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# Teaching Across Boundaries: American Educators and Ultra-Orthodox<sup>1</sup> Women in Jerusalem

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes the efforts involved in developing and establishing a Master's in Clinical Sociology program, in Jerusalem, for Haredi women. The development of this educational program evolved over a period of one year and was implemented in the fall of 1994. The difficulties in developing a program for a cultural group unlike your own, over 10,000 miles away, and for very specific purposes presents special challenges. The reasons why there is a need for Haredi women, trained in counseling techniques, is also explored. In addition, there is a discussion of the students themselves and the problems they experience as students in this experimental program. Also described is a research project that has been developed to learn more about the social and cultural dynamics of the unique communities where the students live and work.

## Introduction

This is a story about networks, serendipity, and persistence. It begins in 1979 at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where three academics (two sociologists and an anthropologist) become colleagues and friends. The scene changes as one of the sociologists pursues his roots, becomes religious in the Orthodox Jewish sense, and emigrates to Jerusalem, leaving behind his tenure, some of his friends and colleagues, and embarks on a new journey. The three continue to stay in touch and eventually the two

other colleagues (both gentiles) move together to administrative positions in the School of Community Service (SCS) at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton.

In April 1993 the Israeli sociologist who is now the registrar at Neve Yerushalayim (Neve), a school in Jerusalem that was established to provide an in-depth, college-level program of Jewish Studies, contacted his two former colleagues about the possibility of entering into a cooperative venture to provide a Master's level educational program in Jerusalem.

The rationale for the need for this program is many-fold. First, there is a need for employment opportunities for married women whose husbands are in full-time Torah study in Jerusalem. This pattern of full-time study is often the rule among Haredi families in Israel. Second, there exists a serious need for family and marital counselors in the Haredi community, especially for women counselors. Women counselors are extremely important because of the difficulty many Haredi women have in discussing serious personal problems with male therapists. Third, Israeli universities teach primarily in Hebrew and although Hebrew is a spoken language for most of these women, they are not sufficiently fluent to take course work in Hebrew. Fourth, the cloistered pattern of Haredi communities makes it very difficult for the women to even think about regular interaction in secular settings. Such interaction creates the opportunity for serious cultural and value conflicts for the women. Although most, if not all, are up to the challenge, this is not a complication that they need in their busy lives. Fifth, Israeli universities are very much in the European model. Thus they have very strict admission standards, traditional models of course development and sequencing, and other formats and peculiarities that militate against the non-traditional needs of this special population. And finally, the time constraints on the lives of these women make traditional university class scheduling very difficult.

Additionally, most Haredi women feel most comfortable in single gender classes, prefer faculty who respect and are sensitive to their value orientation,<sup>2</sup> and a setting in which there is an absence of social activities and modes of behavior that are inconsistent with their religious and social world view. It is clear that although the women in this program are intellectually curious and academically oriented, most would forego the degree unless the program met their stringent normative criteria.

The clinical sociological perspective was especially relevant in this educational setting. Because sociology encourages, and often requires, an examination of organizational contexts such as the mental hospital, the school, the apartment complex, the synagogue, or the Yeshiva, and the relationship between those contexts and individual functioning, clinical sociology is especially useful. In addition, the perspective recognizes the importance of the social construct of community in the Orthodox value

hierarchy. Because of the importance placed on community, among the Orthodox, there is a need for multi-level analysis and some distancing from the traditional medical model which is most common in the training of counselors. Clinical sociology unlike other more traditional approaches is able to meet these challenges.

It is also important to emphasize that sociology, unlike some other disciplines, treats religion as a critical variable in societal analysis while also underscoring the reality that religious law and ritual are *social facts*. As a result sociology can avoid the problem of some other disciplines who may identify religious behavior as deviant. Using clinical sociology as a framework also allows a special sensitivity to the role of research methods in clinical training and the importance of understanding the rules for acceptance of evidence, the principles of research design, the concepts of sample size and representativeness, and the important role that evaluation of existing programs can play in finding overarching solutions.

Perhaps surprisingly sociology has much greater acceptance in the Orthodox community than do other social or behavioral sciences, especially psychology, which is most often associated and identified with Sigmund Freud. Disciplines such as psychology often ignore the subtle and not so subtle subcultural differences critical to understanding the dynamics of the Orthodox Jewish world, e.g. Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Chassidim, etc. Sociology, and clinical sociology in particular, also place a high value on issues of social policy and intervention at the community level which is critical to effective work in the Orthodox community. Although the individual level of analysis and treatment is important, the ability to imbed analysis and treatment in a community context is necessary for treatment success in this type of tightknit community.

After approximately 12 months of discussion and planning, and three trips from Jerusalem to Denton by Neve administrators, UNT sent two faculty to Jerusalem to make final arrangements with their Israeli colleagues. After this early June, 1994 trip a contract was signed that provided the basis for a formal partnership. Through *word of mouth* only, information spread about this new program that was to start in the early fall. As a result, 18 students enrolled and began their studies in the fall semester shortly after the end of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The following narrative is a description of the program as it developed, many of the problems that emerged, a description of the varied backgrounds of the students, and a research agenda that has developed as a corollary to the program.

### **The Setting<sup>3</sup>**

Neve Yerushalayim was established in Jerusalem in 1970 to provide an in-depth, college-level program of Jewish Studies giving Jewish women from

all types of Jewish backgrounds, including those from secular childhoods and those from Orthodox ones, the opportunity to explore their heritage. Since 1970 Neve has experienced impressive growth and significant success in fulfilling its mission. The campus, in the Har Nof district of Jerusalem, was funded by a \$4 million grant from the US government which was matched by a \$4 million grant from the Israeli government. During the past 24 years thousands of Neve's graduates have returned to their home communities and many have joined the ranks of teachers in the Jewish educational system.<sup>4</sup> It is also important to indicate that many have remained in Israel, have become ba'al teshuvot,<sup>5</sup> and have married Haredi men.<sup>6</sup>

Har Nof is a newly settled thriving district of primarily religious Haredi western immigrants in the northwestern hills of the city of Jerusalem. The neighborhood provides Neve with an immediate environment which is both sensitive to its needs and receptive of social services, educational and cultural programs, and other benefits that Neve offers.

It is obvious that you are entering a religiously conservative neighborhood when you enter Har Nof, as you do when you enter any other Haredi neighborhood. The men in these neighborhoods are typically bearded, have earlocks (of greatly varying lengths), wear a black hat, and most likely wear a plain white shirt and black suit. Women abide by the Orthodox concept of modesty by covering their arms, legs, and heads. But they are often brightly and colorfully dressed unlike their husbands. Children are in evidence everywhere, or so it seems, and many women are seen on the sidewalks walking children and pushing two-child strollers.

You can alternately hear English, Hebrew, and sometimes Yiddish, as you walk down the streets of Har Nof. There is a great deal of individual variance in the ability of women to speak Hebrew. English is the primary language spoken in the neighborhood. As most men *learn* in the Yeshiva, they often learn to speak Hebrew early and are very likely to have an excellent knowledge of written Hebrew as well.

The Haredi are often opposed, on issues of social significance, to less religious Israelis. For example they oppose autopsies, even for medical or criminal investigation reasons; have opposed public arenas because activities could take place there on the Shabbos; have opposed the construction of a swimming pool where men and women could swim together; and have opposed certain archeological excavations which may disturb Jewish remains. They also do not believe in the traditional theories of evolution, advocating a more literal translation of the bible. It is clear, however, that there is much intra-cultural variance within the many Haredi communities and also variance within communities, on these and other issues.

Haredi families are patriarchal in nature. They are also very conservative on social issues in that the Halakhah<sup>7</sup> regulates all social behavior. For

example, all Haredi believe that homosexuality is a sin; and have very strict laws surrounding sexual behavior among both singles and married couples -- including abstinence between single people; strict limits on birth control among the married; the observation of laws of family purity that regulate sexual behavior within marriage; and the prohibition of specific sexual practices.

Additionally, marriages are arranged by matchmakers who assist young men and women in finding potential marriage partners. Most men and women marry in their late teens or early twenties. Although the young couple make the final decision as to whether to marry, they often do so with very little personal information about each other as opposed to detailed knowledge about family background. They do not touch during the courtship and may decide to marry after dating only four or five times. Although these values and beliefs appear to be very conservative compared to most in modern Western societies, they are committed to following the strict interpretation that Haredim apply to Halakhic writing. As expressed by a forthright and articulate rabbi, "we are unapologetic for our beliefs and resultant behaviors."

All Haredi men continue to *learn* either full or part-time. We do not have specific data on what percentage *learn* full-time in a Yeshiva but it appears that a large number of younger men, especially Americans do *learn* full-time. Men who study full-time receive a relatively small stipend from the Israeli government or charities and may earn some money from tutoring novices. However, observation and interviews make it clear that the stipends and wages from tutoring cannot support families, especially large ones in the inflationary Israeli economy. Thus, many young and growing families, are supported by the work of wives<sup>8</sup> or by gifts and support from parents and grandparents in their native countries.

### **The Need for Counselors and Family Service Professionals**

There is a need in the Haredi community, both in Israel and abroad, for professionally trained social service practitioners such as family counselors. On the one hand, the religious Jewish community presents special challenges such as large family size and low income. On the other hand, due to its particular cultural norms and religious values, the community's members have historically been reluctant to avail themselves of existing services in dealing with crises. They appear to be even more reluctant to treat ongoing situations before they develop into major problems. The reluctance results, in part, from the perception that available social service professionals and counselors are culturally insensitive to religious values and the lifestyles of Haredi Jews.

Discussions with Haredim in both the United States and Israel give the impression that there are a growing number of social problems among the

Haredim. To the outside observer, this is perhaps surprising for such a pious and conservative community. This is in part attributable to the more diffuse nature of community boundaries in comparison to earlier generations, and the resultant increased exposure to outside values. However, much like other places in today's world there are problems of child and spousal abuse, among other concerns. Interviews also indicate that there is an emergency telephone line in Jerusalem where Haredi women who have been sexually assaulted, have been abused by their husbands, or have other emergency concerns can call and speak with other Haredi women. This telephone line, called SOS, is answered by Haredi para-professionals who provide on-line advice and refer the callers to professional therapists.

There is also the perception within the community that there are high levels of eating disorder problems among women. In fact, our pretest data suggest that eating disorders have been and continue to be a problem for ba'al teshuva women.

Other types of marital and parent-child discord are also increasingly becoming a problem. In one interview, a student indicates that class discussion illuminated the fact that two-thirds of the class had had a firsthand association with divorce, as either a child of divorce, a sibling of divorce, or were divorced themselves.<sup>9</sup> However, interviews also indicate that there is some denial that there are these kinds of problems within the Haredi community. There are also reports of drug abuse by young men in the Yeshivas, primarily by American immigrants who brought their habits with them. It appears that this is a problem that dissipates as the young men become more and more accustomed to the religious life-style. None of the above is mentioned to suggest that the level of these problems is nearly as high as in secular Western societies, but rather, that the level is higher than one might expect given the strongly religious nature and conservative value orientation of the community.

When confronted with personal or family problems the first source of help often sought by Haredim is the rabbi. Many rabbis feel that they have a religious obligation to counsel. Many in the community are acutely aware of their rabbis limitations in this area due to a lack of formal training and the heavy burden of other responsibilities. Currently rabbinical training programs, for this community, do not include courses in pastoral counseling.

There are also networks of informal counselors who have responded to family and individual stressors. These informal counselors are often neighbors, friends, classmates, and occasional relatives. In some cases they are paid para-professionals with little professional training, but they serve an important role as listeners and concerned advisors. These counselors appear to act out of a religious concern to be of service and in the perception that they are effective. While they believe they are being genuinely helpful, they

also believe in the importance of formal training and credentials. Thus many seek an opportunity to attain academic training that focuses on their community's needs. In addition there is also a need in the religious Jewish community to provide higher education and career options in Israel for Haredi Jewish women graduating from seminaries and undergraduate programs of study.

Women who graduate from the UNT/Neve program will have a marketable skill, oriented toward the needs of their community, which will also provide a salary to assist in supporting the family while the husband continues his *learning*. The primary goal of the program, as it has been developed, is to train and certify qualified counselors to serve the general population, as well as the Haredi Jewish community with its special concerns, and provide opportunities for employment and service.

### **The Students**

In the Fall 1994 term, the program began with 18 women enrolling in classes. The students ranged in age from 21 to 48 and all but four were married. Three were single and one was divorced. Twelve had been born in the United States and six were born in other countries including Switzerland, Belgium, Israel, South Africa, England, and Canada. Of the married women all but two had children. The number of children ranged from one to 11. Former, and in some cases, current occupations of the women include teachers, nurses, counselors, retail managers, secretaries, social workers, and camp counselors.

In January 1995 all of the students were interviewed in an attempt to better understand their goals for themselves, their families, their communities, and the program; what problems they were experiencing in course work; and their perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the individual courses. In addition, many of the women talked freely about their lives, their personal problems and concerns, their day-to-day issues, the impact of the Haredi lifestyle on their lives, and their backgrounds prior to emigrating to Israel.



**Table 1: Student Biographical Information**

Name	Age	Birth Place (Country)	Marital Status	# of Children	Former Occupation	
Student 1	FFB <sup>10</sup>	32	US	M	5	Teacher
Student 2	FFB	40	US	M	11	Nurse; Developer of Neve Hadar Retirement Home
Student 3	BT <sup>11</sup>	38	US	M	6	Counselor
Student 4	BT	32	US	M	0 <sup>12</sup>	Retail manager
Student 5	BT	35	US	M	3	Counselor, Teacher
Student 6	FFB	43	US	M	5	Certified Childbirth Educator, Nursery School Director
Student 7	FFB	22	US	M	1	Director, Intensive Pioneer Division, Camp Sternberg
Student 8	BT	38	US	M	1	Counselor
Student 9	FFB	48	Switzerland	M	3	Teacher, journalist, foreign correspondent, social worker
Student 10	FFB	24	Belgium	M	2	Field work in special education
Student 11	FFB	20	Israel	S	0	Advisor
Student 12	FFB	22	South Africa	S	0	Teacher, student counselor
Student 13	BT	21	England	S	0	Student counselor
Student 14	BT	41	US	M	2	Founder, administrator of ASCENT Jewish Education
Student 15	BT	25	US	M	3	Sales Secretary
Student 16	FFB	43	US	D	2	Teacher, resident counselor
Student 17	BT	22	Canada	M	0 <sup>13</sup>	Social worker
Student 18	BT	24	US	S	0	Program planner, Afro-centric summer camps; caterer

The table illustrates the diversity of students in the program. Although initially we thought that the group would be relatively homogenous, this is obviously not the case. The range of ages and occupations is similar to what one might find in a graduate class in the United States. There are, however, more married women than a comparable stateside group of graduate students and the number of children is, of course, more than one might expect in the United States. Although most of the women say that they want to restrict their work after graduation to Haredim in Israel, several indicate that they may return to the states and some have an interest in practicing with those outside the community in addition to those in the community. Lastly, the number of women who are Frum from Birth is exactly one-half of the student

body. Perhaps naively we thought that the number of ba'al teshuvahs would be much higher.

Although there is a great deal of heterogeneity among the students on demographic dimensions, their personal needs, value orientations, and world views, although certainly not uniform, are much more homogeneous. The women are extremely task-oriented, require structured relationships to maximize the efficiency of their learning, and are somewhat anti-intellectual. Students are also very conscientious, extremely studious, willing to accept a lot, and do a lot -- but demanding of efficiency. As one student stated, rather succinctly:

... So I guess, why do I want so much structure, I want it to be cost effective. I want to get through the material as efficiently as I can. I just want to get through it. And I have to learn something because I'm already doing it (counseling). This is hands-on for me. This is as hands-on as you can get. So I don't want to just sit in the course and go over ideas. I want to get something. I want to go home with something.... I think there has to be a curriculum ideal. What you want us to get. And it's step-by-step. And right now I don't think we're getting it. But again, I've learned a tremendous amount. I just think there could have been a better usage of some of the time.... It could be that along with the academic input that everyone is given, there should be a clinician alongside saying, 'Okay, this you're never going to use.' Very simply there needs to be someone alongside the academic saying 'this is what they really need and this is what they don't need.'<sup>14</sup>

But, another student, an older woman, said:

... (At the beginning) I just memorized (for the essay exams in theory) ideas. I didn't understand. The second exam I memorized but I understood everything. And now when these videos are coming on I don't even have to take copious notes. I understand it. So it's as if it was a building block, and I can hear it in (the instructor's references) back, and his references forward. And I'm beginning to understand, well this is a round ball. There is no beginning and end. It's just a whole circle.

At the same time many of the women are really struggling with the time commitment and the intellectual rigor that the program demands. Being a student, again, is very unusual for the women of Har Nof and other Haredi neighborhoods. Many are receiving very strong support from their husbands and children and others are not. Study for married women, in the form of returning to school full-time, is a commitment that requires at least some adjustments in the family routine. This is easier for some families than it is for others. But, it is critical to understand that the primary responsibilities of wife, mother, and obedience to G-d must always come first.

As another student stated:

It's something very unique that this group of women are doing and they can't really, not that they can't share it with all their people, but unless you are doing this, you can't understand what you're doing. My friends who aren't involved in this, at the age of 35, can't understand, 'what in the world is she doing?' Instead of taking, doing, or washing the dishes, I'm reading.... So it's something that's going on in our lives right now that really you can only share with people who understand what you're doing, and respect what you're doing, and who have an appreciation for it. Because the majority of the people don't understand. They are very, very busy, and they're being creative, there are a lot of women here with all kinds of talent and interests. But this is very specific, and it's quite unusual, you know, while you are raising small children to be involved in this kind of academic pursuit. So I think that when I'm overwhelmed by the program or frustrated, or I can't figure out which direction my paper should go, I'm going to call someone in the program because that's who understands the predicament that I'm in.

Several students in the program are receiving professional training and education that better equips them for an avocation or para-professional position that they have been practicing for years. As related by one of the older women in the program:

So for me, this program actually started out with my coming to someone who's in the course and saying, 'I have such and such kind of problem, who can I send them to?' Basically, I've been doing this unprofessionally for years. This program is basically enabling me to find out that which I knew instinctively, how much of it is in the books, and to correct misconceptions. And also it puts enough of a different perspective on it for me to feel comfortable with what I'm doing. There are problems in the Jewish community and there is a need for a realistic picture of the Jewish community. This program is going to look at the Jewish community for what it is and for what it's not and work within the system (and try to improve things).

There is also a commitment to family and obedience to G-d that is unusual to those who come from secular communities. Nothing apparently separates the Haredi woman from these responsibilities. Throughout their very busy daily lives, problems of day-to-day living, concerns about finances, and raising children, and sometimes parents sharing their crowded living quarters, their devotion to family and G-d continue to be paramount. This commitment shapes their world view and how they interact with others. Haredi women don't appear to have leisure time, even on Shabbos. They are constantly at work making their family and their belief structure function.

### **Program Design**

The master's degree program in Clinical Sociology, with a concentration

in Family and the Life Cycle, is designed as a 36 hour degree in clinical sociology.<sup>15</sup> This relatively new perspective is a multi-disciplinary approach that examines the implications of communal, organizational, familial, and small group patterns for maladaptive behavior and psychological functioning. Students who wish may take an additional 12 hours of graduate work coupled with a supervised internship and a state licensing examination to satisfy the requirements for licenser in the state of Texas as a Licensed Professional Counselor. This license is reciprocal with many states and with some foreign countries. Holders of the license are entitled to third-party reimbursement for their counseling services in the states where they are licensed. There is no Texas residency requirement for students, and all courses, as well as the internship can be taken in Israel.

- \* UNT retains full responsibility for admission decisions, requirements for earning a degree, the curriculum, the qualifications and hiring of all faculty, and the academic standards and evaluation processes. Neve provides the site of instruction, recruits students, provides on-site management, and acts as the interface with the Jewish community in Israel.
- \* The curriculum is delivered through a three part strategy that combines televised instruction and audio conferencing; seminars conducted by adjunct faculty, usually with state-side Ph.D.'s in social psychology or social work, that are hired by UNT; and courses taught by UNT faculty in residence in Jerusalem.
- \* One course is taught each of the long semesters by video cassettes recorded at UNT and mailed to Neve. Bi-weekly audio conferences are also held. Students watch the television course accompanied by an Israeli instructor who engages the class in discussion and problem solving around the lecture material presented via television. Examples of courses include Sociological Theory and Research Methods.
- \* The courses taught by Israeli adjunct faculty are of two types. One type are traditional courses such as Marriage and the Family and Sociology of Childhood and Adolescence. The second type are courses that benefit from rabbinical input including Perspectives on the Jewish Family and Dynamics of the Counseling Process and Jewish Law and Ethics and the Professional Counselor. These courses are designed to address diverse issues arising out of the interface between the requirements of Jewish law, the clients' needs, and the interventional approaches of counseling theory. These courses are team-taught by an academic and a rabbi in an attempt to integrate traditional beliefs with modern counseling theory.
- \* The courses taught by UNT faculty in residence are those that UNT

has developed as foundation courses for the clinical sociology degree at UNT. These courses are on the interface between traditional sociology and clinical sociology and form the basis for this new sub-field.

Students are able to complete the 48 hours necessary for licenser in two years by taking nine credits during each long semester and six credits each summer semester. The supervised internship of 2,000 hours will be facilitated in a clinical setting that will be set up on the Neve campus. This clinic will be staffed by professionals who in addition to offering subsidized client services will supervise graduate student interns.

As noted previously in this article this particular educational context is especially suited for teaching a clinical sociological perspective. Although much family therapy utilizes a systems approach, they do not detail adequately how external systems impact on internal family systems. For example, in co-dependency theory, a family member may occupy an enabler role allowing the family to maintain homeostasis even in the face of a dysfunctional family member such as an alcoholic father. In contrast, the sociological perspective might ask if well-intentioned neighbors or Jewish social workers, because of religious cultural values that encourage helping, might act to assist the enabler thereby helping to maintain a dysfunctional system.

Sociology also presents many relevant theoretical perspectives, that are not normally considered in traditional counseling programs, such as labeling theory, exchange theory, and conflict theory. There is also an emphasis on relating changes in the social environment to symptoms of social and individual functioning as well as the use of many tools from related social sciences and perspectives including demography, cultural dynamics, social ecology, and the use of ethnographic analysis.

The educational program has been approved by respected rabbis in Jerusalem and it is hoped that this will help the Haredi community become more open in seeking out and receiving counseling help. This bridge is seen as vital, and it is expected that community rabbis will become involved not only in the referral process but also, where appropriate, as active partners in the development and delivery of this community service.

### **Implementation Issues**

In order to be accepted in a foreign environment it is vital to familiarize yourself with the unique cultural and social mores of the people among whom you find yourself. This is especially true when your relationship with those with whom you have contact will suffer if there is not a sense of mutual respect. It is in this way that our relationship with our Israeli students is not

dissimilar to our relationship, as anthropologists, with informants. If we are to have a successful relationship we must understand the other's world view and have a basic respect for the people themselves.

Examples of issues that reflect cultural and social orientations that were important to understand when implementing this project were:

- \* Scheduling of classes -- Among the Haredi it is especially important to understand the importance of the Shabbos. The Shabbos actually begins in Jerusalem when a city-wide siren sounds approximately 30 minutes before sundown on Friday and ends with a siren approximately an hour after sundown on Saturday. This early beginning and late ending of the Shabbos takes into consideration atmospheric conditions, the height above sea level, and other problems associated with exact timing. This precaution is taken to assure that there are no mistakes. In an educational program for women the issues around the Shabbos are especially critical because so much time is necessary for women to prepare for it. For many women preparations begin early and continue until just before sundown on Friday. In addition to not attending classes on the Shabbos, it is also not an appropriate period for study. Thus women, in reality, lose the ability to go to school, or study, on Friday and Saturday of each week. The nine major holidays, that are also observed, take further time from the Haredi woman's schedule. This requires especially innovative methods to assure the level of class time and study participation that is normally expected in American universities.
- \* Dress of instructors -- The Haredi have very specific and conservative dress codes for women which out of respect should be kept by female instructors. These include wearing opaque hosiery, dresses that come below the knee, sleeves that go below the elbow, and necklines that must not expose the collarbone. In addition, married women must wear a wig or a head covering at all times when in the presence of men other than their husbands. It is helpful if visitors observe these customs, especially if they are Jewish, whether Haredi or not. In fact, it is a violation of Halakhah to encourage a person of Jewish heritage to violate the Jewish law.
- \* Food preferences -- It is especially important to be respectful of the food requirements of Haredi Jews. Their kosher requirements are very stringent and are what is referred to as glatt kosher. It is especially important to observe the dietary laws when interacting with students in the program and to only suggest eating in restaurants that are glatt kosher, which are relatively few in Jerusalem.
- \* Time commitment and orientation -- Cultural and religious norms

appear to require that nothing come before obligations to G-d and family. As a result there seem to be a ready rationale for not completing an assignment or other class-related responsibility. This is not to say that course work is not taken seriously, because it is. But, the culture does condone putting other responsibilities in third place behind religious and family responsibilities. Time orientation is also very different than in the United States. It seems that almost nothing starts on time in Israel. Although people are very busy and task-oriented it seems that *starting on time* does not have the same importance as it does in the states. This may also be related to the primary value placed on taking whatever time it requires for religious and family matters.

- \* Social interaction -- Married women may not touch any males except their husbands. Thus it is extremely improper for a man to extend his hand, hug, or even touch a woman on the shoulder. Driving is also forbidden on the Shabbos and instructors who would like to visit their students' families, on Friday night or Saturday, must observe this rule. One needs to plan ahead and have the ability to stay over or walk to your hotel. Taxis do not go into Har Nof on the Shabbos.
- \* Composition of class cohort -- The discussion of Neve and UNT representatives, at the beginning, assumed that the composition of classes would be of married women only. This was because of the nature of some of the course content.<sup>16</sup> However, it soon became clear that there was a great deal of interest in the program by non-married women, including the unmarried daughter of the dean and founder of Neve Yerushalayim.<sup>17</sup> This incongruity was hotly debated by the administration in Jerusalem and some of the Haredi social psychologists who had been contracted to teach in the program. Eventually a decision was made to mix the married and unmarried women in the same class with the possibility of separating them, on occasion, when the subject matter dictated. This decision is still being discussed. Although no *incidents* occurred several of the women do not believe that the mixing is a good idea. The instructor,<sup>18</sup> for a course on the family in the fall term, also expressed concern about the practice. Although she did not change her lecture material because of the composition she felt uncomfortable presenting some of the material.
- \* Presentation of controversial concepts -- This must be done with extreme care and creates special problems when unmarried girls are in the same class as married women. It is not a concern to discuss sexually explicit material (within certain parameters) between married women. It is a problem, however, for men and women who

are not married to discuss such things and it is a further problem to expose unmarried girls to this material. We are told that this is to protect girls from learning about sexual matters outside of marriage. This includes the discussion of social and behavioral theorists who might believe in concepts and practices that are unacceptable. The opinions of women, on this issue, seem to vary a great deal from individual to individual, however. One married student, with many children, expressed in an interview that it was not right for unmarried girls to learn about sex and some of the problems of marriage before becoming married. She believed, especially strongly, that this education was the responsibility of the husband and wife to work on together. As she expressed it, "women should learn the joys of married life before they learn the problems." The task of the instructor is to be aware of the difficulties that some women will have with the material and attempt to introduce it in a way that is respectful, tactful, and cognizant of the alternative beliefs that may be held. A basic knowledge of the women's beliefs is important, and a willingness to learn appropriate behavior is vital to the success of this type of educational programming.

One concern by UNT faculty that has not evidenced itself thus far as a problem was a fear that the Haredi would reject many of the modern theories of psychology that especially call for openness and exploring the inner-self. However, as one student responded in a question related to this concern:

If someone says there are contradictions, it's because they don't understand either the law or the healing process. There are no real contradictions. You can say there are certain ideas of Freud that Judaism doesn't agree with. But then take a look at Freud a little bit better, his first ideas, his later ideas, did everyone accept them? No. How are they accepted? How can they be used? The whole concept of Judaism is that anything that exists in the world is usable. The question is can you peel off the peeling? Can you see what's there?

... The whole concept of psychology is to understand yourself. Part of Judaism is that you cannot serve G-d properly unless you understand yourself. The question is how willing you are to really know who you are. Are you willing to accept your limitations? Are you willing to work with your strengths and accept responsibility for them?

Although the clinical sociology perspective can be shown to be a very important element in the success of this program, the problem of the graduate's professional identity and acceptability as a practitioner has not been without problems. Issues of licensing and the overwhelming acceptance of the profession of social work within the Jewish community has created difficulties for some graduates of the program. This problem continues to present



challenges as students attempt to create their own professional identity.

Another important element in establishing this program was the necessity for trust to be developed between all of the partners in the venture. The ability of the former colleagues to resume their comfortable relationship, after more than a ten year hiatus, formed the basis for discussion to begin. It was also helpful that there was a high level of confidence between the institutional representatives and a respect for their prerogatives.<sup>19</sup> There was never a question that the program would consume resources and that the cost of the program had to be borne by the students themselves.<sup>20</sup>

It was also clear from the beginning that the principals on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean needed to convince their own institution's leadership that this was a worthwhile venture and that the other party could be trusted to make the partnership work. This appears to have been done with little difficulty which is a credit to the bureaucracies and leadership at both institutions. There were also clear indications from the beginning of the negotiations, that everyone connected with the development of the program, including faculty, deans, and other staff was uniquely qualified to build a curriculum and program structure that would meet the needs of this new constituency.

The fact that this program was for women only also presented its own dilemmas, including those of trust. From the beginning, all of the principals who engaged in the development of this program for women were males. However, an important element of the June 1994 trip to Jerusalem was for the two UNT visitors to meet with prospective students and discuss the nascent curriculum and answer questions. What the two found was a group of articulate, sophisticated, and well-educated women whose intellectual and personal abilities were clearly evident to both observers. A group of prospective Israeli adjunct faculty were also interviewed. Not surprising, this interview also resulted in very positive relations and understandings between the prospective faculty, the Neve administration, and the UNT faculty. As a result the prospective women students, the prospective Israeli faculty, and the UNT faculty emerged from these discussions with a high level of mutual respect and commitment to the goals of the program.

As all good faculty understand, it is important to develop a strong level of trust with students, if the classroom experience is going to be a positive one. Two specific strategies were used to build the level of trust for the instructor of the television component. This component was feared most by the students in the program both because of the subject matter and the impersonality of the medium. Because of this fear, the program was designed so that the instructor for the television component spends the first week of the course in Jerusalem in face-to-face interaction with the students. Additionally, the instructors also take Polaroid photographs of each of the women so that they can refer to them

by name and be more comfortable with them during the audio-conferencing.

The administration of the program is also now communicating via the Internet. It is hoped that this technology can soon be used by students to discuss directly with the instructors. However, using this technology also requires a level of trust that must be surmounted. In the case of this program the building of this platform of trust began more than a year before the students entered the classroom and continues by investigating new strategies to make the relationship stronger.

The fact that both men and women faculty teach in the program, and that at least one-half of the instruction is by gentiles, was never discussed openly, although it is clear that there was some concern about these issues. We believe, however, that these hidden fears have been largely obliterated by a culturally and gender sensitive faculty who have attempted to understand the students from the women's own cultural backgrounds, in good anthropological fashion.

### **Research Related to the Project**

The UNT/Neve partnership has also instituted a plan to investigate relevant social patterns within the Haredi community. Faculty involved in the research project will collect baseline data which it is hoped will be useful in analyzing broader sociological, psychological, and community issues in the Haredi world. There is a paucity of scholarly research available on the Haredi and on many of the social and behavioral problems which critically affect these communities.

This aspect of the program was enhanced when the anthropologist member of the founding group was contacted by the mother of one of the prospective students for the program. The mother, a practicing clinical psychologist, in Texarkana, Texas called to inquire about the specifics of the program. Over the next several months her developing interest in the program, and a latent interest to understand the Haredi community better, prompted her to suggest collaboration with the sociologist and anthropologist on a long-term research investigation of American ba'al teshuva women, like her daughter, who were now Israeli citizens.

As a result, a research component was begun early in the academic year by these social and behavioral scientists. The research began in January 1995 with a test questionnaire that was administered to seven women, only one of whom was a student in the master's degree program. The questionnaire was modified greatly as a result of this pretest. Although the questionnaire had gone through a rigorous review by the three investigators, and a seemingly endless cadre of rabbis, the women found many ambiguities and problems with it. A modified version of the survey (over 200 questions) will be initiated

in April 1995. It is hoped that it can be administered to over 500 ba'al teshuvus. This survey will be followed by life history and structured interviews with a sample of the women. Additionally three psychological inventories will be administered including the Beck Hopelessness, Anxiety, and Depression scales.

Subjects for the initial questionnaire will be ba'al teshuvus who are emigrants from the United States and are residents of Jerusalem Haredi neighborhoods. The women will be representative of the range of ages in any population group. However, a preponderance of the women will be from 20 to 30 years of age.

Various themes will be explored by the questionnaire including shared cultural and social characteristics, family backgrounds, reasons for the women's change in religious status, their current relationship with their families of origin, their reported problems in their present lives, and any past or present history of emotional problems. Follow-up studies have been planned to describe and understand these ba'al teshuvus, their world view, and their present understanding of themselves and those they interact with. The women in the survey will be asked to provide the names, addresses, and phone numbers of their parents for possible follow-up interviews. Research areas to be investigated include the following:

- \* Exploring the relationship between these women and their families both before and after becoming ba'al teshuvus.
- \* Identifying the problems of ba'al teshuvus and delineating coping mechanisms to assist them in their transition from the secular to the religious world.
- \* Interviewing male returnees to Haredi Jewry, to understand how they differ in their conversion experiences, expectations, and family relationships as compared to female returnees.
- \* Studying the relationship of ba'al teshuvus to their families of origin over time, to explore possible changes in attitude of the family of origin, including whether these families become more or less religious over time.
- \* Comparing the attitudes of parents of male ba'al teshuvus to the parents of female ba'al teshuvus.
- \* Tracking longitudinally whether or not ba'al teshuvus become less zealous as the number of children in the family increases and as time passes.
- \* Comparing the self-esteem of religious women to non-religious women in Israel and in the United States.
- \* Exploring the characteristics of Christian returnees to fundamentalism (Born Again Christians) to those of Jewish returnees, and investigate how these changes are related to societal pressures

and changes.

Although secondary to the educational program this research effort is viewed as integral to the overall goals of UNT and Neve. A plan to integrate the research with instruction has been developed and students in the research methods class will be used to collect a portion of the data and develop new research topics. One unique aspect of this component is that approval of all of the instruments used in the study have been reviewed by rabbis at Neve and in the larger community. As a result, some questions have been eliminated and some re-worded in an attempt to make the questionnaires acceptable.

We believe that the integrity of the instruments have not been compromised and believe strongly that the validity of the survey has been improved immeasurably by this process. It has been suggested that some of the wording of the original questions was so improper, by Haredi standards, that some of the potential women for the study would have excluded themselves from the survey. This, of course, would have harmed the reputation of both institutions and the viability of the research project as well. Compromise wording has been found in all cases and we believe that the research project is better as the result. However, it is also fair to say that the project could not have been developed and administered without the strong support of progressive rabbis in the Haredi community and at Neve. Their ability to explain the importance of the research for internal *and* external reasons was critical in convincing some that the project should be approved.

## Conclusions

The initial tendency for most outside observers, including many anthropologists, is to view the Orthodox Jewish community as an homogenous one. The relationship with our Israeli institutional partner has served to highlight important cultural factors that define internal differences.

First, the Orthodox community described here is of primarily European origin. Our student body, thus far, does not include religious Jewry with origins from Muslim countries, commonly called Sefaredim. This religious subculture's encounter with modernity is more recent and they are even less likely to seek solutions to social and emotional problems outside their immediate family circle.

Second, our student community is currently, totally misnagdic, consisting of non-Hasidic sects; the later, while extremely varied, consist of tightly-knit communities built around a traditional highly influential *rebbe*. The acceptance of secular education as a value with utility for ameliorating problems in the Orthodox world will occur at much later points in the Sefardi and Hasidic communities and the program described in this article would

never have been initiated within these communities. It is reasonable to expect, however, that the program occurring first in the European, misnagdic community will spread to the other Orthodox communities through the expanding enrollment of students and the treatment of clients from both these other subcultures.

All three communities fall within the Haredi category. The term has gained acceptance among academics because of its relative neutrality. The alternative designation of Ultra-Orthodox is much more value laden.

Even within the more narrowly defined grouping which describes our student body -- women from families with European origins associated with the non-Hasidic Yeshiva world -- there are important nuances. At one level, there are differences associated with country of origin. English speaking Orthodox Jews from the United States, South Africa, and the United Kingdom display subtle differences in outlook. Perhaps most significant is the inclusion of the ba'al teshuva movement with the Haredi world. In general, individuals who enter Orthodoxy in this way remain very deferential to the leaders of Haredi communities. Their impetus is to internalize the norms and beliefs of their new community, not to challenge them. Nonetheless, the ba'al teshuva sub-community represents the only segment of the Haredi world with significant secular education. This education was almost always acquired before identification with and entry into this new reference group. Many ba'al teshuva reject secular education for their children. The reasons for this are complex and are, in part, related to the unavailability of a secular education in instructional settings accepting of Haredi values and world view.

The UNT/Neve program is viewed by its students, especially those who are ba'al teshuvus, as a rare exception in this regard. This program is seen as a secular program, not only sympathetic to Haredi values, but most unusual, a secular program willing to integrate the values into the curriculum and emerging theoretical models.

This program has been an experiment in collaboration, cross-cultural partnerships, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, the application of social and behavioral knowledge, and the demonstration of the importance of integrating research, application, and teaching. We are also learning a lot about each other and the administrative problems in implementing a program such as this.

At this point it is working for UNT, for Neve, and for the students. It will be several years before we see whether it works for the residents of Har Nof and other Haredi neighborhoods in Israel, the United States, and perhaps elsewhere.

We believe that the research on ba'al teshuvus and other issues related to Haredi culture and communities will be useful in the future to the residents themselves, their families and friends "back home," and to other academics

and practitioners. It will be especially interesting and useful to those who want to understand how change can be implemented within communities by integrating modern social and behavioral principles with traditional religious and cultural values and understandings.

## NOTES

1. Ultra-Orthodox is a term used to describe those Orthodox Jews who are the most culturally and religiously conservative and who reject most modern secularism. They refer to themselves as Haredi, meaning the G-d fearing, and we will use that term, for the most part, in this paper.

2. Orthodox Judaism, especially the more conservative forms of the religion, present many problems for the Modern Orthodox, Conservative, and secular Jews in Israel. The Haredi are often seen as standing in the way of progress and in building barriers between themselves and the larger society.

3. Portions of the narrative that describe Neve and its programs have been adapted and abridged from Neve Yerushalayim publications.

4. Neve attracts Jewish women from many parts of the world but has special programs for American, French, Israeli, and Russian women.

5. A ba'al teshuva is a person who has become religiously observant. Or, more specifically, has become Orthodox after the age of consent.

6. These men are from many national backgrounds, but more often than not, are American.

7. The body of Jewish law that is based on the Torah.

8. Informal discussion with many Haredi women indicate extremely busy lives. Their seemingly hectic lives include supervising and socializing many children, keeping spotlessly clean homes, holding down part-time jobs, providing a high level of support for their husbands, and preparing the often elaborate meals for Shabbos and "Yom Tov" (seasonal religious ceremonies). Haredi women often indicate that they are very tired. At the same time they appear to be very contented and happy.

9. Only one student in the program is actually divorced herself.

10. FFB is an abbreviation for Frum from Birth which means that a person was born into an Orthodox family or became Orthodox prior to attaining the age of consent.

11. BT is an abbreviation for Ba'al Teshuva which means that a person has become religious. Or, more specifically, has become Orthodox after the age of consent.

12. This student was married one week at the time of the interview.

13. This student is pregnant with her first child.

14. This interview was completed shortly after a meeting of the Sociological Theory course.

15. The complete curriculum can be seen in Appendix I.

16. It is generally believed that married and single women should not discuss issues and concepts of a sexual nature in the presence of one another.

17. Early in the first fall semester several men inquired about the availability of a program for them. There has been discussion of the development of such a program. However, it would by necessity, have to also be single gender and the requisite number of potential students has not yet been identified.

18. This instructor holds a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from an American university. Both she and her husband are Haredi Jews, live in Har Nof, and both have private counseling practices.

19. For example there was never a question that UNT would have complete control over curriculum development, faculty selection, admissions criteria, and etc. However UNT also never assumed that these decisions could be made alone if a successful program was to emerge. Thus a spirit of collaboration, rather than control was evident from the beginning.

20. The cost for this program is \$300 American dollars per credit hour. This is much more expensive than enrolling at Israeli public universities. It is not however high when considering out-of-state tuition at an American university.

### Appendix I

#### Curriculum for Master of Science in Sociology – Family and the Life Cycle

The full curriculum for the master's degree includes the following:

- \* **Seminar on the Family** -- Taught by an Israeli adjunct faculty member, on-site
- \* **Perspectives on the Jewish Family and Dynamics of the Counseling Process** -- Team taught by a Rabbi and an adjunct faculty member, on-site
- \* **Family Systems and Addictive Disorders** -- Taught by UNT faculty in residence in Israel
- \* **Sociology of Childhood and Adolescence** -- Taught by an Israeli adjunct faculty member, on-site
- \* **Social and Cultural Aspects of the Counseling Process** -- Taught by UNT faculty member, on-site
- \* **Theory, Methods, and Issues of Therapeutic Practice** -- Taught by an Israeli adjunct faculty member, on-site
- \* **Jewish Law and Ethics and the Professional Counselor** -- Team taught by a Rabbi and an adjunct faculty member, on-site

- \* **Sociology of Mental Health and Illness** --- Taught by UNT faculty in residence in Israel
- \* **Assessment Techniques for the Professional Counselor** -- Taught by UNT faculty member, on-site
- \* **Contemporary Sociological Theory** -- Taught via television and audio-conferencing from UNT (with adjunct instructor on-site in Israel)
- \* **Community Organization** -- Taught by an Israeli adjunct faculty member, on-site
- \* **Testing, Research Methods, and Design** -- Taught via television and audio-conferencing from UNT (with adjunct instructor on-site in Israel)
- \* **Social Statistics** -- Taught via television and audio-conferencing from UNT (with adjunct instructor on-site in Israel)
- \* **Practicum** -- Supervised by Neve faculty under the guidance of UNT faculty
- \* **Internship (2) in Clinical Sociology** -- Providing advanced level learning and supervised application in a clinical setting. Taught by UNT faculty in residence in Israel.