sisters were going out too often with a boy who was not Italian. If Joann's date happened to be Italian, her mother would say, "A nice Italian boy, isn't that nice?" When Ann Marie was 21, her mother said, "It doesn't look like you're going to date an Italian."⁹

⁸ Almost one-fourth dated men who were of various religious persuasions: 8% dated only men who were Italian; 29% dated mostly Italians. Second-generation women reported the following figures for their daughters' dating: 45% all or mostly Catholic; 33% from all religions; 10% Italian or mostly Italian; and 46% from all ethnic backgrounds.

⁹ Interviews with: G.S., Bellmore, 6/3/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81.

Third generation women were less likely to marry Italian American men than were the first and second generations. Almost three-fifths married men of Italian descent, usually those who were also third generation. Another 6 percent chose men who were part Italian. Like the second generation, only 27 percent of these interviewees said their parents preferred them to marry a man of Italian descent. For example, 40-year-old Rayna said, "Somewhere along the line I was indoctrinated that I was going to marry somebody Italian." Loretta, the first in her extended family to marry a non-Italian, remembered that her parents believed one should marry one's own kind, adding that it was assumed that she and her sister "would marry educated Italians."¹⁰

Despite the high rate of endogamy, these women, like those of the second generation, rated religion more important than ethnicity. Of the 95 percent who were Catholic, 85 percent married Catholics. And two-fifths of these women reported that marrying a Catholic was more important to their parents than their "marrying Italian." Judith, for example, told me her parents would accept a non-Italian son-in-law, but not a non-Catholic.¹¹ Of those women who did not marry Italian, most chose German or Irish mates, which is a

¹⁰ Interviews with: R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81. One-third of these women married men who were second generation.

¹¹ Interview with J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81. Another one-fourth said their parents had no preference as to their spouses.

pattern consistent with the literature on Italian Americans as well as with my findings on first and second generation Nassau women.¹²

Interviewees, unlike some cases in the first and second generation, reported that their parents did not exert pressure nor did they actively discourage relationships they did not approve of. Almost without exception, these women recalled that they decided when and whom to marry. Love tended to be a more important reason for marrying than in the case of the second generation. However, they met their future spouses in similar ways: one-fifth through a friend; one-sixth through school or college. Camille's husband, like Rayna's and Joann's was a friend from school; Jo's was the driver of a car pool at college. Another sixth met their futures through their families. Lucille's sister introduced her future husband to her. One-eighth met their men at parties or dances, one-tenth at work. Nanci's future worked with her at her father's restaurant. Others met at bars, beauty salons, weddings, church services, and a roller-skating rink.¹³ At their marriages these women tended to be a bit younger (average 23, husbands 25) than the second generation, but like them they nearly all chose to be

¹² One in ten married men who had two ethnic backgrounds.

¹³ Interviews with: C.M., Glen head, 1/20/82; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81; L.P., Merrick, 1/5/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

married in the Church.

Supervising and guiding them through their young adult years before marriage also involved providing information about sex. Compared to the second generation, a larger proportion of these women said they had received such information before marriage. Other signs also indicate that the facts of life were discussed more freely than in their mother's time. Knowledge was most often obtained from female friends, as had been the case with their parents, but unlike the first and second generations, books rather than female relatives ranked second in importance as sources of information. The mother was the third most frequent source and thus more important than in the earlier generations. For example, Joann, Jo, and Ann Marie mentioned that their mothers had explained the facts of life to them; the latter recalled that in 1957 when she was going to camp, she was 11 at the time, her mother had had a talk with her about Lesbians. She also recalled that all of her questions about sex were answered at home. Jo, after having heard "some very disturbing things at school" when she was 12, had had a discussion about sex with her mother. These mothers were also more likely to have informed their daughters about menstruation than the older generations.¹⁴

¹⁴ Interviews with: L.P., Merrick, 1/5/82; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81.

Likewise, discussions concerning birth control, divorce and abortion were more common than in previous generations. One-fifth of the interviewees said their mothers had practiced birth control and about one-half of them said it was discussed with friends as well as with their mother. As in the second generation, divorce was the most openly talked about subject, although half of them said their parents were opposed to it. But these women were more tolerant of divorce, thus reflecting the changing attitudes in society at large; half of these women knew family members or other relatives who had divorced in the period since they themselves had been married.

Compared to divorce and birth control, abortion was not usually discussed. Only one in six, mostly younger interviewees, said they had talked about it with friends. But, like the second generation, one in four knew a friend or a relative who had had an abortion, but unlike the earlier generations, none of these interviewees admitted to having had such an operation herself. With the more widespread use of birth control since the 1960s, abortions were not the only option available to these women, as it had been for the earlier generations.

After their marriages, third generation women and their husbands usually rented apartments in Brooklyn, Queens, or Nassau. Only about one-fourth of them, fewer than the second generation, reported living with parents or in-laws. After

having saved some money over several years, they purchased homes in Nassau County, where they would raise their children, usually not far from parents or other relatives, most of whom lived in Nassau County or New York State (as was true of the second generation also).¹⁵

These women continued the trend started by their mothers of settling in ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Despite the increasing numbers of Italians in Nassau since World War II, only 15 percent of interviewees characterized their neighborhoods as "Italian," although one Glen Cove woman did indicate that her community was predominantly Italian. Three-fourths of interviewees said their neighborhood was "mixed."¹⁶

Other differences in degree rather than in kind are evident in the work and education of these women. Yet, there are also signs indicating a trend toward the eventual undermining of a woman's dependence on home and family. Like their mothers before them, third generation women worked when single. There seemed to be none of the supposed inhibitions concerning women's working that existed among the Italian born. The second generation had moved into clerical positions and their daughters continued to enter that field

¹⁵ Twenty-eight percent lived in Nassau, 51 percent elsewhere in the State, mainly in the Metropolitan area.

¹⁶ Interviews with: I.S., Plainview, 6/25/81; J.G., Merrick, 8/4/81; A.G., Merrick, 3/5/81.

as opportunities became available in the service sector. They were also more likely than their mothers to hold high white-collar positions. Mirroring Gambino's findings regarding Italian women's employment, these trends also reflect the tendency since World War II of more women to enter clerical, service, and, more recently, professional positions.¹⁷

Examination of the jobs held by these interviewees before marriage indicates that half of them worked in clerical positions, one-fourth in women's professions (teacher, nurse, librarian, chemist), and one-eighth in service occupations. Of the remaining three, one was a technical artist, another a textile designer, and the third an assistant dress designer.

Most started working part-time. Nine-tenths of the third generation indicated that they had worked part-time at some point in their lives, three-fifths of them having worked part-time before their marriage, usually as cashier, salesperson, or waitress. They ordinarily took such positions while still in school or college, some being summer jobs. A few took such jobs while waiting for a full-time position as teacher or nurse, sometimes working as a substitute in these fields.

Their responses to the question: Why did they work when

¹⁷ Blood of My blood, p. 90. Top categories of women's jobs were clerical, food service, teaching, sales, typist, book-keeper, hair dresser, servant, nurse, dietitian, therapist. Kessler-Harris, Women Have Always Worked, p. 146.

they were single? indicated that it was not as important for them to contribute to the family income as it had been for the first and second generations. Moreover, most of them were not expected to turn over their paychecks to their mother; instead, they paid board. Three younger women, who were under 35 in 1981, said their parents thought that working was a way for them to learn responsibility, the value of money, and the way to manage it. Part- and full-time work enabled these women to pay for clothes, commutation, lunch, and/or part of their education. Although four-fifths of them paid board to their parents, there was a tendency toward shifting from laboring for the family to working for one's own needs and independence. One-fifth of these women paid no board at all; of those who did, one-fourth of them said their mothers saved their board money for them until they married.¹⁸

But while keeping more of the money they earned, most of these women still lived at home until marriage. Five of the thirty-three interviewed had lived away from home only because they were attending school. Only a fourth of those who provided information said they had considered moving out and living on their own. This was a marked change from the second generation's response. The rest of these women either

¹⁸ Interviews with N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81; G.S., Bellmore, 6/3/81; C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81. Cf. R. Gambino, "La Famiglia," in White Ethnics, ed. J. Ryan (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), p. 51.

did not even think of moving out or said that such an idea was unacceptable. Debbie, for instance, recalled that she considered living on her own but knew her parents would never accept it. A 35-year-old Valley Stream woman's response clearly communicates the moral impropriety of such behavior, emphasized earlier in the discussion of the Italian immigrant family:

Only one type of girl left home and she wasn't a good girl. Now we're going to get down to being Italian. It wasn't done. You only did it because you wanted to mess around.¹⁹

Besides living at home, the third generation, like the second, were subtly tied to it in other ways. Career consciousness was low; less than one-fifth indicated that they had received any counselling from their parents in that respect. Advice, when given, usually concerned which jobs to avoid. In keeping with Italian mores, 13 percent of the third generation reported that their parents believed that certain occupations were menial or not respectable. This proportion was slightly lower than that of the second generation. Such jobs included hairdresser and waitress. Joann (34) explained that her parents would not allow her to work as a waitress in a diner or a bar. They believed that waitressing was demeaning and that a bar was an unsuitable place because a woman would be regarded as a tramp and taken

¹⁹ Interview with D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81; A.Z., Valley Stream 9/15/81.

advantage of by men.²⁰

Requiring daughters to find work close to home through family or neighborhood networks was another means of restricting their independence. One-third of the third generation worked for or with relatives or friends at some time in their lives. Another fourth got jobs through a relative or friend. Finally, one-third held at least one job which was near their homes when they were single. But these figures, being lower than those found for the first and second generation, indicate a tendency away from such practices.

Third generation women were as likely to be employed outside the home, when they were wives and mothers, as the second generation. Three-fifths worked, two-fifths were housewives. Like their mothers, most (79%) worked for financial reasons. A second income helped pay for their children's schooling and to buy items for their homes, finance vacations, or purchase luxuries. The others (20%), similar to the second generation, gave non-economic reasons for working: "I really wanted to do something for myself," said a 34-year-old woman, "to find out about me and what I could do."²¹

²⁰ Interview with J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; Gambino, Blood of My Blood, pp. 40, 364; 27% of interviewees said their parents considered certain occupations unsuitable. (The question was misunderstood on the questionnaire.)

²¹ Interview with J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81. According to the second generation, 60% of their daughters worked, 29% were students, 11% housewives.

Differences between the second and third generations are evident in their work patterns. In tracing their movements in and out of the work force, unlike the second generation, none of these women worked full-time throughout their married lives. But on the whole, more of them worked and had longer working lives than their mothers. Nine-tenths of all married women worked full time at some point after marriage. Two-thirds of them held a part-time job while married, usually after they had had children. Of the twenty-nine interviewees who were mothers, twenty-two returned to work when their children were in school. Hence, like other American women, these Italian Americans have been entering the work force in increasing numbers and are more apt to continue working after taking time out for babies.

Were these women more successful in attaining social mobility? Although difficult to gauge because women move in and out of the work force and usually work in segregated positions, a crude estimate is revealed by using a woman's first and last full-time job. Three-fourths of the respondents remained in the same work throughout their working lives. This figure is not significantly different from the proportion of the second generation who were also fixed in their clerical or teaching positions. However, about one-fourth of these women did attain a measure of social mobility; half of them did so through a promotion. Gloria, for example, began her working life as a file clerk and

later became an executive secretary. The other half, a larger proportion than those of the second generation, improved their lot by an education that prepared them for better positions. While Debbie worked as a secretary after high school, she later attended college and graduate school to become a reference librarian. Lillian first worked as a typist; after having had her children she attended college in the 1970s and obtained a job as a reading teacher. Such examples are probably part of the trend of middle class women since the 1960s to move from clerical into professional positions.²²

Like the second generation, almost all (92%) of these women were white-collar workers and held the same types of jobs. While most of the former clustered in low-level white-collar positions, particularly clerical, almost equal numbers of third generation women (45-47%) held high- and low-level white-collar jobs. That more third generation women could be found in the high white-collar category may indicate a trend toward women's having careers and not simply jobs.

Within the high white-collar category teachers (20%), educational administrators (8%), nurses (6%), and store and sales managers (6%) accounted for the largest group of women. The largest number of lower white-collar workers were

²² Interviews with G.B., Garden City, 9/16/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81; L.Z., Plainview, 7/9/81.

salespersons (10%) and secretaries (10%). The latter, together with clerical occupations (clerk, bookkeeper, administrative assistant), represented almost one-third of this group. This was lower than among the second generation, where 45 percent were clerical workers. The high proportion of salespersons in the third generation (10%) as compared with the second (3%) probably reflects the growth of the service sector of the economy since World War II.²³

Also similar to the second generation is the proportion who expressed their spouse's positive opinion regarding a wife's working. When asked about their husbands' attitudes, 57 percent said they supported the idea. A subtle qualitative difference with the second generation can be detected in reviewing the responses. Several women tended to couch their husband's positive attitude in a way that emphasized a concern for the wife's self-development. For example, a Garden City woman, 41, said, "[He] thinks it's good for me and helps to improve my self-image." Like their mothers, one-fourth of these women said their husbands were not in favor of their working, especially if there were children at home. Judith noted that her husband did not want her to work until their daughter was in school. One in six, including Loretta, Ann Marie, and Geri, said their spouses had no

²³ Compared to a third generation of non-Italians, Italian women's jobs were similar: in the high white-collar group, most were teachers (19%) or nurses (19%); secretary (33%) was largest among lower white-collar jobs.

opinion or left it up to their wives. That a majority of second and third generation husbands favored their wives' working reflects the increasing dependence on the wife's earnings.²⁴

These women were able to take positions in more professional but still largely segregated occupations because of their educational background. In addition, the economy has made more service occupations available to women over the last 20 years, more opportunities in the professions and so-called men's jobs have been opened to women. Parental support for education, especially college, for their daughters, was also a factor.

As table 14 shows, the third generation was somewhat more educated than the second. They were more likely to have attended college and/or received a degree; a graduate degree was also more common for the third generation. The new importance attached to a college education for women is revealed by comments from interviewees. Rayna (40) said she was the first woman in her extended family to attend college. In 1963 Jo became the only female college graduate on

²⁴ Questionnaire #217; interview with J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81. Ralph E. Smith, ed., The Subtle Revolution (Washington, 1979), pp. 165-167. Among the non-Italian group of 30 women, 65% said their husbands favored their working, 10% were opposed, and 25% said it was their own choice.

both her mother's and her father's side of the family.²⁵

Parents of the third generation, as compared with those of the second, were more inclined to recognize the significance of higher education for women. Only 7 percent of the second generation stated that their parents had encouraged them to go to college, while 29 percent of the third generation mentioned that their parents had encouraged them to attend. Of those second generation women who expressed a favorable attitude toward education for their daughters, 42 percent stressed the importance of college.

TABLE 14
WOMEN'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION: SECOND VS. THIRD
GENERATION (In Percentages)

Level	Second Generation	Third Generation
Grammar school	5%	3%
High school: Some	7	1
Graduate	38	34
Business/Trade school	17	10
College: Some	12	18
Graduate	11	14
Graduate: Some	2	3
Degree	8	17

Source: Interviews and questionnaires from 181 second- and 77 third-generation women.

In general, though, third generation women reported as much if not more support for education by their parents as the second. Like the latter, almost two-thirds indicated

²⁵ Interviews with: R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; J.B., Westbury 9/24/81. Second generation women reported that 32% of their children were college graduates, 18% with graduate degrees.

that their parents favored education for women. But when asked directly, nine out of ten second generation women reported that they and their husbands supported education for their daughters. Such support is visible in comparing the educational backgrounds of sons and daughters. Unlike the second generation, the women of the third were more likely to have had more years of schooling than their brothers: 40 percent in the case of third-generation interviewees, while 29 percent had an equal amount. Second generation women indicated that their daughters received either the same (65%) or a better (25%) education than their sons. However, when questioned about their parents' attitudes, interviewees who had brothers showed no clear consensus: half of them believed it was more important for males to be educated, the others thought it was equally important for both.

A family's financial situation did not prevent these women from completing high school, as often happened in the first and second generations. These women took a high school education for granted. But, to attend college, money was a consideration, although not the most important one. Indeed, the second generation family, as part of the middle class, could more readily afford college for its children than could the working-class immigrant family. Only two interviewees indicated that money was not available for college. Among the fifteen who attended, six indicated that their parents paid for it, five that the women themselves worked

while in college, and the other four that both parents and children contributed. Such evidence makes it difficult to determine just how important money actually was, but only 3 percent of the entire third generation said that their parents' attitude was based on finances.²⁶

Of those third generation women who attended college for a year or more, 30 percent went away from home: Camille attended Niagara University for two years; Joann was a student at the University of Toledo for one year. Of the 70 percent who went to college locally, Joann and Jo, among others, said that they could have gone to an out-of-town college but chose to stay at home, instead. Such a proportion is in marked contrast to the 5 percent of second generation women who actually attended colleges away from home. In choosing to go away, these women were asserting their independence, as Joann put it: "I wanted the freedom to decide when to come in and the opportunity to make my own mistakes."²⁷

But despite this trend of allowing daughters to go away, the majority of these women, like the second generation, attended colleges in the New York metropolitan area. Interviews indicate that Italian mores are still operative

²⁶ Gambino says that higher incomes were sought and attained first, then this wealth was used for children's education ("Measure of Success," Attenzione, July/Aug. 1983, p. 14).

²⁷ Interviews with: C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; L.W., Merrick, 5/6/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81.

and may account in part for these women's commuting to college. A Uniondale woman (32) said her parents wanted her to stay close to home. Debbie and Nanci also recalled that going away to college was unacceptable. Debbie's parents believed that "an 18-year-old girl should not go away from home." Rayna's father said "something terrible would happen" to her if she went away.²⁸

Apparently Italian American parents also tried to keep their sons close to home whenever possible. From information from the second generation, it appears that sons were as likely as daughters to attend nearby colleges. Only two out of nine interviewees who had college-educated brothers said they went to school away from the metropolitan area.²⁹

A minority of respondents reported negative feelings about education for women and some expressed qualifications. One in ten of the third generation said that their parents believed high school was sufficient education for them. Catherine, encouraged to complete high school, was able to attend secretarial school for one year at her parents' expense. In general, it was "high school important, college not important," in the words of one 25-year-old. Such

²⁸ Interviews with: G.M., Uniondale, 9/2/81; D.A., Westbury, 7/9/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81; R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81. Given the home-oriented working-class family, Italian or other, their children usually go to local colleges anyway.

²⁹ Percentages of sons and daughters who went away to college were similar: 51 and 57%, respectively.

sentiments reflect the traditional Italian belief that higher education was unnecessary for women, whose ultimate role in life would be that of wife and mother.³⁰

That useful education leading to some trade or profession continued to be important was evidenced by the fact that most third generation daughters indicated that their education prepared them for a specific job. Of 78 percent who gave this response, almost half had received secretarial training while another fourth had prepared for teaching. That education which had direct application was important is suggested by comments from Lucille and Nanci. The former recalled that she could go to college and study art only if she were planning to become an art teacher, while Nanci's parents said education was only worthwhile if you studied education.³¹

Except for some name-calling and jokes by fellow students, only one-third of the third generation believed they had been treated differently at school because of their Italian background. Ann Marie, who attended a girls Catholic high school in the 1960s, claimed that the Irish nuns seemed to favor the Irish students.³² In general, these

³⁰ Interview with: C.S., Garden City, 2/27/82; questionnaire #351.

³¹ Interviews with: L.P., Merrick, 1/5/82; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

³² Interview with A.Z., Valley Stream, 9/15/81.

incidents seem to be milder than those cited by the second generation, which is not surprising given the remoteness from their immigrant roots.

In spite of their higher educational level and the fact that most of them worked, these women still depended on their husbands for the chief financial support of their families.³³ Compared to the second generation, spouses of the third were more apt to occupy high white-collar positions. Two-thirds of husbands of the second generation were white-collar workers, while over three-fourths of third-generation spouses were in such positions. Among the latter, the largest categories included: managers (12%), proprietors (12%), salesmen (7%), executives (6%), and insurance brokers (6%). No particular types of blue-collar jobs were prevalent among the two groups and fewer spouses of the third generation were blue-collar workers (23%) than husbands of the second generation (32%).

While there were these differences in the proportions of white- and blue-collar workers, spouses of second and third generations did resemble each other in their home-orientation and their choice of social activities. Two-thirds of the third generation indicated that their husbands did not spend time with male friends. Among the 32 percent

³³ Rubin (Worlds of Pain, p. 178) notes that the middle-class woman's contribution to the family income is much lower than that of working-class wives.

who did socialize with other men, bowling or other sports were the most common. One-third of their spouses were members of a variety of organizations, of which only the Knights of Columbus was predominant.

As fathers and husbands, these men also did not seem vastly different from their second-generation counterparts. In 84 percent of the cases, husbands of the third generation involved their wives in major family decisions. They seemed as willing to share household tasks: 40 percent did so regularly, while another 35 percent did so occasionally. Jo's husband, for example, was in the kitchen doing the dishes while she was being interviewed. But assistance with housework did not necessarily mean taking over the responsibility for it. The sexual division of labor was revealed when women described the chores their husbands usually performed: taking care of the yard and the car, repairing and painting the house, and -- the bane of their existence -- taking out the garbage.³⁴

Similarities between the two generations also appeared as women assessed their relationships with their husbands. Like their mothers, a majority of these women said they were more openly affectionate than their parents had been; an-

³⁴ Interview with J.B., Westbury, 9/25/81; 90% of the second generation said their daughters and sons-in-law arrived at decisions mutually. Kessler-Harris (Women Have Always Worked, p. 158) and others indicate that husbands of working women take little responsibility for housework.

other third said they were "just as affectionate." Rayna (40) and Nanci (30) said they had rarely seen their parents display affection.³⁵ Apparently in many families this Italian custom was practiced beyond the first generation.

Over half of the third generation also judged that communication between husband and wife was better than in their parents' case. Judith said, "We spend more time sitting around and talking." Nanci said her husband was "not as quick-tempered as her father was. You know, he communicates with you." The others believed that they were as open and honest with their spouses as their parents had been.³⁶

That husbands had a greater role in childraising than their fathers had when they were young -- a theme echoed by the second generation -- was mentioned by over three-fourths of the interviewees. A Glen Head woman (27), noting that her husband often changed their daughter's diapers, also emphasized that he was interested in spending time with her. Similarly, Nanci explained that her husband "does everything" with their two sons, pointing out that his interest and commitment went far beyond those of her own father.³⁷

³⁵ Interviews with: R.P., Garden City, 8/4/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

³⁶ Interviews with: J.A., Seaford, 11/6/81; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81. Five women said they had more in common with their husbands (and were better matched) than their parents.

³⁷ Interviews with: C.M. Glen Head, 1/20/82; N.I., Elmont, 7/6/81.

Even with the willingness of husbands to help in the home, women continued to perform their traditional duties as wives and mothers. Like the second generation, half of the third managed the household finances, while husbands handled the money in 30 percent of the cases and 20 percent reported husbands and wives sharing this responsibility. Also similar to the second generation was the size of families and the childbearing span. In the third generation the mean number of children born was two: the first born at the mother's average age of 25, the last when she was 30.³⁸

In talking with the third generation about their children, limited information suggests a greater departure from the Italian heritage than that of the second or third generations, much of it resulting from the attitude of the third generation women themselves. Several said that Italian traditions were not being passed down and a few women felt that they were unimportant anyway. For example, Camille indicated that she does not cook any Italian food and added, "I don't have the slightest desire" to go to Italy.³⁹

Concerning childraising, few interviewees mentioned respect, obedience, and the family's importance. Only one said she had tried to be strict with her children, setting up rules for them to follow. But four-fifths had their

³⁸ Second generation women reported that their daughters had an average of 2.3 children.

³⁹ Interview with C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82.

children do chores and three indicated that sons as well as daughters helped with the housework. Lucille and Joann admitted that their sons received more consideration than their daughters. The only statement concerning the supervision and protection of daughters came from Catherine, discussing the possibility of sending them away to college:

We didn't like the idea. I was afraid for them. I felt they weren't worldly enough to handle going away and I was afraid of bad influences on them.

Finally, about one-fifth reported that they had tried to instill in their children the idea of the closeness of the family, particularly with reference to holiday gatherings.⁴⁰

Most of these women could not specify anything particularly Italian that they wanted to pass on or had passed on to their children, although one-third of them did mention recipes. More typical was Lucille's sense of regret that her two children would have nothing from their Italian heritage:

The last Italian is my grandfather and I'm sure they'll remember him because they're old enough to remember him but they won't really have the stories or the closeness and their children's children are going to have nothing as far as Italian goes except an Italian name. ⁴¹

Some indication of the direction in which fourth-generation daughters are being raised is apparent from these

⁴⁰ Interviews with: L.P., Merrick, 1/5/81; J.P., Merrick, 5/4/81; C.S., Garden City, 2/27/82.

⁴¹ Interviews with: L.P., Merrick, 1/5/81. When asked if she cooks Italian, "I make a good roast beef, that's about all," said Camille (interview with C.M., Glen Head, 1/20/82).

women's opinions on their children's work and education. Like second generation parents, most (89%) of the third generation favored as much education as possible for their daughters, although three (of 33) said it was up to their children as to how far in school they might go. One-fourth of the third generation also indicated that their daughters' working would also be up to them; two in five said that, whatever her marital status, they favored their daughter's working; but one in three said they did not want their daughter to work, especially if she had children. All of which was comparable to opinions of second-generation parents.

Their work patterns resemble those of their mothers. Three-fourths of married daughters worked outside the home. Most (95%) had white-collar jobs, usually clerical, three-fifths of them in the low white-collar category. Of the 35 percent in professional/managerial positions, most had jobs similar to their mothers': teacher, nurse, librarian.

These daughters entered the work force with as much education as, and often more than, their mothers. More of them had a college degree and graduate work (table 15). Fewer were merely high school graduates, although fewer had an advanced degree, since one-third of these women were still in school, this figure is probably lower than one would expect in comparison to older third-generation women.

Overwhelming parental support for education is also re-

flected in a comparison of educational backgrounds of sons and daughters. In twenty-one cases where sons and daughters had completed high school, two-thirds of the daughters had

TABLE 15
WOMEN'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION; THIRD VS. FOURTH
GENERATION (IN PERCENTAGES)

Level	Third Generation		Fourth Generation	
	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar school	2	3%	0	--
High school graduate	27	34	7	23%
Business/Trade school	8	10	4	13
College: Some	14	18	6	19
Graduate	11	14	9	29
Graduate: Some	2	3	4	13
Degree	13	17	1	3

Source: Interviews and questionnaires from 77 third-generation women.

achieved the same educational level as their brothers, and one-fourth of them had received more education. When compared with third-generation interviewees, these figures indicate a continuing trend toward equality of education, although not necessarily superiority. In addition, fourth-generation women (33%) were just as likely to go away to college as third generation (30%). But unlike the third generation, where sons were as likely as daughters to have gone to out-of-town colleges, more of the fourth-generation sons (57%) attended college far from home, which suggests that perhaps Italian American parents, as Catherine mentioned above, still harbor doubts about allowing daughters to go too far from home.

Continuing the trend of their mothers, most daughters of third generation women dated men whose ethnic backgrounds were diverse. However, when compared to the third generation (38%), they were more likely to date men of various faiths, since 55 percent did so. Despite such a departure, most (73%) finally married Catholic men, although less frequently than the third generation (85%). Being Italian also proved to be less important, only half of them (47%) marrying a man who was Italian or part Italian, whereas 65 percent of the third generation did so. Religion and ethnicity were thus becoming less important criteria in mate selection.

For the third generation family religion tended to be less important than for the second generation, although the majority of their children received their First Communion and confirmation. Only 17 percent of the children of these interviewees attended Catholic schools, a lower percentage than for the third generation. Such a figure runs counter to the supposed trend in Catholic school enrollment in the suburbs. Figures on church attendance also illustrate its diminished importance for the third generation as compared with the second. In almost one-fourth of these families no one attended church. Of those who attended, four-fifths went regularly. But this figure is comparable to current church attendance figures among the second generation families. Like the latter, over one-fifth of the third generation indicated that everyone went to mass. Only the mother and

children attended in 17 percent of the families, while another 18 percent reported that only the wife or mother was a church-goer.

Like second generation women who lived in Nassau County, the majority of third generation families generally belonged to churches having ethnically mixed congregations. Less than one-fifth said the church they frequented had a substantial number of Italians in the congregation.⁴²

Certain religious traditions continued to be practiced by the third generation, although with decreasing frequency. Only 29 percent mentioned attending feasts with their own children as compared to four-fifths of the second generation. Since World War II, such celebrations have declined in the New York Metropolitan area. Less than 10 percent of these women reported that they believed in or practiced the "evil eye," an Italian type superstition, whereas in the second-generation home three-fourths had seen a family member talk about or dispel the evil eye. Crucifixes, saints' pictures, and statues, however, seemed to be as prevalent in the homes of the third generation as in their mothers' homes. Two women said they served the traditional pastry for St. Joseph's Day. Four-fifths of this group celebrated holidays by cooking traditional Italian dishes. A fish dinner was prepared for Christmas Eve, while grain pie, bread, and

⁴² One-third of these women described their parishes as mostly Irish.

lamb were served at Easter.

Like their second-generation counterparts, the third generation tended to join church-related groups above all others. One-third of them were members of such associations. They were also just as likely to be members of organizations (71%) when compared to the second generation (68%). Among the joiners, next in importance after church organizations were groups pertaining to children, such as the PTA, followed by job-related groups, including the Nassau Reading Council. Groups related to Italian ethnicity, such as the Sons of Italy, ranked next.

In sum, the lives of third generation Italian American women in Nassau, when single or married, were not vastly different from their second-generation counterparts. Like them, third-generation daughters worked when single. They were a bit more likely to have white-collar positions than their mothers. Their financial contribution to the family was not as crucial as it had been for their mothers, and more of these women kept more of the money they earned than did the second generation. Like their mothers, most lived at home and generally did not receive constructive advice concerning their working futures, although a minority indicated that their parents told them what jobs they should avoid. These women made less use of kin or friendship networks when looking for work and were less apt to have a job close to home.

On the whole, third-generation women attained higher levels of education than their mothers and parental support for education was higher than that exhibited by the Italian born. More of these women went away to college than their mothers, but like the latter the majority enrolled in institutions close to home. And almost the same proportion received an education preparing them for a specific job.

Although less severe than among the first and second generation, restrictions for third generation women were still evident in guidelines concerning dating, appearance, and the use of makeup. As an issue, being allowed to wear makeup was less important to these women than it had been to the second generation. Like the latter, several women emphasized that there were social restrictions on them even before they dated. While most began dating at about the same age as their mothers and most had to observe curfews like the second generation, they were less likely to date Italian men than were the previous generations.

More third-generation women received information about sex before marriage and obtained that knowledge from some of the same sources as the second generation. However, the woman's mother was a more important source than among the second generation and interviews revealed that there was more open discussion between mothers and daughters, not only about sex but about birth control, divorce, and abortion.

As married adults, the roles of husband and wife, the

relations between the spouses, the types of groups each was involved in, and even where most of their relatives lived were found to be quite similar to those of the second generation. Differences were evident in degree rather than in kind. Third generation women had smaller families and slightly shorter childbearing spans. Marrying an Italian Catholic or a non-Italian Catholic was less important to them. They were more likely to work and to stay in the labor force after they had had children. They were also more apt to hold professional white-collar jobs than their mothers. Regarding religion, more members of the third generation never attended church as compared to the second generation, and fewer attended feasts or practiced the "evil eye."

In raising the fourth generation, limited evidence indicates the continuation of a few of the trends exhibited by the third generation. More young fourth-generation women are or will be receiving higher education; more are working and white-collar jobs continue to be prevalent. Religion and ethnicity tend to be less important in their choices of spouses than it was for their mothers. Most mothers did not mention respect, obedience, the importance of the family, or even the supervision of their daughters as part of their upbringing. Except for the food, and possibly the religious symbols, Italian customs do not hold the importance they did for the earlier generations. Relinquishing parental control is perhaps suggested by the rising number of third-genera-

tion women who believed that their daughters should decide for themselves when to work and whether to pursue their education. The fourth-generation daughters will move away from their Italian heritage. Perhaps it is this generation which will finally be able to chart its own course in life without feeling that they are betraying their Italian heritage.

CHAPTER 7

ITALIAN AND OTHER NASSAU WOMEN

So far this study has focused on comparing the lives of three generations of Italian American women; particular attention has been paid to their work, education, religious upbringing, and relationships with the opposite sex, in an attempt to highlight the uniqueness of their Italian heritage. But in order to highlight their uniqueness, these women were compared with a group of non-Italian women. In this way, the role of ethnicity is more clearly delineated.

This study includes 301 Italian American women --first, second and third generation -- and 111 non-Italian women: German, Polish, Irish, English, Russian, and American Negro. Nearly half of the non-Italian group came from families with more than one ethnic background and, proportionally, there were fewer foreign-born (first generation) and fewer second-generation but comparable percentages of third-generation women: 26 percent were fourth generation and beyond. While 95 percent of the Italian women were Catholic, 4 percent were Protestant, and 1 percent Jewish or other. Catholics accounted for 55 percent of the non-Italian group, Protes-

tants 34 percent, Jews and others, 10 and 3 percent, respectively. The Italian group contained more married women (72%), but fewer widows (13%), than the non-Italians (67%, 17%, respectively). Otherwise, both groups were fairly similar in the proportions of women who were single (Italian 6%, non-Italian 4%), divorced (5%, 6%), separated (2%, 1%), and remarried (3%, 5%). These Italian and non-Italian women also resembled one another regarding the average number of years lived in Nassau, their mean age in 1981, the average number of years married, the age differential between spouses, ages at marriage, ages at birth of first and last child, their child-bearing spans, and mean number of children per family.¹ In comparing and contrasting the lives of these two groups -- their education, religious practices, work outside the home, relations with the opposite sex -- I have also considered their residence patterns, including reasons for moving to or remaining in Nassau County.

My analysis indicates that Italian traditions of male superiority and familism are apparent when measured against

¹ Other statistics include:

	Italian	Non-Italian
Mean number of years lived in Nassau	30	34
Mean age	55	57
Average number of years married	30	30
age difference between mates	3	3
age of mates at marriage	26	24
Woman's age at birth of first child	26	26
birth of last child	32	32
Woman's child-bearing span	6	6
Mean number of children per family	2.4	2.6

other Nassau women. The Italian family more strictly controlled and sheltered its women as evidenced in attitudes about work and education as well as in personal behavior, particularly with regard to the opposite sex. The closeness and emphasis on the family is displayed in their residence patterns and in their reluctance to join outside organizations.

Scholars have found that Italian family members often live closer to one another than other ethnic groups and that their neighborhoods are more stable because, as Gans points out, they are less likely to move away.² They are also more likely to live with relatives, as Gambino shows, in describing Little Italies. Finally, Italians visit their parents and siblings more frequently.³

Asked where most of their relatives lived, four-fifths of the Italian women said either in their immediate vicinity, in the county, or in New York State (usually the City). Only 57 percent of non-Italians had kin in the vicinity, county, or state. Only one in five of the Italians had relatives living (in the U.S.) outside of New York State, as compared with two in five non-Italians.

Stronger kinship ties were revealed indirectly, when it

² The Urban Villagers, pp. 15, 289.

³ Greeley, Why Can't They Be Like Us?, pp. 77-78; Krause, Grandmothers, p. 149; Korbin and Goldscheider, Ethnic Factor, pp. 187, 204, 210, 238.

was found that, while some 60 percent of non-Italians were born in the City, 80 percent of the Italian women were born there; one in four of the former were born outside the State, one in ten of the latter.⁴ Such figures indicate less geographic mobility among Italian families, as well as a desire to live near their birthplace in order to be closer to parents and other relatives. Another measure of kinship ties was revealed inadvertently when the women were asked about friendship: sixteen (5%) named relatives as their closest friends. In some cases, I had to emphasize that I meant friends not relatives. Among non-Italians, fewer than three in a hundred named kin as their closest companions.

Greater contact with family was also apparent from Italian replies to the question: Are you in weekly contact with your family? Ninety-six percent said yes, as compared with 86 percent of non-Italians. But while these Italian women lived closer to and had more contact with family, it appears that they were not more likely to have relatives living with them than non-Italians. A third (31%) of the latter said they had relatives living with them, as compared to a quarter of the Italians. Since the relatives living with them were usually parents of one of the spouses it is probable that, since the non-Italians were slightly older,

⁴ These figures were calculated without the foreign-born. Of both groups 10% were born in Nassau County.

they were more likely to have their parents or in-laws living with them. Similarly, when asked if relatives lived with them when they were growing up, about two-fifths of both groups replied in the affirmative -- grandparents, uncles, and cousins being most frequently named.

Neither were any significant differences between the two groups evident regarding why these women moved to Nassau and why they remained there. Both gave similar reasons, predictable from the literature: the quest for an affordable or larger home for a growing family; wanting to live in a suburban environment; being near family; or being near the place of employment, usually the husband's (table 16).

TABLE 16
REASONS FOR MOVING TO NASSAU COUNTY

Reason	Italians	Non-Italians
Purchase of home	27%	28%
Suburban living	19	24
Family ties	18	17
Job	12	16
Other	24	15

Source: Questionnaires and personal interviews from 301 Italian American and 111 non-Italian women.

TABLE 17
REASONS FOR STAYING IN NASSAU COUNTY

Reason	Italians	Non-Italians
Suburban living	38%	43%
Job	27	22
Family ties	16	9
Home owner	7	9
Other	12	17

Source: Same as table 16, above.

As to why the women had remained in Nassau -- averaging 30 years for Italians, 34 for others -- the responses were similar (table 17): Most said they were content in the county and liked the suburban environment; one in four cited the husband's occupation; family ties was next (slightly more important for Italians, of course), and owning one's home was voiced by a little under 10 percent of both groups.

Being Italian has also been shown to be influential in analyzing women's work. Yans-McLaughlin finds that Italian-born women who are gainfully employed are less likely to work outside the home than other married women.⁵ She and Gambino⁶ point out that when Italian women work, they choose part-time jobs or work whose cares can be left behind at quitting time: such jobs cause minimal disruption of the family and do not threaten the male's role as breadwinner. Of all white working females, Italian women generally have the lowest proportion in professional or technical careers and the highest in manual or operative. Although traditional Italian values dictate that such menial jobs as domestic are unsuitable for females, family or cultural guidance in the choice of careers is lacking.

But are these generalizations reflected in the work patterns and attitudes of Nassau women? Regardless of ethnic

⁵ Family and Community, pp. 53, 364.

⁶ Blood of My Blood, pp. 14, 176, 179.

background or marital status, over half of both groups worked, whether single or married. Despite Italian-born wives' tendency to remain in the home, compared to other women in Nassau County (based on the 1925 Manuscript Census), such a trend was not evident in 1981 among the three generations of Italians studied. Neither did Italian women, more than others, prefer part-time work as posing less of a threat to their husband's status. Three-quarters (73%) of Italian American women interviewed had worked part-time at one time in their lives, but so had the same percentage of non-Italian women. Such evidence suggests that the values of the Italian born regarding women working changed over time. The assimilation process, as well as the movement of the second generation to suburbia, are factors which have assisted in that alteration of behavior.

When Nassau women reported their husbands' attitudes about wives working, similarities were evident between the two groups: 56-58 percent of both groups said their husbands approved. One-quarter of Italian husbands opposed their wives working, especially if there were children, whereas one-fifth of non-Italian husbands were opposed. A larger differential was found in the no-opinion category: Only one in six of Italian husbands were said to have no opinion, as compared with one in five of non-Italian husbands. Finally, unlike their non-Italian counterparts, 3 percent of Italian women said their husbands believed they should work only if

the family needed money. Such differences reveal a more traditional attitude among the Italians. But the similarity between the two groups in the proportion of working wives suggests that their husbands' admonitions were either not taken seriously or not acted upon by these Italian wives.

Similar results were obtained when these women were asked about their parents' attitudes toward women working. A favorable response was reported by half the women in both groups, and a negative attitude was reported by about one in ten, with a slightly higher proportion (13%) for the Italians. One in twenty (6%) of the latter said their parents thought women should work only until marriage, whereas only half as many (3%) non-Italians thought so. Slightly fewer Italian parents (10%) either had no opinion or deferred to their children, as compared with non-Italians (12%).⁷

On the question of attitudes toward a daughter's working, fewer Italian women approved (39%) than did other women (45%); Italian women were also more strongly opposed (32% to 23%) if the daughter had small children at home. Fewer Italian women (24%) would leave the choice up to the daughter, as compared to non-Italians (29%). Such sentiments suggest the staying power of the more conventional beliefs regarding work among Italian women relative to non-Italian.

A comparison of these two groups as to why they worked

⁷ The percentages (47-48%) favoring women's working were almost identical in both groups

outside the home supports the belief that Italian women may indeed think traditionally about their sex roles. Like other American women, both groups said their primary motivation was financial. While the family economy was crucial to the survival of the immigrant generation, the two-family income of today has become a necessity for these women who inhabit an area where the cost of living is one of the highest in the country. Self-fulfillment was the other major reason why women worked, according to this survey. But while both groups cited similar reasons for being employed, non-Italian women were more likely to cite self-fulfillment than the Italians (31% vs. 21%). Perhaps this is because Italian families were more in need of a second income, Italian husbands being somewhat more likely to hold low-level white-collar or blue-collar jobs. But from the limited evidence I have gathered regarding spouse's income, this is doubtful.⁸ Part of the reason may more logically be attributed to the fact that, in contrast to Italian women, more non-Italians were found in high white-collar positions (e.g., teacher, nurse), which may also be more personally rewarding, providing them with more self-satisfaction. Or it may be that Italian women, knowing their husbands or families are apt to

⁸ Of 74 Italian women reporting, 64% of their husbands' incomes were in the range \$25,000 to \$35,000, the same as that for 66% of the husbands of 41 non-Italian women reporting. Women making under \$15,000 were 23% Italians, 29% non-Italians. Mean family income for Nassau residents in 1979 was \$33,702 (Twentieth Census [1980], 2:34ff.).

be critical of women working, try to justify their employment by saying that money is needed. Then again, it may be that Italian women, having less sense of themselves apart from their families, are less likely to see their working as an independent move made primarily for their own well-being.

Despite some differences in attitudes about work, a consideration of their positions shows women in the two groups to be more similar than different. The largest number in both groups were in one of the following occupations: teacher, secretary, clerk, nurse.⁹ When their status is compared, however, differences emerge. While those in the lower white-collar (e.g. clerical) category were equal, there were fewer Italians (33%) than non-Italians (41%) in the high white-collar positions (table 18). More Italian women were bluecollar workers, usually in the semiskilled category, with a preponderance in the garment industry, whereas none of the non-Italian women were employed there.

TABLE 18
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF NASSAU WOMEN

Status	Italians		Non-Italians	
	No.	%	No.	%
High white-collar	59	33%	28	41%
Low white-collar	96	54	37	54
Blue-collar	23	13	4	6

Source: Questionnaires and personal interviews from 301 Italian American and 111 non-Italian women.

⁹ Among Italian positions, salesperson was tied for fourth.

TABLE 19
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF NASSAU DAUGHTERS

Status	Italians		Non-Italians	
	No.	%	No.	%
High white-collar	52	45%	22	61%
Low white-collar	57	50	13	36
Blue-collar	6	5	1	3

Source: Same as table 18, above.

Examination of their daughters' occupations shows a similar pattern. In both groups, the leading occupations are teacher, secretary, and nurse. Comparable proportions from both groups are housewives, are in school or college, or are employed outside the home. But while table 19 shows that almost equal numbers of Italian daughters were found in the high and low white-collar categories, most non-Italian women clustered in the high not the low white-collar group. Slightly more Italian daughters had blue-collar jobs as compared with non-Italian daughters.

A greater difference between types of jobs and status level is found by comparing the occupations of the mothers of women questioned for this survey. Among non-Italians the prevalent job types were teacher, secretary and bookkeeper; for the Italians, they were sewing-machine operator, seamstress, and working in one's own business. Not surprisingly these differences were reflected in the proportion of women holding white-collar and blue-collar jobs (table 20). While 3 percent of Italian mothers were in the high white-collar

category, 27 percent of non-Italian mothers were professional workers. The difference was less in the lower white-collar category. Over two-thirds of Italian mothers were blue-collar workers, while less than one-half of non-Italian mothers (32%) were employed in blue-collar jobs.¹⁰

TABLE 20
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF NASSAU MOTHERS

Status	Italians		Non-Italians	
	No.	%	No.	%
High white-collar	3	3%	11	27%
Low white-collar	32	27	17	41
Blue-collar	81	70	13	32

Source: Questionnaires and personal interviews from 301 Italian American and 111 non-Italian women.

Although the types of jobs these women performed were probably directly related to their educational level, how influential were Italian mores in shaping women's job selections? Women were asked if they had received any counseling regarding jobs and if their parents believed certain jobs to be unsuitable for them because of their ethnic background. While most Nassau women did not receive counseling about jobs, non-Italians were more likely to have received such advice from their parents. More Italian women (16%) than others (11%) indicated that their parents believed certain

¹⁰ Since the women were asked about their mothers' occupation, responses do not reflect the situation in 1981. Most were retired or dead. The largest category for non-Italian mothers was unskilled, while for most Italian mothers it was semiskilled.

jobs to be unsuitable for them because of their ethnic background. As shown above, Italian parents often expressed negative feelings about jobs considered to be degrading, menial, or immodest. Similarly, jobs considered servile (waitress, domestic) or a threat to one's respectability (actress) by non-Italian women were the same as those described by the Italians. Both groups had similar views, therefore, concerning what was suitable work for women, except that Italian parents tended to be more emphatic about it.¹¹ Hence, the difference may be one of degree rather than of kind.

In discussing women's work, Yans-McLaughlin and others point out that Italian-born (and some second-generation) women often obtained jobs through kin and worked under the protective eye of Italian friends or relatives.¹² When Nassau women were asked about this, the Italians were more apt than non-Italians to have worked for friends or relatives. But the answers were similar from both on the question of whether they had obtained a job through relatives or friends. Such a difference may not, however, be attributable to ethnicity alone. It may be that Italian women reported working with friends or relatives more frequently because their

¹¹ This question was probably misunderstood by some of the women replying to the questionnaire; hence, any results not obtained from interviews are tentative, at best.

¹² Family and Community, pp. 203-204.

fathers or other relatives owned the business. Such a situation seemed to be less common among the non-Italians. This pattern could suggest that Italian women more often sought such easy paths toward employment rather than seeking it more independently. That more of their kin had businesses that could use their services made it that much easier to pursue such paths.¹³

On the question of paying board at home, both groups indicated that the practice was customary. However, Italian women (86%) more often contributed to the household than non-Italians (61%). The latter included many middle-class families in which daughters did not contribute. The difference may also suggest, however, a stricter adherence to the Italian working-class tradition of the family economy; or it may imply that Italian daughters were more easily controlled by their parents, less able to assert their independence. Perhaps they, more than other women, felt a greater responsibility to the family.

In discussing the question of moving out of the house before marriage, Italian women exhibited greater dependence within the home. Whereas one in three non-Italian women moved away, fewer than one in twenty Italians of the second and third generation left the nest before getting married.

¹³ Based on questionnaires and interviews from Italian and non-Italian women; Italian-born women excluded because there was only one foreign-born non-Italian woman for comparison.

In talking about this issue, two of the non-Italians explained it quite differently from the way Italian women had, as noted in the previous chapters. Marilyn, aged 59, said she "never planned to live at home with [my] parents That wasn't my cup of tea."¹⁴ And Betty: "I wasn't aware that I should be home. [It was] part of my expectations that I would live on my own."¹⁵

Although most Italian Americans interviewed did not move out of the house, more than one-fifth of them thought about doing so; only one-twentieth of the non-Italians had done so.¹⁶ Probably parental pressure and their own reluctance to take the initiative prevented many Italian women from moving. As mentioned previously, many realized that leaving home was frowned upon, and few Italian women wanted to bring shame on themselves and their families. A 45-year-old second-generation Italian, told she could not share an apartment with three female coworkers in 1957, explained: "You just didn't rebel. I didn't know how. Today I would have moved out."¹⁷

The restrictive and protective environment of the Italian home is also reflected in the number of women who atten-

¹⁴ Interview with M.P., Manhasset, 8/31/81.

¹⁵ Interview with B.S., Manhasset, 8/5/81.

¹⁶ From interviews with second and third generation Italians and non-Italians.

¹⁷ Interview with J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

ded local colleges. Only 14 percent of Italian women went to colleges outside of the New York Metropolitan area. The figure (44%) was much higher for non-Italians. My interviews suggest that non-Italian parents were less reluctant to send their daughters away from home; a 63-year-old woman from Oceanside recalled: "My mother was quite firm in wanting me to go [to college] out of the New York area. As an only child, this would be an experience." Marilyn, who went to the University of Southern California in the 1930s, said that her mother so far from lamenting her going helped her pack her bags. A 45-year-old woman, who went to Syracuse University in the 1950s, reported that she wanted to get away from home and her father was glad to see her go.¹⁸

Compared to the college-educated brothers of non-Italian women, the brothers of Italian American women were also less likely to go to college away from home. Two out of three brothers of the former went away from home if they attended college, whereas the figure was two out of five among the Italians. This evidence supports Gambino¹⁹ and others who have noted the tendency of Italian children to be bound to the home. It also suggests that Italian daughters were more sheltered than their brothers.

Differences between the two groups are still evident

¹⁸ Interviews with: B.K., Merrick Library, Merrick, 9/8/81; B.S., Manhasset, 8/5/81; M.D., Garden City, 7/29/81.

¹⁹ Blood of My Blood, p.36.

among the children of these women. Daughters of second- and third-generation Italian women are still less likely to go away to college (40%) than their non-Italian counterparts (56%). Although the gap is less pronounced, sons of Italian women were somewhat less likely to attend out-of-town colleges (53%) than those from the non-Italian group (57%).

While these examples illustrate the point, most Nassau Italian women in this sample never attended college. The low record of formal education among Italians is well known. Earning a living tended to be the first priority for the Italian-born; hence a utilitarian vocation was valued over education for education's sake. Such skills could often be acquired without formal education. Daughters were expected to prepare themselves educationally for their future as wives and mothers. Life in America and the decision to stay there helped reshape these commitments, along with the changing economy.²⁰ Cohen has shown how family support of education for women in New York City came about in the interwar period. These second-generation daughters completed high school so they would be prepared for the clerical positions that were increasingly available. However, Cohen also noted that on the whole these women were more educated than their male counterparts, who still sought blue-collar employment in construction and other trades that did not

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 245-247, 338.

require a high school diploma.²¹

The educational level of the Italian women tends to confirm the stereotype: While they were a highly educated group, they were somewhat less educated than other women on every level, especially post-high school (table 21). Nearly three-fourths (72%) of the Italians were high school graduates, which was approximately the same (75%) as for non-Italian women. But only two-fifths of Italian women took courses beyond high school, as compared with over half of the non-Italian.²² For Italians, it seems, higher education was not a priority: completing high school was enough.

TABLE 21
WOMEN'S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level	Italians (%)	Non-Italians (%)
Grammar school only	8	0
High school: Attended	6	8
Graduated	33	20
Business/trade school	14	17
College: Attended	14	18
Graduated	11	13
Postgraduate: Courses	3	9
Degree	12	15

Source: Questionnaires and personal interviews from 301 Italian American and 111 non-Italian women.

²¹ "From Workshop to Office," pp. 218ff., 287.

²² According to the 1980 census, 76% of Nassau women aged 25 and over had completed high school (General Social and Economic Characteristics: New York, 2:34-951).

For the daughters of these women, the level of education had improved markedly over the previous generation, even if they had not caught up to the non-Italian group (table 22). Half of the daughters had attained a college degree, as compared to two-thirds of the other group. Non-Italian daughters were more likely (21% to 17%) to have taken some college as compared to the Italians, and it

TABLE 22
DAUGHTERS' HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Level	Italians (%)	Non-Italians(%)
Grammar school only	1	0
High school: Attended	0	0
Graduated	21	11
Business/trade school	6	5
College: Attended	17	21
Graduated	32	35
Postgraduate: Courses	11	11
Degree	12	12

Source: Personal interviews and questionnaires.

appears that twice as many Italians stopped with a high school diploma. Hence, again, the importance of obtaining education beyond the high school level appears to be less crucial for Italians.

These comparisons show that it has taken time for increasing numbers of Italian women to pursue educational opportunities beyond high school and thereby approach the cultural levels of other American women. Part of the reason for such a pattern is that the Italian women came from homes which were less affluent than those of non-Italians; so

financial considerations may have been more influential in shaping educational pursuits.²³ In addition, parental attitudes are worth noting. Although half the Italian women interviewed said their parents had a positive view toward women's education, when measured against the non-Italian group, parents of Italian women were somewhat less apt to express favorable opinions about education. More Italian parents than non-Italian held unfavorable or indifferent attitudes about education.²⁴ The proportion of parents holding two opposing views about their daughter's schooling was slightly higher for the Italians. The different educational levels between the two groups might help to explain their attitudes on education. Usually, when Italians said education was good for a woman, they meant finishing high school or vocational school. Such training for either a single or married woman would prepare her to help the family. One 55-year-old woman reported that her parents "always stressed" having a high school diploma; Catherine recalled that

²³ Their fathers' status was as follows:

Status	Italian		Non-Italian	
	No.	%	No.	%
High white collar	22	8	28	27
Low white collar	89	32	23	22
Skilled	83	30	28	27
Semiskilled	19	7	8	8
Unskilled	57	21	14	14
Agriculture	6	2	3	3

²⁴ Italians held unfavorable or indifferent attitudes in 30-35% of the cases, as compared to less than 10% of non-Italians.

"the all-important thing was to graduate high school."²⁵ For non-Italian women, however, parents tended to think of their daughters' finishing college. Whereas fewer than one in ten Italian parents encouraged their daughters to attend college, the proportion was one in eight for non-Italians.

When these women were asked their attitude concerning education for their own daughters, the responses of both groups were practically identical: 87-89% in favor; opposed, 4-5%. As for leaving the decision to the daughter: 6-8% in both Italians and non-Italians.²⁶

On the question of sons' education versus daughters' there was a greater difference. Although half the women (50-54%) of both groups received the same amount of schooling as their brothers, one fourth (28%) of Italian women received more education than their brothers, whereas fewer than one in ten non-Italian women outdistanced their male siblings.²⁷ Such is also the case with regard to the daughters of each group. When compared to their male siblings, half (52%) of each group of daughters had achieved the same educational level as their brothers. One in five Italian daughters (versus 1 in 10 non-Italian) received more years

²⁵ Questionnaire #212; interview with C.S., Garden City, 2/27/82.

²⁶ One percent of Italian women reported disagreement with their husbands on the daughters' education.

²⁷ But 22% of Italian women and 37% of non-Italians had fewer years of schooling than their brothers.

of schooling than their male siblings. These figures corroborate Cohen's findings that higher education was not a necessity for Italian males, who continue to dominate the blue-collar field.

In order to test the hypothesis that Italians valued practical, vocationally oriented education, women were asked if their schooling had prepared them for a specific job. There was very little difference between the two groups: Italians (71%) and non-Italians (65%) said it had. Perhaps the clue lies in the word "usefulness": For the Italians, being a secretary, teacher, a designer (or even an operator) in the fashion industry was an acceptable goal, whereas the non-Italians mentioned a much greater range of positions, but also with teacher or secretary as prevalent.

Any attempt to highlight the distinctiveness of being Italian would not be complete without an examination of religious practices. For Italians, as compared with other Catholics, religion has played a different, less crucial role. Greeley notes that Italians, compared with other Catholics, were the least pious. Although they considered church attendance less important, they believed that their children should be baptized and receive religious instruction in preparation for First Communion and confirmation. Most Italian-born distrusted the Catholic Church in this country. Few sent their children to parochial schools. Their tradition of feasts honoring patron saints, and their belief

in such superstitions as the evil eye appalled other Catholics. Gambino asserts that with the move to the suburbs religion may have played a greater role in the lives of Italian Americans as they became "Hibernianized."²⁸

In the interviews women were asked how religion had affected the way they were raised. While responses were not directly quantifiable, some general impressions were obtained. Non-Italian women who were also Catholic were twice as likely as Italians to say that religion had played a major role, using such phrases as, "Most vital part of my life," "center of our lives," "strongly" affected "my upbringing." By contrast, Italians said religion had had a "moderate" influence on them, that attending mass was the "visible part" of religion in their childhood.²⁹ Others said religion had shaped their moral values; still others, that religion had played but a small part in their lives. Four out of 172 simply said, "None." Asked how religion had affected the way she was raised, Jennie said, "It didn't."

²⁸ Greeley, Why Can't They Be Like Us?, p. 68; Blood of My Blood, pp. 232-234, 241. Also: Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants," p. 237; Feminella and Quadagno, "Italian American Family," pp. 68-69.

²⁹ Questionnaire #78; interview with: G.R., Oceanside, 9/23/81; P.E., Garden City, 9/21/81; S.O., Merrick, 4/20/81. Pat, who had attended Catholic school, said religion had "thoroughly" affected the way she was raised and that she and her friends had thought about becoming nuns. They had played with their holy-water fonts and used Necco wafers for "communion." No such response was recorded for the Italian American women.

No such answers came from the non-Italians.³⁰

The Italian response as a whole tends to be indicative of the secondary role that religion characteristically played in Italian life. Italian women were not at all apologetic about the fact that religion was not a major factor in their lives. Ida recalled : "Religion was never a big thing in my house. My parents were not really very religious." Mary: "We were not staunch Catholics."³¹ Another woman reported, "[Those] mores that paralleled Italian customs were carried over; otherwise, we were taught at home to take [religion] with a grain of salt."³²

When asked how often their family had attended church when they were children, nine out of ten women, Italians and non-Italians alike, reported regular attendance at church. Almost without exception, they said they and their children went to religious instruction and received First Communion and confirmation. One gets the impression from the interviews, however, that non-Italians continued going to church after adolescence, while many Italians reported parental pressures to attend easing off at that time. Mary noted that after confirmation she was free to do as she pleased about going to church. Jerre and her brothers "had to go

³⁰ Interview with J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

³¹ Interview with M.M., Merrick, 5/7/81.

³² Questionnaire #337.

until we made confirmation and then after that if you didn't want to go they didn't really push you."³³

On the question of who in the family went to church in their youth, three-quarters (77%) of non-Italians said they all did, but only one-third (36%) of the Italians said that. Only mothers and children attended in one-third of Italian families, twice the frequency (one-sixth) of non-Italian families. Children went to church alone in one-sixth of Italian families, but only one in twenty non-Italian. Jennie recalled that, while she and her siblings went to church, her mother stayed home to cook.³⁴

When questioned about church attendance in their own families, Italians reported much lower frequency than non-Italians: almost nine out of ten (88%) among the latter, six of ten (63%) among the former. Similarly, infrequent or no attendance was much higher (17-20%) for Italians as compared with non-Italian Catholics (5-7%).

Among the families of Nassau Catholics, according to these women, the whole family was as likely to attend church (36%) as the woman herself (36%). Otherwise, the husband and wife together were most likely to attend (20%). In surveying Italian American women, the woman herself was

³³ Interviews with: M.M., Merrick, 5/7/81; J.L., Bellmore, 6/3/81. Infrequent attendance was approximately the same for both Italians and non-Italians (5-6%).

³⁴ Interview with J.D., Port Washington, 7/18/81.

the most frequent church attender (31%), followed by the whole family (27%), and the husband and wife (21%). Hence, when measured against other Catholics, Italians tend to have less regular church attendance by fewer family members.

A similar pattern is revealed in figures gathered from women concerning church attendance in their daughters' families. Both groups reported regular church attendance (65% non-Italian, 53% Italian), although again the proportion was lower among the Italians. Italians were also slightly more likely to attend church irregularly (7%) than other Catholics (5%). Non-attendance was again higher for the Italians (40% versus 30%). Whether they were Italian (56%) or not (65%), in most of their daughters' families everyone attended church. Among non-Italian Catholics, a daughter and her children were more likely to go to mass (25%) when compared to the Italian group (13%). For the latter, a daughter alone attending church (19%) was a more frequent occurrence than in the non-Italian group (13%). Again daughters of Italian women had a worse record on the frequency of church attendance, as well as on the proportion of family members who went to church services.

Just as church attendance of Italian women was lower than that of other Catholics, so was their attendance at parochial schools. Half as many Italian women (22%) as non-Italian (44%) said they had gone to Catholic schools. As Gambino has shown, while such a pattern is characteristic of

first- and second-generation Italians, more third- and fourth-generations are attending these schools, but not primarily for religious reasons.³⁵ The main reason, among the Italian parents who helped to establish parochial schools in the suburbs, seems to have been the hope of maintaining their children's ethnic character. Nevertheless, it does not appear that there is an appreciable increase in Catholic school attendance among children of Italian women surveyed and they still lag behind other Catholics. One-fourth of Italian interviewees said they sent at least one child to Catholic school, while 29 percent of other Catholic women did so. Although it is risky to formulate conclusions on the basis of small numbers, my interviews with non-Italian Catholics suggest that their main reason for attending parochial schools was religious, whereas the parents of Italian interviewees believed that such schools provided better education.³⁶ Thus, while not unimportant for Italian women, religious piety did not appear to be the prime motivating force in choosing a parochial school.

But these figures should not be interpreted too narrowly. Nassau Italians still practice many religious traditions from their ethnic heritage. In keeping with the empha-

³⁵ Blood of My Blood, p. 240. My questionnaire did not ask why women went to Catholic schools or sent their children.

³⁶ Nevertheless, there does not appear to be any appreciable increase in Catholic school attendance among the children of Italian women surveyed.

sis on home and family, attending feasts to honor patron saints was reported by the parents of many Italian women (71%), although less so in their own families (44%). No similar activity was reported in interviews with non-Italians. Belief in the evil eye was common in over one-fourth (29%) of Italian women's parents, but only one in eight non-Italians recalled superstitious beliefs in her own family. One Italian woman in twenty reported this belief; no non-Italians did. Religious symbols -- crucifixes, statues, saints' pictures -- were found in a majority (53%) of Italian women's homes and in those of their mothers, but among the small number of Catholic non-Italians interviewed, the proportion was only one in four, although one in three said their mothers had had such symbols.³⁷

Not surprisingly, because of their distrust of the institutional church, as well as their more personal and home-oriented attitude toward religion, Nassau Italian women and their mothers were less involved in church organizations than their Catholic counterparts. For example, while half the non-Italians interviewed belonged to church organizations, less than one-quarter of the Italians did. Among mothers of the former, two-fifths were members of religious groups; one-fifth of Italian mothers were. Among daughters of these groups, participation rates were still higher for

³⁷ While Italians mentioned their observance of saints days, non-Italian Catholics did not.

non-Italians. Only 8 percent of Italian daughters were involved in church associations, 13 percent of other Catholic daughters were.

My findings tend to confirm those of other scholars³⁸ in that Italians are not generally "joiners" as compared to other white ethnic groups. Asked if their mothers belonged to any sort of group, three-fifths (64%) of non-Italian women said yes, but less than one-third (31%) of Italians said their mothers were group members. Moreover, non-Italian women were also more likely to be group members (82%) than the Italian women (68%). The former more often belonged to more than one organization (55%) than the Italian females (36%). This was also true for the daughters of both groups.³⁹

Although I have found no scholarship regarding Italian women's recent involvement in organizations, Yans-McLaughlin found Italian women's involvement in Buffalo in the first third of this century to be minimal, usually limited to the more educated and affluent. Those who were group-oriented formed religious, national, charitable, political, or labor associations, most of which were created during the First World War. Women in these groups devoted themselves to "proper female functions." They usually acted in familial roles rather than as individuals, so that their involvement

³⁸ Gambino, Blood of My Blood, p. 324.

³⁹ Group membership: 35% among Italian daughters, 71% among non-Italians, who often belonged to several groups.

did not necessarily signal the Italian woman's independence, although they do indicate a departure from the traditional home-orientation of Italian women.⁴⁰

A consideration of the types of groups Italian women joined shows that they joined such as were similar to those studied by Yans-McLaughlin: church groups (21%) or of child-oriented groups (22%), such as the PTA. Among non-Italian women, the largest proportion were also members of church groups (25%), but social groups (27%) were next in importance. Mothers of the Italian women questioned were most often members of church groups (51%) or child-oriented groups (14%). Religious groups also ranked first among non-Italian mothers (39%), followed by civic groups (19%). Daughters of these women exhibited a somewhat different pattern: non-Italians favored groups that were social (30%) and child-oriented (28%). Italian daughters favored social groups (31%) and work-related organizations (23%). This suggests that Italian women generally participated in groups which did not threaten their traditional roles. But non-Italian women also had high participation rates in similar groups (tables 23 and 24). Perhaps a better measure of Italian women's traditionalism is that, while neither group could be characterized as feminist, fewer Italian women were members of such groups than non-Italian women. In addition,

⁴⁰ Family and Community, pp. 244-247.

among mothers and Italian women themselves, involvement in civic organizations was less than among the non-Italian group, while membership in ethnic associations was greater.

In patterns of work, education, religion, and group affiliation, distinctions between Italian women and others have been indicated. But the influence of Italian values on women is most apparent in their personal behavior, tending toward a more traditional conception of gender roles.⁴¹ The protection and supervision of women, a customary practice in Italian families, which frequently stifled their independence and sense of identity, were perpetuated beyond the first generation. This is especially apparent when contrasted with the experiences of eighteen non-Italian interviewees ranging in age from 35 to 80.

TABLE 23
TYPE OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF NASSAU MOTHERS

Type of Group	Italians	Non-Italians
Church	51%	39%
Children	14	9
Ethnic	3	1
Social	13	13
Civic	4	19
Political	10	2
Work	4	2
Fraternal	1	15

Source: Questionnaires and personal interviews from 301 Italian American and 111 non-Italian women.

⁴¹ Femminella and Quadagno, "The Italian American Family," pp. 79-80.

TABLE 24
TYPE OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF NASSAU WOMEN

Type of Group	Italians	Non-Italians
Church	21%	25%
Children	22	16
Ethnic	9	1
Social	18	27
Civic	8	14
Political	8	3
Work	9	5
Fraternal	5	4
Feminist	--	4

Source: Same as table 23, above.

TABLE 25
TYPE OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF NASSAU DAUGHTERS

Type of Group	Italians	Non-Italians
Church	19%	19%
Children	19	28
Ethnic	--	--
Social	31	30
Civic	8	6
Political	--	--
Work	23	19
Fraternal	--	--

Source: Same as table 23, above.

The feeling tone of interviews with Italian women was quite different from that with other women, largely because of the Italians' stronger sense of ethnic identity. When second and third generation Italian interviewees were asked, for example, "How do you think of yourself? - as Italian, Italian American, or American?" only one in eight replied, "American"; over one-fourth said, "Italian," and the majority (60%), "Italian American."⁴² Among non-Italians,

⁴² Women answering questionnaires were not asked this.

one-third labeled themselves "American." Asked about the number of ethnic customs they observed, Italian women showed a greater propensity to follow these traditions: only one in a hundred said, "None," as compared to one out of five non-Italians. Half the Italians who followed their traditional rites said they practiced between four and six, as compared to a maximum of three among non-Italians. Such customs included: speaking a foreign language in the family, reading ethnic publications, cooking ethnic foods, celebrating holidays according to traditional forms, and telling stories or proverbs from their heritage.⁴³

When asked about discrimination on the job, Italian women more often than non-Italians (13% to 6%) felt they had experienced prejudice because of their ethnic background. Italians also felt they had been treated differently in school because of their ethnic background (27% vs. 11%).

When interviewees were asked how their ethnic background had affected the way they were raised, Italian women more often acknowledged their ethnicity, their Italianness, and emphasized respect, obedience, and the importance of family. In contrast, non-Italian women sought to deemphasize their ethnicity. Lillian, 74, growing up in lower Manhattan, said her Irish background did not influence how she was

⁴³ Among non-Italians, 45% replied that they were ethnic Americans; 18% simply used their ethnic background to describe themselves, e.g. German, Irish. On the questionnaire a place was provided for listing "other" ethnic customs.

raised. To her, ethnic backgrounds "didn't seem to exist" at the time. On three separate occasions during an interview with a 63-year-old Hungarian woman who had been raised in Wisconsin, she emphasized her lack of ethnic awareness: "We didn't have those big ethnic divisions that we have here in the East," she said, adding that her family was "not ethnically oriented." A Manhattan-bred woman of the same age, discussing her German-Russian-Jewish heritage, said, "I don't think it affected anything. I don't think we were raised very differently." Mary, an Irish Catholic who spent her childhood in Brooklyn, reported that she did not see any difference between her family life and that of other ethnic groups. Another Irish Catholic, 47, raised in Queens, admitted that she had never paid much attention to ethnic and religious backgrounds. Marjorie, 43, who also lived in Queens until age 13, believed that her German, French, and Hungarian background had had no influence on her upbringing.⁴⁴ Finally, a German-Irish Massapequa woman wrote:

Had trouble answering some of these questions. Not the answers, but found difficulty relating to the questions - I believe because I'm not ethnic enough.⁴⁵

Besides denying the importance of ethnicity in their upbringing, non-Italian women more often emphasized their

⁴⁴ Interviews with: L.L., Merrick, 11/3/81; B.S., Manhasset, 8/5/81; B.K., Merrick, 9/8/81; M.W., Merrick, 3/7/81; M.R., Plainedge, 7/25/81; M.D., Garden City, 7/29/81.

⁴⁵ Questionnaire #24.

freedom, not the restrictions that governed their youth, adolescence, and early adulthood. Even when they mentioned rules, restrictions, or instances of inequality, non-Italian women tended to be more matter-of-fact about them than did the Italian women. Again and again, Italian women used the word "strict" to describe their upbringing, often becoming emotional and resentful in discussing it.

Non-Italians characterized their growing up in more detached terms. Evelyn, for example: "My parents were very lenient. I did just about as I wanted." Margaret, raised in Rockville Centre, recalled: "We were always a liberal family." A Massapequa woman, 46, talking about growing up in Brooklyn: "I don't think I was ever restrained or restricted."⁴⁶ Replying to the question, How were you treated in relation to your brother(s), three-fourths of the non-Italian women who had brothers reported no difference in treatment, whereas only two-fifths of the Italian women so replied. Mary, growing up in Whitestone with her brother and sister, said there were no restrictions on them: regardless of gender, they could "go out and come home whenever [they] wanted to." A Garden City woman reported: "I was given a great deal of freedom and my brothers were given a great deal of freedom to grow. We were never held down to any

⁴⁶ Interviews with: E.C., Merrick, 10/27/81; M.H., Rockville Centre, 9/21/81; P.B., Massapequa, 9/9/81; G.R., Oceanside, 9/23/81; M.P., Manhasset, 8/31/81; M.D., Garden City, 7/29/81.

great degree." Another woman, from Massapequa, recalled that, although some chores at home were performed by both sexes, the females did the ironing. But she considered this an equitable arrangement because, "If I ironed my brother's shirt, he had to pay me."⁴⁷

What is noticeable about these interviews is that none of the women, unlike the Italians, mentioned conflicts over the sexual division of labor. Even women who admitted differences in treatment between boys and girls told how they received concessions from their parents in other ways. Marilyn, for instance, acknowledged that her brothers could stay out later than the girls but added that they could more easily get the use of the family car.⁴⁸ It is significant that none of these women used the word "sheltered," as did the Italians, in talking about their upbringing.

While parental attitudes for both groups concerning dress, smoking, drinking, and hair-dyeing tended to be similar, restrictions on the use of makeup were more frequent in the case of Italian interviewees, whose families were more apt to express negative feelings about it. Naturally, therefore, more Italians used makeup without parental consent than did the non-Italians. More than twice as many of latter recalled no parental restrictions about the use of

⁴⁷ Interviews with: M.R., Plainedge, 7/25/81; M.D., Garden City, 7/29/81; E.G., Massapequa, 8/8/81.

⁴⁸ Interview with M.P., Manhasset, 8/31/81.

cosmetics. In general, parental reaction to the use of makeup was also less violent. Phyllis, for example, said, "I don't think there was any arguing about any of these things," referring to makeup, smoking, hair-dyeing, and so forth. But the use of makeup by Italian women seemed to challenge traditional values about how a woman ought to appear: the "natural" look, that is, supposedly the mark of a woman's respectability. Because it was a more serious matter, therefore, going against parental wishes and/or orders by using makeup provoked a greater reaction in Italian families than in others, where one did not find the counterpart of the Italian daughter being hit for wearing lipstick.⁴⁹

Supervision of dating was also more common among Italian women. While unheard of among the non-Italian group, chaperonage was a fairly common practice among some first- and second-generation Italian women. Moreover, many of the first and even second generation also reported having dated only their husbands. That is probably why one finds that many Italian women dated on the sly, in contrast to the non-Italian group in which such behavior was nonexistent. On the other hand, although both groups had curfews, the proportion was higher among Italian women. Such regulations were more strictly enforced among Italian families; an

⁴⁹ Interviews with P.B., Massapequa, 9/9/81; S.M., Wantagh, 6/13/81.

Irish woman remarked, "Never, ever, was anything said if you came in late." In contrast, an Italian woman from Westbury reported that when she came home 15 minutes late, her father dislocated her jaw.⁵⁰ Although these cases represent two extremes, they illustrate the importance of obedience to rules in an Italian home.

Dating was more subtly controlled by Italian parents who also tended to make it known that they preferred that their daughters date and marry Italians. Hence, while a majority of both groups indicated that they could and did date young men of any and all ethnic or religious backgrounds, Italian women were more inclined to say that their parents preferred an Italian boy. The non-Italian group reported that their parents tended to favor young men who were of the same religion. A somewhat similar pattern was revealed in responses concerning the importance of a man's religion and ethnicity in marriage. Both groups said their parents favored a husband of the same religion, but Italian women gave ethnicity a higher priority than did the other group. These findings are supported by a comparison of the ethnic and religious backgrounds of mates of Italian Catholics and other Nassau women. Among the latter, 36 percent married men having the same religious and ethnic backgrounds as their own, while 67 percent of the spouses of

⁵⁰ Interviews with: M.R., Plainedge, 7/25/81; J.B., Westbury, 9/24/81.

Italian women were also Italian Catholic. But while ethnicity seemed to be more important for Italian women, marrying within the same faith took precedence among other Nassau women. Almost half (48%) of the latter indicated that they had married a man having the same religion: 91 percent of the Italian Catholic women married Catholics.⁵¹

Finally, in order to explore Italian protectiveness at its most personal level, women were asked if they received information about sex before marriage; they were also questioned about birth control and abortion. Slightly fewer Italian women (67%) than non-Italian (73%) said they had received information about sex before marriage, and both groups reported the same sources: mothers, friends, books. But while non-Italian women were just as likely to be informed by their mothers as by their friends, this was not the case with Italians, suggesting that Italian mothers and daughters were more reluctant to discuss sexual matters. Unfortunately, such reluctance often meant providing no information at all. Many Italian girls therefore relied on friends who were probably no better informed than themselves. Similarly, many Italian women were less likely than others to be informed about menstruation, a greater proportion of them learning about it only after it had happened.

⁵¹ The largest ethnic group (22) in my sample was Irish. Half of the husbands of Irish women were also Irish, and all of the Irish women had married Catholic men.

Even more uncommon were discussions of birth control and abortion. Compared to non-Italians, a smaller proportion of Italian women admitted that they or their mothers had practiced birth control. Three non-Italian women told of having obtained some form of birth control devices before marriage. In addition, compared to the non-Italian group, birth control was less likely to be discussed with friends or relatives, according to Italian women. The subject of abortion was more taboo among Italians, but more Italian women knew relatives or friends who had had abortions; several of the women had had one or more themselves. This situation is understandable if we realize that the non-Italian women were more apt to use birth control and that over 40 percent were Catholics who would not consider having an abortion.

In conclusion, there were important differences in the lives of these Italian and non-Italian women, although both resided in Nassau County. That Italian traditions of familism and male superiority were especially influential in shaping such difference in behavior suggests that living in suburbia did not bring about complete assimilation. Italian women tended, even after marriage, to live nearer their kin and maintain closer contact with family. They were more likely to reflect their parents' opinion that certain jobs were unsuitable for women and they worked with or for relatives more often than non-Italians. Italians paid board at

home more frequently and a smaller percentage of them moved out of the house or left home to go away to college. More husbands were opposed to their working outside the home, and the women themselves held more traditional attitudes about work in that they were less likely than other women to consider self-fulfillment as a goal. And a greater percentage of them were opposed to their own daughters' working if they had children.

Religion tended to be less important in the lives of Italians as compared with other Catholic women. The former did not attend church as often and neither did they attend in families as frequently as other Catholics did. Similarly, Italians were less likely to belong to church organizations but, on the other hand, they often followed religious traditions and practices carried over from Italy and they were more apt to display religious objects -- crucifixes, pictures of the Virgin Mary, images of saints -- in their homes than other Catholics.

Another evidence of the home and family orientation of Italian women is the fact that fewer mothers of Italian women were members of groups, particularly, civic or feminist organizations, although they frequently joined religious and child-oriented groups. Within the home, Italian women seemed to be more controlled -- more sheltered, protected, restricted -- than other women. Italian girls were more apt to feel that they were treated differently from their

brothers, particularly in the matter of chores and the relative freedom allowed each gender.

Restrictions were also greater for Italian women in matters of makeup and dating. Compared to non-Italians, their parents seemed to put more pressure on them to date and marry Italians. All of which indicates that these women possessed a greater ethnic awareness than other women: they were more apt to think of themselves as Italians first and Americans second; they followed more ethnic customs and observed a greater number of traditions brought over from the Old Country. As a result, perhaps, more Italian women than others felt that they had been treated differently at school or at work.

From all such evidence it appears that Italian mores were influential in shaping the Italian woman's life and that of her children. Living in a suburban county did not give rise to full assimilation. Yet, over the course of three generations Italian mores have lost some of their importance as the behavior of the Italian American woman, as shown in her work patterns and educational level, approaches that of other American suburban women.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS A PART OF MY STUDY WHICH TRACES
GENERATIONAL AND ETHNIC CHANGES AMONG NASSAU COUNTY WOMEN.
THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS. PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS WITH
A RESPONSE THAT BEST EXPLAINS YOUR EXPERIENCE. IF THE
QUESTION DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU PUT N.A.

CITY OR VILLAGE OF RESIDENCE _____ YOUR INCOME _____
BIRTH DATE _____ HUSBAND'S INCOME _____
BIRTH PLACE _____
MARITAL STATUS _____
DATE OF MARRIAGE _____
YOUR AGE AT BIRTH OF FIRST CHILD _____ YOUR AGE AT BIRTH OF
YOUR OCCUPATION _____ LAST CHILD _____
WHAT IS YOUR HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION _____
(OR WAS) YOUR MOTHER'S OCCUPATION _____
YOUR FATHER'S OCCUPATION _____
YOUR MOTHER'S AGE AT THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST CHILD _____ LAST
CHILD _____
AGE OF YOUR MOTHER AT HER MARRIAGE _____
AGE OF YOUR DAUGHTER AT HER MARRIAGE _____
DAUGHTER'S AGE AT THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST CHILD _____
YOUR HUSBAND'S AGE WHEN HE MARRIED YOU _____
WHAT IS YOUR HUSBAND'S ETHNIC BACKGROUND?

WHAT IS YOUR ETHNIC BACKGROUND?

ARE YOU FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD GENERATION?

ARE YOU CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, JEWISH, OR OTHER?

IS YOUR HUSBAND CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, JEWISH, OR OTHER?

COULD YOU PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
(SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, OR OTHER SCHOOLS ATTENDED)?

WHAT WAS YOUR PARENTS' ATTITUDE ABOUT EDUCATION FOR WOMEN?

DID YOUR EDUCATION PREPARE YOU FOR A SPECIFIC JOB? WHAT WAS IT?

WERE THERE ANY JOBS YOUR PARENTS FELT WERE UNSUITABLE FOR YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR ETHNIC BACKGROUND? WHAT WERE THEY?

WOULD YOU PLEASE LIST YOUR FIRST AND LAST FULL TIME JOB?

DID YOU EVER WORK PART TIME? WHAT DID YOU DO?

WHY DO YOU (DID YOU) WORK?

WHAT WAS YOUR PARENTS' ATTITUDE ABOUT WOMEN WORKING?

WHO ATTENDED CHURCH IN YOUR FATHER'S FAMILY? HOW MANY TIMES EACH MONTH DID THEY GO?

WHAT PART DID RELIGION PLAY IN YOUR CHILDHOOD?

HOW WERE DECISIONS MADE BETWEEN YOUR PARENTS?

WHO HANDLED THE MONEY IN YOUR PARENTS' HOUSEHOLD?

DID YOUR MOTHER BELONG TO ANY GROUPS OR ORGANIZATIONS? WHICH ONES?

HOW MANY CHILDREN DID YOUR MOTHER HAVE?

DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY RELATIVES LIVING WITHIN YOUR PARENTS' HOUSE? WHO? WHEN?

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE MEN YOU DATED.

DID YOU RECEIVE ANY INFORMANTION ABOUT SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE? FROM WHOM?

WHY DID YOU MARRY WHEN YOU DID? HOW DID YOUR FAMILY INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION?

PLEASE LIST THE NAMES AND OCCUPATIONS OF YOUR CHILDREN.

HOW ARE DECISIONS (LIKE MOVING) MADE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND?

WHO USUALLY PAYS THE BILLS, BALANCES THE CHECKBOOK, ETC.?

HOW DOES YOUR HUSBAND FEEL ABOUT YOU WORKING?

DOES YOUR HUSBAND SHARE THE HOUSEWORK WITH YOU?

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU LIVED IN NASSAU COUNTY?

WHY DID YOUR FAMILY MOVE TO NASSAU COUNTY?

WHY HAVE YOU REMAINED IN NASSAU COUNTY?

HOW WAS THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF YOUR PARENTS DIFFERENT FROM YOURS? (ETHNICALLY)

DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY RELATIVES LIVING WITH YOU? WHO AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT FRIENDS OR NEIGHBORS?

ARE YOU IN WEEKLY CONTACT WITH YOUR FAMILY (PARENTS, CHILDREN)?

WHERE DO MOST OF YOUR RELATIVES LIVE? (IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, IN THE COUNTY, IN THE STATE, OUTSIDE THE STATE)

ARE YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS NEIGHBORS, CO-WORKERS, FRIENDS FROM CHURCH, OR FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL?

DO YOU USUALLY SOCIALIZE IN COUPLES OR JUST WITH YOUR FEMALE FRIENDS?

WHAT GROUPS OR ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU A MEMBER OF? IN WHICH ARE YOU MOST ACTIVE?

WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

WHO ATTENDS CHURCH IN YOUR FAMILY? HOW MANY TIMES EACH MONTH DO YOU GO?

RECENTLY MANY AMERICANS HAVE "DISCOVERED" THEIR RICH ETHNIC HERITAGE. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ETHNIC CUSTOMS OR CHARACTERISTICS HAVE YOU KEPT ALIVE WITHIN YOUR FAMILY? CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY.

_____ AN ETHNIC LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN WITH FAMILY MEMBERS
_____ YOU READ A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PAPER OR MAGAZINE OR
_____ AN ETHNIC PUBLICATION
_____ YOU COOK ETHNIC FOODS
_____ YOU CELEBRATE CERTAIN ETHNIC HOLIDAYS
_____ YOU INCORPORATE ETHNIC CUSTOMS IN YOUR CELEBRATION
_____ OF CHRISTMAS, EASTER, ETC.
_____ YOU PRACTICE CERTAIN SUPERSTITIONS RELATED TO YOUR
_____ ETHNICITY
_____ YOU ATTEND FEASTS ON CERTAIN SAINTS' DAYS
_____ YOU TELL STORIES OR PROVERBS RELATED TO YOUR
_____ ETHNIC HERITAGE

IF I HAVE NOT MENTIONED AN ETHNIC CUSTOM YOU FEEL IS IMPORTANT, PLEASE LIST IT BELOW:

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND.

WHAT IS YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND'S ATTITUDE ABOUT EDUCATION FOR WOMEN? (YOUR DAUGHTER FOR EXAMPLE)

HOW DO YOU BOTH FEEL ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER(S) WORKING WHETHER SHE IS SINGLE, MARRIED, OR A MOTHER?

HOW MANY CHILDREN DOES YOUR DAUGHTER HAVE?

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE MEN YOUR DAUGHTER(S) DATED:

WHAT IS THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE MAN YOUR DAUGHTER(S) MARRIED?

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE IN YOUR DAUGHTER'S FAMILY?

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS OR GROUPS IS YOUR DAUGHTER(S) A MEMBER OF?

WHO ATTENDS CHURCH IN YOUR DAUGHTER'S FAMILY? HOW MANY TIMES PER MONTH?

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MAKE-UP OF YOUR DAUGHTER'S NEIGHBORHOOD.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THREE OF YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS:

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR HUSBAND'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. Family Background.

1. When and where were you born?
2. Would you tell me about your childhood in _____.
3. What chores did you do at home?
4. Tell me about your mother and father (job).
5. How were decisions made?
6. Who handled the money?
7. How were you treated in relation to your brothers?
8. How did your ethnic background affect the way you were raised?
9. Would you tell me about your school days (kind of school, how long attended)?
10. Were you ever treated differently at school because of your ethnic background?
11. What was your parents' attitude toward education for women?
12. Why did you choose to go to college? (location, did she finish?)
13. How did religion affect the way you were raised?
14. Who usually attended church in your family?
15. How involved in church activities was your family?
16. What superstitions did family members have?

B. Adolescence.

17. Did you work before you married? Details.
18. What was your family's attitude about women working?
19. What were the job possibilities open to you?
20. Did you ever work for or with relatives or friends?
21. What did you do with the money you earned?
22. Why did you work?
23. Did you ever feel discriminated against at work because of your sex or ethnicity?
24. Did your family have any rules regarding the way you should be groomed and dressed? (lipstick)
25. How did your family control your dating? (resentful, curfew, chaperone, date non-Italians, non-Catholics)
26. Would you describe your social life before marriage?
27. What did you do on dates?
28. Why did you get married when you did? Date.
29. Did anyone influence your marital decision? How?
30. How did your family feel about having their daughter marry someone of a different ethnic group? a non-Catholic?
31. Did you receive any information about sex before marriage? From whom?
32. What was the attitude among your friends or relatives concerning abortion? birth control? divorce?

C. Adulthood.

33. Compare your relationship with your husband with that between your mother and father.
34. What ethnic customs were passed on to you from your family?

35. Do your holiday observances contain any particular ethnic customs? What are they?
36. How are decisions made in your family?
37. Who controls/handles the money?
38. What special chores does your husband have at home? your children?
39. At what times during your married life did you work?
40. What jobs have you held? part time? full time? discrimination?
41. Why did you decide to work?
42. How does your husband feel about his wife working?
43. Are you involved in church activities? Details.
44. Who usually attends church in your family? How often?
45. Tell me about how and when you came to Nassau.
46. Was it easy to make new friends?
47. Could you tell me about two or three of your closest friends? Where they live, how you met?
48. How often do you and your husband (family) visit friends, neighbors, or relatives?
49. What special things do you and your family do in your leisure?
50. Did your husband go out with the boys often?
51. How often do you entertain in your home? Details.
52. Do you belong to any groups or organizations? How did you become involved? Attend meetings? Offices held?
53. What do you do in your spare time?
54. What magazines or newspapers do you get?
55. Do you ever read ethnic newspapers or magazines or listen to a foreign language radio program? Details. How often?

.....

Release for Research

I _____ knowingly and voluntarily permit
Mary Jane Capozzoli the full use of this information for
research purposes.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Identification	Residence	Date of interview
M.A.	Massapequa Park	May 19, 1982
C.A.	Great Neck	July 14, 1981
J.A.	Seaford	November 6, 1981
L.A.	Baldwin	July 22, 1981
E.A.	Massapequa	June 8, 1981
D.A.	Westbury	July 9, 1981
V.B.	New Hyde Park	July 30, 1981
C.B.	Merrick	April 3, 1981
G.B.	Merrick	June 12, 1981
G.B.	Garden City	September 16, 1981
P.B.	Massapequa	September 9, 1981
L.B.	Wantagh	June 23, 1981
G.B.	Freeport	June 19, 1981
J.B.	Westbury	September 24, 1981
J.B.	South Hempstead	September 29, 1981
G.B.	Seaford	August 25, 1981
R.C.	Williston Park	October 8, 1981
A.C.	Massapequa	April 19, 1982
C.C.	Wantagh	June 30, 1981
P.C.	Seaford	March 2, 1981
M.C.	Merrick	April 30, 1982
J.C.	Merrick	November 2, 1981
M.C.	Merrick	October 24, 1981
J.C.	Levittown	June 3, 1981
E.C.	Levittown	July 15, 1981
E.C.	Merrick	October 27, 1981
A.D.	Merrick	June 9, 1981
M.D.	Garden City	July 29, 1981
A.D.	Baldwin	March 2, 1982
G.D.	Merrick	August 19, 1981
E.D.	Baldwin	September 28, 1981
R.D.	Freeport	June 30, 1981
J.D.	Port Washington	July 18, 1981
M.D.	East Meadow	March 10, 1982
N.D.	Merrick	June 15, 1981
A.D.	Merrick	June 4, 1981
P.E.	Garden City	September 21, 1981
A.F.	Hicksville	September 1, 1981
P.F.	Bellmore	June 6, 1981
M.F.	Massapequa	July 7, 1981

Identification	Residence	Date of interview
L.F.	Merrick	October 7, 1981
J.G.	Merrick	July 22, 1981
P.G.	Glen Cove	August 11, 1981
J.G.	Merrick	August 4, 1981
M.G.	Garden City	September 10, 1981
A.G.	Merrick	March 5, 1981
M.G.	Garden City	August 17, 1981
E.G.	Massapequa Park	August 8, 1981
F.G.	Merrick	August 12, 1981
M.H.	Sea Cliff	July 22, 1981
M.H.	Rockville Centre	September 21, 1981
N.I.	Port Washington	July 28, 1981
Mrs. I.	Freeport	September 17, 1981
N.I.	Elmont	July 6, 1981
E.K.	New Hyde Park	October 16, 1981
M.K.	Freeport	April 17, 1981
M.K.	Sea Cliff	October 19, 1981
B.K.	Merrick	September 8, 1981
K.K.	Great Neck	July 13, 1981
D.L.	Hempstead	March 3, 1981
G.L.	Bellmore	June 3, 1981
L.L.	Merrick	November 3, 1981
L.L.	Floral Park	September 8, 1981
A.M.	Merrick	June 22, 1981
G.M.	Uniondale	September 2, 1981
M.M.	Merrick	May 7, 1981
Mrs. M.	Roslyn Heights	May 12, 1982
V.M.	Merrick	June 29, 1981
P.M.	Baldwin	September 28, 1981
C.M.	Glen Head	January 20, 1982
C.M.	Bayville	February 25, 1982
M.M.	New Hyde Park	September 3, 1981
S.M.	Wantagh	June 13, 1981
J.N.	Massapequa	June 11, 1981
S.O.	Merrick	April 20, 1981
M.P.	Bellmore	June 10, 1981
C.P.	Westbury	July 11, 1981
E.P.	Massapequa	September 10, 1981
R.P.	Garden City	August 4, 1981
M.P.	Manhasset	August 31, 1981
J.P.	Merrick	May 4, 1981
L.P.	Merrick	January 5, 1981
L.P.	Seaford	December 3, 1981
J.P.	Merrick	August 10, 1981
C.P.	Merrick	January 16, 1982
B.R.	Oceanside	October 15, 1981
G.R.	Rockville Centre	September 23, 1981
M.R.	Plainedge	July 25, 1981
A.R.	Bellmore	June 26, 1981

Identification	Residence	Date of interview
V.S.	Baldwin	January 28, 1982
G.S.	Bellmore	June 3, 1981
J.S.	Merrick	October 20, 1981
B.S.	Manhasset	August 5, 1981
R.S.	Massapequa Park	April 26, 1982
F.S.	Seaford	June 18, 1981
T.S.	Massapequa Park	April 26, 1982
I.S.	Plainview	June 25, 1981
B.S.	Massapequa Park	April 26, 1982
M.S.	Wantagh	March 1, 1981
I.S.	Wantagh	June 12, 1981
C.S.	Garden City	February 27, 1982
R.T.	Massapequa	May 26, 1982
M.V.	Merrick	August 7, 1981
L.V.	Massapequa	April 28, 1982
G.W.	Garden City	August 18, 1981
L.W.	Merrick	May 6, 1981
E.W.	Bellmore	June 22, 1981
M.W.	Merrick	March 7, 1981
A.W.	Seaford	March 7, 1981
L.Z.	Plainview	July 9, 1981
A.Z.	Valley Stream	September 15, 1981
S.Z.	Massapequa Park	April 26, 1982

VITA

The only daughter of Josephine Michalicki and Anthony Capozzoli, Mary Jane Capozzoli was born on January 23, 1953, in Oceanside, Long Island. After attending public schools in Merrick, Long Island, she graduated summa cum laude with a B.S. degree from Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, in January 1975. Having also received her M.A. degree in history from Adelphi, she went on to earn her doctorate from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The recipient of two scholarships from each of those institutions, as well as the New Jersey Zinc Company and Parkhurst Fellowships from Lehigh, she is also a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Alpha Theta. Ms. Capozzoli has taught at Northampton County Community College, Muhlenberg College, Widener University, and Central Michigan University, has traveled in Western Europe as well as in the United States and has a working knowledge of both French and Italian.