Haredi/Chabad Women’s Acculturation Experience in a Non-Haredi Institute of Higher Education in Northern Galilee

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Abstract

This article examines the worldview of Haredi/Chabad women as they enroll for the first time in a non-Haredi institute of higher education in the Northern Galilee. Higher education is perceived as a means to escape extreme financial difficulties, and acquire better employment opportunities. For these women, who are both breadwinners and caregivers of large families, higher education in their region meant increased funding and broader range of fields of studies beside the traditional education Haredi/Chabad women could pursue. While willing to compromise at a structural level, they wished to remain separate from all other ethnic and religious groups at the cultural level. They resisted the dominant Israeli discourse on multicultural integration, which to them meant the destruction of cultures, traditions, and religious orientations.

Background

The Haredi population constitutes approximately 9 percent of Israel’s population and counts 700,000 to 800,000 people. The term “Haredi” refers to various Jewish orthodox subgroups that include the Sephardic and Lithuanian Haredi, Hassidim and Chabad Lubavitch (Hacohen & Cahaner, 2011; Levin, 2009, 2011). Serving God and following the Torah’s laws are ultimate goals uniting the various Haredi movements (Cahaner, 2011; Cohen 2005; Gonen, 2005; Hakak 2004). To maintain their own way of life, ideology, and traditions, the Haredi communities have often opted to live segregated with little contact with other Jewish and non-Jewish groups. Their dress code differentiates them from other Jewish groups. With minor differences between affiliations, Haredi men wear white shirts, black trousers, black coats and black hats; and Haredi women must dress in long-sleeve shirts, skirts below the knees and stockings above the knees. Married women must cover their hair with a wig or a scarf (Cahaner, 2011).

Haredi men and women marry at a young age and raise large families in accordance with their belief in God’s command to multiply (Odenheimer &
Ackerman, 2012). Their children are educated in a separate educational system that stresses Torah studies and strict separation between sexes in all spheres of life outside the home (Gonen, 2005).

In all Haredi groups, women's primary duties are those of taking care of children and the home. However, the extents to which women assume financial duties will depend on the Haredi group to which they belong. Each Haredi group (Lithuanian Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Hassidim and Chabad Lubavitch) determines it own specific gender roles and social responsibilities (Deri, 2010; Cahaner, 2011; Cohen & Malach, 2011; Gal, 2010).

In the Lithuanian Haredi, Sephardic Haredi and Hassidic community men have to dedicate all their time to Torah study. Therefore, their spouses assume the role of being *eizer kenegdo*, “a helpmate to her husband” and enable him to dedicate his time to Torah study and fulfilling *Mitzvot*. Consequently, women assume total responsibility as financial providers for the family. In high school, Haredi women are taught self-sacrifice and advised to study in a special seminary track in order to teach in daycare or in primary school. Under special circumstances, the Lithuanian Haredi community will authorize men to leave the Yeshiva and partially neglect their Torah studies so that they can study at university and pursue professions e.g., law and medicine, which are highly needed in their community (Deri, 2010).

The Chabad Lubavitch movement espouses a different philosophy that does not require of women total self-sacrifice for men’s Torah studies. The ideological orientation of this community does not see any contradiction between making a living and Torah studies. On the contrary, making a living is a condition to Torah studies as in the saying in *Pirche Avot* "No flour, no Torah." Additionally, the spiritual requirements for being a Chassid apply to both genders. As a result, aside from engaging in Torah studies men and women members of Chabad communities work and share the financial responsibility of providing for the needs of the family (Arlosoroff, 2012; Cahaner, 2011; Cohen, 2005; Hakak, 2004).

The “Rebbe,” Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, leader of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, has attributed a unique mystical and Kabalistic role to women.
For the Rebbe, women are the catalyst for change and transformation that will lead to the Messianic Era of redemption in the World to Come. This privileged position attributed to women rather than to men dates back to Moses Era, a time in which women had resisted the temptation of worshipping the Golden Calf. Rabbi Schneerson cited the Talmud to support his claim "In the merit of the righteous women of that generation, our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt" (B. Talmud, Sotah 11b). According to R. Schneerson, “Every Jewish woman, in every time and every place, has inherited the special powers of the matriarchs" (Handelman, 2012; Tzukernik 2012). The Rebbe also attributed a teleological meaning to the Feminist movement by connecting it to the mystical Chassidic-Kabalistic principle, "Everything that happens Below has its source in what happens Above (Handelman, 2012). Women’s mission is to pave the way to redemption by their humility and modesty and through their inner peace and glory to bring about the spiritual revolution of humankind. This mystical role attributed to women led to the reinterpretation of their Halakhic obligations, which were to include Torah studies, observation of the Mitzvot, [good deeds] and their participation in Chabad outreach activities. The Chassidic mission of establishing Chabad homes all over the world was applied to both Chabad men as well as women. (Handelman, 2012; Tzukernik 2012).

In Israel, the reality faced by Chabad and other Haredi families varies depending on the geographical region in which they live. Chabad/Haredi families who live in the center of Israel may receive up to 50% of their income from donations from around the globe. Such donations are often unavailable to Haredi/Chabad families in the Northern periphery of Israel. This fact combined with minimal governmental support in terms of child allowance and a large number of children to provide for, place the Haredi family at risk of falling below the poverty line (Cahaner, 2011; Cohen, 2005; Cohen, Hakak, & Meler, 2005; Cohen & Malach, 2011; Dahan 2010; Gottlieb, 2007; Hakak, 2004).

Previous studies have emphasized the obstacles that often prevented Haredi women from accessing higher education and entering the job market (Gottlieb, 2007; Hakak, 2004; Malhi, Cohen, & Kaufmann, 2008). Some of the obstacles include the
large number of children under their care, family financial difficulties, lack of sufficient governmental funding and employment opportunities. (Gurovich & Cohen-Kastro, 2004; Malhi, 2009).

After being approached by the leaders of the Haredi community, the Safed College, a non-Haredi institution of higher education affiliated with Bar-Ilan University, took upon itself the challenge of establishing a teacher-education program especially designed to meet the needs of Haredi/Chabad women to pursue a degree.

Haredi/Chabad women, who lived in separate communities with little interaction with other Jewish and non-Jewish ethnic groups, were expected upon entrance to a multi ethnic institution to go through a process of acculturation. This process has been defined by J. Phinney (2003) as a process of psychological, social and cultural adaptation that occurs when groups of various ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds come into contact with one another. J.W. Berry's basic model of acculturation (1997, 1998) includes four acculturation strategies available to ethnic and religious minority groups: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Minority groups may want to assimilate, that is, absorb their religious, ethnic and/or cultural heritage into that of the dominant culture. Alternatively, they may want to integrate, i.e., maintain their own cultural heritage by weaving it into the dominant culture. Or minority groups may wish to remain separate with little contact with the dominant culture to preserve their cultural heritage and traditions and thus opt for separation as the preferred mode of acculturation. Separation becomes segregation when it is forced upon the minority ethnic/religious group by the dominant culture. Marginalization refers to a transient or permanent state of rejection of and alienation from both ethnic and dominant cultures.

The Interactive Model of Acculturation (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Sénécal, 1997) expands Berry’s (1997, 1998) original model and accounts for interaction between the acculturation expectations of the dominant and minority group and the degree of match and mismatch between them. This model views the degree of concordance of expectations of ethnic and dominant groups as the most important
predictor of ethnic group’s perception of discrimination. The greater the cultural
distance, the greater the mismatch of acculturation expectations and expression of
ethnocentric attitudes by the dominant society, the more intense the discrimination
experienced by the ethnic/religious group (Gezentsvey, 2008).

The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) adds a multidimensional
level to the Interactive Model of Acculturation by showing that the acculturation
process is far from linear and domain specific. Ethnic individuals may want to
assimilate in higher education, integrate their values with those of the dominant
culture in politics, and in the economy, and yet they may want to maintain their own
traditions and religious beliefs by establishing a separate preliminary educational
system and communities (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, et al., 2005; Navas, Rojas,
Garcia, & Pumares, 2007).

This qualitative study gives a voice to Haredi/Chabad women who seldom had
the opportunity to access higher education for lack of academic Haredi institutions in
the Northern Galilee. They were asked to convey from their own perspective the value
of obtaining a degree in terms of employment, economic gains, and self-fulfillment.
An additional goal of this study was to examine these women’s acculturation
expectations upon entering a multiethnic institution as well as their view on the
structural socioeconomic and/or cultural/ethnic integration of Haredi/Chabad women
into non-Haredi academic institutes, job markets, and society.

Method

Research Participants

Research participants were twenty-three Haredi female students. Eighteen belonged to
the Chabad movement, three others to the Haredi Sephardic, and two others to the
National Haredi movement. These women lived in Northern Galilee in separate
Haredi communities. The great majority of these women were married, in their thirties
(Mean 32.8, SD=6.28) and with an average of five children per family (Mean = 4.52,
SD= 2.60). All the participants in this study had completed vocational training in
special seminaries and were employed as teachers in primary schools or daycares.
The participants’ tuition had been funded by the Ministry of Education within the framework of New Horizon, a program that required teachers to complete a Bachelor’s degree in Education as a condition for continued employment. The Safed College offered these women transfer credits for the teacher-seminary certificate they had obtained in the past. After explaining the purpose of the study, consent of the participants was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and permission to tape the interviewees was granted (Bruner, 1990; Denzin, 2001; Patton, 2002; Plummer, 1995). At the report writing stage, all the names of the interviewees were replaced by pseudonyms.

**Research Instrument**

The in-depth semi-structured interview was deemed the most appropriate research tool to capture the common and divergent experiences of the participants. The interviews included an interview guide to guarantee that all topics were addressed by all the research participants (Denzin, 2001; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). The interview guide included topics related to background information such as their religious orientation, marital and employment status, and number of children. Other topics related to the actual and potential strengths of their community in advancing higher education for women: the extent to which husband, parent, rabbis and significant others in their life had contributed to their decision and, empowered them to access and succeed in higher education. Additional topics concerned the financial hardships and dilemmas these women faced as mothers, breadwinners and students. Also addressed were the topics of career advancement, family welfare and personal well being in relation to higher education and obtaining a degree. These women views on multicultural integration in academia, in the job market and in Israeli society in general were also examined.

**Procedure**

The researchers, professors in Safed College were presented with a unique
opportunity to conduct phenomenological interviews with these women. Interviews, lasting between 60-90 minutes, were conducted privately in one of the offices of the college. Each interview started as an informal conversation with the opening question: "Could you tell me how you came to the decision to complete a BA degree in a non-Haredi institution, and how did such a decision affect your life?" The open-endedness of the research questions, the privacy of the interviewers’ suite, and the fact the researchers were also instructors in this educational program increased rapport and made the participants feel at ease. The interviewers did not always adhere to the order of the questions appearing in the interview guide in order not to interfere with the flow of the conversation. For the same reason questions about topics that had not been addressed by the interviewee, probes and clarifications were requested only at the end of the interviewee’s narrative.

**Analysis**

Content analysis of the interviews followed Strauss’ (1987) constant comparative method and Patton's (2002) guidelines of analysis. Interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were read several times to uncover similarities and differences in the narratives. In so doing, the researchers were able to identify common themes embedded in the shared experience of these Haredi/Chabad female students. Analysis of the interviews relied solely on the subjective meaning and interpretation that the interviewees gave to their experiences, and on the feelings and thoughts they attributed to them. Therefore, the questions of "objectivity" and fact validation did not arise in this study (Bruner, 1990; Denzin, 2001; Holsti, 1969). Nevertheless, recurrent and themes and episodes evoked by the interviewees increased the reliability of the findings. At the report writing phase, all inductively drawn inferences were supported with direct quotes from the women’s narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By resituating the interviewees in the Haredi movement, mentioning their age and number of children, the researchers expected the reader to verify the validity of their findings.

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1 The program has been discontinued because of lack of sufficient accommodation to the needs of Haredi women concerning their separation from all other students.
inferences and comprehend the interviewees' experience (Bruner, 1990; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Results

Haredi Women’s Mission

The Haredi women interviewed saw their primary mission as fulfilling God’s first commandment "set forth and multiply.” Thus, getting married, having children, and taking care of them were essential duties that took precedence over any other endeavor:

I am Haredi. What is most important to me is to found a family, bring up my children, and support them materially and spiritually. Rachel- Haredi, 26+3

My goal in life is to have a Jewish home and bring up a future generation. We are different from other Jewish girls who first want to be financially secure, have a car, a degree and a good salary. Founding a family is last on their priority list. Miriam- Haredi, 21+1

Since early childhood, Haredi/Chabad women are educated to fulfill the Mitzvot of the Torah and to abide by rules of modesty concerning their dress code and personal appearance. The strict separation between male and female in all spheres of life outside the home is the norm:

In the Haredi movement, we educate girls to fulfill the Mitzvot especially in relations to modesty. Modesty has a big impact on the places of work and study we can choose. Haya-Chabad, 26+3

Women are educated to follow a clear path of the Torah. There is no bending of rules and no openness in education. There is one clear and definite direction in the Haredi world and you have to follow it. Haredi women have to look a certain way and dress according to certain standards. There is no exception. In other religious movements, women may look different from one another. There is no specific obligation such as wearing below-the-knee skirts, long-sleeve shirts, and socks above the knees. Rerut- Haredi, 37+5

The interviewees explained that the Haredi movement placed no restriction on women in terms of pursuing academic degrees. On the contrary, women were encouraged to do so, as long as they did not neglect their primary duties of motherhood and the institution in which they studied respected the Haredi norms of modesty and strict separation between genders:

There is no interdiction to study placed on women. Nowadays we have Haredi colleges and there is a great openness on this subject. Miriam- Haredi, 21+1
Once, girls were allowed to study only when they got married. Today things have changed. There is a lot of support for higher education. Women can study anything they want as long as their studies do not clash with the Torah and with women’s most important duties—motherhood and homemaker. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

All studies have to fit the Haredi spirit. Women must study separately from men and the content of the course has to be supervised by rabbis so that it does not conflict with the laws of the Torah. But there is no objection to higher education. Shosh-Chabad, 33+7

Aside from being mothers and homemakers, all the women interviewed reported being employed outside the home. The Haredi group these women belong to often determined the extent to which they perceived themselves as the unique financial provider of the family. The interviewees belonging to the Lithuanian and Sephardic Haredi mentioned that being the financial provider of the family was one of their most important duties since in so doing they allowed their spouses to devote all their time to Torah studies:

Women may study in institutions of higher education but men are allowed to study only in Yeshivot. Women have a very important role. They must work to financially support their husband who must study the Torah. To reach this goal, educators encourage women’s participation in the work force. Rerut-Haredi, 37+5

Rabbis support women who want to continue their education because they understand that all burden of financial support will be on her. She has to give her husband the serenity and financial security to study the Torah. Pnina-Haredi, 38-3

In contrast, the interviewees belonging to the Chabad movement reported sharing with their spouses the roles of breadwinner and financial provider. They often appealed to the socio-economic reality they were facing in order to explain that one salary was no longer sufficient to fulfill the ever-increasing economic needs of large families:

The socio-economic condition of our day and age often convince us that we need to learn a profession. There are unlimited expenses, prices are rising, and there is no limit to it in the horizon. Women also need to become a financial provider. A degree gives women the prospects of acquiring a respectable salary, with God’s help, of course. Bat Sheva-Chabad, 30+4

Facilitation of Haredi/Chabad Women Enrollment in a Non-Haredi College

Haredi/Chabad women usually pursue a degree in Haredi institutions of higher education located in the center of the Israel. For Haredi women living in the Northern Galilee, the long bus commute to such institutions, childcare, and the pressing need to
support their family made pursuing an academic education in Haredi colleges in the center of Israel an unrealistic and unattainable goal. Some of the women interviewed who had tried to commute to the center of the country soon realized that it was an impossible task:

I started my B.A. studies in Bet Rivka College. But I did not finish because my twins were born then and had to take care of them. I did not have time to commute, so I was happy when I found that I could obtain transfer credits and complete a degree in Safed College. Meyrav-Chabad, 36+7

Women in the North have to travel to Jerusalem or Bnei Brak, which means time, transportation, and tuition, costs. All this is very time consuming and makes the cost of higher education too high to be affordable. Shosh-Chabad, 33 +7

In our community, we prefer to study in Chabad colleges. But because of the numerous problems with transportation I was not be able to further pursue my studies. Haya- Chabad, 26 +3

Blocked from accessing Haredi institutions of higher education in the Northern Galilee and faced with the imperative imposed by the Ministry of Education of obtaining a Bachelor degree as a condition for continued employment as a teacher, these women had no alternative route to pursue their studies without leaving the Northern region. As a result, the spiritual leaders of their community approached the Safed College administrators to formulate the conditions under which Haredi women would be authorized to study in a non-Haredi institution:

To advance I needed a BA. Many women in Safed had to complete an academic degree. We spoke to the rabbi of our community and we found a way for Haredi women to study in Safed College. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

Within the framework of “New Horizon,” we have had to complete an academic degree. So, we look for a place that was easily accessible. When our friends said that a new program is opening for Haredi women in Safed College we joined the group. The studies are not easy. Bosemet- National Religious, 40+8

The interviewees explained that respect for the Haredi traditions and the norms requiring modesty and strict separation between genders were *sine qua non* conditions for attending a non-Haredi institution:

There are no objections to work and study in any environment that is considerate of the Haredi customs. It must keep the separation between men and women and the topic taught may not contradict the spirit and power of the Torah. Shosh-Chabad, 33+7
A non-Haredi environment must fit the commands of the Torah, and the worldview and standards of the Haredi world. Women must study and work in separate women-only classrooms. Rerut-Haredi, 37+5

**Primary Sources of Social Support for Enrolling in Non-Haredi Institutions**

Before enrolling in a non-Haredi institution, the interviewees invariably reported that they had first consulted with the rabbis, the spiritual leaders of the Haredi community who were the ultimate authority to endorse the college and program of studies. To that effect, these women reported corresponding with their rabbis in the Sacred Newsletter in which they inquired whether the environment and program offered by Safed College was in fitting with the spirit of the Torah:

Haredi/Chabad women may study many subjects but each subject has to obtain a kosher certification from the rabbi. All studies must fit the Haredi spirit. Women have to study separately from men and the content of the course has to be supervised so that they do not conflict with the laws of the Torah. Shosh-Chabad, 33+7

Before I started my studies, I was awaiting for the rabbi’s response. We wrote to the rabbi from Leibovitz in a Sacred Newsletter and received an answer. He answered that he himself was studying at a university and that he wished me a lot of success. Once he answered, I told myself: "I have an answer. It does not matter what happens next." Haya-Chabad, 26+3

I wrote a letter to the rabbi in the Sacred Newsletter. The rabbi answered me that Rabbi Akiva started to study when he was 40 years old. I am really close to this age and persistence is what counts. I understood his message and registered. Meyrav-Chabad, 36+7

Higher education was expected to lead to higher salaries:

Women must have the opportunity to study. This is the only way that they will be able to financially provide for their family. Academic studies help women to develop confidence and obtain a good job. Bat Sheva-Chabad, 30+4

We come here to study not to become great intellectuals but to obtain a diploma so that we may survive on a daily basis. Ahinoam-Chabad, 25

Women have to study. Otherwise, they get into an economic vicious cycle. Many Haredi women do not go to study because of the financial difficulties they face. But then, they get deeper and deeper into financial problems. Havah-Haredi, 26+4

The participants reported that their spouses, parents, and in-laws understood the importance of obtaining a degree to acquire better jobs and higher salaries and thus, increase the overall welfare of the family:
Most of the husbands want their spouses to help in the finances. In our days and times, it is hard to provide for the family alone. Women are encouraged to have a profession especially in education. Rachel-Chabad, 26+3

The parents and the husband are happy when a wife is an additional source of income and can provide for the financial needs of the family in a respectable manner. Meyrav-Chabad, 36+7

My parents want me to have a degree so that I can obtain a high salary and provide for the financial needs of my family. Rachel-Chabad, 26+3

To reach this goal all of the extended family members committed themselves to relieve part of the burden by assuming childcare and homemaking duties. Whenever possible, financial, and emotional support was also provided:

My father in-law provides some financial support. My parents support me and watch my baby when my husband cannot. They also provide some financial help. Thank God, I manage and I am thankful to the creator who provides for all. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

My parents understand that it is difficult and support me. My mother babysits when my husband cannot. Rachel-Chabad, 26+3

The interviewees also mentioned the invaluable help their spouses provided by assuming household chores and childcare duties so that they could complete their assignments on time:

Thank God, my husband helps me and supports me. He listens to me and helps in house chores. He buys ready-made food so it is easier for me to study. He drives me to the college and comforts me when I worry about money. Haya-Chabad, 26+3

My dear husband assists me the most. He compliments me and gives me the help and space to study. Yocheved-Chabad, 38+5

My husband helps and many chores fall on him. He has to watch the children when I study and gives up on his schedule so that I can finish my assignments on time. Rachel-Chabad, 26+3

Other husbands were reported to assist their spouses by letting them use the Internet in their office since having Internet at home is prohibited in the Haredi/Chabad community:

My husband also helps. He gives me the tools I need to complete my assignments. He lets me use the Internet in his office. He gives up on many things so that I can succeed and complete my papers. Bat Sheva-Chabad, 30+4

Rare were the Chabad women interviewed who reported confronting a lack of understanding and opposition from their spouses. Meyrav was one of these women. The only source of emotional and financial support was her mother:
My mother gave me a loan so that I can study. She tells me about the benefits of completing a degree (with God's help). She says, "BA is a license to any employment you desire." She repeats this sentence over and over again. My husband, may he have a long life, does not support me. He tells me that my studies cost too much money. He says: "Why do you have to take so many classes? I do not have the money to support your studies and you are losing a day of work."

Meyrav- Chabad, 36+7

Several of the women interviewed mentioned that in other Haredi denomination beside the Chabad movement parental or spousal opposition was one of worst obstacles to accessing higher education:

Some of my friends' husbands are not supportive. They prevent their wife from studying because they are scared that she will not able to take care of the children and the home. Yearah, Haredi, 30+5

When you face parental opposition, you do not go to study. Their opposition is always backed up by Jewish principles and values. So, you have to comply because you cannot change Jewish principles and values. Rerut- Haredi, 37+5

Self-Realization and Higher Education

Most of the interviewees specified that higher education and professional career advancement were not the criteria of personal worth. Instead, an individual’s worth and integrity were measured by the extent to which one followed the Mitzvot of the Torah and the Shulhan Aruch:

Personal worth is not judged by the level of education or by the knowledge acquired but your values and the extent to which you grow up to be a human being. Chassidut, fear of God, and being a good Jew who perform God’s commands as they appear in the Torah and in Shulhan Aruch are of outmost importance. For women it is also related to good parenting and mothering skills. Yoceved-Chabad, 38+5

Haredi women’s merit is not measured by higher education but by the way you lead your life and the kind of human being you are inside and outside the home. Academic studies may contribute to Haredi women's development but in another manner. The stress is to get a good job and succeed at work. Bosemet- Chabad, 40+8

The interviewees described the opportunity to realize their professional dream and career goals:

My studies bring me closer to my professional dream. I always wanted to study special education and therapy. Without a BA degree, I cannot pursue these fields. Even though it is right now not easy to combine childcare and house chores and studying, I know that my degree will bring me closer to my professional dream. Shosh-Chabad, 33+7

Our standing we get from the Torah but a degree allows us to obtain a higher ranking in the Ministry of Education and a better salary. Pnina- Haredi, 38+3
In our material life, a degree opens other doors. It gives women more opportunity to find a job and advance in their career. Yocheved – Chabad, 33+7

Haredi Lifestyle and Acculturation Challenges in a Non-Haredi Institution

The interviewees reported that the Haredi/Chabad way of life with its imperative of fulfilling the Mitzvot of the Torah is spiritually rich. It gives Haredi women a clear sense of purpose and direction in life—dimensions the interviewees found often missing from the life of non-Haredi Jewish women:

The difference between women who keep the Mitzvot of the Torah and those who do not, relates to their self-awareness, internal richness, clarity of purpose and direction in life. Chabad woman are much more stable because they know the purpose of their life. Additionally, their unique lifestyle gives them a sense of community. Yoceved-Chabad, 38+5

These women often denounced the non-Haredi media for spreading preconceived ideas and stereotypes about the Haredi culture while being very ignorant of the richness of their culture and traditions:

The Hilonim [secular] do not know us. They are poisoned by the media and the fear that if they learn more about us they will return to religion. A rabbi said once: “If you do not have a past you do not have a future.” The Jewish world is a beautiful and good world. The Torah is infinite. It creates harmony between the people (of course there are exceptions). The Torah unites us as a family. For instance, Shabbat unites all the family. They sing together and tell stories from the Torah. I simply feel that the Hiloni [secular] women are missing something. Daniella- Chabad 30+3

The most important Mitzvot in the Haredi tradition relate to modesty and strict separation between genders. These are basic commandments of the Torah to which Haredi women must adhere. For the interviewees, the function of these norms was to protect them from sexual temptations that arise when men and women are in the same space:

Our bad instincts work extra hours and because we are humans, we have to watch for ourselves and try as much as possible not to be exposed to the outside world i.e., the world outside the limits of religion. We must preserve the separation between men and women in adulthood just as we have kept this separation since childhood. Havah-Haredi, 26+4

The temptation of drifting apart from the Mitzvot was another valid argument for requesting gender-segregated classrooms in non-Haredi institutions:

Haredi women must study separately from men. Humans are easily influenced. Bonds are created between women and men when they study together in a mixed classroom. This leads girls to progressively neglect their Torah duties and the Mitzvot. Meyrav- Chabad, 36+7
Acculturation Expectations: Separate but Equal

Although the interviewees maintained that all Jewish souls were sanctified as part of the divine soul, the Haredi/Chabad ideology also required these women not to study with non-Haredi [secular] women. Strict ideological, educational, and geographical separations were for these women the only way to protect Haredi/Chabad women from the temptations of the non-Haredi world that compromised the purity of the Mitzvot:

Although every Jew is sanctified with the divine soul, the difference is that I keep the Mitzvot and Torah (This is from Rabbi Leibovitz). Yoceved- Chabad, 38+5

I respect all Jews and their opinions. But in the Haredi education there is no compromise. Aharon said: “Love peace and pursue peace.” He was the emblem of the love for Israel and unity. He would bring people close to the Torah and not the Torah closer to people. In education, there is no compromise; we have to apply what we believe in otherwise it is a lie. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

To support their claim, the interviewees gave examples of Haredi/Chabad women who intermingled with other Jewish groups and as a result drifted away from the Haredi lifestyle by removing their stockings and enlisting in the army:

Going out of the Haredi circle had led women to mix with people whose behavior and beliefs are not according to our tradition. Very fast, they forget all signs of Jewishness. This is what happened to one of my friends who went to study at the university. Yoceved- Chabad, 38+5

The minute that Haredi girls are exposed to the open world and get a taste of it, they may trip and fall. When a Haredi girl goes to the university and mixes with non-Haredi, she takes off her stocking. She continues with a nose ring and one day she no longer remembers how a Haredi woman looks like. Pnina-Haredi, 38+3

Studying in a non-Haredi environment might spoil Haredi girls. They get used to a different environment, and associate with friends who are not to our spirit. This may have a great impact on them. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

For the same reasons, Haredi women had to be protected from the negative influence and temptations of the Internet and non-Haredi media, TV, and newspapers:

Women in the Haredi movement are educated separately and protected much more than other religious girls. Girls are protected from negative subjects and from modernity. Internet, cheap literature, and hanging out in pubs are not allowed. Pnina-Haredi, 38+3
The interviewees explained that given the strict ideological separation between the Haredi and non-Haredi world, they did not wish to have contact with any other ethnic or religious groups that studied in the college:

I would not promote the integration of Haredi and non-Haredi. I would not promote multiculturalism. Our college does contain many cultures; the Arab sector and the Jewish sector we cannot integrate with them. Pnina- Haredi, 38+ 3

I am Chabanickit and being Jewish is what unites us. But I do not know enough about other religious or non-religious Jewish movement to tell the difference in their world perspectives. Bat Sheva-Chabad, 30+4

I do not believe that you need multiculturalism. I do not meet with other groups and I do not know what their traditions are. I do not feel the need to be in contact with them. In my opinion, contact with people who are not Jewish may be very negative. We must keep distance, yet respect each other. But we do not need to mix. Rachel- Chabad, 26 + 3

We study in separate classrooms and I have very little contact with other ethnic groups. Multiculturalism is not a simple task for the Haredi sector. Ahinoam- Chabad, 25

Nevertheless, for the interviewees all people regardless of their ethnic or religious group membership deserved to be treated with equal tolerance and respect. In order to promote tolerance and respect between ethnic groups and religions one had to work on accepting differences and allowing each group to maintain separate religious beliefs, customs and traditions:

With all the willingness of Israel to expand multiculturalism, I believe that they have to let every ethnic group to live among themselves with their own language and their own tradition. The secret of success is communication and tolerance. If there is mutual respect and acceptance of those who are different then we can surmount any obstacle. Shosh-Chabad, 33 +7

We should promote tolerance and mutual respect but we do not need to mix every group together. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

In the interviewees’ opinion increasing inter-ethnic group contacts and multicultural integration would ultimately result in the destruction of all cultures and traditions:

We could work on accepting others and their difference and on mutual respect but contact between people of various religions would only lead to the corruption of traditions. Ahinoam- Chabad, 25

**Increasing Access to Higher Education**
Relieving Haredi women from their financial burden was for the interviewees a precondition for increasing access to higher education. Most of the interviewees mentioned that despite the full tuition waiver from the New Horizon program, higher education was very expensive and intensified their financial struggles. Meyrav, who was more fortunate since she had obtained a loan from her mother and a scholarship explained:

I have a loan from my mother and two scholarships from the college and the Ministry of Education but the price of education is still very high for us. There are also some organizations in our community that support higher education. They give us short-term loans without interest. These loans help when we are in real financial distress. In some cases, they also give scholarships. Meyrav-Chabad, 36+7

I also work as a nursery teacher full time. It helps with payment but we have many expenses. Every month we have an overdraft in the bank. Higher education is very expensive. We have to take into consideration that the expenses of a Haredi family are high since there we have many children. This fact often prevents women from studying. Rachel-Chabad, 26+3

The interviewees explained that the prospect of having an additional financial burden often prevented highly motivated and talented women from pursuing higher education:

It is very hard for Haredi families to finish the month. Even if a mother wants to go to study, she will not be able to do so because the tuition is too high and she cannot pay for it. Reyut-Haredi, 37+5

In order to increase Haredi women’s access to higher education one had to find various sources of funding to prevent the additional burden on their large family:

Most of the religious girls have problems financing their education. By giving them scholarships or loans, we will be able to convince them to pursue their studies. Daniella-Chabad, 30+3

**Expanding the Fields of Study**

For interviewees, increasing access to higher education also meant expanding the fields of study. While some studies e.g. criminal justice and social deviance contradicted the spirit of the Torah and were forbidden, other areas of study beside education would give Haredi women the opportunity to access a broader range of professions:

In our days and age Haredi or-[Chabad] girls can study anything but it depends on the Haredi movement to which they belong. I would recommend psychology, special education, medicine,
therapist, accounting. Paramedical studies, dental hygienist, and medical secretary are some of the professions that Haredi girls could aspire to. Daniella- Chabad, 30+3

Women could find jobs in speech therapy, nursery school teacher, rehabilitation therapist etc. Not all professions fit both men and women. Some jobs fit only men such as being a singer or a police officer since based on Jewish law women cannot work in them. Meyrav-Chabad, 37+7

Increasing Employment Opportunities

Facing a dire lack of Haredi employment opportunities in the North of Israel, the interviewees stressed they would be ready to be employed in any non-Haredi work environment in the region provided that such environment complied with Haredi modesty, family life, and strict separation between gender:

The work environment has to fit Bat Israel [the daughter of Israel]. Haredi women who work in a non-Haredi environment may be exposed to all kind of remarks in the non-Haredi world and to the Internet that is prohibited for Bat Israel. This is why Haredi women neither enlist in the IDF nor do any community service. Shosh-Chabad, 33+7

Haredi women must find jobs that fit their religious orientation and traditions such as separation between sexes, and Kosher food. Their work assignment has also to conform to the norms of modesty. For instance, a Haredi woman who is an industrial designer may be requested to look at pictures of models that are not dressed modestly. Employers must understand that this is not appropriate for Bat Israel. Ahinoam- Chabad, 25

We have to check every place of work separately and whether it fit the rules of the Torah and modesty. If the rabbis certify the place as Kosher then parents and husbands will support women’s work outside the home. Shosh-Chabad, 33 +7

Discussion

This research sheds light on Haredi/Chabad women's, who were the first generation of religious women to enroll in a non-Haredi academic institute situated in the Northern Galilee. These women grew up in isolated Haredi communities and were expected to adjust to an environment where students belonged to different religions and ethnicities.

Through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, these women conveyed their attitudes toward higher education, obtaining a degree, and multicultural integration in a non-Haredi socio-economic culture. Their narratives expressed an intense desire, often equated to dreams, to pursue a degree despite the lack of Haredi institutions of higher education in their region. The necessity of obtaining academic degree was perceived as a means to escape extreme financial
hardship and insure the well being of their families. The lack of benevolent donors in the periphery of Israel, the reduction in governmental child allowance combined with the new requirement of the Ministry of Education to hold a BA degree as a prerequisite for continued employment as teachers, were some of the influences leading Haredi women to pursue higher education.

In congruence with Westheimer's (2012) analysis, the findings of this study illustrate the change within the Haredi community that prompted an ideological transformation legitimizing Haredi women’s enrollment in non-Haredi institutions. Understanding the importance of higher education as a vehicle of economic mobility, the lack of Haredi institutions of higher education in the North of Israel and the financial hardships the Haredi families have been facing in this peripheral region of Israel, propelled the representatives of the Haredi community to approach non-Haredi college administrators. Together they engaged in the joint enterprise of creating the optimal conditions for Haredi women to maintain modesty and strict separation between the sexes while pursuing a degree. The commitment and support of parents, in-laws and spouses, who shared in childcare and household chores relieved some of interviewees’ burden and contributed to their academic success.

The common prejudice, also adhered to by the researchers before conducting this study, was that Haredi women sacrificed their life goals and assumed all family responsibilities to allow for their spouses’ complete dedication to Torah studies in the Yeshiva. This reality was supported only in the narratives of Lithuanian Ashkenazi and Sephardic Haredi women. In contrast, this was not the case in the narratives of Chabad women. In conformity with the findings of Handelman (2012), and Tuzkernik (2012) Chabad women neither felt submissive nor needed to sacrifice their lives for their spouses’ Torah studies. Chabad husband and wife both worked to provide for their large family and fulfilled the Mitzvot including Torah studies. Except for one interviewee, all spouses were reported as committed to supporting and enabling their wives’ education.

Accepting the richness of the Torah and pursuing its ways with humility and modesty made the interviewees profoundly fulfilled. Yet, although pursuing a degree...
and career advancement were mentioned as fulfilling a dream, they were not connected to the notion of self-realization. Parenthetically, the concept of self-realization did not appear in any of these women’s narratives.

The findings support two models: the Interactive Model of Acculturation (Bourhis et al., 1997) and Relative Acculturation Extended Model (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, et al., 2005; Navas, Rojas, Garcia & Pumares, 2007). In accordance to the Interactive Model of Acculturation (Bourhis et al., 1997) the Haredi women’s expectations of separation often clashed with the expectation of multicultural integration they attributed to faculty and college administrators which they interpreted as a rejection of their way of life and traditions.

In addition, and in conformity with the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, et al., 2005; Navas, Rojas, Garcia & Pumares, 2007) the findings show that female Haredi students’ acculturation expectations were not linear but dimension-specific. While studying in a non-Haredi college, these women were able to convey to the interviewers their values and cultural identity. Proud of their Haredi heritage and lifestyle the women wanted to continue to live in their segregated community in which they could educate their children without exposing them to outside influences.

Although Haredi women wished for separation in all spheres of life, the lack of Haredi institutions of higher education and Haredi-only job markets in the Northern Galilee caused the women and their leaders to compromise at the structural level. The interviewees were willing to attend non-Haredi colleges and work in a non-Haredi workplace, provided that these environments would grant them the conditions to adhere to Haredi modesty rules and separation between genders.

The Haredi women specified that they respected the beliefs and traditions of other Jewish and Arab groups; yet, in fact they showed no interest in their beliefs and traditions. Coming in contact with other ethnic and religious groups posed a threat to the integrity of their community and to their way of life. Rather than accepting multicultural integration, these women promoted a pluralistic ideology in which each ethnic group could maintain their own religious beliefs and traditions, while living in
Haredi women’s resistance to the dominant Israeli discourse on multicultural integration amounted to an aversion to the melting pot assimilationist ideology believing it would lead to the destruction of all religions, traditions, and cultures.

In agreement with other research (Chahaner, 2011; Hakak, 2004), the findings prove the need to create Haredi institutions of higher education in the Galilee. Until then, non-Haredi colleges must accommodate the needs of the Haredi community to increase access for this minority. Additionally, increasing Haredi women’s opportunities for higher education does not only mean finding an establishment that respects the separation between genders and norms of modesty but also expanding the fields of studies in science and technology.

In accord with other research in the field (Cahaner, 2011), the findings reveal that the financial struggles of Haredi families in the periphery of Israel intensified upon enrollment, as these women had to give up many working hours and pay additional childcare expenses. Therefore, increasing funding for Haredi students is a prerequisite to increasing enrollment in higher education.

The findings revealed to the researchers how little they knew about the Haredi value system and how the stereotypical conceptions of the non-Haredi world, pervasive in the media, had misguided their judgment. Additional research focusing on the stereotypical conceptions of the non-Haredi world toward the Haredi would help raise awareness, correct public opinion, and achieve greater tolerance for this segregated group. Furthermore, Haredi women are entitled to equality in education and employment.

Bibliography


Haredi-Chabad Women’s Acculturation Experience in a Non-Haredi Institute of Higher Education in Northern Galilee


