

SuperWoman of Valor:

Can the modern day superwoman co-exist with the traditional woman of valor?

An in-depth study on ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in a culturally specific College Program

By

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Abstract

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The changing role of women brought on by social and economic transformations has affected higher educations as well as the workforce. As more women return to college, there is a growing interest in the “returning women” and nontraditional college student. However, little research exists on “returning women” from religious communities. The present phenomenological study focuses on the shifting role of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman from the traditional *Eishet Chayil*- Woman of valor- to the “returning woman” attending a culturally specific college. Grounded in systems theory and guided by role theory concepts the study seeks to gain knowledge regarding the ways in which these ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers deal with both attending college and its impact on their roles and relationships. Twenty-six self-identifying ultra-Orthodox Jewish students were recruited for this study via flyers and snowball sampling. Three main themes emerged from the interviews (1) shifts in their community and their role expectations (2) their experiences in school and the need for support and (3) rewards and conflict from these experiences.

Additionally, this study provides a comprehensive review of the needs of ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers as they juggle multiple roles. It describes the community's changing views about college, the ways in which women managed both role conflicts and reward, and how college attendance led women to reconstruct their roles and their relationships. The study findings indicate that due to the community's financial needs, need for professionals from their community, changing times and the existence of culturally specific college programs the community's leaders and members became more accepting of college attendance. Though it was expected that women attended college due to economic need, many women attended due to a desire for change or a life altering experience which drove them to enroll in college. Women found college to be rewarding not only academically, but it increased their self-esteem, self-confidence, self-respect and altered their position in the home giving them greater purpose. They also benefitted from role enhancement, role expansion and a new conception of the *Eishet Chayil*. Conflict that they faced in terms of cultural role expectations, (e.g.; *Eishet Chayil*, holiday and Sabbath obligations) role conflict, role overload, time constraints, the need to blend school and family and constant feelings of guilt were highlighted as well. Women did not question their religious beliefs, possibly due to the culturally specific college program, but they did question community beliefs which they were raised with. Even though they reconceptualized their role and role expectations participants in the study prioritized their traditional roles over their new student role. Most importantly, though, the present study serves to highlight the importance of support for change to occur within not only an individual but a community as well.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Research Question:

This study examines the experience of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women enrolled in a culturally specific college program in New York City. It looks at their reasons for seeking a higher education, their experiences as students and the nature of the rewards and conflicts that arise as they juggle the roles of student, mother, wife, worker and member of a religious community.

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is tightly knit with strict rules and boundaries. Its members observe the Sabbath strictly, maintain their own religious day schools and yeshivas, dress modestly, eat only rabbinically supervised kosher food, attend synagogues with separate seating for men and women, and generally strive to adhere to rabbinic law. The community rejects assimilation, avoids secular politics, entertainment and the ideological views of others, subscribes to a traditional gender division of labor and has been known to prescribe a traditional role for women. It expects women to be a wife and mother, to marry young, to have large families and to function as a traditional full time homemaker (Longman, 2008). Women who do go out to work are encouraged to work in jobs that allow them to give high priority to their family life such as a teacher or a secretary.

At the same time, changing conditions have led many women from the ultra- Orthodox community to seek a college degree. More specifically, due to economic conditions and as more and more young men delay entry into the workforce to participate full time in Talmudic study known as "*kollel*," women find the need to become the primary family breadwinner or to bring

in a second paycheck. To maximize their income, increasing numbers of women now pursue higher education. This trend has been facilitated by the emergence of special college programs - such as the one in this study-- that serves the Orthodox community, accommodate their religious needs and shelter them from the secular community. Although little is known about the impact of higher education on the lives of ultra-Orthodox women, their move from traditional homemaker to student to breadwinner risks challenging personal, familial and community perceptions, expectation and roles. This study seeks to understand how these women experience their shifting roles, manage role conflict that is likely to arise, and otherwise reconcile competing demands for their time, values, energy and allegiance in the hopes of advancing an understanding of perceptions and needs of these women and contribute to the foundation of knowledge for intervening with them.

Background

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is the fastest growing component of Jewry worldwide due to its high birth rates, and the lower fertility rates of other Jewish groups. In addition, members of other Jewish groups willingly integrate themselves into wider society while ultra-Orthodox avidly avoid assimilation (Maller, 1987; Valins, 2003). Despite the expansion of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community it remains understudied. Due to issues of trust it is difficult for outsiders to enter, much less study, the community (Heilman, 1992; Levine, 2003; Winston, 2005).

Researchers have investigated depression, anxiety disorders and domestic violence among Orthodox Jewry (Greenberg & Shefler, 2002; Loewenthal et al., 1997; Twerski, 1996), women's modest dress code (El-or, 1993) and traditional roles (El-Or, 1994) as well as studies on women who "left the fold," and women who have returned to the community (e.g. Kaufman's (1993) *Rachel's Daughters*). Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women have been the subject of few studies and the education of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, the focus of this research, has received minimal attention.

Various Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Groups:

The term Jew is defined as "a person belonging to the worldwide group claiming descent from Jacob (or converted to it) and connected by cultural or religious ties" (worldnet. Princeton). Jews are considered to be a religious group, an ethnic group, a culture, a nation, and some consider Jews to be, a family (Jewfaq.org). The Jewish religion is based on the laws of the Torah believed by Jews to have been handed down from God to Moses on Mount Sinai. The

Torah consists of the Bible and more broadly the entire corpus of Jewish law- written and oral- including the *Mishna*, the *Midrash*, the *Talmud* and later day legal commentaries (Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972). *Halakhah*, or Jewish law, defines how Jews should both lead their lives and how they should practice Judaism. It was codified in the Talmud and in later Responsa literature. Responsa literature studied to this day is comprised of letters that were exchanged among Rabbis consulting one another on *halakhic* matters which were printed in volumes of text. It is within the area of *Halakhah* that the great divide in contemporary Judaism exists (Schoenfeld, 1989).

The Jewish Community is not unified. Rather Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism emerged in differential responses to the process of secularization and assimilation (Schoenfeld, 1989) that followed wars, exposure to surrounding cultures and the laws of the host societies (Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972). While the long history of Jewish secularization is beyond the scope of this study, it is helpful to understand how secularization of American Jews fueled the fears of assimilation -- the process by which a newcomer becomes so thoroughly a part of its host society (which accepts them) that they become indistinguishable from it. Fears of assimilation have shaped the educational practices of the ultra-Orthodox community under study here (Heilman, 1992).

The secularization of Jews dates back to 18th century Europe, the home of most Jewish people at the time. Industrialization, urbanization and mobility of the period changed not only the world but Judaism as well. Industrialization overrode traditional ideas and practice and freed Jews from living in enforced European ghettos. The massive change, described by some historians as “emancipation”, made it possible for Jews to choose whether or not to follow the local community’s traditions. Though the religious leaders warned against secularization for fear of assimilation, many European Jews did not heed to their words. Those who entered mainstream

non-Jewish society began to assimilate in whole or in part, giving up their Jewish identity, developing a new Jewish identity and finding a middle way which allowed them to achieve competence in their host country without complete assimilation. These European Jews “acculturated”, they attempted to “fit in” with the secular world in their dress, language and education, but in private kept their traditional lifestyle. The popular aphorism-- “Be a person when you go out in the street and Jew in your home”-reflects this response to industrialization (Heilman, 2006). The acculturated Jews became known as *maskilim* or enlightened Jews. However, overtime many *maskilim* replaced their Jewish beliefs and traditions with those of the new culture, and their children tended to become fully assimilated or ceased considering themselves Jews.

American Jews today also fear assimilation. Sociologists predicted in the 1950s that Orthodoxy would disappear in the American melting pot (Heilman, 2006). To prevent this, Jews, like other ethnic and religious groups created boundaries to insulate themselves from their host society. These boundaries can include social interactions, and social norms including religious ideas that help the group define itself, reinforce self-identification and confirm their *outsider status*. The stronger the boundaries the less interaction there is between groups. With strong boundaries and a closed society leaders can more easily monitor behavior and sanction unacceptable departures (Sanders, 2002).

In contrast to the many Jews who assimilated, Orthodoxy forestalled assimilation and became a growing force in America (Heilman, 2006). According to Longman (2008) these contemporary religious-traditionalist communities are becoming increasingly isolationist; its leaders view the prospect of assimilation as a threat to the survival of the community and its traditions.

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community has created an extremely closed society based on its own social institutions and organizations. According to William's (1964) the more that a cultural or ethnic group fulfills the needs of association, cultural expression and economic opportunity internally the less the members of the group will need to access resources of the host or dominant society. Breton (1964) concluded that ethnic communities that create their own social institutions and beneficial forms of social organization contain members and decrease the pace of assimilation. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community created its own schools, synagogues, charity organizations, community organizations shops and factories, many of which also provide employment to community members (Heilman, 2006).

Orthodox Jews:

Of the approximately 5,290,000 Jews in the United States an estimated 10% or 530,000 are Orthodox- (ujc.org). However, Orthodoxy represents a range in beliefs, rituals, culture and willingness to participate in the secular world (Heilman, 2006).

Modern Orthodoxy:

Modern Orthodoxy advocates a combination of traditional religious observance while encouraging active participation in the secular world. Heilman (2006) describes modern Orthodox Jews as "contrapuntalists", --individuals who seem to be living within potentially rivalrous cultures to which they have competing loyalties. Unlike other Jewish groups who have forgone many traditional religious activities to meet secular demands, modern Orthodoxy seeks to lower the level of tension between itself and the larger environment while attempting to uphold a traditional religious way of life. To this end, modern Orthodox Jews have a loose

social structure. Members join together weekly for Sabbath and holiday observances, but spend the rest of their life within the secular society. Their synagogues and institutions provide opportunities for members to “Judaize” their daily lives. But modern Orthodox Jews live a “bi-worldly” existence with a dual allegiance to the conflicting worlds of tradition and modernity (Davidman, 1990).

Ultra-Orthodox Jews/*Haredim*: *Hasidim* and *Misnagdim*:

The term *Haredi* used in Israel to refer to the ultra-Orthodox Jews, comes from the Hebrew word meaning “fearful” and has been translated as “those who tremble” (Stadler, 2002). The term ultra-Orthodox Jews is also used to refer to *Hasidim*, from the term “pious” and *Misnagdim*, meaning “opponents”, which are two groups of Orthodox Jews opposed to Modern Orthodoxy. *Misnagdim* and *Hasidim* are distinguished by their distinctive dress and their general absolute rejection of modern secularism (El-Or, 1994).

Ultra-Orthodox Jews follow the Torah law and rituals literally (Ringel & Belcher, 2007). The Torah dictates how members should live their life both in public and privately, how they should relate to their family and friends, how they should dress, what they can eat, and how they can cook and bake. The Torah is both a Bible and a “how to” book, with interpretations from Commentaries and Rabbis. Members of this community subscribe to many conservative social values including gender norms which include modesty in dress and behavior, gender separation from early childhood, sexual abstinence until marriage and the adherence to complementary gender roles in marriage (Ringel & Belcher, 2007).

As noted above, ultra-Orthodox Jews also place strong boundaries between themselves

and the secular world to forestall assimilation. Described by Heilman (2006) as “enclavists” they view the outside world as a threat and attempt to live their lives within their own culture and “world”. They have created a fairly self-sufficient social system so that it is unnecessary for community members to seek entertainment, education, and employment outside, in the secular world. They provide religious schools for their children, a range of ultra-Orthodox Jewish news press, literary publishing companies, and entertainment via concerts, plays and videos produced by members of the community. Many of the members of the community do not listen to the radio, read the global newspapers, watch television or movies and lack access to the Internet. They try to shelter their children from the outside, but even with these established barriers, secular ideas manage to seep into this enclosed society (Davidman, 1990; Heilman, 2006).

Hasidism:

Hasidim, or “*Chassidism*”, is an even more insular subgroup of the ultra-Orthodox Jews. Although many of the *Hasidim* who came to America following World War II gave up their *Hasidic* way of life for the American dream, others maintained their old style in dress and beliefs. Their survival strategy has been defined as “resistance” (Davidman, 1990). The community shields members from the wider society by creating alternative ways for members to obtain jobs, residences, and even spouses. *Hasidim* have rejected jobs that require university degrees on the ground that traditional University signifies impurity (A Life Apart, 1998).

The community exercises strict control over the lives of its members and otherwise follows the strict script established by their Eastern European Rabbis prior to World War II. They hold strong to the belief that they will not modify the Bible to fit America, but they will

modify America to fit the Bible (A Life Apart, 1998).

Environmental Impacts:

Individuals are influenced by the environment around them, for some this may mean creating stronger boundaries or separations, but for all it means that any shift in society will create some form of change for each individual (Longman, 2007; Valins, 2003). According to Gitterman and Germain's (1980) life model individuals constantly adapt to changes in their environment. Individuals both change their environment and are changed by it (Payne, 1997). This holds for the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community that constantly adapts to shifts in the secular environment and thereby changes its environment as well (Heilman, 2006; Longman, 2007; Valins, 2003). Both modern-Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities recognize that whether or not their community joins or resists the influence of the secular culture, it cannot escape its' influence. For example as divorce increased in America at large it also began, albeit slower and later, to increase in the ultra-Orthodox community (Longman, 2007). It takes some time for a change in secular society to filter into the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.

In this study the term ultra-Orthodox Jew refers to *Haredim* and both terms include *Hasidim* and *Misnagdim*. Despite their differences both *Hasidim* and *Misnagdim* follow the Torah's strictest laws that mandate the creation of strict boundaries between themselves and wider society.

The Eishet Chayil: The Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Woman:

The Jewish community has been described as an unequal and patriarchal social system in which men lead the family and women live as second class citizens. But from the community's perspective a woman is seen as her husband's counsel, and in return her family treats her with the utmost respect (El-Or, 1994; Heilman, 1992; Levine, 2003).

A woman of valour who can find?
For her price is beyond pearls.
The heart of her husband trusted in her
And he would have no lack of gain
She did him good and not evil
All the days of her life

Proverbs 31:10, as seen in Wengrov, 1982

The woman of valor described in Proverb 31.10 refers to the ultimate Jewish woman who is expected to occupy the traditional role of wife and mother and to selflessly serve her family and community even when she is required to take on the burden of the breadwinner (Heilman, 1992; Longman, 2007; Ringel & Belcher, 2007). In contrast to the modern ideal of individual autonomy the woman's role in the Orthodox community is characterized by her relational capacities and reproductive value vis-à-vis her husband, children, family and the wider community (Longman, 2008). More specifically, following a short courtship arranged by a matchmaker women are expected to marry at a young age (18-21) to bear children early in their marriage and to have large families (Ringel & Belcher, 2007; Shai, 2002).

At the Friday night Sabbath table, the Orthodox Jewish husband recites the above verses praising the woman's role in the family and describing the ideal wife. The bible describes her as a skillful manager of the home, and a blessing to her family. The Talmud states that the Jewish

mother builds the wisdom of the Jewish home, that a man without a wife lives without joy and blessings, and that a husband should love his wife as himself (Yev. 62b, as seen in Schoenfeld, 1989). Rosenthal and Roer-Streir (2006) note, that ultra-Orthodox mothers also expect their daughters to become “a woman of valor” i.e. a hardworking woman who runs the home, maintains harmonious family relationships and is considerate to other community members. In this traditional role there is little room for the “I” and the women are encouraged to be self-sacrificing (Rubin and Wooten, 2007).

The relationship to religion is also highly gendered. Whereas men in the community carry the responsibility to maintain religious scholarship and attend the synagogue three times a day, women practice their religious observance through their good deeds for others in the community, through rituals in the home such as candle lighting on the Sabbath and through the preparation of kosher foods (A Life Apart, 1998; Bunin Benor, 2004; Ringel & Belcher, 2007). Women are expected to receive spiritual fulfillment in motherhood which holds precedence over other religious observances such as prayer and Torah study (A Life Apart, 1998; Bunin Benor, 2004). In brief, women’s ultimate role as homemaker and caregiver keeps them in the private sphere of the home and the closed community; some work part time but they are encouraged to work in positions that are not career oriented and that allow them to give precedence to their family life and to remain within their community.

The “*Kollel*” wife:

The ultra-Orthodox community has recently experienced a change that has the potential to disrupt these patriarchal arrangements. Today, many young married men participate in full time Talmudic study (known as “*kollel*”) while the women become employed and assume the

traditional breadwinner role (Shai, 2002). These young couples survive financially with support from their families and/or the wife's employment. Though some couples are idealistic and hope this arrangement will be long-term, most couples expect that enabling the husband to fulfill this role will be temporary, a few years, and that it will create strong spiritual foundation for their home. They view the arrangement as a spiritual "kick off" to their marriage (Shai, 2002).

Interestingly, though, if the "kollel wife" attends college and enters the secular workforce, her exposure to the outside world may pose a threat within the community including a threat to the gender division of labor and women's traditional role within it.

The ultra-Orthodox community is also facing economic shifts similar to those faced by secular society creating a need for a double income. Even more so though, due to the religious requirement the cost of living is usually higher for Orthodox Jews (e.g.; kosher food, holidays, private education) (Longman, 2008) thus an economic crisis can have a greater impact on them. These changes create a need for a double income, causing ultra-Orthodox Jewish women to enter the workforce which has brought to the forefront the similarities between the *Eishet Chayil*, or woman of valor and the *Superwoman*. The *Superwoman*, a 1970s media myth, describes a woman "who not only brought home the bacon but fried it up in a pan" (Mims & Lankford, 1994, p. 58). The *superwoman* had it all; a career, family and individual autonomy. However as women attempted to achieve this ideal it became evident that along with this success came stress, conflict and increased anger and hostility which was felt by the women as well as their spouses and families (Houston & Kelly, 1989; McBride, 1997). As the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman assumes new roles she too may be attempting to "have it all", but not without conflict.

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women and Education:

The Jewish community has always placed a high priority on education (Lavender, 1976). However, the kind of education and who gets educated varies by Jewish sect. The educational paths of ultra-Orthodox men and women have always differed. Ultra-Orthodox Jews believe that their main purpose in life is “*Avodat Hashem*”-- to be in “the service of God”. However, while ultra-Orthodox men serve God by learning *Talmud*, ultra-Orthodox women are exempt, if not forbidden to learn the *Talmud* (Bunin Benor, 2004; El-Or, 1994; Sieger, 1997; Labovitz, 2007). For generations ultra-Orthodox boys went to “*Cheder*” (religious schools) at a young age, often leaving home for months or years at a time. In contrast the community initially opposed Biblical studies for girls who they expected to become mothers and homemakers. Religious studies for girls were left to the parents.

The religious education of Jewish women did not become institutionalized in Europe until the early 1900s when education became mandatory for all children. Boys could fulfill this mandate by attending “*Cheder*”, but to obey the new rule girls entered a public school where they became fluent in Russian, Polish or German and many lost their “*Yiddish*” capacity. The girls also began to imitate the dress of wider society and learned more about the history and culture of their host country and less about Jewish history (El-Or, 1994).

Fearing the long-dreaded assimilation (El-Or-1994) the European ultra-Orthodox community opened religious studies to women. They created an educational framework for women that taught the Torah; the Bible with commentary. The education of women was furthered once the growing Zionist movement and the pre-World War II migration of Eastern European Jewry to other countries threatened the existence of the Orthodox community. The community then concluded that providing women with the basics of Jewish study might prevent

them from leaving the fold (El-Or, 1994).

The establishment of an Orthodox educational framework for women began by Sara Shenirer, a young seamstress. She began what was to become known as the *Beit Ya'akov* movement by teaching young girls Torah, the bible with Rashi's commentaries. Rashi (1040-1105), a medieval French rabbi, is the author of the first comprehensive commentary on the bible as well as on other ancient Judaic text. Rashi's commentary is noted for its clarity and is the first commentary taught to children (Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972). The *Beit Ya'akov* movement continued in America and in other countries following World War II. The education of women became popular especially as options for preserving the ultra-Orthodox community grew fewer and fewer in a secular, pluralistic, and democratic society (El-Or 1994).

Following the Zionist movement and the pre- World War II migration of Eastern European Jewry to other countries the Eastern European Orthodox Jewish community created a religious education system for women to keep them informed of Jewish traditions and tied to the community (El-Or, 1994). It also re-established the "*Cheder*" movement that groomed boys to remain in full-time religious study. The sex segregation of these elementary and high schools minimized interaction of boys and girls, to the point that they rarely talked to the opposite sex so that the co-ed classroom became both uncomfortable, and unacceptable.

The community also preferred to keep both boys and girls from entering colleges and university on the grounds that youth were especially susceptible to the new found freedom offered by college life and college would lead youth to reject their traditional religious values and views (Berger, Jacobson & Waxman, 2007; Lavender, 1976). They also worried that sending their children to secular educational institutions might result in anti-semitism on campuses. Since the ultra-Orthodox Jewish leaders refused to accept secular colleges and

universities (Berger et al., 2007; Heilman, 2006) they set out to create their own programs such as the one at Touro College described below (Berger et al., 2007). They preferred a college that would allow them to continue to provide sex-segregated education to members of their community and otherwise accommodate the community's unique culture and lifestyle needs.

Touro College:

Touro College derives its name from the Touro family, leaders of colonial America, who represented the ideals upon which the College has based its mission (Touro Bulletin, 2003). It was founded in 1971 based on Dr. Lander's "vision" or dream to create a college that offered a high quality and broad-gauged educational experience in the standard disciplines while transmitting the Hebraic and classical traditions to bright young scholars. This dream intensified through the 1960s after one third of American Jewry became assimilated into secular society. The College opened just when the changing secular economy made it increasingly necessary for young Jewish adults to secure a college degree to earn an adequate living (S. Parnas, Personal Communication, 29, March 2005, B. Simon, Personal Communication, 30, March 2005).

Touro College was established to enrich the Jewish heritage, to strengthen Jewish identity and continuity in the larger community, especially, on the college campus and to otherwise serve the Jewish community (Holzer, Personal Communication, 29 March, 2005; Touro, 1976, Touro College Bulletin, 2003). When Touro College opened in 1971 with a class of thirty -five male students, the press described it as a great experiment in Jewish higher education blending the best of Jewish and secular scholarship in an atmosphere of personal attention and academic excellence. In 1976 Touro created a campus in the vibrant Jewish community of Flatbush, Brooklyn. This campus currently enrolls 1000 students per semester offering sex segregated

classes and a way for the community to maintain its boundaries from the secular world.

In 1989 Touro established the School for Lifelong Education specifically to serve the academic needs of the ultra-Orthodox/Hasidic community (Touro, 2005). It followed the tradition of other lifelong education programs in the United States that were created for adult students who wanted to complete a college education but had difficulty fitting the schedule of traditional college programs. Programs such as University Without Wall programs, University Extension programs and contract or experiential learning *assessment* programs credit a student's prior learning experiences outside of college, allow external degree completion (no campus residency requirement was imposed) and distance education (Spanard, 1990).

The homepage of Touro's Life Long Education program states that the School was established to: "serve the academic needs of the *Chassidic* communities, whose unique culture, commitment and lifestyle require bold and innovative approaches to higher learning." Instruction is offered in a variety of modalities to accommodate the student's lifestyle and commitments to family and occupation (Touro bulletin, 2008).

The School accommodates the Jewish community in various ways. Classes are held within the *Hasidic* neighborhood so as to offer not only convenience, but a comfort level for the women as well (Berger et al. 2007; Heilman, 2006; S.Parnas, Personal Communication, 29 March, 2005). The separate men's and women's divisions make it possible for women to go to college as does its practice of holding classes for men and women on different nights. Sex segregation enables men who wish to remain in "*kollel*" and work to get an education at the same time (Touro Bulletin, 2003; S. Parnas, Personal Communication, 29 March, 2005). The program further accommodates the Jewish community in the way classes are scheduled. Students can attend mentorials (e.g. scheduled by the professor and the student) or collaborative classes (e.g.

scheduled on alternate weeks), in addition to some traditionally scheduled weekly classes. Women's classes are not held on Thursday nights when the community expects women to shop and cook in preparation for the Sabbath, nor during the two weeks prior to Passover when homes need to be strictly cleansed in preparation for the Holiday. Classes are cancelled on days prior to the Holidays for this same reason.

Touro College has expanded enormously during the last thirty years. It currently enrolls approximately 15,000 students from all walks of life in its various schools and divisions (Touro Bulletin, 2003). Its growth in part reflects its capacity to address the needs of the Jewish community to help the Jewish community maintain its gendered norms, to protect community members from exposure to secular politics, entertainment and ideological views and in general ensure that the community secures its social, cultural and political boundaries. Upon completion of the program students receive either an Associate in Arts (A.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.) or Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree (S. Parnes, Personal Communication 29, March 2005, Touro, 2005, Touro Bulletin, 2003).

The establishment of programs which are culturally specific and created solely for the ultra-Orthodox community has not eliminated trepidation about the impact of secular studies on the ultra-Orthodox women. In Israel, for example, where many accredited programs are established for the ultra-Orthodox Jews, some ultra-Orthodox Rabbis now prohibit ultra-Orthodox women from attending these programs. They argue that programs take too long to complete and lead women to delay their prime goals of marriage and child bearing (Ettinger & Rotem, 2007).

Chapter 2

Theory:

Theory Introduction:

In the last few decades the roles of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman has undergone changes due to secular infiltration, inner political transitions and economic shifts (Longman, 2008). This study will be using a multi-theoretical approach to examine the issues faced by these women. It will be grounded in the System perspective to understand how the students' interactions with their environment influence their experiences as well as there being a strong emphasis on role theory to understand the relationships between the individuals and their roles.

Systems Theory and its implications for this study

This study emphasizes role theory which is used to understand relationships between individuals, however it is beneficial to briefly discuss the Systems perspective. The Systems perspective views individuals as part of systems, and describes how environment influences the person and their roles and how the individual influences their environment as well. This concept is imperative for this study as it attempts to comprehend not only how the environment is allowing for shifts in roles, but how these shifting roles alter the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy originated general systems theory in 1928. Until then it was believed that systems could be broken down and each component analyzed independently, and that the parts can be added in a linear fashion to describe the whole system. Von Beralanffy proposed that this was not so and that in truth a system is characterized by the *interactions* of its

components and the nonlinearity of those interactions (Walonick, 1993). With this new understanding of systems came the growth of the Systems Perspective.

System perspective suggests that individuals are made up of subsystems and are part of super-systems. Each individual and the systems interact and influence each other. The individual and the systems are constantly adapting to changes and interchanges with different aspects of their environment. The environment changes the system, but it is also changed by the system. This however is dependent on a number of variables, such as whether the systems are closed or open systems. Closed systems are systems where there is no interchange across the boundaries and interaction occurs only within the system while open systems allow for energy to cross the boundaries and there are interactions with the outside environment allowing for information to come in and go out of the system (Payne, 1995; Walonick, 1993). An example often used to differentiate between the two systems is a closed vacuum flask versus a tea bag of hot water which allows water in and tea out but keeps the leaves inside (Payne, 1995). Thus the amount of interaction and influence that systems have on each other is dependent on their boundaries which are set up within the system.

According to Kuhn (1974) all systems tend towards a state of equilibrium which is the ability to maintain the fundamental nature of the system even though influences from outside systems are permeating the boundaries and influencing the system. Payne (1995) explains that social system can maintain their equilibrium by fulfilling all of their system's needs this is known as synergy. However, if a system does not create synergy- if the needs of the system are not met within the systems bounds- then outside resources would be necessary for the system. This may affect the equilibrium of the system and cause reciprocity, the idea that if one part of

the system changes this change will interact with other parts, thus causing change within the system.

As stated above the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community are viewed as “enclavists” (Heilman, 2006), however as insular as they are, they cannot remain as a “closed” system completely unaltered by changes occurring in the secular world. Changes in society at large are infiltrating into the ultra-Orthodox community and influencing individuals and in turn their system. The community members and leaders attempt to maintain a state of equilibrium by fulfilling the needs of their community member from within. However reciprocity is occurring within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community as members of the community are influenced by other systems and in turn are affecting the equilibrium of their community.

Introduction to Role Theory

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish women attending The School for Lifelong Education experience additional modifications in their roles if only due to the additional role of student. These changes may potentially impact their relationships, cause role strain and or role enhancement as well as impact their self-identity. Theoretical frameworks such as role theory role accumulation, role stress, role enhancement and role change are potentially useful in examining how these women deal with these role changes and its impact on their relationships. These theoretical constructs will guide the development of this study. The utility of each framework will be described here:

Role Theory:

Role theory, as a theory, is rooted in anthropology, sociology and psychology. Though Parsons (1951) is often credited with founding role theory, George Herbert Mead (1934), Ralph

Linton (1936), Jacob Moreno (1934) and G. Simmel (1920) are noted contributors to the theory. Role theory has even been traced back to G. Tarde (1888) and Emile Durkeim (1893) by Rochblave-Spenle (1962). Role theory is designed to explain how individuals in specific roles or social positions are expected to behave and how they expect others to behave (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). Though some claim that role theory as a theory offers little utilization (Biddle, 1986; Lemay, 1999), the concepts used in role theory assist in explaining human behavior from the individual up and the social structure down (Lemay, 2007). The theory is based on the key concept of roles whose definition varies depending on the theoretical perspective that they are being viewed through (Hindin, 2007).

Two Guiding Perspectives: Functionalist and Interactionist perspective:

Two guiding perspectives on role theory are the functionalist perspective and the interactionist perspective. The functionalist perspective based on the work of Parson (1951), Durkheim (1893) and Linton (1936) focuses on the organizational structure of social life and the function of each individual in society. Society, as a structure, is viewed, according to functionalists, as static and each individual in their role is necessary to keep the equilibrium while any changes cause disequilibrium (Biddle, 1986; Lynch, 2007; Rubin & Babbie, 2008). In contrast, the Interactionist perspective, based on the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) view society and things that are social as constantly changing through the interactions that individuals have with others (Rubin & Babbie, 2008; Hall, 2007).

Functional Role Theory:

The functionalist approach to role theory began with the work of Linton (1936) and was formalized in Parsons (1951) publications. Functional role theory focused on the characteristic behaviors of individuals who hold social positions in a stable social system (Biddle, 1986). Functionalists define roles as prescriptive and based on a shared understanding of expectation. Individuals learn these roles and are expected to conform to these roles and to sanction those who deviate from these roles. From this perspective roles, which are created by society and are universally agreed upon, are defined by a set of predictable expectations placed by society on an individual in relation to their role. These role expectations are comprised of the perceived rights, privileges, duties and obligations of any occupant of a social position relative to others in the social structure (Lynch, 2007).

Functional role theory follows the perspective that the social system is considered stable, and that individuals within this perspective will learn and follow the roles which are normative expectations that dictate appropriate behavior. In this perspective individuals in specific roles are expected to act in a specific predictable manner, there is little room for change without causing strain or conflict. Thus, it is fairly impossible for individuals to adopt or combine additional roles or to negotiate role demands which are seemingly an everyday occurrence for individuals with multiple roles. From this perspective multiple roles are seen as conflict inducing and the constant switching and overlapping of role performances is viewed as “deviant” situations representing “exceptions” to the structure and normal social order (Prus, 1996, as seen in Lynch, 2007) As with functionalism in general, functional role theory is limited in that social system have not proven to be stable and social positions and roles are not necessarily clearly delineated or fixed (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007; Lynch, 2007.)

Interactionist Role Theory:

The interactionists, or symbolic interactionist, role theory is based on George Herbert Mead's development of the mind and self. Roles are not viewed as static, but rather they are flexible; learned through social interaction. Unlike functional role theorists who posit that roles are prescribed, interactionist role theorists suggest that norms are developed through constant negotiation between individuals and society (Biddle, 1986; Brookes et.al, 2007; Lynch, 2007).

In contrast to the functionalist view of roles, interactionists shift the view of roles from stable norms to more changeable; continually readjusting social processes. A role cannot be viewed independently as it is created through interactions with others and individuals are constantly attempting to coordinate their behaviors with others to jointly constitute a given role. Theorists from this perspective constantly consider how roles are played out and how this playing out of roles impact both the actor and the others, it is concerned with the relationships (Hindin, 2007; Payne, 1997).

George Herbert Mead describes how roles are adopted through his developmental model of children's adoption of roles in the development of self. According to Mead (1863-1931) roles are first merely imitated and then role expectations and behaviors are learned through play, reciprocity and interactions. Adults continue to adopt roles and adapt to them through interpersonal interactions. It is the act of role taking and reciprocity which actually creates roles and expectations (Lynch, 2007). Symbolic interactionists believe that outcomes are determined by social interactions or outcomes. Roles are perceived as the relationships between what a person does and what others do around them. Communication, the use of verbal and non verbal

symbolic acts such as speech, gestures and body language, is considered central to the integration of roles and achieving role expectations (Brookes, et.al, 2007).

The Interactionalist approach allows for a more dynamic and complex conceptualization which captures the experiences of social interaction from the perspective of its perceiver and the perceived. It accounts for beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes; norms, contextual demands and expectations; and identity and self-concept (Lemay, 2007). This perspective may offer a better understanding of how changes in roles impact the individual and their relationships.

Limitations of Role Theory:

Though the concept “role” is used in approximately 10% of published sociological research (Biddle, 1986; Lemay, 2007) and role theory is used in many anthropological, psychological and sociological research studies (Lemay, 2007) role theory has been criticized as a theory. Criticisms lie in its inability to explain social deviance, its limitations in explaining how role expectations came to be, and its inability to explain when and how role expectations change.

Role theory though, has offered an abundance of concepts which have assisted researchers in understanding the individual and social structures. For this study, concepts from role theory will be used to guide this study in an attempt to explain how these traditional women with traditional role expectations deal with role changes, multiple roles and possible role conflict and or enhancements.

Role Theory Concepts:

The functional and Interactionist approaches offer two very different general perspectives to role theory. Whereas the functional role theory perspective suggests that roles are static, prescriptive and based on shared understanding of expectations, the interactionist role theory posits that norms and roles are learned through social interactions thus they are flexible. This study does not attempt to resolve these differences which relate primarily to how roles are assumed. But rather it will use a number of concepts and theories which have emerged from these perspectives to explore the way the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women at the School for Lifelong Education perceive and understand their roles, and how roles impact their behavior and their identity.

Roles:

Loosely defined, roles, which represent a point of articulation between the individual and society, consist of a set of rules or norms that function as blueprints to guide behavior. In general people are conceptualized based on their roles. (Lynch, 2007). Indeed ebaugh (1988, as seen in Lynch, 2007) points out that when individuals are asked “who are you?” their response usually includes their social categories or roles (e.g., female, wife, French, lawyer). Thus behavior is predictable depending on context and role expectations. According to role theory, for one to change their behavior they must change their roles as well since each role has its own set of norms which influence one’s beliefs and attitudes as well (Turner, 1990). In addition, one’s perception of their role affects how or if one will be able to deal with change (Payne, 1997).

Multiple Roles:

Individuals do not assume a single role. On a daily basis, individuals juggle numerous roles which must be organized and negotiated. The mother who is an employee, spouse, sister, friend, colleague, and yoga instructor may find that these roles overlap. These roles cannot always be discretely separated as individuals are often called upon to play more than one of their roles at the same time and in the same place (Lynch, 2007). Multiple roles have been an area of interest for researchers studying the effect that numerous roles have on the individual. Researchers have posited two competing arguments to address the dynamics of these multiple roles; role strain and enhancement.

Role Strain:

The term “role strain” was introduced by William J. Goode in 1960 to describe the difficulty in performing multiple roles (Sieber, 1974). “Role strain” is composed of two concepts, “role conflict” and “role overload”. Although these two concepts are often used interchangeably, they are independent, albeit related concepts (Coverman, 1989).

Role Overload:

Role Overload occurs when the demands on the individual exceed their ability to achieve and undertake the role. The individual is unable to not due to an inability to comprehend what is required, but rather they lack the capacity due to limitations of time, skill level or education (Brookes et.al, 2007). In essence, the individual is unable to succeed at the role due to limitations beyond their control. For example: the concept of “the day is short and the work is great” relates to the shortage of time that limits one’s capabilities of achieving their role demands

(Coverman, 1989; Hecht, 2001). Role overload can also be seen when a novice social worker is allocated a clinical case which demands a level of complexity beyond their clinical competence.

Role Conflict:

Role conflict occurs when an individual is unable to satisfy the demands of one role due to the interference from the demands of another role. For example, if a working mother has a job meeting and her daughter's recital scheduled simultaneously. It is not possible for her to be at both, thus the role conflict forces the woman to choose which one is more important at that time (Coverman, 1989; Hecht, 2001).

Role conflict theory describes role conflict as a condition in which a person is faced with incompatible role related expectation. This incompatibility can result from disparate expectations associated with a single role or from competing expectations associated with two roles that a person occupies simultaneously. Role conflict theory presumes incompatibility and is viewed as a negative condition which one typically associates with stress and lowered performance (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Role conflict or scarcity theorists argue that an increased amount of roles is associated with negative affective and behavioral outcomes for the individual. It holds that each individual has a fixed sum of energy to spend and adding a role commitment will inevitably detract from the resources available for another (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King, 2002). For these theorists it is typical for conflict, or strain, to arise between various roles and should be expected (Tompson & Werner, 1997). Role conflict theory asserts that when faced with two roles that are conflicting the individual will avoid transitioning into roles which are perceived as inducing conflict or tension (Barber, 2001).

Role conflict resolution theory (Gross et al. 1958) suggests that individuals do choose among incompatible norms based on their view of others and their norms. Van de Vliert offers three steps which may be taken to resolve stressful role conflict which are a choice among norms; if that is not possible, a compromise among norms; if all else fails, withdrawal from the situation (Van de Vliert, 1979, 181 as seen in Biddle 1986). Hall (1972) proposed three individual strategies for coping with or eliminating role conflict. The strategies are structural role redefinition, personal role redefinition and reactive role behavior. Hall suggests that one can either, alter structurally given demands, modify personal role definitions or meet all role demands (Biddle, 1986; Elman & Gilbert, 1984; Stanfield, 1998). Perrone et al. (2006) suggests that coping skills are crucial for individuals faced with multiple roles. Coping skills such as role reduction and cognitive restructuring have been offered as solutions to role conflict (Elman & Gilbert, 1991).

Role Enhancement:

Though role conflict seems to indicate that multiple roles cause stress and should be avoided it does not take into account the positive aspects gained from multiple roles. Role enhancement or role accumulation suggests that multiple roles can increase self-esteem, social identity (Sieber, 1974) and enrichment (Ruderman et al, 2002). In contrast to role conflict, role enhancement research has found that maintaining multiple and contradictory roles does not, in and of itself, lead to stress and discontent (Baruch, Biener & Barnett, 1987; Sales, Shore & Bolitho, 1980), Rather individuals with a rich combination of life roles-including work, marital, and parental roles-experience greater overall life satisfaction than individuals who focus primarily on a single role (Perrone et al, 2006).

Sieber (1974) offered four rewards of holding multiple roles: accumulating privileges, status security, status enhancement and enhancement of self-esteem. Multiple roles can be used to buffer one another (Tompson & Werner, 1997), participation in certain roles may generate resources for use in other roles (Ruderman et. al, 2002) and the additional requirements attached to each role give purpose, meaning, and direction to one's life (Hong & Seltzer, 1995; Thoits, 1983). In contrast to the scarcity hypothesis, Wethington and Kessler (1989) found that multiple role occupation was actually related to decreased psychological distress as these individuals had more successful coping mechanisms with multiple role demands.

Role Change:

Role change, which describes the actual changing of a role, differs from role transitions and role reallocation which describe the movement of an individual out of one role and into another (Burr, 1972). Role change offers the option of actually changing the role, thus the expectation and behaviors for that particular social position will actually undergo a change. Role change will typically occur when there is a widespread misfit between the role and the person due to a systemic structural or attitudinal change. Role change can also occur for other reasons such as; change from another person, which will affect the individuals role or change in environmental structure or cultural values as they apply to the individuals role and to its various goals and functions (Turner, 1990). For this change to actually lead to a successful negotiation of a new role pattern, thus role change, is dependent on several conditioning factors. According to Turner's model for role change (1990) these factors include (a) whether there is a realistically achievable alternative role pattern whose benefit cost ratio is actually more favorable than the old pattern; (b) the extent of structural autonomy of the role setting, the extent from close observation, or the weakening of normative controls over role performance; (c) the extent to

which role incumbents are unified in their desire for role change and mobilized to promote change; (d) the extent to which there is mobilized “client” demand for the services this role provides or would provide under a new pattern; (e) the cultural credibility of the potential new role pattern; and (f) success in gaining institutional support for the new pattern including in many cases legal and judicial action. Not all six of these factors are relevant for all kinds of potential role change, however if the total effect of the relevant conditions is negative or questionably positive, the focal role will choose resignation rather than role change. Resignation by the focal role may also occur if the role change envisioned involves encroachment on the rights or duties of other roles and a competitive situation is created and a balance cannot be met (Turner, 1990).

If however, it is possible for a balance to be met between the competitive roles and all other factors indicate a positive outcome, role change will occur. However, this change is relative, and not absolute. This creates a new pattern and new accommodation techniques in which people interact. This new existence rarely exists without conflict, and the good and the bad need to be accepted for the most optimal results (Turner, 1990).

Application of Role Theory to this Study:

Role Theory explains that an individual’s role or position guides their behavior based on the role expectation that the individual and others hold for that role. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish women juggle numerous roles, each with their own role expectations. The women’s roles as mother, wife, student and community member require predictable yet different behaviors depending on the situation. This study will use role theory to try to understand how the women perceive their role expectations, explore the effect of multiple roles as role conflict or role enhancement, and attempt to explore how role change occurs in this community, if at all.

Role Theory and Women:

Alice Eagly (1987) suggests that the value of role theory is in its ability to predict the differences of people based on their gender roles. Social role theory posits that society constructs the roles of women and men based on a prescribed gender division of labor- one that enforces patriarchal relations of power built into the system of male domination and female subordination (Harrison, 2005). These socially constructed sex roles first appeared in the early 1800s as the industrial revolution separated home and market production and needed someone to work in the new factories and someone else to maintain the family at home. These prescribed roles have persisted until this day, with some modification. The early domestic code emerged to inform each sex of their proper gender roles leading to notions of masculinity and femininity. The prescribed gender division of labor helped to uphold the gendered status quo to the extent that the norms and expectations were internalized by children early in life and adopted by adults and expressed in various social settings (Ferree, 1990; Harrison, 2005; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). However changing social conditions can and have affected the social construction of women's roles. Technological, demographic, and environmental developments have modified the organization of both work and family life. At the same time the women's movement challenged traditional gendered expectations advocating new roles for women (Chafetz, 1984; Turner, 1990).

In the 1950s the prevailing "domestic code" in the United States-- which targeted the middle class --still assigned men to full-time breadwinning and women to full time homemaking. Although many working class and poor women worked outside the home to help their families make ends meet, these women could not escape the impact of the widely held

social expectations governed by dominant norms. Indeed after World War II the well-known and highly influential sociologists Parsons and Riesman posited ideal types of male and female behavior that corresponded to the needs of post-war society. Among other things, these norms encouraged women to leave the workforce they had joined to fill the places left by men sent to fight the war. Post war social norms conveyed by the media and other socializing institutions reinforced the idea that a woman's place was in the private home and a man's place was in the public sphere (Breines, 1986; Ferree, 1990). Men were given near full reign in the public sphere where major society decisions were made while women occupied center stage within the family and the much less powerful private sphere (Abramowitz, 1996).

In the 1960s and 1970s the feminist movement launched a second round in the fight for women's equality (the first was the battle for the ballot). The movement declared that "the personal is political", and challenged the idea of women's traditional sex roles (Ferree, 1990). In the early 1980s feminist scholars themselves influenced by the women's movement began to question sex role theory as well as sex roles played out in daily life. That is, they applied a gender lens to existing sex role theory and concluded that both male and female roles were socially constructed by historical circumstance, not biologically determined, fixed or inevitable, and thus open to change (Ferree, 1990). However, to this day society still holds women responsible for most domestic matters including quality of the marital relationship, the mental health and well-being of children, and even for preventing male violence. Given these mandates, women are regularly blamed when things go wrong (Ferree, 1990).

Feminist theorists also distinguished between sex and gender to highlight the difference between biological attributes and the social construction of gender roles. Sex refers the

biological state of man and woman and gender to describe the socially assigned male and female attributes popularly known as masculine and feminine behaviors. Feminist scholars documented that children were socialized at a young age to accept these gendered expectations, that parents encouraged girls to play with dolls and boys to play with trucks and that gender stereotypes seeped into all aspects of daily life. The notion of proper feminine and masculine behavior shaped role expectations including the deeply held belief that proper or feminine women subscribe to communal attributes (caring, nurturing friendly, cooperative, emotional) and performed the expressive role, while proper or masculine men possessed genetic attributes (i.e. achievement oriented, assertive, independent, active) and fulfilled the instrumental role (Harrison, 2005; Pierce et al., 2003). Another way that the division of labor was continued was by sustaining the “ideology of domesticity” by socializing women into believing that “motherhood” is “natural” and that “good” women are mothers who stay home with only one role; the role of the “good” mother. This causes conflict and guilt within women who are either forced or choose to take on another role outside of the home bringing to question their being a “good” woman (Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Hock, McBride & Gnezda, 1989; Russo, 1976).

In effect, gender role theory focuses on the creation of the gender division of labor. It argues that this social structure is sustained by societal processes that impose gendered specific male and female behaviors and roles as well as by defining women and men who step out of these roles as deviant. Feminists also suggest that the gender differential grants men more access to power and resources than women, helping to ensure that the gender division of labor will stay in place unless women initiate the change (Ferree, 1990).

In the 1960s and 1970s the Feminist movement exposed the gender division of labor as

unfair, challenged the gendered status quo as discriminatory, and fought for equal opportunity, if not equal power with men. The mobilization of large numbers of women brought down barriers and opened new doors, especially in the workplace- a trend that was reinforced in the early 1970s by the growing demand for low paid women workers in the expanding service economy. In line with role theory, the new opportunities outside home, especially the pursuit of more education, jobs and careers, led to changes in women's role in the home. In many households, the necessity for a second income also weakened the male-female gender divide (Turner, 1990). While increasing women's options, the access to new and multiple roles brought by these changes outside the home created new role dilemmas and new role opportunities for women (Abramowitz, 1996).

Chapter 3

The Returning Women

As noted earlier, the traditional ultra-Orthodox Jewish culture expected women to choose their family role above any other role (Moore and Gobi, 1995; Ringel, 2007). However, internal and external changes described earlier are affecting this traditional culture, in ways that impinge on the traditional gender division of labor (Turner, 1990).

Due to economic changes in the community, including increased birth rates and higher living costs (e.g.; private education, kosher foods) as well as the necessity of a college degree for jobs that previously did not require degrees (e.g.; pre-school teachers), many ultra-Orthodox Jewish wives/mothers are returning to school today-- some after many years in the home. While their experiences are shaped by the gender and religious prescription built into ultra- Orthodox Jewish culture, in many ways it parallels, but in a more intense form-- the experience of secular women who return to college after a long absence.

Academic interest in the experience of returning women surfaced in the mid-seventies in response to (1) the rise of the women's movement which encouraged women to work outside the home (2) the loss of male earning power to deindustrialization globalization, and stagflation and (3) the expansion of the service economy that created a demand for low paid female labor. As women responded to these changing needs and norms, many attempted to combine the role of wife and mother with that of worker or student (e.g.: Anderson & Mieзитis, 1999; Barnett et.al, 2001; Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Clouder, 1997; Thomas, 2001; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Though prevalent in the 70s and 80s, these changing needs are becoming more relevant

in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community today as the shifts and changes are now filtering into this isolated tight knit community. Reflecting the power of the mainstream, most of the literature on the returning women dates from the 1970s and 1980s, however since the 1980s research comparing traditional and non-traditional students, the needs and concerns of the non-traditional student and benefits of college education for returning women was conducted (Benshoff, 1991; Home, 1998; Kasworm, 1990, 2003; Thomas, 2001). This review will use both the more recent literature as well as the dated literature to glean insights into the more recent trends of ultra-Orthodox Jewish returning women.

Returning Women in General: Why They Go Back to School:

Traditional college students range in age from 18-24. However, by 1997 approximately 6 million or 42 percent of college students were 25 years or older (Thomas, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics non-traditional students are classified as students over the age of 24 (2005). Women are now considered the fastest growing population of non-traditional students (Kassworm, 2003). A large part of the increase in older college students, what has been termed “returning” or “re-entry” women, are women who work, manage families and fulfill other adulthood obligations while attending school (Thomas, 2001).

The literature reports that women re-enter or return to college for various reasons typically in response to other major changes in their health, careers, religion, family circumstances, a reassessment of goals and priorities or due to a critical life event (Ross, 1988). They seek self-improvement, self-actualization, new knowledge or new skills to carry out new vocational, family, and /or social roles (Benshoff, 1991). Many women return to school in response to uncertainties regarding their religious beliefs and identity issues (Amstey &

Whitbourne, 1981). However, economic and financial necessity is the most common motive for adult women and men to return to school (Scanlon, 2008; Spanard, 1990).

How Returning Women are received by the School - Gender expectation:

Returning women were not always well received by the college. In the mid 1900's university leaders viewed ex-housewives as less serious about their education than men and predicted that the women would drop out of school prior to completing their degree or if they graduated, they would not enter the workforce. These beliefs reflected both traditional stereotypic views of women and housewives and the assumption that it was not all that feasible to re-socialize adults to new roles later in life (Johnson, Schwartz & Bower, 2000; Lefevre, 1972). Findings by researchers studying the ever growing number of women returning to college challenged these gender biased views (e.g.; Anderson & Mieztis, 1999; Barnett et al, 2001; Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Clouder, 1997; Thomas, 2001; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). They found that returning women in college took their education very seriously, demonstrated strong ambitions (Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Kasworm, 1990) often more so than traditional students (Lewis, 1988; Tidball, 1980). They were also found to adjust quickly to attending classes with younger college age students (Connors, 1982, Kasworm, 1990). Connors (1982) found that though non-traditional students (ages 25-50) manifest a greater desire for direction, guidance and limits on writing assignments than traditional college aged students (18-24) and spend on average one hour more than younger students preparing for class causing additional stress they are similar in their regard to the importance of gaining a degree (Katz et, al., 1975; Limbert, 1991).

The research regarding drop-out rate has found that women are more likely than men to

drop out for non- academic reasons including family variables and pressures (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home, 1998). Studies of women who did not complete their college education found that the women tended to adhere to traditional sex role expectations (Pirnot, 1987), to be overwhelmed by the triple demands of family, work and school (Johnson, Schwartz & Bower, 2000), to run into financial problems, conflicts over work, family and time or faced unmet personal needs (Stolar, 1991). In contrast, women who completed their degrees gave high priority to self- actualization (Pirnot, 1987).

Positive Outcomes:

Research has also shed light on the more positive outcomes for the returning women. School has enabled many to find a new role and identity and has altered their self-image, from someone's woman, wife, and mother, or as dowdy, subservient, and intellectually inadequate (Katz et. al, 1975) proving that they could attain greater achievements and move from the dead end role of married woman (Britton & Baxter, 1999). Oplatka and Tevel (2006) found that women returning to school felt more energized in life, reported higher levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing and increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Returning women have also expressed an opening of the self to a new depth, breadth, and richness of experience, a changing view of values, new aspirations and interests, reframing of existing understanding as well as an opportunity for personal growth which was deemed inappropriate in their traditional feminine role (Kasworm, 1990; Katz et al., 1975; Lefevre, 1972; Woodley & Wilson, 2002).

Studies comparing returning women with full time homemakers found that returning women tend to be more self-confident and individualistic than full time homemakers with children (Lefevre, 1972). In addition, Stern (1998) found that married graduate students who

have additional roles, such as parenting and working, reported greater satisfaction with their studies and less stress from school than non-married students. In a similar vein, researchers comparing working women and housewives report that working women demonstrate stronger career interests, intellectual achievement, autonomy and individualism and hold less conventional attitudes (Lefevre, 1972). Further, research on employed women and women on maternity leave revealed lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher scores on measures of mental health, life satisfaction and self-esteem in employed women and women on maternity leave than on homemakers (Rubin and Wooten, 2007). Working women were also found to have a better relationship with their children despite parent child conflicts (Lefevre, 1972).

Role Challenges:

Given that the gender division of labor still assigns men to breadwinning and women to homemaking, even when they work for wages outside the home, it is not surprising returning women tell researchers about the role challenges that they face. “Returning Women” consistently express concerns regarding the difficulty of blending school and family in their lives, (Thomas, 2001) and the additional stress due to college disrupting or interfering with other aspects of their lives (Dill & Henley, 1998). Katz et, al. (1975) found that women returning following an absence pertaining to their being a woman faced two pervasive problems; the difficulty in reconciling the demands placed on them as student, wife, mother and housewife due to time constraints as well as feelings of emotional fragmentation brought on by conflicting roles. They expressed feeling fragmented “between private lives (as a parent or partner), and public sphere (as a student in higher education) and between experiential ways of knowing (personal, subjective, emotional) and academic knowledge (objective and abstract)” (West, 1995, 133).

In general returning women's problems are due to a lack of money, day care, self-confidence, privacy, time, study skills, ability to manage stress, contact with peers, place to work, personal goals and mentors (Bigrigg, 1998; Limbert, 1991; Terrell, 1990). In addition, they exhibit guilt regarding their decreased availability towards their children, their inability to maintain their responsibilities such as their role as a mother and their constant need to make compromises in their careers due to family considerations (Terrell, 1990).

Some returning women perceive entering college to be a threatening experience due to fears of failure, the unknown, non-acceptance by other students or faculty, grades and failure to succeed (Johnson et al., 2000). Lefevre's (1972) study summarizes a typical three stage sequence that returning women describe. Initially, they are anxious and feel threatened, they then enter a period of growing confidence and involvement to a final orientation toward the vocational world.

Support:

It is believed that social support benefits one's quality of life; the greater the social support the better the quality of life. The "stress buffering" hypothesis posits that the relation between social support and quality of life is dependent on stress level. Social supports help to mediate adverse effects of that stressor (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Helgeson, 2002). Thus the higher the stress levels the greater the need for social supports (Helgeson, 2002). The support considered to be the most effective is emotional support which is defined as having people available to listen, to care, to sympathize, to provide reassurance, and to make one feel valued, loved and cared for (Helgeson, 2002; Jacobson, 1986). Another form of support which is beneficial is instrumental support which is concrete assistance such as help with household

chores, lending money, or running errands (Helgeson, 2002; Jacobson, 1986). Research on returning women have found that support from spouses, family and friends, is instrumental for these women to achieve their goal as it assists with resolving stress. However, it is not always easy to secure this support, especially from spouses.

Van Meter and Agronow (1982) report that for a woman to place another role, such as student or worker, before that of mother and wife, she must first have her partner's support to minimize role strain and decrease stress. However, husband's support for a wife's education is often colored by his gender attitudes and beliefs (Suito, 1987, 1988). While many husbands may endorse equal opportunity for women, they still consider child rearing to be a woman's job and expect women to give primacy to home and marriage (Clouder, 1997; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Berkove (1979) found that husbands often supported women but assumed that family and household roles would not be altered (as seen in Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Norton et al. (1998) found that when initial spousal support exists it often diminishes after the burden of additional responsibilities takes over. Cricket, Meehan & Negy (2003) attribute this to resentment by the non-student spouse of the additional responsibilities they must shoulder.

These gendered attitudes tend to vary with education--with husbands and mothers with more education-- (Suito, 1987, 1988) being more supportive of women returning to school than those with less education. However, instrumental support was greater among less educated husbands and mothers possibly because they believed that a higher education would allow their wives and daughters an opportunity that they did not receive (Suito, 1987, 1988). Sansing (1983) found that while the relationship between returning women and their mothers remained unchanged following their reentry to school, less educated mothers were more likely to question the role changes and liberal choices that their daughters made (Katz, et.al., 1975; Suito, 1987).

Marital Satisfaction:

There are conflicting findings on how a spouse's attending school impacts marital happiness. In the 1970s and 1980s it was believed, though unsupported by research, that a spouse returning to school would invariably divorce his or her spouse following completion of school (Kelly, 1982). However many "returning women" reported that their marital relationships became stronger following their reentry to school (Berman-Brandenburg, 1974; Kelly, 1982). In the last couple of decades, with an increase in married women entering school, research has shown that marital satisfaction is impacted by the return to school (e.g., Cricket et al., 2003; Johnson et.al, 2000; Kelly, 1990). Cricket et al. (2003) found that married undergraduate students manifest significantly high levels of marital distress on multiple dimensions in their relationships as compared to other couples. They have increased difficulty displaying affection, resolving differences with their spouses, report greater levels of aggression with each other, decreased levels of shared time, and were generally less satisfied in their relationships. Sokolski (1996) found that when both spouses were students marital satisfaction was higher than when only one partner was in school, though Cricket et al. (2003) did not find this to be true. Zosky et al (2004) found that the relationship between women and their spouses often changed for the worse once they returned to school.

Relationship with Children:

Many returning women report varying amounts of guilt regarding their children and their mothering role (Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Lefevre, 1972). Johnson et al., (2000) found that the greatest source of stress for adult women students is due to child-care concerns. Even so Zosky et. al (2004) found that mothers would not compromise their parenting roles no matter

how demanding their school work. Anderson & Mieziitis (1997) found that role conflict was more likely to affect the psychological health of women who have returned to school if they were parents, and especially if their children are young. On the other hand, research has also indicated that children of returning women seem to be positively affected by their mothers returning to school as they gain greater independence, responsibility and interest in school (Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Kelly, 1982). Returning women note that praise from their children, especially from their daughters, was an unexpected reward following reentry to school (Katz, et.al., 1975). Leppel (2002) found that a strong motivator for degree completion for single mothers is their children.

Requests for help from returning students:

Lamb-Porterfield, Jones & McDaniel's (1987) analysis of the needs of 104 full-time returning women students found that they needed assistance developing better academic, study and library skills. To assist them with the conflicting roles they also required additional evening and weekend classes as well as independent study opportunities. Students also reported a desire for faculty who understood the needs of adult students and for child care services at the educational institution (Benshoff, 1991; Clouder, 1997; Johnson et al., 2000; Limbert, 1991). Home (1998), however, found that even when supports or gestures are offered they do not necessarily have the desired result as the students are so overwhelmed.

The “finagling” act, how do they do it?

Rather than challenge externally imposed expectations or seek support from the institutions that they attend (Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Clouder, 1997), some returning women

attempt to alter their own behavior (Clouder, 1997). They take a lighter coursework load (Leppel, 2002) and arrange their class schedule, homework and study times around their family schedule. In effect, they cut back on personal time as well as sleep and otherwise alter personal behavior (Clouder, 1997; Johnson, 2000; Kelly, 1982). One returning woman admitted to locking herself in the bathroom to complete her work uninterrupted (Bigrigg, 1998). Many have missed social gatherings and had many sleepless nights so that they can complete their studies (Clouder, 1997; Johnson, 2000).

Religion and Culture and the Returning Woman:

Students of differing cultures, religions and minority groups are faced with issues of acculturation that scholars describe as a process of integrating majority culture and ethnic identity in a way that the interplay of both is congruent and distinguishing; often creating a new reality for themselves and a new self emerges. Minority students report feelings of isolation and loneliness as they attempt to deal not only with their own dissonance and need to belong, but also with their family values, customs and often lack of understanding and support. Immigrant women and their daughters describe the difficulty of acculturation as they must redefine gender and family roles, enter the worlds of higher education and work, and struggle to maintain ethnic values (Hickey, 1996). Some students attempt to keep a foot in both worlds, while others respond to the dissonance that they are feeling by dropping out (Romero, 1981).

There is little research regarding returning women of different cultures, religions and minority groups. What is available indicates that the returning women of differing cultures, religions and minority groups may face not only similar issues faced by younger college students of various backgrounds, but in addition they face challenges that the traditional returning women

face combined with cultural challenges to the returning women (Abbas, 2003; Katz, 1975; Longman, 1989; 2008; Schwarzbaum & Starr-Glass, 2002).

Religion and culture compounded with educational aspirations and outcome:

Culture and religion can also affect women's education. Abbas' (2003) study on young South Asian women of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani backgrounds in Great Britain found that religion did not seem to compound Indian women's educational aspirations, but that Muslim respondents did feel that religion and culture impacted their education. One student stated that her religion empowered her to remain strong in the face of pressures and to perform in education. Other women felt that cultural clashes left them unable to complete their degrees. One young Muslim woman for example started college but then dropped out as she felt torn between two cultures. Her family believed that she should marry young and that her education was not important, and her culture did not permit her to pursue many of her dreams. She married at 19, but ten years later she returned to school and stated that it was a great feeling as she now was able to deal with both cultures and attain her educational aspirations.

Returning women of different cultures and religions face additional challenges. Katz et al.'s (1975) study of 20 returning women included five Chicana women. The Chicana women stressed the need to work harder than their Anglo cohorts, but did not stress role conflicts or time constraints as issues they needed to deal with. Liberation from the home was not a primary goal for these women. Abbas (2003) reported that women from different cultures faced particular situational barriers, including considerable financial constraints, difficulties in balancing conflicting responsibilities, inadequate support systems, and institutional barriers (e.g., racism and sexism) (Thomas, 2001). Religio-cultural beliefs regarding patriarchy and role expectations

caused some of the women to drop out of school (Abbas, 2003).

Education valued for different reasons:

Katz et al. (1975) found that in contrast to Anglo women who focus on personal issues, Chicano women see education as the means to a better life. They think of academic achievement as a matter of personal satisfaction but also as benefiting their entire community. Thomas (2001) found that most African American women return to school to acquire better career opportunities and economic improvement. Education enhances their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy and can have a positive impact on their marriages and their relationship with their children.

Support:

As noted above support is an important factor for returning women to complete their education (Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). For returning women of different cultures and religions this support may be more difficult to attain due to cultural beliefs regarding gender roles. Abbas (2003) found that though some Muslim women expressed a lack of support due to conflicts regarding role expectations, few South Asian Muslim women felt that they faced hostile parents or feared exclusion from the community as they entered college. This may be due to an increasing understanding of the benefits gained from education. Non-Muslim South Asian women felt that they had social support from their parents and community (Abbas, 2003).

Jewish Women:

Despite the community's emphasis on women's traditional role as wife, mother and homemaker, financial need has forced ultra-Orthodox women to seek a college degree. For

some the high cost of running a Jewish home (e.g.; kosher food, private Jewish education and holidays) has created a need for more than one paycheck. Other ultra-Orthodox Jewish women have returned to school because ultra-Orthodox Jewish men have decided to delay their entry into the workforce in order to participate in full time Talmudic study (Shai, 2002). This shift in male roles from breadwinner to scholar has created a need for women to gain a college degree so that they can support their families.

Research on Orthodox Jewish women who return to school has found that they too face challenges stemming from their cultural beliefs. Longman (2008) described the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in her study as “exceptional” because by entering secular universities and places of employment they crossed the boundaries between their community and the surrounding society thereby challenging their communities’ traditional gender norms, roles and expectations. A number of the women in Longman’s (2008) study explained that they could negotiate traditional gender norms because they had an “open minded” upbringing that also emphasized obtaining some type of secular skill or education. Women with “open minded” husbands; men who pursued a secular education or who did not oppose secular education for their wives, also had an easier time pursuing secular higher education. Given the chance, the women with open minded backgrounds and spouses want more education due to personal interest, ambition and desire, rather than pure financial necessity. Many of the women stated that their class or financial means allowed for them to deal with balancing their many roles because they could afford help and support (Longman, 2008).

However, most ultra-Orthodox Jewish homes regard secular education for women as incompatible with the traditional expectation that they marry young and have large families. Schoenfeld’s (1989) study of modern Orthodox Jewish women found that though the women in

her study did not face the same cultural barriers faced by ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, they did not escape conflict between roles and over role expectations. Their decision to return to school reflected free time, boredom, desire to finish their education, career goals and professionalism. Many reported an “identity crisis” and were seeking a “new identity”. Though the women assumed an egalitarian approach to their work life, they did not apply this principle to their religious practices and showed little interest in participating with men on an equal basis in religious services and rituals. These women viewed their role and their place from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism—as a caretaker, nurturer, and helpmate to their families, and they did not question this religious role nor did they show any interest in participating equally in the male traditional religious roles.

Both modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish women reported experiencing higher levels of stress and pressure than they had originally expected. The stress diminished as they progressed in their studies and with success their self-esteem increased as well. Although they felt conflicted about spending less time with their husbands and children, they maintained the family equilibrium by making sure that they did not neglect their household duties nor put additional responsibilities on family members. They described the resulting pressures as “overwhelming”, “unbelievable” and “debilitating”. They felt mentally and physically stressed (Longman, 2008; Schoenfeld, 1989).

When faced with conflict between their school or careers and their family, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women put their family first. They held their traditional role as wife and mother above all of their other roles (Longman, 2008). In contrast, according to Schoenfeld (1989), among modern Orthodox women who held traditional role expectations, a number of them allowed their professional drive to prevail over their traditional family roles.

Chapter 4

Methodology:

Type of Study:

The purpose of this study is to advance an understanding of perceptions and needs of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in a culturally specific college program in New York City and to contribute to the foundation of knowledge for intervening with them. It explores the women's reasons for seeking a higher education, their lived experiences as students and the nature of the conflicts, if any, that arise as they juggle the roles of student, mother, wife, worker and member of a religious community. The three main research questions that guided this study are;

- ❖ How, if at all, do the experiences in school change them or their roles?
- ❖ How, if at all, do their experiences change their relationships with others and their community?
- ❖ How, if at all, do they deal with competing demands; are they viewed as rewarding or conflicting?

Given the limited data currently available about ultra-Orthodox Jewish women and their academic experiences qualitative methodology and a phenomenological perspective was used to understand these women's experiences and how if at all this experience influenced them.

The qualitative research design was used for this study as it focuses on gathering information through an inductive and first person approach which contributed to filling current gaps in our understanding of this topic. The qualitative method also allowed for personal and narrative interviewing of individuals which seemed to be an appropriate strategy for a group that

is often suspicious of outsiders and for a group where gender norms and boundaries are so strict (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1994).

This study used a multi-theoretical perspective to examine the issues faced by these women. It is grounded in the Systems perspective as it examines the way the individual students interact with their environment as well as there being a strong emphasis on Role theory to understand the relationships between the individuals and their roles.

Payne (1997) explains that the Systems perspective posits that all organisms are systems, composed of subsystems, and in turn are part of super-systems. Systems, as well as individuals within each system, interact with each other and these interactions influence the individuals and the systems. Thus the individuals and systems are constantly adapting due to changes and interchanges with different aspects of their environment. They both change and are changed by the environment. The emphasis of this perspective is on changing environments and how adaptation occurs and how it affects individuals and systems. It illustrates relationship patterns and shows how boundaries impact systems and individuals.

Whereas the Systems perspective looks at interactions between the individual and their environment, Role theory attempts to understand the relationship between individuals and their roles in society and its impact on social and individual identities. Role theory is designed to explain how individuals in specific roles or social positions are expected to behave and how they expect others to behave (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). Roles are constantly changing due to interactions with others thus impacting the individual and their relationships (Hindin, 2007; Payne, 1997). Role theorists have offered an abundance of concepts which have assisted

researchers in understanding the individual and their relationship in society. In an attempt to understand the role and relationships of these students, role concepts are used to guide this study.

Though many researchers such as Patton (1990), Yin (2003) and Payne (1997) offer numerous research designs- among them grounded theory, ethnographical and case studies, this qualitative study uses a phenomenological perspective to understand the experiences of these women as ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in a culturally specific college program juggling multiple roles. According to Moustakas (1994) phenomenology emphasizes the lived experiences of people as conscious beings. To understand these experiences the researcher interviews individuals undergoing this phenomenon and explores their experiences in an attempt to create meaning regarding their experiences (Cresswell, 1998). This study explores the phenomenon that these women are undergoing as students in a culturally specific college it is based on the systems perspective and role theory as it seeks to understand the experiences of these women. Unlike Heilman's ethnographic study on ultra-Orthodox Jews, it is not attempting to describe and interpret ultra-Orthodox Jews and their culture, but rather it seeks to explore richly the perspectives of women in the ultra-Orthodox community going through a particular experience.

Their experiences were explored as a whole, not a sum of its parts. The experiences that these women went through were observed through a holistic perspective, which understands that the whole is a complex system which is actually greater than the sum of its parts. It also believes that the individual's social environment and political context is important for understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The holistic approach is beneficial for this study as these women live in a social environment which affects their day to day lives and cannot be ignored in this particular phenomenon. It is also important to see the whole complete picture so that the

interactions and roles that the students are faced with are understood and analyzed to see how they influence each other.

Using a qualitative design comes along with its fair share of limitations (Gambrill, 2002; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Weiss, 1998). Since quantitative designs use hypothesis based on theory and experiments, tests that are determined to be statistically significant and there are strict requirements for sampling, the results from these research designs are often more generalizable than qualitative studies. This study is limited in its generalizability as it looks at students only from this specific program and will not be doing experiments which can be proven to be statistically significant.

However, the purpose of this study is not to prove a hypothesis or prove generalizability but rather to explore a specific understudied phenomenon and the way that the students' roles and relationships are affected by the School for Lifelong Education and how, if at all, they deal with competing demands. It deconstructs the phenomenon that occurs as the students travel through the program so that a greater understanding of these changes and how they manage them can be understood.

Sampling, Recruitment and Instrumentation:

This study was submitted to both the Hunter College and Touro College Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB renewal from both Hunter and Touro was granted during the data analysis process period. As expected there were no human subject protection concerns as the study was administered on adult students over the age of twenty-five, it was a voluntary study and students signed consent forms stating this. Participation in the study bore no reflection on their grades or success in school. Students were also guaranteed confidentiality and were

informed of the studies goals and plans. All interview tapes, logs and all other data gathered will be maintained in a secured place for three years.

Twenty-six women from the School for Lifelong Education were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. Interviewing 26 students gave the researcher the opportunity to compare and contrast the results of the interviews as they offered different insights. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study was that all the women must be registered in The School for Lifelong Education, have been married at one point, have children, but no grandchildren, be 25 years or older and that they self-identify themselves as being part of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. There are students in the program who do not meet these criteria as some students are single or do not have children, or may already be grandmothers.

The participants were recruited using what Patton (1990) describes as “purposeful sampling” to create a homogeneous sample of information rich cases that were then studied in depth. This homogenous sample allowed the researcher to study a subgroup of the population while allowing her to gain a greater perspective on the specific issues regarding these women’s experiences in the culturally specific college program. Participants were also recruited via snowball sampling whereas a number of participants who were interviewed recommended classmates contact the researcher to be interviewed.

The students were recruited for this study through a variety of different strategies. Flyers advertising the study were posted in the hallways of the college program and were distributed to students (Appendix A). The flyer asked students who fit the profile to either return the form with their contact information on it to the office or to please contact the researcher via e-mail or by phone. The researcher spent a few days and evening recruiting students personally. She

informed them about the study and asked them if they would like to join the study if they fit the criteria. Upon receiving over 20 recruitment forms the researcher called respondents to set up a time that would be convenient for them to be interviewed. The researcher once again described the study to the students and asked them whether they would be willing to be interviewed. Following the initial phone call students were called the day before their scheduled interview time to confirm the interview time. Due to the limited time that these students had, a number of the students who had initially agreed to be interviewed dropped out prior to the interview. Students who were able to schedule a time needed to reschedule at least once, some students rescheduled up to four times. Recruitment continued until the researcher felt that she had reached the point of saturation.

The students met the researcher at The School for Lifelong Education in an empty office or empty classroom. Prior to beginning the interview the students' were given the consent forms (Appendix B) to sign and were explained their rights. They were told that at any time that they would like to stop the interview they may, and that they can choose to not answer any questions that make them uncomfortable. Students were also guaranteed confidentiality and were explained what actions that would be taken to ensure their confidentiality e.g.; name changes, identifying information deleted. All of the students signed the consent forms. The researcher then asked the participants whether they would agree to have their interview audiotaped and were guaranteed that their interview would be transcribed only by the researcher and would not be listened to by anyone else. All of the participants agreed to be audiotaped and signed the consent form to be audiotaped (Appendix C). Following the signing of the consent forms the audiotape was turned on and the interviews began. The interviews lasted on average about 45 minutes.

This study used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) which was created for the purpose of this study. As suggested in phenomenological tradition the interview guide was created to explore their experiences and their meaning (Creswell, 1998). The guide covered issues regarding their reasons for applying to college, choice of college, their college experience, reactions from community members and the challenges that they face. The researcher also focused on their view of the role of women and their roles, how it may have changed for them and for others and the impact that school has had on their roles, relationships and self-identity. Their communities' shifts and secular influences were also discussed, as well as how they dealt with any competing demand that they may have faced. The researcher also asked them questions regarding their future goals. The researcher followed the same guide with each participant, however due to the semi-structured set up of the guide there was movement in the interview and questions were not necessarily asked in the same order for each participant. This allowed the participant to speak freely and to be more at ease during the interview. Following the completion of the open-ended interview students were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and a number of close ended questions e.g.; age, how many children they have, categorization of religious orientation, how long they are married for and income. Information from these questions was used for descriptive statistical purposes and also offered the researcher information regarding the participants that may not have been gleaned through the interview.

All participants were interviewed by the same interviewer and each interview followed the same interview guide. In qualitative research the issues of reliability and validity are viewed differently than in quantitative research. Reliability is the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out and validity is the extent to which it gives the correct answer (Kirk and Miller, 1986, pg. 19). Kirk and Miller

(1986) describe objectivity as being the “simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity as possible” (pg. 19). Thus reliability is the degree to which the findings are independent of the research study and validity is the degree to which the results are correctly interpreted. Guba and Lincoln (1981, 1985) substitute reliability and validity with “trustworthiness” and offer four criteria to ensure “trustworthiness”. The criteria consist of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The interviewer attempted to assure reliability and validity, or “trustworthiness”, for this study by being as objective and unbiased as possible.

Data Collection Type and Issues in data collection:

The data was collected via in person interviews as well as through notes taken following observation. The researcher interviewed each of the participants and self-transcribed each of the interviews soon after interviewing them. In the hopes of keeping participants comfortable, observations made by the researcher were recorded following the observation period.

The researcher herself, as an ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman, offered various advantages and disadvantages to the study. The advantages include, acceptance into the program by the students both as an observer and as an interviewer, as well as an understanding of the community. However, in addition to this knowledge of the community there was a constant need for bias awareness of preconceived notions regarding members of the community which needed to be checked so as not to bias the research and to attempt to keep it as objective as possible. During the data collection period the researcher kept notes, known as “bracketing” regarding her own preconceived notions so that they could be checked during analysis of the data.

An issue that did come up during many of the interviews was the reaction that the participants had towards the researcher. The comfort level which allowed for women to open up to the researcher as she was part of the community also permitted the women to question her about her own experiences. Participants questioned the researcher regarding her choice of going for a doctorate at the same time that she was a mother. The researcher attempted to complete the interviews prior to discussing her personal experiences with the participants. Following the interviews many of the participants did stay for a few minutes to talk to the interviewer about her experiences and some women asked for guidance regarding their future plans.

Planning the Data Analysis

Data analysis for qualitative research is a constant interplay between studying the data and linking it to theory (Babbie, 2008). In qualitative data the analysis consists of sifting, sorting and organizing the data so that themes that emerge can address the original problem that was identified (Coleman & Unrau, 2005). The data collected is studied and gone over numerous times as it is coded and labeled in the hopes of unearthing trends or themes from the data (Babbie, 2008). In a phenomenological study the researcher sets aside prejudgments they may have regarding the experience, this is known as “bracketing”. It is imperative to have a strong systematic plan to guide the data analysis so as to reduce biased results.

As suggested by Coleman and Unrau (2005) there are six steps to follow during the data analysis stage. An initial framework for data analysis is established by transcribing the data (Step 1), and then by creating a plan for analyzing the data (Step 2). Following the transcription

of the interviews, a preliminary review of the data is conducted at which time preliminary notes are taken. The possibility of using computer programs for coding the data exists.

Following the transcription of the data and the planning for data analysis, which is done through previewing the data and planning what to record, the data undergoes the coding process. Coding is the process that is used to recognize differences and similarities so that the data can be categorized in a way that describes what the data is about and each category is labeled with a category name which is known as its code. Coding is done through the constant comparison method, where data is sifted through and meaning units with similar characteristics are grouped together within the same category and are given the same code. Coding is done on two levels (Step 3 and Step 4). First-level coding groups together meaning that are obvious and concrete and do not need to be interpreted for meaning. Second-level coding deals with meanings that are less obvious thus the need to interpret the meanings underlying the data.

Following the coding process the data is ready to be interpreted which is done by creating classification systems and presenting themes (Step 5). It is at this stage that relationships regarding the themes from the data emerge. Numerous suggestions are given regarding extracting meaning from a data set for example creating diagrams, matrixes, metaphors and looking for missing links and missing data. These extractions assist in bringing forward the themes from the data.

The final step is asserting the trustworthiness of the results. This is done by the researcher establishing their own credibility, documenting what was done to ensure consistency, and what was done to control for biases and preconceptions. For this particular study, the

researcher as an insider must be even more careful regarding prejudgments. The researcher's assumptions and prejudgments will be discussed in the conclusion section of this paper.

Data Analysis

Nvivo 9, a qualitative analysis software program, was used to organize coding and analysis of interview transcripts. Each of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and converted into text files which were uploaded into the qualitative analysis program. Though self-transcribing can be burdensome and time consuming as it takes hours to transcribe each interview, there are numerous benefits gleaned from this process. The interviewer found that self-transcribing the interviews offered her additional benefits when it came to analyzing the interviews as she became thoroughly acquainted with each interview and had a better understanding of the participants and their experiences. The statements made by the participants took on additional meaning for the interviewer who recalled their voices, tones, hesitations and reactions to the questions.

The interviews were then read numerous times in their entirety prior to beginning the coding process this allowed for the researcher to grasp the participants responses and to begin to organize the material. The transcripts were then gone over to extract/highlight significant statements from each interview and notes were taken on each interview (Creswell, 1998). As the qualitative method of data analysis suggests the data which was collected was studied and gone over numerous times as it was coded and labeled for meaning, these meanings were then clustered into themes that related to the experience that was being studied; the experience of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in a culturally specific college program (Creswell, 1998). As an

“insider” the researcher was aware of her biases and made sure to check her assumptions during the data analysis stage. The steps taken will be discussed in the conclusion section of this paper.

Coding was used on two levels, first level coding identified data that was obvious, while second-level coding interpreted these obvious responses for meaning. The process of first level coding consisted of collapsing the data into “meaning units” which were then organized into identifiable categories that were coded with the data analysis program. The second-level coding refined the coding further and also uncovered similarities and differences between the categories in the hopes of discovering relationships. Linkages between categories were then made so that themes and trends could be found. The data was then reevaluated at different intervals to be sure that all relevant data was being evaluated (Babbie, 2008; Coleman, & Unrau, 2005).

The researcher summarized each of the themes and their subthemes to gain an understanding of the students’ experiences and how it impacted them. The themes were then analyzed to understand how they related to each other and what can be gleaned from them. Three main themes emerged from the interviews (1) shifts in their community and their role expectations (2) their experiences in school and the need for support (3) rewards and conflict from these experiences. When describing their experiences, these themes often interconnected. The issue of juggling multiple roles seemed a given to these women and they discussed how they were influenced by shifts in the community’s view of their roles and techniques used to manage their multiple roles. They also discussed the rewards that they received from attending school and how it affected their numerous roles. An important issue discussed during these interviews was the amount of support that these women received not only from their families, but from their community as well as this seemed to impact the way that they juggled the conflict that they faced and how they viewed their rewards.

Chapter 5

The Participants

The sample consists of 26 ultra-Orthodox Jewish female undergraduate students who were enrolled in Touro's School for Lifelong Education. The women were all over 25 years of age, one woman was 24, but turning 25 in a couple of months, they were or had been married at one time, were all mothers, but not grandmothers and they self-identified as being part of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. Though more women showed interest in participating in the study by completing the recruitment flyer, due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts they were unable to participate in the study. Time constraints was an obvious issue even with the women who did participate as almost all of the interviews were scheduled and then needed to be rescheduled due to conflicts facing the participants.

As previously mentioned the final sample for this research study resulted in 26 participants. The women's ages ranged from 24 to 48 years of age. Ten participants were between the ages of 24 to 29, ten were between the ages of 30 to 39 and six were between the ages of 40 to 50 with the mean age being 34 and the mode being 28. Twenty-two of the participants were married while four had been married and were now divorced. All of the women had been married by the age of 24 (range seventeen-twenty-four) with the mode being 19 (n=11) and the mean being 19.8. The married women had been married ranging from 3 ½ years to 25 years and the divorced women had been married from 1 ½ years to 20 years.

Seventeen of the participants were never enrolled in any other college prior to The School for Lifelong Education. Four of the participants had been enrolled in Touro on Avenue J in Brooklyn. Two were enrolled in Adelphi, one in Brooklyn, one in Sara Schnerer and one in

Nursing School. From the nine participants who had attended colleges other than The School for Lifelong Education, except for the one student who had completed her nursing degree in nursing school, they all stated that they were now in The School for Lifelong Education because it is the only place where they feel that they will be able to attain their degrees due to their lifestyle and needs.

All of the participants had between one child and eight children. From the married women four had two children, seven had three children, six had four children, three had four children, two had six children and one had eight children. From the divorced women; one had one child, one had three children, one had four and one had five. The ages of the children ranged from 3 months to 23 years of age.

All participants were enrolled in The School for Lifelong Education and were in the midst of their semester at the time of their interview. Three of the students were in their first semester, one was in their second semester, four were in their third semester, seven were in their fifth semester, one was in her sixth semester, two were in their seventh semester and six were in their eighth semester. They were majoring in the following areas: Psychology (n=7), Education (n=4), Human Services (n=4), Special education (n=2), Science (n=1), Psych-ed (n=5), Psych-hs (n=2) and one was undecided. Their future goals were to work in the following fields: social work (n=10), Special education or Education (n=8), Administration (n=2), Art Therapy (n=2), Nursing (n=1), Midwifery (n=1), Medicine (n=1) and one participant was interested in attaining a Psy-d. Thirteen of the participants are not working outside of the house for pay, seven are working full time outside of the house for pay and six are working part-time outside of the house for pay.

The sample consists of 17 women who self-identified as Hassidic. Two were from the Bobov Hasidic sect, two were from Satmar, three from Lubavitch, one Belz, one Spinka, one Munkatch, one Gur and one Breslev. Two self-identified as being married to a Hassidic man, one who self-identified as Sphardic, two self-identified as ultra-Orthodox and two who self-identified as orthodox but then stated that others would view them as ultra-Orthodox but they considered themselves more open-minded though they followed the customs of the ultra-Orthodox community. It is interesting to note that many of the women stated that they were different than the other women of the community as they were more open-minded than the typical ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman.

Of the 22 married women, 19 of the husbands were working, two were students and one was learning in *Kollel*. Eleven of the married women stated that their husbands had learned in *kollel* during their marriage. Four learned in *kollel* for one year, one for two years, two for seven years, three for ten years and one for 15 years.

Most of the participants were receiving financial aid for school and they stated that this was one of the reasons that it was possible for them to come to school. Data was collected on household income, six of the participants declined to answer the question. From the women who did report their average income; six reported an average income that ranged from 0-\$25,000, four reported income that ranged from \$25,001-\$50,000, seven reported income that ranged from \$50,001-\$75,000, three reported household income of \$75,001- \$100,000 and one reported having an income greater than \$100,000.

The Students:

Sara- Sara is a 35 year old mother of eight children ranging in ages from one to 13. She is married for 16 years. Sara works full time outside of the home as a teacher and is in her third semester majoring in education with plans to continue for her Masters of Education.

Esther- Esther is a 41 year old mother of four children. She is married for 20 years. Esther worked as a midwife prior to finding out that she was ill and would be unable to continue to work in that field. Following her recovery she returned to school to attain a degree in Special Education, a field with flexible hours and better working conditions for her. She is in her fifth semester.

Aviva- Aviva is a 28 year old mother of two boys. She is married for nine years and she and her family live in Boro Park. Aviva began college two years ago when her first son was five years old, while in college she had her second child. She is now in her sixth semester majoring in psychology with the hopes of continuing on for a Masters of Social Work. Aviva does not work outside of the home.

Deborah- Deborah is a 28 year old mother of three. Her children are six, three and 17 months old. Deborah lives in Flatbush. The community she grew up in is extremely insular and ultra-Orthodox. She is married for eight years. Deborah is in her fifth semester majoring in psychology and art and is interested in gaining a Masters of Art Therapy. Deborah is the first female in her family to go to college. Deborah does not work outside of her home.

Rivka- Rivka is a 33 year old mother of four. Her children range from four to 14 years old. She and her husband live in Boro Park and are married for fifteen years. Rivka is in her second

semester and is majoring in psychology. She would like to work either in Special Education or Social Work. Rivka does not work outside of the home.

Gitta- Gitta is a 28 year old mother of four who is married for ten years. Her children's ages range from two to nine years old. Gitta is in her eighth semester and planning to graduate at the end of this year. Gitta is majoring in psychology and plans to go to school for nursing. She works full-time outside of her house.

Hinda- Hinda is a 33 year old mother of five whose children range from five to 13. She is married for 14 years. Hinda lives in an extremely insular Chassidic community. Hinda is in her first semester and would like to continue on for a degree in Social Work. Hinda does not work outside the home.

Bina- Bina is a 36 year old mother of five children ranging in ages from five to 16. She is married for 17 years. Aviva is in her fifth semester majoring in education and psychology. Presently she works full time as a teacher, she hopes to attain her Masters of Education.

Itta- Itta is 36 years old and the mother of two children ages 12 and 10. Itta lives in Crown Heights. She is married for 13 years. She is in her fourth semester and is majoring in psychology. She works part-time outside the home.

Kaila- Kaila is a 28 year old mother of three young children. Her oldest is two years old and her youngest is six months old. Kaila is married for three years. Though she grew up in a *Hassidic* home, her husband is from a *Litvish* home, but both are from extremely ultra-Orthodox homes. She is in her fifth semester and is majoring in psychology with plans to get her Masters of Special Education. Kaila works full-time outside the home.

Chaya- Chaya is a 34 year old divorcee with three children. Chaya grew up in a Hassidic home. She was married for six years and though she started Touro on Avenue J prior to her marriage she did not return to college once she was married. Chaya is now in her fifth semester at The School for Lifelong Education and is majoring in psychology with the goal of going for Art Therapy. She works part-time out of the house.

Miriam- Miriam is a 44 year old mother of three. Her children are 17, 20 and 21. Miriam is married for 25 years and though she did work outside of the home when her children were younger she does not work now. She is in her first semester in college, unsure that she will continue and undecided as to her major.

Naomi- Naomi is a 37 year old mother of six children ranging in ages from four to 18. Naomi is married for 19 years and she and her family live in Boro Park. Naomi is in her fourth semester and is majoring in Science and would like to continue in the medical field. She does not work outside of the home.

Penina- Penina is a 37 year-old mother of four ranging in ages from two to thirteen. She is married for seventeen years and she and her family live in Boro Park. Penina is in her first semester and is majoring in psychology. Penina works full-time outside of the home.

Tova- Tova is a 34 year old mother of four. Her children's ages range from three to 14. She and her husband are married for 15 years. Tova is in her third semester majoring in education and would like to attain a Masters of Social work. She works in her Husband's business.

Vera- Vera is a 48 year old divorcee with four children ranging in ages from 15 to 24. Vera was married for 20 years to her ex-husband. She lives in Crown Heights. Vera is in her eighth

semester and is planning to graduate this year with a degree in education. She is planning to continue on for a Masters of Education. Vera does not work outside of the home.

Shoshana-Shoshana is a 29 year old mother of two ages five and seven. She is married for nine years and she and her family live in Boro Park. Shoshana is in her fifth semester and is majoring in psychology. She is planning to continue on for a Masters of Special Education. Shoshana does not work outside of the home.

Tzipora- Tzipora is a thirty three year old mother of three children whose ages are nine, 12 and 14. She is married for 15 years. Tzipora ran a successful computer business prior to an accident which had debilitating repercussions. Tzipora is in her eighth semester and is planning to graduate this semester with a degree in Psychology. She would like to continue on for her Masters of Social Work.

Malia- Malia is a 25 year old mother of two children ages three and 11 months. She is married for five years and she and her family live in Boro Park. She is in her fifth semester majoring in human services and she would like to attain a Master of Business. Malia works full-time outside of the home.

Rachel- Rachel is a 28 year old mother of four ranging in ages from newborn to seven years old. She and her husband are married for seven years and live in Boro Park. Rachel is in her seventh semester majoring in psychology and education with plans on attaining a Masters of Education Administration. Rachel works full time outside of the home.

Leah- Leah is a 48 year old mother of five children ranging in ages 15 to 23. Leah started college 27 years ago but stopped when she got married. She returned a number of years ago only to stop mid-semester due to difficulty managing her responsibilities. Recently she returned and

is in her eighth semester planning to graduate with her degree in psychology this semester. She would like to continue for her Masters of Social Work. Leah works Part time outside of the home.

Dina- Dina is a 27 year old mother of three children ages five, three and three months old. Dina and her husband are married for seven years and live in Long Island. Her husband comes from a *Hassidic* family. Dina is in her final semester majoring in psychology and she is planning to go to school for Physical therapy. She does not work outside of the home.

Ariella- Ariella is a 24 year old divorcee with one child. Her daughter is four years old. Ariella is in her seventh semester and is majoring in education. She is planning to continue for her Masters of special Education. Ariella does not work outside of the home.

Hadassah-Hadassah is a 29 year old mother of three ages eight, six and four. Hadassah and her husband live in an extremely insular community. They are married for ten years. Hadassah is in her third semester and she is majoring in education with plans on continuing for her Masters of special education. Hadassah works full-time outside of the home.

Brenda- Brenda is a 41 year old divorced mother of five ranging in ages from five to 20. She was married for 18 years. Brenda is in her third semester majoring in human services and she would like to continue on for her Masters of Social Work. Brenda does not work outside of the home.

Malka- Malka is a 40 year old mother of six ranging in ages from five to 18. Malka and her husband are married for 19 year. Malka attended College years ago but did not complete her degree because she was able to build a career without it. Malka would now like a career change and is in her final semester and graduating with a degree in psychology and education. She is

planning to continue on for her degree in special education. Malka does not work outside of the home.

Introduction to Findings:

Interviewing the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women regarding their experiences enrolled in The School for Lifelong Education offered a glimpse into not only their lives, but their community as well. It was evident from the onset of this study that the story that these women would offer would differ from that of other college women, even non-traditional college women who were mothers. These women were brought up in a sheltered community with religious beliefs and community expectations. However, due to changing times the community's role expectations for women began to shift, women were not only offered the opportunity to step out of their traditional role, but for many it became necessary for them to take on the role of the breadwinner.

To understand how these women experience these shifts it would seem necessary to first understand their personal interpretation regarding how their community has altered its view of their roles and their position on college. Thus the first chapter in the findings section examines the participants' beliefs of what the community expects from the traditional Orthodox Jewish woman and how they regarded college, why they believe these expectations were reassessed which in turn allowed women to enroll in college; an institution the community seemed opposed to.

With shifts occurring by the community and its leaders, the role of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community was reconstructed by these women and described in the next chapter allowing us to understand why these women then chose to apply to college. Interestingly these shifts caused women to personally reassess their roles and what they expected as well, which became

glaringly evident in many of their interviews. The women describe how they viewed their roles and the necessity for women to multi-task as they took on multiple roles.

With an understanding regarding the community's shifts and gradual acceptance regarding college and the women's new roles, one can begin to grasp the experiences that the women undergo as students. However, similar to research conducted on the general population, to accommodate for changes in their roles and to alleviate conflict regarding multiple roles not only does the community's view need to be altered but the women depend on the community and their family for support (e.g., Kasworm, 1990; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982; Zimmerman, et al, 2008). The following chapter discusses the emotional and instrumental support system both in regard to institutional support (The School for Lifelong Education) as well as familial support as it impacted their experiences in school.

It is clear that college attendance impacts not only the students, but their relationships as well. The final chapter recognizes the impact that school had on these women and their relationships from their point of view. It considers the benefits, rewards and conflicts that these women experience and how they cope with their multiple roles both as rewards and conflicts. It also explores how, if at all, their roles have changed personally and how they describe these changes in their roles.

These stories are the women's personal experiences. For some of the women attending college is a means to an end, for others it is a growing experience while for others college is a safe haven. Whatever their reasons for attending college their stories offer insight into the benefits and challenges that these women encountered as they embarked on this new role while maintaining their position in their gradually shifting, but still insular community.

Chapter 6:

Role of the Jewish Woman and college

Traditional Role of the Jewish Woman: The woman of Valor; The Good Mother

The Orthodox Jewish community has been portrayed as a patriarchal society where men work and women stay home to take care of the domestic needs of the family. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community instills gender role expectations in young girls and boys as both a cultural norm, and as a religious obligation. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are educated as young children that their proper role is to be an *Eishet Chayil*; a “woman of valor.”

An *Eishet Chayil* is the Jewish version of the “good” mother. The dominant or mainstream expectations of the “good” mother-- a term coined in both Feminist literature and the literature on the social construction of motherhood in the United States, --have a long history in the United States. Prevailing norms regard Motherhood as “natural” for women and “good” women become mothers (Arendell, 2000; Hay, 1996; Russo, 1976). “Good” mothers stay-at-home and devote nearly all of their time to child care, mothering, and being a good wife (Smith, 1993, Sears, 1999). Until the 1970s, society regarded women who were both mothers and workers as “bad” or “deviant” mothers, which deterred women from working for wages outside the home or led to feelings of loss, sadness, or guilt among women who either by choice or necessity could not conform to these prescribed wife and mother roles.

The *Eishet Chayil* spells out the community’s expectations for the role of a “good” mother in the Orthodox Jewish community. Proverbs 31: describes the *Eishet Chayil* as a woman who gives food to her home, and dresses her household in fine clothing. However the *Eishet Chayil* also “from afar brings sustenance.” That is, she must support her husband, help

with – or even carry- the responsibility of financially supporting the family. In many ways one can argue that the *Eishet Chayil* is a super woman. She both takes care of her family and helps financially.

The *Eishet Chayil* has been praised as a woman who adheres to the socially defined wife and mother roles. However the specific role expectations and how they must be performed has changed over time. Before World War II and following emigration to the United States, the primary role for Orthodox Jewish women- as in society as large, was the wife and homemakers. Some may have worked in the community to support their families, but this was a secondary commitment.

The women in this study were taught that women's place was in the home as wife and mothers. Their teachers depicted an Orthodox Jewish woman as one who has as many children possible and who stays home to raise, nurture and care for them. She is described as selfless, expected to cook, to bake, do homework with her children and to be home for her family.

Shoshana, a young mother of two, described the role of the woman as:

Being a perfect role model for her kids; meaning just to be a good person, raising fine kids, having them be respectful, putting together beautiful meals for Shabbos and Yom Tov having everyone look put together.

A woman is expected to be “home; taking care of the kids” or as Tzipora suggested “being home, having more kids.” Rachel said their role is “a housewife, a mother and a nurturer- seriously that is basically it.” Sara explained that “in general the woman's role is to be the mother, to raise their children.” For Hinda a “woman should be home just getting the house ready for her children and her husband.” Vera believes the community's view of the woman's role is “very much having children, raising them, doing homework with them; the morning routine.” Kaila described the view as “a woman should be home with their children, definitely.”

Ariella believes that the role is “probably what’s been going on for generations. Being home, being a mother and being a wife, for most people.” Bina, a mother of five, believes the view of a woman’s role is:

just having a large family, just being there and available 24 hours. Making sure the house runs smoothly, the kids are dressed, proper, neat. There’s always, you know food, breakfast, lunch, supper readily available and the Holidays are also ultra-special. They put a lot of emphasis on the home being super, super clean and if those are your preferences then that is a full time job.

Penina said that as she was growing up women were raised in “a very boxed-in ideology.” The view passed down from mother to daughter was that women should be shopping and taking care of the kids. Their job was to take care of the home not to have a career.

Malia defined an *Eishet Chayil* “It’s all basically supporting your husband.” Similarly Brenda described an *Eishet Chayil* as “someone who basically serves her husband...we serve our husband, we take care of our husband, we make him feel like he’s the top of the world, we respect them.” Leah also focused on the role of the wife. She understood an *Eishet Chayil* to be “someone who got married and did what their husband told them to do.” Deborah remembered *Eishet Chayil* being defined as “getting married, having kids, supporting your husband and let’s say he wants to learn, [supporting him].” For Tova it was also about sacrificing for your husband “someone who really has to sacrifice for their husband...I was told that a woman should just be there to let her husband just learn and grow in *Torah*.” Miriam described an *Eishet Chayil* as:

someone who is always put together, and greets her husband royally, also has supper on the table when he comes home, laundry should be done, house should be neat and clean, and just to make a very family oriented house.

Dina grew up hearing that an *Eishet Chayil* is:

A good stay at home mom, someone who stays at home and supports her husband's learning and is there to let the kids in and has a nice warm supper on the table. And tucks her kids into bed and they're all safe and makes sure that they're all taken care of and well supported.

Shoshana said she is:

a woman who is very *anivasdik* [humble]..someone who is just very quiet, and you don't really hear her. She's just there doing her role which is just being at home and sewing and cooking up a soup and just tending to the baby.

A few women discussed that the *Eishet Chayil* was defined as the ideal woman, a woman who succeeded at everything and gave of herself completely to her husband and her children, she was, as Vera said, "a woman who was managing it all and was everywhere at the same time." Malka described an *Eishet Chayil* as "she does everything and she does everything well, so if you want to be an *Eishet Chayil*, then you have to do everything and you have to do everything well."

The *Eishet Chayil* - the women of valor- may also help out financially. Recently, ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are increasingly entering the work force. When they do, most work, as Itta says, "within [the community] as a teacher or a secretary or in a local store," as these positions are considered safe and proper jobs for women in the community. However, as this study shows, due to a series of social economic changes more women are working for wages both inside and outside of the religious community.

Selflessness

Many women brought up the issue of selflessness saying that the role prescribed for women included little leeway for self-care. According to Tova:

what I see my sisters do...they have kids every year or two. They do not do anything for themselves. They're definitely there for their kids and their husband, but I never hear them doing anything for themselves to grow in anyway. I don't

hear them thinking about what they want to do with their lives. I hear their lives are their kids and their husband, basically their kids, not even their husband. I only hear about their kids...but I never hear them do anything for themselves.

Deborah, a young mother of three, felt the proper role of the Orthodox Jewish woman is:

Definitely getting married, having a family taking care of your husband, taking care of your kids being happy, *Shalom Bayis* [peace in the home], supporting your husband as long as he needs it,.... just standing by his side.... Everything is for everyone else there is nothing for you.

Leah, a mother of five in her forties, said she always heard that the proper role of a woman is:

To take care of a family, first of all to have as many kids that you could, regardless of whatever is going on. And then to be there for everyone, have no idea what to with yourself. But if you don't have a self, then it is so much easier because you don't have needs. And I don't know. Just make everyone happy and who cares if you're happy.

Some women suggested that the community expects women to abandon their own needs for others. Malka believed "we are more duty bound. We tend to think of others. We are encouraged to think of others before we think of ourselves. I think that this is taken too far in our community."

Living up to the Ideal of the *Eishet Chayil*:

Though the community ingrained its view of the *Eishet Chayil* in women as young children, some women in this study concluded that the ideal is unrealistic, and that simply following the guidelines of an *Eishet Chayil* could not guarantee a perfect home or the ability to cope with everything. Deborah, a young mother of three children close in age, experienced guilt when she could not achieve what she had been taught:

.... a lot of the time I felt guilty that I didn't rise up to the expectations. But now as I get older or maybe I'm getting wiser and I think it was unfair to brainwash us to make us think that we're failures when we're not... They should give us the scenarios where we may fall down, but where we may not always succeed. But you know that's okay and it may not always be that way, don't put yourself down

you can always get up. And everyone has different things, [the way they described it] it was more like everyone was put into one big square, or whatever it is, and [it's not so] we're all different. There can be many different kinds of *Eishet Chayil*. It's not just one way.

She explained that it took her time to realize that her teachers were presenting the ideal and that one can be an *Eishet Chayil* without being perfect. She now believes that an *Eishet Chayil* is “being the best that you can be. Maybe some would say it's like being a superwoman...I would say it's just being the best that you can.” Penina also questioned what she was taught as she said:

I think they're just not realistic, they're just not realistic, they didn't teach us how to cope with certain things that you don't expect; certain things that do happen. Like my friend was saying, [you think that] if you are always there to encourage them [husbands] and [if you are] good they're going to change... Sometimes you can try and be encouraging, but that end result is not what they taught you. ... *Eishet Chayil* in my opinion is to be encouraging and to be quiet whenever you have to be.

Different Role Expectations for men and women:

The traditional Jewish Orthodox family socializes both boys and girls to their respective gender roles. Boys are taught that it is the man's role to be the breadwinner. In Genesis (3:17-19) it states; “by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.” Girls are taught that their role is to be an “*akeres habayis*” (principal of the home), having and raising children and caring for their husbands. Participants believed that there were certain jobs for men and certain jobs for women - and that it is obvious when men attempt to do “women's work.” Naomi, a mother of six whose husband has recently begun to help out in the home since she started school, observed:

No matter how great your husband is, at the end of the day...you'll know when a man dressed a child and when a woman did. There's no doubt about it...and you'll know when a house is being run by Mr. Mom or Mrs. Mom, there's no doubt about it.

Similarly some women believed women could not do “men’s work.” That is, women should not have full responsibility for the *parnassah* (livelihood). Vera explained that a woman “should not have to be in the front line, should not have to compete. [She should] not have to push herself forward.” After all, traditionally the home is her domain.

The gender role differentiation in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community parallels role expectations historically prescribed for men and women in the general population. However, just as role expectations for men and women shifted in the general population, so too they shifted in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. In both instances, social and economic changes led or encouraged women to enter the paid workforce. The pressures include the high cost of living in the community, the need for increased income to support large families, and to pay for the private education necessary to teach Orthodox children the Jewish way of life (Longman, 2008). In addition to these pressures a woman’s income is needed because the community endorses men’s full time learning in *kollel*. As more and more young men do not earn a living, women assume the role of breadwinner in addition to full –time homemaker (Shai, 2002).

With these changes the community began to shift its definition of women’s role. At the same time it began to relax rules or expectations held by the community, such as where women were expected to work, which previously prevented community members from advancing financially. One such rule was the prohibition against community members attending college. This made it possible for women to improve their financial situation which in turn could not help but affect their traditional role.

Community’s Shift on College Attendance:

The general Jewish community historically placed a high priority on education. However, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community rejected college education for its members as they viewed

it as a risk for assimilation (Berger, Jacobson & Waxman, 2007; Lavender, 1976). Participants reviewed their community's negative view towards college as well as the relaxation of this prohibition.

Parents and schools typically encourage secular high school students to pursue a college education. However, this is not the case for high school students in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish and *Hassidic* schools. Hadassah, a 29 year old mother of three, explained, "Basically the education that I received in high school, and the local high schools that many of the women went to, discouraged us strongly from going to college and pursuing our education." She added:

they probably gave us a reason that the things that we would be reading would not be appropriate for us. They may conflict and contradict our religious beliefs. They said that they felt that women should be secretaries and teachers and we should not go out to the world and that would not be good for us. (And) They really wanted to keep us as sheltered and protected as they could.

High school teachers presented college negatively to Shoshana. "When I finished high school, the thought of going to college right away was just negative, because the teachers, the principals, they never made it look like a good thing." Tzipora learned that college "is a very bad place. You know people change. It's not something we do." Esther, the daughter of a Jewish studies teacher, grew up with the understanding that she did not belong in college. Her mother told her "it's (college) not a *frum* (religious) thing, why can't you just be a teacher?" She has realized though that this way of life is unrealistic speculating that:

....there are two hundred teaching jobs, and there are three thousand girls graduating. What do you want them to do? They have to go to college, and if you want your husband to sit and learn for the first couple of years, why do you have to rely on your parents? Go get a good degree and get a good job. Also there are colleges now that are separate, [gender segregated] so we don't have that problem. Girls don't have to go to Brooklyn College. They don't have to go to Harvard.

A number of participants maintained they did not realize how great the shift towards college acceptance and attendance in the community was until attending college themselves. Tova said “well I had no idea there were so many women from the community here, until I started coming here. I was really surprised to see so many people here who I didn’t think would come here.” Penina said “there are more people who are coming who I would never have expected to see (them) in Touro ten years ago.” Shoshana was surprised to “see some of my schoolmates or my grade-mates, because it wasn’t the thing to do...But they’re here.” Chaya says that when she first realized how many ultra-Orthodox and *Hassidic* men and women were going to Touro’s School for Lifelong Education “I was kind of shocked...I was a little shocked like people who used to think that college was weird or it just wasn’t for them. There are people with hats on their *sheitel* (wig) here. (And) It just doesn’t fit the stereotype.” (Women who wear hats on their wigs are usually from extremely ultra-Orthodox Jewish insular communities as this dress code indicates a higher sense of modesty.)

As college became more acceptable, more women enrolled. Rivka observed, “It used to be like ‘oh you went to college. That’s not for a Jewish mother. A Jewish mother really belongs at home.’ But now there are so many more Jewish women who are professionals.” In the past women who finished high school took an acceptable job in an office or teaching, in the community. In sharp contrast today many women high school graduates enroll in one of the various college programs that offer them gender segregated classes. Aviva feels that “more women are opening their minds to it, and ... that it doesn’t have a stigma anymore, people aren’t afraid of it anymore.” Itta said, “well, it’s just become more acceptable to come to college” she then reminisced:

When I was in Seminary, I remember people were talking about college. I was too afraid to tell my parents “I’m not interested in going to Seminary. It is boring, I would much rather go to college and study something that will help me rather than this boring stuff.” I was just too chicken to do it, and I never thought I would actually do it. And at that time it was like, “what do you mean college?”

In many parts of the community the acceptance of college is obvious. However, while Naomi, a mother in her late 30’s, comes from a sect that is opposed to college, she sees the shift in other sects:

I graduated 19 years ago...when I graduated in the religious community it was a stigma, whoever went to college they were like a “bum”, or there was something wrong. It was really a red flag, nobody did that. In fact high schools didn’t give credits. Today, I don’t think that there is a high school student who graduates and doesn’t have credits towards her degree.

Accepted, but not by all:

The growing acceptance of college education for community members, including women, has not become universal in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. Penina suggests that the view toward college:

really depends who you ask, because I don’t think it changed. The ones who were against college, they’re still against college. Actually I work in ___and they’re really anti-college, they just feel that it’s really not right and it depends on the community.

After some thoughts she concluded that “I guess it has picked up...maybe it’s pretty much accepted because so many *Chasidische* [Hassidic] men are doing it.” Gitta also reported that views about college in her community are mixed but evolving:

It is now a really big mixture. Most people are considering it and they’re considering it for their children, but many of them are starting to change their views and they feel that it is something that they have to do now...A few years ago people would never have thought of going to school and now they are.

Naomi who comes from the *Bobov* sect, described the shift there:

I'll tell you, the community that we're in, we're *Bobov*, so the really strong *Bobover*'s do not approve they call me Dr. _____. They make fun of me, and I know that it's not in a positive way. But I think that underneath it, it's more accepted to do. I don't think that to graduate college is a *shiksa* (gentile) thing to do anymore. I think it's still unusual, because in our circles, it's still new, maybe the younger generation, but our generation most of us don't go back to school. But listen it is what it is.

Bina, a teacher, also depicts the evolving shift in the community's view. She explained "it's becoming more accepted, but I have to remember where I am when I am talking." When teaching in a school where college is accepted she will converse with her students regarding college. However, at the considerably more ultra-Orthodox alternate school where she also teaches, she says "I wouldn't discuss my college there at all. I'll say I've read something or I heard something, I won't mention college, because it's a No No."

Many of the study participant's children attend schools that do not accept college education. Some of these children are embarrassed to disclose their mother's college attendance. Tova sends her children to a school that rejects college. Her older daughter became distraught when her younger daughter told classmates that their mother was in college because the girls asked her, "why would your mother be going to college?" Rachel, a senior in college, revealed that some women in college choose to hide their attendance from friends and family. Hinda who comes from an extremely tight knit *Hassidic* community, concealed her college attendance from members of her community because "they look down at people who go for education, I don't know why, but they would look at me like I was out of my mind."

One woman shared a conversation that she had with a fellow classmate. When the women in this study asked her classmate where she worked the classmate refused to divulge this information for fear her employers would find out that she was attending college. Interestingly the classmate explained to the participant:

it's pathetic, because they need therapists who speak *Yiddish*, and they'll grab me once I have the degree, they'll grab me. But as long as I am in the getting my degree process, it has to be a hush hush.

A number of women hypothesized as to why the community held such a negative view towards college. Their thoughts included the community's concern regarding exposing girls to secular ideas, its' insularity and the ways that it brought women up "in a box." The long standing concern regarding assimilation also played a role. Rachel who works with high school students said college was still a big "NO NO" in her community because:

It's hard to put, especially with teen-agers...it's hard to put very clear boundaries. How do you tell a seventeen year old "career is not your life, your home is your life?" Judaism doesn't emphasize the career in a woman and yet, it's hard to put those boundaries, it's much easier to just say "no," because there are those people who will just take it overboard, or maybe push off getting married, or push off having children and start playing around with the fundamentals of *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). It's hard to set those boundaries.

The shift towards greater acceptance of college for community members has various causes. Study participants pointed to economic necessity and the shift towards the *Kollel* lifestyle, the growing need for professionals within the community, the creation of college programs specific to the community needs, such as Touro, as well as changing times.

Accepted Due to Economic Necessity and Shift towards the *Kollel* Lifestyle:

Many of the women believe that college has gained acceptance due to economic necessity. The economic downturn has affected the ultra-Orthodox community as well as the general population. The community is susceptible to the same economic forces as society at large and often due to their high cost of living, and *Kollel* lifestyle are impacted even more than others.

The women respondents understand that entering the workforce without a degree hinders one's ability to earn a competitive salary. Malia said "everyone is going for it now (college) and there are more places that are not co-ed and all the jobs are demanding degrees." Malka suggested "we are a needs based community...maybe because you need it for work it became more acceptable." Malka went on to explain that college is becoming more accepted by community leaders due to the economic need:

I think it really is about the bottom line, people need a paycheck, they need certification and I think that's what people want. I think that from the top down (community leaders) they really do allow it (college) more because you can't really stand in the way of people making a *parnassah* (income).

Few of the women interviewed have husbands still learning in *Kollel*. Yet many attributed the acceptance and increase of women's college attendance to the *Kollel* phenomenon. Deborah, a full-time mother of three, asserts:

When I was in school they were like, "okay marry someone who sits in *Kollel* all day, don't go to college, don't get a degree"-what are you going to do, work as-a teacher, a secretary? Who's going to support you?...I think they're coming a little more into reality that, hey, you need something if you want to get a better paying job and if you want to marry someone who sits in *Kollel* to be able to support them.

Malia also holds the *Kollel* phenomenon responsible for women's college attendance:

now that the husbands are all staying in *Kollel* because that's what they're learning in school that they have to do now, and the wives have to earn the *parnassah* (income). It's hard to earn money on a non-degree job.

Dina, whose husband's siblings are all in *Kollel*, cites a number of factors: "the job market and (like) what's going on, and so many husbands losing their jobs, and not getting paid so well in *Kollel*."

Leah also cited financial considerations, but then added:

I guess I also think that the *Kollel* lifestyle did that. That the women are supporting the men for the first few years and if you're going to work at a job

where they pay \$10 you are not going to make it. I mean you barely make it if you make more than that. So I find that the *Kollel* lifestyle, along with cuts in education led to more women going to college.

She added that budget cuts and other changes in the general public education system in general have affected ultra-Orthodox Jewish women for whom working in the education field was deemed an appropriate job. The college degree is now needed as jobs without such a degree are becoming obsolete. Kaila, a teacher, stated:

I know (like) years ago it was frowned upon [college]. But I think that people are coming to the realization that you need to do this in order to make a living because rents are sky high and everything is so crazy today that this is part of it. I think (like) parents in my community were like, “you have to wait till you’re married to go to college.” And now they see that that changed because they see that this is the only way to make it.

In the words of Malka:

I think degrees are required now for a lot more jobs, or rather you get paid more for jobs with degrees...it’s become more acceptable for an unknown reason. It used to be unacceptable. Maybe because you need it for work it became more acceptable.

Bina attributed increasing college enrollment to shifting economic trends. Historically, she says, members of the community worked in trade oriented businesses which did not require advanced education. However the advent of electronic marketplaces and other macroeconomic factors are reducing opportunities in those areas and forcing people to join the service sectors which typically require post high school education. According to Bina:

People are starting to realize it because there are no jobs available. So what are the jobs that are available? Education, medicine and technology. The problem is that we’re realizing, but the schools, the real orthodox schools are not buying into it. They’re not ready for the reality. I feel bad for my boys, because they are not preparing them in English, I don’t have the money for extra tutors and I know that they’re going to graduate and they’re going to need to go find employment and they are going to need to support a family and the types of jobs that there are today, you cannot have without an education.

Need for Professionals in the community:

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community has been publicly criticized for concealing problems within the community. Now there is a movement to increase awareness regarding, mental health issues, among others. However people in the community do not seek the help that they need because they are fearful of leaving the community for assistance. They are also wary that professionals outside of the community will not understand their needs. As a result the need for professionals from the community has grown and in turn made college attendance more acceptable within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.

Tzipora, a mother of three majoring in psychology, observed that “mental health has become more not so taboo, OCD, all these things were shoved under the rug, no one was supposed to know.” She feels that college should be more accepted because community members need to know about issues in the community and there is a need for professionals to help community members. “Basically a lot more people could be helped if it [college] wouldn’t be such a taboo thing....I feel sorry for the people who are not getting the help that they need.”

The need for Home grown professional became the driving force for many community members to embark on a degree. Aviva plans to become a social worker explains:

I realize that there is a very big void for a *heimish* (ultra-Orthodox or familiar) woman to be doing what I want to be doing. Because you know someone who knows the culture, speaks the language for those who don’t speak English well, and I can be on their level because what they experience, I experience what with family and all the religious aspects of it. It’s something that I am totally a part of. I think that they can accept guidance from someone like us more than from someone who has no idea what they’re talking about, or someone who just doesn’t get it.

Tova, a mother of four, felt this void personally in her time of need, as she sought help outside the community due to a lack of professional assistance within the community. She explained that this led her to pursue a degree:

What's motivating me to do it? Because I had to work out a lot of my own things in this community and what happens is that a lot of things are kept secret here. People are not dealing with it. And I did get a lot of help, but I got a lot of outside help from people who were not part of this community. People from this community did not understand and did not want to deal with it. So I had to go outside [of the community], because that was the only place that I really felt understood and I want to help other people who are living in this community. Let them have someone from this community that is living their same lifestyle help them.

Rachel, a mother of four who works with teenagers, felt that community members who are against college are acting “narrow minded and frankly selfish, because our community needs women with degrees.” She believes that there is a need for professionals within the community for the community.

Esther, a mother of five children including two autistic children, is planning on working in special education. She explained that members in the community are often at a loss when they need to find appropriate programs for their children:

Especially parents with special education kids who are special ed themselves. The Board of Education will end up sending their little Moishele with *chassidische peyote* (often long curled sidelocks) to public school and the kid gets lost, and it's not fair. So I want to be the one who says, no, that child belongs here and that child belongs here.

A number of women concurred that these child centered communities would benefit greatly from access to educated therapists and professionals who understand the community and can speak *Yiddish*. As Bina, a mother in her late thirties who grew up in an insular community, explained women who speak the *Hassidic* dialect of *Yiddish* are desirable because they will work better with the children. “First of all they speak *Yiddish*. You're not going to have someone so fluent

with the *chassidish* [Hassidic] *Yiddish* unless they actually grew up in that environment, and that's what they're using." And "the schools also liked that they didn't need to bring in outsiders with a degree."

Availability of College Specific Programs:

The introduction of culturally specific college programs within the Jewish community also helped the community accept the idea of college. Naomi said "I don't know what happened first if it's the women who brought the programs or the programs who brought the women, but either way there is a lot more out there for women." Rachel who works in the Orthodox Jewish high school system with teenage girls explained that college acceptance increased because "there are a lot more programs that are opening up that are in compliance with what we need." She added the community's needs are "the segregation, the atmosphere is very, very *frum*, (religious) it is not the one of career. It's very driven. The women are very driven, but yet with the right perspective." Brenda, a divorced mother of five boys, focused on the gender-segregated classes as a deciding factor for college acceptance now:

You don't want women and men together. In those days it was harder to go to college because you went between women and men. Nowadays you have it separate for men and women...but in those days we didn't have that option so it was much harder. Even us people, people who are in school now, probably wouldn't do it then.

Miriam, a mother in her forties whose children are presently attending college, felt that the community leaders are more accepting of college now. She explains that this is because "well since Touro was born...because it's an all-girls school or an all-boys, and they give *heterim* (allowances) for it (college attendance) more readily."

Shoshana, who attended an extremely insular high school where college was not accepted, explained:

at this time I think it became more of the norm because Touro became a great option to go to for your degree and it's so okay because *halachikally* (according to Jewish law) everything is so kosher about it, so why not? So it became normal.

Chaya, a divorced mother returning to college since her marriage and divorce, added:

I think Touro has changed the view of college, as like a non-threatening thing. It used to be if you went to college-your whole culture and identity has to change, and now it's not necessarily the same thing.

Dina, a young mother of three who attended other college programs in the past, suggested that:

there are just so many more programs now that the world has accepted that they see that it's just for women, it's very *tzenuah* (pious, modest), it's done in the right way, they see that the women are getting jobs. Also I think it's become more that people don't look down upon it as much because there are so many different kinds of colleges and they know that college doesn't mean that you are just out there in the world and going to night clubs. It means you are learning because you want to support your family.

Deborah, a young mother of three who grew up in a traditional home concurred:

now there are schools like Touro and Sara Schnerer and there are institutions that are compatible with Orthodox Judaism and have a good environment. Maybe years ago, there was like Brooklyn College, and they didn't approve of it because it wasn't conducive to *frum* (religious) women. Now it's more okay, because there's Touro.

The establishment of Touro helped to shift the community's view regarding college attendance.

For members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, The School for Lifelong Education, a specific Touro program has made college even more acceptable as it is not only gender segregated but has specific qualifications for the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community.

Changing Times:

Some women attribute greater acceptance of college acceptance in the community to changing times. The closed insular community has not been able to shield itself from the impact of technological advances such as the internet. As more community leaders and schools are realizing “America is not a ghetto,” a phrase often used to juxtapose the strict insular living condition of Jews in Europe prior to World War II where they had little interaction with the secular world with present living conditions, Orthodox Jews in America including their leaders have become less closed and insular. Leah, a woman in her forties returning to college following a twenty-seven year hiatus, feels that the community leaders may not be in complete agreement with college but “they know that it is a losing battle” the world is changing, there are economic needs “and they know that people will go to school anyway.” Dina, who grew up more open-minded but her husband’s family is extremely Hassidic, believes that changing times are changing our society and the reality that we are used to therefore has shifted “it’s more acceptable that the woman works and she goes out...so I definitely think its [college] become more acceptable.” Rivka, who graduated high school 16 years ago, said she called her school to request her transcripts. When her principal was surprised that she had decided to go to college she replied:

“yes, after so many years I finally got the brains to do what you never told me to do.” So he said “Oh so now you are blaming it on me?” I said “Not you specifically, but the whole school, it would have been much easier for me to do it then then to do it now.” so he tells me “Well a lot of things have changed and we’re looking out for the good of our students”

she concluded by saying “it is a completely different world now, it is a different generation.” As Tzipora, a 35 year old woman said “the generation is definitely more out of the box.” Hadassah feels that college is becoming more acceptable because:

in general people are starting to be more open minded. In that sense it's starting to be more like women shouldn't be like closed in a box. They are allowed to have their own life, and they should be able to be educated and know things. It's not as funny, you know, for a woman to have a degree now. When I graduated (high school) my friends who had a degree they went to their Rabbi and they asked "should they/shouldn't they" [go to college] and it was a whole thing if it was allowed. And now I don't know if anyone's asking the Rabbi."

Sara feels that "there definitely has been a shift in their view. I'm not saying completely, I'm not saying that everyone agrees with it, but there definitely has been a shift."

These shifts in the community's views have changed its expectation of the women's role. According to Aviva who grew up with a stay at home mother, "I think that [women's role] has changed very much. It used to be a stay at home mother. I think today since there are many homes that need the dual income they understand that a wife needs to go out." Rivka added, "I think the community is definitely more open to women working in the outside world also and the secular world." Thus with the greater acceptance of college and changes in the community's role expectations for women, more women in the community have begun to pursue a college degree.

Chapter 7:

Changing Roles:

As discussed in the previous chapter, societal and economic shifts in both the general population and in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community have affected the community's views and social expectation for women. These wider changes created the conditions for women to expand their role and attend college. Although no data on the women's view about their roles prior to attending college was collected in this study, the literature shows that going to college often changes women's view of themselves and their roles (Katz et. al, 1975; Britton & Baxter, 1999). The women both described changes in their roles as women but continued to accept the ideal of the "good" mother: the *Eishet Chayil*.

Most of the women agreed that the definition of an *Eishet Chayil* is a woman who respected her husband and took care of her children and her home. A number said that they accepted the meaning of *Eishet Chayil* that they learned in school and expect to subscribe to this norm which calls for them to be a supportive wife, a good mother and a woman who fulfills the needs of her family and home. The women described an *Eishet Chayil* in different words: Kaila said she "should be a warm loving person who takes care of her family and all of their needs and does all the right things." For Hinda she is "someone who is there waiting for her husband and giving him encouragement whenever he needs it, and being there for the children physically and emotionally in whichever ways they need it." Ariella said that an *Eishet Chayil* is "someone who respects her husband and who puts their kids first, and who is modest in their speech." In contrast Tzipora's definition of an *Eishet Chayil* changes with the times, "nowadays in my view an *Eishet Chayil* is someone who could help pay the bills, pay the mortgage."

Eishet Chayil; Balancing Everyone's Needs, Including One's Own Needs.

For many women an *Eishet Chayil* is a woman who has the *binah* (good sense) to help her family succeed and to happily balance her own and her family's needs. That is that some women defined *Eishet Chayil* in that it allowed them to consider their own needs. Naomi explained that an:

Eishet Chayil is someone who Hashem (G-d) gives them the ability to balance their home and see what has to be done and do what has to be done...prioritizes, if you see that your husband is not capable of handling making the *parnassah* (livelihood), he's losing it, you should jump in and chip in whatever has to be done. If it's the other way around, and your husband thinks you're too overpowering and your kids are losing out for what you are doing and it's a little bit more selfish because you want to get a degree and your kids are losing out, an *Eishet chayil* is someone who will step back and say, I really want this very much but my family's needs come first.

Sara, a full time working mother of eight whose husband is in *Kollel* said:

There are many different roles that a woman could fill and it's going along with what's needed for your family. That is achieving your greatness; going along with your family doing whatever their needs are. Doing what they need, hopefully using *binah* (good sense) and accomplishing whatever their needs are.

Rachel said it is "a woman that nurtures her family and at the same time knows how to nurture herself so that the home can be healthy." Leah said:

If you ask me what is an *Eishet Chayil*? I would say if you take care of yourself then you are doing everyone else the biggest favor. Similar to the oxygen mask on the plane, put it on yourself first, isn't that pure cruelty? Put it on the kids first, but the kids are useless without you. So that's what I think when someone becomes a mother there is no way that they can be self-centered anymore. It's gone, it's finished.

She continued on to explain that realistically when mothers are doing things for themselves in truth they are doing it for their children. Bina felt that an *Eishet Chayil* meets this balance differently as she explained she is:

somebody who covers the needs of her family first, and everything is there after...If we gave birth to these children we owe it to them first. But after that if it's within normal range, and they're getting their needs met, definitely a woman should feel comfortable pursuing her own desires.

Tova described supporting her husband in *Kollel* for the first eight years of their marriage as what a "true *Eishet Chayil* should do." She did not feel that she was doing anything for herself then because "I never heard anyone saying a woman has any other role." However, her understanding of an *Eishet Chayil* has changed:

I would define it with a little more balance. I don't think there is anything wrong if the husband wants to learn to be supportive. But I feel that a woman equally has to grow too, together, it's not only the man growing I think they both have to feel that they're growing. I think that's really what G-d wants. The woman has to be equally happy and fulfilled. And I don't think you can get completely fulfilled by just sitting at home and taking care of kids, for me that's not a possibility.

In contrast, Esther emphatically defined an *Eishet Chayil* "not by her work or not by her college degree, absolutely not. A woman of valor is someone who supports her husband no matter what he does. That's what a woman of valor is."

The Role of Women:

A new conceptualization of *Eishet Chayil* was accompanied by changed role expectations.

Women should be home:

Many women did not alter their view that a woman's role is to be in the home despite shifts in the community's view of college acceptance and of women's roles. The women attending college or planning a career understand that the community's expectation of the women's role has shifted. Yet they do not reject the women's traditional role. Miriam who worked when her children were younger but is now a stay at home mother, said:

I think a woman's role should be at home, absolutely. I think the workforce is not for women... [she should be] either a housewife or working. You can't do it all you just can't do it all. I tried it, it just doesn't go.

Women who held to the view that a woman's role is "to bring up my family," echoed this.

Gitta, who works full time, sounded remorseful when she explained:

I think a woman should be home with their kids. Even if it's not possible, I think it is beneficial for the kids if their mother is home with them and not having twenty five different roles at the same time.

Kaila, who works full-time and has three small children said:

I firmly believe that if a woman is going to give birth to children she needs to be there physically, emotionally and in every way. Because anyone can pop out babies, but what kind of mother are you going to be...A woman needs to be taking care of their family, their spouse, their husband, their children and all the needs. And that's a job itself.

Give the women the choice, but not the full burden:

Other women believed that women should be given the choice to work outside of the home but the woman should not be accountable for the full responsibility of the *parnassah* (livelihood). The *Kollel* lifestyle was discussed and a few women believe that though it is nice for the woman to support her husband for a year or two while he is learning, the expectation that the woman support her family financially for many years is unrealistic. It is also demanding too much from women. Esther believes:

when someone has younger children, little kids, really it's [women's role] to be home. I know we have this thing that the husband should sit and learn and the wife should go out to work. You know what, it's very nice for a couple of year two, three, five after that the husband should go out to work because the woman is the basis of the house, she's the one who is bringing up the children and if the woman is out working and husband is learning [who is watching the children?]

She continued on to say though that once the children are older:

I don't think there is anything wrong with a woman either going out to college and getting a degree or going out to work, because after a while a woman feels resentful...let her go out, let her enjoy life and do something. I feel that if a woman works they have a goal in life and they don't get depressed.

Role Defined by what you Love to do:

Interestingly, shifts in the community needs and views allowed some women to develop independent views of the role of the women. Those who defined the role of women as what they "love to do" or by "what makes them happy" had become less bound to community expectations.

Aviva said:

I think being a wife and mother are very important. But I think the most important thing is doing what you love. If you're not the type to be home with your kids, because for whatever reason you don't have the motherly instinct very strong, do what you need to do. If you need to go out to work so that you can have patience when your kids are there, do that. You have to be happy where you are. I don't think that if you are home being miserable about it your children will be happy.

Tzipora feels:

Whatever makes a happy mother. If a happy mother is someone who has seven kids at home and doesn't get any brain stimulation and reading then good for her. But if a happy mother means she goes off to college, then the kids are happy. So to me it's whatever makes that woman happy. So if it means going off to get a degree and reading math books and statistics so be it.

The recurring theme regarding a woman's happiness reflects the belief that if a woman is responsible for her family's happiness then if she is unhappy the home will be unhappy. The women holding this view explained that if the woman is happy being home, raising her family and taking care of the house then this is what she should do. However, if full time caregiving and homemaking made her miserable, then it was important that she be able to work outside of the home. Penina explained:

It depends on the person. A woman's role is that she should do the best that she can and whatever makes her emotionally stable she should do it. If it means

working and it will make her a better mother, she should work. And if it means that she won't cope and she'll be a nervous wreck she should stay home.

Malia said "I don't have one specific view...My way is people should be happy with their life. They shouldn't overexert themselves." Rachel a mother of four explained:

a woman in my sense of religiosity and my personal belief should be there to be able to raise a wholesome family and be able to nurture the home. And yet, at the same time, figure out a way to fulfill her passions, because otherwise the house is dead.

Most of these women understood that women are different and what makes one woman happy can stress another. Ariella said "I think it's what individually works for you. I don't have a defined set of ideas. I think people should prioritize their kids but beyond that I really can't say, because every person is different." Deborah simply explained:

role? Like what should she do? I think she should do what makes her happy and satisfied...you need to feel happy, because if you're not happy no one else in your home is going to be happy. Your husband will be miserable because you're miserable, your kids will be miserable because you're miserable. So you need to have that sense of fulfillment and do whatever it is that makes you happy.

Gitta said:

I think they should try to do the best that they can do with the resources that they have. I don't think that we could say that every person has the same role. We should say that every person is good at something else and they should do what they are good at, and not try to do something that someone else is or not try to copy what the next person is doing, because we all have our own identities...

The proper role in the home, is to give your kids the attention and love and try to help them succeed, but it's complicated to do that because if you're only worried about them, then you're not really worried about your life. So then you're actually giving up your life for them and once they get older you may be alone and not have experienced life. So it's a very hard combination to adjust to.

It seems difficult for these women to choose between the traditional role they were brought up with and their personal needs and desires which many women perceive as a secular view point on the woman's role.

Their view of the Secular role of women vs. the role of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman:

Many of the women described their view of the secular woman's role as compared to the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman's role. A few women explained that their view was conjectured from articles and books that they read, as they had minimal contact with secular women. Their view of the secular woman was that "she was a career woman," "her career came first." Kaila felt that "they first go to college and they finish and then they start their life." Rivka compared the two views:

Probably with the outside world you're not married at eighteen and you have kids, you first do school, it's probably much easier to get your career done and then have your family. But here, you get out of high school you get married, have kids and then you could go back to school.

When comparing what they believed the secular woman's role was and the ultra-Orthodox woman's role they found that their personal view was somewhere in the middle. Bina said:

I feel that a lot of secular woman when they wake up and they realize what they missed, it's a little too late. They put so much emphasis on their career only and they wake up and they realize that their clock is ticking. And, they realize, where have I been? Life is too short, and they want to have children and they don't want to be alone in the world and then it becomes all complicated. So they end up with this huge career-great, but now what?

Whereas the other way, just raising kids for me, looking at the ultra-Orthodox part, I feel that they are missing out a lot on life. For me, I feel that they are missing out all the intellectual stimulation that they could really have used and put to good use even in their family. I really feel that it should be part of the education, because it can only enhance their motherhood and their relationships with their husband and their friends, all around.

Thus the changing view of women's role expectation along with the community's gradually shifting view regarding college attendance offered the opportunity for many women in the community to enroll in college.

The Student Role; The choice to attend College:

For the non-traditional college student, a host of considerations are taken into account in deciding to enroll in college. For an ultra-Orthodox Jewish married mother some of these considerations may include a perceived conflict with her traditional way of life, the negative stereotype associated with college attendance, and a general friction with her cultural values and norms. Though the community's views have shifted regarding college attendance it is a gradual shift, and for many in the community, university attendance still does not have an obvious function in an ultra-Orthodox woman's traditional role. Instead it conflicts with traditional cultural values, so that the decision to attend is not taken lightly.

Research has shown that financial necessity is the most common motive for adult women and men returning to school (Scanlon, 2008; Spanard, 1990). The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is generally susceptible to the same economic challenges as wider society but due to their high cost of living in this community the need for more income is often greater. The shift towards the *kollel* lifestyle has also led women to assume the role of the primary bread-winners.

While some women pointed to financial motivation as the reason that they returned to school most women had other goals. Their reasons fell into three main categories (1) anticipated financial need or career enhancement, as was expected (2) a search for more "purpose" in life, and (3) a life altering crisis that triggered a desire to make a fundamental lifestyle change.

Anticipated financial need or career enhancement:

Many of the women interviewed believe that increasing financial pressure on parents as well as the *kollel* phenomenon contributed to greater tolerance for women's college attendance. This may be due to the high cost of raising a family in the ultra-Orthodox community and also

because many young couples rely on their parents for economic assistance following marriage (Shai, 2002).

Not surprisingly many women reported that they chose to attend college for economic reasons. Vera, a divorcee who had not worked outside of her home since before her marriage over 25 years ago, was looking for a job because she needed a *parnassah*, (an income). She concluded that without a degree, pay would be minimal, and decided to go to school. But she was unaware of how long it would take to complete her degree. Ariella explained that she came to school “for economic reasons, you know you want to actually get a job that will pay more than \$10 an hour.”

Changes in administrative policy have also contributed to increasing college enrollment. The New York State Board of Education began requiring college degrees for certain positions in educational institutions receiving public funding. This had a significant impact on the many ultra-Orthodox women working in education. Sara explained that she enrolled in college because “I was teaching for fifteen years and [due to] the registrar changes in the education system I just feel that it will be beneficial for me to have my degree...because of economics.” She believes that once she has the degree “she will just continue (teaching) with the degree, earning more money hopefully, or else I would go onto some other program in the therapy field and expand in that.” For some women, the changes meant they would be unable to progress to higher positions or, in some cases, even maintain current positions without obtaining a college degree. As Malia who has been working at the same job for a number of years said “I was always interested in starting a career and I know that in the job that I am in, if there is any potential then I need a degree.” She decided to go to school because “I knew that if I wanted to move on in life I would need the piece of paper. Just to stay in the same place, I wasn’t

interested.” A college degree became glaringly necessary for Rachel who has been working at a program for special needs children when she was approached to take over an administrative position “and it halted because of my not having a degree.”

Many of the women interviewed believed that a college degree would enable them to attain more flexible jobs. Kaila, a teacher who works full-time, explained that she decided to go to college because “I would love to be able to choose my hours, be paid well, and be home for my children all at once.” Malka who had worked long hours at her previous job explained that she returned to college because “my family grew and I couldn’t keep up with the deadlines with any grace anymore...I wanted to find something a little more in sync with my kids and family in terms of schedule.” She also explained that although her husband works, with six children in private schools, “we need to boost the income badly.”

Desire for Purpose or Something Different for Themselves:

For some women the decision to attend school was based on a desire to find a purpose other than being a mother and/or housewife. The women expressed this by describing a need for stimulation and a feeling of boredom or questioning what they would do when their children grew up. A few women contrasted their mothers’ lifestyles or the traditional housewife’s lifestyle with the way of life that they desired. For these women attending school was not motivated by financial necessity since they were already financially secure.

Some women who did not need additional income pursued a college degree with an eye to the future. Aviva, a financially secure mother of two, said that while she did not need to work now, she considered going to school when she thought about her mother’s experience searching for a job in her forties after being home with the children her entire adult life and without a college degree. She felt that her mother, a bright and talented individual with valuable life

experience was hampered in her search for meaningful employment by her lack of formal education:

My mother, wasn't able to get anything higher than an entry level job. [Despite] all her years of being a negotiator, a teacher My mother was only able to do these things [entry level position] because she had all these children and we *were a lot, we were 8*, and she wasn't able to get anything higher than an entry level job.

I realized I didn't want to be like that. I don't want to be someone who at the age of forty can only get an entry level job. That's why I decided to pursue a career, to pursue higher education.

Aviva explained that she feels that she could do this because she only has two children, but that her family comes first. She said:

If something were to happen with my family, my family comes first. You know I only have two children now, I am twenty eight I would love to have many, you know, so if I need to take a break I will do so gladly. My goal is eventually that when I am older I should have a life. I should not have to live vicariously through my children.

However, Miriam, a 48 year old mother of three college-aged children, admitted that attending college was not a choice she would make, but her daughter insisted that she enroll. She is in school "just to keep busy" and for "self-confidence, to show myself that I could do it." Leah, returning to college following a 27 year hiatus, explained that over the years she worked in various jobs and found it too daunting to complete her degree with little children and family responsibilities. However, the loss of her husband's job made her realize the benefits of a degree. Additionally, she explained that she "feel(s) like a tremendous pressure and I really need to have some closure on this twenty seven years and get my degree and walk down with my cap and gown."

Penina who had been successfully working for years, explained "I have children at home so I'm not really looking to be challenged, I'm looking to be stimulated education wise." This

need for stimulation was echoed by other women as well who desired more than the traditional housewife lifestyle, such as Tova a mother of four concurred: “I always felt that I needed more than just staying home with my kids, it was just not enough for me.” Deborah, a young mother of three children close in age, said “I did it more because I was looking for more. I’m not satisfied with sitting at home taking care of kids being a housewife. I’m looking for more...most of it is because I wanted to do something for myself.” Deborah appreciates the stimulation that she gains from school “because sitting home talking to a seventeen month old is not that much fun.” She is consciously choosing a lifestyle contrary to the traditional housewife lifestyle of women in her community. Her father who is against her being in college has told her “when I win the lottery you’re staying home and watching the kids.” She in turn explained to her father, who she describes as “very old fashioned”, “no, you’re not, I’m not just going for the money, I want to do something with my life. I would never be happy just sitting at home.”

Hinda, a mother of five boys who comes from an extremely tight knit *Hassidic* community, decided to come to school because she was bored and was looking to be stimulated. “I don’t have anything to do now. I don’t have a baby now [her youngest is five years old]. I have five boys, I don’t have a girl, and I’m looking for some fun now, not fun, I’m looking for some fulfillment.”

Rivka explained that she married soon after completing high school and stayed home to take care of her children because that is what young Orthodox Jewish women are taught is the correct way of life. Shoshana seemed to concur that this is the reason that she did not attend college following her high school graduation.

Why did I start now? I’m married, I have two kids and why did I decide to start fresh now and not straight from high school? Because in my situation, from the

school that I went to, it wasn't the thing to do to go to college. It was to get out of school, get a job, get married have kids, that was the thing to do and that was that.

However, observing women in the community attend college altered her view on college and her personal goals.

But now I see the importance and it is such a good thing to do. It helps you for the future and it's never too late to start. So I decided why wait and I shouldn't regret the time that I could have done it.

She appreciated that though:

some women are perfect just taking care of the kids and being home and taking care of doctor appointments, but for me I felt like I was just staying on one level. I want to do more, even though that is a big job already. But when the kids start getting older.. Why wouldn't you start working now for something you'll have for the future so when they do eventually, when they're teenagers, so that you could be busy with something other than the kids-out of the house.

Life altering crisis that triggered a desire to make a fundamental lifestyle change:

Research has shown that for the non-traditional student, entering college is usually initiated by the reassessment of goals and priorities or by a critical life event (Ross, 1988). This study confirmed this finding. Women often turned to college after an episode or crisis led them to question their ideas and or life style. Some were full time mothers others were working outside the home but did not recognize the necessity of a degree. Despite these differences, in both situations, unforeseen circumstance led the women to seek a college degree.

When asked "What made you decide to go to college?" women in this group often began their answer with a long sigh followed by considerable introspection. The stories varied from lost pregnancies to life threatening illnesses. Following a miscarriage, Naomi, a stay-at-home mother of six chose college as a lifeline, for her college gave her a place to escape to while she mourned the loss of her unborn child. To Naomi who married at 17 and had her first child at 18 followed by six consecutive pregnancies and nursing children, her role as she had known it was

gone. She said “when I entered college, that was my life, I needed college for many reasons.” College offered her the opportunity to find herself and to come to peace with the changes that were occurring in her life. Though things have changed and settled down since the miscarriage she still believes that for her college was necessary at the time. Naomi feels that many women in this program are similar in that “you’re here for a purpose. ‘I’m coming back because and I’m going to finish because’...here they (the students) have baggage and you know they have a life. And most of them are complicated.” She has found that the women in this program have had life altering situations which triggered their college entry. Naomi considers college critical for women in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community as an outlet:

Many of us, women especially, suffer, because we don’t know that there is another world out there and we sit in the confines of our homes and we bemoan our hardships. Everyone has hardships. I don’t think there is a person that doesn’t have a hard life, some more and some less. But if there is an outlet, if there is a way of making yourself, you can’t take away your hardships, that’s there, that’s from Hashem (G-d), but we can balance it a little bit. We can give ourselves some good things. Why not offer it [college]?

An only child and mother of three, Hadassah’s life was altered following a family emergency when one of her parents became ill and required constant care. Hadassah relocated her family to be close to her parents. This in turn sent her life into upheaval and caused her to reassess her goals. Following much introspection at that time she realized that there was no “me” in her life, everything was for others. This caused her to become “strong enough to go to school.” She explained “I wanted to do something for myself...I’m telling everyone that I could get a better job but I’m not sharing with anyone that I’m doing it for myself.” She is fearful of what others in her tight-knit community will say about her and how they will judge her knowing the true reasons for her going to school. Hadassah lives in a community where “Touro is

unacceptable” and as she says “I’m probably the only woman who goes to Touro.” She defended her duplicity:

I know it’s bad [not telling them the truth about college] but I live in a very close knit community, and it’s a wonderful community and they should all live and be well, but they don’t necessarily mind their own business AT ALL. And if one person is judging me and thinks it’s the improper thing to do, I don’t want the whole community to talk about me and say “she’s the newer person and she dresses differently, and look now she’s going to college, and soon who knows what will happen to her.” So I just figured I’m doing it for myself but I don’t need everyone talking about me, so this is what I just said.

Hadassah understands her community’s opposition to college but she defended her choice to attend. “It was a good thing for me. Maybe for them it’s not a good thing, and I respect that.” She has found that college “brings out more positive energies out of me.”

Esther, a mother of five including two children with special needs, was forced to resign from her previous job following the discovery and treatment of a serious life threatening illness. In light of her inability to work at her former job she returned to college for a degree in special education with the goal to help mothers of children with special needs navigate the education system in the hopes that they would understand the benefits available to them and have better access than she had. As she explained:

I want to help parents to not have to go through what I went through, because I suffered terribly until I figured out what I had to do. And it’s not fair for parents to have to suffer, especially with the Board of Education...so I want to be that one who says, no, that child belongs here and that child belongs there.

Through attaining a degree in Special Education she hopes to assist her community.

Following a debilitating accident Tzipporah was forced to stop running her successful business. She found it difficult to stay idle at home as she had previously led an active life. She explained:

It wasn't going to work just shopping and lunching like all my friends do. Plus my baby then was five and I couldn't have anymore, so what was I going to do then? If you can't have more and you only have three and my oldest was then twelve what was I going to do, like what was I going to do?

So I guess I'm a very good candidate for your study, because technically it (going to school) was the best thing for me to do, because what else could I do? You're not going to sit at home.

Tzipporah was aware her physical condition might progress causing her to lose her ability to walk. However she decided to attend school regardless of whether she will be able to complete her goal and achieve her Master degree because "it made sense to do that. Not for the money part, but more for the keeping stimulated part. I did it more to keep me happy." For her the decision to go to school was the best one she could make, it was not out of financial necessity but rather to give her a purpose and keep her content. Her husband constantly reminds her "you're doing it just for enjoyment, right? So just enjoy it, forget about what's going to be." Tzippora feels that school has filled a void in her life and that whereas she had felt bored and unmotivated she now feels empowered, happier, smarter and her self-confidence has increased. She has found that others respect her choice especially considering her circumstances.

Two women in the study chose to attend college after joining support groups where members of the group encouraged them to attain a degree. Tova, a young mother of four, who did not feel accepted by her family or the community explained that she went outside of the community to receive help from 12-step support groups to deal with abuse and addiction from her childhood. During these sessions members in her group showed surprise at her closed upbringing and lack of education and suggested that she attend college as they felt "it would really make a difference in my life [if I went to school]." Now in school, she added, "I see that it does. It's really giving me that self-esteem." Tova's experience has taught her that the

community is deficient in assisting individuals with similar experiences of her own. Her goal is to create a haven for members who feel uncomfortable seeking help within the community.

Itta, a mother of two in her thirties, chose to start college following personal soul searching and the advice from support group members as well. She said that “it was that work (in the 12 step program) on myself that actually gave me the push to come here.” She has found that college has helped her as “I really never thought I would amount to anything much...It has been a really big boost, very validating.”

For years Gitta, a mother of four, had wanted to go to school but people consistently talked her out of it. It was only after the birth of her third baby that she realized that school was definitely for her. While her child was in the ICU for a few weeks:

I saw who worked in the hospitals. I decided that they actually need some people who really care and who really know what they're doing. And then I said if those people can do it, I definitely can do it.

Gitta started school six years ago when “it was almost unheard of. Really it was not so many women going to school.” And when she started to go to school people said “does she need attention?” However, now she observes a shift and believes that it is because “people feel that they need to do something more than just be a mother...and because people need to get jobs...” Though she has chosen to go to school for her own personal reasons, and by choice, she finds that school has created additional stress in her life and has limited her ability to be a good mother to her children. She believes that it is important to get a degree because “when we do finish raising our children we can feel that okay we have a career and we don't have to feel, like okay my life is over...” However she questions whether it is worth the price “if we're going to lose out in the end, I mean we're definitely going to lose out in the end, we'll lose out certain aspects of just enjoying having children without certain stresses.”

Chaya, a divorcee, explained that she had gone to school before she was married. Her ex-husband demanded that she stop going to college because he basically wanted her to be a full-time mother and to depend on him. However, following her divorce she “picked college because I myself have reevaluated my religion and culture.” In reevaluating her religion and culture she questioned why mothers could not go to college, obtain a degree and increase their education. She chose to go to school despite the community’s resistance to college. “I decided to go to school, it’s unfortunate, because they (women in the community) can’t go to school.”

Why These women?-Breaking the Mold

It is befitting to question why these women have chosen to attend college as opposed to other women in the community. These women offered insight into how the community perceives the role of the women and how their views on college attendance have shifted often altering role expectations. The women in this study went to college for various reasons including; financial necessity, desire for stimulation and /or a life altering occurrence. But it does not explain why other women in similar situations choose not to go to college. One can assume that other women are also financially strapped, bored or have life altering episodes and yet make other choices. This raised the question: what makes these women different?

Almost all the women who were interviewed, at one point or another during the interview offered their own insight as to why they were able to break the mold and enroll in college. They either view themselves as more “open-minded” or asserted that they were brought up as somewhat “non-conformists.” Accordingly, they were already unconventional. Bina believes that her community members are not surprised by her attending college as she was always

viewed as progressive, especially when she began to drive when most women in her community do not do so. She said:

They probably think I'm going off the beaten path, but on the other hand they probably thought that even when I graduated and if they see that I am still grounded, even though I drive, then they figure nothing bad is going to happen.

Tzipora also does not believe that her attending college surprised community members because she honestly feels that they have always viewed her as different and she never felt truly accepted. “Really I'm the out of townner, I'm this European girl who moved here and married an American boy, I'm sure it (college attendance) just adds to it.” Sara feels that her community members expected her to go to college “It's something that was always up my line, but it was never something that I felt that there was a pressure for me to do.” However due to shifts in the education system, “Right now I feel that there is a pressure for me to do it right now. That's why I'm doing it.”

Malia explained that though she grew up very sheltered and college was unacceptable in her home, she “was always a rebellious kid, I always said I wanted a career.” She believes that her rebellion caused her to be more “open-minded,” which led her to not only accept college but to actually attend college. As she explained:

Because I was so closed, I wanted to know more, so I became friends with people who were more open minded and more modern people and weren't *chassidish* (Hassidic). So I learned from them and then it became normal to me. So I wasn't surprised by all of these things, like for me going to college, well my friends were going, so I didn't see it as such a big deal.

Incidentally, when she was dating her husband and he told her that he was contemplating attending college her reaction was “Yeah, finally somebody who is more out there, more open minded.” She explained that her husband was able to consider college attendance because he grew up in a more “open-minded” *Hassidic* home as well as “his father was brought up [out of

town], a real American guy, an interesting family.” Though Shoshana, a conventionally ultra-Orthodox Jewish mother of two, would never have considered attending college, it was her husband’s unconventional upbringing which led her to attend college as she explains:

My in-laws are very supportive. My mother in law, the interesting thing is that she went to Bais Yakov and she lived in Williamsburg [a more insular highly ultra-*Hassidic* community] so she’s not the typical *chassidische* woman in that education is important to her. All her girls have their degrees.

Many women suggested that it was their upbringing that made college attendance acceptable. Aviva believes that she was able to consider college because “I was raised very open minded, even when I was younger my mother was going to school.” Rachel feels that it was her background that allowed her to be open to attending college. “I grew up here in Boro Park, my father is American and my mother is Israeli however they’re very nonconformist, they were always different in the way they raised us, they let us be.” Though she grew up within the tight knit ultra-Orthodox Jewish community she was not forced to conform to all their ideas. Leah who grew up exposed to the secular world feels it allowed her to be more open to the world and able to attend college. She believes that members of the community lack exposure which hinders their ability to attend college and progress.

I do think that they are not properly prepared. My first cousins were not *frum*, (religious). My mother came from Baltimore. We travelled since we were young I met up with Budhists and I don’t know what. I really had a very wide exposure. The average (ultra-Orthodox Jewish) person, you know, their mouth falls open when they go into the world and they see what’s going on there and they don’t seem to be able to handle it.

The Role of Community’s Growing Acceptance of College Education for Women:

When asked whether the community’s gradual acceptance of college affected their decision to attend college a few women indicated that while community acceptance has increased, this is not why they chose college. Deborah said “I would say I’m doing it more for

myself, not because everyone else is doing it.” Gitta who attended college prior to it becoming accepted by her community said that “years ago people thought I was more crazy, but now they more admire it, or they’ll say everybody is doing it.” The acceptance of college by the community is not why she enrolled in college but it has now made her college attendance tolerable. Naomi said that her choosing to go to college was not impacted by the community’s gradual acceptance of college because “I’m very individualized regardless of what the community thinks.” However she did explain that “Of course, due to my children I’m going to want to fit in, I’ll try to stay within the [community] bounds.” Thus she attends a program that is accepted by her community as there is a need to conform. Hinda, who has not told members of her strictly ultra-Orthodox community that she is in college, explains that though she is different than her community members, “I don’t want to be seen as an outcast.”

Despite their open mindedness they could not have embarked on college if not for community acceptance of college for women and the creation of culturally specific college programs. Deborah explained that though she was attending college for herself:

I guess in a way, if nobody was going to college would I have broken the mold and gone? I don’t know-maybe. But to me I don’t know, most of it is because I wanted to do something for myself and probably some of it is because it was more acceptable.

With the decision to embark on a college degree the women were taking on an additional role. But they were also bringing into question their ability to become a *Superwoman*; a woman who could bring home the bacon and cook it up as well. The women offered their opinion on whether it is possible for a woman to “do it all” and whether this should be their goal.

Can a Woman do it all?

Research on the entry of women into the paid workforce indicates that female employment has not altered this idea and has been coined as the “ideology of domesticity” (Williams, 2000). The “ideology of domesticity” which hold that women’s “place is in the home” regulates the gendered division of labor that exists through hegemonic gender norms. Women continue to complete most of the household chores and caregiving activities of the family even when working outside of the home. Hochschild (1989) has studied the “second shift” which refers to the caregiving and housework done by women after a full day of work outside the home. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community instills the ideology of domesticity (i.e.; *Eishet Chayil*) in children as both a cultural norm, and as a religious obligation. Women who take on new roles often challenge the “ideology of domesticity.”

With shifting beliefs of what a woman’s role is comes additional responsibilities and some women explained that they are now expected to do more, not less. As Ariella explained “like cook and clean and be the mother and have like a great career that brings in money, just the expectations.” When study participants were asked if, as women they should be able to do “it all” the response was one of laughter and some mixed reactions. Some women believed that it was a fact that women are able to do everything, some thought that it was unfair that they should be expected to do it all, and some explained that they could do it all, but not at the same time.

Women Can do it all:

Women who believed that a woman should be able to do it all suggested that women had the capabilities to “do it all”, but that it depended on their personality and whether they wanted to “do it all”. Rachel a full time working mother said:

Not only is a woman expected to do it all, but most of the time she does it all...If she wants to add anything but the domestic responsibilities she's expected to do it all. I think it's an upbringing and it is values. I would feel devastated if I wasn't doing all that stuff. I would feel completely inadequate, besides for inadequate I would feel like a huge hypocrite...that's clear to me, I know what I am supposed to be doing. I know what I will be assessed about after a 120 (afterlife). I know I won't be assessed on education. I will be assessed on whether my home ran well, whether I gave my children the physical and emotional needs and whether I gave my husband the physical and emotional needs.

Sara felt that it depended on what your goals are as she explained:

Oh a woman could accomplish it all. But it all depends what your main goal is. If your main goal is to be a career woman, and by the way you're a mother, then you come out with certain goals, you come out with certain accomplishments. If your main goal is to be a mother and you're going to work to accomplish your main goal, then hopefully you accomplish your main goal of raising a family

Malia felt that you can only try:

My way of thinking is do whatever you can do. I don't think everyone should be able to do everything. If you're able to do it, do it. If you're not able to do everything- then don't do it. I don't think people should overwork themselves they should do what they enjoy doing.

Vera, a divorcee, seemed to feel that it is not a choice we make. Women have to do it all as she said:

Well in our *frum* [religious] world we know that the woman is the *akeret habayis* [mainstay of the home] so it's in theory and in practice, and then what does "it" mean it's not limited to everything...meaning when I had to do it all, it was taking care of a disabled child, figuring out how to manage my rent and my expenses, taking care of all the paperwork, finding yeshivas for my sons. Now when I have to do it all, it's plus looking for a *shidduch*, [a marital match] plus being in college and I still have to do it all...it's whether I want to or not, whether I can or not, whether it's all getting done or not...It's survival.

Some felt that it depended on the woman's personality as Rivka said "it's not a matter of should do, some people can and some can't." Bina said that it depended on whom, but that on a whole she thinks that women are able to juggle much more than men:

I mean I really shouldn't be saying this but the way I see the men around me, the women are more capable; they juggle much better. If a man had to, I mean a man I knew, had to do everything I'm doing I don't know how successful they would be. And I don't think they realize that. I don't think they realize how much we

accomplish in our day to day. They think somehow that all the things happen automatically because they come home and it's done. They don't realize that to prepare supper you have to wash last night's pot to make the next meal – it just happened. Or they don't realize that the kids are bathed and in pajamas – it just happens. They don't realize.

Tzipora also felt that women are able to handle multiple tasks as she said “I think the woman...could do it all, not more, I'm not saying we're better than them [men], but we have a way of juggling better.”

Can do it all-but not at the same time:

A few women believed that you could “do it all” but as Aviva, a mother of two said “not at the same time.” They were adamant that when bringing up children there are certain things that one needs to give up on. Malka laughed and said:

A lot of women think they could [do it all] and I think they're really stupid...who could do everything? It's not human. I mean I do, in terms of having experienced the range of different roles, if that's what you mean, then yes, I heartily agree. I could do things that I never thought I could do, and my roles are super varied. But to try to be and excel at all those things at the same time is just foolish in my opinion.

Women Cannot do it all:

Most of the women felt that it is not possible for a woman to do it all. Miriam who had worked when her children were younger explained:

No, I think a woman can't do it all, because there is always that guilt feeling that when you are at work or at school then the kids need you. What if a kid is sick, what if they have a cold? You know kids need their mother at home.

As Deborah said:

I don't believe in it. I can't do it all, maybe I'm wrong, but I don't believe that there is anyone out there that can have a full time job, take care of their kids, cooking and cleaning and doing it all by themselves. I don't think it's possible, I think it's perfectly fine to get help from the outside.

Hinda responded that:

everything means something else for everyone. There's someone in my class who has four children and she comes to school here and she has a job, I wouldn't be able to do that. That's what I call everything...I don't think it's possible to do everything. I think that at some point it's going to plop somewhere.

Leah questioned women's ability to "do it all":

I have a very strong feeling in my head that there is no way that anyone does it all. And I think that you are in the saddest place if you think you are doing it all...I don't think we do it all. I think that if a woman doesn't know that she is not going to do it all, I feel sorry for her because I can't imagine her being anything but miserable.

Naomi said:

I don't think that women can do it all. I do not think that women are superwomen, nobody is superhuman, G-d made it that way, but I do believe that we should be given the opportunity and that opening. So that if we should want to, and we feel that we can do it, we should be able to. But should we feel that we are forced to do it, should we feel that we must do it? Absolutely not.

Gitta explained that people think that they should be able to do it all and they place too much pressure on themselves as she said:

I think that people think that they should be able to do it all but they can't always. They think that they should have to do it all, but years ago people didn't have to deal with as many things as we have to deal with. And yes, we do have the extra things that people didn't have years ago, but we do have the extra stress that people didn't have years ago

The expectation regarding women's ability to "do it all" caused additional pressure and guilt as women felt they need to succeed at everything. Shoshana explained "sometimes it will irk me when I find that there is this pressure in our society that you have to do it all and be up to par with everyone else, or else you're just a loser." A few women agreed with this notion as Hadassah said "It's very sad if you expect women to do everything and then a woman is going to feel like she is just not living up to what she should do." Leah simply responded "no, I'm not into martyrdom, no, I don't think you could do it all, you really can't." Dina believed that this idea of women "doing it all," is actually self-imposed because women expect too much from

themselves, they expect to be the perfect mothers and the perfect cooks and to excel in every area. This is what adds pressure to their lives and causes them to have greater expectations and not be happy with what they achieve as she said:

I think it's crazy, I think we do it to ourselves. Just like everyone thinks women should be skinny, we did that to ourselves..I think women, we, expect too much from ourselves. I think it's true. I get upset if I'm not that perfect mom. I don't know if it's Judaism, but I definitely think there's this super hero type of thing that women think they should be the best mom, the best cook, a clean house, clean kids, dress nice, great grades, helping them with homework every night, you can't be the best in everything.

Ariella had her own thoughts on women attempting to "do it all":

I think people are capable of doing it all, but not as many as people think. I think there is too much pressure, some people can't handle it, but they are doing it because they think they have to be like superwoman. I think that someone is going to end up suffering. Something is going to end up falling apart. You can't do everything perfectly.

The women did feel though that even if they were unable to do everything at once they should be given opportunities, such as an education or a chance at a job.

Chapter 8

College Experiences and Support:

To attain their degree students need to overcome additional conflict and stress. Previous literature indicates that social support moderates stress (Helgeson, 2002; Jacobsen, 1986).

Support is often characterized as expressive or emotional support and instrumental support.

Expressive or emotional support is defined as behaviors that create feelings of comfort and make people believe that they are admired, respected, and that others are willing and available to provide compassion and security for them (Jacobsen, 1986). Instrumental support is defined as assistance provided for tangible problems such as loans, childcare or transportation (Lin, 1986).

Support is necessary for ultra-Orthodox Jewish students to alleviate conflict and stress. The establishment of Touro College's The School for Lifelong Education offers both institutional supports and instrumental supports to their students to improve their experience. Students discussed instrumental supports offered vis-à-vis flexibility, extensions and scheduling that worked for them. They also mentioned supports received from the professors and administrators both in the form of emotional or expressive support. Students felt that the institution encouraged and advocated for them. The students spoke about the need for both expressive or emotional support as well as instrumental support from family members to succeed in their studies.

Instrumental Support from The School for Lifelong Education

Many of the study participants mentioned that college attendance was only possible for them due to the existence of The School for Lifelong Education as the school offers support necessary for them to attend college. This is consistent with Hammer, Grigsby and Woods

(1998) finding that students who perceived their university as providing effective support systems reported lower levels of conflict. Whereas Touro College has accommodated for issues such as gender- segregated classes and fear of assimilation the specificity of The School for Lifelong Education has zeroed in on concerns of the *Hassidic* or ultra-Orthodox community by offering instruction in a variety of modalities to accommodate the student's lifestyle and commitment to family and occupation (Touro Bulletin, 2008). Thus, The School for Lifelong Education was viewed as the only viable option for most of the study participants. As Tzipora said "there's nothing to discuss it's for a Jewish person, mother-perfect." Hinda stated "where else can we go?"

Most recommendations for the program came from members of the community who had graduated from this program. These graduates understood the women's need for a creditable program, considerate of their lifestyle. The features of the program allow many of the women to enter and complete college when under other conditions this could not occur. Malka, who returned to college after many years, was anxious about completing college due to her numerous responsibilities. However, her husband's friend, an employee at The School for Lifelong Education, insisted "you could handle this program."

Study participants acknowledged that they chose this program, coined "Touro's greatest secret" or as Chaya declared, "it's like low profile Touro," due to its reputation as accommodating to women with growing families. The three areas where they observed the greatest instrumental support were in the flexible class scheduling, holiday schedule and its convenient location in Boro Park, an ultra-Orthodox enclave, making it easily accessible to members of this community.

Class Scheduling:

Students appreciated the availability of classes on Sundays, during the week and at night. They also welcomed the option of mentorial versus collaborative classes. Mentorial classes refer to an independent study type class in which students meet their professors individually to review the five assignments for the semester. Within the mentorial set-up professors assign independent work to students which they collect at each meeting. Collaborative classes refer to small classes that meet once every other week for one and a half hours. More independent work exists than in a standard classroom but less than in a mentorial. The meetings with the group and the instructor allows for more presentation of the material by the instructor and for more group discussion than the mentorial format. Both of these scheduling options limit the time required out of the home. Student participants understood that other programs require greater attendance, and acknowledged the decreased “face” time necessary as a reason for choosing this program. As Chaya, a divorcee and mother of three said, “It works with my schedule. I don’t have to sit in class every night till 10:00.” Ariella who had attended the more traditional Touro on J explained:

[I appreciate] the mentorials, you don’t have to spend, let’s say, in Touro on J you had to spend like seven hours twice a week. Here you have to come in for only two or three hours and you do the rest of the work at home.

Gitta signed up at The School for Lifelong Education because the classes were at night when her children slept “I could be a mother and go to school, so I never actually left them. I would put them to sleep and then go to class.” Naomi, a mother of six, explained scheduling benefits in regard to her children:

I wanted to be home for the kids, I wanted to put them on the bus. I wanted to be there to take them off the bus and I wanted to be there to spend time with them. This program worked. No other program would have accommodated my hours.

Esther feels that this program works for her:

because when you're married, you have so many more responsibilities and Touro on Avenue J is a great place, but it definitely is harder and the hours are not conducive with a married woman who has kids. Even if you have, I mean my youngest is 14, I can be out, but it's still better for people in this situation to be here.

The students voiced their appreciation for the program's flexibility not only in terms of parent responsibility, but also employment. Sara, a working mother of eight explained "I decided to come here, because I'm working full time and I need the classes to be flexible."

Rachel a working mother of four stated:

I wouldn't be able to weather it otherwise. I don't have the luxury of just not working. I have to help to subsidize economically at home. So therefore I need to be able to work, go to school at night... the staff here is very understanding of our lifestyle of running a home, children, work.

Jewish Calendar:

The School for Lifelong education follows the Jewish calendar; thus school is closed for all Jewish holidays. For women from the ultra-Orthodox community this is advantageous as Itta explained "they work with our schedule, the holiday schedule." Malka found the program beneficial as "it works around our calendar which is extremely helpful especially around Passover or all the holidays." Aviva said, "I chose it because it works for us, for frum (religious) women, like there's no school for us, thank G-d, before Passover, which for us is great. You know we need that. And it also revolves around our schedule." Verafelt "a very big plus about this Touro branch is the Pesach (Passover) and Sukkot vacation."

Students acknowledged that in other colleges they would have missed many classes due to Jewish Holidays. Students who attended other colleges in the past mentioned experiencing missed classes due to holidays, docked points, and being held responsible for missed work when

they could not come to class . Gitta who had attended Adelphi for one semester, contrasted her experience:

And Yom Tov (Jewish Holidays) when I was in Adelphi I just missed school on YomTov, and when I came back I was responsible for the work. (And) When I asked a question from my professor, he said, “Listen you just have to accept that you weren’t here and you won’t do as well as you usually do.” Okay, that was fine with me. But I still missed a lot of school. It is definitely less stressful (being in The School for Lifelong Education), certain aspects are less stressful when you’re around your own people.

Within the Community:

Many of the women chose to attend The School for Lifelong Education because of its location. Other Touro college programs with gender-segregated classes exist in different neighborhoods such as Flatbush on Avenue J. This specific program in Boro Park however alleviates the need to travel for many of the women. Penina explained that she came here “because it’s in the neighborhood, I live in Boro Park... so there’s no reason to look elsewhere.” Malia said that when she began to look into college programs she chose The School for Lifelong Education because her cousin told her “there is a place that is right around the corner” (so) “why wouldn’t I come here?” Aviva realized the benefit of the program’s location as she explained “I also like the fact that it is nearby, I live in Boro Park. It cuts the time with running back and forth and with all our other roles (time is limited).”

The college offers them an education within their community, with their community members and within a segregated environment. Brenda said “I like that here we’re all the same and we’re all in the same boat and it’s only women. I’m just more comfortable here.” A number of students do travel from Crown Heights, Flatbush or Williamsburg, as the benefits of

the program outweigh the commute. Deborah who lives a few blocks away from Brooklyn College said that she came here because:

this is also geared towards Orthodox Jews and I'm an Orthodox Jewish woman, and the fact that they really work around the Jewish holiday schedule and they work around those needs (of the Orthodox Jews). Whereas I don't think I would have gotten that at Brooklyn College.

Itta who travels in from Crown Heights explained that she came here because she heard that:

they work with your schedule, the holiday schedule, the Yomim Tovim, or just hearing that they're very understanding like if someone had a baby they're very understanding and they work with you. Honestly, if I would have gone to any other college, I don't know if I would have made it through. I probably would have just been scared off by all the deadlines, and knowing that they work with you just made a world of a difference.

Experiences in School

Noted for its' supportive atmosphere, study participants described their experiences at The School for Lifelong Education. They focused on their class experiences, their professors and their classmates.

Class Experiences: Mentorials Vs. Collaboratives

The students discussed the benefits of mentorial versus collaborative classes. Mentorial classes offered extra flexibility allowing students to study at their own pace and complete their work on their own time. Naomi explained, "Here, in Lifelong many of the things you really have to teach yourself. (So) For me that worked because I was able to do it 2:00 in the morning, which you can't do in a class." For other women it was the ability to structure the semester tailored to their needs. A number of women admitted that though they thought they would find the mentorials boring they actually enjoyed them. Hadassah, an education major said:

actually my mentorials I did not expect to enjoy, and I was actually very worried about it. (and actually) I am finding that it is really very interesting. I like the book that I am reading. I enjoy talking to my professor about it.

Some women admit learning more from mentorials than from collaborative classes, as Dina said “some of them I’ve actually learned more than coming to classes. It’s all the teacher.” For Rachel, a full time working mother, the mentorials offered options that she would otherwise not have had.

I’m grateful for the mentorials. Do I like it? Not as much as I would have liked sitting in class getting it all in from a professional or a professor. Then again, I’m out very early every morning, come home to children and even classes that are given at 5:00 I cannot make, so I really have to be thankful for this program.

Students mentioned challenges faced with mentorials. Although they meet with the professors five times over the semester, they are responsible to learn the bulk of work on their own. Tova, a mother of four explained:

I do not like one on one doing modules because I do most of the work on my own and I do well in a classroom setting. On the other hand the full class is a little tough because it is a lot of hours and it’s every week and that means I’m out a lot more and that affects my kids. They don’t like when I am out that much.

In other cases women chose collaboratives over mentorials when they realized that once out of the house the time difference for collaboratives versus mentorials was actually insignificant. Tzipora explained that at first she had taken mentorials “because I thought it would be better for me not to be away from the kids so much, but then I realized once you’re out, that extra hour or two is not going to break it.”

Expectations of Classes –role strain:

Students had mixed expectations regarding classes. Some students admitted starting school with no expectations, others found it more difficult than anticipated while others found it

unchallenging. Students who admittedly chose this program believing the classes easier than other programs found it more difficult than expected or than its reputation suggested. Malia said that her cousin who attended The School for Lifelong Education told her:

It [The School for Lifelong Education] was easier, but it got harder now at The School for Lifelong Education. She hears the homework that I have and she says it's much harder, it's getting more professional. And isn't it supposed to be easier, this program?

A few students who attended other colleges felt that as the program attempts to improve its reputation it is becoming academically more challenging. Dina who attended various colleges and training programs prior to attending The School for Lifelong Education said:

some of them (classes at Touro) were extremely difficult. I would say most of them were, compared to any other school. I feel like a lot of the teachers feel that the girls don't feel like they are in a real college so they feel this pressure to give all this extra work to make us feel like we are in college.

It's actually unfortunate because I feel here the teachers try so hard to make it a college, where they actually make it harder. Like I came here because I thought it would be easier, it's easier in terms of...I only come in let's say three days a week at night, but I have like 50 hours of work, so even when I'm not here I'm always working. So it ends up being so much harder.

Ariella felt that professors in the colleges she attended previously seemed less concerned if students cheated or completed their work whereas here the professors stayed on top of things.

Chaya explained that "They don't just hand out free credits here they're very tough. My first semester I was shocked...I thought it would be an easier school, I don't think it is necessarily easier, just different..."

A number of the students complained about the number of papers assigned. They explained that they had never received proper training in how to write a paper in high school and many had not written a paper in years. Incapable of achieving success in this area these women faced role strain. Bina, a thirty six year old mother, said "I didn't practice writing since I left

school and in my high school they didn't teach writing majorly well." Hadassah, a 29 year old woman, facing difficulty writing papers concurred:

I didn't have the education that I felt that you needed to go to college. I never wrote a research paper. I never did research. I don't have a computer. I don't have internet at home, I don't want to have internet at home...I have this paper to do for writing and I don't know how I'm doing it. I feel like I need a writing tutor to help me. So if I do it, I really think it's a miracle.

Four of the students described their college experience as "easy" and unchallenging. They admitted that due to this undemanding atmosphere they are able to attain their degree. Malka who described her classes as simple and a waste of her time caught herself and bashfully said "I really hope my name is not going on this because I have so much *Hakores Hatov*, (gratitude) at the same time I have so much *Hakores Hatov* because I really could not do this without this program, that's the bottom line. It is easier that's why I'm here." Rachel seemed to agree with this sentiment when she said:

I hope this doesn't sound discriminatory, but I feel that because this program has the name of, and is rightfully very accommodating to people's needs they are also very accommodating to people's intellectual needs. And it's very evident in the classes.

Rachel claimed that the program did censor their learning "not in an unbelievable degree, but it's felt." Meanwhile Hinda, who came from an extremely sheltered *Hassidic* community, expressed surprise that the program exposed them to certain information, such as fertilization of identical twins. She said:

I thought the teacher would just skip the pages...or the next page that we're supposed to learn are the parts of the human body, that would be censored in the school that I went to. Certain parts, fine the arms, but other parts? It would be censored.

For many of the students their classroom experiences exposed them to a new understanding of the world and the way they view it. Itta, who thought college would bore her, described her first night in class:

I was actually quite amazed, when I first went into my Introduction to Psychology course and we finished at 10:00 at night. And I was thinking I cannot believe this because physically my body is shut down, I am so exhausted and I don't know how I am getting up to get up the steps to take the train and switch trains to get home, and I am so wide awake and feeling so alive. And it was such a wonderful feeling to really enjoy studying

Tzipora felt that coming to school "has made me more aware of a lot more stuff. Just by taking classes you become smarter, just more knowledge." Miriam, a woman in her forties, described the classes as "very educational, it's nice." Shoshana said "I love being in class, I love to learn... the actual class is like wow-that is something I didn't know, so I love that part." Tova said that even though the classes may be difficult and the work is burdensome "I really enjoy what I am learning so I don't mind."

Professors:

For a college program to gain an accommodating reputation they need to have supportive staff and professors. The School for Lifelong Education offers an encouraging atmosphere and this is due greatly to their faculty. Naomi said "well, they're all women (the professors), which is a major plus...Here not every professor, but a majority, are understanding, and they realize that this is a unique program and I think they respect that." Aviva felt that "in general the staff want it to be a good experience for the students."

Participants described professors as "easygoing," "understanding to women's issues," "nice," "considerate," and "supportive". Vera was amazed by the professor's interest in their students "everyone is an entire world-they remember personal things that we tell them, they

don't forget who we are between one week and the next week and they're very interested in our sharing our experiences." Most of the students found the professors stimulating, well prepared, able to communicate their material well, passionate about their material and interesting on a whole. Gitta said "The professors are very smart. Some people say 'oh Touro, it doesn't have a great name' I think they have great professors. Smart ones, intelligent ones."

Students described the professors as knowledgeable in their subject matter as Penina portrayed them "some teachers are actually very good, they have the presentation and they know how to communicate with the students and they can give over their material well." And Dina said:

Some of them are excellent, most of them are actually very good...In general I think they try very hard to find people who know what they are talking about and who are very passionate, maybe a little too passionate about what they are teaching.

For Vera, a woman in her forties who grew up in Europe, the teachers enhanced her experience.

I am very much enjoying most of my classes...The reason why I am enjoying it so much is because when I was a child there were almost no *frum* [religious] people with degrees...I'm coming here and I see these women [professors] here in wigs who have ten kids and whose children are in *kollel* and they know everything. And I'm sitting there with my mouth open drinking it all in. And they know everything in both area [Jewish studies and secular studies] and I'm constantly marveling about this, about the teachers. It's a luxury for me to have *frum* [religious] teachers like this who know everything.

Students agreed that professors accommodated their needs, offered extensions when necessary and worked with students so that the program would meet their needs. Hadassah, a working mother with three children, said:

I find that they [the professors] are supportive and I feel that I am in an environment that is supportive and if it happened that I needed an extension, I never needed one, but if I did, I feel that I would be able to work with them.

Professors make themselves available to their students. Rivka found that “they make sure to let you know that any time that you need something from them, you can always call them at home, always feel comfortable to contact them.” Malia found them supportive, as she said “they are understanding and they give you extra time. I know, like, when my sister-in-law got married last year, the professor was understanding about it. Because I needed extra time because I went to Israel for the wedding.”

Dina had a different experience following a C-section when she found not all of the professors accommodating. She experienced that they were:

Actually not so nice about it. (Which) I was surprised because that was one of the main reasons I came here. They were like “why is your stuff so late? Why don’t you remember things?” And I was like, “I just had a baby.”

Other students who faced issues with professors found that in a supportive environment, they could find a way to meet their needs. One student with sleep apnea and another with ADHD found that with proper documentation professors would work with them. Bina described the professors “they are very understanding, they’ll have a make-up date, you’ll go over to a professor and as long as they know that you are trying they’ll really work with you. This is the atmosphere here.”

Classmates:

The strongest factor in The school for Lifelong Education specificity remains their student body. Originally the program catered to the ultra-Orthodox *Chassidic* community and the women’s program included mothers over the age of 25. Recently the program has evolved. Still catering to the ultra-Orthodox community they have included modern-Orthodox students and have begun to accept young single women who do not have children, as they see a need in

the community to assist them in attaining their degrees. Although strong similarities between the students exist the group lacks exclusive homogeneity. As Tova who grew up strictly *Hassidic*, described it “there is a nice combination here.”

Even with obvious differences many students described their classmates as similar to them; Orthodox Jewish women balancing multiple roles. Miriam, a mother of three in her forties, explained that “they’re all balancing the same things that I am.” Malka, a mother of six in her forties said “we’re all women, we’re all struggling to juggle with kids.” Most of the women are of a similar age group and stage in life. Naomi, a mother of six in her late thirty’s, assessed why she came here rather than Touro on J “when it comes to my stage in life and my age, I’m more fitting into this program than on J (Touro on J).” The women describe themselves as busy with multiple roles leaving them less time to socialize than women in other college programs. Naomi said that the student body here is distinctly similar in that the women have returned for a specific reason and they plan to finish. A number of students concurred and mentioned that students in this program either came due to a life altering experience or chose this particular school due to their lifestyle (e.g; kids, working full time). Chaya, a divorcee said:

a lot of people here have some interesting life story that necessitated they’re coming to a school like this. Like they’re either working full time or they’re husband has alzheimers and they need to start their own career, or they’re divorced, or they have little children, or something that makes it not possible for them to go to a regular college.

Students described their classmates as a social support group. They found that the women derive from a similar place and aspire to grow and expand. Tova feels a kinship towards her classmates:

I love them. This part I love. I find that the people here are coming, a lot of them are coming from a similar place like I am. They want to grow, they want to do something more, like expand a little more.

They regard most of them as intelligent and uncompetitive. However, due to their multiple roles and obligations women confessed that though they did enjoy talking with their classmates, they cannot stay to socialize. Malia felt that this depended on the age of the students as she said:

there are younger ones that you find, the ones that are younger and bubbly and they have all their friends. And the older ones, they come to class and they stay for a few minutes after and then they leave.

For some of the women school led to strong friendships. Bina said “I made such nice friends. We’ll study together, we’ll share notes...” Aviva reminisced that “when I was in a situation, when I didn’t quite catch on I had no problem calling other girls. And I would say that on the most part they were very helpful.” A number of the students said that they will miss the camaraderie that they have with their classmates. Dina, who attended other schools, said that one of the great benefits here was the ability to connect with anyone due to similarities, whereas elsewhere, “you have to find one person out of like a hundred people that you can connect with. In all the other schools it’s very competitive and nobody wants to help you.” Whereas here she found that the students assist each other. Interestingly though, Gitta, who attended this program prior to its evolving said that when the group was more homogenous they were a stronger social support for each other.

The Same, but different:

One would think that in a group such as this one, students would feel a strong kinship and likeness. Though they did describe a number of similarities, most of the students stressed differences. As Dina explained “everyone is so different you know, you think just because someone is Jewish we’re all the same, but I guess it’s just like any culture within a culture, everyone is so different...” She continued to say that even with all these differences e.g., the way they dress, friendships still exist. She echoed the feelings of many of the students who

claimed that the greatest similarity between the students was that “everyone has the same goals, and everyone sees through all the classes that we are all in the same boat...and we’re all just trying to get the same thing.” Deborah described the students as different “there’s *chassidish*, [Hassidic] there’s modern *frum*, [religious] but with the whole thing people really put that aside and no one really shuts out someone else because they’re not the same.” Hinda who comes from an extremely *Hassidic* community and dresses extremely modestly said “I might not dress so, how do you call it funky, but I feel in place.” Gitta though believes the differences affect the students as she said “we’re all of the same community, but age-wise and status-wise we’re very different. And it makes a big difference if someone has five children and someone else is single- How you manage and get through it.” For Bina the response to the students’ similarities seemed evident as she explained “I would say similar, because that’s what attracts us all to come here. We somehow have our differences, but they’re really little differences, nothing major.”

Though far from the oldest in their classes, most women interviewed described themselves as the oldest in the program. Older students questioned whether the younger students should attend this program as they pressured the professors to accelerate. Miriam, a mother in her forties, said:

so you know what bothers me about the classmates. So there are a lot of younger ones like 18-19 year olds and you know they just came out of high school. So I feel that they’re like pressuring the teacher to go on a little faster. I don’t really feel that they belong in this school. It is more for women who are married then for you know, kids who aren’t and don’t have that many responsibilities.

They described single students as “different” because they had more time to socialize and did not have as many responsibilities as the married mothers. This allowed school to be their main focus. Shoshana described her feelings towards the single girls:

I don't find that I have so much in common with them, because for them schooling right now is the main focus. So the married women, the ones who have kids, I feel that I am more up to par with them, because I feel like we have other responsibilities.

I get sometimes jealous. Like I had someone in my adolescent psychology class and I called her up for something and she tells me "I love, love, love this course and like I come home and that's all I do." And I was like wow, like in a way lucky you, because I love this class too, and if I had more time I would love to read the chapters and be more familiar with it so that when I come to class and the professors start discussing the chapter I'll have more to say. But I find that she's the one, the single girl, who is the one who is talking away and she's like smiling and so in love with this course. I'm like, hey, I don't have that much time... So the married ones are the ones that I feel that I am more comfortable with.

Contrary to this viewpoint other students felt that the single younger students did not take college as seriously. Itta, a mother of two in her thirties, said:

I find it difficult to relate to the younger girls who just want to text or multi-task while they're in class. I don't know why they sit in class and if you text it affects your grade. I don't know how they do it, I mean okay there's flexibility but you're sitting in a college class- boundaries.

Esther, a mother of five in her forties, found that the "younger girls don't have the maturity."

Kaila, a mother of three in her late twenties, said, "I was in a class with this really young girl, she's like nineteen, our views on life are completely different, she's a baby." On a whole, even with all these differences Hadassah echoed many of the students feelings when she said "some women I am similar, some maybe less similar, but we are all really going for the same goal-to get our degree."

Familial Support:

Study participants found that The School for Lifelong Education offered institutional support in the form of both expressive/emotional support as well as instrumental support.

Support from family members is helpful as well to alleviate conflict and stress. The next section

discusses participants experience with expressive/emotional support as well as instrumental support received from parents, spouses, siblings, children and friends.

Parents:

In this tight knit community children rely on their parents for support. Though women marry young, they often settle down near their parents and following marriage their parents offer various forms of assistance. Many of the women feel that their parents are emotionally supportive of their attending college. Rivka, an only daughter, said “my mother doesn’t stop bragging about it. How her daughter is in college and her daughter is this. So she is so happy.” Hinda whose sister also started school said “my mother is so happy she has two daughters that are going for education.” Kaila, whose mother had not wanted her to go at first, “is so proud and she is so excited, ‘oh my baby is going to college’ and it’s so huge. She’s busy telling all her friends like I’m some major scientist.” Chaya, a divorcee with three children, said “my mother is supportive verbally but not physically...it’s more like psychological support that helps me.”

Father:

For some women, though their mothers are supportive of them going to school their fathers are not. Brenda said her father tells her “what do you need school for? You don’t need school’...He felt you have to get married.” Even now since she has gotten divorced “he’s like ‘what do you have to go to school for? Let your husband support you.’” Chaya said her father “was pushing me not to go. He was telling me, ‘what are you wasting your time with this? You should be home with your kids.’” Deborah’s father also does not feel that school is for a mother as she says “my father is like very old fashioned...but in a way he’s not angry with me. My father went to college himself, but he’s a man.”

In-laws:

Considering that women in this community marry at a young age, within the community and bring up their families the same way that they were raised, their in-laws often play a role in many of their decisions. For many women marrying into more “open-minded” families with a greater acceptance of working women and college assisted them with their decision. Aviva explained how her mother-in-law's working status not only offered her support but allowed her husband to back her decision as well:

He grew up with a working mother, not a white collar career it was a very blue collar career, but that idea of having a mother who has a strong role and an equal role with a husband, is something he was raised with. I am really thankful to my mother in law for that.

Some women found that their in-laws offered more support regarding their school attendance than their parents. Malia, whose father-in-law grew up in a more “open minded” community said her father-in-law “is very supportive, he thinks that’s the way in life to go, that’s how he was brought up.” Dina said that her mother-in-law keeps telling her to finish “only because she got like 50 credits through one of these programs and she never finished and she always regretted it. And she’s always like ‘you should finish, you should finish.’” Deborah whose family and friends do not attend college said her mother-in-law is happy she attends college and is extremely supportive of her decision to go “because of all her daughters and daughters-in-laws I’m the only one [going to college].”

For other women their in-laws had difficulty dealing with their daughter’s- in-law attending college as they viewed it as contrary to cultural norms. Bina’s in-laws were “not so excited [with my decision to go to school] because they probably felt it would take time away from the family. They felt it was not the right thing for a woman to do...my mother-in-law is

very traditional.” Rivka’s mother is ecstatic that she attends school. However her mother-in-law is horrified by the prospect of having a daughter-in-law in school. She constantly tells Rivka’s husband that if she continues to go to school she will eventually divorce him. Hinda who lives in an extremely ultra-Orthodox community, said that though her mother approves of her decision to enroll in school, her mother-in-law “thought I was crazy, she was like ‘go have another baby’.” However, since explaining to her that college will offer her the ability to assist her husband with the financial responsibility, her mother-in-law wants to know “when are you going to start already?”

Instrumental support from Parents:

In terms of instrumental support a few women described the difficulty their mother’s face with helping them due to age or their own family responsibilities. Vera, a woman in her late forties explained “I only have my mother and my mother is 87 and she is very very used up, she’s not like the grandmother who can help.” Sara, a mother of eight said:

They don’t really help out, they’re supportive. I mean my mother is babysitting right now. Listen she comes every Sunday to babysit. Other than that there is not much that she could do. The running of the house is the running of the house. I don’t have a housekeeper. I don’t have anything. My parents are working. My in-laws are working. There’s nobody, there’s not much more that they can do other than be supportive.

Other women described how their parents and in-laws do offer instrumental support.

Rachel said:

My mother is very involved. My father is more of a father figure always calling up to hear how the money is doing...My parents live around the corner, so when my mother hears that I’m not feeling that great, she’ll run over, take one kid to the park, help out here and there.

Ariella, a young divorcee who lives with her parents, receives support from her parents, and when she attends class “my mother will watch my daughter.” Malia, a young mother of two said her mother will cook her Sabbath and:

My in-laws are very supportive. They’ll cook suppers for me when I have tests. In the beginning my mother-in-law would watch my son, when she able to, when I had school. She was willing to come over and babysit. Now she doesn’t have the energy. She’s in her sixties and she fell down a number of times and she doesn’t have that much energy.

Kaila said, that in terms of Sabbath preparations, “my mother takes care of that. She makes me basically everything.” She admitted that most of her instrumental support comes from her mother-in-law as she says “My mother-in-law on the other hand helps out with the kids all the time, she’ll babysit and she’ll help me with homework if I need it. Really, it’s amazing.”

No Support from Parents:

Though a changing view of college exists in the community, some women did not receive emotional or instrumental support from their parents and in-laws. Naomi feels that her parents do not offer emotional or instrumental support as she says:

My parents are really not supportive honestly. My mother comes from Europe and she was always home with us and she had to make a three course meal and she was always into her cleanliness. I mean her floor had to be shined three times a day. She very much does not approve of my lifestyle right now. But I don’t see eye to eye with that.

Tova said her parents do not believe that she should be in school because “they don’t believe in a woman having a life other than having kids.” Tzipora described her mother who lives in Europe, as her “biggest support system,” her mother-in-law though resented her going “she’s old fashioned in that she thinks the mother belongs at home.” Her mother-in-law will call her in the evenings when she attends school, and then call back and disapprovingly say “you’re always out

in the evening.” Some parents felt school was not the proper place for their daughter, as Esther described her mother’s reaction “my mother said ‘you’re going to college, how could you be going to college?’ I said ‘Ma, I’m married, I could do what I want’...But my mother was very much against it.” Miriam describes her mother as unsupportive of her decision to go to school, “(my mother) she hates it, she’s trying to get me to stop immediately, even yesterday.” She explains that her mother is unsupportive because “I used to spend a lot of time with her, and now I can’t, not as much.”

Siblings:

Participants considered siblings an additional source of emotional and instrumental support for women in school. Some participants said they actually started to go to school because their siblings attended and suggested they apply to school. A few women turn to their siblings when they need assistance. Malia said that her sister offers support “She’ll cook me supper when I need it...I tell my sister you take my kid (and she will).” Shoshana said her brothers “are very proud of me for going to college. They look up to me for going to college.”

Kaila, the youngest in her family, said that though her family offers support she does feel resentment from them regarding her choice to attend school. “I was complaining, she (her sister) said you have a choice, you didn’t have to go to school.” But this is rare and she admits that:

I feel like I lean much more on my family, [now] more than ever. My sisters are great. They’ll send over suppers. I enjoy the pity that I’m getting. Because they’re like ‘oy, she has to go to school’, it works great for me.

Other women said that their siblings have a difficult time helping them because as Rachel said “everybody has their lives” and though they offer them emotional support they cannot expect more than that from them.

Some women have found their siblings and sisters-in-law to be unsupportive. Tova described her siblings reaction to her going to school: “Siblings, um, they rather I did not talk about it, it’s really not a part of their life style and even if I spoke about it, it wouldn’t be acknowledged or asked about again. So I just don’t.” Shoshana said that the vibes she receives from her brother’s wife indicate that it is “not a good time to be in college.” And that “no, there’s a time for everything, now you’re a mother who should be raising your kids, and then there is the time when you can go back to college.” Dina’s sister-in-law did not mince words when she told her “you’re not giving full attention to your children. How could you be the best mother and go to school...It’s better to be home.”

Children:

The emotional or expressive supports that parents received from their children often motivated them to continue. Many women felt that their children were proud of them for attending school. Some with younger children said their children envisioned them coloring in school and were excited for them. As Deborah, a mother of three young children said “my kids think that I’m going to nursery or playgroup. They think that I have a *Morah* (teacher).” Dina’s children “think that’s what I do. They’re like I go to school and you go to school” and they ask her “when can I come to school with you and color?” They’re like ‘where are your pictures?’” Many women discussed their children’s interest in their classes as Vera said “my sons already know the names of half the teachers here. They know stories and jokes that the teachers are telling.” Rivka’s kids are always asking “when are you going? What are you going to do? How was your test? How was your class?”

Brenda, a divorcee with five children ranging in ages five to twenty one, receives support from her older children. “They are proud, they are actually impressed to see that I am getting good marks and all...They’re impressed to see that I could do well.” Bina found her children emotionally supportive as she said “my family is very supportive. Especially my kids. They’re always “so where are you up to? What book are you up to?” Her son will offer instrumental support as well “my son will help me with the Judaic Studies. He’ll sit down and help me. And I feel that it’s a bonding time also.” Her older children offer instrumental support too:

I have my big ones to babysit so that if I do have a class at night, I could always run out and she’s there. Or if I do have a lot of homework, she’ll help me. She’ll put up supper. She’ll put the little ones to sleep. We help each other out-it’s necessary.

Other women described instrumental supports that they received from their children in the form of cleaning help and babysitting. Chaya, a divorcee with three children, said “my older daughter is the age that she could babysit already. So she is babysitting for me and that helps me. I had to learn how to train my kids to help a little bit.” Itta’s children offer no emotional support.

However she has delegated jobs to them thus she receives instrumental support though it comes unwillingly and with a price:

Now sorting the laundry is their job. There are certain places that I need to make cuts. Like I need to say, “you did a wonderful job on the floor.” And you know that all the dust is under the closet, and I can see what they shoved under there and I’m just not going to notice it...I like it, it’s not getting done properly. It’s not getting done the way I want it. But there is a lot that I have to ignore.

Naomi explained the necessity for her children to help:

The children are learning if Mommy can’t bathe the little ones, the older ones are going to chip in and bathe the little ones... They’re chipping in more. They have to, because now that I’m absent more, they have to fill in the role.

Bina finds that her children are going through this process with her “they are very excited, [about] every milestone I reach. I feel that if they do go to college they’ll understand the process because they’ve lived it with me.” For many women hearing their children say they want to go to college in the future offers them the support to progress forward.

A few women described their children as their cheering squad constantly encouraging them to finish their homework and assisting them with their work. Some of their children have begun to call their mothers psychologists and therapists though they have not yet completed their degrees. Tzipora’s son will tell her:

“You’re going to become a fancy psychologist, right?” So when I ask him “what’s up?” He always says, “If you’re going to become a fancy psychologist then you don’t need me to tell you, you can read my mind.” He’s very busy, like if his friend has a problem, he’ll say, “come on ma, go and help him, I know you can. Call him over, help him, you are a psychologist.”

Leah discussed her children’s mixed support. She said:

My kids, um semi, they encouraged me, they really wanted me, they were like “Ma, why don’t you get a good paying job?” [They were] More into the money. They encourage me, but you know a couple of times my son who is fifteen years old, he came over to me two years ago and said “Ma, if you can’t make suppers I really don’t think that you should be going to school.” So that’s how far the encouraging went.

For other women their children are unsupportive of their college attendance and they constantly make comments, such as Naomi’s son who said “When I get older, I’m never going to go to college. I want you to be home, and I want you to tuck me in.” And Tziporah’s middle son who said “but you’re never home.” Some children complained regarding the lack of time that their mothers have due to attending college. Itta said “My daughter resents it. She thinks that I am not there enough.” Sara, a mother of eight simply said “They’re not so excited about it (her attending school), but we just have to make it work with the reward system and prizes. And we

have to make it work.” Miriam, who enrolled in college due to her children’s insistence that she attend, said they offered her support. They told her “you have to do it, you have to do it” and they are very proud of her. However they are showing no instrumental support as they are not helping out at all with the housework.

Spouse:

Women portrayed their husbands as supportive of their choice. However, pursuant to their traditional roles as the mother and housewife women still performed most of the household chores and childcare responsibilities. This finding corresponds to previous research which found that working mothers still maintain the bulk of responsibility for household and childcare work (Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Spitzer, 1988). Even when describing the instrumental support that their husband offered in terms of childcare, the mothers used words such as “babysit” or “watched the children for me,” rather than it being their responsibility. As Hinda said “he *babysits* the kids if I have to go at night.” And Itta said “he’s available as the *babysitter*.” A few women questioned why they consider their husbands babysitters or why others think it is amazing that they are helping. These women felt that their husbands should share in the childcare responsibilities. Itta told me her husband will help only as a babysitter, and then caught herself and said, “he’s not the babysitter, he’s the father.” Hadassah who has three children admits that her husband is unsupportive however she still feels that he should help out with the children:

I think it’s his children too and I don’t see the big deal. I think it’s funny if sometimes he’ll tell me you know, “I watched them” or “I did something...” I think it’s funny...It’s your kids. It’s not like you’re doing me a favor. You’re doing it for them, not for me.

Many of the women admitted attending college due to their husband's expressive or emotional support. In a community where college attendance for married women is just beginning Penina said "My husband is really not against it. He was very encouraging about it, because so many *Chassidische* [Hassidic] are doing it now." Shoshana's husband recommended she enroll in college because he appreciated the enjoyment that she gleaned from working with children and believed that a degree would assist her in this field. Her husband offered support:

It wasn't like he was like, "get a job", no, (he said) 'I'm going to work for two people now.' he's working very very hard, "you go to school, and focus on your school ...so push yourself through it and you could do it."

Malka describes her husband as "very supportive" and he "encouraged her to go." Some women portrayed their husbands as not necessarily supportive when they started school. As Gitta explained "at the beginning he was like, 'I don't know, you fell on your head doesn't mean everyone else has to.'" However as she gets closer to completing her degree, he has become supportive and is encouraging her to finish. Even when she feels she cannot continue he will tell her, "You've done it till now in harder situations and you know you're almost there. You can finish it."

Women discussed instrumental supports they received from their husbands. Some women said their husbands help if they are told that it is for school. Malka said that her husband encouraged her to go and:

He doesn't like to do things that are harder for him, but if I say it's for school, he's very happy. That's the one thing, that if I say that it's for school, I know it's not going to stress him out (and he will help me)...He's definitely much more proactive. He always helped out. But now he expects to have to help more.

Sara a mother of eight who works full time said:

It is not easy. He was supportive of my going. He wanted me to go, and he tries to help out. But the man is still not the woman in the house. He tries whatever he can to help out.

About half the women said their husbands helped more now that they were in school. Naomi simply stated:

He has to, he has no choice. He comes home earlier now...Now he knows I have college at 6:00 on Tuesday. He respects that, and he's home at ten to 6:00 because he knows the children are there and the adult needs to be present.

Rivka said:

He (her husband) helps me a lot, a lot. When I have class from 5:30-7:30, he's always home. Maybe he expects less from me now because he knows I'm busy now. He'll take the kids out if I have things to do.

Rivka jokingly said "he (her husband) just wants to make sure that he gets credit for my being in school. He said 'make sure to tell her (the researcher) that I help you so much and without me you would never be able to do it.'" When asked, she admitted his statement is true, and like many other women her husband has had to adjust his schedule so that he is home when she attends school.

A few of the women received instrumental support in the form of help with their schoolwork. Shoshana described her husband as her assistant, constantly checking that she was completing her work. "He is so supportive, and he is so on top of my schooling. He was like my assistant, like my advisor standing over me. He is there for me 100%." Some women admitted that their husbands would type for them or help them with their homework. For Leah, starting school when her husband was out of work, proved to be extremely beneficial, because he helped her. She did admit though that doing school work with her husband causes other stress on the marriage. As she said:

My husband would say “so what’s your homework tonight?” and really got me moving...He would tell me just write. I would read the stuff, but he would give me what to write. And I would say “but why?” And after a while he would yell, “Just write!” and I said “okay the marriage is going.” So I stopped it. I do my own homework. He would type it for me. I don’t know how to type...he did a lot of typing for me.

Dina also found little benefit asking her husband for assistance with schoolwork as she said “One time I asked for his help and it didn’t work. So I was just like forget it, because the way you want to write something isn’t the way others do.” For Dina, and other women, the assistance that they received from their husband included lowered expectations regarding supper or housekeeping.

Dina explained:

He’s very accommodating he doesn’t expect supper. He doesn’t expect the house to be perfect. He’s great in that he doesn’t expect anything because he knows I’m trying my best. That’s his way of helping. If peanut butter and jelly is supper, even when it’s Shabbos, then that’s okay.

Kaila echoed this sentiment “I’m blessed with a husband who will eat peanut butter and jelly for supper if he needs to.” When Shoshana feels overburdened with schoolwork, her husband will buy take-out and they will go away for the Sabbath. He works hard to make it easier for her.

Some women have found their husbands have mixed feelings regarding their attending school. Though they are supportive of their attending and comprehend the necessity of it, they question the time required outside of the home and the chaos incurred. Rivka’s husband told her, “I’m happy that you are happy and that you found what you want to do.” “But” she says “he still wants to have a normal home.”

Two women described their husbands as unsupportive of their attending college while simultaneously offering instrumental support. Rachel, a full time working mother of four, said “He’s supportive not of the idea, he’s supportive because I chose to do it.” She said:

My husband, that is very supportive of generally anything I do, doesn't find a very great need for what I am doing now. It's hard for him to see me work hard. I think he feels a little guilty. He wasn't comradering me to go back. He doesn't like to see me work hard. He was like "come on stay home." And I had to be the one to push myself.

Hadassah, a full time mother of three, said her husband is definitely not supportive of her going to school and he did poke fun at her books:

He is not supportive of my being in school, definitely not supportive. In the beginning I was studying and he was looking at my book that I was studying and he saw a picture of whales and he was laughing. He said "oh very cute, you study animals and then you know how people think, what nonsense." I told him "you don't have to support me, but you cannot make fun of it."

She said that though he never did again, and he watches the children when she is in school, she still does not talk to him about her schooling.

Friends:

Traditionally, when one embarks on their college experience they do so with friends or assume that their friends support their decision to attend college. However, for most of these women college is foreign to their friends and they attend on their own. Some women said that they did not discuss their choice to attend college with their friends. Penina said "I didn't discuss it with my friends, I just applied." Some of their friends are unaware that they attend college as Vera said "not so many friends know." Others though, did discuss it with friends and have received mixed reactions to their decision.

Miriam, who enrolled in school now that her children are in college, said her friends "think I'm nuts. Yeah two of my friends simply think I'm crazy. They're like 'what do you need it for? You know you're too old for this'..." Some friends suggested that college was not worth the effort and they should "just go get a job." Rivka's friend told her "Oh it's crazy, so many

years it's not worth it. Just get any job. What do you need it for?" Other friends told them that this was not the appropriate time to attend school and as Shoshana's friends told her "Why do you need this? How could you balance your life with your husband, kids, your family and school? It's so much work." Hadassah, whose friend said college is unnecessary, told her "I think you're putting stress on the wrong things, and I should be a wife and a mother and a daughter and what am I doing college for." Naomi who comes from a *Hassidic* sect that disapproves of college said her friends "disapprove, they disapprove, very much" and they have bluntly told her "You're crazy. Look what you did. You're losing your kids." A few of Bina's anti-college friends "think I'm going off the beaten path."

Other women found their friends supportive of their decision. Though their friends do not feel that they could attend college, they admire their enrolling and offer them expressive support. Shoshana said:

I have one friend who whenever I talk to her and I say, I have homework or something like that she says "I admire you, I really admire you. I can't see myself going back to school. I'm amazed. I think you are so smart for doing this. It's great. It's something that will stick with you in the future. You'll have your diploma, your degree. It's something."

Some friends will acknowledge that they could not attend college because they find motherhood overwhelming but nonetheless they encourage them, offer them support and respect them for their decision. Dina said:

I have friends who are proud of me. They're like "we could never do it, but it's amazing" you know you wish they could do it, and I'm like "you could do it" but they're like "no" they don't want to even attempt to do it because it's just too much. "Just being a mother is overwhelming. We don't want to do more."

A few women appreciate that though their friends do not understand their desire or need to attend college, they are encouraging nonetheless. Malka said “some people are like ‘okay, I don’t know why you think you need to do this, but okay.’”

Chapter 9

IMPACT OF COLLEGE:

Impact on Relationships:

Relationship with Spouse:

Attending college affected the student's relationships with their friends and family. In a community where cultural norms and role expectations dictate that women's place is in the home, relationships are not likely to remain the same as roles change. Naomi, a mother of six children, described the transition:

I think up until now I was like a worker, you know I don't mean a worker getting paid, but I was like the wife taking care of the kids. Now, "she's her own person, she has a goal in life," and it's more like equalized the relationship.

Bina, a mother of five in her forties, echoed these feelings. When she and her husband first married, they did not anticipate that she would go to college. College led her to see herself differently which in turn altered the marital relationship. She explained that college makes you "less of a pushover and you learn to stick up for yourself and validate yourself as a person... And the more valuable you become the more they (husbands) respect you." She felt that once a woman begins to respect herself and brings home a paycheck, the relationship improves. Her view is that marriages suffer when the women stay at home and wait for their husbands to give them everything. She ended off by saying "Obviously we respect our husbands, they are definitely the head of the household, but to a certain degree it gives us some room in the playing field, it's not like you have no say in the matter."

EX-Husband:

The divorced women interviewed for this study spoke about the ways in which their going to college affected their ex-husbands. Vera, who had been married for 20 years, recalled that her ex-husband would berate her for not working. She admitted that she chose not to work because she knew that he would not help her with running the house or caring for their disabled child. Vera assumed he viewed her college enrollment as a selfish act. She imagined he would say “oh sure when we were married she couldn’t go to college, why couldn’t she do this, now she’s doing it and she’s doing it for herself.” She believes her ex-husband, who tried but failed to get a GED, was both extremely jealous of her and in awe of her ability to attend college.

Chaya and Brenda, also divorcees, stated that their ex-husbands insisted that they be stay at home mothers, because they wanted their wives to be dependent on them. Brenda, who had been married for 18 years, said her husband insisted on being the man of the house, the breadwinner, and viewed himself as the smarter one. Now that she is in school he is surprised and impressed, probably questioning how she is able to manage everything on her own. Chaya’s husband “didn’t want me to go to college. He basically wanted me to be a full time mother and depend on him and stuff.” But she described herself as an intellectual and once she was divorced she returned to school.

Relationships with family:

Women described how school affected their relationships with their families. Women who were always counted on to help their siblings and parents were now unavailable. Gitta described herself as the daughter and sibling who members of the family always called upon when they needed assistance. It took a while for her family to realize that her time had become

limited once she went to college. However, she felt guilty and shocked when they stopped asking her to babysit and otherwise help them. Recently, her sister went in for surgery. In the past she would have asked Gitta to babysit. “I was like shocked that she actually counted me out of the equation which I guess in some ways it’s actually good, but in other ways I feel bad that they’re not relying on me anymore.”

Relationships with Friends:

Relationships with friends seemed to undergo the greatest changes once the women attended college. For many of the women going to school meant ending many friendships. Aviva found that school altered her interests and made it more difficult for her to communicate with her friends. She became less interested in what they were discussing and they were not interested in what she was learning in school. Gitta felt that conversations with her friends deteriorated for similar reasons. She explained “I sometimes feel that I just can’t sit and talk to people who are talking about their diets all day. I feel like I’m different sometimes.” Kaila though felt that her relationship with her friends did not change because “between you and me, I don’t think I am any smarter now than I was three years ago.”

Most of the women found that lack of time when attending college altered their friendships. Gitta said “I do not hang out with friends anymore, because who has time for friends. I don’t have time for friends. I don’t really have much of a social life just because I just don’t have time for it.” Like Gitta, many other women faced time limitations leading them to hang up on their friends or not answer their calls at all. Miriam feels that her friends are unsupportive of her interest in going to school possibly “because I’m not on the phone so much.” Her friends feel that school attendance affects her role as a friend. Vera simply stated “there is

no place for friends once you start college.” Some of their friends understood, but others watched friendships change. Chaya feels that college both altered relationships with her existing friends, and changed who she chooses as new friends. “I always hang up the phone because I’m busy. ‘I’ll talk to you later.’ You kind of choose like to do things with people who are on the same track as you. But also I have limited time.” Since coming to school though she has found that “my social life has improved since I came to school because I met people with similar life time goals and it’s helped.” These new relationships consist of more similar role expectations.

Brenda, a divorcee, stressed the importance of keeping friends, “I don’t have that much more time to spend on the phone with friends ... but I try to be very careful with my friends.” Gitta said that her close friends understand her and her time limitation but she feels that she is missing out on a lot of things because she is in school. She also knows that her friends are supportive. Bina finds that many women lose their friends when they are in college but they do not realize how important friends are. She makes sure to go out with her friends and make time with them because it is:

not even now, but later on in life. (Like) When you’re getting older and your kids get married and they’re starting their own life and you don’t always want to count on them for company. And you start calling friends who you haven’t spoken to in years and telling her what’s happened in that time is difficult. So I find that for me is a key in being able to survive this, because I can always vent to a friend. So I feel that friends for me have been the strongest support system.

New thoughts about religion:

Students did not believe that college affected their religious beliefs. Some women said that this was because the Touro program was geared towards their community and sensitive to their religious beliefs. Rachel, a mother of four in her thirties, explained that she does not feel that her religious views are at risk at The School for Lifelong Education as she feels that “they’re

hypersensitive to a degree that made me even a little upset. Like in one class we had a chapter that we're skipping, and that made me upset." She felt that there is censorship occurring at this program. Dina said that in this college you do not feel religious conflicts because "they keep it very separate." Hinda said "there is nothing about religion going on."

Other women indicated that their strong religious beliefs did not change. Kaila who grew up in a strict *Hassidic* home said "my mother worked very hard on us with that (religious values and beliefs), I really have to give her credit." Aviva explained that individuals from the community attending college:

Need to have a very strong center. I'm not saying self, because that's something different. I think that there is a certain amount of stability that you need to have before you can start coming. Because you need to be able to screen, to be able to say this is not for me, this is for me. I can learn this but I don't want to internalize this because it may mess things up with the way I was raised and it may mess things up for me.

She suggested that religious women needed to erect boundaries when exposed to new ideas:

I say, this I am letting in and this I am not, and I think that comes with maturity and I think you need to have that because you want to be true to yourself. You don't want it to change who you are. You want to evolve, but you don't want that true center of yours to be invaded...I know who I am, and I know what is okay and what is not.

Naomi explained that her religion has "always been what it's been. I'm a strong believer and I believe life is tough, and I believe everything is from Hashem (G-d)."

Many women reported that attending college actually strengthened their belief as they became more aware of the miracles of the world. As Brenda said "I can definitely say nothing stayed the same (in terms of religious beliefs), I became better. I really did become better."

Brenda, a divorcee, said that in terms of religion she is "even stronger now since I'm in school, I feel like I connect to G-d even more." Bina agreed with Brenda's view that school increased her

religious beliefs. She said “if anything it strengthened it because I realized how miraculous things are that I didn’t realize until now. I got a greater appreciation.”

Question community beliefs:

A number of women admitted that college caused them to question the ideas they were brought up with, if not their religious belief. For Rivka attending college taught her that you should not accept things at face value, “not what everyone says you just accept it right away as a fact, you learn to question, you learn to analyze, you learn to have your own opinion.” Shoshana who has numerous brothers said that going to college made her question the education system in the community “it really bothers me to see that the education system in the *Chassidish* [Hassidic] schools is so looked down upon, it is not important. And it bothers me so much because education is a tool that helps you get somewhere.” It angers her that boys especially are not given the proper tools to manage in the secular world:

It’s not their fault. They were just never taught and they are so bright. They were never taught math, spelling, grammar, and it bothers me because I come from a *chassidische* [Hassidic] family and I know my brothers are so bright, and they have great personalities, and great street smarts but they have to call me and ask me how do you spell like an easy word when they’re writing a letter to their doctor or something. I don’t look down on them because I understand the situation; they didn’t get their education.

Some women questioned the lack of importance that their high schools give to education or college. They feel that high schools should promote college so as to offer women greater opportunities. Rachel, a mother of four who works with high school students, stated “my younger sister, I just spoke to her about it, she’s upset that she didn’t get that Umph (support from high school to go to college).”

Rewards from Going to School:

Personally; Purpose and Increased self-esteem:

Previous research on returning women indicates that college attendance increased self-esteem, self-confidence and created a newfound self and altered self-image (Kasworm, 1990; Katz et.al, 1975; Lefevre, 1976; Oplatka & Tevel, 2006) the findings in this study support this earlier research to the extent that study participants reported that the college experience increased their self-esteem, self-confidence and altered their position in the home. Aviva, a mother of two, revealed “It made me realize that I really have a lot of power.” Through knowledge attained from college she gained confidence in her beliefs and actions. College was extremely beneficial for Naomi as she said:

Like I said I was sheltered for sixteen years in the confines of my home either being pregnant or nursing a baby, or taking care of the little ones. And I was really not into the real world at all. I mean this is just me personally, I went straight from being seventeen getting married and having a baby in my hand at eighteen and you know sixteen years consecutively of just taking care of the children and now all of a sudden there’s a whole world that opened up to me. Hey there’s something beyond having children and nursing, there’s a whole world out there. So it did a tremendous benefit for me personally.

School offered her a purpose and made her feel as if “you’re not being used, you’re a person.” A number of women echoed the sentiment of “gaining a purpose.” Rivka, a stay at home mother of four boys, said “I have a purpose in life now in other words.” Tova said that her husband and family have noticed a difference in her as well. “It has helped me tremendously, my husband and my kids see a tremendous difference in the sense that I am excited...When I am back there with my kids and my husband I feel like I have a life and it’s not only them.” Going to school provided Shoshana a big boost:

automatically it put me into a different status. I was a college girl. I felt like I'm not just a mommy, I have college, I have college work. It made me feel like "look at me check me out, I'm in college."

Women recognized that college provided them with increased self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. They felt better about themselves which in turn enabled them to demand respect from others. School made Rivka feel good about herself "I feel good about myself, I feel like you can't just talk to me the way you want, I deserve respect, you learn that you don't need to take everything from everyone else, and you learn to think and use your own brain." Deborah, who was a stay at home mother of three young children, said. "I felt my brain was getting dumb, from just sitting at home...I feel more confident with myself...I feel like I'm going somewhere now. I feel like it matured me to a certain extent." Ariella, a young divorcee, explained that college not only increased her confidence it provides one with the ability to communicate and sound knowledgeable about various topics:

it gives you confidence and you feel like you can discuss certain subjects. (like) You will be talking to a certain person and they'll be talking about x,y and z, and not necessarily will they be talking about exactly what you learned in class, but you'll understand some sort of concepts that they are talking about. You'll understand something cause it's different things that you learned...it makes you a well-rounded person.

Bina, a teacher who went to school to increase her wages, discovered other gains:

We came into this because we do want to make more money at the end of the day. But even if we don't, the fact that we grew so much, we became so much more knowledgeable in so many different areas. It just enhanced our lives so much.

Tzipora, who suffers from a debilitating health issue, found school to be empowering. "You can carry on a conversation with people and you can blow them away because you just have so much information now...you feel smarter, so your confidence for sure goes through the roof."

Academic Achievement:

For some students the increased self-confidence and increased self-esteem came from gaining new knowledge and accomplishing something for themselves. For others it emanated from getting good grades in school. Miriam, a woman in her forties, said “I’m gaining more self-confidence, because I am doing well, so you know that’s one way that I see changes in myself.” A few women were surprised by their good grades as they had not previously done well in school. These positive outcomes directly result in greater self-esteem. Dina, a mother of three who is planning to go to nursing school, said:

I definitely have a higher self-esteem. I definitely know that I could do more now, I never thought I could do. Not that I think I’m smart, but I never thought I was as smart. I was always put in the special ed. classes like the math and the extra reading. But it’s funny because I’m actually the only kid from all my brothers who actually went to college and am graduating from college when they were all in really good schools and very academic. And so everyone laughs, because I was never really into school and I never thought in a million years that I would ever go to college. And here I am graduating...It’s really exciting.

Tova, who joined a support group due to a low self-esteem, found that school has affected her personal view of herself. “I never knew that I was such a good student and suddenly I see that I am really doing well.” Shoshana, a young mother who had been brought up with the expectation of being a stay at home mother, explained:

for me it helped me, because I wasn’t the greatest student in high school. I didn’t care about algebra or all that stuff. I was like for what, for what reason? But here I’m like, I feel this new like for school, so it’s definitely positive for me.

Itta gushed:

I have discovered that my brain works, I see the letters A, and I think no, it can’t be...oh my gosh, I really never thought I would amount to anything much. I don’t

know I just think of all the drama as a kid with all the studying. It has been a really big boost, very validating.

Hinda who lives in a strictly insular *Hassidic* community which rejects college attendance, echoed this as she said “I feel very very right, I don’t know the comments that I’m getting from the professors are very good and they write that I’m very insightful, and I am just feeling very very good. I’m becoming very self-confident.”

Practical Advantages:

College also offered women practical advantages. College compelled them to become more organized and forced them to complete their tasks. Leah, who returned to college after five children and 27 years, felt gratitude:

I really am grateful that it made me more organized, you know conscious of my time, using my time wisely, I’m really grateful I went back. It forced me to really get my head straight on.

Brenda concurred “It got me organized. I realized that school makes me think that I have to get that done, and that done...I found that it was also great for my mind, great for my confidence.” It not only increased their knowledge, it improved their critical thinking and forced them to apply their minds. This enabled them to accomplish and succeed. The new knowledge helped Malka, who had previously worked as a consultant. But she admitted that it also exposed her shortcomings. She said school “definitely helps the critical thinking, you know it makes me realize how totally ignorant I am-glaringly in some areas.”

Accomplishment only with conclusion of semester:

For some women feelings of accomplishment derive only as they conclude each semester. These women admit finding classes stimulating and learning information which they

are utilizing to enhance their work. However, they do not observe any changes regarding their self-identity or self-esteem. Most of these women came to school for economic reasons and gain their self-esteem from work, children and family. They view school as a means to an end; they are attending school because they need to attain that “piece of paper.” In Malia’s words, “I know I need that paper so I’m just going for it. I go to school and I come home right away, I don’t sit and chat and I do my work.” Rachel felt that attending school does not “affect the way you view yourself, kind of like you’re doing what you gotta do.” She admitted however, that “it may affect the way I feel about my accomplishments, but as a person and a wife and a mother, no, no. As an accomplished human being, it definitely makes me feel accomplished.” For Sara going to college does not increase her self-esteem or make her feel more important:

I don’t feel more important, I feel that I’m accomplishing. My main goal is to raise my family. I do not need to be a major career woman out there. That’s not my goal. I’m going to work because I need to pay the mortgage, and that’s why I’m going to work.

Chaya concurred:

I don’t really tie my self-esteem to college. I guess maybe when I graduate, when I graduate then I’ll feel good because there are so many other things in my life. I’m a mother, that’s my main thing. School is really more of a side thing.”

For Leah, returning to college after 27 years, her reward is based on her completion of college as she harbored feelings of failure regarding her inability to complete college. She lived with a voice in her head that said “you’ll never do this, give it up, you are never going to do it.” But completing it for her

will be very exhilarating and not because what it means for me, because I don’t think it holds that much for me. I just think it’s a personal promise that I made to myself years ago, and I guess I didn’t look at it that way, but I recommitted to that promise two and a half years ago and it’s very rewarding.

College offered these women an opportunity to have their own “me time”. It is a place where they could go to, take a break and meet new people. Some women discussed how separating themselves from their family to go to school and gaining their own “me time” made them better mothers, wives and even cooks. They would return home with a desire to achieve more in their other roles. Rivka, a stay at home mother of three boys, said “I am loving it for myself.” The greatest reward that she gained from school was that she “found herself.”

Bina said that school is difficult, but that it is rewarding in all areas. She went on to explain:

When I see my kids also wanting to go to college, even when they complain that I’m not available for them obviously they don’t see college as a bad thing. They also want to go-I’ve set a good example for them. I’ll hear my daughter say- “when I graduate, I want to go to college”...to me that’s great.

Rewards in having Multiple Roles/Role Enhancement:

Consistent with previous findings regarding mothers attending college, all of the women acknowledged that adding the role of student increased their responsibilities and necessitated a need to accommodate and juggle roles. However research on multiple roles suggests that role enhancement or role accumulation can increase self-esteem, social identity (Sieber, 1974) and enrichment (Ruderman et.al, 2002). Concurring with these findings some women in this study found multiple roles actually to be rewarding. For a few of the women having multiple roles has made them feel accomplished. Naomi feels gratification in doing more “it’s accomplishing, now that I joined college, yes, it’s accomplishing.” They feel accomplished when they are busy, and achieve more. As Tova said “I actually feel accomplished when I do more.” Malia said “I can achieve more. I do work better under pressure.” Rachel echoed these thoughts as she said “I don’t like to be static, I’m pretty dynamic.” She said that if given more roles she would figure

out a way to juggle them. Penina found adding student to her multiple roles rewarding. She believes “that when a person stimulates their mind and they’re filling themselves with knowledge somehow they are focused on what’s important and what is not, you know you’re not busy with silly things.” Penina views the additional role as preventing her from wasting time. Itta seemed to agree with this as she admits spending a lot of time watching television prior to attending college, however now even with additional roles she finds that “somehow there’s more time to get things done than when I had less roles.” Chaya said that when she is on vacation the benefits gained from additional roles become more obvious:

I see in the quiet times, in between semesters I feel a void, like where’s my book, what do I have to do next. You get kind of in the mode of juggling and then it’s hard to stop. I personally enjoy it (the juggling)...it’s pretty rewarding, I like it, there is a structure and a rhythm to it.

Shoshana found that the more roles she has the greater her desire to achieve success in all her roles.

I feel like I’m growing in every area of my life, it’s not just my schooling. It’s not just education wise. It’s just adding to everything else. Now, like in school, I’ve learned some techniques. Now I’m focusing on special ed. right, I see the importance of reading more to the kids and taking them to the library and having them pick out their books and sitting down with them so I’m adding more to my kids. I’m growing. My kids are growing from it. My husband’s growing from it. I find that it’s just helpful in a lot of ways.

For others just the idea of appropriating additional roles is rewarding because it allows them to demonstrate their ability to juggle multiple roles. Hadassah said:

It’s more rewarding, because when I sit in class, I think, “wow, I’m sitting in class” and when I do a paper I think “wow, I’m doing a paper” and when I get a good mark I’m like whoa, my face is shining and I’m glowing and it makes me very proud of myself.

The fact that she can successfully add this role to her many other roles is rewarding. Kaila, a full time working mother of three young children, described gaining great satisfaction from managing multiple roles:

so I actually get a great satisfaction (from multiple roles). Like at the end of the day when I come home, I'm like okay, I was a fantastic teacher and I got great feedback from teachers so I know they're happy with me and I know my principal is happy with me. And then I come home and I see my kids and they're so cute and the fact that I'm doing well in school that gives me great satisfaction. So at the end of the day, yes my day was very hard. Yes, I'm exhausted. But I did something today.

For some women multiple roles force them to increase their organizational skills. Brenda said that when she was home with her kids she found that it took her longer to complete her tasks. However, now when she is in school in addition to her other responsibilities she finds she is more organized and actually accomplishes more. Hadassah concurred as she said "More roles? Right, you become more organized."

Conflicts:

The School for Lifelong Education allows ultra-Orthodox Jewish women to attend college while controlling for stressors they may feel in other colleges. As discussed in the previous chapter classes are scheduled so as not to impact their Sabbath and Holiday responsibilities, they have segregated classes with classmates who share similar expectations. Thus, conflict faced in other colleges may be alleviated. However, these women still feel conflicts comparable to those of returning women with children, as well as additional conflicts due to cultural expectations and norms.

Conflicts with school and home responsibilities:

For the Orthodox Jewish woman whose role model is the *Eishet Chayil*, she views her home as one of her main responsibilities as it says in proverbs 31; “*she arises while it is still night and gives food to her household...she watches over the ways of the household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*” The responsibility of taking care of the household and keeping the home running smoothly falls on the woman. Even for women who work and have begun to attend college the role expectation that they will run the household still exists. Attending school for most of these women does not alter that. Though some of the women have delegated some of their home responsibilities to others, many women have not done this. As Miriam explained “the laundry still has to get done, the cooking still has to get done.” Rivka however, sees school affecting her home responsibilities:

It’s just not like it used to be. There’s no, I mean obviously I didn’t put up supper yet. It’s just not the same. Laundry...it’s just not the same. I’ll find that my kids don’t have a shirt, or something to wear. There is a difference if you’re in school or not if you’re a mother.

A number of the women deal with the conflict between school and home by balancing their responsibilities. However Shoshana described the difficulty with balancing her home and school responsibilities:

When I am in class I give 100% of myself, I’m here and I’m going to listen and give my opinions. But once I’m home, for me my home stuff comes first, my *Home* homework...So for me that’s a challenge because really the challenge is to make time for both the school work and the home homework.

Other women say that they deal with it by cutting back on what they do. Dina has “gotten very comfortable with- like here is a box of cereal, here’s a bowl, here’s a spoon, figure it out.” Rivka said “so sometimes I’ll buy like once a week take-out, or take it easier, like easier suppers.”

An additional conflict that Orthodox Jewish women face regarding household responsibilities is the preparation for the Sabbath and the Holidays. Aside for the daily meals which need to be prepared for the family, every Friday night and Saturday a special meal is served for the Sabbath. The meals for the Sabbath and the Holidays often require considerable preparation, and since cooking is prohibited on the Sabbath, must be prepared in advance. It is also expected that the house be clean in preparation for the Sabbath. Thus around mid-terms and finals many women will try to buy take-out or go to family to ease their load. As Shoshana explained:

We have mid-terms next week and I just texted my husband, “can we find somewhere to eat for Shabbath?” because I’m not going to cook. From tonight on, I’ll be starting my studying and tomorrow and next week, that whole week of mid-terms, I’ll buy take-out.

Deborah, a young mother of three, said she has managed conflict by compromising “I can’t really cook every day and sometimes it’s pizza or grilled cheese.” When it comes to preparations for the Sabbath she said “I’ll be more stressed out. I have to take out more than I cook. But if it gets really stressed out like around finals time or mid-terms-I will go to my in-laws or parents.”

Other women though, refuse to allow school to alter their Holiday or Sabbath responsibilities. Malka said that when it comes to Holiday or Sabbath preparation “It’s still me.” She is the one responsible for taking care of everything. Some of the women will not do any school work on Thursday or Friday so that they can prepare for the Sabbath. Malia said she is able to prepare for the Sabbath because “Fridays I spend my day preparing for *Shabbos*, I never do my school work on Fridays.” Rachel, a full time working mother of three, said that she “cognitively separates them (school and housework) from each other,” she stays home for Sabbath and the Holidays and manages to complete all her schoolwork without it affecting her

housework. She explained that “my husband is not the type of person who is ready and willing to pack into his parents or my parent’s home for *Yom Tov* (holiday).” Thus, she is “premeditated” with her preparations because she does not want her attending college “to seem like it is wreaking havoc on my life, or my husband or children’s life. I have to make it work out. And the way to make it work out is to be premeditated.”

Conflicts with school and spouse:

As discussed previously ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are brought up as future *Eishet Chayil*, though defined differently by many of the women in the study, most agreed that an *Eishet Chayil* is a good wife and supportive of her husband. Here too, as with the “good” mother, cultural expectations impact the definition of a “good” wife. The verses of *Eishet Chayil* describe *A Woman of Valor*, or a “good” wife as; “*Her husband’s heart relies on her...she does him good and no evil all the days of her life...*” She supports her husband and takes care of his needs never harming him. If she succeeds at this then – “*Her husband lauds her..*”(Proverbs 31). When describing how attending college impacted their relationship with their spouses most of the women spoke about their spouse as being supportive of their choice to go to school or spoke about how they assisted them in their responsibilities. Only a few women spoke about conflicts faced between school and their spouse, putting into question their ability to act as an *Eishet Chayil*. Deborah said she often finds that the stress that she has from school causes her “to snap at him (her husband) more.” Naomi, married for 19 years, said:

on the one hand he’s used to, “my wife is always home”, and you know “my supper is always there.” I don’t compromise on that part. But he doesn’t have the automatic presence that he’s used to...It’s a challenge. Sometimes he feels a little gyped. You know the books come before him. That’s when I need to prioritize. I need to step away and say I’ve overstepped the line, I need to give up on this

course for now. I mean not give up, I have to push it aside and now it's my husband's turn.

Dina, who described her husband as rarely home, said the little he is home she is busy with her school work and she cannot spend time with him. Some women attempt to separate their school work and time with their spouse. Esther, a mother of five who described herself as extremely structured, spends time conversing with her husband patiently waiting until he leaves the room before embarking on her schoolwork. Kaila whose husband attends college the nights that she does not, has instituted a "date night" where once a week they go out together, but:

by the time that once a week comes around I am so exhausted, and I'm off, my off night is Tuesday night and that's when I do all my homework because when else am I going to do it? So it strains the relationship. It does, because my husband is like let's go out we'll have a good time, and I'm so tired I can't.

For many of the men, the conflict arises due to inconsistencies between what they expected from a wife and who she actually is. Rivka said that though she has a supportive husband, he grew up with the idea that "the women are brought up in a certain way. You get married, you have kids, you clean, you cook, you go shopping, you do errands; this is how you are brought up." He now has difficulty dealing with the reality of her being in school. Rivka feels that he is a scared of her changing:

I think this is what they are afraid of; that you don't need them anymore. I mean I used to always need to ask him for money, I have my own checkbook and everything, but I rely on him for everything. And I think he's scared that I'm not going to need him anymore. I think that's the fear.

Hadassah, who described her husband as emotionally unsupportive of her attending college, believes that her future success scares him:

I think subconsciously, I don't think he's aware of it, but I think he's a little afraid that I am going to get a degree and be much smarter than him, and have a better job and do what I want and make a lot of money...So I'm a little sensitive to it.

Tzipora whose husband is extremely supportive and proud of her going to school, still remains wary about what she repeats to him about her classes. Experience taught her that when she used psychological lingo on her husband he was bothered by this as she felt it affected his male ego. Though they both know that he is joking when he says “when you get your degree, I’ll retire and you’ll make the money,” she still takes caution with his ego and makes sure not to put him down. Bina admits that though she has a supportive husband who agrees with her attending school, conflict still exists as she does not fulfill certain role expectations:

at the outset of our marriage that wasn’t the plan (her attending school). He supports it, but on the other hand sometimes he feels like I shouldn’t be going out at night. “But why am I leaving the kids at home?” I’ll say “if I’m going to a wedding it wouldn’t be a question”. If I am doing homework sometimes he’ll say even if I’m home, I’m not really with the kids, or when it comes crazy times like final times and I’m up late hours it can get to him.

Though they decided together, that she should attend college, the reality of her attending school, remains inconsistent with the expectations that he has for a wife. It is “expected” that women will go out at night to social events such as weddings. But not “expected” that they will go out to school, or be busy at night with homework. These issues cause conflict between them, however Bina does believe that “he obviously sees the reality of it that this is the only way to advance.”

Conflicts with School and Children:

The earlier chapter on roles discussed the issue of the “good” mother and how women in the United States are raised to believe that women naturally want to be a mother, and to be a “good” mother they must remain selfless and stay home with their children. Other mothers who go out to work are viewed as deviant or “bad” mothers. In looking at the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women brought up to believe that their role is to be an *Eishet Chayil*- a woman of valor, whose sole purpose is to take care of her family and her home, the idea of a “good” mother is not only

ingrained in them, but believed to be their purpose. Thus, it would seem reasonable that the one area where all of the women discussed feeling conflict existed between school and their children. The women admitted guilt regarding conflict around school and their children, but it was clear from the onset that when facing conflict they would choose their children over school. Naomi said “.usually at the end of the day I’ll give up the school for the children. Not usually-it’s always like that.” Hadassah simply stated “of course my children come first. They need to be taken care of before my school.” But even knowing that their children would take priority some women discussed the challenge of coming to terms with these decisions. Naomi expressed her feelings of guilt and struggling:

I’m going to say every hour, not every day, every hour it’s a challenge of prioritizing what I am going to do. I have my child’s PTA, but I have a class, I have a test tomorrow, but my daughter wants to make *latkas* and it’s *Chanukah*....My four year old said to me, “I want you to be home and I want you to tuck me in.” I try my hardest to be there for them. It’s hard. On the one hand I don’t want to miss anything from them. Maybe if I was there more for them, I could do more for them. Then on the other hand I think to myself, maybe the fact that I’m away from them is a good thing. I’m giving myself room going away and coming back being a mommy.

She continued on to explain:

It’s taken a tremendous toll on me. It’s not easy. Plenty of days under the cover I cry, it’s not simple, but it’s something that, listen I chose to have six children, no one put it upon me and it’s something that we take, we have and we learn to deal with it. It has its great things [college], like I said you go to college and it’s an escape, and it’s a great feeling when you get an A on the paper. And it has its downsides, like when you say I got my A but I didn’t tuck my daughter into bed tonight, and I couldn’t study with her for her test. These are small things, but to them it means the world...

A number of the women discussed conflicts that they had with their classes and their children’s PTA’s or performances. The women admitted attempting to find a way that they could still go to class, but in the end their role as a mother prevailed and they chose their children’s PTA or school performance. As Naomi said:

PTA means the world to her, honestly in life it's a pin drop-you could call the teacher. But she made that special project. And you know what? I'm going to go to that PTA because in life she'll remember that PTA-that Mommy went or she didn't go. I can make up that class.

Dina felt that she had no choice but to miss class when her daughter had her pre-school graduation:

I'm sorry I can't miss that. They had a whole *challah* baking thing, and I happen to know all the parents from her class happen to be stay at home moms and I knew she'd be the only one whose mother didn't come in. And it was very difficult, but I went in. I took the test early. I met with the teacher separately. I worked it out that I wasn't missing anything. It made it very hard but no matter what, to me, that's my priority that they come first.

Another area of conflict that the women faced regarded balancing their schoolwork and children. Some mothers admitted that when they had schoolwork due or they were in the midst of mid-terms and finals they would become impatient with their children. Malia explained:

I yell at my kids more...I lose my nerves a lot, I try not to. I feel that when I'm in class I am more pressured and stressed out. But after the semester I'm more of a caring mother. I bake with the kids.

Shoshana gets nervous when she has to complete work for school, and will catch herself yelling at her children. She then stops, and asks herself, "What are you doing?" and focuses on her goals:

My kids are my goal and my school is my goal, so sometimes it can be a conflict-yeah it could be hard. Like what should I do? Should I stop what I'm doing and not give my full attention to school and give my attention to the kids?

In the end she says:

I'll just get so upset and I'll just close my book and I won't read that chapter in psychology and I'll focus on my home and my kids. But then I'll be upset because then I'll be behind with my work. So it's hard, but in the end you figure out a way to make it work.

For Dina the conflict exists in the time sharing between her children and schoolwork. Her daughter recently said “Mommy, all you do is work, work, work, every time we talk to you, you are on the computer, you are working, working, working. When are you ever going to play with me?” Deborah feels that she snaps at her children and has them watching too many videos so she can complete her work. She constantly promises herself “Once I get my degree-I’ll make up for that.” Then she finds herself thinking “my kids are more important than what I’m doing right now. Okay, so I won’t get the best grade. But then I want that, I want that “A”, I don’t want to settle for less.” Gitta discussed the conflict she feels as a mother especially when taking psychology and education classes:

I think what I’m learning in school is great, but because I’m in school I can’t really do it. I think that I would be a better mother if I wasn’t in school. I would have more time to read my kids stories. I would be calmer and I wouldn’t be on the edge because I have so much to take care of.

Most of the women acknowledge the importance of giving their children the time and attention they require. A few of the women mentioned attempting not to do their school work around their children or when their children require their attention. For Tzipora it is simple:

I basically have a rule, it’s my own rule that when my kids come home, I don’t have my books open...But around 8:00 and we have had our family time and whatever, I will start working and they’re very accepting of that.

Other women wait until their children fall asleep before beginning their schoolwork. Esther said “it isn’t fair to do college [work] when the kids are there. So like 10:30 they go to sleep...then again I can stay up till three or four in the morning.”

Though many women discussed that they chose this program because they could go to classes at night when their children slept, their absence from home created internal conflict. Even more so, women found it difficult to leave the house with their children still awake.

Though family members or their spouses watched their children, many of them believed they belonged at home. Chaya, a divorcee, said "...I don't know, I keep asking myself, is it a good thing that I have to leave my kids with babysitters at night, I keep second guessing myself..."

Many women alleviated some of this conflict by scheduling their classes around their children's schedule. Tova, a mother of four, described a choice that she had to make. She was taking a 5:00 class once a week which she realized was affecting her daughter negatively as she did not do her homework on those nights. Initially she decided to stop going to school entirely until her children got older. However, after speaking to her daughter, who explained that she needed her home during those hours, she switched her class to one that would accommodate her schedule better. Other women dealt with this conflict by taking more mentorials so that they would not have to be out of the house as much.

Malka, who returned to school following a career, explained that her previous job forced her to make choices between her family and job. More often than not, she found that she chose her job over family. Due to those choices she needed to change careers "I need work that I was not going to need to make those choices for. And I'm certainly not going to put myself through an education where I'm going to have to make those choices." If she now feels a drop of resentment from her children she alters her choices. Everything is now scheduled around her children.

Guilt -

Guilt remained a recurring theme among all of the mothers, as Chaya said "we always feel guilty." Mothers felt guilty when they left their children to go to school. They felt guilty when they did their homework instead of playing with their kids. When they were nervous and

uptight because of schoolwork that needed to be completed they felt guilty. When their children commented on their being there less for them they felt guilty as well. Many felt guilty about becoming more selfish and less selfless.

Some women appreciated that guilt was normal and that their attending school did not hurt their children. Others believed that attending school and taking time for themselves actually benefitted their children. Bina deals with the guilt by recognizing that going to school is not only for herself, but for her family as well. Dina manages it by saying “hopefully they won’t remember this and then when I can pay for things hopefully they will appreciate it.”

To deal with this guilt many women found themselves treating their children spontaneously for ice cream, buying them rewards and doing something just for them. Some women did it to appease their guilt, some did it because it gave their children something extra and others felt that their children deserved it. Leah feels her children deserve it because they are sacrificing “when a mother goes to school, she’s not going alone; her family is really going with her.”

The Finageling Act

Individuals with multiple roles function in their daily lives by managing their roles. Previous research has found that they alter their own behavior rather than asking others for assistance (Berman Brandenberg, 1974; Clouder 1997). Women in this study seem to support these findings. However they seem to juggle more roles than others due to role expectation and cultural norms. When asked how she juggles it, Rachel responded “isn’t it innate, isn’t it a nature?” Yet, for many of the women it was clear that they did have to “finagle” and juggle their

many roles. The women offered three solutions that they found assisted them. Prioritizing, receiving additional assistance and reassessing their standards.

Prioritizing:

The majority of the women said that they juggle their roles by prioritizing. Aviva explained that:

there really are a lot of responsibilities and it's a heavy load to bear. I think that I have prioritized I know what's important for right now. I always think that at the end of the day my family comes first. College is a very close second, but definitely my family comes first.

For Naomi prioritizing does not end with just saying that the children and family come first, though in the end she said she always prioritizes her children. She juggles everything by just taking it one day at a time. Though she does have a goal, it is not necessary for her to achieve it- her family comes first. Tova concurred that prioritizing remains the key to juggling and she admitted that "I really have to have my family in mind, because that is my priority, so I have learned to put them first." Malka said "my school stuff gets done around everything else. You know I don't schedule school things first, I schedule my school things around the family." Itta explained that "I kind of work backwards, I see what are my deadlines for things and working backwards I see how I need to divide out my time." For many women prioritizing means as Hadassah expressed it "what needs to get done, gets done first, that's just the way it goes." Which means cooking gets done when food is needed, bills get paid on due dates and they complete papers and homework last minute. Many women agreed that planning in advance is not possible due to multiple considerations and unpredictable situations which arise. As Bina said:

I can't plan too much in advance. I make my appointments, I know my work schedule so that takes priority everything goes around that, then I make my school schedule, I put that in my palm pilot every semester..I do everything today for tomorrow. I see what needs to be done for tomorrow I can't work too much in advance.

Prioritizing assisted women in organizing their responsibilities which in turn assisted them in juggling their roles. Some women learned to shop more systematically, cook in advance and plan their time better. Some have become premeditated and methodical in their work and complete their papers and study in advance. For Sara, a mother of eight who works full time:

Every minute of the day is occupied. Everything has a very specific time. Everything has to be bought at a specific time, my orders have to be given in at a specific time, I have to get it at a specific time and everything has to be baked on time. Before I go to work on Friday everything has to be made for *Shabbos*. Everything has to be done, if not, it's not (done). Everything has to be done systematically. When are things done? Sometimes [at] 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning but you know, we manage.

For a number of women, such as Dina, she found staying on schedule helpful as well:

I think in general when I'm on schedule [I manage]...I write a list at the beginning of the week of what has to be done and I really stick to it, I'm very organized, and I have to do everything exactly on time, and like my school work I never push it off.

Esther sets aside four hours of her day to do school work and explains "you have to be on top of it, or else you will just lag behind and it will accumulate."

Though prioritizing assisted most women with juggling their multiple roles, they also realized the need to reassess their standards and give up on certain expectations.

Reassessing Standards and giving up on certain things:

Most women agreed that juggling everything is not possible. These women manage by allowing some things to slide and appreciating that excelling in all areas is unnecessary. These women have come to accept a lower grade, a less than sparkling house, take-out food or non-

gourmet meals and have learned to ask for assistance from others. Rivka believes that “you can’t be a perfectionist. If you are a mother and a housewife you have to know how to take it easy and juggle everything at once.” She feels it is not possible for anyone to succeed at everything. She realized that her going to school means that someone ends up paying, whether it is family or friends. Leah also discussed the “fall out” that occurs “I definitely feel that there is fall out, I definitely feel that my family suffers.” Shoshana explained that you need to:

Not overwhelm yourself with other parts of your life right now. If cooking and cleaning is going to take away from your studying then you are going to become frazzled and you won’t be able to do anything, not the cooking and cleaning and not the studying. So you have to balance it out by giving up some of the things that you usually do.

Leah who returned to school 14 years ago and then stopped because she found it too difficult to manage, described her conversation with the college administrator. She suggested “don’t stop, you can pass with C’s” and I said “if I knew how to do that I wouldn’t need to be here in school,” so when I came back twelve years later, I said “I think I learned how to get C’s.” Perfection was no longer necessary. For Chaya the realization that you do not have to be the best you just have to do your best has helped her. She also learned that “good enough” is also acceptable. For many women the “good enough” concept seemed to help them juggle; their house may not be shining but it is “clean enough”, their grades may not be A+’s but they are “good enough” and their meals may not be exquisite but they are “good enough”. Bina manages by lowering her standards:

I have to say that my house is not always super clean because I would not cope if that’s the case, it’s clean enough to be happy....But it comes before *Shabbos* I’ll always make sure that it’s sparkling. But to say that the whole week I’m always on top of every closet and shelf- for sure not because then I would not be able to manage all this.

Sara admits that:

Sometimes I have to look away at things. I also, I try to get my highest grades, but if I get a grade lower I don't make myself crazy, I don't. I try, I try to get my highest grades, and I'm doing pretty well. But if I get a grade lower because I did not spend another thirteen hours on a paper, I'm going to leave it that way, because I'd rather spend those other hours doing other things."

Other women manage to juggle by giving up on certain things. Sleep was the number one area that women seemed to cut. Bina said she manages "by staying up nights." Many women said that they managed doing their school work by sleeping less. They use the time that most people use to sleep to do their work. Some women said that gave up on their "me time". Miriam said that everything still gets done. She gives up on her sleep and her exercise:

It's a little bit stressful for me. You know I used to go jogging on Ocean Parkway every single morning at 8:30. Now I can't do that anymore. So my weight is shifting. You know it's hard because I'm not taking out that time for myself.

For Shoshana everything gets done on the due date by sacrificing her sleep "when something needs to be finished, the night before I'll be sitting up and I'll be typing it up. That's how I manage it, that's how I get it done."

Gitta said:

I manage. My kids always look cute and their homework is always done. I manage to do everything. I think the thing that I don't manage to do is take care of myself. That I don't take care of, but everything else I do, everyone else is part of number one on my list to do, which puts me [last]...

Women mentioned that they do not go to weddings or parties unless they must, and they have given up on time with their friends.

Receiving additional assistance:

Women stated that though they rarely asked their husbands or children to help in the house before, they now find that they are delegating jobs more and expect them to help more. Rivka said "it's not easy, but my husband helps me a lot, a lot, a lot." Some of the women said

their children help with cooking. Others said they expect them to clean more and their older children help with bathing and watching the younger ones. Some women hire more cleaning help than they had before. Deborah now gets “cleaning help, like one and a half times a week.”

Whereas they felt guilty asking for help in the past, they do not anymore. Shoshana said:

cleaning help definitely helps. I have a cleaning lady who comes to my house, and I don't feel guilty about that. I'm not saying anymore “no, you should be cleaning your own house by yourself [or] you should be folding laundry by yourself.”

Stopping School/Work:

This study focused exclusively on women in school. Therefore it is difficult to presume whether women unable to juggle school and their other responsibilities dropped out of school. However, women interviewed who returned to school following a hiatus, shared their experiences. Some of these women stopped due to the birth of a child and found it difficult to juggle the role of student and newfound motherhood, others stopped because they found their other roles too demanding and returned once their responsibilities became more controlled. Some women who worked while in school realized the difficulty they faced juggling their roles and they chose school over work. Aviva who worked when in school said that “I realized that I couldn't do both because I wanted to excel in school and I wanted to excel in work and you can't do both so I chose to continue college instead of work.” Malka admitted:

I'm not working at the moment because I think it would be too much. That's why I admire so many of the women here. To be running a house and working and going to school is completely unimaginable to me.

Shoshana described her classmates who worked and attended school as “superwomen” because she wonders “how could you manage all that?”

Impact of college on Roles: Role shifts

Student participants discussed the impact that school has on their roles. For some women adding the role of student affected the way they view and enact their multiple roles and how their roles relate to each other. Other students believed that it was imperative that their student role remain separate from their other roles. It is interesting to note that though women discussed ways in which their roles were altered by school, on closer introspection it seems that the degree at which school affected their roles correlated with the amount of support and acceptance that these women felt and received from their family and community.

Some women who described their community, family and spouses as supportive of college now, seemed to view their role as student as not changing them or their roles, but rather as allowing them to assimilate the role of student into their lives. Their role as a mother and a wife still existed and remained important. However, the way that they enacted these roles changed. Deborah a mother of three who grew up in a traditional home, but who described her husband and family as being supportive, explained how she deals with her multiple roles:

I have to compromise in certain things. I can't really cook every day and sometimes it's pizza or grilled cheese...I have to take out more then I cook, but if it gets really stressed out like around finals time or mid-terms- I will go to my in-laws or my parents.

Gitta, who began school years ago and described the difficulty in juggling multiple roles at a time when she received no support from her community and family, now realizes a shift in her community and family's reaction to her being in school. She explained that her roles have not changed but being in school has affected her roles "I do only what's necessary and essential for life to move on. Things like being organized and having everything perfect, that's not even on my list. I always say that when I finish school I can pick up on that."

Some women explained that having grown up with specific role expectations they have difficulty coming to terms with their new role as a woman in college. As Kaila said “I don’t come from that kind of family. Like my father’s like stay home and go make potato *kugel* (pudding) and *challah* that type.” Kaila, however married into a family where college is promoted and she enrolled in college because her mother-in-law and husband encouraged her to. She did admit that college has not impacted her and that “between you and me, I don’t think I am any smarter then I was three years ago.” Kaila also believes that her correct role is at home with her children. It would seem that though she has been encouraged by her husband and in-laws to go to school, the expectations that she grew up with and that her parents instilled in her have made it difficult for her to truly accept her role as a college student.

Bina who returned to school after 15 years of marriage explained how her family also needed to deal with changes in their role expectations as she explained that when she got married going to school was not in the cards. Though Bina receives support from some of her family and friends she does not receive support from her in-laws and many of her community members. Bina insists that the role expectations that she was brought up with are imperative. Her role as a housewife and caretaker goes beyond the actual physical work. She sees it as her responsibility as a Jewish woman to continue the faith of her children.

I’m still in the kitchen on *Erev Yom Tov* (the days before the Holidays) and I still do my huge affair, because I don’t want my kids to feel like I am in college in that way. I feel that this is what is going to connect the future generations. We love to think that our teaching and everything that we learn are things that are going to keep our children on the right paths. But really I think it’s those *Yom Tov* (holiday) smells that they remember from their mothers house. We’re human beings and whether we like it or not, food and clothes take precedence because that’s what the world is like. So when you walk into a home before a holiday and the home smells like that holiday, it just triggers those memories of when you were a child and your grandmother used to prepare it and you just feel at home.

You feel like you belong. So that I do, I just don't want to take it away...I barely buy take-out.

Naomi, who receives support from her family, but not from her community said:

I'm still the mother of the home, and the responsibility, the *Yom Tov* (Holidays) , the Shabbos and suppers and baths, it still falls on me....The roles, not that my roles change, it's that they're chipping in more, they have to because now that I'm absent more they have to fill in the role...it's just that (the roles) are more sectionalized or divided

These women who describe their roles in terms of role expectations that they grew up with do seem to accept that their new role as student does create role expansion, however they seem to have a difficult time allowing it to influence their other roles. Though they do not try to separate their roles completely they seem to want to succeed not only in their new roles but also in their role that they and their families envisioned they would enact.

Hinda who comes from an extremely Hassidic community and has not divulged to members in her community that she attends college explains that she altered the way that she enacts her expected role as a woman by:

doing the priorities first...whatever the kids don't notice, won't get done...Like the main things like folding the laundry and getting food for *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* (Holiday) that needs to get done, but I'm talking about if everything is sparkling and they don't notice it, so they don't need it.

However, she clearly prefaced this by admitting "I am not saying this to my Williamsburg neighbors." Hinda obviously does not believe that her community would offer support and she does not even feel comfortable confiding in them that she has taken on the role of college student. Hinda enrolled in college because her children all started school and she felt bored. But she says that now she feels that attending college has affected all of her roles and her role expectations of women in her community. She described how her view of her friends has

changed now and she cannot comprehend how they feel fulfilled in their roles though this was the way she led her life:

I don't know how they are not dead bored, and I can't understand how they feel fulfilled just by pushing their strollers in the street and sitting in the pizza shops drinking coffee. It was just very empty for me.

Rivka described her life prior to attending college as similar to Hinda's description of her friends:

I am very happy that I came to this point that I realized that I don't want to walk up and down 13th Avenue (shopping district in Brooklyn) and just be stuck home and doing nothing. I am very happy that I realized this, to not just sit home and wait for your husband to support you and not just every time ask for \$10 and \$20.

Though this was the way that these women performed their roles they have now altered their roles and how they perceive the role of women in their community. However there does seem to be a difference between Hinda and Rivka in regard to their acceptance of their new role, possibly due to the support that they receive. Rivka who receives support from her husband, parents and friends explained that she views college as the tool that changed her "into a different person." In the past she felt like "I was playing house a *totty* (father) and a mommy, you get married and a year later you have a kid and then another one and then another one because that's what you are supposed to do." Since starting school Rivka feels that she is more intelligent, she learned to question others. Her self-esteem and self-confidence has risen and she in turn feels that she deserves respect. She also views herself as more selfish now, and though she still juggles her old roles, it is with a new zest and desire to find her own happiness, and she expects her family to go along with her.

Hinda on the other hand, seems to be struggling with assimilating her multiple roles with her new role as student; a role which does not seem to exist in her community's comfort zone.

Hinda even described the role of a woman as "50% share in setting up a family, keeping the

household going, physically I mean making the food and the laundry, just being in a good mood and wait for my husband to come home.” She described her view of an *Eishet Chayil* as “someone who is there waiting for her husband and giving him encouragement whenever he needs it, and being there for the children physically and emotionally in whichever ways they need it.” She said that school has not changed her view as it is the same as her community’s view of what an *Eishet Chayil* is.

Aviva realized that she changed in all her roles when she would talk to her friends and family about her classes and they showed no interest. Some of them felt that she was putting them down. She began to feel that she had nothing in common with them:

I started feeling like I couldn’t talk to anyone because they were so dumb. And I was speaking to my friend about it one time and she said “you have to stop because it’s not that they’re dumb. They may not be at a place that you are, but they didn’t change you did.”...And the truth is things did shift and I had to sort of recalculate and figure out how this fits into my life.

Since Aviva did not feel supported by her friends she realized that among her friends she would need to separate her role of student from her role as a friend to maintain acceptance among them.

Rachel and Hadassah were two women who admitted receiving little emotional support from their spouses regarding their attending school. Both of these women viewed their new role of student as completely separate from their roles as mothers or wives insisting that they did not allow their roles to interfere with each other. Rachel, a mother of three and full-time worker, insists that she cognitively separates her roles from each other and if she ever “find it enmeshing, I feel very guilty...I don’t want to feel like I’m gypping anyone.” Hadassah, a mother of three, who came to school following deep introspection brought on by a family emergency explained “I don’t think that school has impacted these roles too much because it’s really something that I am doing on my own, it’s not involving anyone else. It’s not taking away anything from anything

else.” For these women their new role of student has not become a part of their whole self. They have been unable to assimilate it into their roles. Rather, they work around their other roles insisting that their student role not interfere with any other role that they have.

Hadassah further explained that whereas in the past she defined herself by her roles she now views herself separate from all of her roles and her biggest conflict is “being me.” She described her multiple roles as:

I think there is, like a big me and attached to me is all the roles. So I’m still me. (when I look at myself) I don’t see *morah* (teacher). I don’t see Mommy. I don’t see daughter. I don’t see wife. I see me.

Hadassah admits that being “me” exclusive of her roles is a challenge. It is possible that this is because in order to be comfortable being “me” she must find a way to assimilate all of her roles and feel content with how her multiple roles interact with each other.

Though for many of the women school changed the way they viewed their roles or accomplished their roles, for Dina her role changes occurred differently. Dina explained that as a mother, she has a million roles, because they just come along with being a mother. Dina viewed her roles as a mother and a wife as the impetus for changing her roles rather than her role as a student changing her roles as a mother. “I love being a mother, I wouldn’t change that for the world, I love being married, I wouldn’t change that for the world.” Recently a friend of hers asked her:

“Do you ever regret anything, like getting married so early, or having kids so early?” and I was like “no”. Obviously it’s all meant to happen, but I think they all made me want to go to school, or made me the person that I am, or made me realize how much I could do or how much I could balance.

Thus one can question whether the addition of one individual role can be held responsible for role change or whether it is actually the interaction between multiple roles within the same

person that impacts the way they perform their roles. It would seem evident that for most of the women the additional role of student has created role expansion. Their roles do not necessarily change as they are still expected to manage, and are actually held responsible, for all of their roles. However, it does seem that an important element that affects the way they enact their roles is dependent on the acceptance of and support that they receive regarding their new role as it would seem to affect how they manage their multiple roles.

Chapter 10

Summary and Conclusion

The changing role of women, brought on by social transformation, has affected not only the workforce but higher education as well. The last three decades has witnessed a return of married women and mothers to college and university (Barnett et al, 2001; Kasworm, 2003; Oplatka & Tevel, 2006; Thomas, 2001). These shifts have led to an increased interest in the “returning women” and “non-traditional” college student. Past research on this population has focused on many areas including, but not limited to, women’s reasons for attending college, their expectations, rewards and conflicts faced, academic achievement comparative to younger students, attrition rate, motivation, maturity levels, support systems and impact of college on their multiple roles (e.g., Britton & Baxter, 1999; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003; Thomas, 2001). However, research on “returning women” or “non-traditional” college students from religious backgrounds attending culturally specific college programs and the affects that it has on their roles and relationships is limited. Members from these communities attend college for varying reasons and face different challenges than other “non-traditional” college students. This study focused on the shifting role of ultra-Orthodox Jewish “returning women” attending a culturally specific college.

The purpose of this research study is to gain knowledge regarding how ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers attending a culturally specific college program deal with their experiences in school and its impact on their roles and relationships. A phenomenological perspective was used to understand how these students acted and reacted to the phenomenon of becoming a student. The sample for this study includes 26 mothers registered at The School for Lifelong Education at

Touro College who are or had been married, have children, but no grandchildren, are 25 years or older and self-identify as being part of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. The research questions were sparked by the researcher's personal experience as an ultra-Orthodox woman teaching ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in college as well as by the community's gradual shift away from its historic opposition to college for community members. Attending college affected the way in which women constructed their role, what they experienced as students and how they managed the conflicts that arose as they attempt to juggle the roles of student, mother, wife, worker and member of a religious community.

Understanding changing roles through Systems Perspective and Role Theory

This study uses a multi-theoretical perspective to understand the women's experiences and their reconfiguration of their roles and relationships. It is grounded in Systems perspective to assist in understanding how the individual student interacts with their environment and the impact that the environment in turn has on their experiences as well. Role theory is also used to examine the relationships between the individuals and their socially defined roles.

The woman's role in general underwent various shifts. Whereas historically women have been socialized to believe that their role is to be home and men are to work, these role expectations have been challenged due to social changes and economic necessity. Presently women are a growing force in the workforce. However, the gendered division of labor and the ideology of domesticity still exists causing women to feel conflict and guilt regarding their roles and how they enact them. Today, women are expected to juggle the domestic role as well as the breadwinner role (Arendell, 2000; Ferree, 1990; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1989). So too, the roles of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman have undergone changes due to secular infiltration,

inner political transitions and economic shifts (Longman, 2008) causing new challenges for these women. In this traditional and tight knit community the women are joining the workforce while still responsible for their domestic role. As they begin to enter the workforce the need for higher education is becoming apparent. With the enrollment of college it seems that their roles have been altered as well, though how this plays itself out seems to depend on a number of variables.

One important variable is the community or system within which the women live. As Payne (1997) explains, the Systems perspective, posit that all organisms are systems composed of subsystems which interact with each other. Therefore the individual and systems are constantly adapting to change and to interchanges with different aspects of the environment. In this study the system in which the women live -- (the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community) is undergoing shifts which affect women's roles that in turn influence the system. Role theory concepts (e.g. roles, multiple roles, role strain, role overload, role conflict, role enhancement and role change) were used to explore how the women perceived and understood their roles, and how changing role expectations reshaped their behavior and identity. Loosely defined in role theory, roles consist of a set of rules or norms that function as blueprints that guide behavior. In general individuals are conceptualized based on their roles, as society expects individuals in particular roles to behave in certain ways (Lynch, 2007). Thus for individuals behavior to change their role must change as well. This change however is dependent on their perception of their role and how or if they will be able to deal with the change (Turner, 1990; Payne, 1997). For these women who grew up with specific role expectations, attending college affected their perception of themselves as women and their roles. However, these changes could not occur without shifts occurring within their system; their community.

The effects of the System; Community's Acceptance of College:

For years, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community opposed college due to a fear of assimilation. However, it became increasingly necessary for women to go to college if they were to manage economic challenges, the need for a second paycheck and the “*Kollel*” lifestyle for men. Once issues that were previously “hushed” came to the forefront, the community gradually acknowledged the need for professionals within the community. For community members to fill these roles a college education would be needed. Thus the establishment of culturally specific college programs designed specifically for members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community also helped the community to relax its opposition to college for women. The availability of gender segregated classes, scheduling and a general understanding of the Jewish ideology played key roles. Still other women were influenced as technology and information from the secular world filtered into the ultra-Orthodox community forcing them to begin to think “outside of the box.”

The women reported that the extent to which the community accepted college education varied with the stringency of the sect and its level of insularity. Unlike the increased acceptance of college within most of the ultra-Orthodox community, acceptance has been more gradual in the more insular and *Hassidic* communities. Some sects became even more resistant to education at this time. Women from the more resistant sects described their women's roles and community role expectations for women as quite traditional roles. Women who belong to sects that oppose college face additional challenges leading some to conceal the fact that they are in school from their community.

The Women and their Reasons for Attending College:

With the acknowledgement from community leaders that changes occurring in the community necessitated the need for not only a changing role for women but also an allowance for college attendance, women were given the opportunity to reassess their roles. Though the understanding was that women would be attending culturally specific college programs due to economic necessity, a belief held by the researcher as well, it seems that the general acceptance of college gave women the ability to attend college even when there was no financial need. Literature on “returning women” reports women return to college for various reasons, including; life changes, identity issues, a need for self-improvement and knowledge (Benshoff, 1991; Opitka & Tevel, 2006; Ross, 1988). However the most common motive for “returning women” is usually economic necessity (Scanlon, 2008; Spanard, 1990). Of the 26 women in the sample three of the women did say that they were enrolling in college due to the economy, and six said it was because a degree was now necessary for them to continue at their present job or to advance in their career. However, the majority of the women came either because they were in search for a “purpose” in life (n=11), or they experienced a life altering crisis that triggered a desire to make a fundamental lifestyle change (n=7). Acceptance of college by the community allowed these women to consider college which would otherwise never have been an option.

Though there is an increased acceptance of college in the community not all women are returning to college at this time. This leads one to question why these women have chosen to expand their roles and embark on college. Eight of the women described themselves as being more “open-minded” than members of their community, and five described themselves as

growing up in homes where they were not forced to conform to the community's view. Three of the women mentioned that though they did not grow up in non-conformist or "open minded" homes their husband's grew up in such homes and encouraged them to attend college. Five of the women described themselves as "rebels" growing up and their rebelliousness attracted them to secular culture and a desire to gain an education and embark on college. However, even these women acknowledged that without the institution of culturally accepted colleges they would not attend college at this time because even as non-conformists they still felt the need to conform to society at least for their children's sake.

Personally interviewing these women offered the researcher additional insight into this specific population. The participants were self-assured women willing to share their experiences and thoughts. Seventeen of the women feel that they owe their increased confidence to their college experience. They were aware that attending college in their community labeled them as different. And that at times it was a struggle to remain in both worlds. Even women who were concealing their college attendance from their family and community evoked pride when they discussed their achievements. Most of the women discussed openly the challenges they encounter daily juggling their roles as well as the internal conflict and guilt that they faced as women challenging their traditional community's expectations. The women also discussed the additional stress that they feel is placed upon them by their community's expectations of their roles. They felt that much of their guilt is due to their community's expectation of what and how they should be achieving their role. A few women expressed the need for the community to reconstruct the role of the women in the community as there is too much pressure placed on them as an *Eishet Chayil*.

Changing Role Expectations, and reconstructing the *Eishet Chayil*

The women presented their understanding of a traditional ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman and her roles in terms of the ideal *Eishet Chayil* (women of valor) that they learned from their teachers, parents and members of their community. The women described the ideal as one that directed women to marry young, have many children, care for their home and family, while offering considerable emotional and practical support to their husbands. The women explained that traditional roles included assisting husbands with financial support if needed. But that in such instances the community encouraged women to work as a secretary or a teacher within the community. These were viewed as “safe” jobs in relation to women’s roles and in relation to exposure to the outside worlds.

The women also stressed the importance of complying with the community’s gender expectations. These expectations though were changing pressed by external forces that among other things weakened the community’s historical opposition to college attendance by its members. These shifts in the community’s view of college allowed for women to not only enroll in college but to reassess their role expectations as well. In turn this caused many of the women to reconstruct their concept of an *Eishet Chayil*. Women described their view of their role as changing. Though, they were still expected to take care of the home, there was now a growing awareness of the woman’s “self” as opposed to the previous expectation of women being selfless. Therefore while five of the women believed that a woman’s place is in the home taking care of her children, 21 women believed that women should be given the choice to stay home or work and should be encouraged to do what made them happy. Though women stressed that a woman’s happiness is important for her home and family, the concept of a woman’s happiness, was never taught to them as essential for an *Eishet Chayil*.

Women also began to reassess what their family and community expected from them as *Eishet Chayil* and how this played itself out within the context of the division of labor. Many of the women described the community's expectations in terms of what a woman was "expected" to do as confused. Whereas the community expected women to assist in financially supporting the family and begin to work, they still expected the women to be home taking care of the domestic domain. This in turn caused nine of the women to redefine the *Eishet Chayil* as a superwoman, while 17 of the women felt that it was impossible to achieve it all and they felt that the women should do only what they can. Other women though felt that the community was requiring too much from women. Some of the women began to point out the inequality and lack of egalitarianism within their marital relationships, which seemed to contradict not only their traditional view of the division of labor, but their original definition of an *Eishet Chayil* as well. Whereas they grew up believing that a woman should be supportive of her husband and take care of her family, many did begin to question the role of the father. Nine of the women questioned why it is that when their husband's watch the children it is considered "babysitting", and why they constantly feel guilt when they leave their children, but their husbands do not. Within this traditional community it would seem that women would understand this as a division of labor. However, their modern view of their role caused them to reevaluate many of their circumstances.

The transition that these women seem to undergo can be seen in their future goals as well. Though many of the women acknowledged attending this program due to its cultural specificity they seemed more open regarding attending a Master's program. Women stated that though they came here for their Bachelor's degree they would attend other programs outside of the community for their Master's degree. This program has seen more than seventy-five percent of their past students attend Master's programs. Though some of the students attend programs in

other Universities many of them attend programs within the Touro system. However, none of the other Touro programs are as culturally specific as The School for Lifelong Education. These women have opened themselves up to new experiences now and are willing to embark on new challenges.

Role Expansion:

With women's personal shift regarding their role expectations and their community's shift as well it would seem that their role is changing. However though these women did attend college and were leaving their "traditional" role expectations, they still claimed responsibility for the home. This finding corresponds to previous research stating that working mothers still maintain the bulk of responsibility for household and childcare work (Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Spitzer, 1988). When describing their multiple roles all 26 women prioritized their role as a mother and wife above their role as a student or worker and they felt that they had a greater responsibility to their traditional roles. Though these women may be juggling many roles and increasing their roles it does not seem that they are necessarily changing their roles, but rather they are facing role expansion. Role expansion is when individuals take on new roles while maintain their old roles. These women may be altering the way that they view their roles or the way they enact them, but they are still responsible for not only all their old roles but their new role as student as well.

Multiple Roles-Role Strain; Role Overload

Role theory stresses the concept of role strain; the difficulty in attempting to manage multiple roles. As these women expanded their roles they did experience role strain; composed of role overload and role conflict, in numerous areas. Role overload is the inability for an

individual to achieve and undertake a role due to a limitation of time, skill level or education (Brookes et al, 2007). The women clearly experienced role overload when they were required to write papers or take classes that they felt that they were unprepared for. Eleven of the women explained that growing up they did not receive the education that was necessary for them to succeed in college. They were not taught how to write papers or exposed to English literature. Therefore they felt that they were limited in their capabilities in these areas in college. Another area where 20 of the women described feeling role overload was in completing their work and their home responsibilities. They often found that there was too much work to do and that yes, “the day is short and the work is great.” For these women this concept was glaringly obvious as they took care of their growing families, their household responsibilities and attempted to complete their school work.

Role Conflict vs. Role Enhancement

Two diverging perspectives regarding the effects of multiple roles on the individual exist; Role Enhancement and Role Conflict. Role enhancement theorists posit that individuals benefit from multiple roles as they gain increased self-esteem and social identity (Sieber, 1974) and enrichment (Ruderman et.al; 2002). Sixteen of the women in this study expressed receiving rewards not only from school, but from the additional role of being a student. Ruderman et.al, (2002) found that participation in specific roles may generate resources for use in other roles. This was true for at least 17 women in this study who mentioned learning information in school that they could use as mothers and at their jobs. Seven of the women found that when they accumulated additional roles they felt greater fulfillment and a need to succeed in each of their roles. Eleven of the women also mentioned that keeping busy increases their self-esteem allowing them to achieve more. Role enhancement theorists do not assert that multiple roles

come devoid of stress and conflict. Rather this stress and conflict enhances the individual as they acquire successful coping mechanisms with multiple roles (Wethington & Kessler, 1989). One can contend that this is true for these women who juggled their multiple roles and offered coping methods to manage multiple roles. Another area where these women seem to gain role enhancement is with their reconstruction of the *Eishet Chayil*. Their new view of the “ideal woman” opened them up to a new identity as well as a chance at new experiences.

Opposing research regarding multiple roles asserts that when individuals are faced with numerous roles which are incompatible they will face role conflict. Role conflict theorists claim that this will cause stress and lowered performance leading individuals to avoid roles perceived as inducing conflict or tension (Barber, 2001; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Tompson & Werner, 1997). Solutions offered to reduce or eliminate role conflict suggest that coping skills in the form of role reduction and cognitive restructuring help (Elman & Gilbert, 1991). Study participants discussed conflicts that they face regarding their multiple roles in the home and in school. Seventeen of the women reported difficulty managing their home responsibilities and completing school work. They were often conflicted by which responsibility to complete first. Attending school often caused conflict with their husbands. Though their husbands may be supportive of the idea of college they did not always realize the repercussions this new role would have on their home life. Thirteen of the women said that their spouses were now placed in a position where they were expected to help out more and expect less from their wives. Eighteen of the women reported facing the most conflict with their role as mother and student. Women found that their children required their attention when they needed to study. They also faced role conflict when their children had school functions scheduled for the same time that

they had class. Seventeen of the women reported a constant source of guilt felt regarding juggling their multiple roles as a mother and student.

Coping with Role Conflict-

As mentioned above, much of the conflict facing these women is due to societal role expectations. In addition to the dominant motherhood ideology in the United States since the 1950s which stressed motherhood as “natural” for women and “Good” women are mothers who stay home with their children, these women were brought up to become *Eishet Chayil*. It is understandable that when faced with these expectations, the additional role of student would increase stress and conflict. Past research has found that returning women manage the conflict by altering their own roles rather than challenging societal expectations (Berman Brandenburg, 1974; Clouder, 1997). “Returning women” have reported taking lighter case loads, sleeping less, and managing their schedule around their family life (Clouder, 1997; Johnson, 2000; Leppel, 2002). The women in this study described juggling their roles, thus reducing stress and coping with conflict in three ways; prioritizing, receiving additional assistance and reassessing their standards.

These women never questioned the role of motherhood; they were mothers and wives before they considered enrolling in school. They were raised believing their role as a mother and wife was foremost and most important. When discussing prioritizing their roles, the women all agreed that their children and family came first. Though they mentioned feeling conflict at times, they admitted that the conflict was theoretical because they would always prioritize their children over school or work. Women discussed the need to prioritize schoolwork and housework as well. Eighteen of the women found that by prioritizing they completed work that

needed to get done first allowing them to then complete their other responsibilities.

Prioritization forced the women to be more organized and assisted them in accomplishing not only their schoolwork but their other responsibilities as well.

Study participants also found that to juggle their roles and reduce stress it was necessary to reassess their standards and give up on certain things. Fourteen women explained that they were forced to realize that perfection was not essential in order to manage their multiple roles. The idea of “good enough” assisted many women in coping and managing their many roles and responsibilities. These women learned that though they may want an A, or a sparkling clean house; a B was “good enough”, and a house that was clean but not sparkling was “good enough”. This new attitude allowed them to reassess the way they enacted their role and helped them to juggle their multiple responsibilities. Women reported scaling down their dinners and holiday meals, eating out more and buying take-out. They also reduced the amount of time spent on their housework. To juggle multiple roles the women reported giving up on their “me” time and most of all on sleep. Women reported doing their school work at times that would not interfere with their family usually forcing them to stay up late into the night or wake early.

An additional coping method applied was additional assistance. Twelve of the women admitted that though previously they completed all of their responsibilities on their own, they now asked others for help. Often they turned to their spouses or children to assist them in their housework, cooking or childcare. Some women began to receive additional cleaning help as well as they found that this helped manage their housework.

Rewards vs. Conflict

One of the guiding questions in this study looked at the impact that college has on these

students in terms of conflict and rewards. Do these students find that the addition of another role causes conflict or do they find the experience rewarding? If they face both conflict and rewards, which do they feel outweighs the other- are the rewards more beneficial than the conflict, or is the conflict so stressful that it is difficult to appreciate the rewards? Literature on “Returning women” has found that college attendance produces both conflict and reward. Returning women have expressed feeling overwhelmed by school and difficulty blending both their home and school responsibilities. This conflict has caused additional stress and guilt in these women’s lives (Dill & Henley; 1998; Katz, 1975; Thomas, 2001). The women in this study also reported conflict regarding their ability to juggle their home and school responsibilities as well as feeling overwhelmed at times. They discussed the additional stress and guilt that they felt due to school. Many of the women admitted that much of their conflict, stress and guilt resulted from societal expectations of what they were supposed to do and how they should enact their role.

“Returning women” have also reported rewards that they have attained from attending college. Concurring with past research findings which indicates that positive outcomes for returning women includes increased self-esteem, improved self-image and an altered self to a new depth, breadth and richness of experience (Katz et. Al, 1975; Lefevre, 1972), study participants seemed to receive similar positive outcomes. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in this study reported increased self-esteem, self-confidence and an altered position in the home. College attendance also opened them up to new ideas and thoughts. For some women the increased confidence empowered them and led them to demand more respect. For others it offered them an opportunity to realize their potential and their abilities. Some women though insisted that the only reward college offers them is the degree they will receive when they complete their education.

An interesting finding in this study was the correlation between women's reasons for enrolling in college and the impact that college had on them. Though women attending for financial reasons shared similar backgrounds and classes with the women who chose to come to college either in search of "purpose" or due to a life altering crisis their college experience differed. Women attending school due to financial need or career change (n=9) viewed college solely as an ends to a mean. Seven of these nine women did not acknowledge receiving any additional rewards from college other than their degree. Additionally they kept college as separate from their family life and religious beliefs as possible and insisted that they were not impacted by their college experience. If they faced conflict it was usually due to scheduling which they managed to work out. Six of these nine women also felt that a woman's place is in the home, but admitted that today it is often necessary for a woman to work outside of the home to either support the home or subsidize the income.

However, all of the 17 women who attended college because they were seeking "purpose" or had a life altering experience felt college did affect their lives. They saw college as rewarding in numerous areas. They found it increased their self-esteem and their confidence as well as it impacting the way they enacted their other roles. These women insisted that their college experience made them better mothers and wives. They concluded that this was due to either, practical tools they picked up in school in terms of parenting and marriage or because they just felt better about themselves and their roles. Many of them found that the additional role of student kept them busy in a good way. School made them happier and pushed them to achieve more in their other roles. They found that this was often reflected in their housekeeping roles or their increased quality time with their children. These women believed that the rewards from college were well worth the additional stress and conflict that they faced.

The Importance of Support on their experiences as students:

Previous research regarding returning women has found that support from spouses, family and friends is instrumental for these women to achieve their goal and to reduce stress and conflict that they may face when juggling multiple roles (Jacobsen, 1986; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Study participants chose to attend the School for Lifelong Education specifically for this reason. They described the program as supportive of their needs as ultra-Orthodox Jewish women providing an atmosphere that they not only feel comfortable in but they also feel supported by the institution. The program provides for gender segregated classes, scheduling around their holidays and it is conveniently located in Boro Park, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish enclave. The students stressed the importance of flexible class scheduling, being part of a homogeneous group and having professors who were aware of their circumstances and offered flexibility and assistance.

For these women, many variables which would otherwise have created increased conflict and stress were diverted by their attending a college that was not culturally specific or as accommodating as this particular program. One basic variable which would have prevented at least 17 of these women from attending college was co-ed classes. Due to religious stringencies many women in this community would not have attended college had they not been given the option of gender segregated classes. This program eliminated that conflict. Other variables such as scheduling around the holidays and flexible class scheduling may seem simplistic, however for students who are faced with missing classes due to religious holidays or who need to deal with class scheduling around their children's schedule, flexibility becomes a driving force and prevents additional conflict. Twenty-four of the women described support and understanding from their professors as an additional variable in making this program more accessible for

students. Professors at this program are aware of their students' circumstances. In contrast to other college programs where professors usually have a class of traditional college students and only a minority of returning non-traditional students, these professors are faced with a majority of non-traditional students with mitigating circumstances. The professors are aware of their situations and are equipped to deal with them and offer them the support necessary to achieve their goals. Fifteen of the students also explained that being part of a homogenous group is helpful as they feel accepted by their classmates and feel comfortable in this environment. Though they did discuss that even within a homogenous group differences exist, they were well aware that this program offered them the comfort and support from classmates with similar backgrounds to them that they would not have received in other college programs.

A number of these accommodations may seem mundane, but for these women they made college attendance possible and helped to prevent what would have otherwise created additional stress and conflict. The conflict that faced the women in this study often mirrored stress and conflict experienced by most returning women. They did not seem to experience additional conflicts due to the availability of culturally specific college programs which were supportive of their needs.

Though the program is privately owned, its success depends heavily on acceptance by the community and its leaders. Community leaders will offer their approval for the program based on what is being taught by the professors. Community members will enroll in the program and attend only with the approval of the community leaders. Thus, for the program to succeed it needs the endorsement from the community leaders. The comfort with the program is derived by the curriculum content as well as the program's support and flexibility. The professors tend to be sensitive regarding the material that they are exposing their students to. Participants stated

that college did not cause them to question their religious beliefs, but that may be due to the prescribed course content. Four of the women recognized this as minimal censorship.

Familial Support

The women in need reached out to their family and friends and received support. Fifteen of the women described their family members as proud and accepting of their attending college and provided emotional support. Seven women described their family as being instrumentally supportive, as they would help with the children and their household responsibilities. For many women instrumental support was not actually necessary but it offered them credence to what they were attempting to achieve. Fourteen of the women described their parents or in-laws as traditional. These women mentioned that they did not receive any support from them because attending college was in direct contrast to what they felt a mother should be doing. For these women attending college included the additional stress of dealing with family members who were opposed to their actions.

Participants indicated that support received from their spouses and children helped lower the amount of stress that they faced. Supportive children (n=13) and spouses (n=14) were willing to help more in the home and overlooked when women scaled down on their household duties. However, almost all of the women reported that both their spouses and children still expected them to carry out all of their prior roles. Their role as a mother and wife was still considered their primary role. It was obvious that even though they admitted that their spouses and children were helping more, this assistance was temporary and the women's roles were not changing.

Seven of the women described their children as unsupportive. The children complained about their absence from home and the time spent doing their homework for college. Some

children went so far as to tell their mothers that if they could not complete their responsibilities as mothers while in school they should not be attending school. Two of the women described their husbands as being emotionally unsupportive even though they helped with their children. Women who did not receive emotional support from their spouses and children found that it was best to do their school work when it did not interfere with their family time.

Friends were also considered a viable support system. Twelve of the women said that friends encouraged them to complete their degree and expressed awe in their ability to embark on college when they were juggling numerous roles. Since many of their friends were also married, had growing families, and experience financial difficulties, their validation of the difficulty of college and their encouragement increased the respondent's confidence to continue school. However, 14 of the women's friends were unsupportive. They constantly questioned why the respondents were attending college as they did not understand the benefit of a college degree.

Support or lack thereof, from family and friends played an integral part not only in students' ability to achieve their goal, but also decreasing or eliminating the stress that was produced by school. Women who felt supported in their new role seemed to have an easier time juggling their multiple roles and dealing with role stress than the women lacking such support.

Impact of College on relationships

Adding the role of student to their multiple roles affected the students' relationships and their roles. School seemed to equalize the dynamics of the marital relationship and thus change it. Adding the role of student to that of sibling or daughter also changed the dynamics, due to the women's additional responsibility as a student. However, it was in the area of friendships

that participants related the most visible change. Fifteen of the participants felt that due to a lack of time they were unable to spend as much time with their friends and this often caused distance. It is interesting to note that when prioritizing their roles most of the women placed friend on the bottom of their list, if they included it at all. Participants did not make their friendships a high priority. When they experienced role overload or role conflict in these relationships ten of the women explained that they often “stepped out” of their friendships. That is they “hung up on them,” did not return phone calls, and cancelled dates. Eight of the women also felt that once they started school they had less in common with their friends which also created distance. None of these women expressed these feeling regarding their spouses and children. It was probably easier or more important for them to prioritize their spouses and children over school then to give priority to their friends over school. This may also explain why friendships were altered more than any other relationships. Relationships with lower priority were not as essential to the women and when forced to “step out” of a time consuming relationship, they chose one with less precedence.

Roles-Do they really change?

This study focused on the experiences and shifting role of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman as she enrolls in a culturally specific college program, due to shifts in her community’s needs and their altered stand on college acceptance. These women were brought up with a traditional view of their role and its expectations, but due to changing times for many of these women their role expectations have changed while for others these changes are gradually beginning to filter into their more insular religious communities.

Throughout this study it was evident that though these women self-identified as ultra-Orthodox women and seemed to be part of a homogeneous group there were differences among them stemming from how insular and stringent their homes were. The acceptance of college by their family and friends depended on each individual sect's view of college and whether women should be attending college or achieving their role as a traditional Orthodox woman. It also seemed that the amount of support that these women received from their family and friends was also dependent on their view of college. Of the 17 women who described their spouses, parents and friends as being supportive of college, most often reported greater support from them. While seven women whose family and friends disagreed with their attending college, or their new role, did not offer emotional or institutional support. There were three situations where institutional support was offered without emotional support or acceptance of college, but those students were aware that their new role as a college student was viewed as improper. It is interesting to note that previous research indicates that not only does support moderate stress and conflict (Jacobsen, 1986), but for an individual to change their role one factor that is necessary is support from their system (Turner, 1990). Thus it would seem that for these women to change their roles from a traditional woman with household and family responsibilities to one who is a student as well it is necessary to receive support from their community and their family.

In many cases this support is becoming more evident. The community on a whole is gradually beginning to accept college attendance, albeit in culturally specific programs. Women who are from parts of the community where college is more accepted and their family recognized their college attendance seemed more able to include the responsibilities of student in their life. These women reported less conflict and an ability to juggle their responsibilities with their family's assistance. Women who did not receive support from their community or family

members seemed less willing to assimilate their role as a student into their lifestyle. Five of these women stressed the importance of keeping their schoolwork separate from their other responsibilities and felt more guilt than the other women if it ever became enmeshed in their lives or affected any of their family members. On the extreme end of the spectrum two of the women who were admittedly concealing their college attendance from members of their community or family and were receiving no support seemed to keep their roles separate. They seemed to be doing this because they were uncomfortable in their role as a student.

The role of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman is shifting at this time. However, until the women are supported by their families and their whole community not only regarding college attendance, but also the changing responsibilities that they have, most of these women will continue to separate their role of student from their other roles. These women may be experiencing role expansion which allows them to take on an additional role. They may also be altering their other roles as a coping method and seeking additional assistance to complete their role. However, the full responsibility of their roles still lies on these women causing stress and conflict. It would seem that support is necessary not only with empty phrases such as “I am proud of you” or in spouses agreeing to “babysit” their own children. There needs to be recognition that when the wife or mother takes on the role of student, or in the future worker, the demands of her other roles need to be altered so that her actual role is in essence changed. This will decrease not only the conflict that these women face but the guilt as well.

Contributions of the Study

Previous research has found that the traditional returning women have expressed both positive and negative benefits from returning to school. They have experienced conflicts

between their multiple roles but have also expressed personal rewards such as self-esteem, recognition, prestige and financial remuneration. Returning women of different cultures and religions have expressed these experiences along with additional conflict concerning cultural clashes. Minimal research has been conducted regarding ultra-Orthodox Jewish women's experience in college. Schoenfeld (1989) and Longman (2008) who conducted studies on Orthodox Jewish women in college found that these women faced similar experiences to other returning women and increased conflict due to their religious and cultural conflict. This study though brings to the forefront the experiences of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women as they attend a culturally specific college program. Thus, offering insight into a closed community undergoing shifts allowing women to reconfigure their traditional roles while remaining in their insular community.

This study also offers an understanding of the needs of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women who are attending college and juggling numerous roles as their community undergoes changes. It offers insight into the benefits of culturally specific college programs which enable these women to attend college in an atmosphere that they feel comfortable in as well as supported. For many of these women if these colleges did not exist they would be unable to attain a degree. It offers the reader a comprehensive review of what ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers juggling multiple roles find beneficial in their ability to achieve their goals. It also describes how the women have reconstructed their roles and the impact that college has had on their relationships. It depicts how the women deal with the conflict that arises and the rewards that they glean from attending college. Most importantly, though, this study serves to highlight the importance of support for change to occur within not only an individual but a community as well.

Implications for Social Welfare:

The Social Welfare and Social Work field is dedicated to understanding “culture and its function in human behavior and society” while “recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures” (National Association of Social Workers, 1996). However, lack of research and information regarding specific cultures and populations often make it difficult to achieve this goal. This issue is evident regarding the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. Research concerning the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is limited, especially research regarding women attending college. This is highly due to the community consciously creating boundaries between themselves and the Western culture as well as secular societies so as to remain a minority, or the “other” (Heilman, 2002). This lack of literature not only makes it difficult for Social workers, practitioners and educators to assist or work with members of this particular group, it may cause misunderstandings, suspicion and reservations creating additional conflict between the community and society at large. Additional research regarding the ultra-Orthodox community can benefit social workers by offering them knowledge regarding the community and their specific needs. This study offers a glimpse into the community as a whole as well as the women’s point of view regarding the challenges facing the community, the women and the children. The study contributes insights and knowledge which can be helpful in understanding and assisting the community.

Additionally, social workers have an ethical responsibility to broader society to “promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity with the United States...social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence...” (National Association for Social Workers, 1996). This

research examines the benefits of culturally specific college programs for a specific group of women. However, understanding the aid that this program offered these students who would otherwise be unable to attain a degree, benefits the social welfare field to advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence.

One of the greatest implications of this study exists in the insights offered regarding the shifting roles of women in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community and the gendered division of labor within their traditional culture. The social work and social welfare fields have made great strides in empowering women and in impacting the role of the woman in American society. Women have been given equal rights to men in many areas and though the gap between the sexes seems to be decreasing, the struggle for egalitarianism still exists. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish community has been described as a patriarchal culture where women are still considered second tier, or the “other” (Heilman, 2002; Heschel, 1991; Siegel, 1997). This study offers the women’s personal perspective of their role and the shifts that they have been making within their community and within their marital relationships.

The women’s experiences have caused many of them to reconstruct their personal views and understanding regarding the ideal *Eishet Chayil* –“woman of valor”. By doing this, they challenge not only their own concept, but intentionally or not they pose a challenge to the patriarchal norms in the community and the view of women as selfless, less than and second tier. Attending college and challenging the traditional role of women in their community has brought to the forefront issues regarding equality between men and women in the community and in their homes. Though the women did not discuss the equality in terms of religion, many did question the lack of egalitarianism within their marriages. If shifts that these women face in their homes resonates throughout the community, this traditionally patriarchal, insular community may join

the struggle for egalitarianism faced by the general population. Though the women still maintain that, as Bina says “obviously we respect our husbands, they are definitely the head of the household,” the shifts are there and the changes “give us some room in the playing field, it’s not like you [the wife] have no say in the matter.” The shifting role of the women in this community is empowering many of the women. At the same time, it stresses the women’s need for support within the community and from institutions assisting the community so that these women can successfully manage their multiple roles and changes they will ultimately face.

Limitations:

This study is limited in its generalizability as it is studying a seemingly homogeneous group of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women from one culturally specific college program. Another limitation to the study is the misconception that these women are part of a homogeneous group. In truth growing up within different sects of the ultra-Orthodox or *Hassidic* groups alters the views that one has. Thus, the women are offering differing viewpoints about the community, changes within the community and role expectations based on their individual upbringing within the specific sect that they grew up in.

An additional limitation in this study deals with participant recruitment. The researcher recruited women by asking women to sign up for the study. This method of recruitment gave the interviewer the opportunity to observe reactions from the students approached to join the study. Though some women responded that they fit the criteria to join the study they were unable to join due to time constraints or a fear of sharing their personal story. This leads one to question whether the participant sample consists of women who had more free time, were able to better juggle their roles or were simply more sociable or more willing to share their stories. One can

question whether the experiences of other women in the program who refused to join the study or who were not approached to join, would differ than the experiences of these women.

One of the study's greatest limits is also one of its strengths. The researcher herself is an ultra-Orthodox Jewish mother juggling numerous roles. This afforded the researcher acceptance by the study participants as a shared experience between the researcher and the participants exists. However, the researcher did need to keep in mind the possibility of research bias. Although the researcher attempted to stay objective when interviewing the women it is possible that preconceived notions or beliefs held by the researcher regarding the community and their expectations as well as personal experiences that the researcher had juggling multiple roles may have impacted the focus of this study. It is therefore important to have an understanding of the researcher's assumptions and what was done to attempt to prevent researcher bias.

Researcher's Assumptions:

When conducting a phenomenological qualitative study, the researcher's personal experiences, beliefs and assumptions may cause bias. Thus, it is important that the researcher is aware of what her or his assumptions are regarding the experiences to prevent bias. In this particular study, the researcher as an insider, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish married woman juggling multiple roles, came to this research study with a slew of assumptions and beliefs regarding this research question and its findings.

Growing up within the community that this study was conducted in, the researcher shared similar experiences as the participants in the study. She attended one of the community's private schools, was educated in a similar manner as the participants and was brought up with similar beliefs and expectations. Therefore, the researcher assumed that she understood the experiences

that these women were undergoing and that in some ways they were similar to her own experiences though her college experience differed in that she attended a secular college following high school.

Assumptions that the researcher had prior to conducting the study included the women's reasons for enrolling in school for financial reasons solely, their views of their roles as a traditional *Eishet Chayil*, the community's regard towards college and its impact on their college attendance and their ability to juggle their numerous roles. Prior to conducting the study the researcher wrote notes describing what her assumptions were regarding the survey questions and discussed them with her advisor to make sure that these biases were recorded so that they could be checked in the future. During the interview the researcher realized the importance of not leading the participants and in allowing them to respond to the questions and to lead the conversation so that their responses would not be biased by the researcher. She followed their lead, giving them room to share their personal experiences.

Following the interviews notes were taken regarding each of the interviews and the impressions that they had on the researcher to highlight data, especially data that contradicted the researcher's initial beliefs. When analyzing the data, the researcher used Nvivo 9 to assist with coding the material, this also helped to assure that each of the interviews were included when comparing themes and that one interview was not being excluded or another weighed on more heavily due to researcher bias. The program also assisted in preventing censorship or dismissal of some of the data as it assisted in extracting data. Once the data was coded and sorted into themes the researcher was able to view the participants' responses and was then able to write up the results of the study with their causal statements absent of her prior biases. She was able to go back to her own initial beliefs and biases and make sure that they were not weighing on the

interpretation of the data. At times the researcher found herself rereading numerous interviews to be sure that she understood the participant's responses and was not biasing her results with her own beliefs.

An additional concern of bias regarding this particular research study was whether the participants responded to the researcher based on what they believed the researcher wished to hear and what they thought would be acceptable to say within their community. The researcher attempted to remain as objective as possible throughout each of the interviews, in an attempt to prevent these assumptions by the participants. However, when analyzing the data she did keep in mind the possibility that responses may have been made to please the researcher and made sure to look for similarities and contradictions in the data.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study offers insight into the experiences of ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers in one specific college program and how they juggle their multiple roles. However, additional research regarding this topic would be advantageous. Future research regarding ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in other culturally specific programs may assist in assessing the benefits and disadvantages of this program as compared to other culturally specific programs. It would also be beneficial to compare ultra-Orthodox Jewish women who are attending secular colleges with ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in culturally specific college programs to assess the differences in their experiences. This would also gauge whether these programs aid these student in other ways than their being sanctioned and accepted by their community and their leaders. It may also be interesting to compare the experiences of women of other cultures in culturally specific colleges to ultra-Orthodox Jewish women.

In addition further research should be done to explore age difference, number of children, religious sect differences and college status as it may impact the students' experiences. Though it was looked at briefly in this study it was not the focal point and may have a bearing on the results. Difficulty regarding whether the participants' views were affected by college or whether they held these views prior to attending college existed. Possibly, a study comparing women who are in college versus those who are not yet, but are registering to enroll would be beneficial to understanding this point.

The study also does not investigate fully why these women are able to manage their roles as opposed to women who "step out" or drop out of college. Additional research may benefit from possibly interviewing ultra-Orthodox Jewish women who were enrolled in The School for Lifelong Education but "stepped out." This would help to explain what differed from their experiences as opposed to the participants of this study allowing them to complete their studies.

Further research investigating the above points, would be valuable assisting future students in the community attain a college degree while juggling numerous roles. It may offer a greater understanding regarding the costs and benefits to the individuals and their families. Additionally it would offer suggestions regarding supports that can be offered by the community and its institutions to improve the quality of the student's experiences as they embark on a college education within their community as it continues to undergo gradual shifts.

Appendix A:

Are You a 25-65 Year Old female?

Are You A registered student at The School for Lifelong Education?

Are you, or have you ever been married?

Do you have children, but no grandchildren?

*Do you Self-identify as being part of the
ultra-Orthodox Jewish community?*

If you answered yes to all the above questions:

A study is being conducted regarding the experiences of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women in The School for Lifelong Education. If you are a female student at The School for Lifelong education between the ages of 25-65 and are or have been married, have children but no grandchildren, self-identify as being part of the ultra-Orthodox community and would like to participate in this study please contact Briendy Fried-Stern at 718-513-0167 or 917-992-7640 or e-mail her at **bstern@hunter.cuny.edu**. You may also leave your contact information on the bottom of this page and return it to the psychology office and Briendy Fried-Stern will contact you.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will have no impact on your relationship with the School for Lifelong Education. Confidentiality is guaranteed. If you have questions about the study, you may contact Briendy Fried-Stern at 718-513-0167 or by e-mail at **bstern@hunter.cuny.edu**.

Name:

Contact Information: Phone:

e-mail:

I am interested in hearing more about this study and give permission for Briendy to contact me:

Signature _____

Appendix B:

Informed Consent

Briandy Fried-Stern is a PhD candidate at the Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York. You are being selected to be a part of her study as you have voluntarily responded to her recruitment. (material 1) The study will explore the experiences of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women attending The School for Lifelong Education and you have been selected to participate in the study as you fit the necessary criteria. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study is being registered in The School for Lifelong Education, having been married at one point, have children but no grand- children, be 25 years or older and self-identify as being part of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. It is anticipated that no less than 7 but no more than 25 students from The School for Lifelong Education will be interviewed. The interview will take about two hours and, if you agree, will be taped. The study will be the basis for her dissertation.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will have no impact on your relationship with The School for Lifelong Education. You can skip any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Several steps will be taken to protect your *confidentiality* so that no one will be able to connect you or anything about you to this interview: (1) A numerical code rather than your name will be used on both the interview cover sheet and the tape. (2)The cover sheet will be removed from the rest of the interview and will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's office. (3)No one but the researcher (and possibly the chair of her dissertation) will listen to the tapes or read the transcripts. (4) The dissertation will be based on a summary of the information received from everyone interviewed. (5) Your name will not appear in the report. (6) Only the final paper which summarizes the findings will be publicized. (7) The completed interview notes, tapes, and transcripts will be stored for three years in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office after which time they will be destroyed.

There are no potential benefits to participating in this study. However, it may give you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences as an ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman attending college.

Although the risks of your participation are minimal, it is possible that you may experience some discomfort from discussing past or current unpleasant experiences. As part of this informed consent form, you will be provided a list of resources where you can receive counseling should you feel the need for support.

By signing this consent form and proceeding, with this interview you indicate that you consent to be part of this study. By signing the audio release form you grant permission for this interview to be taped.

If you have questions about the study, you may contact Mrs. Fried-Stern at (718)513-0167 or by email at bstern@hunter.cuny.edu , or her PhD dissertation chairperson, Professor Mimi Abramowitz, at (212) 452-7106 or by e-mail at iabramov@hunter.cuny.edu. You should contact the Hunter College IRB office at (212) 650-3053, if you have questions regarding your rights as a subject or if you feel you have experienced a research-related injury.

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask any questions that I may have. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.

Participant's Name

Date

Researcher's Name

Date

Signature

Signature

Appendix C:

Audio Tape Recording Release Consent Form

HUNTER COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

AUDIO TAPE RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM

Protocol # _____

Researcher: Briandy Fried-Sterm

Title: Superwoman of Valor

As a part of this project an audio tape recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project. Indicate below the use of these audio tapes to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of these audio tapes you will not be identified personally.

The audio tapes will be used by the researcher for the research project

The researcher will transcribe the audio tapes

I have read the above description and give my consent for the audio tapes to be used as indicated above. I have also been given a separate consent form.

Participant's Name

Signature

Date

Researcher's Name

Signature

Date

Appendix D:

Interview Guide:

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about the School for Lifelong Education and your experiences as a student.

1. Let's start with your decision to go to college. Can you tell me a little about it-
 - i. What shaped your decision to go to college at this time?
Probes: changes in your family circumstances, economics or personal reasons?
 - ii. When did you start (date?)
Probe: Is this your first time starting college, if not, when did you first start college?
 - iii. What did you hope to accomplish?
Probes: Personally, economically, socially, intellectually, spiritually?
 - iv. When do you hope to graduate?
 - v. By the way, have you decided on a major yet, if so what is your major?
Probes: Why did you choose this major? What do you hope to do with this major?

2. The School for Lifelong Education is a very specific college program, can you tell me a little bit about how and why you chose this program-
 - i. How did you hear about the School for Lifelong Education?
Probes: referral, heard from friend, family, Rabbi, other community member
 - ii. Did you consider attending any schools other than Touro? Probe-Brooklyn College, Thomas Edison (on-line courses) any other programs?
If so why did you decide on Touro, if not, why not?
 - iii. Would you recommend this program at Touro college to other women in your community.
Probe: If so why, if not why not?
 - iv. Are many other women from your community attending college now, whether it be the School for Lifelong Education or another college?
Probe: Has this impacted your decision to go to college and this program?

3. I was wondering if we can discuss how attending college may have affected you on various fronts-

A.-Let's start with you personally:

- i. Probes: Can you tell me some of the ways that being in college has affected your sense of self and self-identity
- ii. What about your future plans (interest in employment)
- iii. Going to college often starts us thinking. Has being in college affected your thinking regarding work, religion, politics, world events, Personal values, etc. (let respondent take the lead)

B. Next can we talk about the impact school has had on you in relation to your family:

- i. Your family (spouse, children, parents, siblings), have they reacted to your being in college? How?
- ii. How has it affected their view of you, and your view of them?
- iii. Has your attending school affected your relationship with them? In what ways?
- iv. Has attending college affected your role in the home? Your responsibilities such as Sabbath and Yom Tov (Holiday) preparations? Other?
- v. Has being in college affected your ideas about parenting, marriage, yourself as a woman?

C. How about the impact that going to college has had on your close friends?

- i. Have your close friends reacted to your being in college?
- ii. How has it affected their view of you, and your view of them?
- iii. Has your attending school affected your relationship with them? In what ways?
- iv. Has being in college affected your ideas about your friendships, your friendship with women, your role in your friendship?

D. Now let's turn to you and your community:

- i. Have the members of your community reacted to your being in college?
- ii. How has it affected their view of you, and your view of them?
- iii. Has your attending school affected your relationship with them? In what ways?
- iv. Has being in college affected your ideas about your community, about your role in the community, about a woman's role in the community about man's role in the community?
- v. What would you say your community's view of college is in general and about women going to college in particular? Have any of these ideas changed overtime?

4. I am interested in your experiences at The School for Lifelong Education-Can you share some of your experiences with me?

i. How did you find the courses?

Probes: Level of interest, level of difficulty, level of comfort etc.

ii. How did you find the professors?

Competency, Interest, supportive of students, level of challenge

Were the professors what you expected?

iii.. What about your classmates?

Interesting, supportive, friendly

Were the students what you expected?

iv. Speaking of your classmates-How would you describe the other women in your classes? Probes: similar to you, different in what ways?

5. Has going to college created any dilemmas for you? (Personal, economical, social, intellectual or spiritual dilemmas?)

i. How about your values, and beliefs, have they changed at all regarding your community, Judaism, education, marriage, raising children, women's role...?

ii. Do you find yourself questioning any of your religious views?

6. Now I want to look more closely at your student and family roles as you are both a mother and a student.

i. Can you tell me a little about your work experience?

Are you working now? What is your occupation, full time/part time.

Have you worked in the past, in what area, full time/part time.

How many children do you have? Ages?

Are you the primary caretaker

How are you managing being mother, student wife and community member

Probes: Can you tell me more about this? Did you need help, what kind of help did o need? get? from whom

i. How did family member responds to these needs.

ii. How did you respond to the kind and level of help you received

7. How would you assess your experience with your multiple roles as a student and a wife/mother? (Let the person talk at length before you use any of the probes, You many not need them They may or may not talk about benefits or rewards If you still want that info you can weave the questions into the discussion, but later on.)

- i. Probes: Can you tell me about the benefits and rewards of living with multiple roles?
 - ii. Can you tell me about the burden and challenges of living with multiple roles? Conflicts and strains would ff here.
 - iii. What strategies have you tried to be able to juggle your various roles? Which have and have not worked?
 - iv. What, if any, recommendations would you offer other women who are planning to do what you are doing?
 - v. What are your thoughts about juggling your multiple roles once school is over and how you will manage this?
- I. There is a well known saying or belief that “women should be able to do it all” what is your reaction to this idea?
 - II. Has your experience as a student affected your view of this idea?
8. Speaking of women’s role, I would like to ask you about your view about a woman’s role in your family and the community;
- i. What is your view of women’s proper role in the home, community, wider society
 - ii. What would you say is the secular world’s view of women’s proper role in the home community wider society
 - iii. What would you say is the Orthodox Jewish community’s view of a woman’s role in the home, community, wider society?
 - iv. How do you think these views compare and contrast?
 - v. What is a woman of valor/Eishet Chayil? How is it expressed in your family, community, religious circle?

Demographics:

For the study purposes, I would like to collect some demographic information, if you don't mind just completing this page.

What is your age? _____

Which High School did you go to? _____

When did you graduate from high school? _____

Number of years in college?

Degree pursuing?

What is your current marital status?

- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never Married
- Other

How old were you when you married? _____

How many years are you/were you married? _____

Number of children

What does your husband do at this time?(e.g.; working, student, kollel)

Husband's highest secular degree

- Less than High School
- High School Diploma
- Community College degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Master's Degree
- Phd,

Did he learn in kollel, if so for how long? _____

Mother's Highest secular degree

- Less than High School
- High School Diploma
- Community College degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Master's Degree
- Phd

Father's highest secular degree

- Less than High School
- High School Diploma
- Community College degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Master's Degree
- Phd

Number of people in your household Including yourself _____

How would you categorize your religious orientation;

- Modern Orthodox
- Orthodox,
- Ultra-Orthodox,
- Chassidic (which sect) _____
- Misnagid?
- Other (Please specify _____)

Household income:

- \$0-\$25,000
- \$25,001. -\$50, 000
- \$50,001-\$75,000
- \$75,001-\$100,000
- Over \$100,000

THANK YOU for taking the time to participate in this study.

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