

ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI WOMEN IN ACADEMIA: A GENDER EQUALITY PLAN, IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CHANGE¹ PROJECT

Adi Binhas and Hana Himi

Introduction

The glass ceiling is a key concept in gender research, describing invisible barriers which inhibit the promotion of talented women to senior positions in various fields – industry, education, and others (Ansari, 2016; Basu, 2015). Andersen found that in innovative leadership biotechnology firms, the greater number of senior professional women who mentor young women weakened the glass ceiling effect. The issue at the heart of this study is the identification and definition of pivotal themes that create a glass ceiling for women in minority groups in Israel.

The study focused on exploring personal experiences and the kinds of unique barriers and challenges facing Israeli women of Ethiopian origin in academia. It analysed ten success stories of women who managed to break through the glass ceiling and progressed to high academic degrees despite being the children of immigrants, young women who had to deal with all the problems entailed in adapting to the host country's traits. That confrontation included socialization processes that were characterized, among others, by prejudice, economic straits, and the distinctive demands of the higher education system. We begin by describing the barriers facing unique groups; describe the particular characteristics of this group of women, using the term *coherence* and its three components; list the resources available to those women which helped them break down the barriers; and conclude with a discussion where we argue that the women's inner forces were significant for their success, despite the many barriers.

Most of the women we researched were born in Ethiopia, immigrated to Israel as children and studied in the Israeli education system. Few Ethiopian women in Israel have reached doctoral studies, which is a great challenge for women from immigrant families, who have to deal with immigration, and economic, cultural, and social challenges. This preliminary study is unique because this group has not yet been studied in Israel.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background is based on a description of the existing barriers which face unique groups at the entrance to academia, with specific reference to the challenges facing the immigrant population. We also present coherence as a

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resource which helps when individuals must deal with all the demands placed on them in situations of stress and crisis. The content world of coherence helps us explain how the women cope with the immigration process and integrating into a new society.

Barriers to immigrant women

To enter and integrate into a society, immigrants must acquire not only the language but also the society's culture, norms and values; they must structure social networks which can help them to progress. Immigrant women face unique challenges and are often channelled to specific jobs on the lowest rungs of the occupational hierarchy and do not access higher education (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). While there is substantial literature on women's empowerment, little reference is made to the integration of non-traditional women, or to demographic issues and power relations. In particular, there is a need to engage with academic development and integration into normative employment of immigrant women, who face dual challenges as women and immigrants (Hugo, 2000). Education is a crucial variable which can advance people into their place in deficient stratification, and change their status in society, especially in traditional societies. A study of women in Turkey showed that until the 1970s, women rarely left their homes, but about four decades later a significant change in women's status was discernible in terms of social hierarchy and their social, political, and religious status. Over that period they gained liberation and self-fulfilment (Gretty & Abadan-Unat, 2015). A study that looked at the identities of nineteen female and male Ethiopian-Israeli immigrants dealt with identity-related experiences, and described the processes associated with defining personal identity, their connection to ethnic and other identities, and their ways of coping and building themselves within a complex identity (Yakhnich, Getahun & Walsh, 2021).

Academic entry barriers

Admission threshold barrier

Admission thresholds to academic institutions are a significant barrier for unique populations, constituting a factor that impedes admission even if other barriers have been overcome. In the Israeli case, criticism of the psychometric entry tests has argued that they are culturally biased, and that to pass the tests the applicant requires 'western' know-how, unfamiliar to immigrants from non-western countries. The applicants' grades in matriculation exams and other academic selection methods are directly linked to their social, cultural, and economic background. Admission thresholds are adjusted to candidates from a medium-high socioeconomic background, who belong to the majority culture, and are familiar with the demands through other groups they belong to. For students from a low socioeconomic background, lacking an environment conversant with academic education, these requirements could lead to adjustment difficulties, reduced self-confidence, and fear of failure. They are often exposed to negative remarks about their prospects for fitting in,

stereotypes, and racism, which damage their motivation and adjustment abilities (Griffin et al., 2012, Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013).

Financial barriers

Lack of economic resources impacts on students' achievements and experience, as well as the percentage of students who will graduate. A weak economic background is one of the factors that prevents pursuit of academic studies or causes concerns and burdens during them. Worry about finances affects students' ability to complete their degree. Some also work, and must help support their families (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Professional barriers unique to immigrant women

Regarding the constant tension between social expectations of women in general to fulfil the roles of housekeeper, wife, and mother, and the world of education and career, for immigrant women the tension between the two spheres is stronger. This is particularly true for immigrant women from patriarchal societies in which women are expected, and expect of themselves, to take a major part in running the home and looking after the family. Aspirations for education and employment clash with the expectations at home (Buchsbbaum & Dagan, 2010). This part has presented the barriers to academic education among the study population and similar groups. The very admission to an academic institution is the initial barrier, followed by the unique challenges and barriers which these populations face – readiness for and knowledge about academic studies, financial barriers, and others. Women must deal with unique difficulties vis-à-vis societal or family expectations to marry and have children, which are typically postponed by academic studies. If they already have a family, they must cope with the disruption of the family equilibrium and the demand that they continue fulfilling their previous role within the family framework.

Antonovsky's sense of coherence (SOC) approach

The present study is based on the central concept of sense of coherence (SOC) within the salutogenic approach of Aaron Antonovsky (1987, 1993, 1994), which emphasizes the strengths of the individual. SOC has three key components: understandability, which refers to a general conception of the world as having an understandable sequence, so that individuals believe that the challenges they face are understandable; this experience is a basis for manageability, which refers to a manageable reality, wherein individuals perceive themselves as better able to cope with stressors and believe they can avail themselves of resources for coping, and thus have the motivation to cope; while experiencing significance. Antonovsky (1987, 1993, 1994) maintains that the intensity of SOC is an important factor in the movement towards health. These components are essentially close to concepts such as optimism, mental resilience, sense of efficacy, resourcefulness, and more. In Antonovsky's opinion, the extent to which individuals have such experiences is the result of their status in their social environment, a product of their culture, and above all, related to the type

of work they engage in, their family structure, and other factors like gender, ethnic origin, genetics, and even coincidence. SOC reflects individuals' ability to understand events taking place in their lives, the extent of their preparedness to handle the expected pressures with the resources at their disposal, and their perception of life as meaningful. SOC already develops during childhood and adolescence. The social conditions, socioeconomic conditions, and social relationships that exist within the family, experiences and exposure to culture within the family, as well as gender, ethnicity, genetics, and more are all significant for the development of SOC (Antonovsky & Sourani, 1988). Antonovsky (1987) argues that individuals with a high SOC perceive events as less threatening, and therefore their level of anxiety is lower than that of individuals with a low SOC (Svavarsdottir, McCubbin, & Kane, 2000).

Case study: Israeli-Ethiopian women in academia

Integration of Israeli-Ethiopian women in higher education

Israeli women of Ethiopian origin encounter unique difficulties when integrating into higher education. The division of roles between women and men in Ethiopia was of the kind common in patriarchal societies, where the man holds the key position. With the emigration to Israel, the woman's position changed, and became more central and equal (Bostin, 2008). Despite the negative impact on the family structure, there have been positive changes in the status of Israeli-Ethiopian women. They are integrated in various public systems in a variety of roles – formal and informal education, the military, the media, and other fields of employment². As regards academic studies, most Israeli-Ethiopians (men and women) study social sciences. Ethiopian women mostly train in social work; at the other end, very few study engineering, architecture, biology, maths, physics, statistics or computer science. The divide between women and men in these fields is common in general, but is more pronounced among Israeli-Ethiopian women (Fuchs & Friedman-Wilson, 2017).

Methodology

Research method

The research used the qualitative method and qualitative phenomenological research, in which the researcher tries to understand the interviewee's personal experience and interpretation of reality from her personal experience. Through the questions asked, researchers try to understand the interviewees' interpretation of reality and their feelings (Creswell, 2007). The present research is based on the subjective and reflective experience of Israeli-Ethiopian women who are studying for a PhD or already have a PhD. Our focus was on the opportunities which helped them succeed (in their opinion), and on the barriers and challenges they have confronted during their academic career. We assumed that, by drawing on the personal experience of these women who are also immigrants, we could

identify means for encouraging similar future success by formulating suitable policy (for this group and perhaps similar ones). The research was aimed at deepening the understanding of the external barriers facing women from minority groups in academia – in our case, academic women of Ethiopian origin. Which tools could break those barriers, and which sources were contributory to their success? The interviewees were asked to describe their career development track, the barriers that stood in their path, and how they overcame them. The interview content formed the basis for a qualitative content analysis aimed at learning about their choices, coping style, and the resources they drew on, thanks to which they reached high academic achievements.

The study population

The study consisted of ten interviews, conducted with Israeli-Ethiopian women with a PhD or studying towards a doctorate in different fields (Table 1).

Table 1. Study population of Israeli-Ethiopian women.

Name	Number of children	Age on immigrating	Study field	Institution	Career
Tzippi	2	15	Social Sciences	University in Israel & abroad	Civil service
Sarit	2	16	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Management position in the civil service
Keren	3	7	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Management position in the civil service
Reut	2	10	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Academic & civil service career
Roni	3	6	Science	University in Israel	Civil service career
Soli	2	Born in Israel	Life Sciences	University in Israel	Civil service career
Ravit	0	6	Engineering	University in Israel	Academic & civil service career
Shir	0	Born in Israel	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Civil service career
Orit	2	5	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Academic career & management position in NGO
Batya	3	5	Social Sciences	University in Israel	Management role in the civil service

Data analysis

The research used a qualitative research method of semi-structured open interviews. The data analysis applied the coordinated phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994). After conducting conversations with the interviewees, significant themes were identified and analysed. Through these themes, the research attempted to explain and understand the experiences and perceptions of women about the elements which contributed to their success.

Ten interviewees participated in the research. Meetings with them were held face-to-face in a university, café, or hospital (in the case of a doctor who works

at a hospital). The interviewees lasted between one to two hours and were transcribed by the authors. Guiding questions were prepared in advance of the meetings, but the participants were allowed to freely describe their experiences and introduce other topics than those they were asked about. The aim was to obtain a picture of their academic experience and what it entailed in terms of the challenges, feelings, attitudes of the institute, the community and the family, and their perception of the process of academic progress.

Ethical issues and rights of the participants

The interviewees participated freely in the research. They were informed that they could decide not to answer some of the questions, and could halt the interview at any stage. Their details remain confidential. The broad context of the research was explained to the interviewees, and they were given a document containing all the details of the project. The entire research proposal was approved by the Ethics Committee of the institutional research authority, and the interviewees signed a consent document for the interview.

Findings – barriers and opportunities

The interviews made possible an in-depth exposure of the interviewees' world, as well as the characteristics of their prolonged and complex coping throughout their lives. The results of the interviews elicited findings about barriers which originated in the respondents' external environment – economic barriers, lack of instrumental resources, their home environment and lack of proper conditions for learning – as well as barriers connected to their intrapsychic and emotional worlds, due to their confronting racist attitudes prevalent in various people and officials in their external environment.

1. External barriers: economic barriers, challenges of socialization and prejudice

A. An external barrier – economic resources

All the interviewees described a complex array of coping with economic issues. While at university, it was hard for them to hold a job, nor could they help their parents and siblings. Sometimes they had to move far from home, which they cited as a significant external limitation and a contributory issue to the sense of guilt and pangs of conscience caused by not meeting responsibility towards their family. By choosing to pursue higher education and to live far from the family for years, they felt they had “abandoned” their families, and failed in their responsibility towards them. Reut, for example, mentioned that “when we started college, they emphasised that because of the psychological burden, we must also be sure to get enough rest, so we would be physically and mentally in equilibrium ... it was clear that I'd always have to work while I was a student. Studying at night, after work, meant that I paid a high price in my achievements. I knew I could have done better if I didn't have to always work.” The respondents indicated that their lack of funds made it difficult for them both in getting by

daily life, due to the need to work intensively in parallel with studies, and also caused guilt feelings to develop because they were unable to help their family.

B. An external barrier – the challenge of socialization as daughters of immigrants

A prominent common denominator in all the interviews was the statement that the respondents always sensed some insecurity around their lack of knowledge and orientation in the Israeli experience, both regarding the history of the State of Israel and the culture in Israel in general. This included the two interviewees who were born in Israel. In their experience, they lacked the information necessary to fit in, which their parents could not give them. They felt that they had a constant gap in knowledge about cultural issues, and in the study framework it created a sense of alienation, delay, social barrier and lack of belonging to wider society. Some noted the dramatic consequences of their lack of information – they were not admitted to certain institutions because they were not proficient in the level of cultural content required in the admission conditions – such as the university psychometric tests. While the first external barrier described above clearly stems from an external economic resource, the second resource combines an interaction between the inner experience and the encounter with characteristics of the external sociocultural environment.

In our opinion, the individual's emotional and cognitive ability to deal with the range of demands required in an interpersonal encounter with a different cultural environment is actually an encounter which integrates interpretation from their inner world and external events, including external barriers. The more an individual's interpretation makes room for personal space, self-confidence, personal aspirations, meaning in life, and hope, while minimizing tagging messages which external society sometimes dismisses – the less significance and impact there is to the external barriers.

C. An external barrier – prejudice and racism

Coping with the characteristics of the third barrier seems to be the most complex and emotionally difficult because it is beyond the individual's control; it requires an encounter with content and messages which transmit labelling and rejection by the host society, which is almost impossible to change. The forces needed to deal with this barrier are thus more complex and harder to enlist. Eight out of the ten interviewees described situations in which they experienced a tagging, negative attitude towards their ethnic origin. When they achieved goals with excellence, reactions to them were typically of astonishment. Their outstanding achievements in high-school were a source of pride and in the process they were assigned – and accepted – a representative role as outstanding students in the schooling system.

They described a dual attitude towards that representative role: they became role-models for other schoolgirls, and alongside the sense of pride they also developed feelings of responsibility towards the community – their schoolmates of Ethiopian origin who failed to meet the challenges as they did. In every

interview there was a clear expression of their own attitude, or the environment's, to their skin colour and its prominent presence in the space as part of their identity, and an issue they always confronted. From childhood, at school, and until now as mature women with academic and professional status, they encountered prejudice. The participants noted that, in many ways, they have adapted to those reactions.

Sometimes, it was precisely exposure to that prejudice which contributed to the development of ambition, with an increasing desire to prove themselves. For example, Ravit says:

"When we had to choose study-tracks in high school, it was clear to all my classmates that I would go to physics, but when the physics teacher asked who would enrol in it, I said I, and she replied – 'you shouldn't, you won't be able to pay for private tuition'. I was the top student, and I took physics with 5 credit-points [the most demanding] in physics, without private tuition."

Roni told us: *"I always wanted to study psychology, but I knew I couldn't learn what I wanted but rather what would help me progress in life. And I also wondered – who would want to go to an Ethiopian psychologist?"*

That kind of coping seems to be an emotional and cognitive challenge because it entails dealing with the deepest layers of the individual's personal attitudes, and the community's, towards their skin colour and ethnic origin. Their physically conspicuous presence cannot be concealed or changed, so dealing with this barrier necessitates the mobilising of inner forces as a strengthening resource in the face of that complexity.

Beyond everything described previously, the combination of the three barriers appears to create a complex scheme for dealing with what the environment demands from the individual. Those demands can generate an emotional and cognitive burden which requires the young women to enlist strengths and abilities. That complex confrontation leads to the questions underlying this study: how did they, each in their own way, cope with these barriers? How did they build self-confidence and ability as they confronted them, reaching the highest achievements at academic level? We believe it was possible to elucidate the map of internal resources and sense of coherence which helped them reach their achievements. The study's findings suggest that an in-depth analysis of the interviewees' theories has the effect of instilling actual content into the concept of coherence: we enlarge on this in the following section. They were able to cope thanks to their ability, each in their own way, to mobilize internal forces that helped them overcome the external barriers.

The inner forces: understandability, manageability and significance

Understandability

All the interviewees in the study clearly indicated that they understood the challenges which faced them. Their ability to cope more effectively with the tasks ahead of them was made possible by realistic conduct, initiative, and motivation

to achieve their objectives. They also realized that their achievements were distinctive and that, in their own way, they had also won affirmative positive preference in the various systems.

Soli told us: *“I’m not happy that my position is one that’s reserved for people of Ethiopian origin, but I understand that that situation I wouldn’t have received this job. If Ethiopians were already holding senior positions, we wouldn’t have needed these ‘reserved’ jobs.”*

This position stemmed from a realistic understanding of reality, an ability to organize towards it while taking advantage of the opportunity they have in their positions to be a mission of change. Keren, Reut and Batya described that they are active in various activities to promote the community, and Orit is a senior public official in which she is involved in promoting the status of women in Israel. As for their attitude towards home, family and community, they describe processes of change that have taken place over the years: as children they were ashamed of their characteristics, language and family, and over the years, having grown stronger, they returned to their roots and pride and respect for their defining characteristics. Their ability to observe the processes retrospectively is noticeable when analyzing the changes that took place in them in the way they formulated things and reacted to them differently. They express deep understanding of their past development, and recognition of the ability they have developed to appreciate the home they came from, as a result of their strengthening and increased self-confidence. For example, Orit says: *“When I was a schoolchild, I thought my parents were irrelevant, I wanted to be different from them, I didn’t speak Amharic, I had no friends from Ethiopia, I never invited friends home. It took me years to reconnect with my language and roots.”*

Manageability

Antonovsky (1987, 1993, 1994) defined manageability as the capacity of an individual to manage reality, to be able to deal with stressors, to be motivated, and possess coping abilities. The contents of the interviews with all respondents clearly reveal their excellent management skills; they have good capacities for managing their choices, and correctly identify the characteristics of the reality in which they operate and manage it in a manner that advances them. This was true for them, right from the very start vis-à-vis public systems. Orit, for example, recalled her integration into the school, a few months after she immigrated to Israel:

“When I started school, they put me in the recent immigrants’ class ... I didn’t like the idea of it ... the class of native-born kids looked much better, and the teacher seemed interesting. When I asked to switch to her class, they asked me in surprise ‘Do you know Hebrew?’ It gave me the push to improve my Hebrew so they could transfer me. And I was transferred, and since then was never in recent immigrant classes.”

Roni shared an experience from high school: *“I was accepted for the top track and when I chose the one beneath it, the head-teacher summoned me for a talk. He was really disappointed, saying ‘Until a student of Ethiopian origin is accepted for this track, I’m not*

giving up'. He took it hard." Despite their young age, already as high-school students, they were assertive in the face of managerial authorities. They knew how to stand up for themselves in front of officials and manage their choices according to their considerations, a quality that was highly contributory to building their future academic career. They developed a long-term academic career track that was packed with challenges and setbacks, simultaneously dealing with their community's attitude towards academic studies – considered not immediately profitable or useful as a step towards obtaining a secure job.

Significance

According to Antonovsky (1987, 1993, 1994), significance means the intention for a life of health. Significance has components such as optimism, mental resilience, perceived efficacy, and resourcefulness. People build up those qualities from their culture, family, and origin. In the life stories, by analysing the contents of the interviews, it becomes clear that the study participants were typified by inner forces and imbued meaning into the way they coped with the demands placed on them around migration and adapting to transitions in different areas of life. Coping itself was a meaningful experience for them, representing a meaningful process with a sense of control and self-structuring in accordance with the objectives they were striving for. The inner capacity to believe in their abilities throughout the process stemmed from a combination of variables, including traits of independence, motivation, activism, the ability to handle change and transitions, personal resilience and long-term vision, curiosity, having strong opinions, aspiration for meaningful action and the ability to cope with stress and uncertainty.

The external barriers described did not weaken them, and were actually a challenge for them. Over the years of their development they displayed strong coherence and patience to deal with lengthy processes, self-confidence, and the aspiration to succeed in academic careers and in general. In conclusion, the content analysis of the interviews clarified the dominant expressions of each component of coherence: understandability, manageability, and significance. The integration of all three is reflected in very strong coherence which when put to the test, resulted in exceptional achievements.

To summarize our findings: from the description of the many and varied barriers which women encounter, we identified that inner strengths and high personal abilities enabled them to deal with the challenges they faced. They were confident, knew how to adapt to changing situations, and were strongly ambitious to achieve their goals. They are role-models for their environment and especially for women from unique groups who have ambitions to advance in academia.

Discussion

Conforming with what is described in the research literature, the study participants, who are the daughters of immigrants from Ethiopia, also dealt with parents and an environment that did not provide support and familiarity with

opportunities for starting an academic career, or the tools children must receive in order to foster academic skills (Griffin et al., 2012; O'Shea, 2016). Nor were there people in their close environment who would help them learn from their experience or were aware of the demands of the academic and bureaucratic system, as well as the options they might have in the academic context (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013).

As children of immigrants, they had to cope with life in families for whom economic survival was almost always on the agenda, and their family's financial hardships were also among their concerns for years ahead. Investing in academic studies was not always understood, for in the participants' homes it didn't seem to be a possible and realistic path to take (Erisman & Looney, 2007). In addition, they faced prejudice from their environment over the years – in their own community, at school, and among friends, teachers, and officials in the education systems. The women dealt with various barriers: the economic barrier, for example, was expressed to some extent by the barrier to receiving scholarships from foundations, and by having to work.

In that area, participants pointed out that because they grasped the circumstances, they organised towards and controlled it, worked diligently and took advantage of opportunities; they were able to find resources in the economic field. In contrast, the second and third barriers were characterized by a combination of coping with emotional and cognitive variables. The second barrier is focused on the interviewees' interpersonal capacity for dealing with what the socialization process involved, while the third barrier is almost impossible to break down because it is entirely rooted in the personal attitudes of the "other", and the more rigid their prejudices, the harder it is to change their attitudes and perceptions, if at all.

In the face of the second and third barriers, the participants' high levels of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993, 1994) helped them. Their ability to instil meaning into the long academic path they had started helped them understand the implications of their future achievements. They were able to manage, even when the immediate environment did not support and understand what was required of them, and even criticizes them (for example, regarding the fact that they were still unmarried at a relatively late age, that they lived far from home, and were often absent from family reunions due to school constraints and more).

The importance of the power of coherence is clear and noticeable, given that despite the environment's attitude, they understand the personal benefits likely to result from their choices. Thus, they can internally manage contradictions between the different worlds they live in, without plunging into dilemmas which the conflicts surface, and instead to grow. Participants knew how to rationally prioritize between major and minor issues, to show restraint and be flexible in places where they realise they can't influence every situation and every encounter (such as when facing prejudice). They harness their inner strengths to achieve personal and professional benefit. In terms of Antonovsky's approach (1987, 1993, 1994) one finds that the participants well understood the obstacles confronting them and drew on inner forces to deal with reality's challenges. They

displayed creativity, flexibility, and the ability to understand complex situations; along the way they showed determination, self-confidence and perseverance, even in conditions of uncertainty and stress. Their drive, optimism, belief in their skills and mental resilience, helped them break the barriers. When they described the course of their lives, one identifies from an early age the desire for meaningful endeavours, curiosity, and understanding how to conduct themselves in complex situations, by planning the next stages (such as choosing a high-school track or the field of academic studies). The external barriers could have contained elements of threat, but activism and positive thinking helped deal with those barriers; in retrospect, they could identify the factors which weakened them, and were aware of the path they took, and returned there with renewed strength.

Our findings show that the participants understood that acquiring education is a long journey but education is a vital resource offering them a channel with which they can break through and successfully build a professional career. Along with the fact that academic education is based on personal achievements, the interviewees realized that they represent and demonstrate not only personal development but also that they represent the collective. Their ability to engage with that complexity, alongside the responsibility (or perhaps the burden it imposes) is reflected in the interviewees' narratives. It is evident that they underwent, and are still undergoing, processes of development and a constant internal discourse in the face of those issues. The participants were undeterred by hard work, a critical environment, and also "paying prices" in other arenas (economic, family, community).

Examining the external barriers versus the internal forces, it is discernible that their inner forces were resources through which they overcame objective and environmental constraints which were actually external barriers. In addition to the personal perception, that is, seeing themselves as subjects of a collective mission, there is another significant layer that is part of their personal and professional lives – they are role-models for others in their community. It is reflected in different ways, in their chosen fields, in research and in public and voluntary efforts. They indeed embody messages of change, control, and hope, and thus fulfil their mission by sending a message. They are an example for the whole community, and for unique communities generally, illustrating that personal and professional development is also possible for within a challenging environment, strewn with assorted external barriers.

It is clear that the respondents' coping process is a long and tough one, certainly accompanied by crisis and distress. But their ability to harness inner forces, to foster, establish a high sense of coherence, that integrates clear understanding of short- and long-term goals, and the significance of different goals thus advanced their manageability. And all this while recruiting flexibility and formulating the personal narrative in the face of reality in a way that identifies and articulates opportunities and hope. It is worth emphasizing that given the young age of all the interviewees on immigrating to Israel, and the very practical way they embarked on their external and inner journey, the achievements described are even more significant and impressive. This should be enlarged on in another article addressing the meaning of those processes, against the

backdrop of traits of adolescence.

In conclusion, this article has illuminated the uniqueness of the personal journey that our respondents undertook that hones the significance of the struggle and challenge entailed in coping with the inner forces – and in terms of this research – coherence, alongside the external barriers of their cultural and social environment that is marked with prejudice and impedes the socialization processes.

Practical recommendations

The study offers practical recommendations to encourage more women from unique groups to pursue higher academic studies:

1. identifying outstanding female students in B.A. studies and providing them with information on options for further academic studies;
2. creating a mechanism which provides mentoring to women from unique groups in academia, to provide the guidance and information to which they have not been exposed;
3. providing financial support from the institute during studies;
4. offering joint meetings of students with doctoral graduates who can tell their story and show that different groups have representation in advanced degrees as well.

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