

Formative Experiences of Orthodox Jewish Women: Attachment Patterns and Spiritual Development

Shoshana Ringel

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Abstract This qualitative study examines formative spiritual experiences of thirteen Orthodox Jewish women. The author discusses differences between Orthodox-born women and women returnees to Orthodoxy. From an attachment perspective, the data suggests that secure as well as insecure attachment bonds are the primary factors in religious development for these respondents. The author also argues that spiritual development from a Kabbalistic perspective offers a complementary paradigm from which to evaluate the respondents' religious development. Finally, recommendations for clinical practice with Orthodox women are discussed.

Keywords Orthodox Jew · Attachment · Adult attachment interview · Kabbala · Spiritual development

Attachment theory provides a framework from which to examine faith development in the context of interpersonal relationships, as well as one's transcendent relationship with God. This theory suggests that while secure attachment between the child and the caregiver typically predicts later secure relationships and a secure pattern of relationship with God, abuse or neglect may lead to insecure attachments and may have a significant impact on one's pattern of religious faith (Kirkpatrick 1999, 2005). Attachment theory may explain the yearning for God as a safe haven and the striving for a religious structure as a safe base that would replace earlier insecure bonds with one's biological family. While attachment theory is based on the

need for relational bonds as primary motivation, Kabbalah views the interpersonal as an aspect of one's relationship with the divine. Kabbala is an old Jewish mystical tradition that includes a stage theory of spiritual development, it therefore provides a complementary model from which to view Orthodox women's faith development.

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative study regarding the formative spiritual experiences of Orthodox Jewish women. Relatively few empirical studies examine faith development in the Jewish Orthodox community; among them are Davidman and Greil (1991), Dufour (2000), Kaufman (1989, 1995), Rapoport et al. (1995), Levine (2003), and Loewenthal (1988), authors who conducted studies of Orthodox women and gender-related issues in the community. In addition, there are some Jewish authors who have described Orthodox faith development from a religious perspective (Berman 1973, 2002; Soloveitchik 1965). The relative lack of writing and research in this area is surprising considering that the Orthodox community is the fastest growing Jewish denomination in the US. One third of the Orthodox Jewish community includes 18–25 year olds, many of whom have chosen to join the community as young adults, despite, or perhaps because, of its rigorous social and religious demands (Retrieved on 10/11/05 from <http://jcpa.org>). According to the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, synagogue affiliations in the Orthodox community grew from 10 to 20% of the general Jewish population from 1990 to 2001, but stayed about the same or declined in other Jewish denominations. Because children are 39% of the Orthodox community in the US, and the elderly are only 12%, the Orthodox community in the US will most likely continue to increase rapidly. This study aims to contribute to this important but relatively small body of literature by investigating patterns of attachment and faith-development among women in the Orthodox community.

S. Ringel (✉)
University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work,
Baltimore SSW, 525 W. Redwood St, Baltimore, MD 21201,
USA
e-mail: sriningel@ssw.umaryland.edu

The Orthodox Jewish community is comprised of several groups, differing in stringency of observance. In this study, the author included highly observant Orthodox respondents, but excluded the Hasidic and Modern Orthodox denominations. The community adheres to conservative social values including complementary gender roles and early marriages, and they emphasize daily observance through prayer, rituals, and religious events (for related articles by this author, see Ringel 2007; Ringel and Belcher 2007; Ringel and Bina 2007). Religion plays a major role in the fabric of familial, social and cultural life of the community. For Orthodox women, life revolves around familial and social relationships, and their religious identity is mediated through their familial and social roles.

There are several theories that conceptualize the process of faith development, among them socialization theories (Levenson et al. 2005) and cognitive theories (Fowler 1981). It is beyond the scope of this paper to address all relevant theories, and therefore only two theories, attachment theory and the Kabbalah, have been chosen as lens from which to conceptualize the findings of this study. Attachment theory is selected because the findings suggest that primary attachment bonds were crucial for the respondents' spiritual choices and that secure or insecure attachment determined the pattern of their faith development. Kabbalah was selected because it includes a stage theory of Jewish faith and is, therefore, relevant to the respondents in this study. Both theories appear to complement each other—attachment theory with its focus on interpersonal bonds, and Kabbalah with its emphasis on internal spiritual development as it is expressed in everyday life, interpersonal relationships, and ones' relationship with God.

Literature Review

Attachment Theory and Faith Development

Attachment theory proposes that patterns of attachment develop based on the caregiver's capacity to recognize, mirror, and regulate the child's affects through ongoing interactions between the child and the caregiver. These interactions help strengthen the child's internal cognitive and affective schemas, patterned upon the early child–parent interactions. Bowlby (1969) called this process of building internal representations “internal working models.” Infant-caregiver interactions predict the quality of attachment style in infants and their affective, cognitive, and social development (Beebe and Lachmann 2002; Sroufe 1979; Stern 1985; Tronick 2003). We might hypothesize that, similar to cognitive and emotional development, religious development occurs in the context

of relational experiences with caregivers and is transmitted through child–parent interactions. For example, just as children's affects are regulated through parental mirroring and attuned response, which are eventually internalized, children's affects may also be regulated through parental religious practices and rituals that later become self-regulatory mechanisms for the adult.

There are interesting findings regarding the links between attachment patterns and the development of religious faith. Some researchers speculate that God can be likened to a powerful parent who provides the believer with a secure base and with a loving relationship in which the believer feels safe and secure, with a God who is always available in times of loneliness and need (Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1992). Interestingly, one study found that children who were avoidantly attached to their mothers (meaning that because of caregivers' distance, they learned to behave as if they were independent and did not need closeness), were the most likely to report a sudden religious conversion experience during adolescence or adulthood, but only if they were raised with mothers who were themselves secular and avoidant (Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1992). The authors hypothesized that the respondents may have needed to find a compensatory caregiver who would provide them with the emotional responsiveness and security that they did not receive from their mothers. In a study of 200 adults, these authors found that the greater differences were between secure and avoidant adult attachment groups. Secure respondents viewed God as more loving and intimate, and they were likely to be more committed to their faith. Avoidant respondents viewed God as more distant and controlling, and they were likely to be less religiously committed, or agnostic. The anxious respondents were most likely to report supernatural experiences. These results are similar to findings from another recent study (Ringel and Bina 2007) suggesting that adults who grew up in secular, and at times troubled, family backgrounds may have sought support, safety, and stability both in their new religious community and through their religious faith. To date there has been no research looking at attachment experiences in relationship to individuals who leave the faith of their families.

Later attachment studies found that the pattern of belief correlates with the respondents' attachment styles (Kirkpatrick 1999). For example, avoidant respondents tended to have a distant and impersonal relationship with God, while anxious-ambivalent respondents (meaning that they are clingy, as well as resistant in their attachment style and have difficulty in self regulation), reported a variety of intense religious experiences such as personal revelations and speaking in tongues. Respondents who were securely attached developed their own personal and stable relationship with God (Kirkpatrick 1999, 2005).

In addition to Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1992) work on attachment and relationship with God, it is important to mention the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main et al. 2002). The AAI is a highly validated qualitative measure that aims to identify adult states of mind in regards to early attachment experiences such as separation, loss and trauma. Unlike the experiment of the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al. 1978), during which the researcher observes behavioral patterns of young children in response to actual separation and reunion with the parent, the AAI examines thoughts, fantasies and affect states associated with memories of experiences of separation, loss, and trauma. Based on the results of their studies, Main and Goldwyn (1984) identified four adult attachment styles which roughly correspond to Ainsworth's infant attachment styles. These include an autonomous (or secure) style, a dismissive (or avoidant) style, a preoccupied (or ambivalent) style, and an unresolved-disorganized (or disorganized) style in respect to loss or trauma (for further details, see Hesse 1999). Attachment is measured through the AAI based on the coherence of speech of the interviewee when asked about his or her relationships with early attachment figures. For example, secure/autonomous attachment is thought to exist when the speaker values attachment and is free to examine thoughts and feelings about attachment relationships in a reflective, coherent manner. In the AAI attachment scoring manual (Main et al. 2002), coherence is determined based on Grice's four maxims, the first of quality, or "be truthful, and have evidence of what you say," the second of quantity, or "be succinct, and yet complete," the third of relation, or be "relevant to the topic at hand," and the fourth of manner, or "be clear and orderly" (p. 44). The secure/autonomous category does not necessarily emerge only from a secure childhood. Some respondents may receive a secure/autonomous scoring despite early experiences with abuse and trauma, and they are categorized as "earned-secure." According to AAI coding methods, a person who is secure shows some capacity for metacognitive processing, or the ability to examine memories regarding attachment relationships in the midst of conversations about them (Hesse 1999). It is proposed by this researcher that the coding methods of the AAI in which she has been trained can be helpful in analyzing qualitative data not collected through the AAI, if that data concerns discourse regarding attachment experiences. The coding methods described in Main et al. (2002), will be utilized to help analyze respondents' narratives in the current study.

Spiritual Development According to the Kabbalah

While attachment theory locates spiritual development within an interpersonal matrix of human connections, the Jewish Kabbalah, a spiritual-mystical tradition, delineates

stages of spiritual growth from a mystical perspective that is more focused on one's relationship with oneself, with others, and with God, which might be called transcendent attachment. These stages are called levels of the soul (Berke and Schneider 2006; Cooper 1997; Wolf 1999). "Nefesh" is the lowest level of the soul; it connotes spirituality through the physical and sensory organs as well as ritual activities, such as eating kosher foods and lighting candles on the Shabbat. It is sometimes called the "animal soul." This level is also the least connected with the Divine (Cooper 1997). Nefesh may be compared to the earliest attachment experiences where the young child experiences and perceives the caregiver through sensory organs such as touch, smell, and sight because the child's cognitive capacities are still undeveloped. The next level of the soul is "Ruach," which means wind or spirit. Here one's relationship is through speech and emotions, and thus this level is associated with emotional awareness through interpersonal experiences (Berke and Schneider 2006; Cooper 1997). This level is also related to creativity and personal actualization. This stage may be compared to a more mature level of psychological development when the child's language abilities and increasingly more complex interpersonal interactions enable them to engage in more sophisticated relationships. "Neshamah" is the third level of the soul and means breath. It relates to transcendental states of consciousness, symbolization, and integration of heart and mind, feelings and thoughts (Berke and Schneider 2006). It is associated with purity of life and righteousness (Cooper 1997). This level may correspond with an attachment style that is based on the adolescent's development of abstract reasoning and symbolization predicated on their more highly developed cognitive structure. There are two much more refined levels of soul. The fifth level is "Chayah," or "living essence" (Cooper, p. 98), which is highly spiritual and has little connection to the body. It is experienced only during altered spiritual states. The sixth level is "Yehidah," or "unity" (Cooper, p. 99), which connotes unity with the divine where there is no longer any duality. This level may correspond to the initial stages of romantic attachment, where partners typically fall in love with each other and tend to lose a sense of differentiation and autonomy. These levels of soul are associated with growing attainment of spiritual awareness, with the lower levels directly affected by everyday morals, ethics, and values. Each level is dependent upon the others, so that one cannot attain a higher level of awareness without purifying the lower levels of consciousness first.

Methodology

Two research questions were developed based on the author's earlier findings: (a) what are the formative

experiences that lead Orthodox Jewish women to their spiritual lifestyle, and (b) What are the differences between the faith development of Orthodox born women and women who became Orthodox later in life? These initial research queries were not related to the respondents' attachment patterns. Attachment concerns emerged later during the analysis of the data.

Procedure

This qualitative study, based on a modified grounded theory method of analysis (Gurbrium and Holstein 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1990), was conducted in an urban Jewish community. It is a part of a larger study examining gender roles, attitudes towards the external community, and the role of religious practice in Orthodox women's daily lives. This study was conducted through an open-ended interview guide. The interview guide was designed with colleagues from the modern Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox communities, and the questions were revised based on emerging new data. For example, more questions were developed regarding the returnee status of the respondents when it became clear that 7 out of 13 respondents belonged to this category.

The interviews were held at either the respondents' homes or offices and lasted approximately 1 h. All the interviews were tape-recorded following a signed informed consent. To protect the respondents' identity, each interview was given a code name that was used on a taped interview and on a demographic questionnaire. The taped interviews were then transcribed and transported onto NUDIST software for qualitative data analysis. For further detail of methodology, please consult Ringel (2007).

Respondents

Thirteen women from an urban Jewish community were interviewed for the study. The inclusion criteria stipulated that the respondents must be Orthodox Jewish women. Individuals were recruited using a snowballing technique. The investigator developed personal relationships with two key informants, meeting them for lunch, going to their homes for the Sabbath, and participating in community events. These key participants then referred other respondents to the study and also gave the investigator legitimacy in the community by recommending her to potential respondents. The investigator herself is Jewish and Israeli, credentials that gave her additional access to the Orthodox community.

The respondents ranged in age from 24 to 69, with an average of 45. All had children, and all except for one (widow) were married. Seven respondents became Orthodox in early adulthood (these respondents are called "returnees,"

or Jews who came back to the lap of Orthodox observance after growing up in secular or in non-Orthodox households), and six were born in Orthodox households. Among the respondents were two college graduates, and four with advanced degrees (M.S.W., Ph.D., M.D., and M.B.A.). The remainder completed a 2-year post-high school religious education. There were no differences in level of education between Orthodox and returnee respondents. All the respondents had worked outside of the home in the past, and most currently worked part-time except for four participants who were stay-at-home mothers.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were analyzed using the constant comparison method of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This investigator and her research assistant consulted with each other and compared their coding criteria after reading over the transcribed interviews. They assigned the data to open coding categories and then grouped these categories into larger aggregates. The initial coding categories were determined by identifying recurrent patterns within the data. Finally, the investigator and her assistant arrived at general themes that emerged from these criteria and will be described later in this paper. Three methods were used to increase the trustworthiness of the data including (a) immersion in the community over a period of approximately 1 year, by going to religious services and gatherings; (b) participating in Shabbat meals, observation of the respondents at different social events and with other family members; and (c) triangulation, or using several methods to validate the data, including self-reporting, investigator's observations, and checking back with the key respondents as necessary (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Notes were taken by the principal investigator throughout the analysis process in order to create an audit trail so that the process could be tracked if necessary. Finally, respondents were consulted after the data analysis phase in order to clarify questions and ambiguities in the data.

As the data analysis process developed, it became clear that early attachment styles had a significant impact on the respondents' faith development. Therefore, the investigator decided to use the AAI (Main et al. 2002) coding methods discussed earlier in the literature review as an additional means for data analysis. This method of analysis will be demonstrated throughout the paper.

Findings

The predominant theme identified in the data indicated that religious development occurred in the context of on-going

relational experiences with family members, peers, and community. These included mothers, fathers and grandparents. Through these relational bonds, social values and Jewish religious traditions and rituals were transmitted from one generation to the next. A second pattern showed that respondents experienced a solitary religious experience, rather than a relational experience that had a significant impact on their spiritual development. Both of these patterns of faith development will be presented, and differences between Orthodox-born and returnee respondents will be discussed.

Faith Development through Family Bonds

Most respondents reported that their close bond with their family members, whether mothers, fathers, or grandmothers was the key factor in their growing into, or choosing, an Orthodox lifestyle. These bonds were central in the religious development of both Orthodox-born women and returnees. Some of the returnees noted that it was their responsibility to maintain the Jewish traditions, even when their own parents left a traditional lifestyle and became more assimilated.

Several respondents noted that their mother was an important factor in their faith development. Such mother–daughter relationships were generally characterized as emotionally intimate and secure, with the mother remembered as a loving caregiver, a role model for kind and humane behavior. Rather than through scriptural knowledge, mother’s teaching was transmitted through religious rituals and story telling, or through the mother’s personal example of Jewish values and traditions. One respondent described how her mother taught her to take responsibility for her actions and develop good moral values as a child: “Every time you walked out the door, you had to remember you were Jewish, especially a religious Jew, and as a grown Jew you represent every Jew.” Her mother also taught her to appreciate and accept her lot in life: “Never forget that we are richer than many of your friends or many people you know that have a lot of money, because when you have Torah...we are very rich anyway.”

Another respondent’s mother, who lacked formal education, taught her daughter that an intimate relationship with God was possible even while engaged in daily activities:

My mother through her very simple teaching...was a very spiritual and religious person; she absorbed everything from her own mother’s home. She taught me a lot of things that no book would teach me... to be kind and compassionate and stay connected to God; that you can talk to God anytime you want, all day long.

From an AAI perspective, this mother seems to be a loving parent who goes far beyond providing basic material needs and physical care to her daughter. The respondent is cognizant of her mother’s intellectual limitations, but appreciates her loving and spiritual nature. This capacity to view her mother realistically is one of the characteristics of an autonomous attachment style. While this respondent’s father was a very religious man who went to Synagogue three times a day and closely followed the Jewish rituals, she learned from her mother that being kind and compassionate to others was the essence of Jewish spirituality. The narrative also captured the intimate nature of the relationship of the respondent and her mother with God, which can be seen as a way to regulate affect with God as the caregiving figure.

The father’s religious influence was described in different terms. While many respondents reported that their mother’s personal characteristics of love, compassion, and nurturing were the predominant influence on their faith development, the father’s formal religious practice and knowledge of religious texts and rituals were emphasized. One respondent remembered going to synagogue with her father at the age of five, and another identified spirituality with her father: “My father and I are more alike personality wise, so I think he has always felt more spiritual and my mother more practical; so she wasn’t as spiritual.” Similarly, a third respondent differentiated between her mother’s more literal rituals and her father’s philosophical and “esoteric” understanding: “My father was more the esoteric. My father and I would take walks and as a child (we) would hold hands and talk about the universe, where my mother was a much more concrete kind of person.” This respondent described how she would sit in services with her father and have philosophical conversations about the meaning of life, “...so spiritually that kind of yearning was fed in me through my relationship with him.”

Several respondents described their grandmothers as inspirational figures in their faith development. Grandmothers were associated with ancient traditions, such as lighting candles, giving blessing after meals, and doing good works. One respondent, a returnee whose family was secular, reported that this relationship contributed to her choice of an Orthodox lifestyle: “I used to go to temple with her (GM) and she would introduce me around... it was over a long period of time that I realized; I knew I was going to end up in this place...” This respondent suggested that the Orthodox community as a whole had become a safe haven, beyond the biological family. For returnees whose families may not have provided a sense of safety and security, the Orthodox community may symbolize a new attachment paradigm.

Two respondents who grew up in Orthodox households reported the sense of lived faith transmitted by their

grandmothers. One described her grandmother: “She doesn’t follow Halachah (teachings) in the same way, but every single day she thanks God for the beautiful gifts that she has.” Another provided a moving description of her grandmother blessing the meal: “She had to say it in her own words to really connect with God... There was always an awareness of what went on without her and within her and vis-à-vis her [being] heard by me. [This] beautiful sense of who she is and what she projected was indeed inspirational.”

Similar to the influence of grandmothers, several respondents described the transmission of faith from one generation to the next. Even a respondent (returnee) who grew up in a non-Orthodox household experienced this spiritual legacy from older generations: “I really just reconnected back to my grandparents and back down the generations. If there was a lost generation with my parents, I just continued where they left off.” Another respondent described going to her grandparents’ house “so we had that influence of going to Bubbe (Grandmother) and Zeide’s house every Sunday, and for awhile my grandmother, my Bubbe, lived with us after my Zeide (Grandfather) died, for a year until she died; so we had that influence.” A third respondent reported how religious traditions were transmitted from grandmother to mother to daughters:

My grandmother was the hub of the family Jewish activities. She had the Seder, she had the Friday night dinners every week, so when she took sick, my mother took over that role of having the Friday night dinners and sort of being the hub person... I think my sister and I felt like we really liked that and we wanted to carry on.

While this quote describes how religious traditions were passed on, it does not indicate a sophisticated level of spiritual understanding; it seems to show an early stage of Kabbalistic development, *Nefesh*, where spirituality is seen through concrete or sensory experiences. It also shows that attachment to Judaism is represented through family rituals and traditions that are transmitted intergenerationally.

One Orthodox born respondent noted that she felt compelled to follow previous generations: “I could never walk away from this kind of a life because I felt that the life, to be rich and full and meaningful, that’s the only way, I couldn’t see any other way.”

Three respondents, all returnees, described negative parental experiences that paradoxically strengthened their religious practice. One’s father insisted that she go to a Catholic school, the other’s father chose a traveling job that distanced him from the family and led to divorcing her mother, and a third respondent’s father mocked her religious observance:

My father... for a long time I was very defensive about a lot of things because I always felt I had to defend my religion to him. He’d always kind of ask questions not to learn but to kind of mock. Nowadays he asks questions to learn, but then he would ask questions to mock... So when anyone would ask me questions about it ... I would feel very... attacked and stuff.

According to AAI coding methods, this respondent reports a rejecting behavior by her father. However, her insight into her defensive response, and her apparent forgiveness of her father’s unloving behavior, suggests that she may be more similar to someone who is autonomous/secure, if scored on the AAI.

Faith Development through Attachment to Community

In addition to family, Jewish communal institutions such as the religious school, group travels to Israel, and the Synagogue were important religious supports for several respondents. One described a religious school teacher who was more important to her faith development than the religious texts she studied: “She (the teacher) was just a tremendous person and really like a Mom. She was...a special lady. The Torah that you learn is beautiful, whatever, but you’re really turned on because of your role models, you know what I mean?”

Many respondents recalled group visits to Israel with female peers as formative, spiritual events. For one respondent, the synagogue was remembered as a womb-like environment, where she felt nurtured and fed by the sound of prayers:

...one of my earliest memories is being about three, maybe four, as most memories are from very early childhood. It’s more of a sensory memory than it is a thinking or intellectual memory, but the memory is one of being in a very warm place...it was a somewhat dark, very warm place with a musty smell, and I could hear the murmurings of the praying...though I remember sitting pretty much by myself, feeling totally entranced by the feel and the warmth and the smell...and just feeling very much at home and very much in a secure environment.

This respondent’s experience is a good example of *Nefesh*, an early Kabbalistic spiritual stage where faith is based on sensory experiences. It also shows faith development emerging from a secure attachment. The respondent’s ability to reflect on this early experience and differentiate it from a more mature, intellectual understanding reflects an aspect of metacognitive monitoring, or

ability to reflect on her thought processes, changes in the self over time, and differences between self and other (Main et al. 2002).

In summary, ten women reported that religious traditions and spiritual values transmitted from family members, previous generations, and from the Jewish community became formative religious experiences in their lives. Through close relational bonds, religious traditions were passed from one generation to the next, placing the development of religious faith for many of the respondents in a positive interpersonal context. However, three respondents reported negative experiences with fathers that strengthened their decision to pursue an observant life. For these respondents, the search for God and an Orthodox lifestyle may have been an attempt to find a loving and idealized caregiver, a supportive community (or family), and possibly a structure to help regulate dysregulated affects, typically a parental function that was not available for these women. As demonstrated in one respondent's words, this early insecure pattern may be replaced later on by "earned security," based on later positive life experiences and more mature spiritual development.

Faith Development through Solitary Transformative Experiences

Unlike the previous pattern of faith development nurtured and shaped by attachment bonds with family and community, three women returnees described solitary transformative experiences. One respondent described her spiritual awakening alone at the Western Wall in Jerusalem:

...and I am there by myself in a foreign land ...after the initial, "Oh my gosh, I'm all alone, I'm separated from them" [her husband and children]. To my surprise, it was so liberating..., like wow, this is just about me...I'm here for myself, this is about me talking to God with my full attention, with no distractions. I'm here for myself, by myself, so it opened up the whole world of me as a woman davening (praying) on my own, separate...

This quote has a fresh, authentic quality, the respondent was not trying to screen out thoughts or feelings, and her awe and enthusiasm is palpable. In the AAI, this quality would reflect coherence in thought patterns, and may indicate an autonomous, or secure attachment. The respondent's transcendent attachment to God becomes possible when she is away from her everyday human attachments to her husband and children. It seems equivalent to the level of "Neshamah," the third level of the soul in Kabbalah which relates to transcendental states of

consciousness and integration of heart and mind, feelings and thoughts.

Another respondent described the moment she decided to become Orthodox, despite social pressures, and despite her family's secular background:

There were a lot of "aha" moments. But I would say the best moment was, I was still going out with this guy from high school and I finally realized that I was just being taken advantage of...I read this [religious] book... and I sat down... and I wrote this boyfriend of mine a letter, and I said you know what? I just came to the realization that I don't want to do this. I want to be religious, I don't want to touch you anymore and that's it. I'm finished with you. And it was, like so empowering, and I just felt like religion is empowering. You know, I'm the one in charge. I don't have to do what other people want me to do that I don't care about.

While this quote has a feel of an angry, and somewhat preoccupied state of mind, it also indicates the respondent's ability to reflect on her thought processes and to notice a change and a developmental progression in herself regarding her relationship with others.

A third respondent described a similar moment of realization, when, as an adolescent, she decided to follow the Kosher laws on her own, and this gave her a sense of empowerment and independence. Despite their decision to observe a strict religious discipline, and live in a close-knit community where individuality was superseded by familial and communal responsibilities, these respondents reported that their transformative spiritual experiences contributed to a stronger sense of self, a greater personal freedom, and a shift in their relationship with significant others where both attachment needs, and needs for exploration and autonomy could co-exist.

Discussion

This study shows that most of the respondents' religious beliefs developed through relational experiences with family and community. Differences were found in faith transmission from female and male family members. Respondents reported that their fathers transmitted the faith through formal observance and scriptural knowledge, while mothers and grandmothers transmitted it through affective attachment bonds, modeling of personal values and daily rituals. This finding is similar to earlier research which shows that while mothers are more prominent attachment figures than fathers early in life, fathers become more influential during adolescence, when cognitive functions and intellectual achievements in school are of greater concern (Arbona and Power 2003).

Differences were also found between the faith development patterns of Orthodox born and returnee respondents. All the Orthodox born respondents noted that loving and nurturing bonds with family members helped strengthen their faith. This is a pattern supported by previous research, suggesting that the strongest indicator of faith continuity is growing up in a strong faith-based environment (Loveland 2003). Some of the returnees, however, reported that transition to an Orthodox lifestyle occurred despite or because of early negative experiences with fathers. Difficult family history may have led these respondents to look for refuge in the more supportive and cohesive Orthodox community, as well as in a transcendent attachment to God who would never let them down and would always be there for them.

Three returnees reported a second pattern of faith development through an experience of spiritual awakening that took place in solitude, rather than through an ongoing relational engagement with family and community. Doubts in their previous way of life, insecure attachments with one parental figure, the father in this case, and a personal search for spiritual meaning and transcendent experience may have been factors in this seemingly sudden awakening.

As in the case of most of the returnee respondents, who described their spiritual awakening during adolescent and early adulthood, the search for an identity is a common developmental phase in adolescence (Arnett 2001). It also fits the concept of conversion noted by Paloutzian (2005), who states that a key factor in conversion is doubt about one's present beliefs and way of life, expectations that have not been met, and personal disappointments. In some of the returnees' lives, family dysfunction and disillusionment with secular values may have been significant factors in the decision to adopt an Orthodox way of life. This pattern of faith development is similar to the faith development style found by Loewenthal (1988), who called this pattern "inspiration." However, in Loewenthal's study the formative spiritual experience occurred in the context of dyadic relationships with husbands or friends, rather than in solitude, as in the present study.

Attachment theory provides a lens from which to understand faith development in the context of interpersonal and internal factors. This theory posits that an attuned relationship between the child and the caregiver typically predicts a secure attachment pattern. Conversely, the lack of attuned parenting, abuse or neglect may lead to an insecure attachment and may have a significant impact on conversion experiences later in life (Kirkpatrick 1992). This suggests that a relationship with God and with a close-knit religious community may substitute for the lack of positive early attachment experiences with caregivers. This was clearly the case with some of the returnees in the sample, who reported negative relational experiences with

their fathers. Attachment theory may also explain some returnees' yearning for God as a safe haven, and their striving for a social and religious structure that would help contain dysregulated affects stemming from chaotic, disorganized or abusive home environments. While respondents' attachment styles were not identified in this study, it is interesting to note that all the respondents, and especially the returnees (some of whom experienced difficult childhoods), expressed passion, enthusiasm and deep commitment to their religious faith and lifestyle. This finding raises the question of whether initial insecure or anxious attachment styles can change and become more secure through the process of religious development and within a religious community that may substitute for deficits in parental love and stability. According to the AAI, these respondents would have earned the "earned secure" category (Main et al. 2002).

While attachment theory is based on the need for relational bonds as primary motivation, Kabbalah views the interpersonal as an aspect of one's relationship with the divine, and may therefore provide a complementary model for understanding Orthodox women's faith development. In their observance patterns, the respondents demonstrated aspects of the first three soul levels in Kabbalistic terms: *Nefesh*, or faith through daily ritual; *Ruach*, or faith through emotional awareness and interpersonal relationships; and *Neshamah*, or spiritual integration of body, feelings, and mind, expressed through righteous living. These paths of Jewish observance may be uniquely female, and distinct from the sphere of male observance that is rooted in daily synagogue attendance and prayer, as well as the formal study of religious texts. These Kabbalistic stages complement the development of attachment bonds starting from physical and sensory interactions between mother and child, such as holding, nursing, cooing and smiling, to more abstract levels of emotional regulation and mentalization, with God representing a parental attachment figure.

This study examined a small convenience sample, and therefore the findings cannot be applied to Orthodox women in general, or even within this local community. It also leaves open the question of the attachment experiences of those raised in Orthodoxy who may choose to leave the faith. However, this study does show that Orthodox women may have a unique pattern of spiritual and religious development, based primarily on interpersonal relationships, and expressed through daily rituals and service to their family and others in their community.

Implications for Research and Practice

The findings and related literature review show that faith development is a social, psychological, and spiritual

process. Another recent study by the author and her collaborator (Ringel and Bina 2007) suggests that Orthodox returnees may be at continued risk for multiple problems, including substance abuse, family violence, and psychological disorders. Orthodox returnee clients may therefore search for a cohesive social group, clear moral guidelines, and a social system that would help them regulate and contain unmanageable affects and impulses (Geyer and Baumeister 2005). A highly structured religious system may also help these clients with issues of self esteem, stress, and social isolation that are quite common in the modern world. A strong belief in God may substitute for a powerful, benevolent parent who is present in all aspects of their daily lives, unlike biological parents who may have been neglectful, abusive or preoccupied.

Culturally-competent clinicians may consider utilizing faith with these clients as a safe-based from which to view other problems these clients present, including marital conflicts, domestic violence, depression, and parental difficulties. These clients' Orthodox faith is their system of meaning from which to work on these issues, launch new understanding, and develop more adaptive relational patterns. The presence of spirituality as a structure and container for the treatment may be communicated through biblical stories and scriptural passages and through mutual knowledge of and appreciation for Jewish religious values. Spirituality can also be mutually recognized as an overarching structure in the client-therapist encounter. From an attachment perspective, the treatment can be viewed as a constant process of contact, disruption and repair (Fosha 2003) between the client and the therapist. With Orthodox women clients, this process may be closely linked to spiritual meaning in the client's own life, the therapist's system of meaning, and a new spiritual understanding that evolves between the client and the therapist.

It is also important to view religious faith, and religious conversion, within the lifecycle, and to examine the meaning religion holds during each particular life stage. For an adolescent, religious observance may become a way to forge an identity and find a more accepting, structured community. It may be a way to distance from a disorganized or dysfunctional family system, as some of the returnees in the sample reported. For young adults, religion may become a container that helps regulate marital conflicts and provides spiritual and emotional supports.

Culturally competent practice also includes the clinician's knowledge of Orthodox religious beliefs and values, and respect for these clients' way of life. This includes traditional gender roles, emphasis on intact families, individual loyalty to community values, and adherence to strict religious laws.

Using AAI coding methods to analyze respondents' states of mind in regard to attachment suggests that the

spiritual development process in itself may contribute to the resolution of early negative attachment experiences. While it is not clear how their belief in God, and living within a structured social community, helped some respondents to come to terms with early attachment disruptions, it seems that their religious development was concurrent with psychological growth. In the therapeutic situation, clinicians familiar with attachment theory and research methods may utilize their Orthodox clients' narratives to identify their states of mind in regards to attachment, both in terms of early relationship with significant others and current relationships with spouses and children.

Future research with this population, or other religious communities, could utilize the AAI to identify the respondents' states of mind in regards to experiences of separation, loss and trauma. Examination of the relationship between AAI findings and specific patterns of spiritual belief structure may deepen understanding of the association between attachment and faith development. It would be particularly useful to discern whether and how spiritual beliefs and attachment styles influence each other and change over time.

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Author Biography

Dr. Ringel is on the faculty of UMB and maintains a private practice in Baltimore. She is currently completing her certification on the Adult Attachment Interview with Mary Main and Eric Hesse. She recently co-authored a book with Dr. Brandell, “Attachment and dynamic practice” from Columbia University Press, and is currently working on a second book with Dr. Eda Goldstein and Dr. Dennis Miehls, “Advanced Practice: Relational principles and techniques”, also from Columbia Univ. Press. She has published widely on clinical practice, faith-based communities, and attachment theory and practice.

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