Bar Ilan University

Uncovering the Story:
The Experiences of Modern Orthodox Married Women
who Remove their Head Covering in Mid-Life

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT I

AUTHOR'S NOTE 1

INTRODUCTION 5

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 8

1. WOMEN'S BODIES 8
1.1. WOMEN'S BODIES AND THE DISCIPLINE OF GENDER 8
1.2. WOMEN'S BODIES IN RELIGIOUS TRADITION 9
2. HAIR AND THE FEMALE IDENTITY 11
2.1. HAIR AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL AND A TOOL OF IDENTITY 11
2.2. HAIR AS RESISTANCE 12
3. FEMINISM AND RELIGION AT THE CROSSROADS 12
3.1. MODERN AND ORTHODOXJUDAISM: THE CONFLICT 12
3.2. HARMONY VS. DISSONANCE 14
4. MEETING AT A CROSSROAD 14
4.1. WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN MIDLIFE 15
Women's Psychology 16
Midlife 17
4.2. MOTHERHOOD 19

METHODOLOGY 20

1. NARRATIVE RESEARCH- A WINDOW TO A WIDER WORLD 20
2. THE PARTICIPANTS 21
3. THE INTERVIEW 22

CIRCLES 25

1. SELF-CIRCLE 28
1.1. A NEW IDENTITY? 28
1.2. IF IT HURTS, WHY DO IT? 29
1.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MIDLIFE IDENTITY 29
1.4. THE EMOTIONAL "SELF" 37
2. CIRCLE OF LIFE PARTNERS 40
2.1. HUSBANDS AS BUILDING BLOCKS OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES 41
2.2. HUSBANDS: SUPPORTIVE, INDIFFERENT, AND UNENTHUSIASTIC 43
2.3. MUTUALLY INFLUENCING RELATIONSHIP 44

3. CIRCLE OF CHILDREN 49
3.1. MOTHERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION 50
3.2. FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOTHERING 55
3.3. SUPPORTIVE CHILDREN 58
3.4. EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION? 60
4. CIRCLE OF FAMILY 62
4.1. MOTHERS 62
4.2. FATHERS 63
4.3. FAMILY 64
5. RELIGION/HALACHA CIRCLE 69
5.1. WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH *HALACHA* 70
5.2. METHODS OF COPING WITH *HALACHA* 70
5.3. USING *HALACHIK* TOOLS 71
5.4. THE RELEVANCE OF *HALACHA* 72
5.5. *HALACHA* USED TO BE DIFFERENT 73
6. WHY IN MIDLIFE? 74
6.1. THE "GUARDIAN" THEORY 74
6.2. RELATIONAL CULTURAL DISASSOCIATION THEORY 77
6.3. WHY REMAIN RELIGIOUS? 79
6.4. DISTINGUISH HALACHA and RABBINIC AUTHORITIES 84
7. CIRCLE OF FRIENDS 89
7.1. FRIENDS AS BUILDING BLOCKS OF IDENTITY 89
7.2. DIFFERENT FRIENDSHIP FOR DIFFERENT TIMES 91
8. CIRCLE OF GENERAL SOCIETY 94

TAKING OFF THE HEAD COVERING 99

1. FEAR 99
2. AESTHETICS 99
3. "MY BODY IS MINE" – FEMINIST THOUGHT IN UNCOVERING 103

REMAINING AT A CROSSROAD 106

1. SCHACTER'S FOUR IDENTITY STRUCTURES 107
2. CLOSED IDENTITY VS. OPEN IDENTITY 109
3. ONE IDENTITY FOR ONE SITUATION AND ANOTHER FOR THE SECOND 112
4. MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT 113
5. SYNAGOGUE: INCONSISTENCY OR OPEN IDENTITY? 116

MIDLIFE 118

1. SEARCHING FOR AN IDENTITY – AT THE AGE OF 50 118
2. I DON'T CARE WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK ANYMORE 122

3. DO WOMEN HAVE MIDLIFE IDENTITY CRISES, TOO? 125

CONCLUSION 126

REFERENCES 131

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of married, Modern Orthodox Jewish women who during midlife removed their head covering. It centers on the way the women negotiate with the experience of living within their society and with themselves. For this purpose one-to-one, in-depth personal interviews were conducted with fifteen married women who removed their head covering in midlife. Along the study, their experiences were considered firstly through the lens of their identity and those around them, secondly through their reasoning for removing their head covering, thirdly through their negotiation with their multiple values and multiple selves and lastly through the prism of their positioning in midlife.

Whereas rational reasoning, *halachik* solutions and even feminist perspective may appease those searching for the rational of these women's decisions, the terminology did not respect the women's engagement, agency or complex experience, and paradoxically contributed to silencing and compressing the women to conform into preconceived notions of epistemology.

What emerged from the women's voices was an awakening of the multiple self in midlife. A nuanced, complex and multifaceted experience, which allowed the women to discover and rediscover aspects of their identity while in constant flux and negotiation with the dictates of society and religion, without necessitating the abandonment of either.

Author's Note

The practice of *halacha*, otherwise known as Jewish law and jurisprudence, is one of the tenets of an Orthodox lifestyle (*Encyclopedia Judiaica vol. 15*, 2nd ed., 2007, p. 493). *Halacha* is described as:

> *…the entire body of Jewish law, from scripture to the latest rabbinical rulings. It is a complete system of law governing every aspect of human life. It has been traditionally viewed as wholly rooted in God's revealed will (B. T., Ḥag. 3b) but subject to the ongoing interpretation of the Jewish jurists (B. T., B. M. 59b) (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 6 2nd edition, 2005, p. 3747).*

Therefore, it is understood that in Orthodox homes, *halacha* is supposed to be followed in all aspects of life. The *halacha* discussed in this study is the *halacha* of head covering, which is expected for a woman to take upon herself on the occasion of her marriage (*Encyclopedia Judiaica vol. 8* 2nd ed, 2007, p. 506).

As one who was raised in the Modern Orthodox Jewish world, the acceptance of this *halacha* was expected. It was part of the educational system, and although my Modern Orthodox upbringing assured that the practice was looked upon with a critical eye, the conclusion was clear. It was a rabbinical commandment, if not a biblical one, and there was no way around it. So as a young, committed, religious woman, I covered my hair from the day after my wedding.

And yet even before I had put on my head covering, I felt an emotional and rational dissonance between the practice and my own beliefs as a woman who lived with at least one foot in the modern world. I realized almost immediately that despite my acceptance of the custom, I would probably decrease my level of observance over time. I predicted this as I saw this happen to others around me and since I assumed that the practice would be hard for me because of my deep rooted awareness of the injustice done to women by the construct of culture that excluded

them from the narrative and prevented them from achieving agency. I decided early on that I should cover my hair as stringently as possible so that the when the time came when I would want to reduce my head covering stringency, I would have maneuverability (wearing a braid, wearing loose hair under a hat, etc.), so as not to abandon the custom in its entirety.

As the years wore on, my head covering became more and more of a symbolic measure. In addition, the dissonance I felt in the beginning of my marriage grew. I began to ask myself why I was wearing a head covering at all. I knew all the *halachik* reasons for head covering and found that I could not bring myself to make that break from tradition on what I judged as an "emotional whim". If I chose to put this practice aside, where would it end? If I was to take matters into my own hands, then what was to stop me from doing so with other commandments?

Rationality was a good reason to do so, I reasoned. If I could prove that the practice was outdated or irrelevant, I could explain to myself and others that this is not a "slippery slope" – I was not putting aside the authority of rabbinical figures. I was simply adapting to the times in which we live. Others, too, may agree with me, I told myself, if they looked at the *halacha* without the constraints or the burden of their position. Although *halackicaly* there was a rationality that could be leaned on to justify women who chose to uncover their hair or at least suggest that they were not defying a biblical prohibition ["It might be that there is no biblical obligation of hair covering at all" (Broyde, 2009, p. 173)], through my search, I found that the answer was not in a *halachik* rationality but in a different epistemological framework of knowledge. Through the study of women and their subjugation, I found that I felt like I was walking around daily with a sign of oppression on my head. This understanding was enough for me to remove my head covering once and for all.

And yet, it was still a process. In my personal life, at home, on the Sabbath, in synagogue surrounded by my friends were the places I found it was easiest to remove my head covering. There I was representing my true identity. Rosh Hashana[1] was the first day I took it off, and the first place I went without a head covering was synagogue, feeling that I had found myself and was representing my true identity. In the workplace surrounded by strangers was the place I was more fearful of judgment and delayed taking off my head covering there for another few months.

And then I began to question how other women came to this decision. Many books, blogs, articles, etc. were written about putting on head covering, celebrating the spirituality of the practice, the beauty of it, the joy found in it. I felt that there was a lack in narratives by women who chose to take it off. Not those who were divorced (which is accepted by many rabbis as a legitimate reason to remove head covering), nor by those who chose not to be observant any longer. I wished to hear the story of my peers: those who took it off still believing in the institution of Modern Orthodoxy; those who, by taking it off, understood that they were defying the words of those same rabbis who they were obeying and respecting in other parts of their lives.

I perceived their actions as brave, as challenging, through the prism of my own story, and yet I knew that not everyone shared my thoughts and feelings. What was their story? How did they did they perceive their actions? What were their thoughts? How do they see their actions in light of their continued categorizing of themselves as Modern Orthodox, which intimates an observance of the commandments as set by rabbinical authorities? How do they perceive their actions through the eyes of those around them? Who did they consider when making their decision?

[1] The Jewish New Year

In this study, I attempt to address these questions by listening to the narratives of those whose experience is most magnified, those whose decision is part of a deep, entrenched involvement. The interviewed women of this study are in their midlives, who have in many instances been wearing their head covering for many years, identifying themselves as one who covers their hair, who may or may not have built their identity for years around the basic fact that they cover their hair. These women have decided after many years to take off their head covering and I wish to delve into their experiences in order to learn about the phenomenon.

When pondering the issue, it became clear that this subject represents a much bigger question of how many women within Modern Orthodoxy negotiate or outright ignore the seemingly glaring juxtaposition between their religious praxis and their secular values. How do they negotiate the seeming contradiction in their life? Do they see a contradiction? Who helps and supports them in this path? Are they comfortable with their decision? Head covering is just an example of the many instances that are inherent in Modern Orthodoxy, which this paper will not address. Modern Orthodox Judaism promotes a melding of secular and modern life, of what may appear as conflicting to the outside observer. Therefore, using the topic of hair covering as a starting point, one can see the contradictions that exist in the Modern Orthodox world.

Introduction

The regularization of women's bodies through dress, as well as perceiving women's bodies as a locus for management and oppression, is a topic discussed at length by feminist theorists (Arthur 1999; Bordo 1993, 1997; Butler1990, 1991, 1993; Eilberg-Schwartz 1995; Nussbaum 1999; Okin 1999; Polhemus 1978; Rich 1980; Sanday 1982; Turner 1996). Other feminists scholars identify these oppressions through cultural symbols, such as the Hijab and Abaya in Muslim society and the over exposure of the body in Western society (Al-Qasimi, 2010; Bakhtiar, 1996; Bronner, 1993; Clark, 2007; Davary, 2009; El Guindi, 1999; Greer, 1971; Syncott, 1987). In resistance to this phenomenon, women in several cultures have attempted to take control of their bodies by covering/uncovering them in direct opposition to society's dictates. The manifestation of this discourse in religious Judaism can also be found with regards to the issue of covering one's head (Bronner, 1993; Scrieber, 2003; Seigelshifer, 2006; Weiss, 2009).

Orthodox Judaism dictates that a woman must cover her hair from the moment of her marriage. The cultural discourse abiding by this custom is rampant in the religious Orthodox world and can be found in oral, as well as written sources; the rationale behind the praxis, however, is more diverse (Bronner, 1993; Scrieber, 2003; Seigelshifer, 2006; Weiss, 2009). Understanding the practice as a commandment of God, a societal norm, a way to fit in, or an instrument that enables a connection with God were some of the reasoning shared by the women of this research.

And yet, the phenomenon of women who live within the Modern Orthodox Jewish world in Israel today, who have chosen to make a life changing decision by removing their head covering while still married—which is forbidden by Jewish jurisprudence—is the issue

heuristically observed in this paper. The paper will investigate the understanding behind these women's decisions to uncover their heads and ultimately try to render the meanings behind this decision. What was their influence and what enabled them? With whom did they negotiate with as they removed their head covering and how did they understand the act of uncovering itself? Whether they viewed their act as a political statement is also a noteworthy point, and if it was, the act can thereby be related as a feminist discourse to conceptualize the process they went through and the decision they made.

Moreover, the responses to the multiple—and at times conflicting—identities of those who live within and give credence and authority to an oppressing society, can be graphed on a dichotomous scale. The paths most often taken are either accepting the authority of religion while casting aside any opposing thoughts, or choosing to leave the religion, deeming it too hopeless to fix. The women in this study seem to reject this dichotomy while attempting to straddle and negotiate multiple values (Gilligan, 1988; Hartman, 2007, 2013; Hirschman, 1970), such as the secular vs. religious; being a mother vs. an individual; her husband's concerns vs. her own concerns, etc. and other values that are addressed in this study. How do these women make sense of their decision? And how do they perceive religious society's reaction to them?

Furthermore, the women in this study are women in their midlives. Changes made in the lives of individuals in midlife are often dismissed as a midlife crisis. However, dismissing a truly life altering decision as merely a midlife crisis disrespects the experience of the individual and relegates them to pathology. It dishonors the agency in their decision and the thought process they underwent. This paper will explore how these women experienced life changes during this time in their lives. How did they come to revisit a decision they made years ago and how do they make decisions in this point of their life? What enabled them to change? How did they choose to

relate and represent their experiences to their children, as agents of socialization, to their partners, and to their communities? Literature of women in midlife is lacking (Gergen, 1990; Lippert, 1997; Mcquaide, 1998), and therefore, there is a need to give a voice to this group, to understand their perspective, and to respect and dignify their decision.

Lastly, a psychological theory has arisen in the latter part of the last century that describes the self through relationships, which seems to describe the experiences of the women in this study more accurately. Existing research in relational psychology pertaining to midlife is small, especially with regards to women in midlife. Through the application of relational psychology theories, this paper will examine the developmental process of women in their midlife through the prism of this religious dilemma. There does not seem to be any literature that specifically considers women's subjective experiences in removing their head covering, nor that deals with the implications their age, roles as mothers, and what their status in the community has had on their decision. The issue in and of itself is a feminist one, since it draws its roots from women's experiences of womanhood, motherhood, and marriage.

The value of this study is multifaceted. Firstly, it is a study that enables women's voices that have never been expressed, out of fear or lack of worth, to be heard. Second, its goal is to understand women's growth in relationships, to recognize how women's relationships with others and with themselves develop in midlife. By studying the development of women as they cope with the issue of religious alternatives with regards to their head coverings, these relationships become apparent. And lastly, it shows how these women negotiate the issue of multiple values in their life, constantly negotiating with religion and themselves as they build their identity

Theoretical Framework

The act of head covering engages many aspects in women's lives. The following section touches upon the discourses relevant to the research brought here. Each sub-title brings forth a short background on each discourse: the body, hair and female identity. Modern Orthodox Judaism converges with modern feminism, and issues relevant to women in the time period of this research—female psychology, midlife, and motherhood—are addressed in relation to Modern Orthodoxy.

1. Women's Bodies

Despite bodies being external, the choices made as to the external form of the body is symbolic of many internal processes. Women, who have historically had little control over the content of the messages and symbolism chosen, have had those messages and symbols dictated to them. Understanding society's dynamics with the body is pertinent in order to understand the symbolism of the act of head covering.

1.1. Women's Bodies and the Discipline of Gender

The body, in general, and the female body, specifically, have been widely discussed, creating various and diverse theories as to the understanding of the concept of "body" (Bordo, 1993; Conboy, et al. 1997; Douglas, 1973; Grosz, 1994; Price and Shildrick, 1999; Weitz, 1998; Young, 1990). Theorists of the body claim that control over the body's corporality is a symbol of social control over individuals and groups (Arthur, 1999; Douglas, 1966; Turner, 1984). Thus, in every patriarchal society, patriarchy's management of women's bodies implicitly symbolizes the social control over women, enacting oppression upon their bodies.

Michael Foucault (1979) claims that the body is a site of subtle social and cultural disciplines upon which power relations are played:

> *[I]t is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission […] The body is… directly involved in a political field… This political investment of the body is bound up in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination… the body becomes a useful force only if it [is] both a productive and subjected body (Michael Foucault, 1979, p. 25-26).*

This idea can be applied to all patriarchal societies where patriarchal ideals are expressed through customs and practices on women's bodies. Society's dictation to cover or uncover women's bodies can be understood as a form of these disciplines.

In accordance with the theory that women's bodies are a site for the power struggle of social control, taking back control over their bodies can assist women in the resistance of patriarchy's domination. Indeed, there are women who use their bodies openly (De Luca, 1999; Parkins, 2000; Peterson, 2001) and subversively (Arditti, 1999; Butler, 1990; Fisher, 1993) as carriers of political messages opposing gender subordination of women (Davis, 1997; Frank, 1991; Weitz, 2001). Similarly, women who defy accepted cultural dictations to cover or uncover their bodies are also resisting oppressive norms, which subordinate women. Do the women removing their head covering, an action that opposes societal dictations in the Orthodox Jewish world, express similarities to these agendas?

1.2. Women's Bodies in Religious Tradition

Various practices of covering women's bodies can be found rooted within the religious dictates of different religions. Devout Muslim society regulates the wearing of the Hijab and Abaya and covering women's bodies (El Guindi, 1999), while Jewish tradition demands the

covering of women's knees, elbows, and collar bones as well as hair[2]. These religious dictates and regulations are considered by some to be an oppressive means, whose goal is to dominate women (Berktay, 1998; Sered, 2000).

Hartman, a professor specializing in gender and religion explained in her book "Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism :Resistance and Accommodation" (2007) that some religious leaders rationalize these oppressive means and control women's covering of their bodies by quoting traditional and textual sources. Jewish religious leaders use the dichotomous division of characteristics (Descartes, 1647, 1649) in order to equate women with physicality and men with intellect (Ortner, 1972). In his book, *On the Generation of Animals*, Book II: (Aristotle 3), Aristotle's view of woman as a flawed male correlates to Jewish thought on the sin of Eve, equating women with shame and over-sexualization, as well as deeming them responsible for perpetually considering how their body may affect the men gazing upon them.

> *This Platonic paradigm, espoused by Philo and reclaimed with a vengeance by Maimonides, regarded woman as animalistically oversexed, incapable of controlling her base urges, whereas the "real man : was seen as impenetrably in control, serene governor of all things physical- including , but not limited too, his own body. Woman's putative vulnerability to her sexual urges serves not only as a sign of her inferiority to man; it embodied precisely the type of base physicality he was to contain. It is in the service of this containment that much of the regulation of woman to the private sphere, and the demand that she cover herself extensively when in public, can be understood." (Hartman 2007, p. 50).*

[2] Women in the Orthodox Jewish world adhere to this modest dress code. Women in Modern Orthodox setting can be found wearing variations of the dress code. The variations of women's dress vary from short sleeves, to sleeves above the elbows, sleeves below the elbows, sleeves to the wrist, etc. (The same can be said about skirt lengths and necklines.)

2. Hair and the Female Identity

Head covering covers not only the head but the hair as well. Different variations of Orthodox Judaism cover the hair in varying degrees, from covering just the top of the hair, whereas more ultra-Orthodox and Charadi Jewish women will cover all of their hair. Understanding the symbolism of hair is a necessity in order to consider the implications covering ones hair may have and the subliminal messages it sends.

2.1. Hair as a Cultural Symbol and a Tool of Identity

Hair is a powerful symbol. Its power comes firstly from its physical aspect, which makes it very personal and reflects the "self," and secondly because, despite its personal aspect, it is publically viewable (Leach, 1958). In addition, hair is malleable and therefore has the ability to symbolize changes and differentiations in group and individual identities (Myrerowitz Levine, 1995, p. 85; Synnott, 1987).

The importance of hair in constructing identity can be found in cases where hair is not present, having been cut or shaved, such as with skinheads, soldiers, monks, and prisoners. The shaved head represents an erasure of an individual identity in order to comply with a secondary society, which is seen as more important. Accounts of female cancer patients and how they felt as though their identities were in question after losing their hair strengthen the meaningful connection between hair and personal identity (McGarvey, et al. 2001; Weitz, 2004).

An additional role of hair is to differentiate between the two sexes. The physiological differences are slight but the cultural ramifications are great (Syncott, 1987). This paper delves into how the women in this study experienced their identities with regards to their hair. How did

removing their head covering and revealing their hair affect their identity as an individual and within their community?

2.2. Hair as Resistance

Hair, similar to the body, can be used as a tool to resist societal norms. Feminists found hair to be an ideologically expressive tool, used as a political instrument to express their opposition to patriarchal norms and its oppressive aspects (Patton, 2006, pg. 45; Syncott, 1987; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 337-340). Moreover, just as hair can be used to symbolize an acceptance of cultural dictates, by dressing and styling it in adherence to acknowledged ideas of beauty and cultural fashions, so by choosing hairstyles that are not accepted or deemed by society as "acceptable", hair can symbolize a resistance to cultural dictates (Weitz, 2001). How did the women in this study frame the uncovering of their heads? How did they experience the act of publicly dressing their hair in a manner that negated accepted hair styles in their community?

3. Feminism and Religion at the Crossroads

3.1. Modern and Orthodox Judaism: The Conflict

Traditional religion presents a great challenge for those who adhere to feminist beliefs since religion is strongly rooted in patriarchal hierarchies (Adler, 1998; Daly, 1968; Hampson, 1996; Plaskow, 1991, 1995; Ross, 2004). Some have chosen to leave religion because of what they see as an irreconcilable conflict. The women in this study have decided to stay within religion in a group called Modern Orthodoxy.

Modern Orthodoxy has been discussed at length by many theorists and feminists (Hartman, 2007, Schachter, 2004; 2000 שגיא ;2006 רביצקי; ;2008 קהת ;2006 רוזנק):

> *"Speaking generally… what is shared is 1) a sense of deep grounding in the halakhic process; 2) an alignment with the centrist and ultra-Orthodox Jews in its organizational , social and religious moods; and 3) its level of respect for/submission to common authoritative sources." (Hartman, 2007, p. 7)*

Orthodox Judaism is a religion that is rooted within the traditional *halachik* praxis and is socially, organizationally, and religiously loyal to traditional, authoritative sources. It perceives modernity as an opportunity, which can be integrated to the extent that it does not transgress the boundaries of the *halachik* praxis.

Others differ slightly from Hartman in their definition, yet all discuss the inherent multiplicity of values of modernity and Orthodoxy ensconced in the definition of Modern Orthodoxy. One of the ways Modern Orthodox Judaism copes with these multiple values is by compartmentalizing secular truths, to the secular realm, or by harmonizing modern values and beliefs with religious ones. As two distinguished scholars of Jewish studies explain:

> *"Their adapted acculturation has inclined them to synthesize or compartmentalize their lives so they can exist simultaneously in the parochial world of Orthodoxy and the more cosmopolitan one of modern America without feeling the constant pressure of inconsistency"(Heilman & Cohen,1989, p. 18).*

Feminism is compartmentalized by Modern Orthodoxy, seen as unable to be integrated with a *halachik* lifestyle, deeming it dangerous and oppositional (Greenberg 1998; Weintraub 2007). Feminism is perceived as a threat to Orthodox hegemonic tradition, incurring a deep sociological fear of change within those in power:

> *"The third reason for the traditional Jewish resistance to the feminist challenge—although this isn't always openly articulated—derives from the widespread fear that feminist ideology poses an underlying threat to Jewish survival. Not lost on today's Jewish leadership is the fact that Modernism has taken a great toll on the Jewish faithful— and so may feminism, the reasoning goes." (Greenberg 1998, p. 5),*

The reasons for such fear is a clashing of values between time held traditions and passing modern fads (Greenberg, 1998; קהת 2008). Feminism identifies with social movements rejected by Modern Orthodoxy. Hartman explains succinctly how feminism represents the ultimate modern fad, and therefore Orthodox Judaism must take an "aggressively defensive stance" against it:

> *"Much of Modern Orthodoxy has constructed its self-conception upon notions of who it is not, and in doing so has carved out a narrow stretch of identity that cuts off from many potentially enriching spiritual and intellectual resources… this negative identity may help to account for Modern Orthodoxy's taking such an aggressively defensive stance against feminism."(Hartman, 2007, p. 14).*

3.2. Harmony vs. Dissonance

There are many theories on the construction of modern identity. Two theories offer a seemingly opposing look at the issue. One argues that a healthy identity is a coherent whole (Erikson, 1958; Marcia, 1966), while the other claims that an inconsistent identity is more fitting in contemporary society (Bauman, 1995; Gergen, 1991). Individuals choose which identity they want to construct: one that requires a consistent reasoning for all their actions or one that accepts and embraces the inconsistencies in their life (Hartman, 2007; Kehat, 2001, 2008; Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Schachter, 2002).The decision made by an individual is heavily dependent on his or her objectives (Schachter, 2004). This paper explores which construction of identity the women in this study chose to take and how they cope with the multiple values that exist in their lives.

4. Meeting at a Crossroad

> *"Identity in women cannot be simply named, for it resides in the pattern that emerges as a woman stitches together an array of aspects of herself and her investment of others…". (Josselson, 1996, p. 9)*

As Josselson so eloquently explains, women entail within them many different aspects of themselves. These aspects at times complement each other and at other times contradict each other with each arraignment as a unique entity of itself. Despite the infinite possibilities, the women in this research meet at one specific crossroad in their life: midlife and motherhood. In order to understand their decision regarding the dilemma of hair covering, it is necessary to explain these two points in a woman's life.

4.1. Women's Psychological Development in Midlife

Jean Baker Miller wrote in the forward of her book "Toward a New Psychology" (1986) that

> *"…the notion that our understanding of all of life has been underdeveloped and distorted because our past explanations have been created by only one half of the human species" (p. xi).*

The psychology of women was ignored for centuries and only in the past few decades has any emphasis been put on the female experience as a unique, distinctive experience from men. New scholarship is filling the void. This thesis positions itself in this discourse and emphasizes the psychological aspects of women removing their head covering through the new, intuitive works on women's psychology.

Research on the psychology of women in midlife that corresponds with the new understanding of women's psychology is even rarer. While the study of women's psychology emerged in the latter half of the past century, it has until now all been amalgamated and consolidated into one study, with no differentiation between the different stages or time periods in a women's life. But it is clearly understandable that women's psychology changes in the different periods of their lives. McQuaide wrote:

> *The major studies of midlife development have been made by male investigators looking at male subjects. The results of these studies, like those of research on heart disease, have been applied to women with the assumption that what was true for the ganger was true for the goose.(1998, p. 21)*

McQuaide wrote this in 1998, and even then pointed out that midlife no longer denotes that same experience researched years ago. Therefore, any research on the psychology of male subjects regarding midlife changes is no longer relevant. If this was true for 1998, it is even more so true today. *50 is the new 40*, the popular saying goes[3]. And for women of the twenty-first century, this could not be a more relevant saying. Women's reproductive abilities have extended into their late forties, so women are starting their married lives later. The effect age has on women's careers has changed: more women join or rejoin the workforce at an older age and the workplace is more sensitive to women being good workers as well as mothers. These two significant changes demand a need for continual research on the experience of women in midlife in order to fill the void of the ever-changing experience of the modern woman. This research finds itself in the unique position to supplement the newly ever-growing literature of women in their midlife in regards to the way they experience their identity.

Women's Psychology

In aspects of Western psychology, the "self" has been categorized since the twentieth century as a concrete identity whose goal of development is to achieve an autonomous identity (Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1920, 1925; Jordon, et al. 1991; Levinson, 1978; Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). An additional understanding of identity of the "self" arose parallel to this classical perspective, that denotes that the self is a product of a relational, communal identity (Baldwin, 1879, 1968; Cooley, 1902, 1968; Gergen, 1991; Jordon, et al. 1991; Mead, 1925, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Various feminist psychologists in the past several decades began to

[3] Depending on what decade one is in.

conceptualize a new understanding of women's development based on this very different idea of identity (Chodrow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982, 2011; Miller, 1986), termed "self-in-relation" (Jordon, 1984, 1985, 1987; Kaplan, 1984; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1984; Surrey, 1985). This refers to a relational theory that emphasizes relationship and connection, suggesting that one's "self" is formed by connections with others. Relational theories in psychology are uniquely appropriate for the understanding of women's psychology as they shed new light on previously unappreciated characteristics and values of women, subsequently enhancing and legitimizing them. Through the prism of relational psychology, this paper will study how the relationships of the women in this research influenced their decision to uncover their heads.

Midlife

Roberta Rubenstein stated that scholars who are versed and educated in the subject of aging are not certain themselves when midlife begins – some say from the age of 30, while others give the cryptic answer: "When the culture gets you to say you [are middle-aged]" (Rubenstein p. 2001). She suggested that aging is a newer version of "the problem with no name", hinting that feminists have not yet "named" the problem in a way that enables women to create alternatives to the negative discourse on midlife. Indeed, Simone de Bouvior (1949) pointed out that the time between "maturity" and "old age" is a problematic one for women since society does not stipulate a specific function for them. Previously, a woman would simply become old when she was stripped of the functions of maternity and fertility (Gergen 1990). Today, this concept is no longer fully accurate, especially with the advancement of life expectancy. Women in their midlife are nowhere near ready to give up their socially designated roles, such as maternity, and society has begun to respond to the "new" midlife emerging, delegating new roles and characteristics to women in midlife. Nonetheless, many women still

view and associate midlife as a negative deterioration of a once active and full life (McQuaide, 1998; Rubenstein, 2001).

Contrary to the assessment that women in their midlives are old, have finished their psychological development, and are of no use to society, midlife is a period of flourishing in ways that are conducive to social concerns and agency (Gilbert, 1993; Guttman, 2008; Niemela & Lento, 1993; Rossi, 1980; Rupp, 2001). In the book "Revising Yourself", Ruthellen Josselson concurred that some women find midlife as a time to flourish. She addressed the various paths women take in life from adolescence through midlife to adulthood and described the conflicts and challenges that they experience.

> *Each of us confronts a different challenge in fashioning our identity. We begin with different pieces, different experiences, and realities. Natural talents, physical attractiveness, social privilege, temperament, social ease, physical limitations, and traumatic early experiences- all these building blocks that we must fit into design. Each of us has been offered different puzzle pieces with which we must assemble complete pictures. We must each make something of ourselves. If we don't, our society will provide us an identity from the bag of deviant labels it has for people who don't create it for themselves (Josselson, 1996, p. 29-30).*

Josselson asserted that while we are given opportunities to become the individuals that we are through various avenues, almost like "puzzle pieces", if we do not "make something of ourselves", then society will make us into what it believes we should be. How much more so is it important to have a strong sense of identity when a woman is in her midlife, where her roles in life have changed, and she can reestablish, remold, her identity?

> *Identity, however, is complex and cannot be stated simply. We are not the same in all regions of our lives, and how we make meaning may change across situations or over time. Identity is what integrates our own diversity, gives meaning to disparate parts of ourselves, and relates them to one another. Identity is how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in the world. I am a woman, but my identity as a*

> *woman is my unique way of being woman in the culture in which I live. And so on with the other aspects of my (or your) identity. (Josselson 1996, p. 29-30)*

Josselson attempted to give a more authentic outlook than the overly simplistic theory of female development suggested until now by male researchers based on male experience. Her depiction of midlife was of a varied, relational experience. Moreover, the women in this research perceived midlife as a time in their lives in which they could develop aspects of themselves neglected while fulfilling expected societal roles. The research gave a voice to these aspects of midlife.

4.2. Motherhood

Culture dictates that all women, whether mothers or not, are defined by their motherhood (Letherby, 1994; Sweeney, 2006) and are asked to put aside parts of their identity for the good of their children (Marshall, 1991). One might speculate how Marshall could propose that a childless woman puts a part of her identity aside for her children if she has none, but perhaps the woman's identity, of being childless, automatically puts a label on her identity specifically because she lacks children, still putting aside a part of her identity. Thus an essential aspect of the identity of women, as mothers, is their position as agents of socialization.

And yet Hartman stated that "the socializing role is complicated by the fact that the community's notion of socialization is sometimes at odds with what these women hope to achieve" (Hartman, 2002, p. 57). Numerous women feel a dissonance between their cultural roles as agents of socialization and the personal values they wish to emulate (Hartman, 2002; Schachter & Ventura, 2008).The women in this study were situated in a place that reflects the complexity of this issue. How did the issues that arose from their motherhood influence their experience in removing their head covering?

Methodology

The subjective experiences of married women ages 38-55 (known in the research as "midlife") , who decided to remove their hair covering while situating themselves in the Modern Orthodox world, was explored in order to give voice to an otherwise 'silent' experience. Firstly, consideration was given to the circles of identity of each of the women; the relationships with themselves and others who affected them or who they affected with their experience. In particular interest to this research was the decision-making process of an individual who lives within a framework of an accepted legal system, such as the *halachik* system within the Orthodox Jewish world; of a private, independent choice within a structure and community that lives within the normative system. Moreover, the relationship between midlife and decisions made in a woman's midlife were addressed and highlighted.

1. Narrative Research- A Window to a Wider World

In order to address these questions, fifteen individual, semi-structured, qualitative narrative interviews were conducted. The qualitative, narrative method is unique in giving voice to its narrators (Josselson, et. al. 2003; Gilligan, 1997) since it enables a sensitivity and emphasis on listening (Reinhartz, 1992). It facilitates a representation of self and the connection between the multiple parts of self (Polkinghorne, 1988; McAdams, 1993, 1997). Furthermore, it portrays society's and culture's roles in a narrative as a central factor in understanding the reality of an occurrence (Bruner, 1986; Lieblich, et al 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988).

> *"People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to one's experience and have a central role in our communication with others."(Lieblich, Zeilber, &Tuval-Machiach 1998).*

Qualitative, narrative research is the method chosen for this paper, since it best helps cognize the life stories and subjective experiences of these women, who have negotiated multiple values, some of which stem from social constructs of religion and womanhood. Narrative research is the most appropriate method in order to understand how women experience reality (Lieblich, Zeilber, & Tuval-Machiach 1998). The best way to understand their narratives is by creating a dialogue in which the participant leads the interview to the places she feels comfortable sharing and experiences a need to speak about (צבר2001). It allows the participant to give meaning to her experience within a cultural, social context (צבר2001) and discuss previously unspoken issues in an open and inclusive manner (DeVault 1999). Feminist methodology acknowledges that both the researcher and participant influence each other in hidden and revealed ways (Oakley, 1981) and therefore it is vital that trust and respect exist (DeVault, 1999).

2. The Participants

The participants in this study are married women with children, who live in Israel (in the greater Jerusalem area), between the ages of 38-55, and who situated themselves in the Modern Orthodox community. They all consider themselves Modern Orthodox, which was ascertained on the phone before the interview, and most grew up in Modern Orthodox homes or became religious or more observant later in life. As life expectancy expands, as was explained earlier, it seemed to be that many of the women in their fifties onward are dealing with similar issues of motherhood, work, and status in the community similar to those in their forties, and have therefore been included in this research group.

Thirteen interviews were conducted. The participants were contacted either by their publications on the subject, joint acquaintances, or at the time of the interview, the women themselves recommended other women they knew to join the study. This is known in theory as a snowball sample (Patton,1990).

3. The Interview

The interviews were open-ended and phenomenological, as explained best by Irving Seidman:

> *The method combines life history interviewing and focused in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology… In this approach, interviewers use primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study (Seidman, 1991, p. 15).*

The dialog began with the opening statement from the interviewer: "I am interviewing women who uncovered their head. Please, tell me your story". The interview then developed through their answers, while **I** listened to the way the women chose to frame their story, their feelings, and experience with regards to the subject. It was imperative that the women spoke in their own words in order to prevent distorting their experience with preconceived concepts and terminology (Fontana & Frey, 1998; Kvale, 1996). Additional questions were asked to clarify and expand, though the goal throughout was to allow the story to unfold on its own. Interpreting and interrupting creates a risk of forming a narrative that is not the participant's (Josselson, 1996; Lindlof , 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Most of the interviews lasted an hour and a half and took place either in the home of the interviewee or interviewer. The remaining ones took place in the interviewee's workplace or public cafes. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew or English, depending on the mother

tongue of the interviewee. They were taped and then transcribed into written text. Any quotes used were transcribed into English with the utmost care put into correctly translating the interviewee's words. The names and details of the interviewees were changed in order to protect their anonymity, although all participants were aware that their interview was to be used in an academic thesis.

The interviews were analyzed through Carol Gilligan's voiced-centered analysis explained in her article "Exit-Voice Dilemmas in Adolescent Development" (1988). Gilligan, as a psychologist, suggested focusing on the multiple voices: the authentic self of the participant with the inclusion of the culture and its dictations in mind during the interview and afterwards when reviewing the interview. These multiple voices can be found through linguistic clues. Dana Jacks', also a psychologist explained the theory of the "I" and "Over-Eye" which aids finding linguistic clues, in her book "Silencing the Self"(1991).

These theories were used in order to work according to the thematic method, whose goal is to create an inclusive picture of the narrative in order to expose social-cultural contexts (שקדי,2003). The thematic method allows an understanding of the many perceptions of the participant on various issues. These may include *halacha*, feminism, motherhood, age, societal status and situation, etc., and how the participant perceives herself in juxtaposition to social constructs such as wife, mother, and part of a community. The fourth method of analysis is based on the differentiations between content, form, holistic readings, and categorical readings (Zilber, Tuval Mashiach, & Lieblich 2008), which allows an understanding of the central issues from several viewpoints, enabling better appreciation of the narrative.

An initial analysis using the thematic method was employed in the first reading of the transcribed interviews, allowing a holistic understanding of the main subject addressed by the interviewees and the societal, cultural, religious, and political framework their story took place in. A second reading allocated an understanding of the main relationships creating the web of relationships the women experienced vis-à-vis their head covering story. The third reading used Dana Jacks theory in order to find the linguistic clues "I" and "Over- Eye" intertwined in their narratives. Special attention was given to words of empowerment such as "I want", "I need", and "I know" in order to hear the "I" voice, as well as recurring words. Shifts in the "I" voice as opposed to the "we/they/ you" voice were noticeably present where the women took themselves out of the relationship. Voices of resistance as opposed to voices of culture were also paid attention to, as the meeting point between these women's inner world and cultural world. The meeting points of these two aspects of their identity often brought forth an easier and stronger narrative of the women as they spoke.

Qualitative research is based on the understanding that each woman's interview is her individual story and cannot represent any group. Rather, it stands on its own as one woman's experience at that specific time in the specific words she chooses (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Despite this, the hope is that the collective stories of all of the women may be worthy of the attention of others, not just those who felt connected to their experiences (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), enlightening through the complex and nuanced experiences of women who live in highly structuralized systems.

Circles

Head covering is a means of identity, internal as well as public, since "covering her hair is the Orthodox Jewish woman's expression of self" (Weiss, 2009, p. 102). Moreover, since "identity...is not just a private, individual manner... [but is rather] a complex negotiation between the person and a society" (Josselson, 1996, p. 31), this discussion can be approached with an understanding that by removing their head covering, these women made a statement regarding their identity to themselves and to society. The seemingly innocent act of removing their head covering can at times carry a deeper meaning and message about identity that even the women themselves might not have seen.

There are schools of thought in Western society where the "self" has been categorized as a concrete identity whose goal of development is to achieve an autonomous identity (Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1920, 1925; Jordon, et al. 1991; Levinson, 1978; Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). An additional understanding of identity of the self, developed parallel to this classical perspective, proposes the idea that the self is a product of a relational, communal identity (Baldwin, 1879, 1968; Cooley, 1902, 1968; Gergen, 1991; Jordon, et al. 1991; Mead, 1925, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Various feminist psychologists in the past several decades began to conceptualize a new understanding of women's development based on this very different idea of identity (Chodrow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986), termed "self-in-relation" (Jordon, 1984, 1985, 1987; Kaplan, 1984; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1984; Surrey, 1985). This refers to a relational theory that emphasizes relationships and connections, suggesting that one's "self" is formed by connections with others.

Identity, as explained by Josselson in her book "Revising Herself" (1996), is a web with many facets of ourselves and our relationships. Woman's identity is unique since it is a web

created by the many aspects of herself and her relationship with others. Growth in identity for women means finding room for the many parts of themselves, a process of "bridging what feels inner and necessary with what opportunities she has for expressing herself in interaction" (Josselson, 1996, p. 32). The identity created by the merging of those many aspects is then translated through the context of the society and culture in which the person lived (Josselson, 1996, p. 30).

Head covering, as previously mentioned, is a significant tool towards creating an understanding of a woman's identity within all aspects of her life. The removal of an object that until then acted as a lens into their identity as a religious person, an individual, and their connection to a community creates an opportunity to perceive the many aspects of their identity. The conflict that many times arises in their journey to remove their head covering allows them, and the outsider, a glimpse into who these women are and how they understand their lives in the intersection of the modern world and their religious world.

These findings are presented through the circles of relationships that create the identity of each of these women, since these "circles" seemed to arise repeatedly throughout the dialogues these women imparted. On close inspection of their stories, it is clear that each woman referred to the different circles that influenced the removal of her hair covering, to different circles in which the removal of her head covering influenced her life. Needless to say, these circles were not hermetic and many times one aspect was discussed in several circles. This melds with the understanding of relational psychology that claims that the "self" is not a separate "identity [that] weaves together all the aspects of ourselves and our various locations of ourselves with others and the larger society" (Josselson, 1996, p. 28). Since this thesis is based off of these women's

stories, in which they bring up their multiple circles and the understanding that it is all interconnected, it is vital to respect these circles and relationships they discuss.

In recognizing these women's identities, it was difficult to separate their identities from their relationships. This too, resonates with the literature of relational psychology that claims that woman's identity is created through self-in- relation (Jordon, 1984, 1985, 1987; Kaplan, 1984; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1984; Surrey, 1985). Within each category, both the women's thoughts about their identities as well as their thoughts about the relationships that are part of those identities are discussed.

The first circle, the "self-circle", encompasses the women's dialogue about their "selves" both in the present and throughout their journey of life. The second circle, the "circle of life partners", is their identity as wives; the third and fourth circles, the "circle of children" and the "circle of family", is their identity as mothers and daughters/sisters; the fourth circle, the "religion/*halacha* circle", is their identity as it relates to their religion; the fifth, the "circle of friends", is their identity as connected to their community; and the last circle, the "circle of general society", is their identity in relation to the larger world. The circles are presented in this order, since they begin with the most internal aspects of identity and continue towards the most external aspect. It is important to note that it has never been discussed as the order of importance in these women's lives and the circles often blend with each other**.**

1. Self-circle

The self-circle is an important circle to start with, since the women's decisions to uncover their hair began with an internal struggle that escalated into a physical, outward act, the act of uncovering their hair. When choosing to remove their head covering and reveal their hair, these women reached for previously hidden strands of their identity, disengaging from others. The feeling of loss of identity is true not only for those who cover their hair but also for those who chose to reveal it.

1.1. A New Identity?

The removal of a head covering, despite it being a very external, public act, reflects deeply on the identity of an individual. This is true in many cultural practices and anthropologist Edmund Leach concludes that "The general consensus was that hair stands for the total individual or for the soul, or for the individual' s personal power (mana)" (Leach, 1958, p. 160). The importance of hair in constructing an identity is undeniable (McGarvey, et al. 2001; Weitz, 2004). The loss of "public" hair, when putting on a head covering, as experienced by these women, revealed a whole new aspect of their identity within these women, as can be seen in other cases of loss of hair such as in female cancer patients. (McGarvey, et al. 2001; Weitz, 2004).

When choosing to remove their head covering and reveal their hair, these women once again drew on an, until now, ignored strand of their web of identity, while previous, prominent, strands withdrew. It seems that the feeling of loss of identity is true not only for those who cover their hair but also for those who chose to reveal it. "Head covering, in a certain way that for a very long time, it was part of who I was and it became an identity issue" (Wendy). "I mourn a little bit, the loss of that identity" (Tal). The feelings of loss expressed by both Wendy and Tal

emphasize two things. Firstly, that head covering had become an integral part of their identities after wearing it for many years. Secondly, that removing their head covering put them in a situation where they had to change their identities. It is clear from their words that it was impossible for them to continue with the same individual identities as before. Wendy' s use of the words “identity issue” hints that it was not something that was solved immediately and was rather a process.

1.2. If It Hurts, Why Do It?

One may wonder if the loss of identity is such an uncomfortable process, why anyone would choose to do so voluntarily. Some of the women shared that as they grew older, their need to proclaim their religious identity in such a public manner waned.

> *So I don’t care that much anymore. I feel good about myself and it was many hours of long process of building my own confidence in my life and feeling, you know, secure as a person, as a woman as, you know, with myself. (Tal)*

The women needed to be comfortable and confident with themselves before making such a seemingly easy, but in actuality very difficult, decision. “When I finally was able to …say I don’t really care what people think of me. I don’t care what they say about me, I can be myself. And it was wonderful” (Wendy). It seems that they felt less of a need to negotiate their identity with society; as time passed, society lost its power in shaping and creating these women’s identities.

1.3. The Significance of Midlife Identity

The question that now arises is why these women chose to change their identities in a later stage in their lives. What prevented them from declaring their lack of concern of what others thought earlier in life?

One of the answers may be found in the theories about disconnection. The classical understanding of the psychological ‘self ‘as discussed by Freud, Erikson and other modern theorists is based on a human separating his or herself from others in order to develop: an individual "self", where boundaries and logical thought is seen as the ultimate to aspire to be, where independence is revered.

Engaging with this theory is a feminist psychology theory which brings forth a new psychological approach to the understanding of the "self". Judith Jordon’s book, “Relational Cultural Therapy” (2009) describes a psychological approach that is based on the understanding that all humans are wired to be connected, to have a connection with each other and with themselves. She explains how she and others like her see the connection as the center of growth and how growth is achieved through authenticity, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment. A person who is not in a relationship experiences isolation, the lack of maturity, and disconnection. In light of this theory, it is plausible to conclude that women who try to live up to the patriarchal definition of "self", which reveres independence, can experience disassociation.

Disassociation is considered a symptom of trauma, which is a theory that is discussed much by Judith Jordon (2010) and Christina Robb (2006). Disassociation is the ability to separate thought from feeling, memory from consciousness, and one part of the personality from another. It is a red flag that trauma occurred and the psyche is trying to heal itself. Robb discusses the place of socialization in this equation. In order to achieve disconnection, dominant societies have used shame:

> *So much of socialization is shaming, especially socialization into the dominant mind-set of "independence" and "socialization towards gender compliance"….shame is directed at marginalized groups and serves to put and keep them in place of disempowerment and*

> *silence…to keep them from expressing their reality in a way that would threaten the dominant view (Robb, 2006, p. 278-279).*

The feelings of independence, a.k.a. disconnection, that the majority of society strives towards is in actuality a source of political control, which marginalizes and attempts to keep the status quo. Gilligan adds that:

> *…like a healthy body, a healthy psyche resists disease, there is an inherent tension between our human nature and the structures of patriarchy, leading the healthy psyche to resist an initiation that mandates a loss of voice and a sacrifice of relationship (Gilligan, 2011, p. 33).*

The fact that several of the women from these interviews experienced, in differing degrees, a lack of concern regarding what society thought of them meant that previously they *had* minded about what others thought of them. They cared if people saw them as the "bad girl", the rebel, going against society's mandate of covering one's head. It may be possible that what caused these women to conform to the dictates of the "good girl" image in their youth was the disassociation that they experienced, the shaming into the accepted values of society. And perhaps their act of removal now was their psyche resisting the mandate of silence.

Wendy' s description of her experience echoes these thoughts. She explained that something was false, something in her identity was not truly hers, and moreover, it was an oppressing presence, pushing down and covering up her true identity: "I felt oppressed and I felt this is not who I am, and people are trying to make me into something that I'm not" (Wendy).

Another woman who mentioned feeling distressed was Moria. She shared:

> *The issue of covering my hair… was taking over to the point that every spare minute I had to think about something, that was what was on my mind. I should- I shouldn't. I was reading as many articles [on] what people have to say about [it]. It was crazy, crazy... I think about it now, it's crazy. It was an obsession with something that despite the fact that people will tell you it's* halacha*, I don't think it should be the central focal*

> *point of my Jewish [life]. And it became to some point that there was no room for something else. (Moria)*

Moria's distress can be a symptom of traumatic experiences, which dominant societies are said to cause. In 1990, a neurological research presented in Antonio Damasio's "Descates' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*"* supported the claim that trauma to the psyche can be seen in psychological terms in the brain. Gilligan added that a split between reason and emotion can signal trauma (Gilligan, 2011, p. 107). The split between reason and emotion can be seen in Moria's description of the obsession that took over her life.

What resonated even further with the theory of disassociation when relating to the patriarchal cultural reality these women lived in was the description of some of the women that taking off their head covering felt like returning to who they had used to be. Some of the women described feeling like they had gone full circle in their search for their identity, in search for their connection with themselves. They were now returning to the identity they had as adolescents. The fact that these women named adolescence as the time when they were truly themselves melds well with the understanding that it was at this time that these women's voices were silenced. "The initiation of girls into the codes and scripts of patriarchal manhood and womanhood tends to occur at adolescence…" (Gilligan, 2011, p. 108-109). And their return to this identity in midlife was noted by Gilligan in her extensive studies on women much earlier on: "The middle years of women's lives readily appear as a time of return to the unfinished business of adolescence" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 170).

The women shared different feelings of the reclaiming of their identities: "Like how I used to feel when I was younger… I started to miss me" (Shir) and "It was like coming back to

myself. Oh, this is who I was growing up. This is who I am… So I thought I was coming home to myself, I was coming back to myself. It felt more genuine" (Kate).

Ora's story especially reflected the demand of dominant society that changed her perception of who she wanted to be. She explained that she put on her head covering since she associated it with a stringency that would evoke serenity in life. She described serenity as a

> *Calm, calm acceptance of everything that [covering the hair was the]... acceptance of an eshet chail[4] where everything is clean and everything is calm and the kids are behaved and the food is cooked on time. That somehow was an image that… together with acceptance of religion/rabbinic/ divine authority… (Ora)*

Her description of achieving serenity through being an *eshet chail*, through accepting divine authority, was not her true identity as can be seen when she continued: "Going back to the original ideology rather than…..moving in direction that, you know, I thought I wanted to move to…" (Ora). She explained that she is still looking for serenity in her life, "but I am not going to get it through the head covering." Perhaps she silenced her own voice in order to accept the dictates of religion in order to "achieve" serenity. She realized after living many years with her head covered that it was not the way to achieve serenity and that she must instead return to her original, individualistic thoughts in order to achieve what she wants.

Why then do women choose to take upon themselves the dictates of society, chose to become "good girls" while silencing their own voices? Virginia Woolf believed that when faced with the choice between women's and men's values, it is the value of men that always prevails. In "A room of One's Own" she explained how women begin to doubt the authenticity and the importance of their values (Woolf, 1929, p. 26). Gilligan added another element in order to answer this question. She explained that

[4] A wife/woman of valor

> *Women come to question whether what they have seen exists and whether what they know from their own experience is true…personal doubts that invade woman's sense of themselves, compromising their ability to act on their own perceptions... (Gilligan, 1982, p. 49).*

Thus, these women silenced their voices since they were taught to be unsure of their true identity. Perhaps the women in this study found comfort in following the dictates of *halacha* and the "good girl" path because they were taught from a young age that their true voice was not reliable and therefore they could not act upon it nor truly trust it. This too, explains why it took the women so long to change their practice. The self-doubt and divided judgment that these women experienced ensured that it would take years and special circumstances for them to attain the confidence needed to give significance to their own individual thoughts and desires.

The various experiences of the women in this study are a testimony to how difficult it was for these women to take upon themselves this change, to gain enough courage to trust their own judgment and their own individual voice. Ora made a decision and then waited eleven months to implement it. Carla had difficulty letting go of religious commandments since she believed that if you take upon a commandment, you should not go back on that decision. She gradually took off her head covering, first uncovering her bangs, then her braid, etc. Wendy described a process in which she removed her head covering by degrees, waiting to feel comfortable and gradually expanding the places in which she felt comfortable to walk around uncovered. Kate took it off first in the United States while on vacation and Talya first took it off on vacation, at the beach.

Gilligan (1982) intensified this conundrum women face when solving conflicts by claiming that women may seem unsure of their right to make a moral judgment and what price that may demand of them. At times, the reluctance to judge is not just insecurity but a deeper understanding that judgment has its limitation and may create pain to those around them.

Gilligan's augmented point shows the depth women put into their decisions, whereas their male counterparts generally deal with decisions in a more unilateral way, as patriarchal societies generally view individual decisions. These women seemed to understand that taking upon themselves the right to judge may undermine the *halachik* authority and Way of Life. The deep understanding of the repercussions of their actions might have prevented the women from acting sooner. As Moria put it:

> *And it just took me a long time to branch out to the idea that I could make some decisions for myself. And I am not sure how scary that is in our general Orthodox world, because if everyone starts making decisions, I don't know what will be left out of Orthodoxy. (Moria)*

Moria still worries about the fate of Modern Orthodoxy, but at midlife, she no longer lets that prohibit her. Other women, too, at midlife seemed to discover themselves in a circumstance where they felt comfortable evaluating the degree of *halacha* they resolved to adhere to, no longer needing a *halachik* authority or representative to decide for them. Some of the women spoke of no longer feeling the need for a coherent, consistent thought processes, such as the *halachik* process. They upheld what they thought was important and they didn't preserve what did not seem to represent a fair, justice-based *halacha*. This in and of itself is a step against the traditional values of male- dominated society, which value coherency and consistency as high level functions of a moral human being (Kohlebeg, 1976). It did not bother these women that they were not consistent; it was all subjective. Thelma was very blasé about it all: "Today I am in a place where I say: whatever I don't want to do, I won't do. And I want to keep Shabbat and I want to keep kashrut… But the commandments today, I keep what I want to" (Thelma). Carla spoke about herself and for women who decide to uncover their hair in general:

> *It is possible for us to, um, breathe more, be ourselves, do what we want. Look less to the letter of the Law and I think this is a time in life for me …. I can go with the flow*

> *more... There is more freedom and more, it is easier for us to create a mood here and there. And not feel chocked or bad about it. To look more for the essence of religion that is important for us and then more internal things and less external things that interests us less. (Carla)*

Shir, too, was a very interesting case since she seemed to have no consistency or coherence in her *halachik* observance. She was aware of her emotional state and followed its dictate. At times, she wanted to cover her hair, so she did, and other times she felt it was right not to cover her hair: "I wore a head covering as long as it felt right to me, internally, physically, if you wish" (Shir). At one point, she took off her head covering and then put it on again, partially in order to challenge society as a sort of social experiment:

> *I wanted to prove that you can be with a head covering [in academia] and I can succeed… it was definitely a conscious act… and then some really amazing things happened, because those five years were really a sociological experiment. (Shir)*

Shir may have felt more at ease taking on and off her head covering, because she did not take on the voice of religious patriarchy: "There never was a religious aspect to it. The aspect that I am going this way because religious women need to… that was never the reason" (Shir). Shir covered her hair because she was emotionally drained and the head covering took care of a point of conflict within her—her hair—and she took it off when she began to miss who she was and didn't care for the side effects of wearing a head covering. She played with the tools patriarchy had given her but did not let it rule her.

Tal showed another side of the coin through her dialogue. She wanted to be coherent, a quality considered a valuable and worthy characteristic by male terms. Tal searched for coherence and consistency in her life, leading her down the path that demanded that she put on a head covering so that everyone would know what her religious affiliation was:

> *Hand in hand with all of that, I would say that always in terms of my own self-definition and my own feeling of my identity, I was always interested in having my outside match my inside. Being consistent in how I felt philosophically and… the way I presented myself to the world… I understood that if I wanted to be perceived in a certain kind of way then I had [to cover my hair]… I was very interested in having people know I was Jewish and religious and I wanted that consistency… during the course of high school, I stopped wearing pants and I wore skirts, um, and then when I got married, I covered my hair. (Tal)*

Despite her attempt to take upon herself characteristics deemed valuable and advanced by the patriarchal system, such as coherency and consistency, quote-unquote playing by the rules of the game, she still found herself at a disadvantage, taking upon herself an oppressive symbol.

1.4. The Emotional "Self"

The positive emotions experienced by most women upon removing their head covering stands to support the claim that covering their head was an unhealthy experience for them (at least towards the end). Many of them described the experience of uncovering their hair as freeing themselves- Shir, Moria, Kate , Carla, Samantha, and Thelma all used the word *"free"* . Talya, Kate, and Carla felt *"relief"*.

Other women specifically mentioned that it was no longer good for them to cover their heads. Margret said: "I was feeling a little tired of it. I was tired of it. It wasn't something that gave me any pleasure anymore… it was really just another chore to buy a new hat" (Margret) while Thelma said:

> *At some point, I felt that it was a performance. It annoyed me. It put me into, into definitions that I didn't want. And I didn't like it. I also felt, this was more important for me, that the fact that I walk around with a head covering doesn't make me a better person. (Thelma)*

The word performance which Thelma used is very strong when familiar with the context of Judith Butler's "performance" which she speaks of in her book "Gender Trouble" (1990). Bulter claims that the gender of a person is not predetermined by the anatomical body it resides in and the gender identity of a person might not be compliant with the gender performance of that individual. The performance she speaks of are a compilation of gestures, acts, and enactments that are associated with a certain gender but, as she explains, are in no way inherent to that gender. The performance is fabricated for the purpose of "regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 136).

Thelma's use of the word "performance" with regards to her head covering is interesting in this context. If her head covering was a "performance" in the sense that Butler explains it, then it was a fabrication whose role was to regulate sexuality. It had no connection to her true identity, just as gender performance has no connection to a person's authentic gender identity. The dissonance Thelma described is also mentioned by Butler who described the dissonance found at times between one's body, identity, and performance. This strengthens Butler's claim that a gender identity is a fabrication. Society's demand that all three aspects line up is part of a public regulation through politics of the body. Thelma's unease and her addressing of that feeling can be seen, through the prism of Butler's theory, as an act of political resistance to the performance enforced, in this case, by the Judaic sages. Thelma was saying this performance of head covering was untrue to her identity and she would not continue to perform it since it was false to her.

In their stories, the women seem to all follow some emotional aspect of themselves. They struggled to feel comfortable making judgments, to give their thoughts value and were aware of their emotions that validated their thoughts. They achieved all this although their society and

upbringing told them they were not to trust themselves. These women tell a story of confidence in their own thoughts, feelings and abilities to judge.

2 Circle of Life Partners

Identity is partially made up of those who support identity (Josselson, 1996, p. 210). These include essential relationships in women's lives. This may present itself as their husbands, children, friends, and so on. Each woman has her own support group. Since this research discusses women who are married, most of the women named their husbands as one of those people.

Partners, in general, have a lot of influence on women. Traditional psychology used to assume that women's identities were built around them. Erik Ericson, a developmental psychologist whose theories on identity reflect the traditional psychological development theories, explains that women delay structuring their identity as they prepare to attract the man that they will marry. They, then, will be defined by him and he rescues her from loneliness and emptiness (Gilligan, 1982, p.12).

As psychology for women developed, this misconception was immediately recognized and disproved, and attempts were made to fill in the gap. Josselson (1996, p. 199) notices that despite the individual identity that a woman develops, which was discussed earlier, she is still influenced by her husband, just not to the extent Erikson suggested. Since a women's identity is influenced by those around her, her partner may delimit the personal characteristics that she may express easily. A woman could not easily make a decision about herself without thinking about her partner.

Most of the women in this research spoke about a role their husband played in their decision, whether it was as a sounding board, an inspiration, or just as someone who had to be

told. Many described the discussion with their spouses concerning the idea before they took their head covering off. Moria discussed it with her husband so much that he got annoyed:

> *Only my husband, we only discussed it at home…when we broached it for the 400th time like before, he said to me: "Quite honestly, I don't mind if you wear it and I don't mind if you take it off, just stop talking about it." He was very…, he didn't want to be, when I tried pushing him into "Shall I take it off?" he wasn't willing to be in that position to his credit. He said that it is something, if I think it is incumbent on me, than I have to be to take it off. (Moria)*

2.1. Husbands as Building Blocks of Women's Identities

Some of the women described the amount of influence their husbands had on their decision. They explain that they would not take off their head covering without their husband's acceptance, seemingly aware that they could not go through the process easily without their husband's approval/support. This was presented by the women as sensitivity to those around them, namely their husband, rather than as a concussion to any type of hierarchal relationship. Margret knew that "he would have been horrified if I started to wear a wig. … But I knew that Curt would be horrified by that, so I didn't go for it" (Margret), while Thelma said:

> *I came to it alone. Of course, with my husband's permission because if it bothered him, then I wouldn't do it … that means I got his permission {questioning tone of voice}. Let's put it that way… (Thelma)*

Josselson takes the time to note that this does not mean that their partner is taking over these women's identity; rather, they are adding on an aspect to their own life. Identity in a relationship means adapting to another's needs while feeling that it complements their identity. "They do not give themselves up to an Other but, more precisely, they add an Other to themselves" (Josselson, 1996, p.215). This idea reflects in the women's description of their relationships in general.

Both Moria and Thelma spoke of mutual respect. The decision of each partner was respected even if it was not important to the other.

> *Really, from this aspect, a lot of things he says: "You decide." Of course, there are things I wouldn't touch. Like with Kashrut- I won't touch that ever because my husband keeps kosher and the kids, when they come, keep kosher... And because my husband keeps Shabbat and we live as a couple in a family, I won't turn on the TV after eating. (Thelma)*

> *But that is a kind of Judaism that we have with the two of us anyway. We both feel that although we are raising religious family, we both, we are not responsible for each other's religion. I like that about our relationship in terms of Jewish things. He just does what he does. He learns daf yomi every day. I am cool with that even if it takes up a lot of time, even if whatever. And he does his things, I do mine and it, it works. (Moria)*

Shir's story is different:

> *I have a history with him; it is something that you can't explain it until you've experienced it. It's time together, it's a shared history, what marriage allows. You grow farther and then closer. You try this and this and this. It's always a negotiation. You are all the time checking each other, checking ourselves, and both of us have been through processes… the national-Zionistic stance is my background… it is still an issue of conversation and on the other hand, this is the way it is. I don't mean to change it. It is open to discussion because everything is open to discussion, although no side can decide for the other. That means you want to grow a beard or not, wear this kipa or another, pray this way or that. Teach the kids this way- that also doesn't matter. Since you take them to synagogue, since you teach them the things you teach them, what you teach them. I teach them other things. Um… so it is okay to accept. (Shir)*

In Shir's dialogue, it is possible to hear the complexity of the decision when spouses are not on the same page. Thelma and Moria spoke from a place of concord with their spouses, whereas the juxtaposition of Shir's situation shows that she and her husband negotiate things in their lives. It is not clear how he views the negotiating aspect of their marriage, but it seemed important for her to be able to explain to herself what her thought process was. She explained how she adapts to his needs and yet how she remains true to her identity. She searched for

middle ground and generally finds one with him. She relayed one particular time when there was no middle ground and it truly hurt her:

> *The only time I really, really had fun was when I got a really short haircut. It happened once. My husband won't forgive me for it. He said: "If you do that again, you won't be able to come into the house." Half kidding, half serious. But it really, really hurt him. Worse than anything else I could do. Because it's not, it's not feminine in his eyes. I looked like some boy. It was so, so fun. I didn't have to deal with it [my hair] anymore… what fun, what freedom, it was great. Really, I really remember it. (Shir)*

This example explains Josselson's claim that partners delimit what women can express easily. Later on, Shir used the term "box of tools" to explain why she chose to cover her hair. This highlights how she felt that there were ways that were available and there were ways that were not. Cutting her hair short was not- due to her husband's objections.

2.2. Husbands: Supportive, Indifferent, and Unenthusiastic

Many of the women felt full support from their husbands. Moria, Tal, Sally, Talya, and Thelma all used the word "supportive" to describe how their husbands felt about the decision.

> *My husband didn't really care, the opposite. He really encouraged me even… he said to me: "You put it on, you are choked by it. If you are choked by it, then take it off."He was very, very happy. (Thelma)*

Many of the women also voiced that their husbands were ambiguous to the decision or did not voice an opinion. Carla, Margret, Wendy, and Samantha all shared that their husbands did not care if they took it off, in varying degrees. Moria's husband made it very clear that it was her decision, that it was something that had nothing to do with him: "He didn't feel that it was something connected to him." (Moria), while Ora's husband didn't give his opinion on the matter at all: "I remember him deliberately not expressing opinions either way." (Ora).

Most of the husbands were indifferent or supportive, which the women seemed very happy about either way; yet two husbands voiced some negative reactions. One was Shir's husband (discussed above), who was unhappy she was uncovering her hair altogether. The other was Samantha's husband, who didn't mind her taking off her head covering, but was not happy with her reasoning behind it:

> *He said in the beginning: "I told you, you don't have to do it [put on a head covering]. But you decided to do it. And suddenly … you decided not to?" He was also questioning… "You don't really have [an] argument… you think just about yourself, but you don't really have [an] argument." And really a lot of it is emotional. Very emotional. (Samantha)*

He also did not want her to be interviewed, since he thought she did not have anything consistent or rational to say. The expectation of a rational explanation, as well as delegitimization of emotional reasons, is consistent with male judgment patterns as described by Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1976).

2.3. Mutually Influencing Relationship

Josselson explains that women's partners' actions influence them as much as their words. "Partners have had their own growth and histories that, for better and worse, have much influenced the course of these women's lives." (1996, p. 214). The women in this research relayed situations, mostly in their religious lives, where their husbands changed throughout their marriage, and how they had to adapt and accept all of the changes.

> *Actually, he also experienced a change… once he didn't care, and today he cares more… he also went through a lot of other processes at the same time in these last years. Ah, religious, personal, and um… it's interesting. (Shir)*

> *The man that I married was kinda a man like me and grew to be not like me… then it started to come out that he doesn't believe in G-d and yeah, it was just, there was a period of tension. It wasn't like we were ever gonna get divorced. It was never part of our relationship. We had a very, very strong marriage and incredible commitment for one another…I finally came to realize that I have to, that he is being true to himself. That*

> *I need to accept that he is being true. Even though he was not that man I thought I married and our life wasn't in the direction I thought religiously... (Kate)*

In addition to these actions forcing the women to adapt and accept them, in very real ways it may influence and change the lives of the women themselves. This is mentioned by Josselson who states that changes in relationship can unsettle a women's understanding of her place with others and create a need to redefine her identity to herself (1996). Several of the women brought up this issue. It seems that their husbands own growth in the area of religion influenced their growth and it became one of the reasons they removed their head covering.

> *When he looks back at it, I think he acknowledges that he went through a similar process and therefore was supportive in the beginning and was equally supportive in the decision not to {cover my hair}, and I think now he is pleased to be seen as the husband of someone who doesn't... So the evolution, the change in values, the change in communities, the change in aspirations, I think it is reflective of a process that we both went through, that we went through together. So that my external changes were symbolic of what we both went through. He certainly never suggested that I go back. Um, and if I choose to, it would still be my decision. (Ora)*

> *My husband suddenly said he had enough… he went through a… midlife crisis, which they say men have too. Um… a general crisis you can say, also relationship wise, also religiously. He really had things that he just said he didn't know what he wanted, where he stood, and he had enough of everything … for me, it is some affirmation that I can take off my head covering. I mean, if he doesn't pray anymore, then I don't need to be the one who holds the external religiosity, you can say. And this is something we have done together. (Carla)*

> *And it did rub off on me. It was a slippery slope in a way. When someone knocked on the door and I would yell don't open it and I would run to look for a hat. He couldn't stand it and after years of that, he finally told me: "Kate, either cover your hair all the time in the house or don't... I can't stand it anymore." I thought, you know, he has a point. (Kate)*

Christina Robb explains that human (positive) growth does not just *happen* in relationships; it *depends* on the relationships to create it (2006, p. 180). These women "grew" the moment their husbands "grew" since they were in relationship with them. It seems from these examples that as long as a woman is in a relationship that is truly authentic and mutual (which is

how most of the women defined their relationships), she reacts and grows within it. Thus, these women' s act of removing their head covering can be seen in the light of positive psychological growth.

Regarding Carla's words about upholding the "external religiosity" of the family, these are often heard in the discourse of women and religiosity; the use of the female body to reflect the religiosity of the family. The expectations of the relationship between a husband and wife in traditional patriarchal families is one in which the husbands governs the household and those within it. Women are expected to uphold the household's ideals and honor, as can be seen in the extreme cases of honor killings where women are killed for bringing shame to their families (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001). If women dress inappropriately and don't act in keeping with the values of the family, they are in danger of being killed by family members. Thus it can be understood that in societies where control is in the hands of men, women's responsibility include upholding the family name through their actions and dress. If this is true in western society as well, although with less violent consequences, wouldn't one expect the husbands of these women to be upset that they are no longer shouldering the responsibility of publicizing the religious ideals of the family through their actions and dress?

Or may it be, as suggested by Elana Sztokman in her book " The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World" (2011), that men are searching for a new orthodox masculinity in which "warmth, care, community, connection, spiritual fulfillment and a flexible halakaha all outside the norms of Orthodox masculinity" (p. 202) exist ? Are they seeking a way to "resolve a certain 'disconnect' in their lives" (p. 202)? If so, there is place to conduct more research into the reactions of these husbands to their wives' actions. Did their wives courage present them with an opportunity, conscious or otherwise, to explore their own

masculinity and identity? To free themselves enough to acknowledging different strands of their own web of identify? It is a subject that should be explored further to determine whether it reflects a larger phenomenon of new masculinity.

In this research, two women, Talya and Tal, allow a glimpse into the thoughts of their husbands and shared that just as their husband's actions influenced them, their own actions and processes influenced their husbands, echoing Sztokman's suggestion. Gilligan writes that when women begin to speak of their experiences, it becomes easier for men to speak of their own experiences.

> *Bring women's voices into what was then called the human conversation changed the voice of that conversation by shifting the paradigm, changing the frame. Like a sound piercing a silence, women voices broke through collective not knowing or disassociation… (2011, p. 41).*

It can be seen from these women's stories that they created a change in their husbands; that their emphatic relationship created a feeling of mutuality in their partners towards their wives' experiences. Both Talya and Tal saw that process result in their husbands becoming feminist men. Talya saw that "he really got into feminist literature. More and more, it penetrated in those years that we lived abroad more and more and more" (Talya), while Tal explained that she

> *…can't say that he was a feminist from the beginning. But I think I made him into one along the way. To give you an example, He recently took, it's crazy, it sounds crazy, but he recently offered to divorce me {laughing}. You understand what I'm saying? So that he doesn't "own" me because this is something that bothers me. Not that we would break up our relationship in any way. You know but he said if it bothers me that you know that he has a kinyan {ownership} over me, that he would be happy to. (Tal)*

Tal's husband offered to divorce her because he seemed to empathize with her feelings of oppression in being "owned". His only way to rectify it, despite what social opinion may be, was

to divorce her, which she appreciated but didn't take him up on. This is a true example of a mutually empathetic relationship, which encouraged growth and changed both parties, in what they considered, a positive way.

Circle of Children

Culture dictates that all women, whether mothers or not, are defined by their motherhood (Letherby 1994; Sweeney 2006) and are asked to put aside parts of their identity for the good of their children (Marshall, 1991). Adrienne Rich's book on mothering "Of Woman Born" focuses on the reason why culture grants motherhood such importance (1986). Patriarchy, she explains, could not exist without the institution of motherhood. Therefore, motherhood is presented as "natural" and mothers are convinced that they had no other identity than being a mother (p. 160). Motherhood is presented as an axiom since, if women were to question these "facts", society as we know (or as patriarchy knows it as a male-dominated society), would be threatened. Rich discusses the requirements of motherhood:

> *Institutionalized motherhood demands of woman maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self- realization, relation to others rather than creation of self. (Rich, 1986, pg. 42).*

If women were to attempt any of the alternatives, society would not be able to exist as a male dominated institution.

The "institution of motherhood", as set by patriarchal society, demands that mothers be responsible for their daughters becoming "good girls". Their role is to provide their daughters with tools to function and succeed within the parameters of social success as defined by the social and cultural context within which they live. This dictate creates within many mothers a dilemma. On the one hand, mothers wish to encourage individuality and help their daughters find their own identities. On the other hand, they wish to help them create an identity that is considered acceptable in society. Otherwise, their daughters are in danger of not knowing how to act appropriately in order to be accepted. (Rich, 1976; Hartman, 2002).

3.1. Mothers as Agents of Socialization

An essential aspect of the identity of women, as mothers, is their position as agents of socialization. Numerous women feel a dissonance between their cultural roles as agents of socialization and the personal values they wish to emulate (Hartman 2002; Schachter & Ventura 2008). The women in this research that are mothers struggle mostly with the expectations from their religious role (Tal, Thelma, Carla, and Moria). Judaism, as a patriarchal religion, demands from its mothers to model religious behavior. The expectation is that by modeling the perfect religious woman, they raise their children to be exemplary products of religious upbringing, who stay within religion. If mothers fail in this role the continuation of the religion would be in peril.

> *It was a huge issue for me [when taking off my head covering] what the kids would take away from me, as they would see it, rejecting a religious [lifestyle]… I was most concerned when I took it off about the kids. Which, to some point, which is why I put it on the first place because I didn't want them to think I was throwing part of Judaism or my belief away on a whim, just [because] I decided I don't believe something anymore.(Moria)*

Understanding that patriarchy has a clear agenda, convincing women that they are responsible for the actions of their children and therefore must model appropriately, might explain why many of the women experienced fears before removing their head covering. They were afraid to go against "acceptable" behavior, even at their own detriment. As Moria explained, she feared that by doing so, she was presenting the wrong message to her children and was worried what that might do to them.

Carla, too, made it very clear that she wore her head covering, partially, in order to raise her children well. She wanted them to be able to "define themselves, their religious status" before she felt she had finished with her role of an educator. She explained what she feared

might happen: "I do think that the way that we chose was clear and we also believed in it… that did help them stay more or less religious." Carla feared that if her children did not receive a clear upbringing (meaning, if she did not raise them in a manner that hid the dissonance she felt in the later years between her roles as an agent of socialization to her personal values), that her children might have had a harder time staying religious.

In the discussion with these women, I heard them share that many of their children did not notice, gave no significant reaction to, or altogether ignored their act of removing their head covering. Their fears that it might change their children's' attitude towards religion and *halacha* did not seem to occur. Thus, religion seemed to have created a "myth" that if women do not model certain behavior their children will surely not be raised appropriately and turn away from social religious norms. In these women's stories and in their perspective their children did not suffer as a result of them removing their head covering.

This echoes the theories of Adrienne Rich and the many feminist theorists on motherhood that followed her. Many of these theories claim that the ideas of a "good mother" are not based on the true "mothering" experience to begin with, but rather are used to advance the agenda of a male-dominated society where women have no identity other than being a mother.

Moria, for instance, reported that although she was worried how her children would perceive her decision, her sons didn't notice she took off her head covering until five months later:

> *Fascinatingly enough, my 4 boys didn't notice for about 5 months. My eldest said: "Don't you need to put on a hat?" And I was floored and said: "Well, you know, I haven't been wearing one for a while."[He] hadn't noticed… (Moria)*

On the other hand, she had the opportunity to talk it over with her daughter, and at the end, she concluded that the chance of her daughter covering her hair if she had kept it on would probably have been less.

> *And my girl who noticed immediately, we sat down and discussed it for a while... She was fine with it. I think my worries were misplaced because I generally think if you are honest with the kids, they are fine. If you try and hide something, it is more difficult. I would imagine that the chances of her covering her hair, if I had kept mine on would have been much less than me taking it off, because that resentment comes out somewhere. (Moria)*

Moria theorized that by exposing her personal values which stood in disagreement with her expected role as an agent of socialization, she was actually performing her "duty" better. She explained that the personal dissonance between her role and her values was impossible to hide. Therefore, the feeling of resentment that her "other, non- mothering" identity would feel, would paint her daughter's picture of the practice of head covering negatively.

Carla, too, believed it was impossible to hide her true thoughts and feelings and therefore shared that she was lucky that in the years in which she covered her hair, she really believed in covering: "The minute you do something that you really hate and you do it really for the kids… then I think it doesn't work."

Alternately, it was several of the women who kept their head covering on until their children were older who found that their children became non-religious. Tal, Wendy, Margret, Carla, and Thelma all shared that they had non-religious children. However, not all of the women felt a sense of failure in their role as an agent of socialization when their children became non-religious. Tal explains that as her thoughts about *halachik* Judaism changed, so did her thoughts as to the sense of failure if her children were to become non- religious.

> *You know, and it was such a goal that all my children should be religious. And it hasn't happened and um… and I …I don't want to look that as a failure of my own… I am happy with the fact that all my children are thinking people and think for themselves and choose for themselves. (Tal)*

In her case, there is a direct correlation between her head covering and her reaction to a non-religious way of life for her children, since one of the main reasons she kept her head covering on was to prevent such an occurrence. After her thoughts began to change, and her children became non-religious despite her covered hair, she then removed her head covering.

> *…three of my kids are married already… I have one more daughter left who is not married, and she is not going to cover her hair. And my younger son is not religious. So the whole idea of being some sort of role model to them was no longer keeping me doing it, so I just stopped. (Tal)*

Wendy shared that for her it was more important that her children were happy and knew how to think critically. Tova Hartman (2002) explains the conflict in education when mothers are expected to raise children who are both religious and perceived as healthy through the standards of modern psychology. Looking at this explanation, it seems that Wendy recognizes that she succeeded in raising healthy children by the scale of modern psychology and that was good enough for her: "Cause I always encouraged them to think openly… and they are all very happy and none of them are religious" (Wendy).

Many of the women in this study had good experiences with their children regarding how and when they decided to remove their head covering. Whether it was because they felt as though they succeeded in their task as an agents of socialization (like Carla and Moria), because they rejected the label of being a "failure as an agent of socialization" (like Wendy and Tal), or because they took off their head covering either when their children were too young to have an opinion or too old for them to care about their opinion.

Thelma, as opposed to these women who had positive experiences, faced difficulties with her daughter when she exposed her to her personal values. Her daughter deemed her mother a hypocrite. The effect this had on Thelma's daughter's acceptance of the identity that is considered acceptable by the Judaic male-dominated society is still unclear.

> *…Like when I told her not to go out in pants or her skirt is too short or something like that, and so she said to me: "Put on a head covering and then tell me what to do." I was speechless. She is right, what can I say? (Thelma)*

Thelma seemed to feel helpless when facing her daughter's accusation. She was aware that by the measurements of *halachik* society, she was in the wrong. But although Thelma first described herself as "speechless", she used this opportunity to create a niche in which speech, her personal speech, came through. She explained to her daughter the concept of "a time and a place", a *halachik* tool which deals with the relativity of different situations.

> *So I explained to her the issue of place. If she wants to go to youth movement, she can't go with pants she wears to the city. It doesn't work. Decide where you are. As long as I was in a certain place, I dressed accordingly. I moved so I can change my dress accordingly. I can't live in a religious neighborhood and not care how I look… (Thelma)*

By resisting the acceptable role as an agent of socialization, she gave the role a new meaning rooted in her own personal values. Instead of her role as an agent of socialization creating a dissonance within her, she merged her personal values to it and cast new content into her role, providing an absence of dissonance in her own experience. She shared with her daughter how to differentiate between different settings and live a complex and authentic life. Yet by doing so, she created a dissonance in her daughter's experience of Judaism which is exactly what patriarchal societies try to prevent (Rich, 1986).

3.2. Feminist Psychological Theories on the Development of Mothering

Feminist writings in the field of psychology have challenged the accepted premise that women are deficient in psychological development and morality since the first half of the 20th century and explain women's development as unique to women (Gilligan, 1936). Nancy Chodrow was one of the first to say that women were not deficient developmentally as opposed to men, just different and have their own unique developmental path (Chodrow, 1974). Carol Gilligan, after conducting research dealing with women's morality concerns, observed a thought process that was unique to the women she interviewed (Gilligan, 1982). She explains that women have a different moral development than men and they perceive the challenges of morality as rising from conflicting responsibilities. Thus, Gilligan, like Kohlberg before her, created a scale of morality, increasing in complexity, but this one is based on the female experience.

> *The sequence of women's moral judgments proceeds from initial concern with survival to a focus on goodness and finally to a reflective understanding of care as the most adequate guides to the resolution of conflicts the human relationships (Gilligan, 1982, p. 105).*

The experiences of the women in this research echoed the challenges met by the women in Gilligan's research. The similarities can be seen with the women in Gilligan's research who are at the point in their lives where they have already decided to be responsible, but the potency of that responsibility prevented them from considering themselves. In order to consider themselves and grow, one option was to minimize the intensity of the responsibility they felt.

It was most clearly delineated in the relationship these women have with their children. Carla, Tal, and Thelma explained that removing their head covering, something they did for themselves, was an action they allowed for themselves to do because their children had grown

up. Carla felt that "… for the kids, I felt that I don't need to pretend about what is wrong, because we finished their education." (Carla).

> *I felt that in some way, it was a good example for my children and I wanted to be a mechanechet (educator) for them. But… three of my kids are married already... I have one more daughter left who is not married, and she is not going to cover her hair. And my younger son is not religious. So the whole idea of being some sort of role model to them was longer keeping me, doing it, so I just stopped… cold turkey... (Tal)*
>
> *…And also when my kids were younger, so I had an educational responsibility to my kids. If you want them to grow up a certain way, instead of dealing with questions that you don't really know how to answer so… you don't want your kids to ask… (Thelma)*

It seems that what the women described is a lessening of the intensity of their responsibility regarding the relationship they have with their children. This fits into Gilligan's last stage where women learn how to integrate themselves into a relationship, taking their needs into consideration as well as those they care for. Here, the removal of head covering is part of a process of development and growth for these women. Removing their head covering did not initiate the growth, but its ramifications did.

Several women shared stories that included children in adolescence or in childhood. These women were unique since they did not wait for their responsibility of motherhood to lessen naturally as children grow up, in order to find their voice within the relationship. Each woman told a different story of how their adolescent children reacted (or how they believed their children would react). Shir explained that her sons were aware of the complexity of life and their mother removing her head covering was just one more aspect of that complexity:

> *It's a delicate game, but as long as the rules are clear, it won't prevent me from speaking with my children. If they ask me, so I have what to answer. I am not afraid of that. Also, they are smart children. They live, they live in a dualism all the time… so they know that*

> *all the time there is this and that. That we are this way and they are that way.... Life is complicated. (Shir)*

On the other hand, Moria explained how she was indecisive on how to broach the subject of her uncovering her head with her children and was fearful of how they would comprehend the complexity of the subject. She shared, though, that her fears were groundless and she should have had more faith in them:

> *He [her husband] said for many years that kids are smarter than we give them credit for, and they don't need to have every single thing explained to them… They are the one steady that can see the person through your persona. They can see you behind everything you do and if you are a spiritual person, they will see it with or without the hat covering it. If you believe they will see it with or without. And if you don't, they will see it also. So he was not troubled by that. I guess I gave the kids less credit. But when I think about it out loud, he's right. They are very perceptive. Too perceptive… (Moria)*

Both Ora and Margret reported that their children were too young and didn't even notice. This, too, may have prevented them from feeling parental responsibility to a degree that would stop them from acting.

Thelma was the only woman who spoke from the role as a grandmother. She shared that her grandchildren asked her why she doesn't cover her hair and she didn't have an answer for them. Despite the relationship she has with them, the responsibility seemed to be at a lower intensity as a grandmother, as opposed to a mother; therefore, this specific relationship did not qualify as a reason to keep her head covering on.

Most of the women explained that they experienced no resistance from their children. Thelma was the singular and unique interviewee in this aspect. She shared the difficulty she battled with when making the decision regarding her relationship with her children, specifically her teenage daughter. By incorporating her "self" into the relationship with her daughter, where mothers are supposed to be selfless and put aside their own needs, she felt that she lost some of

her integrity in the eyes of her daughter. Her decisions were no longer easily defended since she was no longer selfless. By taking herself into account, she left herself open to criticism, since the cultural expectation of a mother is to be selfless and put her children first (Rich, 1976).

3.3. Supportive Children

A number of the women reported that their children were happy they took off their head covering. Carla's and Wendy's children all said: "Finally!" Tal's children said: "You should have done this years ago." Thelma's related that: "My older secular son said: 'Oh ho, finally I have a mother who looks normal... ' I guess it is easier for him to go around with a mother who looks normal in his eyes, than a mother who looks Charadi" (Thelma).

Their children were encouraging, and yet many of them were more than just encouraging: they were the inspiration for their mothers' decision to remove their head coverings. A number of the women described their decision occurring after witnessing their children chose a more liberal lifestyle. This not only opened them up to more legitimate possibilities, but also allowed them to feel less of a burden of responsibility. Carla felt as though "it was actually the boys who, ah... started developing very open and flexible ideas about a lot of things. So, part of the changes that we made as a couple were also in the footsteps of our children" (Carla), while Tal felt as though she

> *…got some strength from the fact that they found their way and I could find my way to go, too. And with interacting with each other, you know, I think my accepting their decisions and also my feeling that its ,that it's good to make those kind of decisions, I think…Maybe it did help me in the process of coming to the decision myself . And also I didn't feel the big burden, the responsibility of being a role model anymore. (Tal)*

Janet Surrey and her colleagues discuss the term of mutual empowerment when considering a positive mother-daughter relationship. They explain that it is possible for the

mother- daughter relationship to reach a unique and special place where each one of them can grow and develop together (Surrey, 1985). These women's stories seem to reflect a relationship with mutual empowerment. The mothers were not only supportive of their children's choices, but the children also helped their own mother develop an understanding of how she wanted to live her life.

For the women who credited their children as fulfilling the function of role models to a more open way of life, Gilligan's theory seems to discuss similar themes (2011). Just as Gilligan speaks of the resistance of girls, tapping into the resistance of older women, thus the choosing of different religious paths by the children awakened their mother's awareness of the multiple options of religious paths.

> *If women and girls stay with one another at the time when girls reach adolescence, girls' playfulness and irreverence will tap the wellsprings of women's resistance. And women in turn, taking in girls' embodiment, their outspokenness and their courage, will join girls in their desire for relationship and for knowledge and, by doing so, teach girls that they can say what they want and know without being left all alone (Gilligan, 2011, pg. 160).*

Many of the children of the women in this study did not choose the accepted path for religious offspring; they did not continue in the path of their parents and live a religious life. This decision helped the women to "re-open and challenge" choices they made during their own development. This can be heard in many of their own words. Tal felt that "It was such a goal that all my children should be religious. And it hasn't happened… and I think that, you know, going through that process helped me think about these things with myself" (Tal). Moria felt as though her children are "challenging… my intellect and it makes me think about things that I've done… also having two teenagers, 16 and 18, who ask questions about life which make you think" (Moria). Whereas Carla felt as though her "…boys started developing very open and flexible

ideas about a lot of things… so I understood that I guess that it is not so clear in the end and that *halacha* doesn't need to be, and this I actually learned more from my sons" (Carla).

Thelma's words were very passionate regarding this issue. Her son is no longer religious and when she began to discuss the issues with him, it raised very hard questions for her. She felt cheated out of the option to have chosen a different religious path expected of children when she was younger. She cried out that no one gave her a choice or a right to ask. Her son's rejection of the traditional framework of their religion sent her back to her adolescence and childhood and she felt a great loss in what was never presented to her as legitimate; it never occurred to her that it was valid to question. Her son's resistance opened her eyes to the fact that choosing different a different path than that of the accepted framework is valid. From this, she then took agency over herself and her religious practices.

> *We had a lot of conversations and it really came up for me, why am I religious at all. Like angrily, I thought to myself, why did he get the right to not be religious and I wasn't even given that right...? And I felt that I was given the right to deal with things that bothered me and I needed to make a decision: either I throw out everything or I throw out what will allow me to breathe…. I need to breathe. (Thelma)*

3.4. Educating the Next Generation?

Gilligan suggests in her 2011 book , "Joining the Resistance", that if problems are addressed by speaking out about them, then there are more chances of preventing the cycle from continuing (2011, pg.160). Likewise, the act of "consciousness-raising" is mentioned as a political method whose purpose is to better understand a situation. It usually takes place when a group of women who gather to talk about what they want and how to get it (Robb, 2006, p.69). This affords them a chance to create a real relationship and grow.

Yet, it does not seem that many of these women chose the path of imparting their wisdom unto the younger generation. Many of the women stated that they would be supportive of their daughters' decision to cover their hair. They were very open in allowing the next generation to choose on their own. They did not choose to impart the lessons they learned onto the younger generation. Ora, Carla, Moria, Sally, and Tal all stated that they would be supportive of their children doing whatever they wanted with regards to covering their hair and would not suggest one way or another. Only Wendy was very vocal explaining the patriarchal trap that lay in the way of head covering: "I said, why are you doing this? What are you putting this on your head? Stop that."

These women, even those who claimed feminist inclinations, were ready to support their children's choice to live within the traditional framework of their cultural and religious system. Robb points out that one of the horrors for educators is to realize that their role as agents of society was helping suppress girls' voices, teaching what a good girl (or boy) is and shackling them to aspect of a religion that because of its patriarchal element takes advantage and exploits them (Robb, 2006). Most of these women did not seem to identify with Robb's thoughts in regards to their children. They did not perceive head covering as a patriarchal element of religion. They did not see themselves as oppressing their children's voices. Instead, they felt that by allowing the younger generation a choice, they were allowing them to have more freedom than they felt they had. They seemed to feel that by allowing other possibilities to exist, they were creating a space of growth for their children. Perhaps here once again we see the women valuing a choice made from an internal source of each and every person over a shared discussion.

4 Circle of Family

Others who support identity are those who contributed to the formation of their identity to begin with – parents and family. This pertains to the relationship women have with their mothers, fathers, and other people in the family unit, like sisters and brothers, and the dynamics between the relationships that women grow up with.

4.1. Mothers

Josselson (1996) found women's connections with their mothers at midlife are not usually as important as in early adulthood, but they hold great significance. Many women attempt to correct their mother's perception of them and try to better their relationship, even later in life. The women in this thesis did not talk much about their relationships with their mothers. For most, it did not come naturally to speak of their mothers' reactions to removing their head covering. Some shared that they told their mothers after the fact and some didn't mention it to their mothers at all. Others shared that they received support from their mothers when they removed their head covering.

Tal was one of the women who mentioned her mother in her interview. She had an interesting situation, since her mother had not covered her hair throughout her childhood, but now her mother had begun to cover and she was upset with Tal for uncovering her head.

> *[She is now] extremely upset with me, that I stopped covering my hair. Come on, mom… [She said]:" You should do what I tell you to do." I said: "Well, then you told me not to cover. So which one should I do? {laughing} And since you chose not to do something doesn't mean I jump on every change that you make. I need to make my own decisions about things." So we have come to a mutual standoff {laughing}. (Tal)*

Josselson adds that many women see themselves living out their mothers' dreams, although they change it so they do not take on their mothers' traditional values. This was reflected very strongly in Margret's story:

> *When I was 17, my mother had a very serious stroke… she lived for six more years, but she was very disabled. So, me at seventeen, I was traumatized… but it wasn't possible for me to stay in my hometown and live... I might have decided to be more traditional, um, more serious as I saw it about Judaism. [After I returned for a short while to live in my hometown] It was like reconciliation with my mother. It was like, I'm not rejecting you; I'm not rejecting your life. I'm actually living it for a while and enjoying it very much and feeling very… I mean, it was a very healing experience. (Margret)*

Margret became more traditional than her mother in an attempt to distance herself from the pain and trauma she associated with her. In order to find her true self, she needed to get over her anger and emulate her mother. The acceptance of who she is, without running away from the trauma, allowed her to become less traditional and eventually remove her head covering.

Reflecting on the stories of Tal and Margret, it seems, as Josselson said, the connection between these women and their mothers were not very strong. Their mothers did not seem to influence their decision greatly.

4.2. Fathers

As for fathers, Josselson shares that few women have emotionally intense relationships with their fathers, though some women attempt to start a relationship with their fathers in midlife. Again, this is reflected in this thesis as well. Shir was the only one who relayed a close relationship with her father:

> *My father, on the eve of my wedding, we sat, I don't remember, we sat and talked about it. I am very close to my father and we have all different kind of talks…. I sat at their house and he said he was worried and disturbed about this [that I covered my hair]. And I was just in shock. So, my wedding night, I don't remember if I asked, he said: "What do you mean? Of course you won't go with a head covering. Your mother doesn't cover,*

> *your grandmother didn't cover", like she is actually moving from her father's property to her husband's property, like this is taking a true tradition. That is the conversation that I remember and it is really interesting to me suddenly to see the reference point in my history with him, that it was up for discussion. "Of course you won't cover…".(Shir)*

Despite this conversation, Shir did not share that it influenced her decision in any way when removing her head covering. Her father's assumption that she would continue on in the tradition of the family, although it negates a *halachik* commandment showed that the issue of tradition was more important to him than straightforward *halacha*. She connected this reasoning to that of a different *halachik* idea of a women being her father's property and then becoming her husband's property. Thus, despite her father urging her to reject a *halachik* commandment, she still associated his opinion to a patriarchal way of thinking.

It seems that these women's fathers didn't hold much sway over them at this point in their lives. It would be interesting to question whether women in midlife choose not to connect to their fathers since they represent a patriarchal way of thinking at a time in which they no longer care to connect themselves to societal dictates such of that of patriarchy.

4.3. Family

In the context of her family unit, Shir related that:

> *My family [parents and siblings] didn't respond to it so well [that I wanted to cover my hair]. They didn't, they didn't like it at all. They weren't embarrassed to say so either. What did they say? That it will hurt my promotion and all kind of academic stuff and… it was also a shock. Because, you don't trust my intelligence? You don't trust the things I externalize? If I wear jeans and a t-shirt, I will be a better researcher? Really!... [When I took it off], they didn't react. They didn't say anything – nothing, which is a strong statement. From knowing the people, I would say they felt like the peace returned...I think mostly the fear that maybe I would suddenly say: "Oh, you are happy? Okay, then I am putting it back on." I am not like that, but I think that was their fear that I would suddenly return. (Shir)*

Talya, on the other hand, revealed a family unit who influenced her greatly; her whole decision making process revolved around how her family would react. This was not surprising to see in her case. She talked many times of the importance of "honoring thy father and mother". First, she described that she did not remove the head covering partly because of them:

> *It was very, very hard for me to take this step because of my parents… It is connected to the subject of fear of not being accepted and judgment ... I was scared, period. When I came back to Israel, I said okay, I won't take off my head covering abroad so that my parents wouldn't say: "Oh, she went abroad. That's what did it." And I really came back with [my head covered]. And it took me a year until I decided I am really taking it off. (Talya)*

She described how she did not tell her parents that she had removed her head covering for two years:

> *And then one day, I did and that was it. But my parents didn't know for two years. Every time I went to see them, I would put it on. It was very hard, very, very hard. And whenever I would go somewhere, to some wedding and if there may be friends of theirs who would see me, I would put it on. But I dealt with it… and after two years, I told them while my knees shook, I can't even describe [it]. It was very hard. It was very hard for them to accept. And to be honest, it is still hard for them. It is not something they get over easily. Hard, really judging… and I knew. And it was hard for me to deal with them because we don't speak the same language [they don't see eye-to-eye]. There is no argument, at all. We don't speak any common language except for me to say: respect who I am… The fear, the fear that every child wants their parents to look at him as though he is perfect, no criticisms. (Talya)*

While Talya was not able to tell her parents right away, she made shared the situation with her daughters, so they would know and understand her:

> *[My girls] knew about the whole process with my parents not knowing… but yes, it was important to share it with them [her girls]. That they should understand my side and understand the indecision with my parents and that I tricked them. Two years. That it is hard for me. That I wish that there will never be a situation where they hide from me something like I hid from my parents. It is something educational and not educational at the same time. (Talya)*

Later when she described the situation today, it wasn't any more of a "happy ending"; her fears were well-founded:

> *…Meaning, they can say:"You were prettier when you wore a head covering," to this day, without thinking twice. … Because the subject of honor thy mother and father is very important. These are older people and I can't create a boycott. It is my weakness. I can't say to them: {knocks on the table} "Don't say that to me." If we want to live in peace, we can't talk about it. I can't say that to them… So I tried to live my life. So I live here and not next to them. I live how I really want…[The head covering]they see it exactly as the slippery slope. And you don't have a way to explain that it isn't. Even though in reality that's what it looks like. They don't see the personal and religious development. They only see the part of me that isn't keeping [the commandments] and that is very external. (Talya)*

In her study, Josselson commented:

> *As they stand more firmly on their own legs… most [women] experience an intense need to share the self they have created with their parents… this is not easy. It often involves struggling for communication across a wide chasm. (1996, p. 224).*

This is exemplified in Talya's story. She has still not found the way to communicate with her parents and yet she still wants their approval. Her instinct told her that sharing herself was a necessary factor in order for there to be mutual growth in their relationship. However, it is clear from this interaction that it is a stagnant relationship.

Perhaps Talya's experience highlights why the other women did not speak of or seem to have a strong relationship with their families. Perhaps they were aware that any relationship with them would not be a mutually empathic one. Especially at this time when they wished to grow and develop, they were aware that that it was a relationship that would hold them back.

The experiences of women with the rest of the family unit were similar. Several told of siblings who had changed religiously and they felt lost to them.

> *My Chareidi brother was never happy with how I covered my hair... So he wasn't happy anyways, so now he is even more unhappy. The fact that I wear pants is like a catastrophe… He is just going to have to accept me the way I am, just the way I accept him the way he is. I am not exactly in favor of the things he does, so learn to live with it. I basically lost him as a brother along his road of Chareidizasia anyways, so we don't have much to do with each other, unfortunately. (Tal)*

> *They don't eat in my house: my brothers… [yet] I am very close to both of them. Also to my brother and to my sister and it's kind of a deal where I come towards them and… I eat at them. And I go to them but they don't come to me. It is part of my life... They have an amazing value world and they are really amazing people but… they don't look at their sister, what it does to her, that you don't eat at her house. Some but, they don't open it. We wouldn't know how to deal with it. We wouldn't know, so it better this way. (Talya)*

Wendy is a little different than Tal and Talya, because she did not have siblings who she felt as though were judging her decisions, but rather the Chareidi family through her husband's side. Perhaps since it was not as personal, she was able to joke about it, a different reaction than the clear pain Tal and Talya expressed when discussing their siblings and how they view them: "I think that… my husband's extended Chareidi-like family[are] probably saying: 'Our Auntie Wendy… the crazy one'. You know, that's okay, because I am crazy. I'm nuts. " (Wendy).

It is clear that some of the families cause more pain than others. It can be said that siblings seem to inflict more pain than extended family members. Josselson clarifies the significance of the emotional distance between children that were raised in the same household.

> *Those who have formed an adult identity that is very different from what they grew up with feel themselves often at a great distance from their siblings. (1996, p. 230).*

Talya, did indeed, distance herself from her childhood and now she feels the pain of distance and an inability to communicate over that distance. In Kate's case, she was the one who stayed closer to her childhood upbringing and yet it was her siblings that distanced themselves. It is possible that Kate's pain is because she was the one who stayed more or less in place and she was "abandoned" by her siblings who "left" her. Tal, who seems to have moved just as far from

her childhood as her brother, but in the opposite direction, seems to be less influenced. Possibly, since they both took steps away, she was more able to accept his choice.

5. Religion/Halacha Circle

When faced with an irreconcilable conflict between strongly held personal values and religion-based values, some may chose to disassociate from that religion. The women in this study decided to stay within a religious framework identified as Modern Orthodoxy, despite choosing to cease to adhere to one of its practices. The definition of Modern Orthodoxy as a sub-group of Orthodoxy, has been discussed at length by many academics (Schachter 2004; Hartman, 2007; 2000,שגיא ;2008 קהת ; 2006 רוזנק 2006 רביצקי). Hartman (2007) defines it as a community that is rooted within the traditional *halachik* praxis and is socially, organizationally, and religiously loyal to traditional authoritative sources. Modern Orthodoxy perceives modernity as an opportunity, which can be integrated into practice to the extent that it does not transgress the boundaries of the *halachik* praxis.

The women in this research all considered themselves Modern Orthodox, as can be understood due to their involvement in this study which had the basic requirement that the women considered themselves Modern Orthodox. *Halachik* praxis, which includes the Torah and the teaching of the sages that came after, deemed it necessary for women to cover their head upon marrying. Modern Orthodox women, as a rule, adhere to this practice, following the customs practiced by their family, their community, and the dictates of their religious authorities (Encyclopedia Judiaca vol8. 2nd edition, 2007). The challenge to understand how these women see their identity within *halacha* in general, and the *halacha* of head covering specifically, touches upon a central question in this research. It is important to understand how these women think and feel about *halacha* when they are objectively, publicly not keeping one of its dictates.

5.1. Women's Relationship with *Halacha*

The range of the women's relationships with *halacha* was extensive. For many of them, it was a focal point in their lives, as was seen by the repetitive use of the word "religion" in their stories. Yet most of their experiences were negative. Samantha described *halacha* as the following:

> *…[The] Torah is so simple, so beautiful, and so helpful and [yet it feels like a] big bag on my back. It felt [that there are] more and more things that [the] rabbi[s] put on us, and I feel like people [are caving in] under that weight. They can't breathe. (Samantha)*

When making the decision of removing their head covering, some of the women chose to ignore *halacha*. Some used its' tools in order to prove that they need not adhere to the rabbinic dictate of head covering, and some questioned the relevance of *halacha*. Lastly, there were those who spoke of a change in their commitment to *halacha* altogether.

5.2. Methods of Coping with *Halacha*

Among those who chose to deal with this issue within the framework of *halacha*, some used the tools of the *halachik* system to negate the necessity of keeping the *halacha* of head covering as opposed to ignoring it. Carla, Tal, Wendy, and Samantha all commented that they did not think *halacha* gave a good enough reason for head covering. This conclusion allowed them to stop covering their heads, stating that in regards to some matters, *halacha* was not something that was an absolute for them.

Not all of these women based their claims within the *halachik* discourse. One may ask then, on what basis did they decide to no longer cover their hair? How can they say that *halacha*'s reasoning was not good enough? Their certainty and confidence may reflect theories that suggest that women speak from a sort of instinct, knowledge, or even a memory, in which

they were able to know what they didn't know that they knew (Gilligan, 2011). It is a voicing of what had been silenced until now. They are speaking out on a subject that it is considered taboo. They are voicing what many women think and yet dare not say.

5.3. Using *Halachik* Tools

Other women went one step further and used *halachik* terms such as *da'at moshe*[5]*, da'at yehudit*[6]*, erva* [7]and the "Rambam's ruling", to support their claim that head covering is not necessary. This way of coping and dealing with *halachik* dictates is not foreign to the framework of *halacha*. These *halachik* tools are frequently used to explain *halachik* practices or to create and support new practices. Nowadays, out of respect for the Sages and a scarcity of eminent scholars ready to initiate change ,along with a fear of creating mistakes that would lead to a diluting observance of *halacha*, not many changes are made (צוריאל, תשנ"ח).

These women chose to forgo waiting for the rabbinic authorities to change and decided to create a change themselves, within the framework of *halachik* discourse. Talya said that she would be "really, really happy if the women of Israel would just decide that they are not doing it, like the Rambam when women decided they are not going to the mikva[8] (Talya). Moria said:

> *I started to think: "Do I have to follow what some women in the 16th century decided to do, based on something that wasn't dat moshe in the first place? It was dat yehudit, and if I think that hair is erva, if hair was erva, then no women should be able to go out with their hair uncovered. Not an unmarried women either." So that went out the window immediately. (Moria)*
>
> *Together with that, I started to research, let's say, with a clear purpose, because I knew what I wanted to hear as the final answer, the issue of halcha of head covering on our*

[5] *Da'at moshe* refers to commandments found in the bible
[6] *Da'at yehudit* refers to laws of modesty based on convention
[7] *Erva* means nakedness and many times refers to parts of the women body, hair and voice
[8] The *mikva* is a ritual bath used monthly by religious Jewish to purify themselves before resuming sexual relations with their husbands

> *days. And I heard voices to here and to here and like many things, also about this, they said that there are things that in the 21st century there are, how should it be put? Different aspects than there once were. (Thelma)*

5.4. The Relevance of *Halacha*

Still another argument was the relevance of the *halacha* of head covering with regards to their lives. Shir and Moira argued that a *halacha* that was decided upon hundreds of years ago is no longer relevant to modern times, while Talya (see above), on the other hand, believed that the *halacha* of head covering should be relevant to the society one finds themselves in. Margret shared that head covering was no longer relevant in her personal life: "I had been totally married, you know, mentally, emotionally, and to everyone around me also. It wasn't a new thing anymore. It was my life, my journey so… [it] wasn't so important anymore" (Margret).

Of all the women interviewed, Wendy seemed to have focused on the issue of *halacha* most intensely and she seemed to be aware of the profound influence *halachik* practice had over her identity: "Head covering…was part of who I was and it became an identity issue. And it's hard to just say okay, this is it, rationally, and I am just going to leave it… such a deep identity thing" (Wendy).And yet, despite the deep connection of *halacha* regarding her head covering, Wendy was the one who seemed to believe most strongly that *halacha* was no longer relevant because she believed that *halacha* is not of divine origin; therefore, it is feasible to determine the patriarchal nature of a codification that was written in times when women's rights had not been heard of, and see it for the patriarchal trap she believed it to be.

> *But I don't think because I am a* halachik *person or that I believe that I have to listen to all of the* halacha *… I think the* halacha *is not singular, it's very dynamic. I think that it's rabbinic in origin and not biblical in origin. I think it's patriarchal … I think that Western civilization has come very far. I think that human rights are more important than… allowing* halacha *to have the force in the law [which] affects people's laws. So, I am very critical of it… I started working in this area because of my interest in women issues and*

> *women's rights, and then I came to look at* halacha *more closely because the* halacha *(it was a source of these rules) and then I went to sociology and anthropology and it has given me a whole another perspective on this… the patriarchal trap of the* halacha *really is bad for women, that is a bad, bad thing. (Wendy)*

Talya, too, picked up on this and challenged the way *halacha itself* perceives women:

> *The subject of women and Judaism is very problematic. I see how the stance of halacha is first of all hard for me. Very hard for me… so it is hard for me because I feel that it is really about women, that women need to cover their bodies. It doesn't matter if it is just a small headband. It is the attitude towards women's bodies that I feel it difficult for me… women cover up. You need to do something for us, the men, and it is hard for me. This consciousness [is] penetrated deep. (Talya)*

It appears that these women's relationship to *halacha* became too complex for them to accept it at face value. They were able to gain the confidence they needed to point out the inconsistency they experienced in the practice of head covering with their time, place, beliefs, and personal lives.

5.5. *Halacha* Used to be Different

Several of the women hinted that they gained the courage to remove their head covering because they remembered *halacha* being practiced differently. These women were able to gain support from their past experiences in order to justify their claims that *halacha* need not be taken as an absolute.

> *Without any learning or knowledge about it, a feeling that, that* halacha *can be more flexible… and also that during the generations, women didn't always cover their hair. Um… so apparently it isn't so black and white. Um… so, so I understood that it isn't so, it isn't so clear at all. (Carla)*

> *I feel that Judaism for me, certainly in the last 10 years of our children in school and I hear what is happening, has become a much more outward religion then an inward religion, which bothers me because that is not what I was taking on board when I was a child… Judaism has seemed to have gone there for me and it's a shame. (Moria)*

Most of them regarded *halacha* as something that was no longer absolute. There is a decreasing absolute acceptance of *halacha* and a change of approach that allows for a more subjective relationship with it. This change is reflected in Gilligan's research, where she found that in the five years following college, both sexes came to understand that things are rarely absolute (1982, p. 166).

6. Why in Midlife?

In light of these conclusions, the question of why women chose to uncover their head now becomes why did the women in this study come to this realization to uncover their heads only in midlife and not after college, like those in Gilligan's research? Josselson's study presents interesting ideas in her book, "Revising Herself". Josselson categorizes four different "pathways to identity" that allow a meta-look at women's lives and how their identities develop throughout their lives (1996). One type is "the Guardians", who grew up silencing their inner desires that were not approved of by others.

6.1. The "Guardian" Theory

Guardians try to please others and be "good girls". They follow the dictates of a parent or a longtime boyfriend who decides their goals. They feel that this person knows best and tries to gain this person's approval and love. By following their dictates, this type feels secure and certain of themselves. They try to shape their inner desires to be compatible with what they were taught was right to do. They do not question their destiny, since they were told it is the right way for them.

In religion, Guardians' beliefs are the same as those of their parents, and they are expected to continue that heritage. Their life is based on family, heritage, and duty. They try to

sustain their childhood selves and they seem not to develop further. Yet, many of them later in life become more self-aware and insightful and come to see the pattern of their behavior. Many times this happens in midlife. They discover emotional experiences they never had and acknowledge their imperfections. This allows them to choose and find themselves. By leaning on their secure base they can give voice to what was silenced.

This pathway to identity reflects aspects of many of the stories of the interviewed women in this paper's research. Josselson's insights therefore suggest that the delayed rejection of these women is an identity pathway that is quite common. There are many women who wait until midlife to explore their true identity and the question of absolutes in their life.

Josselson's discussion of the Guardian archetype sheds light on other interesting issues brought forth in these women's *halachik* identities. Josselson's findings suggest a reason why these women, earlier in life, took upon themselves the *halacha* so absolutely when later in life they began to look at it differently. The expectations demanded of Guardians and their response of obedience is similar to the story of most of the women in this study.

Some grew up in an environment in which there was an expectation that they would lead a religious life in the ways that their parents had before them. Even those who grew up in less religious homes had a sense of the ideal religious lifestyle and felt a pressure to live up to that ideal. Many of them shaped their inner desires into what was expected. Wendy explained how when she was sixteen, she "made a conscious decision that I would either reject everything or embrace it in a more whole-hearted, intellectual fashion. It was much in fashion at the time to embrace" (Wendy). Similarly, Shir felt as though "it was pretty clear that all my friends who got

married, I was one of the first who married, but whoever was around me, it was very clear, you know, to everyone" (Shir). Whereas Moria felt as though

> *It gave me a sense, a feeling, sort of belonging to the "married women" now as opposed to a girl. It gives you an outward sense of belonging to a larger thing. And it suited me to belong to that environment, be one of the ladies who were already doing it, as well as feeling I was doing the right thing. (Moria)*

They had an understanding that they must be good girls in order to be accepted, protected, safe, and secure. Wendy went as far as to call herself a "good girl", thus the sentiment of doing what was expected of her definitely came out:

> *I think that my psychological make-up for a very, very long time and even to this day, is that I have to be a good girl. I have to be nice, I have to be, you know, polite, and I don't know what. I have to be obedient. (Wendy)*

Another developmental aspect of these women's lives that resonated with Josselson's theories was the evolving of their understanding of what they grew up with. Guardians began to see the imperfections in the way they were raised and therefore learned to voice the thoughts they had silenced until then. The women in this research spoke of an evolving of their understanding of *halacha*. Moria described her evolving sense of *halacha* as a move from "black and white to color". Her use of these specific words are very strong, a sense of her life opening up, becoming more alive. Others described their experience in similar terms:

> *So I saw myself as… more serious, who took halacha more serious... My approach to halacha evolved back to what it had been originally, back to what I grew up with, which is that things make sense within a context of society and one should make decisions in that society and not black and white. Things need to be interpreted in context and not absolutely. As a young twenty-two year old, I was looking at the absolutes… the view of halacha that says it changes with time and setting and the environment. (Ora)*

> *I feel now, not like in my 20s, that this is not a black and white subject. I feel a lot of gray… I think for me it was an issue of age... and it just took me a long time to branch out to the idea that I could make some decisions for myself. (Moria)*

> *Halachikly, I didn't feel that I needed to explain it to myself or the halacha came to a place where it no longer meant the same thing to me and I looked at it in a different way and I took it with a grain of salt. (Wendy)*
>
> *But I have changed my opinions about halacha… I have gone through, I am going through now a major [change].Thinking about religion and G-d. Come to different conclusion… (Tal)*

These women speak of a relationship to *halacha*. Bringing truth into relationships is described as courage (Robb, 2006, p. 189). In order to act in relation, to be authentic and to feel, a person must be courageous. These women's actions, in which they brought their own truth into their relationship with *halacha*, can be understood as an act of courage.

6.2. Relational Cultural Disassociation Theory

Another theory that may shed light on why these women waited until midlife to revisit their identity within *halacha* is the theory of disassociation, which was mentioned in the previous "Self Circle" chapter. This idea originates in relational psychology and relates specifically to patients who experience trauma. The theory of disassociation can help answer this question of why these women waited until midlife to challenge *halacha*.

Disassociation is found when people are exposed to repeated humiliation, abuse, and emotional neglect. Patriarchy is seen as a catalyst arbitrator of these behaviors and creator of disconnection by creating a binary cultural experience that marginalizes and creates feelings of isolation. A person may recognize disconnection as a feeling of being unheard and missing an empathetic response (Jordon, 2010, p.41). Through the understanding of the theory of disassociation, it can be understood that these women were exposed to feelings of isolation and marginalization within *halacha*, thus many of them may have now disconnected themselves from the relationship. The amount of time it took them to recover from their disconnection may explain the delay in the development.

Relational- cultural theory suggests that when the injured party can present their feelings to the other party, and the other party responds empathically, the disconnection will cease and connection can be found (Jordon 2010,p. 41). These women's relationships with *halacha* was similar. Although *halacha* is inanimate and cannot respond empathically to the women's stories, once the women felt that they found their place within the *halachik* framework, once they understood that they could reflect and respond and use halacha because they had found enough confidence to do so, without feelings of isolation or marginalization, they were then able once again to find their connection with *halacha*, and based on the theory, grow and develop psychologically.

Moria's story was quite clear cut. When she put aside aspects of *halacha*, she grew in what can be considered *halachik* measures, such as keeping more commandments. Removing her head covering enabled her to create an empathetic relationship, where she expressed her voice and took control over her decision, which allowed her to reconnect with her Judaism and with her inner self. Until then, *halacha* had been "preventing" her from growing both in practice and in "self". By letting go of some of the practice, Moria overall gained more in her connection to Judaism:

> *I discovered when I took off my hair covering that I became more reconnected with my own Judaism than I was when I had it on. It was bothering me to such an extent that I, not consciously but somehow sub-consciously, felt that wearing the head covering was such a sacrifice for me, that I was just being a good Jew for putting it on… I can say about myself also that when I took it off and that had disappeared, I was able to reconnect with my inner self, which I found fascinating, because I didn't realize it until I took it off. It had a very negative impact in my for the last years I had it on. (Moria)*

Another way to understand the disassociation theory is introduced in the relational-cultural therapy method which explains that a woman can heal if she finds self-empathy.

> *It involves the discovery- and relief in discovery- that the others personal limitations drove her or his hurtful behavior. This leads to significant shifts in relational images and acceptance of one's intrinsic worth that lie at the heart of growth in relationship (Jordon 2010, p. 49).*

Similarly, the women in this study may have on their own begun to understand that the source of their complex relationship with *halacha* was due to an apparent intransigence in *halacha* and not rooted solely in themselves. This would then allow them to reach a place of acceptance and growth.

Wendy's story resonated with both aspects of this theory. She explained that she was waiting for an empathetic response from the *halachik* community. Yet it was when she gave up on them and understood that the fault was not her own, that she found a new community who responded to her emphatically.

> *You know, so it was enabling me, that I had the comfort of "Oh, I am a good girl", even though I was not so good… But when I was still "onstage", when I was still in <u>that</u> personae, arguing with halacha, then, you know, I couldn't. I couldn't, I just couldn't do it [take off my head covering]. I didn't want people to think I was a bad girl. I didn't want them to discredit me because of that… So, I guess to a certain extent, at that point in time, it was clearly to facilitate my work and the image I was supposed to be projecting… So I must have intuitively not done until I finally said I don't care anymore… I mean [I am] really not part of that community and I don't need the head covering to… to… mask what I have to say. I can say it without masking it. I didn't want to be part of that community. (Wendy)*

6.3. Why Remain Religious?

The question that begs to be asked then, is if these women came to see *halacha* in such a different light, enough that they felt that it was no longer absolute/relevant or that they had the ability to judge on certain matters through their own knowledge, then why did they choose to stay a part of its framework or why didn't they change other aspects that bother them? Gilligan

raises the idea of the exit/voice dilemma when discussing relationships. She states that people don't like the voice option because it is messy and takes a long time. The back and forth, time, and discussions needed to stay in relationships is tedious and difficult (Gillian, 1988,p. 141). Perhaps when these women chose to stay within the parameters of *halacha*, they were choosing the voice option, which allowed them to stay in relationship with *halacha* and create a back and forth discourse with it, which is valid, based on Gilligan's theory..

Another theory suggests that attempting to maintain relationships might be a part of the human primitive, natural wiring that are built for maintaining relationships (Jordon 2009, p.4). The importance of relationships is discussed much by Christina Robb in "This Changes Everything" and Judith Jordon in "Relational – Cultural Therapy". The central idea is that a person only grows if they are a part of a growth-enabling relationship. Without such relationships, a person does not grow.

Perhaps the women who chose to struggle with *halacha* were brought to the "edge", which is an idea of Carol Gilligan discussed by Christina Robb (Robb, 2006), that when there are so many thoughts and feelings, a person must just stop and listen. It is the place where people speak honestly and it is the place where growth comes from. It is the point that Robert Cole seems to be referring to when he states "… crisis can lead to growth when it presents an opportunity to confront impediments to further development" (see Gilligan 1982, p. 115). In this light, the women who stayed in the difficult relationship with *halacha* were forced to the "edge" by their questioning of it, and ultimately brought themselves to a place of growth.

Tal shared that when she began questioning *halacha*, the first thing she did was to learn more about it, and this helped her stay within *halacha*'s parameters for longer. "And actually, in

some ways, it did keep me in the misgeret[9] of, you know, thinking halachikly for another few more years." Tal seemed have chosen the voice option and she struggled with understanding the *halacha*, which kept her in relationship.

The women in this research had different ways to describe why they chose to stay connected to halachik Judaism. Several women described a need to continue their commitment to *halacha* since they wanted to be part of tradition. Shir said simply "I won't give up on my religious life, and not on my praying and not on my Kashrut and not on my Shabbat. That is things that I will not compromise about" (Shir), while Tal felt as though there was a connection to Judaism from all of the people before her:

> *[I am] keeping halacha, so I am a religious Jew still, and I feel a huge connection to history and my traditions that people sent down to us… And there has got to be something in it. Some people have done it for so long; I, at least, have to think about it a lot before I make big changes. (Tal)*

While Moria explained that externally she might choose not to cover her hair but she feels most comfortable in Orthodox Judaism:

> *It funny because despite the fact that I wear trousers and I took my head covering off, probably because of the fact that I went to Beis Yaccov, I am very traditional with my Judaism… I am very happy in my role as it is. And I prefer if I am going to something Jewish to go to something Orthodox. (Moria)*

> *"And the aspect of that that appeals to me still is it's a tradition, a long standing Jewish tradition, and I like to uphold them and live by them." (Margret)*

This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of relational images. These images are expectations of relationships that we as humans create out of previous experiences of relationships, usually from our early childhood (Jordon, 2010, p. 26). These relational images can be comforting, as in the feeling that tradition creates in many of us. It is the relationship that

[9] Translation: Framework

religious Jews expect to have with *halacha*. This may be one of the factors that pull women to stay within the *halachik* framework even if they cease practicing things that goes with "following *halacha*". Josselson (1996) found that those who are religiously committed feel a greater sense of belonging. This, too, echoed in the words of these women.

While these images can create a feeling of warmth and familiarity, if they are too rigid, they can also keep those from truly being, or feeling, as though they belong in a relationship. Therefore, it was interesting to hear Tal speak of what she called "inertia" in *halacha*:

> "*The inertia, from the beliefs that we are dragging… carrying with us a long time, and they're comfortable and they are what we believed in for a long time. And you know, it sets up, difficult, conflicting feelings within you…" (Tal)*

It seems as though she was describing relational images that are too rigid and did not allow her to grow to a new relationship. There are certain *halachas* in which she explains that the inertia was broken. When she was asked if she was able to pull herself out of that inertia, she replied:

> *Yeah, because as I got older and more mature, I stopped caring how much, what other people thought about me so much. So I don't care that much anymore. I feel good about myself and it was many hours of long process of building my own confidence in my life and feeling, you know, secure as a person as a woman as you know, with myself… so, yeah.(Tal)*

Once she trusted herself enough to judge, she was able to pull herself out of those unhealthy relational- images. Other *halacha*s she remained within the inertia and did not change or leave.

Hartman presents a different theory which returns the agency for their decision to the women themselves. In her article "'Strong multiplicity': An Interpretive Lens in the Analysis of Qualitative Interview Narratives" (2013) she discussed the idea that "multiple perspectives may in fact be the natural outgrowth of multiple experience – that people do not merely speak with a

multiplicity of voices, but that they actually live within a multiplicity of self." (p. 13). Thus, the experiences these women described as enabling and enlightening, may have served them for the specific issue of head covering, but should not be assumed to be true for other aspects of their lives. Hartman urges us to respect the women and to understand how flexible, complex and engaging these women are, as they make decisions for each specific aspect of their life with its individual characteristics and distinctive qualities.

Stemming from Hartman's research it is possible to suggest that the reason the women did not chose to implement their new understanding of Halacha to other parts of their life is simply because they were able to discern the divergent characteristic of their other encounters with Halacha as different and therefore react to it accordingly.

Additional insight on the issue can be gleaned from a different field of research. The choice of the women in this thesis to redefine their identity in a way that is judged by society as a change in their religiosity is reminiscent of people who redefine their religious identity in its entirety- converts. Literature on conversion discusses not only the conversion between faiths but also conversion within faiths (such as those of Catholics to Protestants) (Luebke, 2012, introduction), which sheds an interesting light on the issue of these women.

Gauri Viswanathan, a professor of Humanities, claims that conversion is firstly a significant act that changes the boundaries of "selfhood, citizenship, nationhood and community" (Viswanathan, 1998, pg. 16). She further explains that conversion is not just a religious act but an act of political agency, of cultural criticism, of resistance. It is a deed that exposes that the boundaries of society are not fixed and unalterable.

In explaining the differences between a blasphemer and a heretic, she explains what might be understood as the objective of those who do not seek to fundamentally change religion. She writes:

> *If blasphemers are defined as those who commit verbal offense…. But without necessarily attacking points of doctrine, heretics on the other hand are those whose alternative interpretations of fundamental religious truths substantially undermine the stable foundation on which those truths stand… blasphemy's enemy is not a text or creed but a community , along with the codes and rules it employs to sanction membership within it. (Viswanathan, 1998, pg. 242)*

Labeling the women in this thesis heretics or blasphemers is wholly inappropriate and does not respect their stories. And yet Vaswanthan's definitions assist in understanding why these women have not left religion altogether. They, similarly to the blasphemers described in Viswanthan's book, are creating a paradigm shift, which reflects back to society that the codes and rules of society are not inalterable. They challenge their community, not their fundamental religious truths. In their act of removing head their head covering, consciously or unconsciously, they are confronting the community that represents their religion, criticizing the culture built around their texts and resist the sanctions of society, while challenging the limit of what is acceptable in society.

6.4. Distinguish *Halacha* and Rabbinic Authorities

One of the topics that arose many times from the women in this research was their relationship with those who hold themselves as the interpreters of *halacha*: the rabbinic authorities. It would be incorrect to say that all the women in this research had bad experiences with *halachik* authorities, but a bad experience definitely was a contributor to removing their head covering for a fair amount of them and an obvious pattern amongst many of them. Alternatively, several of them experienced "authenticity" when they met with rabbinic

authorities. Authenticity is when someone is listening to a person and really hearing what they are saying (Robb 2006,p. 181).

> *[The] rabbi… we really trusted him and he ended up being a witness in our wedding. (Kate)*
>
> *I went to someone that he was [a] very modern think[er]. He didn't say that I actually couldn't take it off. He said that it would be difficult to find a loophole with halacha that would say that for sure it is okay to not wear it. But I [knew from a] previous dealing with him, he is very focused on shalom bayit [10] and on the person being shalem[11] with what they are doing... I did meet him a couple of years later and he was actually very sweet. He said to me:" I see you made the decision on your own. Well, good for you..." I did want his opinion. I just never got there before. Maybe one day I will go back. (Moria)*
>
> *One rabbi, who is my rabbi…. Ask a question – he will answer. If you don't ask – he won't say anything. And also, after I took off my head covering and we are still very, very good friends. Good friends… he so does not coerce … It could be that his attitude towards things helped me, gave me the strength to do it. (Thelma)*

The quality of the relationship between women and rabbinic authorities as representatives of *halacha* is significant. A good relationship, an accepting relationship, one in which the women felt freedom to bring themselves, could be one of the reasons that kept the women within the confines of Orthodoxy, and sheds light on another reason why the women chose to stay religious. As Thelma explained, her Rabbi's attitude might have given her the strength to take off her head covering. Without that open dialogue and empathetic relationship, she may have chosen to leave religion completely in order to find those characteristics in a different framework. As Moria explained, her rabbi's emphasis on shalom bayit [12] and on the person being comfortable is what pulled her towards him and allowed her to try and stay within the confines of *halachik* authority.

Alternatively, many women shared bad experiences they had with rabbinic authorities. As is seen by what these women had said to them, the rabbinic authorities overstepped their

[10] Translation: peace in the household
[11] Translation: comfortable
[12] *Shalom bayit* is peace within the household between a husband and wife

positions. While these women chose not to leave the modern Jewish lifestyle, they might have due to these bad experiences:

> *Today, even if you go and see many Orthodox rabbis, not many of them will feel comfortable to come out and say halachikly you don't need to wear it... Though I have spoken to two rabbis [who agree that women should not take dangerous hormone treatments in situations where playing with nida[13] may help fertility]. [They] say they just didn't have the guts to come to and say that [it] is right. (Moria)*

> *I sat here at the head of the table, and the rabbi sat there [opposite] and suddenly the rabbi made Kiddush and the rabbi did like this {turned his body away}. And I went crazy. I understood immediately what happened. I was with a sleeve until here {indicates mid-upper arm}. And that's the whole story. His wife came with a jacket [and handed it to me]… and these things can really influence for the worst. Humiliation, there is nothing worse than that. (Talya)*

Moria and Talya's stories show how difficult it was for them to clash with the rabbinic authorities in general. Moria explained that she was able to separate that experience from her decision to cover her hair. Alternatively, Tehila and Samantha chose not to separate their experience from the framework these people represent. They tell of a direct correlation between their bad experiences and taking off their head covering. Tehila experienced an encounter that she did not want to get into with a rabbi, after which she needed to distance herself from the rabbinic institution, head covering being a symbol of that institution:

> *Then I had a run in with a Chareidi rabbi who… did this very, very mean thing to me and that was the day I said I must disassociate myself with this world. I couldn't get far enough away. (Tehila)*

Samantha described feelings of rejection:

> *This rabbanit {who was perceived as a friend and supporter}… she never [came], she never call[ed when I needed her]. And I felt like… I don't want to make you proud anymore… I hate this thing [the hat] so much and you were like last thing to hold me to stop me from doing it. (Samantha)*

[13] The days a woman is impure due to her period and must refrain from physical contact with her husband.

Samantha's words were full of pain. Her words rang with the anguish she felt from being rejected. The fact that she was rejected by the people who helped her through her conversion process and introduced her to religion made the circumstances all the more intensely emotional. In the process of rejecting those who she saw as rabbinic authorities, she lost any motivation to continue to hold on to the practice they encouraged.

Wendy imparted a very interesting situation in which she works with ultra-Orthodox rabbinic authorities. On the one hand, she claimed that: "Actually, I think no one has said anything to me [about uncovering her hair]… I won't even put on a skirt. And I think that they respect me more" (Wendy). It looks like she had a positive relationship with the rabbinic authorities. And on the other hand, they were what made her look into the issue with *halacha* to begin with and point out the inconsistencies within it:

> *My work forced me to start looking at things closely which I may have not looked at closely if I had not done the work that I did. So, once I start[ed] questioning things closely and so I also went…back to school to learn anthropology and sociology. (Wendy)*

She also shared a situation which was very embarrassing to her, in which she behaved in an unusual manner out of fear of a person she was working for- a rabbi who did not know she had removed her head covering. It did not precipitate her decision to remove her head covering, but it gave great insight into how she saw parts of the rabbinical world and their expectations of her:

> *One time, one rabbi… I was already not covering my hair in… public places. And one time, we went out some sort of festive evening… And I didn't expect [him]… to be there, and I was working for him. And he came in that evening… I literally hid under the table. That was very embarrassing. I would never do that today. I am not proud of that. I am really not proud of that story. But I looked back at it and there was someone who was there at the time… and he saw me and he just... he thought I was, you know, I was out of my mind. (Wendy)*

Wendy was extremely embarrassed by her behavior. The humiliation that Talya described the rabbi bringing upon her can be heard in Wendy's story. Wendy's need to hide her true self from the rabbinical world was part of what prompted her to choose to put her deep identity connection with the practice aside, and present herself as she truly was "removing her mask", as she calls it.

Not all rabbis affected the women and their decision to uncover their heads badly, yet those who did created a lot of damage by creating pain, humiliation, and embarrassment. This is not surprising since Judaism is a patriarchal religion which at times uses the tools of isolation and shame to enforce itself. The difference is that this time, these women trusted themselves and their own judgment enough to overcome a slight by a rabbinic authority. Thus, instead of becoming oppressed further, they took themselves out of the cycle of patriarchy, at least on this issue.

7. Circle of Friends

When building an identity, one's parents, siblings, partners and extended family greatly influences who he or she is and becomes. Yet it is impossible to ignore the great influence one's social circle has on shaping how a person becomes or chooses to be.

7.1. Friends as Building Blocks of Identity

Friendship fulfills several roles. It can be a source for identity options, like introducing different parts of life of which a person might be previously unaware. It can be a sounding board for the trials and experiments one makes with identity choices. And it can also offer a new context, exposing one's thoughts and feelings to a new perspective (Josseldon 1996).

Several of the women shared that throughout their process, they turned to their friends and this answered some sort of need within the women. Some of the women found support with their friends to be more helpful or necessary than other relationships in their lives:

> *And a few friends actually helped me, two of them. A few friends said some things to me, which I think were very powerful to me… I think one friend of mine said she thought it was a pushing down women… that it was sort of like depressing them. And to some extent, I felt like it did that to me also. That was one friend who never covered her hair... And one woman… said to me that she wouldn't even put on a skirt to go to an interview. That she did that once and she found it very degrading that she couldn't just be who she was and wear a skirt and, you know, wear her pants, and she wasn't going to dress for anybody and she didn't care what anyone said. That was also very powerful for me… There was another friend of mine, I once said to my friend… you know, I really want to take off my head covering. She says so take it off. Just like that. Just take it off. (Wendy)*

Wendy's friends offered different identity options. These were women that didn't subscribe to society's expectations, who voiced their discontent with the situation, were able to verbally describe things Wendy felt and did not know how to say. They were basically role models of strong, empowering women who had already acted, and supported Wendy in doing the

same. Moreover, they described the issue in a different perspective: a perspective of one who, although they came from the same society as Wendy, didn't feel trapped within the expectations and terms used. Her friend's answer of "so take it off", and the affect that had on Wendy, shows how novel the idea was to her. She was not used to the perspective that would just accept that and see it as a simple act.

A fair amount of women described their friends as identity options. They looked to them for precedence before they removed their head covering, some of them even accepting their precedent as a *halachik* stamp of approval, as Margret did:

> *A lot of my friends are very, you know, they are certainly as observant as [me]… that they observe Shabbat and kashrut the way I do and take it very seriously. And some of them never did cover their hair, so I didn't really worry about checking with somebody about the halacha of it. (Margret)*

Thelma even describes that the way she removed her head covering was taken from those around her:

> *I always debate when I am, for instance, going to a wedding. In the beginning, I would debate if [I should] to go with a head covering or not. Then I looked around right and left, right and left. And I saw that my friends, who go to synagogue with a head covering, don't go with a head covering. That was good for me. (Thelma)*

Samantha spoke of her friends during the act of taking off her head covering. She removed her head covering for the first time on the way to her friend's house. It is possible that since they were not religious she allowed herself to do so, knowing that they would be a receptive sounding board for Samantha: "My husband wasn't here and I was walking to visit one of my friends, and I said: No! {strongly} No, I hate [it] so much and I took it off… they['re] not religious, so they didn't make whoo [big deal]… they didn't say anything" (Samantha).

These women are probably not aware of it, but by sharing with their friends, they are actually acting politically. Robb discusses the political act of consciousness-raising in which a small group gathers to talk about what they want and how to get it (2006). It is a place with real relationships that could lead to growth. These women are unaware of it when they speak to their friends, but on a small scale, they are creating a place which allows them to grow from each other's experiences.

Moreover, Irene Striver claims that finding your voice can only happen within a network of support and the more voices raised, the stronger the voices become. This is especially true when dealing with dominant cultures, whose aim is to make women feel isolated. This sharing creates empowerment and a possibility of change (Robb, 2006). The act of removing their head covering can be understood as a metaphorical rising of a silent voice. It is a silent act yet it is a very loud act; although it is silent it creates a lot of resonance in these women's worlds and a lot of noise can be made.

This seems to be reflected in Wendy's story. By hearing her friends' experiences and feeling their support, she felt empowered to make her own change which, she explained during her interview, was based on the idea of rejecting the dominant culture that she perceived was trying to trap her

7.2. Different Friendship for Different Times

And yet, nearly an equal amount of the women explained that they did not speak to their friends or, if they did, they felt it was insignificant. Talya felt as though she did not need the support or approval of her friends: "I didn't have a need so much to talk to my friends. I told them, but not… it was something very mine… I didn't feel I needed to" (Talya). Thelma simply

said, when asked if she had discussed it: "If I asked someone's advice? No, no, really not" (Thelma). While Samantha described feeling betrayed by her own friends and having diffiuculty finding new ones

> *I just hope I will find… my way and my people around who will take me… take me with them and feel comfortable with me and I will find some friends because I have also problem to find friends. So it's just my family and my beliefs and my spirituality and my G-d. (Samantha)*

Josselson sheds light on this phenomenon. She explains that by midlife, women are looking for something else in their friends. They are looking for constancy and validation of their beliefs and chosen way of life rather than stimulation or challenge. They prefer long term friendships to new ones (Josselson, 1996). Some of the women from this study didn't have friends because of some kind of betrayal (like Samantha), lack of time, or the demands from their family. The women with friends chose those who understood their lifestyle and in mirroring their lives, made their identities more stable.

These patterns of behavior might explain why some of the women did not describe or seem to have significant friendships. These women, in a very real way, changed their identities. It is possible to suggest that since they may no longer be looking for friends who stimulate their thinking as they did in their youth, they have to search for someone who understands them. They must be willing to venture out to make new friends, which most women in their midlives, according to the theory, are uninterested in doing. They had to be ready to put aside time and effort to help a new friendship thrive. It is possible that many of the women in this study were just unwilling or unable to find people who answered those criteria of friendship and that is why they chose to make this decision on their own.

Josselson adds that an additional role that friendship can fulfill while one builds his or her identity is as an example of who not to be like. It is human nature to build one's personal identity to contrast to people who don't relate to this new identity (Josselson, 1996). Moria explained how one of her friends rejected her, but in the end she grew and developed out of that incident:

> *I think she [the friend] stopped contact with me more or less afterwards [after I uncovered my hair] because she decided we are not religious enough. She never came out right and said it, but she stopped the kids playing [together]… she likes to keep away of anything that might influence her religious views… It made me realize that perhaps the relationship was built on something not quite real. And I can say, as a woman in my 40s, I would have had a completely different reaction. I probably would have cried in my 20s. I have grown up enough to know that that's me. And if somebody can't accept me as I am, then it's not going to work and that's okay. (Moria)*

Moria, by contrasting herself with her friend, combined with perspective that her age gave her, was able to recognize a truth in her life, and define herself more clearly. Although she said that she was unclear as to whose path was better, it can be understood through her words and tone, that she felt that her way was right for her. And this kind of confidence in her new identity was one that she came to from her "self".

Some women shared that their friends were integral in allowing them to search for their true identity. Yet, other women had reached the point in their lives that they were not searching for friendships and, if they were, they were looking for those who were similar to them and would support their identity. Some women were content with this situation and some were not. Those who wanted friends found themselves searching for those who not only needed friendship as much as they did, but also whose identity was congruent with their unique identity. The women searching for these new friendships found them hard to find at this point in their lives.

8. Circle of General Society

In her research, Josselson investigates the idea of identity of the self in women. Two of these insights are noteworthy for this paper's study. The first insight describes that the range of identities available to a person is dependent on the options that society allows. Otherwise, an identity is considered deviant and is rejected by society. The more open the society, the more identity options are available. Some chose identities from within the options available to them and some "tried to burst through whatever structure had contained them as girls, to experiment with themselves and try to create new selves or new worlds." (Josselson 1996, p. 33)

In her research of women throughout their lives, Josselson noticed that many women at the age of thirty-three moved away from the religion they were raised with and joined a more secular group. Some of the women in this study, by removing their head covering but staying within religion, did not necessarily leave their religion, but like the women in Josselson's research, placed themselves in an identity group that gave them more options. Others, like Carla, described creating new identities that confused people: "I mean, I had long hair and I started taking out my braid from my head covering and really it wasn't so accepted to do that… on purpose. Because then they would ask" (Carla).

The second insight from Josselson's research comes to a conclusion that identity in women is relational and that changes in relationship have a most profound impact on their identity. Identity, she says, can be described as belonging to others. Women want to be involved with others and see themselves reflected in others – an identity in connection. Josselson made it very clear by noting that finding oneself with others does not mean erasing oneself in the process. Josselson believed that developing in connection means finding;

> *"more interesting and challenging ways of being with others, knowing them better… discovering more precise and meaningful forms of feeling known and validated as oneself, increasing moments of mutuality and bonds of trust, maintaining connection over time and distance and grappling with the dilemmas of caring for another."* (Josselson,1996, p. 210)

Many of the women in this research expressed a need to find "more precise and meaningful forms of feeling known" and of presenting themselves to society. They felt that the way society saw them was incorrect; they were recognized as representing an identity no longer theirs. Jossselson's insight clarifies their need to correct society's conclusions in regards to what they are labeled. Their identity was partially built out of society's perception. By changing society's perception, they changed their "self". Carla described that experience:

> *And I started pretty quickly wearing pants. Really, just to give a different external look so they wouldn't immediately say: "okay, settlers, right-wing, religious- in a box." I really, really don't like being in a box. So um, and it helped, it helped to define, ah, to define more my personal identity in a religious, political manner in general. (Carla)*

While Carla's deep aversion to the "boxes" that she was put in was very clear, she understood that her identity was partially determined by others. The way she presented herself to the world was the way they would translate her identity. Only she would experience her own identity. In the past, the fact that it was not her true identity did not bother Carla so much, but it became more problematic for her as the years went on. Carla's story represented many of the stories in which the women chose to present themselves differently by removing their head covering. Many times, they chose to remove their head covering in order to align their identity more firmly with their internal identity.

Another issue that arose is that if a woman chooses to remain affiliated to Modern Orthodox and yet wishes to remove her head covering, she must dwell on the consequences of society labeling her as non-religious. Some of the women were not bothered by the fact that they

looked non-religious while others were. Some, such as Carla, explained that they would rather be labeled 'secular than 'religious':

> *I imagine that most people who see me and don't know me think I am not religious. Um, and, I don't mind. I mean, um… listen, I am also at an age that I care less what people think of me. Um… and in conversation, then they find out… so I don't succeed in being religious on the first round of introduction. So, I come this way with shirt and pants and without a head covering. So they leave assuming I am not religious until it comes to who brings this and that. And then I say to the religious people, you can eat that. It's kosher by me. Oh, really? And then the conversation is: where did the kids study, and then they begin to understand where I stand. But externally I think they think I am not religious. (Carla)*

By choosing the external symbols of a non- religious identity, they chose an identity that holds within it more options for identity. Furthermore, they enjoyed the control they have over their identity. If a person was close to them, the person would truly know them and the rest of society was less important to them. Ora explained that she "preferred the current situation of letting, of presenting, myself as who I am and let people draw conclusions gradually rather than having them jump to conclusions" (Ora) while Tal saw it that:

> *Maybe I feel now that even though it seems that covering my hair was an act of greater control, maybe this [uncovering my head] is more active actually because I am the one who is initiating [conversations regarding my religiosity] all the time, so it is something that is just coming about. (Tal)*

Carla even created a mechanism that would force people to ask to her about her identity so that she could explain it to them:

> *I started to what I call "confuse the enemy." Meaning, I had long hair and I started taking out my braid from the head covering… on purpose. Then they would ask. So they would ask where I stand, that they didn't understand as immediately where and what (Carla).*

Despite her contempt of labels and boxes, Carla used it as a tool to advance her agenda of a "relaxed religion":

> *[You're wondering] if I put myself in another box? Actually, proudly [yes, I do]. Ah… there are a lot of things in the religious society that annoy me and, um, everything is looking at the external, all the extremism. It good for me to… show a relaxed religion, an internal religion, a religion that is, ah, connected to society, So, so if I put myself in a box, it is in the box of relaxed religion, ah, that I think needs to be maintained (Carla).*

The words the women used, "boxes", "labels", "package deal" illustrated that they were aware that society categorized them, that their identity was determined by how other people perceived them. And yet, in the modern society of today that values individuality, creativity, and uniqueness, these seemingly neutral words were negative. These women were unhappy with the process of society, as Talya described and later suggested a new option. Talya voiced confusion choosing which identity she wished to represent. She went back and forth between the advantages and disadvantages of each way of life. She was torn:

> *It [head covering] represents that everyone thinks they know who you are, right?" So, if you have a head covering, you think X about this, and Y about the other thing, and Z about the political situation and, like, I pay a different price when they don't think I am religious at all. I didn't want anyone to know who I am... Just let me be who I am…I prefer this situation where they think I am not religious than that they should think I am religious… because I don't like the package deal that comes with religion… and also it minimizes options a lot. But it could be that I am kidding myself because it is also minimizing the other way... But it is more pleasant [when they think I am not religious]. I don't really know why. Maybe because… when I was there, everyone came to a conclusion about you. Um, ah, I don't want to be part of that in that way… no… that… I don't want to belong to here, but I am labeled as belonging. (Talya)*

Talya brought up a third option: "Don't talk about me". Her desire was that people not make judgments; that they not look at her external code of dress as representing something. She wished that people not talk about her body or her thoughts. This dream represents what many of these women seemed to want, but they were unable to put such a utopian idea into words. Talya lived within the world of feminist theory and was perhaps therefore able to think beyond the trivialities, practicalities, and reality of life.

In summary, Josselson writes that:

> *Psychological growth in connection involves finding more interesting and challenging ways of being with others, knowing them better (and simultaneously knowing oneself better), discovering more precise and meaningful forms of feeling known and validated as oneself, increasing moments of mutuality and bonds of trust … we realize our identity only in sharing it with others and the sharing itself confirms and strengthens our sense of who we are. (Josselson, 1996, p. 210-211)*

When these women removed their head covering, they seemed to conform to Josselson's explanations . They attempted to find a more precise form of being known (not as a right-wing settler, for example). They attempted to increase moments of mutuality with those around them (for example, they removed their head covering, creating a situation where people felt more comfortable approaching them). They tried to understand how others perceived their head covering and tried to understand more of what they thought of their head covering. In other words, by Josselson's definition, they were developing in connection. They grew beyond the stage in which many women remain stuck, where women struggle to negotiate with society (and themselves) an identity that entails many aspects of themselves that are not shared with general society. They avoided creating a difficult situation where attempting to develop in connection is futile.

Taking Off the Head Covering

The reasons for removing their head covering as well as the impact it had in on their identity is discussed earlier. The women interviewed also discussed the removal itself and their experience is essential in order to understand the context of their actions.

1. Fear

The removal of the head covering was accompanied with fears for several of the women. Talya discussed the fears in her personal life, the fear of her parents' reactions. Ora shared a fear of misjudgment: she feared that people would judge her community on her actions and she didn't want them to be harmed by them.

> *Not wanting it to reflect poorly on the environment I was living in… and, "Oh, those lazy types in _____!" that people in communities on the right of me saying: "Oh, obviously they don't take halacha seriously in those areas." And there is a limit of how much I can jump up and down and say: "No, this is me, this isn't them. This is really an ideological decision, this is really valid…" [Also], somehow I didn't want people to associate my being fed up, with his kadish, my father-in-law's death was negative, with [a] negative change on my part. (Ora)*

Judith Jordon describes fear in her discussion of relational psychology but she called it relational courage. "An RCT understanding of courage suggests that courage involves feelings of fear and finding support to deal with it." (Jordon, 2010, p. 32). This idea elevates these women's fears to an understanding that their fear actually turned their act into an act of relational courage. In being relational, their acts are elevated to a place of influence on those around them. By facing those fears, they influence all the relationships they touch.

2. Aesthetics

Many of the women shared that they took off their head covering for reasons of aesthetics. Each one of the women described very real, complex truths regarding their aesthetics.

Hair is very personal and creates individuality, an identity (Leach, 1985). When these women's hair became something that repelled them (while it was covered), which they did not wish to identify with, it seemed to create a very strong reaction in all of them.

Having something that a person has strong negative feelings for as part of the person's identity, especially something that is attached to the head as hair is, is not a healthy situation. These women began to having very strong negative feelings to their head covering. Some didn't like how their hair looked when their hair was covered. Others felt that covering their hair was destroying their hair. Thelma felt strongly against the hair covering, that it was doing physical damage to her hair: "I didn't like it because it crushed my hair. And my hair smelled two hours after a shower and it had a bad smell" (Thelma). Ora described that professionals told her it was ruining her hair: "That was actually a factor… that [it] was ruining my hair. I had hairdressers say: 'You really shouldn't, given the thinness of your hair' (Ora). And Moria saw a real aesthetic difference when her hair was uncovered:

> *I have very curly hair and if it is in a hat all day, it looks limp and awful when I take the head covering off. So it bothered me how it looked and it was more exaggerated for me on Friday night, when my kids and my husband would say: "Your hair looks really nice", because they would all of a sudden see it out of the shower without something on it and I had curls again. So that bothered me. (Moria)*

Thelma described an aversion to her hair as did Moria. Ora added the aspect that she was making a part of her body objectively unhealthy and this bothered her. Samantha added one more idea; she is proud of her hair and did not want to cover or hide it. Her hair was beautiful and gave her confidence as did nothing else in her bodily aesthetic. Her words are difficult to hear; the pain is clear:

> *Because look at my hair, how beautiful I am. I am fat, I don't have confidence, you know, I feel I am not really beautiful… [But my] hair, my hair was always what people were*

> *saying: you have beautiful hair. So this was like one thing that was beautiful in me, [so by covering it], they take from you something you are proud of. (Samantha)*

Others did not like the look of the head coverings themselves, which again plays a difficult role. Putting something on their head that they did not like created an aversion for these women. Some wanted to look nice for society and some for themselves. The head coverings became an obstacle in their way of being happy with their appearance. Talya felt it just was not attractive to cover her head: "And I came to a conclusion that …It really makes you ugly… Until then, it didn't really bother me. But suddenly, it was really not pretty… just not pretty" (Talya,).

> *That has always been a big question with me. Do I really care how I look? Who cares? It doesn't matter. There are so many things that are more important. But I was getting to a new place to realize:"Yeah, I care and I don't like the hat or the scarf and I am never [going to] make the effort to make it look good… So either grabbing whatever shlumpy hat… as I walk out the door and not caring how I look." Or: "That's enough! I'm gonna take it off..." But I was happy with the change because, you know, I like my hair. Having curly hair was part of my positive feelings about my looks. (Margret)*

> *I think a lot of time people… lose their sense of beauty. I am married and you know, they don't put effort into, ah, staying the same, beautiful, and I think that's important… I think it is very important that [you take] pride in yourself and not let yourself go and lots of women who cover their hair just don't. They just put a shmata[14] on their head and don't really take care. (Sally)*

Many felt that now that they were older, the head covering was unflattering and made them look old. Moria saw an age discrepancy when she covered her hair: "When I wore a head scarf, it made me look older. It didn't make my hair look as nice. I didn't feel as beautiful… I just didn't feel myself" (Moria). Ora felt, as she got older, that she couldn't "pull off" what younger women can when covering their heads: "It is no longer cute. You know, it is no longer cute and so, at that point, you have to decide what to do instead of cute" (Ora).

[14] rag

> *And maybe by then, even a lot of my friends… had already started to go gray around then and I wasn't. So I was like:"Oh, looks nice, it's an asset to my looks!" and I just thought I looked better that day. And I was ready to acknowledge how important that was to me. (Margret)*

> *And I think, by the way, that you know when you reach an age and suddenly you become older and you are less and less pretty… you know, in youth, everything is pretty. And the older you get, the less… it just isn't pretty. It is ugly and makes you look older. (Talya)*

Shir's unique in her story since she never liked her hair, covered or not. While it was covered, she didn't have to deal with it and so she waited until she was emotionally ready to deal with her hair. What pushed her to deal with it at all was that she didn't feel pretty. It's interesting to point out that although she had ideologically decided that she was comfortable uncovering her hair, it wasn't until she woke up and liked how her hair looked, that she actually acted on her decision.

> *I personally really didn't like my hair…I didn't like it, like it was my [low] self-esteem… and like I didn't like my image in the mirror. [With a hat], it is easy to not get messed up like this, or like this, or like this. Hat and that's it… And with everything I feel, it bothered me more not to be pretty in my own eyes, that it wouldn't be pleasant for me to look in the mirror whether my hair was like this or like covered all the way… and one morning I got up and my hair looked nice and I said: "Let's do it!" [And I took off my head covering]. (Shir)*

Reviewing the women's discourse about the aesthetics of their hair raised a larger question: why was there so little discussion of the issue? Why were women discussing their aesthetics as an afterthought? Why was the answer to "*Tell me your story about removing your head covering*" never "*Well, it was all about how I felt my hair looked*"? Could it be, perhaps, that the idea of "Beauty" was a taboo?

Although these questions warrant another study, I wish to suggest that women's motivations are many times scrutinized. They are expected to rationalize their choices, explain their "true" motivation. Under the male cultural gaze, women are always up for judgment.

When discussing strategies for religion to protect the status quo, Tamar Ross (2004) mentions the "Excessive Scrutiny of Women's Motivation". In this article, she explains that if the motives for an innovation in religion are not purely *halachic*, it is delegitimized. Tova Hartman (2007) brings forth similar feelings within women trying to create a women's prayer group.

The women in this research may be attuned to the constant male cultural gaze, waiting to legitimize or delegitimize their motivations. "Beauty" and "Aesthetics" are not *halachicly* sanctioned rationales. Is it possible that even to another woman, or even to themselves, they still judge their act through the prism of male legitimate reasoning and put "beauty" and "aesthetics" as an afterthought? Or have they become savvy in the rules of engagement with the religious leaders and know better than to put any emphasis on such a "poor rationale"?

3. "My Body is Mine" – Feminist Thought in Uncovering

Several of the women shared that they had a meta-goal when they took off their head covering. They chose to take off head covering to further an important message, or simply because they could no longer ignore the thoughts that arose within them. They discovered feminism and it had affected them and their life style.

As discussed before theorists claim that control over the body as an object is a symbol of social control over the individual or groups (Arthur 1999; Douglas 1966; Turner 1984). From this it can be understood that in patriarchal societies, the management of women's bodies, in

telling them to cover or uncover parts of it, can be seen as social control over women, oppression of them through their bodies.

With the understanding those women's bodies are sites for the power struggle of social control, then taking control over their bodies aids in resisting the domination of patriarchy. Women who defy accepted cultural dictations, such as head covering or to cover or uncover their body, are also resisting oppressive norms, which subordinate women.

The women who spoke of the feeling of their bodies being used might not have been aware of the vast literature on the subject but they felt the pressure of social control to which their patriarchal religion was trying to force them to conform. Thelma did not like being controlled and put into a "niche" for external aspects of her life: "Head covering and pants, that I decided that's it, it bothers me to breathe… they are very external. They are very external and categorizing. They out you in a certain niche and, and, make me do things I don't like" (Thelma). Talya felt so strongly about the patriarchal control that she did not work in any place that would limit how she looked and dressed:

> *I don't work anywhere that demands me to relate to my body… so it is hard for me because I feel that it is really about women, that women need to cover their bodies. It doesn't matter if it is just a small headband. It is the attitude towards women's bodies that I feel it difficult for me… I am not willing to do anything with my body for society… there is a problem when people use a women's body for anything. (Talya)*

Several of the women who connected their bodies to the social control of their religion were the same ones who came to learn about feminism. They spoke about their awakening to feminism.

> *It didn't bother me at all, all the years I wore a head covering, it didn't bother me … but my feminist awareness started trickling into me at some point. I started to read… I started going to women's prayer groups… and then I flew to the States …And I*

> *immediately signed up (to a JOFA conference)… and it was fascinating. It was the little things that slowly, slowly trickled into my consciousness… it is a consciousness that erupts slowly. It doesn't erupt, it is slowly, slowly built. On all different kinds of levels… and it is all the time: material, consciousness, and knowledge and you talk to people and it trickles in…Because the consciousness starts to rise, feminist consciousness especially… so, so the consciousness comes from all different kinds of directions also from the top and also from the bottom. From all directions consciousness develops. (Talya)*

> *I began to question a lot… I was almost a feminist, but becoming more open, you know, evolving my feminist thinking. And my internal thinking about my position as a person and then as a woman… and I started to feel that I do not need to take responsibility for men's feelings and lust. And they can take responsibility for themselves and that… I am very involved in… feminism. (Tal)*

> *I was not going to be in any way silent or covered up…. But I always, always, always read. I usually tell the story that I was feminist from when I was five. That I… read Ms. Magazine, when I was 16 and that I gave my speeches and theory of feminism and women rights. Something about that always interested me… I think that {head covering} is a symbol of oppression, I think that the whole marriage and divorce thing, which is horrible …It's a patriarchal trap and it's really bad and people should know that… You can't get away from it. It's in texts and symbolism. It's everywhere. And it's all, it's very,* very clear. Right? (Wendy)

These women found a direct correlation between their head being covered and an attempt to control them and society through cultural dictates. These women had the words to express themselves, others did not.

Remaining at a Crossroad

Josselson (1996) found that some of the women who searched for their identity abandoned their heritage only to return to it later. Many of the women in this research stated that they did not see themselves returning to covering their head unless life changed drastically. Yet for many of the women, covering their hair has not disappeared from their life, it has simply taken a different form. These women find themselves in a situation that is the epitome of multiple identities. They uncovered their heads, yet they have not fully discarded the practice; they identify times that it is prudent to cover and do so. While many come to a place where it is quite natural for them to move from one identity to the other, others always find it awkward.

In order to understand these women's struggle, it is necessary to understand how an identity is defined. Many modern researchers of identity theory looked to Erikson's developmental stages to understand the building of a good identity. Erikson defines a healthy identity as a "subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (Erikson,1968, p. 19). According to Schacter, Erikson posits that identity formation occurs when the ego transforms the varied identities of childhood into one single identity. This is done by making choices and committing oneself to those choices. These actions suppress the other possible identities. In other words, making choices and committing to the choices creates an inner consistency (Schacter 2002, p. 417). Postmodern theorists such as Gergen, (1991), Cote (1996), Bauman (1995) and Zurcher (1977) look at the same subject but posit that sameness and continuity are not important elements of a mature identity. Identity need not have closure, consistency, and commitment in order to be considered healthy (Schacter 2002, p. 33).

This paper refers to Schacter's research on Modern Orthodox youth in regards to identity structures. Modern Orthodoxy was chosen by him because he "based on the assumption that

maturing within such a community- that is both committed to *halakha* and yet with a strong affinity to certain Western values, cultural models and lifestyles- can be conducive to identity conflict" (Schacter 2002, p. 420). He adds that perhaps the post-modern era is forcing people who identify as Modern Orthodox to create a different religious identity than they did in the past.

Schacter discusses the tension between modernity and tradition as a threat to the community and that Modern Orthodoxy does not seem to have viable solutions. He adds that the rabbinic authorities, whose job it is to negotiate between modernity and tradition, often add to the tension instead of alleviating it. He suggests that it is possible that in the postmodern era, the option to create a mutable identity may ease the tension. No crisis point occurs since searches for a balance between multiple and conflicting identities are legitimized (Schacter 2000, p. 239-241).

1. Schacter's Four Identity Structures

Schacter (2002) found four criteria exist in searching for a good identity structure. The first, a need for consistency and sameness, was expressed in Tal's story. She told of her need for her inside and outside to match:

> *Being consistent in how I felt philosophically and the way I presented myself to the world… and along with my wanting to always present myself to the outside world as something which was consistent with my inner thinking, I began to be very unidentified with that kind of a way of looking and with that whole philosophical approach to life. And wearing a wig really associated me with that and I felt that that was an internal inconsistency for myself also. (Tal)*

Schacter's second criterion stated that all prior significant identities were allowed in the identity structure chosen, that people did not wish to have to give up a part of themselves for the sake of another identity. Many of the women in this research became aware after many years that they were suppressing part of their identity in order to present another one. They seemed to feel

that covering their head no longer allowed them to express all of their identities. They spoke of people not seeing them for who they really were.

> *The kisoi rosh[15] is the one thing that sets up the barrier that I came to see as really, uh, a problem in that there may be someone who needs me, who does not see me accessible… so they have to be able to find me. It makes me less accessible. (Tehila)*

The third criterion was that the identity must be recognized by the social group that was significant to the said person. The women in this research differed slightly from the youths interviewed by Schacter. Many of the women in this research stated that they no longer cared what others thought, although it was also clear that without any society that accepted them, they would not have removed their head covering. "I looked around and saw people who I admired tremendously, who also didn't [cover their head]. And I said I am more like her {pointing imaginatively from one side to the other}, than like her" (Ora).

Schacter added that society at many times was the cause for this dilemma. If society was aware of multiple co-existing identities, the multiplicity would be acceptable. But as long as society didn't accept that possibility, people were forced to choose the consistent, coherent option society deemed acceptable. When the women in this research removed their head coverings, many mentioned that they lived in a society where this seemingly inconsistent act was acceptable. "I don't have to fit into anyone's cookie cutter where I live in my neighborhood – anything goes and everybody is respected and everyone doesn't judge the way people did in the States, and that's how I like to live" (Sally). Sally mentioned her cultural living context as enabling. Her case demonstrated that when the cultural society allowed her to choose from multiple identities; she was no longer forced into a conflicting situation in which she had to choose what was more important to her: her different needs or society's acceptance.

[15] Translation: head covering

Schacter's last criterion was that the identity be both authentic and invigorating (2000, p.161). He explained that some identities made people feel positive and active. They identified with feelings of wholeness and freedom. Other identities caused depression, a stifling feeling, helplessness, and other negative feelings (Schacter, 2002, p. 161). Indeed, the most emotional accounts in this paper were the feelings of the women when they took off their head covering. They felt positive, free, relief, defiant, excited. The feelings they associated with the hat, on the other hand, were many times negative. In addition, many said it made them, or their hair, look old, unattractive, and limp. Tehila connected the time in her life when she removed her head covering, with her need to feel invigorated and positive: "You're just asleep and then one day you wake up and like, whoa where have I been? It's a sexy time in life for a woman. It's very, very full of excitement and potential. "

Schacter suggested a "shift not from integrity to fragmentation but rather a cultural shift from a preference for a search for integrity through consistency to a preference for a search for integrity through self-actualization" (Schacter, 2002, p. 431). This in many ways described the feelings raised in midlife by the women in this research, suggesting that a connection between midlife and openness to a multi-faceted identity might exist.

2. Closed Identity vs. Open Identity

Regarding Schacter's first criteria –consistency, many people in Schacter's research claimed that they still felt a need for their identity to provide them with sameness; otherwise, they experienced disharmony, distress, and confusion. These people attempted to create a "closed identity" (2000). If an individual saw consistency as significant criteria he or she might find herself or himself building an identity that cancels

out other identities. Rejecting the idea of consistency allowed a person to integrate many more identities.

Alternatively, some results of Schacter's research found that several people preferred an "open identity" – a postmodern, multiple, flowing, ever-changing identity (Schacter 2000, p. 36). This "self" could not be understood without recognizing the cultural context and was described as being a collection of "identity fragments" that represent varied identities. (Schacter, 2000, p. 40).

Bell Hooks, social activist and feminist, is well known for her work on intersectionality, the understanding of the many multiple identities that form the oppression of women. In their book, "Are You Not a Man of God" (2014), Hartman and Buckholz analyze Bell Hooks' words of her experience of marginalization and conclude

> *hook's emphasizes the inherently relational nature of this inherently "multiple" perspective: the particular node of seeing developed by the necessity of negotiating between two identities and worlds… hooks identifies the marginal awareness not with a 'divided self', but rather with a sense of vitality and wholeness… ("Are You Not a Man og God", p. 162)*

The women in this thesis who had multiple viewpoints and recognize them seemed to describe a feeling of contentment (or sense of wholeness) with their multi-faceted, inconsistent identity. These particular women from this research also identified themselves as more "oppositional" towards Orthodox practices. Wendy no longer attended synagogue and wavered as to whether or not she wants to be labeled Modern Orthodox. Tal, too, no longer attended

synagogue, considered the Havdala service[16] as problematic, and had even considered divorcing her husband.

Despite, the postmodern approach that claims that the mutable or open identity is what our modern, ever-changing world demands, Schacter found that even those who preferred an open identity still hoped to one day close it. They slowly accept the fact that that may never happen, but still yearn for an identity with no tensions within (Schacter 2000, p. 232). Not many of the women in this thesis were aware of the change they made in the structure of their identity and were even less aware of the tension between consistency and inconsistency. Yet one woman stood out as unique: Wendy. She spoke many times with awareness about her identity and claimed that she welcomed the inconsistencies of her life:

> *I am comfortable with who I am at this point. And I don't think I have to be coherent or consistent. In other words, say I am not halachik, then why don't I just do away with these halachik habits? But it's okay for me… But I don't also have to insist that I am Orthodox where other people may [say that I am not]. I can have this luminal, you know, boundary-lessness {lack of boundaries} and confusion and not… not… not worried about that. (Wendy)*

Moreover, Wendy saw others through the eyes of identity structures. She spotted when others were being inconsistent and seemed to accept that such an identity is plausible, since she had an identity that others would consider inconsistent:

> *She's not being consistent. It's not consistent halachikly for this very frum lady to go mixed swimming, right? So she somehow made peace with her incoherence. (Wendy)*

[16] Havdala is the traditional custom that ends the Sabbath, differentiating the holy day from the weekdays. Tal said:"I make havdala by myself, I don't know if I can continue saying [the words – "God chose us from all the nations… who differentiates between Israel and the other nations"."

3. One Identity for One Situation and Another for the Second

What about those who did not speak with awareness of their identity structure, who were the majority of those interviewed in this research? Horenczyk and Nisan showed how adolescents at times balanced differing and sometimes conflicting identities and chose to represent one identity in one situation and a different one in another situation (Schacter, 2002). For the adolescent, there was no need to make a decision or create a hierarchy between the identities. Schacter explained that those participants who felt a need to be consistent tried to find a balance between their multiple identities. Many times, they reached a balance through practical situations rather than making sweeping decision to change (Schacter, 2000, p. 235).

The women in this thesis explained how they had to deal with finding balance when they discussed the need to put on their head covering for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. At first, many of them didn't make a decision. They waited for an occasion to present itself, and carried a head covering just in case a situation occurred where they would need it. Others were aware that at certain times they might need to cover their hair, but this did not mean that they were again a "head-coverer". Ora had guide-lines when she had to put on a head covering to be respectful:

> *I do for funerals, not for weddings... Yes, for davening in shul , not necessarily for kiddush in shul. I still play [with my head covering].* (Ora)

Thelma was less clear and evaluated each individual situation:

> *Many times, I have [a head covering] in my bag… but it is hard for me is to remember to put it on. And I always have to think- wait, where do I put it on, where is there a chance they may see me? How far, at what traffic light do I already have to [put it on]?(Thelma)*

Sally made sure, at her son's wedding, to cover her hair to respect her soon-to-be in-laws:

> *So [at my son's] wedding, he married a girl from Har Nof and even though they are a very open family, they are a highly respected family, so I had to cover my hair. There was no question – it was a sheital[17] crowd. So I got something [to wear on my head for the wedding]… It wasn't a sheital... It was me sticking out {being different} but this thing was on the top and blending it into my hair. (Sally)*

These women, like Schechter's youths, presented one identity in one situation and another identity in a different situation. They waited for the occasion to present itself before deciding what to do.

4. Multiple Identities in a Cultural Context

Schacter also presented Cote's theory (Schacter, 2000, p.38). Cote's research involved cross- cultural studies of identity formation. He theorized that a person's identity was built in a cultural context. Cote claimed that the cultural context, more than the psychological, decided the identity a person choses. He did not ignore the psychological; rather he puts it in a cultural context.

This cultural influence on the identity can be seen in the lives of the women in this thesis. Their choice to wear their head covering at Jewish rituals even though they chose to remove their head covering can be understood within the context of choosing to identify the complexity of cultural events and behave in a way that respects the occasion:

> *So recently I went to a funeral and I forgot to take a hat with me and somebody actually said: "You know, you should have your hair covered …. So she [the woman at the funeral] said: "Tsk, tsk, tsk." So I said: "Okay, so I forgot, but I am sure the person who died won't be deader." Where it is acceptable to wear it, I will still put it back on. You know, I am not so disconnected with it that I couldn't have it on my head anymore ever, but I don't see myself furthering my religious belief or… thinking that halachikly I'm lost. (Moria)*

[17] Translation: a wig

> *For many years, actually 'til this day, I will play with it for friend's smachot[18] and environments that are not my own or not totally my own… In some level, out of respect for the setting, you know. Bizarre personal rule: what is a religious setting and what isn't? I do for funerals, not for weddings. That's my own practice. Yes, for davening in shul, not necessarily for kiddush in shul… sometimes I do it for the people. Um, or because that the norm in the community which I am visiting in. (Ora)*

The most prevalent reason for these women to put on their head covering again was cultural. Many explained that they put it on to keep the peace, not to create provocation or cause discomfort to anyone. Through these explanations, these women showed that they were aware of the inconsistencies and were comfortable with that choice:

> *We go to events of theirs [my brother's family who are Haradi, and] I respect them and… put the wig on again, which feels for dressing up for Purim {laughing}. I try to dress in public events the way, you know, he [my brother] would like me to. But when I go to his house, I don't… [Regarding my friends in general], I love shalom bayit and the people that it's important for, I do it out of respect for them. Not that it is anything I need for myself. It is a gift, basically. (Tal)*

> *When I went to Shabbats at my son's yeshiva… so I went with a head covering, that was clear, even when I no longer covered my hair. There I went with a head covering… out of respect of the place, of the surroundings. And today, I don't feel a need to… ah… it could be also for my feelings of not being different. So I wouldn't choose to live there, for example. But I say, one Shabbat, I can suffer. (Thelma)*

Some explained that it no longer held any meaning for them:

> *So it is not important enough for me. In some ways, also, when I decided to go with and when I really decided to take it off, one of my thoughts that were the strongest, a kind of chorus was: it doesn't really matter. It so, so didn't matter that it was the equivalent of what color my sweater is today. I have a hat, I don't have a hat, comb my hair this way or that way. It shouldn't be an issue. (Shir)*

[18] Translation: happy occasions

Few spoke about putting it on for themselves. Samantha explained that she wished to respect certain places: "[I] will do it because of respect to go to kotel[19], I put the hat on" (Samantha), while Margret discussed aesthetic reasons:

> *Then… if I'm having a bad hair day on Shabbat and I know that I am going to put my hat on, it's a relief. Okay, [I] don't have to worry about what's going on down there. (Margret)*

Some of these women divulged the constant reweaving of their multiple identities. Tal and Ora explained how their attitude changed towards covering their heads again for specific events or in particular places:

> *No, I probably will not do it again because now it feels foreign to me… I think probably I did it because I was still in the process, you know. But now I think I am pretty much not there already. I probably wouldn't do it again.(Tal)*
>
> *Yeah, sometimes I do it for the people. Um, or because that the norm in the community which I am visiting in, but um, but less and less… well, because I guess realizing that these people accept me for who I am and I am not embarrassing them in front of their guests. And society is also more open than I thought it was at some point. It's not going to jeopardize my friendship, not going to jeopardize their position it's… an acceptance of me, an acceptance of me for who I am and not worrying. (Ora)*

Tal explained that she no longer felt connected to head covering, while Ora revealed further that she no longer felt a responsibility to do it. Both rewove their multiple identities after they had gone through a process of reconditioning. Tal now felt comfortable in a different role, while Ora no longer felt the need to be responsible for others. By doing so, they put aside one of the identities they felt they had to represent beforehand, an identity that they felt was important part of their external messages to society.

[19] Translation: the Wailing Wall or Western Wall, one of the holiest places for the Jewish people, since it is the closest available physical access point (for a Jew) to the Holy of Holies.

5. Synagogue: Inconsistency or Open Identity?

Perhaps the most sensitive place to uncover their heads came out in the stories of women retaining their head covering in synagogue. They either did not seem to see it as a contradiction or did not have an issue with the contradiction. Some embraced it and others were unaware. Most of the interviewed women wore a head covering to synagogue. They explained it in different ways. Many gave a reason to covering their heads in synagogue, perhaps revealing the way their multiple identities lived cohesively together within their mind. Some of the women explained that it was a societal norm and what was expected of them. Shir simply stated that "it is something accepted" while Thelma said "it is really an issue of the synagogue." Many explained that they covered their hair out of respect for the people, for the setting, and for the tradition:

> *I am not looking to stand out… But if that's the norm in society to wear it in shul[20], then I would absolutely wear it. (Moria)*
>
> *[I cover my head in synagogue] because that's the custom…It is obvious that you go with a head covering to synagogue on Shabbat. (Thelma)*
>
> *They [other congregants] wouldn't be happy to have me sitting there without a head covering. And I want to respect, you know, the place.(Tal)*
>
> *I think if it wasn't norm, if people didn't cover their hair in shul, I could quite comfortably daven without it. I don't need it to daven. I think basically here, because… because… out of respect of what's the norm, I'll put it on. But I think in our society that if it wasn't, then I definitely wouldn't have a problem not wearing it. (Moria)*
>
> *[I cover my head] out of courtesy. Um, also, I think maybe its vestiges of the same identity issues. In other words, I don't want anyone talking about it. (Wendy)*

Ora explained as well that "it appeals to the right level of reverence." But then she addressed the inconsistency that she felt with her multiple identities and how she dealt with it:

> *I know that in terms of consistency, if I don't [cover my hair], why should I [in shul]? I feel totally comfortable that I can turn it on and turn it off. But if, on an ideological*

[20] Translation: synagogue

[standpoint] or whatever, I said it isn't necessary, then it shouldn't be necessary in shul either but… I am comfortable with that inconsistency. (Ora).

Others explained that there were aspects of head covering that are genuinely authentic:

I think I kept it on for shul, because it is more, um… like… you know, men wear kippahs because Hashem[21] is on top of them. … I think it is more of an idea of god being on top of me and nothing to do with my husband or tznuit or anything like that but just a thing that says now I am here and talking to god so I am going to wear and remember that he is there. (Moria)

I don't understand why only married women need to cover their hair in synagogue. I think all women should cover their hair from age 12 or 15, no matter what... Men, women… whatever you are. When you come to synagogue, then you need to put something on your head: a kippah, a handkerchief, a ribbon, something that shows respect for the place, that there is something above you. We as humans live in symbols. And this is a symbol. Someone is above you. (Talya)

Some women, like Kate, admitted that the conversation of synagogue and head covering confused them: "I can tell you about Shabbat and shul. I am still very much confused about it" (Kate). Kate's multiple identities rose to the surface and when confronted with an incoherent decision, she was baffled. It seems she was not aware of the multiple identities she wore and now was forced to face the multiplicity, and felt confusion, a not unusual reaction (Schacter, 2000,p. 229)

[21] Translation: God

Midlife

In most psychological studies, midlife in women's lives was not given its own consideration. Either the studies assumed that midlife for women was the same as midlife the studies for men the studies or ignored midlife altogether. For instance, the road to midlife was considered marked by a "marker event" – the separation from a wife, a quitting of job, or a move (Gilligan, 1982, p. 206). Some of these events clearly regarded men only. Furthermore, Valliant, a psychologist, explained that having children was a task left for midlife. This, too, was not probable for women, since their fertile years were in their 20s and 30s (Gilligan, 1982).

In 1996 Josselson exposed new insights to women's midlife development when she wrote her book, "Revising Herself". She explained that the building of women's identity was a process of "bridging what feels inner and necessary with what opportunities she has for expressing herself in interaction" (p. 32-33). She noted, though, that people might experiment with their sense of identity at different times in their lives.

1. Searching for an Identity – At the Age of 50

As discussed earlier, many of the women in this study began the process of challenging *halacha* at midlife. The experimentation the women did with their religion only began in midlife. This correlated with Josselson's finding that many times women at the age of thirty-three moved away from the religion they were born into, to a more secular group (Josselson, 1996, p. 22). It is important to note that the women in this thesis did not all experience a lessening of their religious life; rather they challenged their religious life.

Josselson also found that women at the age of forty-three began to feel that the struggle of finding their identity was behind them, that they were now following a path that they intended

to stay on (Josselson, 1996, p. 24). This finding does not accurately represent the women in this thesis. Many of them at the age of forty-three were continuing their struggle to find their true identity after spending many years just coasting along.

> *So… I am turning fifty and I am finding myself, being more comfortable with myself... In our family, my voice, not regarding religion necessarily, regarding everything, has been somewhat quieted because he [my husband] is very outspoken, very vocal, I am a very quiet person. So I just slip aside and let him do that in a lot of things, and so now I realize that I've got to stick up for myself in the things that are important for me. Yeah, it is part of maturing. And it felt good that I was doing it. You know that was just the shedding of the clothing and at fifty, almost fifty, and now it's like my voice [is] being heard, kind of all the more emotional things. (Kate)*

This pattern is best represented with the life pattern of the "Guardians" who in psychological terms, did not seem to develop during their 20's and 30's. Josselson explained this life choice by saying that they felt less worried about security as they grew older. Tal felt age made a big impact on her decision: "Because as I got older and more mature, I stopped caring how much, what other people thought about me so much. So I don't care that much anymore" (Tal). Moria simply said: "I don't care what other people say. It's easier now, it's just more fun!" (Moria). Thelma explained that:

> *I knew that I wouldn't care if my supervisor saw me and other stupid things like that. You see, so external, so meaningless… Right after [my child's] chuppa[22], both of us [my daughter –in-law's mother and I} took off our head covering and that was that. So all the guests saw that… and I don't care, really I don't. (Thelma)*

Josselson explained that many women felt that now they had a secure base. By standing on that secure base, they could look inside themselves. They found inner aspects that were buried and give voice to what was silenced (Josselson, 1996, p. 70). Several of these women described their secure base as their work. Changing their work place allowed them to give space to desires

[22] Translation: religious marriage canopy

that they might have had before but didn't feel secure enough to voice before changing their jobs.

> *And I think also, obviously when I moved from the previous [workplace] to the new [workplace], it freed me completely because I didn't have to work for rabbi, and I didn't have to put on any airs, um, costume. (Wendy)*

> *And I really wanted to take off my head covering, but of course I worked at a yeshiva high school and it wasn't so practical and my kids were younger… and still at home. Ah, a few years ago, I left my job at the yeshiva high school and went to work at a secular school. (Thelma)*

> *For me, the move from [the first workplace] to [the next workplace] was good for me. Also freed me a lot… I didn't have to leave, but it was an opportunity. I really, really wanted to work at [the second workplace], and it gave me the chance to um… renew… renew my style of work and relationships with people in general. The type of people in [the second workplace] are more open and I was really fun (Carla).*

Moreover, as they grew, they discovered emotional experiences they never knew they had, such as a new sexuality (as Tehila mentioned previously). They acknowledged their imperfections and the imperfections of their role models growing up. Some, through a retrospective look of their childhood years, began to understand what shaped them. This allowed them to release any anger they had and to make changes in the present (Josselson, 1996). This allowed them to choose and find their own way.

Margret realized that she had been angry with her mother and therefore deliberately chose a lifestyle that was different from hers: "I might have decided to be more traditional, um, more serious as I saw it about Judaism [because of what happened to my mother]." Yet, in midlife, she was finally able to forgive her mother:

> *It was a real opportunity for me… it was like reconciliation with my mother. It was like, "I'm not rejecting you… I'm not rejecting your life. I'm actually living it for a while and enjoying it very much and feeling very…" I mean, it was a very healing experience... To*

> *that sense that what my mother was, and what she did, and the kind of woman she was and the kind of Jew she was: that's fine. (Margret)*

Tal spoke of a rebellion she had against her parents, which took her to a more religious place. She came to understand later that the more "religious" lifestyle was not the way for her:

> *I think it was sort of, in some ways, connected to teenage rebellion against my parents also.. How was I going to rebel? … I was gonna [sic] become more religious. It seemed safe…. I became more dedicated about all sorts of stupid things that I don't, I didn't continue to do afterwards… I was striking out of my own and I was creating my own… I think I thought at the time that doing these things would bring me closer to God and then I discovered that wasn't true, so those were not the things that brought me closer (Tal).*

Thelma expressed a lot of the anger she harbored. When her son became chose not to be religious she became angry; she was never aware that she had such an option:

> *We [my son and I] had a lot of conversations and it really came up for me, why am I religious at all? Like angrily, I thought to myself: why did he get the right to not be religious and I wasn't even given that right? And I felt that I was given the right to deal with things that bothered me and I needed to make a decision: either I throw out everything or I throw out what will allow me to breathe. Meaning that I was wearing a head covering, so I got even more annoyed. It annoyed me more that I had to do it. And today I am at a place, like I said to you, that I have reached an age where I do what I want. I decided that I am allowed to do whatever I want, in the bounds of democracy and rules. And if I choose that I want to desecrate Shabbat, then I will desecrate Shabbat and then rest can jump in a lake. But I have reached the point where I more or less do everything out of choice, (Thelma)*

Gilligan explained that this anger is crucial. It was a return to the anger that these women experienced during adolescence when they were forced into accepting patriarchy's demands, when they lost their voices. The anger turned to bitterness and its return to anger symbolized a return to their true voice (Gilligan, 2011, p.154).

2. I Don't Care What Other People Think Anymore

Many of the women voiced that now they felt as though they could do what they wanted and no longer cared what others thought. All of them tied this feeling to their age and their position in midlife. Carla felt as though "I have reached the age where I care less what people think about me" (Carla). Moria felt that she was "adult-enough" to make her own decisions: "Then I looked around and realized at age 40, I can decide for myself and not go to a higher authority" (Moria). And finally, it was almost as if Thelma decided that life was too short for her to do what she *wants* to do in life: "And today I am at the point where I say what I don't want to do, I won't do… and today I am at the age that I do what I want. That I decided that I am allowed to do what I want" (Thelma).

Why did so many women reach a point where they care significantly less about what others thought of them. "Revision of the self is most often revision of desire, the recognition that what one seemed to want at an earlier stage of life was a false desire" (Josselson, 1996, p. 242). The term 'false desire' is not one that echoed the women's experience but the women did come to realize that they did not know if the strand of identity they chose at that point in their life was made out of choice, fear, passivity, external pressure or something else. They realize that they might have been ruled by others desires, that what seemed like their own desires were actually values pushed upon them. This recognition might have taken these women to the place where they were ready to throw off all others and concentrate on finding out who they really are and what their own true desires were.

These newly discovered desires were in many cases desires that always existed but were pushed aside. Josselson explained that as women grew, they attempted to make room for the parts of themselves which were in disuse. These parts always existed but were pushed under,

when they built their web of identity (Josselson, 1996, p. 29). Several of these women voiced a feeling of returning to who they really were: a return to their identity in their teenage years or in the years before they got married. At the time of their marriage, they took on a new identity. Now, years later in midlife, they were able to stop and reflect. They realized that they were not representing themselves as they truly are, that their true identity was that of themselves in their 20's before they got married.

This acceptance of an identity that is not authentically theirs is explained by Carol Gilligan in her later book, "Joining the Resistance" (2011). Many times girls are depressed or show destructive behavior in adolescence because this is the time that society pressures them into conforming (2011, p. 27-28). They have to choose between having a voice and having a relationship. Society convinces them that their voices will ruin their relationships. At first, they resist losing their voice since it sacrifices their psychological health, all for the needs of society. And yet, most girls end their adolescence with their voice buried inside them (Gilligan, 2011, p. 145). It seems that at midlife, after throwing off societies expectations, they again find their authentic voice.

Josselson points out another interesting aspect of midlife. She explains that true compromise between aspects of life needs perspective and energy. The ability to compromise grows as a woman matures. The ability to respect others needs and their own needs at the same time is the highest stage of female development as posited by Carol Gilligan in "In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development". Josselson found that usually women only began to realize that relationships have a flow of needs, feelings, and fantasies in their mid-thirties and that everyone acts from their own centers and has a right to do so (1996, p. 250). Some of the women shared an understanding of that.

> *It is clear to me that in the nuclear family, there must be united approach. It's impossible for one to go this way and the other that. If one chooses to be religious and one not religious, it has to be done through agreement… (Thelma).*

Carol Gilligan presents a different outlook on midlife. She shares that in the lives of the women she interviewed

> *The events of midlife… can alter a woman's activities of care in ways that affect her sense of herself. If mid-life brings an end to relationships, to the sense of connection on which she relies, as well as to the activities of care through which she judges her worth, then the mourning that accompanies all life transitions can give way to melancholia of self- deprecation and despair. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 171).*

For most of the women in this thesis, the relationship or activity that ended is motherhood. Culture dictates that all women, whether mothers or not, are defined by their motherhood (Letherby 1994; Sweeney 2006) and they are asked to put aside parts of their identity for the good of their children (Marshall 1991, 76). Josselson also acknowledges that the demands of motherhood and the attempts to be a better mother are an "essential core of these women's efforts at competence" ("On Writing Other People's Lives", 1996, p. 207). Motherhood is a framework for building an identity that is very strong. All the mothers in Josselson's research shared that their children are the most important part of their lives and that motherhood forms their idea of who they are. The identities of these mothers are built from an attempt to stand up to a certain ideal.

Many of the interviewed women of this thesis voiced that one of the reason they kept their head covering on was for their children. They expressed that it was a desire to be a role model for their children and yet almost as many explained that they took it off because they felt that their motherhood was over. At midlife, many of the women were finished raising their children and felt freer to make decisions for themselves, without thinking of or putting their

children first. These women perceived midlife as a time in their lives in which they could develop aspects of themselves that had been neglected while fulfilling expected societal roles.

> *So for me, my midlife, quote-on-quote, has allowed me to take charge of a lot of areas of my life that, you know, when you are raising children, you really can't. Your kids come first, your family comes first, and your school… My kids' school comes first and everything [about me and what I need] doesn't exist. So when you hit 50, all of a sudden, you wake up and say: Hey, where did I go?! (Sally)*

3. Do Women Have Midlife Identity Crises, Too?

Many people use the popular term 'midlife crisis' for identity crises during the 40's and 50's. Josselson attempts to explain the source of "identity crises". She explains that "crisis in identity can be spurred either by inner change or social dislocation" (1996, p. 28). It is possible that a person finds that at a certain time in her life, her past identity no longer represents her and she seeks to change it to better represent herself.

Other identity crisis can be explained by understanding that identity is an intersection of competence and connection. Competence is a feeling that a person had a meaningful effect on other people's lives. Connection is the ability to make meaningful ties. 179 When the two are in balance, a woman's identity is stable. However,

Adult crises in identity among these women have most often involved the struggle to keep the experience of competence and connection in balance…Growth and revision in a woman's life involve rethinking her competence or her connection or weaving them together in an altered way. (Josselson, 1996, p. 178-179)

The women of this study felt that change began to occur when their identities as mothers changed, as their work situation changed, and when they had time to introspect and reevaluate everything. As their roles in life changed and their competence versus connection became imbalanced, they took the time to balance themselves by restructuring parts of their identity. \

Conclusion

When approaching this research I set out to explain to myself a life experience that I, and so many other women I know, experienced. I perceived the act as simple though brave and therefore wondered at the complexity of emotions described by those I spoke to before taking upon myself this journey.

The first and most important point that I understood from this study was that finding the answers to my question would not be my challenge. The challenge was to find the right perspective whose basic principle was that these women were complex, they were courageous and they were powerful. A perspective that allowed the marvel of these women, with all their challenges and complexity, to shine; that was ready to hear their stories without judgment and accept them for what they were without trying to change them or label them. And more important than finding that perspective, was the importance of embracing it.

Jean Baker Miller, famed psychiatrist and feminist, in her forward to the second edition of her book "Towards a New Psychology of Women" (1987) wrote about an aspect of that challenge:

> *Many writers work to dispel the false ideas which have been purveyed about the group. Dispelling falsities is very valuable, along with it, however, a tendency often emerges to 'prove' that the oppressed group is 'just as good as the so-called first rate people'… in seeking to prove this, writers often accept the standards and values of the dominant group, either wittingly or unwittingly. They often assume that the dominant group's method of advancing knowledge is the best or only method. Indeed, academic disciplines exert heavy pressure on everyone to believe this, and they tend to penalize and silence those who deviate from it. (Miller, 1987, forward)*

I, too, fell in this pithole. One of the questions that initiated my research was to explain how women removed their head covering. It troubled me that many of the women were looked down upon as removing their head covering on an emotional whim and I strived to find the reasons behind the uncovering which would prove to the opposers that the women were actually

using a valid decision making process a.k.a a rational choice. I had taken upon myself the discourse and argument of the dominant society. I was wrong.

The women's voices did not explain to me how it came to be that they removed their head covering in a way that was possible to translate into the words and terms accepted by society in a way that respected their experience. Their words, thoughts and feeling matched values looked down upon by society. Yet I, as Gilligan said, "knew without knowing" that it was not possible that these women's stories began and ended in a terminology that belittled their thought process and disrespected their lifestyle.

This lack is described by Jean baker Miller:

> *… the point is that the close study of an oppressed group reveals a dominant group inevitably describes a subordinate group falsely in terms derived from its own system of thought. These same false categories are seriously flawed in their basic assumption, which had previously defined everything. (Miller, 1987, Forward)*

I was forced to search further in the literature until I found a new way of looking at their stories. I was compelled to combine the widely accepted terminology of coherence, consistency and rationality with terminology of knowing, feeling and caring. These terms needed to stand side by side in a non-hierarchal manner, which valued each one of them in an equivalent manner to the other.

As a student of Women Studies, I knew that there was a hierarchal troubling manner of discussing women's experiences and values. And yet I didn't *know* it. It is the kind of knowledge you know in your bones and not the kind you know in your head. It took reading these women's stories and challenging myself to accept the beauty of their decisions. The empowerment, agency and fulfillment that each one reached in their own lives, in their own way. There is no right or wrong reason to remove one's head covering and there is no need to prove to

anyone that it is a legitimate process. It is the spectacular progression of each woman finding herself in an authentic manner, which needs no defending.

The literature that is part of this thesis helped enlighten me in different ways. The theory of disassociation brought by Judith Jordon and Christina Robb assisted in understanding how the women in this thesis had such difficulty valuing their own reasoning for removing their head covering. Gilligan's theory on women and girls and the psychological pressure put upon them to form themselves into what is accepted by the dominant society even when the price is losing their voice, concreting the understanding of how these women reached a place where they questioned their own legitimacy to remove their head covering.

It was the issue of wearing a head covering in synagogue after removing it during the week which pushed me to search further for theories such as those of Schachter's multiple identity theory as well as Tova Hartman's "multiplicity" to provide new terminology in which to discuss these women's experiences. Understanding the multiple selves, complexities and sensitivity's of the women to each and every unique situation explained how they reached certain decisions in certain situations and other decisions in others. Moreover, the discussion of the psychology of self, in the post-modern sense, showed that the acceptance of terms such as complex, inconsistent, open- identity and multiplicity are beginning to edge their way into accepted society, giving value to these terms that best explain the women's experience.

All the theories mentioned above gave voice to these women's unique understanding of themselves and the *halachik* world that they live within. Their choice to stay religious despite not complying with a religious ordinance in this aspect of their life, suggests that they, too, have begun to appreciate themselves and value their decision-making process. They learned to value

themselves in a manner that overwhelmed the *halachik* structures' demand that they have no agency over their life.

The theory of self-in- relation (Jordon, 1984, 1985, 1987; Kaplan, 1984; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1984; Surrey, 1985), as well as relational cultural therapy presented by Judith Jordon, explained the complexity of choices these women made in their decision- making process. Their connection with others in their lives such as their parents, siblings, partner, or children, influenced their decision in so many different manners and yet it only highlighted how proficient they were at the dance of caring- for others and for themselves. Many of the women had become adept at listening to others, accepting their needs and yet finding themselves within it all and hearing their own voice load and clear, as well, each in their own unique manner.

Theories of midlife articulated by Ruth Ellen Josselson in her book "Revising herself" were helpful in understanding why this appreciation of self and self- empowerment occurred at midlife in these women's lives. It seems that midlife is an excellent time in term of physical aspects, familial situations, and emotional status for women to appreciate, legitimize and respect themselves enough to take agency over their lives.

In summary, these theories assisted in providing alternative understanding of women's experience and rooted themselves within the knowledge that women's unique and complex experience are a source of awe and respect.

In the beginning of the research, my goal was to attempt to portray the experience for others, so that they may learn and empathize with the women. Now, although that goal would be wonderful to achieve, my main hope is that the women who shared their stories, read this

research and see themselves through my eyes and perspective. So they can see how truly courageous, authentic and brave they are. As Miller put it:

> *Why do women not recognize these important parts of themselves? The task, then, was to begin a description of women's strengths and to account for the reasons that they went unrecognized. I believe that this is still a major task before us. Out of this can follow a new framework for understanding women- and men. (Miller,1987, forward)*

Although this task has been worked upon tirelessly since Miller wrote her words, dominant society's grip is still firm. The narratives of the women in my research show that society's grip began to slip when the women were in midlife and yet we have not yet reached the place where both academic discourse and personal narratives begin from a point of recognition of power, strength and agency. It is my hope that this research become a brick in the building of a new discourse and narrative that will empower all women and allow us to see ourselves through the prism of respect.

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תקציר

המחקר בוחן את חוויתן של נשים יהודיות נשואות באורתודוקסיה המודרנית שבמהלך שנות המעבר הורידו את כיסוי הראש שלהן. הוא מתמקד בדרך שנשים מתווכות את חוויתן כחיות בתוך החברה שלהן ועם עצמן. לצורך זה נערכו ראיונות עומק, אחד על אחד, עם חמישה עשר נשים נשואות אשר הורידו את כיסוי הראש שלהן בגיל המעבר. במהלך המחקר, החוויות שלהן נבחנו ראשית דרך הזהות שלהן ושל הסובבים אותן, שנית דרך הרציונאל שהן נתנו להורדת הכיסוי ראש, שלישית דרך התיווך שהן עשו עם הערכים המרובים והזהיות המרובות שלהן ולאחרונה דרך הפריזה של המיקום שלהן בגיל המעבר.

בזמן שהסיבתיות הרציונאלית, הפתרונות ההלכתיים ואפילו הפרספקטיבה הפמיניסטית פייסה את אלו אשר חיפשו סיבה רציונאלית להחלטתן של הנשים, הטרמינולוגיה הזו לא כיבדה את החוויה המרוכבת שלהן ובאופן פרדוקסאלי אף תרמה להשתקתן ולדרישה שימצאו את עצמן בתוך השפה האפיסטמולוגית הקיימת.

מה שהושמע מקולותיהן של הנשים זה התעוררות של זהות מרובת-פנים בגיל המעבר. חוויה מורכבת ומלאת ניואנסים אשר איפשרה לנשים לגלות, ולגלות מחדש, חלקים מהזהות שלהן בזמן שהן היו בתיווך תמידי וזרימה עם ההנחתות של החברה והדת, מבלי לנטוש אף אחד מהן.

עבודה זו נעשתה בהדרכתה של דר טובה הרטמן מן התוכנית ללימודי מגדר, ביחידה ללימודים בין-תחומיים של אוניברסיטת בר- אילן

אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

חווייתן של נשים אורתודוקסיות מודרניות נשואות אשר מורידות את כיסוי הראש בגיל המעבר

נעמה סינגל

עבודה זו מוגשת כחלק מהדרישות לשם קבלת תואר מוסמך בתוכנית ללימודי מגדר של אוניברסיטת בר-אילן,יחידה ללימודים בין- תחומיים

רמת גן תשע"ה