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Gender Differences in the Construction of Spirituality, Work, Learning, and Community by Baalei Teshuvah

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Abstract

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Comments

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3 ORIGINAL ARTICLE

4 **Gender Differences in the Construction of Spirituality, Work,**
5 **Learning, and Community by *Baalei Teshuvah***

6 **Roberta G. Sands · Robyn Rapoport Spero ·**
7 **Rivka Ausubel Danzig**

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13 Jewish men and women who have become Orthodox
14 (*baalei teshuvah*) compare in their constructions of spiritu-
15 ality, work, learning, religious practices, and community?”
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26 over their language and learning deficiencies.

Keywords Gender · Orthodox Judaism · *Baalei teshuvah* · Spirituality 27
28

Introduction 29

Religious intensification within the Abrahamic religions is 30
a notable contemporary development (Antoun and Hegland 31
1987; Zeidan 2003). This paper is concerned with this 32
phenomenon in Judaism and its gender consequences. It 33
examines the perceptions of *baalei* (m., pl.) and *baalot* 34
(f., pl.) *teshuvah*, Jewish adults who were raised secular or 35
within more liberal Jewish religious movements and later 36
committed themselves to strict religious observance and 37
became Orthodox. These *baalei teshuvah* have moved 38
away from the egalitarian-minded culture of their upbringing 39
to a religious culture that separates the genders in 40
synagogue and community life and valorizes women as 41
wives and mothers (Kaufman 1991). This paper examines 42
and compares the ways in which *baalei* and *baalot* 43
teshuvah describe spirituality and interpret their gender 44
roles in the context of their everyday lives as Orthodox 45
Jews. Based on a qualitative study of men and women who 46
described their spiritual–religious transformation over time, 47
it uses data from individual interviews, focus groups, and 48
key informant interviews. The research inquires about how 49
men and women who have become Orthodox compare in 50
their constructions of spirituality, work, learning, religious 51
practices, and community. 52

Since the women’s movement of the last thirty years of 53
the twentieth century, gender differences within Judaism 54
have been the subject of much discussion. Although writers 55
such as Berman (1973) and Biale (1984) have attempted to 56
clarify the basis for discrete gender roles in Jewish law, 57
feminist Jewish scholars view such distinctions as inequi- 58

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59 table (Heschel 1995; Plaskow 1990). A couple of social
 60 scientists who have researched *baalot teshuvah* have tried
 61 to understand women’s choosing a way of life that appears
 62 to run counter to feminist sensibilities (e.g., Davidman
 63 1991; Kaufman 1991). Yet little research on *baalei*
 64 *teshuvah* has compared the perspectives of men and women
 65 on specific dimensions of their religious change.

66 Baalei Teshuvah

67 During the 1960s and 1970s, significant numbers of Jewish
 68 youth who were influenced by the counter-cultural move-
 69 ment of the time became spiritual seekers (Danzger 1989).
 70 In the course of their quests, they explored a variety of
 71 religions and forms of spirituality, with some discovering
 72 Orthodox Judaism. Recognizing this return to traditional
 73 Judaism as a new phenomenon, a few social scientists
 74 examined the initial processes of becoming observant
 75 (Aviad 1983; Danzger 1989; Davidman and Greil 1994;
 76 Glanz and Harrison 1978). Early research also described the
 77 educational institutions and programs that were developed
 78 for this population (Aviad; Danzger) and methods of
 79 recruitment to such institutions (Shaffir 1983). As Danzger
 80 explained, men’s and women’s educational programs were,
 81 for the most part, in separate settings, with the men’s
 82 institutions putting a great deal of emphasis on learning
 83 Talmud (a compendium of law and discussions about laws).

84 Other social science research has focused on women
 85 who have become observant. Davidman (1991) conducted a
 86 qualitative study of women who participated in a beginners’
 87 prayer group at a modern Orthodox synagogue and women
 88 who attended a Chasidic seminary (Chasidism is an
 89 Orthodox religious movement that arose in Europe in the
 90 18th century. It is characterized by mysticism, charismatic
 91 leadership, and religious fervor [Jacobs 2003]). Like other
 92 authors (Aviad 1983; Danzger 1989), Davidman focused on
 93 those who were in their early stages of exploring and
 94 embracing Judaism. Another researcher, Kaufman (1991),
 95 included women who were living more settled lives.
 96 Davidman and Kaufman conducted their interviews in the
 97 1980s. Women who participated in both authors’ studies
 98 were attracted to Orthodox Judaism because of its emphasis
 99 on family and respect for women as mothers and did not
 100 find gender roles in Orthodoxy limiting. While rejecting
 101 feminism, the women celebrated womanhood with respect
 102 to traditional family roles in the context of the Orthodox
 103 community (Davidman; Kaufman 1991). Kaufman de-
 104 scribed these women as accommodating to patriarchy by
 105 ignoring that which maintains male dominance and resist-
 106 ing patriarchy by creating their own women’s community.

107 More recently, Topel (2002) studied Brazilian *baalot*
 108 *teshuvah*. She found that the women were accepting of the
 109 practices related to family purity but resistant to covering

their heads. Roer-Strier and Sands (2001, 2004; Sands and
 Roer-Strier 2004) studied women from a family perspec-
 tive. Their research examined the impact of a daughter’s
 becoming Orthodox on relationships with the family of
 origin, especially the mother-daughter relationship. This
 research, which was undertaken in the USA, Israel, and
 South Africa, found a cultural gap between the mothers and
 daughters with the mothers more identified with feminist
 ideology than the daughters.

This paper expands upon and updates previous research
 on *baalei* and *baalot teshuvah* by including men as well as
 women in an analysis of gender and by addressing contexts
 relevant to living out one’s commitment as an Orthodox
 Jew in the early years of the twenty-first century. It explores
 work, learning, and community, everyday sites in which
 men and women participate, and specific religious prac-
 tices. Furthermore, the paper examines the spirituality of
baalei teshuvah, which was acknowledged (e.g., Kaufman
 1991) but was not the specific focus of previous research.

Spirituality

Baalei teshuvah have grown up in a culture that has diverse
 understandings of spirituality. In the past, religion and
 spirituality were seen as part and parcel of the same
 phenomenon (Hill et al. 2000). A contemporary trend has
 been to separate the two concepts with spirituality describ-
 ing “the personal, the affective, the experiential, and the
 thoughtful” and religion referring to “the organizational, the
 ritual, and the ideological” (Pargament 1999, p. 6). This
 conceptual bifurcation was influenced in part by the baby
 boom generation of last past century whose spiritual
 searching was not necessarily tied to organized religion
 (Roof 1993). This resulted in a “New Age” type of
 spirituality that has diffused to the wider society.

In recent years social scientists have given increased
 attention to spirituality. Some have attempted to “unfuzzy”
 this “fuzzy” term (Zinnbauer et al. 1997) and to specify and
 empirically assess the link between spirituality and religion
 (Hill et al. 2000; Marler and Hadaway 2002; Pargament
 1999). Hill et al. concluded that a “sense of the sacred” is
 central to both concepts, but religion also includes a search
 for non-sacred goals (e.g., social belonging, meaning) and
 means and methods (e.g., prescribed behaviors or rituals)
 that are validated by an identifiable group.

In his introduction to the first of a two-volume collection
 on Jewish spirituality, Green (1986) defines Jewish spiritu-
 ality as “Life in the presence of God” (p. xv). As he
 explains, “the cultivation of a life in the ordinary world
 bearing the holiness once associated with sacred space and
 time... is perhaps as close as one can come to a definition of
 ‘spirituality’ that is native to the Jewish tradition and indeed
 faithful to its Semitic roots” (p. xiii). Berman (2002)

161 suggests that the Biblical concept of *qedushah*, holiness, is
 162 similar to the Biblical and Rabbinic understanding of
 163 spirituality and that this is “about the process of bringing
 164 God’s values into the world” (p. 4). These values, based on
 165 God’s attributes, include productivity, interdependence,
 166 love, responsibility, mercy, truthfulness, and gratitude
 167 (Berman). *Qedushah* is realized through conscious, atten-
 168 tive performance of the *mitzvot* (commandments) and by
 169 engagement in the material world, the locus of meaning
 170 (Berman). Other Jewish perspectives on spirituality are
 171 those of the philosopher, Martin Buber, who viewed
 172 spirituality in terms of sanctified relationships; and the
 173 philosopher-theologian, Abraham Heschel, who connected
 174 spirituality with the observance of *mitzvot* (Silberstein
 175 1987). These writings lead us to envision Jewish spirituality
 176 as relational (through a relationship with God or interper-
 177 sonal relationships) and value-oriented (by imbuing every-
 178 day life activities with Jewish values), and that spirituality
 179 can be realized through performing *mitzvot*.

180 Jewish Feminist Perspectives

181 Jewish feminism in the US arose in the context of
 182 American feminism (Cohen 2005). Accordingly, American
 183 Jewish feminism has assimilated feminist values and
 184 considered how they apply to Jewish women’s participation
 185 in religious, educational, and organizational life and to their
 186 own spiritual development (Heschel 1995; Plaskow 1990).
 187 All the major Jewish religious movements—Reform,
 188 Conservative, and Orthodox—have been affected by
 189 American feminism in some ways (Dashefsky et al. 2003;
 190 Diner 2006).

191 Since the latter quarter of the twentieth century, the
 192 Reform and Conservative movements have accommodated
 193 to egalitarian feminist values by counting women in the
 194 *minyan* (the quorum of ten that is required for a prayer
 195 group), allowing women to receive honors at and read from
 196 the Torah, and ordaining women as rabbis (Cohen 2005;
 197 Dashefsky et al. 2003; Diner 2006). Because separation
 198 between men and women is integral to traditional Jewish
 199 life (Dashefsky et al. 2003) and is constituted in Jewish law,
 200 Orthodox Judaism has been more constrained than the other
 201 movements. Orthodox women pray in a separate section of
 202 the synagogue behind a partition (*mechitza*) and are not
 203 permitted to take on leadership roles in the religious
 204 service. Nevertheless, some Orthodox women have formed
 205 women’s prayer groups or have developed other ways to
 206 express their identities as Orthodox women (Dashefsky et
 207 al. 2003). This includes the learning of sacred texts and
 208 engaging in learning as adults, which Orthodox women
 209 have taken on “with great thirst and exhilaration” (Greenberg
 210 2000, p. 13). The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance
 211 (JOFA 2006) has the mission of expanding “the spiritual,

ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for women 212
 within the framework of *halakha*” (Jewish law) ([http://](http://www.jofa.org/about.php/who/mission) 213
www.jofa.org/about.php/who/mission). 214

215 One of the challenges embedded in Jewish law is the 215
 exemption of women from positive time-bound *mitzvot*, 216
 such as putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries) in the morning 217
 (Berman 1973). With respect to Torah study, opinions about 218
 women’s obligations and lack of obligation have varied 219
 over time (Berman 1973). As a result of women’s 220
 exemptions and ambiguity about their obligations, expecta- 221
 tions of Orthodox women appear to be discretionary 222
 whereas the religious obligations of men are more explicit. 223
 This, in turn, may affect the ways in which women engage 224
 in their spiritual-religious life. 225

226 The literature that has been reviewed indicates that 226
 differences in gender roles are built into the religious 227
 system. Past research on women who have become 228
 Orthodox has found that rather than viewing these differ- 229
 ences as problematic, *baalot teshuvah* celebrate women’s 230
 family role (Davidman 1991; Kaufman 1991). Because 231
 previous research concentrated primarily on the newly 232
 Orthodox who were influenced by the counter-culture 233
 movement, it is not clear how men and women who are 234
 living as religious Jews today perceive themselves in 235
 various spheres of their lives. Accordingly, this study 236
 explores the question, “How do men and women who have 237
 become Orthodox compare in their constructions of spiritual- 238
 ity, work, learning, religious practices, and community?” 239

240 Relevant Concepts

241 In the course of examining the data produced by this study, 241
 we identified several concepts that helped us understand the 242
 situation of *baalei teshuvah*. For one, we noticed that 243
 changing from non-Orthodox and relatively secular to 244
 Orthodox involved a *status transition*. Initially *baalei* 245
teshuvah were novices to a religious movement that 246
 requires substantial knowledge of Hebrew and sacred texts, 247
 adherence to numerous religious laws, and an intricate set 248
 of social practices. In order to move from novice to full 249
 membership, they needed to attain mastery of the norms of 250
 the religious community and demonstrate their proficiency 251
 and commitment. Some of the religious requirements can 252
 be learned through formal study. Others are observed or 253
 learned informally from others. Informal learning occurs 254
 through *socialization*, a social process in which novices 255
 acquire knowledge by interacting with members of long 256
 duration over shared activities (Long and Hadden 1983). 257
 Finally, we view *gender roles* as expected behaviors 258
 associated with one’s being a man or woman, and *role* 259
conflict as stress related to different expectations for 260
 behavior associated with a status held by oneself or others 261
 (Biddle 1986). 262

263 **Method**

264 This was a qualitative research study that used a construc- 312
 265 tivist epistemology to inquire about how men and women 313
 266 understand and explain their social world. Methodological- 314
 267 ly, constructivism aims “to identify the variety of con- 315
 268 structions that exist and bring them into as much consensus
 269 as possible” (Guba 1990, p. 26). The study employed three
 270 methods of data collection—individual interviews, focus
 271 group meetings, and key informant interviews—with no
 272 interviewee participating in more than one activity. The
 273 individual interviews allowed us to obtain in-depth infor-
 274 mation about the spiritual journeys of a diverse sample.
 275 Focus groups had the advantage of eliciting information
 276 from a targeted sector of informants whose group dynamics
 277 stimulated each other’s production of ideas (Morgan 1997).
 278 Interviews with key informants generated knowledge from
 279 persons with particular expertise. Our primary method of
 280 data collection was in-depth face-to-face interviews. The
 281 two other methods were used to supplement, complement,
 282 and triangulate findings from the interview data (Denzin
 283 1989; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). We describe each of these
 284 methods next.

285 Individual Interviews

286 *Sample Selection*

287 The interview sample was purposeful, consisting of 48
 288 *baalei teshuvah* who were stratified by gender and years of
 289 commitment to an Orthodox life. We stratified the sample
 290 by gender because we anticipated that men and women
 291 would have different perspectives based on the different
 292 roles they play in traditional Judaism. The purpose of
 293 stratifying the sample by years of being observant (2 to
 294 12 years vs 13 years or more) was to ensure that the sample
 295 included some people who were early in their spiritual
 296 developmental process and others who potentially were
 297 further along. We required a minimum period of observance
 298 in order to ascertain that all participants were sufficiently
 299 committed in their decision to become Orthodox, and
 300 considered 13 or more years long enough to normalize
 301 one’s religious life and become integrated into a religious
 302 community.

303 The criteria for inclusion in the interview sample were
 304 that they (a) self-identify as *baalei* or *baalot teshuvah*, (b)
 305 have lived in the USA most of their lives, (c) have been
 306 observant for at least 2 years, (d) were born into homes in
 307 which at least one parent was Jewish, and (e) were willing
 308 to participate. In addition, we sought a sample that was
 309 diverse with respect to identification with different streams
 310 of Orthodox Judaism (e.g., Modern Orthodox, yeshivish,
 311 Chasidic) and were living in one of three East Coast target

cities or their surrounding metropolitan areas. We chose
 these criteria to minimize regional variability that would
 occur if we drew a sample from the entire country and to
 maximize variability within the sample.

Recruitment of Sample

Using contacts of our own and those of additional research
 staff, we employed snowball sampling to recruit partic-
 ipants from the three metropolitan areas. Because some
baalei teshuvah are not open about their status as *baalei*
teshuvah and there is a religious prohibition against gossip,
 we asked the individuals who gave us the names of
 potential interviewees to obtain permission for us to contact
 them. The project coordinator conducted screening inter-
 views with all potential participants in order to determine
 whether they met the criteria for inclusion in the sample,
 our targets with respect to gender and length of time
 observant, and our desire to obtain a sample that repre-
 sented diverse sectors of Orthodox Judaism. The screening
 form was also used to collect sociodemographic informa-
 tion about participants.

Sample Characteristics

As planned, the interview sample is comprised of 24
 females and 24 males. The age range is from 31 to 58 years.
 Half of the men and half of the women have been observant
 2 through 12 years; the other half has been observant
 13 years or more. As Table 1 shows, the men and women
 are similar with respect to age, years of observance, marital
 status, parental status, education, and other variables. They
 are predominantly young and middle aged adults who are
 well educated. The professions of the men and women (not
 shown in the table) are also similar. The participants are
 doctors, lawyers, psychotherapists, teachers, scientists,
 human service workers, administrators, and other special-
 ized occupations. (Table 1) There are some numerical
 differences between the genders in the streams of Orthodox
 Judaism with which they identify. We note, however, that
 these streams are not membership groups with discrete
 boundaries. The participants struggled during the screening
 interviews to designate a specific stream, with some coming
 up with idiosyncratic categories or combinations. For
 example, one respondent used the term “Chasidic” together
 with two other categories to convey a spiritual orientation.

Interview Protocol

In order to learn about their spiritual-religious changes, we
 asked participants to draw a spiritual timeline early in the
 interview. Like McAdams (1993), who asked participants
 in his studies to divide their lives into chapters and to label

Sex Roles

t1.1 **Table 1** Comparison of women and men in interview sample in frequencies ($N=48$).

t1.2	Characteristic	Women ($n=24$)	Men ($n=24$)
t1.3	Marital status		
t1.4	Married	21	23
t1.5	Separated	0	1
t1.6	Single, never married	3	0
t1.7	Age		
t1.8	Mean years (S.D.)	46 (7.4)	45 (7.7)
t1.9	Range	31–58	32–58
t1.10	Highest level education ($n=47$)		
t1.11	High school	1	1
t1.12	Some college	0	3
t1.13	College graduate	10	7
t1.14	Master's	6	6
t1.15	Law degree	2	3
t1.16	Ph.D.	2	4
t1.17	M.D.	2	0
t1.18	Parental status		
t1.19	Has child(ren)	21	24
t1.20	No children	3	0
t1.21	Religious movement of childhood home		
t1.22	Reform	8	5
t1.23	Conservative	12	14
t1.24	Traditional	1	0
t1.25	Reconstructionist	0	1
t1.26	None; secular	3	4
t1.27	Spouse is baal (or baalat) teshuvah		
t1.28	Yes	17	17
t1.29	No	3	3
t1.30	Other (convert to Judaism)	1	3
t1.31	INAP; not married	3	1
t1.32	Number of years observant		
t1.33	Mean (SD)	14 (8.8)	15 (9.3)
t1.34	Range	3–30	2–38
t1.35	Current Orthodox stream		
t1.36	Modern Orthodox	12	8
t1.37	Right of Modern	5	1
t1.38	Right wing Orthodox	1	2
t1.39	Yeshivish	2	2
t1.40	Chasidic, Lubavitch	0	3
t1.41	Chasidic, not Lubavitch	0	2
t1.42	Combination	0	2
t1.43	Other	4	2
t1.44	Don't know	0	2

359 them, we asked interviewees to divide their spiritual-
 360 religious lives into time periods with titles. The process of
 361 writing and/or drawing the timeline helped guide partic-
 362 ipants through the interview and refreshed their memories.
 363 We asked them to describe what their life was like during
 364 each time period, focusing on important relationships, their
 365 religious life, and community involvement. In addition, we
 366 inquired about the individual's earliest memories of God,
 367 religion, and spirituality; spiritual struggles; identity
 368 changes; and integration into the Orthodox community.

The interview protocol and informed consent form were 369
 approved by the internal review board of the university. The 370
 consent form gave us permission to audiotape the inter- 371
 views and ensured that the names and other personally 372
 identifying information would be kept confidential. As an 373
 additional protection of confidentiality, we hired tran- 374
 scribers who resided in different cities from those in which 375
 interviewees lived. 376

Procedures 377

The interviewers, located in the three target areas, were 378
 trained either in person or by telephone by one of the 379
 authors. This fostered consistency across interviewers and 380
 the elicitation of rich qualitative data. One of the authors 381
 and another interviewer pre-tested the research instrument. 382
 After the other two authors listened to the tapes and 383
 consulted with the interviewers, the three authors decided to 384
 maintain the same format that they had originally devel- 385
 oped but to eliminate some questions to keep the interview 386
 shorter. 387

Participants were interviewed in their homes or work- 388
 places. Interviews took, on average, between one and two 389
 hours. In appreciation of their sharing their experiences, we 390
 gave participants gift cards to either a bookstore or Jewish 391
 gift shop. 392

Focus Group Interviews 393

Two focus group meetings were conducted with Jewish 394
 professionals who were *baalei teshuvah*. The first, which 395
 took place during the first year of the study, was with eight 396
 participants, six men and two women, who were profes- 397
 sionals in health, mental health, and education. Their ages 398
 were from 31 to 61 and they had been observant 11 to 399
 35 years. The second, conducted 10 months later, was with 400
 ten mental health professionals, eight women and two men 401
 who were 28 to 57 years old and had been Orthodox from 402
 10 to 38 years. Both focus group meetings were conducted 403
 at professional conferences by the same husband–wife team 404
 of mental health professionals. The interview questions, 405
 developed by the authors, had to do with the decision to 406
 become observant and subsequent spiritual development 407
 and social integration. The focus group interviews were 408
 tape recorded with informed consent and transcribed. 409

Key Informant Interviews 410

In order to obtain the perspectives of individuals who had 411
 direct expert knowledge about and professional experience 412
 working with *baalei teshuvah*, we interviewed ten key 413
 informants. The sample of eight men and two women 414
 consisted of rabbis, wives of rabbis, therapists, educators, 415

416 and *kiruv* (outreach) workers from the same general
417 geographic areas as the interviewees. We asked the key
418 informants what attracts people to Orthodox Judaism, the
419 issues *baalei teshuvah* struggle with, possible differences in
420 the struggles of men and women, patterns of movement to a
421 higher spiritual level, and the integration of *baalei teshuvah*
422 into the wider Orthodox community. All of these interviews
423 except one were conducted by telephone. The two authors
424 who conducted these interviews wrote summary narratives
425 describing the content of the interviews.

426 Qualitative Data Analysis

427 Consistent with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and
428 Strauss 1967), data analysis of the individual interviews
429 was concurrent with and followed data collection. The
430 authors became familiar with the contents of the interviews
431 through reading the interviews as they were transcribed and
432 by writing summaries and analytic memos on each
433 individual. The memos included ideas about theoretical
434 issues and other aspects of the interview that were salient.
435 The authors discussed some of these interviews as a
436 research team, generating the contents for these memos
437 collectively.

438 Team discussions were enriched by our diverse insider-
439 outsider positionalities. Two team members identified as
440 Orthodox Jews; one had always been Orthodox whereas
441 another was a *baalat teshuvah*. Both had extensive
442 interactions with *baalei teshuvah* and non-*baalei teshuvah*
443 Orthodox individuals and with non-Orthodox secular Jews
444 and non-Jews. Another team member identified as a
445 Conservative Jew. An outsider to Orthodox Judaism, she
446 also was also familiar with the outsider perspectives of
447 mothers of *baalot teshuvah* from prior research. This author
448 also had a partial insider status as the mother of a *baalat*
449 *teshuvah*. All three researchers had been trained, either as
450 clinicians or as an anthropologist, to monitor their own
451 biases. Consistent with the advantages of an insider status
452 that are discussed in the qualitative research literature (e.g.,
453 Merriam et al. 2001; Shah 2004), insider status gave us
454 access to a sample and enabled us to understand *baalei*
455 *teshuvah*'s language, ask meaningful questions of the data,
456 and project an authentic cultural understanding.

457 As a preliminary step to the gender analysis, one of the
458 authors reviewed the analytic memos to identify gender
459 issues that were alluded to or discussed and, together with
460 another author, chose topics that potentially pertain to both
461 men and women. Next the author conducting the initial
462 review re-read and took descriptive notes on all transcribed
463 interviews, organizing the notes according to the topics of
464 spirituality, work, learning and language issues, religious
465 behaviors, and a "miscellaneous" category. This was done
466 first for the men and then for the women. Based on these

467 notes, two authors wrote analytic statements that identified
468 themes within each gender and between them. Later they
469 discussed each other's interpretations and came to a
470 consensus on the meaning of the findings. This process
471 resulted in the identification of another topic within the
472 "miscellaneous" category, community.

473 A number of steps were taken to ensure that the notes
474 taken by one author were "trustworthy" [a standard that
475 constructivist researchers use in lieu of reliability and
476 validity (Lincoln and Guba 1985)]. Another author re-read
477 and took her own notes on the interviews of a random
478 sample of four men and four women on the same topics as
479 those taken by the other author. Although one or the other
480 author had more details in her notes, the contents were
481 similar. Recognizing that "No two investigators ever
482 observe the same phenomenon in exactly the same way"
483 (Denzin 1989, p. 245), we feel confident that our notes
484 were convergent. In addition, the second note taker re-read
485 the interviews in which there were no notes taken on certain
486 individuals in relation to work and spirituality, clarifying
487 the reasons for the omission of notes (e.g., not working
488 because of retirement). This is a form of "negative case
489 analysis" that also supports the trustworthiness of the data
490 (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 309).

491 With respect to the two focus group sessions, two of the
492 authors debriefed with the facilitators after each session to
493 obtain their impressions of the content and process of the
494 meetings. Subsequently, each of the three authors listened
495 to the tapes and/or read the transcripts. The project
496 coordinator then organized transcribed participant
497 responses question-by-question, and identified themes that
498 were related to responses to each question. Next, the three
499 authors collectively discussed the transcripts and the
500 analysis, adding additional interpretations that we recorded
501 in minutes. We engaged in a similar process with the
502 narrative summaries of the key informant interviews and
503 the project coordinator's analysis.

504 In order to triangulate findings in the individual inter-
505 views with those in the focus groups, two of the authors
506 reviewed the transcripts, the project coordinator's question-
507 by-question report, and minutes on our team discussions.
508 To triangulate findings with the key informant interviews,
509 we re-examined the narrative summaries, report, and
510 minutes of our team discussion. In both cases, we identified
511 whether, where in the transcripts or narratives, and how the
512 participants discussed spirituality, work, learning and
513 language issues, religious practices, and community. Two
514 of us noted places where responses were similar to or
515 different from those in the individual interviews and
516 subsequently discussed and integrated our findings.

517 We note that the original focus of this research was on
518 the process of spiritual transformation. Except for the key
519 informant interviews, conducted in the final year of the
520

520 study, we did not inquire specifically about individuals'
521 feelings or thoughts about gender. This has advantages and
522 disadvantages. It is advantageous that the themes that we
523 identified emerged from participants spontaneously. Had
524 we inquired directly about gender, we might have heard the
525 "official story" conveyed in Orthodox communities that
526 women are naturally spiritual and more innately suited for
527 domestic than work roles. The disadvantage of not asking
528 about gender is that some people did not address gender-
529 related topics at all. We tried to capture themes expressed
530 by a noticeable number of individuals.

531 Results

532 The results are organized by topic, beginning with
533 spirituality and then moving into contexts in which gender
534 differences may become manifest. We have varied the order
535 of presenting the findings on women and men under
536 different topics, discussing the gender that treated a
537 particular topic more extensively or intensively first. Here
538 and there the authors have included statements to help the
539 reader understand the Orthodox context.

540 Spirituality

541 Participants in this study were told orally and in consent
542 forms that this research is concerned with the spiritual
543 transformational processes of adults who become Ortho-
544 dox. Rather than presenting individual interview partici-
545 pants with a specific definition of spirituality, we
546 encouraged them to interpret the concept themselves. The
547 definitions the men and women used coalesced around
548 feeling connected to God (Hashem).

549 All of the women had much to say about spirituality,
550 God, or both. Only one of the 24 women distanced herself
551 from the term spirituality, but she said that her friends
552 consider her spiritual. The women spoke about feeling
553 God's presence, believing in God, praying to God, talking
554 to God, and being very focused on bringing God into every
555 aspect of their lives. They spoke of having had spiritual
556 feelings since childhood or of being attracted to a universal
557 spirituality. They associated their early spiritual feelings
558 with nature, religious observances or ritual objects, and
559 particular family experiences that heightened their aware-
560 ness of life and death. For example, Cynthia, who is 47 and
561 the daughter of a mother who was hidden as a child during
562 the Holocaust, said that she always felt connected to God.
563 She grew up hearing her mother say, "It's such a miracle
564 that we're alive! And look at the sun shining!" During and
565 after college, four women explored diverse forms of
566 spirituality such as yoga, Native American practices,
567 Eastern religions, and meditation and one experimented

with Christian spirituality. After they embraced Orthodox
Judaism, they connected with God through Jewish study or
"learning," prayer (*davening*), music, and/or community
service (*chesed*, acts of loving kindness).

Susan, who is 35 years old and identifies with Modern
Orthodoxy, exemplifies women who seemed to be naturally
spiritual and have built upon this orientation in their
journeys. She recalled her parental home as happy and her
family as warm and nurturing. Through her family's home
observances and synagogue involvement and her experi-
ences at a Jewish day school, a Jewish summer camp, and a
youth group, she became increasingly observant. Susan's
family nourished her spirituality. For at least 7 of the 24
women, however, spiritual questions were sparked by early
trauma. For example, Yehudis, who is 39 years old and
defines her stream idiosyncratically as "BT Orthodox" (BT
is an acronym for *baal teshuvah*) reported that she was
abused by her father and raised for the most part by a single
divorced mother whose home she viewed as "empty" and
"sad." As a young adult, Yehudis repeated early traumas by
entering into an abusive relationship with a man. Then she
started practicing *siddhi* yoga, followed a guru, and found
her way out of the abusive relationship and into one with a
Jewish man whom she married. Later she and her husband
searched for a comfortable place within Judaism, finding it
6 years ago in Orthodox Judaism.

Six of the 21 married women reported suffering in their
adult years over infertility, problem pregnancies or deliver-
ies, or the death of a close relative or friend that resulted in
spiritual growth and the deepening of spiritual connected-
ness. For example, Diane, who is 58 and Modern Orthodox,
recalled that after her child survived against odds after a
premature birth, she realized "that there has to be something
somewhere that's looking down and blessing me with this
child."

The term spirituality had a different resonance for more
than a third of the 24 men we interviewed. Four expressed
discomfort with the term spirituality or denied that they
were spiritual. Four different men did not talk about God or
their relationship with God. Two others talked about their
relationship with God but not in a spiritual way. When we
closely examined the men's interviews, we saw that the
men who distanced themselves from the term spirituality
acknowledged their connection with God while they
directed their attention to the performance of religious
rituals and adherence to Jewish law. For example, Shmuel,
an ordained rabbi who stated that God is "in charge," said
that he is "not a very spiritual person," but rather engages in
religious behavior because he believes that it is "the right
thing to do." Yet, Shmuel said that in observing these
practices, "you keep running into ways of having a
relationship with God." Similarly, Barry, who is 46, said
that he is not sure what spirituality means and does not

621 think about it much but instead focuses on the “things you
 622 do” and the “things that you don’t do.” Nevertheless, he
 623 said, he talks to God “all the time.” Likewise, Edward, who
 624 is 42 years old and identifies as “just Orthodox,” described
 625 himself as “pragmatic” rather than spiritual. Yet he
 626 discussed God as “this spiritual force that ... does have
 627 meaning in the world and that we have to, you know, we
 628 have to *daven* (pray) to, that we have to direct ourselves
 629 to.” The men who did not talk about God or their
 630 relationship with God tended to have an intellectual
 631 orientation toward Judaism or were focused on the
 632 performance of religious practices. Of the two men who
 633 did speak about their relationship with God, one said he is
 634 struggling with this because he does not experience God’s
 635 presence in his life; and the other, a relative newcomer, was
 636 focusing primarily on managing the “details” of living an
 637 Orthodox life. None of the men who were reluctant to use
 638 the word spirituality or talk about God identified them-
 639 selves as Chasidic. They described themselves as Modern
 640 Orthodox, “right wing Orthodox,” yeshivish, combination,
 641 other designations, and “don’t know.”

642 The remaining 14 men (Chasidic, Modern Orthodox,
 643 right of Modern Orthodox, yeshivish, and combination,
 644 other or “don’t know”) spoke more expansively about
 645 believing in and connecting with God without necessarily
 646 using the term spirituality. Three spoke of connecting
 647 through music. Ken, who described himself as Centrist
 648 Orthodox (“other”), spoke in this way about his love for
 649 one prayer, the *Ashrei*:

650 ...I remember feeling, in my room... when I said that
 651 first *Ashrei*, I remember feeling like tingling. Which I
 652 still feel today.... When I go on vacation, and I’m all
 653 alone, and I’m staring at a mountain or a river. And
 654 I’m just by myself, it’s me and God, and I say this
 655 *Ashrei*, slowly, every word. I will sometimes read it in
 656 English as I’m reading. It’ll take me a half hour to say
 657 *Ashrei*. And I will just, you know, the meaning of *Mah*
 658 *rabu maasecha Hashem* (How great are Your works,
 659 O God)...Looking at a mountain, or looking at a river.
 660 And, to this day, in fact we just came back from
 661 Colorado, and I’ll tell you, two weeks ago I had the
 662 same feeling. The tingling, great feeling.

664 Three of the 14 men who talked more extensively about
 665 connecting with God spoke about spiritual yearning and
 666 struggles and of experiencing divine intervention in their
 667 lives. Jeffrey, who at 47 saw himself as a combination of
 668 Modern Orthodox, Chasidic, and New Age, attributed his
 669 giving up drugs during high school to God’s guidance
 670 whereas Aryeh, who was 33 and yeshivish, believed that
 671 spiritual engagement helped him overcome depressing
 672 thoughts or anxiety and helped him grow. Mark, who was
 673 51 and described himself as “just Orthodox,” discussed

674 giving himself daily “peptalks” to bring himself closer to
 675 God and enhance his ability to trust.

676 The findings on women’s and men’s different ways of
 677 talking about spirituality were supported by comments of
 678 focus group participants and key informants. One of the
 679 two men who participated in the second focus group said,
 680 “I sort of bristle when we use the word spirituality,”
 681 preferring to talk about being religious. Women in the same
 682 focus group spoke about loving spirituality and connecting
 683 to God. Two of the key informants said that women are
 684 attracted to Orthodox Judaism because of its spiritual
 685 dimension and two maintained that women are more
 686 spiritual than men.

Religious Practices 687

688 Both men and women discussed their performance of
 689 *mitzvot*, which are required observances, practices, or
 690 commandments. Only men talked about laying *tefillin*
 691 (phylacteries), putting on *tzitzit* (fringed garments), or
 692 wearing *yarmulkes* (skullcaps), as these are required of
 693 men. (Some women in non-Orthodox communities, how-
 694 ever, perform these *mitzvot* [Diner 2006].) Men who talked
 695 about the first time they put on *tefillin* or wore a *yarmulke*
 696 in public spoke about these as momentous experiences. One
 697 man spoke of undergoing the ritual of circumcision as an
 698 adult because it was not performed ritually correctly when
 699 he was a baby. This was a significant event in his journey
 700 toward Orthodoxy.

701 Several *mitzvot* were mentioned only or predominantly
 702 by women. Fourteen of the 21 married women talked about
 703 covering their heads with hats, wigs, or scarves, a practice
 704 associated with modesty for married women. Among these
 705 women, four discussed struggling over doing this in the
 706 past or present. Cynthia, for example, said that when people
 707 ask her when she will start wearing a *sheitel* (a wig), she
 708 says, “It’s hard enough for me to just wear a hat now.” Ten
 709 married women mentioned going to the *mikvah* (ritual
 710 bath), a *mitzvah* related to family purity that is explicitly
 711 required of women (Diner 2006), with four of these women
 712 portraying this experience as spiritually uplifting. Although
 713 some Orthodox men go to the *mikvah* before the Sabbath
 714 and festivals, none mentioned this. Six of the 24 women
 715 mentioned lighting Sabbath candles, with three stating that
 716 they found this experience spiritually moving.

717 Only women spoke about three *mitzvot* that are required
 718 of men and women—*chesed* (acts of lovingkindness),
 719 *midot* (good character traits) and *tzniut* (modesty in dress
 720 and behavior). Of the 24 women, 4 referred to *chesed* and 4
 721 to *midot*. Eleven of the 24 women referred to *tzniut*, with
 722 three mentioning struggles over not wearing pants and two
 723 finding themselves comfortable dressing modestly. Both
 724 men and women talked about keeping the Sabbath and

725 keeping kosher as steps in their religious journeys. Only
 726 women, however, talked about these central religious
 727 requirements in discussing their current practices. Four of
 728 the 24 women interviewees talked about the partition that
 729 separates men and women in Orthodox synagogues
 730 (*mechitza*) with one asserting that praying from separate
 731 space was empowering. Two women expressed dissatisfac-
 732 tion with restrictions on women’s singing in the presence of
 733 men (*kol isha*), not allowed in the most stringent Orthodox
 734 streams, and one mentioned struggling over not being
 735 counted in the *minyan* (quorum of ten).

736 A few *mitzvot* were discussed by both men and women.
 737 Going to synagogue was mentioned by an equal number of
 738 men and women, but only women (6 out of 24) talked
 739 about not liking to attend. *Davening* (praying) was
 740 mentioned by 11 of the 24 men, with one man stating that
 741 he needs to focus on this more. This *mitzvah* was also
 742 prominent for 16 of the 24 women, among whom five
 743 reported that they struggled with this or should *daven* more
 744 often than they do. (We note that the expectations around
 745 davening are different for the two genders. Men are
 746 required to recite prayers three times a day, preferably in
 747 a *minyan*. Women are free to *daven* alone. There are many
 748 opinions surrounding the number of times women are
 749 expected to pray and which prayers they should recite
 750 [Kasden 1981]).

751 Participants in the first focus group talked about
 752 particular *mitzvot* that attracted them and pulled them along
 753 in their journeys. Consistent with the interview findings,
 754 one of the two women in that group described going to the
 755 *mikvah* for the first time as a beautiful experience. In
 756 contrast, only one of the six men and none of the women
 757 mentioned *davening*. In the second focus group, one of the
 758 eight women discussed how working on *midot* (character
 759 traits) helps her grow spiritually and another spoke about
 760 enjoying the *davening* on the Sabbath. Another woman said
 761 that “the *tzniut* thing (modest dress) was so difficult for me,
 762 was so painful because it really touched...tapped into my
 763 identity.” The key informants discussed initial difficulties
 764 men and women have keeping kosher and observing the
 765 Sabbath. When asked specifically about gender issues,
 766 eight talked about women’s struggling over the *mechitza*
 767 (partition), covering their hair, and dressing modestly.

768 Work

769 Twenty-three of the 24 men in the interview sample were in
 770 the workforce and one was retired. All those who were
 771 employed made some reference to work. The men had
 772 academic credentials that enabled them to pursue a
 773 profession or employment that could provide them with a
 774 comfortable income, status, and possible external recogni-
 775 tion (see Table 1). As we will show, the men talked

extensively about their efforts to manage work while living 776
 a religious life. 777

778 Two of the 23 working men reported that they have had 779
 to make compromises in either their professional goals or 780
 religion. Steven, a 58-year old scientist, stated that he 781
 compromised early in his career when he decided not to 782
 attend the most prestigious graduate school in his field, 783
 which had accepted him, in favor of a graduate school that 784
 was less prominent but was located in an environment that 785
 was more conducive to his life as a religious Jew. Although 786
 this decision was made some 30 years ago, he still wonders 787
 whether he would have been more successful in his career 788
 if he had gone to the other school. Yonatan, a 32-year old 789
 college graduate who works in the financial field, implied 790
 that he made compromises in keeping kosher when he went 791
 out with clients to restaurants that would not be acceptable 792
 in his home Orthodox community.

793 Eleven of the 23 working men talked about trying to 794
 integrate work and religion. In their quest to do so, they 795
 tended to focus on either work or religion. Paul, a 54-year 796
 old professor, spoke about directing his energy principally 797
 into his career. Recognizing that his attitude toward the 798
 Sabbath is not in keeping with the norms of his religious 799
 community, he explained that:

800 ...what I worry about religiously is...that in many 800
 respects...I see *Shabbos*...as good for my work 801
 because it rests me up so that I can really go back 802
 into the work world. And I wonder whether I will 803
 reach a point where...when I get to *Shabbos* I can 804
 really enjoy *Shabbos* because *Shabbos* is really the 805
 focus of the week. I think I’ve still got it backwards. I 806
 think to me work is the focus of the week and on 807
Shabbos I rest up for the next (week). 808

809 Nevertheless, Paul tried to integrate work with his spiritual- 810
 religious life by reminding himself that his professional 811
 success comes from God.

812 In contrast, 3 of the 23 employed men reconstructed the 813
 role of work so that it was less important than religion. 814
 Mark, who at the time of his interview was 51 years old and 815
 had been Orthodox for 12 years, reported having had a 816
 number of professional crises over the years. He now 817
 believes that focusing on career success is a kind of 818
 “*avodah zarah*” (idol worship) and that instead everything 819
 in life should be about serving God. Five of the 23 working 820
 men found the de-emphasis on material success in 821
 Orthodox Judaism an attractive feature. Yosef, who was 822
 58 and had been Orthodox for 10 years, said that law “used 823
 to be my whole life,” but “Now, work is just something I 824
 do...in order to support my family. And my real, my real, 825
 entire being is, is being observant and teaching Torah and 826
 learning, and, you know,...that’s what I’d rather do than 827
 anything else.”

828 Eight of the 23 employed men described ways in which
 829 they adapt to working in secular environments. Michael,
 830 who is 36 years old and has a doctorate, dresses in such a
 831 way at his company that he stands out as a religious Jew.
 832 Three other men spoke of wearing a *yarmulke* to work.
 833 Three additional men described bringing their religious
 834 values to work by acting kindly toward their co-workers.
 835 Another man was able to bond with other religious people
 836 at his worksite. Aside from these eight men, there were
 837 three men who worked as professionals in the religious
 838 community where they did not have to make the kind of
 839 adaptations that those who worked in secular environments
 840 made.

841 Of the 24 women interviewees, 17 reported that they
 842 were engaged in full- or part-time paid employment. Three
 843 women were retired (two for health reasons), one was a
 844 student, and three were homemakers. Two of the retired
 845 women had older children and one had school age children;
 846 the student had school-age children; and all three full-time
 847 homemakers had pre-school children. Thirteen of the 17
 848 working women had children 18 or younger living at home.
 849 In all, 18 of the 21 married women had children under 18 at
 850 home. As Table 1 shows, the women interviewees were
 851 well educated. Like the men, they were professionals,
 852 health and human service workers, and administrators.

853 The women did not talk extensively or with much
 854 intensity about their work. Only three of the 17 working
 855 women explicitly said that their careers were important to
 856 them, but they also indicated that work was not their only
 857 priority. For example, Danielle, who put a great deal of
 858 emphasis on her career in her early adult years, reported
 859 that she had an existential crisis when she was 42 that led to
 860 her becoming Orthodox. As she explained, in the past, "I
 861 saw myself as a career person. I would define myself, let's
 862 say, as a doctor. Now...that's obviously very important to
 863 me, but um, but I identify myself as an observant Jewish
 864 woman, with a family, and who's involved with my
 865 community. And I'm a doctor, too." Sheila described
 866 herself as having previously been "driven" to achieve.
 867 Since becoming a mother, she has cycled in and out of
 868 practicing law and engaging in community service. Two
 869 additional women indicated that work was important to
 870 them in the past but not so currently, because they were not
 871 working. Elaine, whose career in the health field used to be
 872 central, reported being overwhelmed at home with her
 873 6-month old baby and that she is going through an "identity
 874 crisis." She had thoughts about returning to work part-time,
 875 but worried that a future pregnancy would make that
 876 difficult.

877 Six of the 17 working women spoke about their desire to
 878 integrate career and religion, linking both. Their approaches
 879 were diverse. A psychologist spoke about praying for
 880 patients and trying to use her relationship with God and

spirituality "in a way that is helpful and healing to people." 881
 Another woman developed a home-based kosher food 882
 business. Six other women described working in full or 883
 part-time in jobs that were aligned with Orthodox educa- 884
 tional or communal services, connecting the two worlds 885
 and avoiding potential conflict between them. Amy, who 886
 once worked as an administrator at a non-Orthodox 887
 synagogue nursery school, now works as an assistant 888
 teacher in an Orthodox day school. As she explained, 889
 "I've tried to put...kindness and the patience...(in) under- 890
 standing...the children that I work with every day...I try to 891
 be better with them." She said that she also tries to be a 892
 better wife and mother. As the examples of Amy and 893
 Danielle show, it was important for the women to integrate 894
 career, religion and family. 895

896 Five of the 21 married women mentioned that marriage
 897 and financial status entered into their career ambitions and
 898 achievements. Cheryl said that work is less important to her
 899 now because her husband works. Amy once considered law
 900 school, but relinquished that ambition in favor of marriage
 901 when her biological clock was running out. Three women
 902 reported that they had to work in order to help pay for their
 903 children's religious schools or other expenses.

904 Five participants in the two focus groups (three men and
 905 two women) discussed their struggles integrating religious
 906 observance and work. The men reported changes they made
 907 over time in their emphasis on work and their commitment
 908 to learning. One woman spoke about her transition from
 909 non-observance to observance while working in the same
 910 job. The key informants, most of whom were men, had
 911 more to say about men's work than women's. Three
 912 commented on men's challenges in working and making
 913 time for daily prayers and learning.

914 Learning and Language Issues

915 Language and learning are integral to entering any new
 916 culture. Newcomers to Orthodox Judaism have varying
 917 degrees of competence in Hebrew and hardly any knowl-
 918 edge of Aramaic, one of the languages of the Talmud.
 919 Furthermore, there is a body of knowledge and know-how
 920 that is central to living an observant Jewish life. For
 921 instance, in the case of the recitation of prayers related to
 922 eating, one needs to learn which prayers are said over
 923 which foods before and after meals, in the light of the
 924 number of post-*bar mitzvah* men present. Considering that
 925 Judaism requires public prayer and other performative acts,
 926 mistakes become visible to others.

927 Two-thirds ($n=16$) of the 24 men expressed feelings of
 928 self-consciousness, inadequacy, or insecurity over their
 929 deficiencies in Hebrew and/or their inability to decipher
 930 Talmudic texts. For example, Leonard spoke about feeling
 931 that he knows less than the "average 6-year old" and Barry

932 remarked, "I had been one of the best educated people (in
933 his previous Conservative environment), and all of a
934 sudden...I'm an ignoramus." In response, these men have
935 worked on increasing their skills through focused study of
936 Hebrew or Aramaic and learning specific prayers. Paul
937 pointed out that during the early stages of his journey, he
938 had little knowledge of Hebrew and thus prayed in English.
939 He recalled having been taken in hand and tutored by a
940 rabbi of a small synagogue:

941 I remember spending a great deal of the year...
942 learning (with)...a rabbi in a little tiny shul....So I
943 went over to his house once a week. He would spend
944 over an hour with me, teaching me word by word how
945 to read the *Shema*. It took us probably a couple of
946 months to get through the first paragraph. But I would
947 practice, and gradually I was able to say the *Shema*,
948 not fluent, but without taking an hour....

949 Other men learned or improved their Hebrew by taking
950 classes locally or had done so in the past by studying in
951 learning institutions Israel. Still the ability to read Hebrew
952 does not mean that they understood what they were reading
953 or that they could keep up with the rapid pace of Orthodox
954 *davening*. Paul talked openly about how uncomfortable he
955 used to feel when he was still reading the *Amidah* (silent
956 prayer recited while standing) when everyone else had
957 moved on. He has since improved his skills.

958 Four of the 24 men expressed pride in their Hebrew
959 skills. Nevertheless, each of them as well as five other men
960 expressed inadequacies in handling the Talmud. One man
961 said that he was learning Aramaic so that he can have
962 access to the *Gemara* (discussions in the Talmud). Another
963 saw himself as "still not at the point where I sort of would
964 like to be...it's like I'm an amateur bike rider; I'm not a
965 professional bike rider."

966 In their discussions of their learning, the men described a
967 great deal of activity. They talked about attending classes
968 (*shiurim*), with one mentioning going to nine a week. As
969 one man explained, "Got to play catch up. I'm not
970 anywhere near where I need to be." Some learning was
971 with specific synagogue rabbis or at outreach programs that
972 have the goal of enhancing the education of *baalei*
973 *teshuvah*. Even though it is common for Orthodox men to
974 learn with a study partner, five men expressed a preference
975 for learning on their own. They attributed this to discomfort
976 with others or with the adversarial nature of learning with a
977 partner. Four men indicated that they are not learning much
978 now; two others reported that they struggled with language
979 learning and could sit not still during classes. Those who
980 were neither learning much nor studying Talmud were
981 apologetic about not actively learning. For example,
982 Shmuel, an ordained rabbi, reported that he was not doing
983 the kind of learning "a man of my stature should" and

984 explained that his teachers at the institution where he
985 received his rabbinical training would be disappointed in
986 him. Michael said, "I would learn *Gemara* if I could learn
987 *Gemara*....I just don't have the skill."

988 In contrast with the men, who talked about their
989 inadequacies and feelings of obligation to study, the women
990 gave emphasis to how exciting and enjoyable learning is for
991 them. Ten of the 24 women spoke in this manner. For
992 example, Shira "tries to go to as many women's *shiurim* as
993 possible because "that keeps me...revved up and in the right
994 direction." Sandra, who has been Orthodox for 10 years,
995 said that when she began to immerse herself in learning, she
996 was so excited, "I was like a kid in a candy store."
997 Orthodox for 7 years, Danielle said that learning makes her
998 feel that she is growing. Karen, who has been Orthodox for
999 8 years, said that when she first became observant, she
1000 "loved" learning and now, "I want to keep learning...that
1001 keeps you going." Almost all of the women (19 out of 24)
1002 reported that they were taking classes on a regular basis at
1003 the time of their interviews or had done so in the recent
1004 past. Others stated that they attended classes in the more
1005 distant past but now were learning on their own by listening
1006 to tapes or reading.

1007 Like 16 of the 24 men, 9 of the 24 women discussed their
1008 inadequacies with Hebrew, their limited text skills, and
1009 feelings of ignorance. Despite the common feelings, the
1010 women did not convey distress over their deficiencies to the
1011 extent to which the men did. For example, Diane reported, "I
1012 can read Hebrew very slowly, but I can read it at this point,"
1013 with a touch of pride rather than unease. Toby, who has worked
1014 hard at learning Hebrew, explained that she was not good at
1015 languages, whereas Cheryl remarked that she has difficult
1016 concentrating when studying Hebrew texts. Overall, however,
1017 the women discussed learning as an activity that is stimulating
1018 and enhances their lives, rather than a means to remedy
1019 deficiencies or to keep up with community expectations.

1020 Besides their intrinsic joy of learning, the women
1021 conveyed pleasure with the social contexts in which they
1022 studied. They described learning together with their hus-
1023 bands at home or with a study partner; attending classes for
1024 women; and acquiring informal knowledge from friends,
1025 neighbors, and families they "adopted" as substitute
1026 relatives. For example, when Sandra moved to her current
1027 neighborhood, which is predominantly Orthodox, a neigh-
1028 bor gave her "a crash course" on the religious requirements
1029 for serving tea on the Sabbath. The women also gained
1030 knowledge from families and friends who invited them for
1031 meals on the Sabbath; these families answered the women's
1032 questions in a comfortable environment and served as role
1033 models. Although much learning occurred in social con-
1034 texts, this did not preclude learning on their own.

1035 Both women and men talked more about the activity of
1036 learning than what they actually learned. Women alluded to

1037 studying the week’s Torah portion and learning laws
 1038 proscribing gossip. They also learned about the laws of family
 1039 purity and how to bake *challah* (bread used on the Sabbath).
 1040 The key informants identified learning as an area of
 1041 struggle for men, implying by omission that this was not a
 1042 problem for women. Men in the focus groups expressed
 1043 feelings of inadequacy over their knowledge of *Gemara* that
 1044 were similar to those described by men who had individual
 1045 interviews. A man with a long beard and a black hat
 1046 expressed concern that people in his own community
 1047 expected him to know more than he knows because of his
 1048 appearance. One of the male interviewees conveyed a similar
 1049 concern about giving a false impression that he is knowl-
 1050 edgeable. A woman in one focus group remarked, “For a
 1051 man, it’s very important to feel like he knows what he’s
 1052 doing” and difficult when he is used to being competent and
 1053 respected to “all of a sudden, now you’re a neophyte.”

1054 Community

1055 Twenty-one of the 24 women in the interview sample spoke
 1056 about the salience of community. They talked about being
 1057 attracted to Orthodox Judaism because of its warm
 1058 community and of being connected to their specific
 1059 religious community and to the Jewish people as a whole.
 1060 Furthermore, the women spoke of service activities that
 1061 linked them to others in the community.

1062 Joyce said that before she became Orthodox, she resisted
 1063 yet desired to be part of a Jewish community. Having
 1064 grown up in a Jewish neighborhood, she appreciated the
 1065 cultural ties and warmth of living among one’s own people.
 1066 As a liberal, however, she was uncomfortable with Jewish
 1067 separatism. After moving back and forth between her
 1068 separatist and integrationist tendencies, she concluded that
 1069 she needed and could draw strength from a strong Jewish
 1070 community. Sandra, who grew up in a family that was
 1071 active in their Jewish community, felt lonely in the mixed-
 1072 religion neighborhood where she and her husband and
 1073 children had been living. The family took incremental steps
 1074 toward synagogue involvement outside their geographic
 1075 area, finally moving to an Orthodox neighborhood.

1076 Diane and her new husband moved to a new neighbor-
 1077 hood after they married. Before then, they were increasing
 1078 their observance but did not consider themselves Orthodox.
 1079 They knew that the community was Jewish but had not
 1080 known anyone who lived there. Soon after they moved,
 1081 Diane’s husband lost his mother. Diane suggested that her
 1082 husband ask a neighbor, who is a rabbi, for help forming
 1083 the daily home *minyan* of ten men, required during the first
 1084 week of mourning. As Diane explained, her husband

1085 ...went over and knocked on (the neighbor’s) door and
 1086 said, “My mother just passed away; I’m going to need

a *minyan* here.” And (the neighbor) said: “Not a 1087
 problem; what else can we do for you? Do you need 1088
 meals, do you need this, do you need...are arrange- 1089
 ments made, do you need help...?” They were 1090
 absolutely unbelievable! 1091

The neighbors’ warmth and responsiveness moved Diane 1092
 and her husband to embrace their new Jewish community 1093
 and Orthodox Judaism. 1094

After Sheila moved to a city in the Northeast as a single 1095
 woman, she dropped in at a gift store owned by an 1096
 Orthodox family. A friendly person, she developed a 1097
 relationship with the store owners and was invited to their 1098
 home for the Sabbath. Sheila reciprocated by inviting them 1099
 to her apartment and babysitting for their children. This 1100
 family incorporated her into their community as well as 1101
 their family. Before long, Sheila was being set up with 1102
 potential matches. She married someone introduced 1103
 through this network and now is active in the Orthodox 1104
 community where her husband had been living. 1105

These are but a few of the numerous examples of the 1106
 women’s talking about connecting with communities. 1107
 Besides these illustrations are discussions of ways in which 1108
 the *baalot teshuvah* participated in and contributed to their 1109
 communities. Eight of the 24 women mentioned being 1110
 active in committee work at their synagogues and/or 1111
 engaging in other volunteer activities that help their 1112
 Orthodox community. Four said that they engaged in 1113
chesed (acts of lovingkindness, such as visiting the sick). 1114
 As Cheryl, who has been observant for 11 years, explained, 1115
 when she was single she participated in community 1116
 activities to promote her social life. “Now...I’m doing it 1117
 because it’s a *mitzvah* to do it.” Yehudis spoke of her 1118
 family’s wiping themselves out volunteering. She said, “It 1119
 felt so good....We had so much energy and enthusiasm, and 1120
 we wanted to give, and we wanted to raise money for good 1121
 causes.” 1122

The 24 men who were interviewed did not talk directly 1123
 about community as an aspect of religious life that they 1124
 found absorbing. On the other hand, they did talk about 1125
 how meaningful it was for them to be part of a *minyan* or a 1126
davening community and to assume leadership roles in the 1127
 prayer service. Seventeen men referred to various prayer 1128
 groups that were part of their journeys. Four talked about 1129
 “making the *minyan*” (being the tenth man, thus completing 1130
 the quorum) and three spoke of serving in a leadership role 1131
 in the service. For example, Robert, who had been 1132
 Orthodox for 22 years at the time of his interview, stated 1133
 proudly that he served for a number of years as a *gabbai*, 1134
 who manages the internal functioning of the religious 1135
 service. He explained that as a *baal teshuvah*, he was 1136
 initially insecure about his knowledge of prayer. Serving as 1137
gabbai forced him to learn the prayers and helped him feel 1138

1139 “in charge.” Still Yonaton, who has been Orthodox for
1140 10 years, has is not sure whether he has the “credentials”
1141 one needs to assume a leadership role at his synagogue.

1142 Twelve of the 24 men mentioned activities in the broader
1143 religious community in which they were active. One man
1144 said that he set up learning programs on special topics.
1145 Three felt confident enough in their knowledge to give
1146 Torah classes or lecture to community groups. The men
1147 also helped their synagogues, outreach organizations, and
1148 religious schools. Clearly, the men were motivated to and
1149 have contributed to their religious communities.

1150 Strikingly, almost all of the key informants said that
1151 *baalei teshuvah* are attracted to Orthodox Judaism because
1152 they seek community. They did not distinguish between
1153 men and women. The focus group members also discussed
1154 community as an attraction. A man in one of the focus
1155 groups spoke about how meaningful it was to him to lead
1156 services.

1157 Discussion

1158 Our findings show a gendering of the terms spirituality and
1159 community and specific religious requirements (*mitzvot*). In
1160 addition, the data point to differences in participants’
1161 constructions of work and language and learning. Men
1162 experienced a conflict between religion and their work role
1163 and felt driven to learn as a way of remedying deficiencies
1164 in their knowledge. Women were less focused on work,
1165 experienced less role conflict, and were more excited about
1166 learning.

1167 Both men and women talked about spirituality and
1168 community, but the women embraced the terms whereas the
1169 men endorsed the concepts but were uncomfortable with
1170 the terms. The women’s espousal of the two terms may be a
1171 consequence of their location in the religious world they
1172 have joined. In this world, the men dominate the public
1173 space of the synagogue or prayer group, and women’s
1174 marital and maternal roles are considered central (Berman
1175 1973). Both in the writings of sacred texts and in the norms
1176 of their respective religious communities, men’s religious
1177 obligations are explicit. Because women are exempt from
1178 some obligations (Berman 1973), they are left with room to
1179 decide for themselves whether or not to observe certain
1180 *mitzvot* and to what extent. The women we interviewed
1181 responded to the ambiguity around their obligations by
1182 constructing internal space in which they could express
1183 their spirituality and by partaking of existing community
1184 space in which they could express their willingness and
1185 capacity to contribute to others. Like the women described
1186 by Kaufman (1991) and Davidman (1991), the women
1187 enthusiastically embraced the spaces that were available to
1188 them.

The men identified more comfortably with the “doing’ of
Judaism and practicing “in the right way,” but, for the most
part, did not openly acknowledge their spirituality. Yet,
when we carefully examined the men’s interviews, we
found that they spoke about savoring over particular words
of prayer, talking to God, and feeling connected to God,
which sound like spiritual feelings and behavior. It may be
that the men associated the word spirituality with emotion-
ality (cf. Pargament 1999), which evokes a stereotype of
women. The men also seemed reluctant to use the term
community, whereas the women discussed community
extensively. Nevertheless, the men talked about how
important it was to them to be part of a *minyan*, which is
a prayer community. They also spoke of feeling good about
assuming leadership roles in the *minyan* or synagogue and
mentioned various kinds of community activities in which
they participated. It is not clear why the men backed away
from using this term other than their conceding that
community was women’s space (cf. Kaufman 1991).

All the men who identified with the Chasidic stream ($n=$
5) seemed comfortable with spirituality. This is not
surprising as the Chasidic movement is characterized by
emotional fervor and spiritual vitality (Jacobs 1997) and
thus would attract people who are spiritually oriented. We
found, however, that other men who were spiritually
oriented gravitated to other streams. Thus, we cannot
conclude that spirituality is the province of a particular
stream.

We also found a gendering of certain *mitzvot*. Even
though many of the *mitzvot* are incumbent on both men and
women, men seemed to emphasize some and women
others. Some of the commandments that the men discussed
are clearly required of men (e.g., laying *tefillin*). The
women discussed *mitzvot* that are expected of them (e.g.,
lighting Sabbath candles). Women probably gave more
attention to the *mitzvot* of Sabbath observance and keeping
kosher because they have hands-on responsibility for
preparing the family’s Sabbath meals and ensuring the
family’s adherence to the dietary laws. Many of the
requirements for both men and women, such as *chesed*,
midot, and *tzniut*, seem to be gendered, denoting qualities
that attest to a woman’s merit as a woman. The gendering
of these *mitzvot* that we saw in the interviews may reflect
such gendering in the non-*baalei teshuvah* Orthodox
community.

A minority of the women interviewees voiced resistance
to covering their heads (cf. Topel 2002), to the expectation
in very stringent Orthodox communities that women refrain
from singing in the presence of men, and to women not
being counted in the *minyan*. On the other hand, the key
informants highlighted women’s struggles with these
issues, as well as the partition separating men and women
in the synagogue. Because the key informants worked

1242 primarily with adults who were early in their exploration of
1243 Orthodox Judaism, it is not surprising that they talked more
1244 about these struggles than the women interviewees, who
1245 seemed to have come to terms with these issues by the time
1246 they were interviewed.

1247 Our findings on work are consistent with gender role
1248 expectations in the larger society, with men giving more
1249 prominence to their work identities than the women. The
1250 men seemed to be conscious of social expectations that they
1251 support their families and achieve success at work, with
1252 some men experiencing role conflict over their priorities.
1253 They struggled to integrate work with their religious roles,
1254 using such strategies as bringing Jewish values into their
1255 workplaces, overemphasizing work or religion, and using
1256 religious values to justify a lack of achievement at work.
1257 Women also tried to integrate their religious and work roles,
1258 as well as family roles, but did not appear to struggle the
1259 way the men did. The men and women who worked within
1260 religious communities were better able to avoid conflicts
1261 between their work and religious roles than those who
1262 worked in secular contexts.

1263 Considering that this study was conducted after the feminist
1264 movement of the last quarter of the twentieth century had
1265 permeated American society, one would expect that before the
1266 women became *baalot teshuvah*, they had aspirations that
1267 were similar to those of the men. Yet, the women, who had
1268 comparable higher education and professions, seemed less
1269 invested in work than the men, even though most of the
1270 women worked. This may be because Orthodox Judaism
1271 legitimizes women's family roles and their communality
1272 (interpersonal, emotional orientation) over their agency
1273 (Bakan 1966), lessening the pressure experienced by non-
1274 Orthodox, well- educated Jewish women to actively pursue a
1275 career. This gives Orthodox women who wish to "opt-out" of
1276 a career (Belkin 2003) validation to do so. An alternative
1277 explanation that is consistent with our data comes from the
1278 work of Mainiero and Sullivan (2005). According to their
1279 "kaleidoscope model," women's career paths tend to be non-
1280 linear. During different phases of their careers, they give
1281 different emphases to (1) being true to themselves, (2)
1282 balancing family and career, and (3) seeking challenges.
1283 Balancing family and career was salient for those working
1284 women who were married and had children at home.

1285 The status transition to Orthodox Judaism generated a
1286 high level of anxiety in the men. Accomplished in their
1287 secular education and occupations, they found themselves
1288 deficient in their knowledge of Hebrew and the Talmud.
1289 Even though both men and women had difficulty with
1290 Hebrew language mastery, the men felt self-conscious and
1291 vulnerable because their deficits could be observed by
1292 others when they prayed in the public spaces of a
1293 synagogue or *minyan*. Some dealt with or compensated
1294 for their deficiencies by taking on leadership roles, while

one wondered whether he had sufficient "credentials" to 1295
assume these roles. Women were aware of their own 1296
knowledge gaps but because they are not required to attend 1297
prayer services on a regular basis and do not count in the 1298
minyan, they could pray at home without having to feel 1299
embarrassed. The findings that six women expressed 1300
objections to attending synagogue and five struggled over 1301
davening raise questions whether they were using the 1302
ambiguity around what is required of them as women as 1303
an excuse to avoid activities or situations in which they felt 1304
inadequate. Future research could clarify this conjecture. 1305

The men expressed more anxiety than the women about 1306
learning, which the men seemed to view as an obligation. 1307
They appeared to be driven by the desire to advance their 1308
knowledge and skills so that they could more easily fit in 1309
with and thus feel more comfortable among those who were 1310
raised Orthodox, whose education in the sacred texts began 1311
when they were children. Both men and women spoke 1312
more about the activity of learning than the subject they 1313
were studying. According to Heilman (1983), men's 1314
Talmud classes are a ritualized activity that offers many 1315
kinds of benefits other than learning, such as fellowship, 1316
cultural performance, and social belonging. Only the 1317
women spoke about enjoying the social contexts in which 1318
their learning took place. This supports our interpretation 1319
that the men's learning activities were a reaction to feelings 1320
of inadequacy and were remedial. 1321

In contrast to the men, the women relished their 1322
educational activities. Using a gender lens, we view the 1323
women's excitement as resistance against the Orthodox 1324
community's focus on men's learning (Aviad 1983). The 1325
women, many of whom have graduate degrees from secular 1326
universities, are intellectually oriented. Operating in a 1327
religious world that privileges men, the women seem to 1328
crave the education they are missing and seek intellectual 1329
stimulation and growth. They want to increase their 1330
knowledge of Judaism and incorporate it into their lives. 1331
Their excitement is shared by other Orthodox women who 1332
have been studying sacred texts (Greenberg 2000). 1333

This research extends the findings of social scientists 1334
who have researched *baalei teshuvah* by using an interview 1335
sample of men and women who have lived as and reflected 1336
on their lives as Orthodox Jews. We found that making a 1337
status transition to Orthodox Judaism has a differential 1338
impact on men and women, creating more anxiety in men 1339
than women. The pressures on men to be knowledgeable 1340
and perform adequately in Orthodox religious spaces were 1341
implicit in Danzger's (1989) study. Like Kaufman (1991) 1342
and Davidman (1991), we found that the women do not 1343
overtly find their gender roles limiting and they revel in 1344
community. We add to their findings by recognizing 1345
women's passion for learning, men's self-consciousness, 1346
and men's and women's deep spiritual strivings. 1347

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AUTHOR QUERIES

AUTHOR PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUERIES.

- Q1. Aviad 1983; Jacobs 2003 were cited here but appears to be missing from the reference list.
Please check.
- Q2. Kaufman 1985; Pargament 1997 occurred in the reference list but was not cited in the text.
Please check.

UNCORRECTED PROOF