

EDGEWORK: BOUNDARY CROSSING
AMONG THE HASIDIM

By

HELLA WINSTON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York, 2006.

UMI Number: 3232038

Copyright 2006 by
Winston, Hella

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3232038

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2006

Hella Winston

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

William Helmreich
Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Philip Kasnitz
Executive Officer

William Helmreich

Paul Attewell

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

EDGEWORK: BOUNDARY CROSSING

AMONG THE HASIDIM

by

Hella Winston

Advisor: Professor William Helmreich

This dissertation draws on qualitative research to explore the phenomenon of boundary crossing, or deviance, among members of various Hasidic communities. In so doing, it also considers the various mechanisms by which communal boundaries are maintained and reinforced, as well as the motivations and methods of those who violate those boundaries. Individual and communal responses to transgression are also examined. The implications of Hasidic deviance are examined with respect to theoretical concerns related to boundary maintenance, deviance and social change in general, as well as the future of these communities in particular.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
1. A Brief History of the Hasidic Movement.....	27
2. Contemporary Hasidic Communities.....	38
3. A Life Apart.....	59
4. Responses to Transgression.....	92
5. The Transgressors.....	120
6. Crossing the Line.....	158
7. Scaling the Walls.....	174
Implications and Conclusions.....	194
Bibliography.....	199

INTRODUCTION

What is a Hassid might you ask, I can give you the encyclopedia answer or the truth, I'll stick to the truth (my truth anyway). To be a Hassid is very difficult, if you were born a Chassid you would be living in a different world then your next door neighbor, see, even if you were born in Antwerpen or New York in 1980, your life would still be more like a polish Jew in 1780 then the guy across the street, you would be dressed differently, talk a different language (called Yiddish) and you would have no idea about the culture of the outside world.

A Hassidic kid won't know (or shouldn't know) who is Madonna, where is Las Vegas, what is DeNiro and what do you do in a Broadway show, the outside world is something to stay away from, he would go to a "Yeshiva" (An institute of learning where students study sacred texts, primarily the Talmud) at the age of three, and stay there till his parents find him a bride. in Yeshiva he will learn all the Jewish laws that apply today and some that don't apply anymore, no secular studies more then the required hour by the government.

A Hassid lives his life according to the book, the book tells you everything, and I mean everything, from the morning ritual of washing the hand before stepping out of bed (it's not as hard as it sounds) to how to dress, (did you know the right shoe comes before the left but the left should be tied before the right) how what and where to eat, and so on till what side to sleep on at night (the first part of the night on your right side and the last part on your left, never face up or face down).

A Hassid has a hard life, it's full of regulations, commands (mitzvot) and custom, the hardest part is the guilt, for even the sages say "there's no person in the world that would do only good and never sin". On the other hand a Hasids life is full of joy, there's always the community to help you in trouble, trouble is always the way of god, since you have no control of it anyway, you might as well use your pain to erase some of your sins, then there's always a holiday coming up, you sit with your family at the meals sing and eat, oh yes eat!!!

See, eating is one thing that's allowed (only kosher foods and only certain way's, but it's still allowed) so eating is a big thing for a Hassid.

So you see, it's not as simple as you think, being a Hassid is very hard yet can be very joyful, if you really believe in it, maybe I should just start believing, it would certainly make life easier, it would.....

*Shtreimel, anonymous Hasidic blogger*¹

* * *

On its face, Shtreimel’s post is a wonderful description of the intensely rule-bound and highly insular nature of contemporary Hasidic communities. At the same time, however, it also serves as a testament to rule breaking itself, and to the ultimately porous nature of these communities’ physical and symbolic boundaries. For example, even though he claims that a Hasid “should not know who is Madonna,” it is clear that Shtreimel knows exactly who she is—and, as is apparent from the content of his subsequent posts, much more. Further, by proclaiming “his truth” on a publicly accessible blog, he is not only flaunting (albeit anonymously) his forbidden “secular” knowledge, but also openly flouting his community’s official prohibition against using the Internet,² quite accurately perceived by leaders in the Hasidic community as a “dangerous” gateway to the “corrupt” secular society. That Shtreimel also claims to be a non-believer is, in some sense, icing on the cake.

It might be tempting to write Shtreimel off as a rare case, support for the commonsense belief that in any group there will always be some members who just

¹ Whom I know personally

² One can be granted an exception to use the Internet for business purposes.

don't "fit in" and are wont to break the rules. However, over the past few years, I have come to know many Hasidic people who engage in activities that are prohibited by the "official" rules of their communities. This includes everything from consuming secular (i.e., non-Hasidic) media (e.g., movies, music, books, art, newspapers, the Internet) to frequenting secular venues and socializing with non-Hasidim. It can also involve violating Hasidic norms of behavior with respect to dress, interaction with the opposite sex and sexuality more generally and, in some cases, even breaking religious commandments.

As will become clear, those who violate norms and engage in officially prohibited activity do not all account for their behavior in similar terms, nor do they all feel the same way about the Hasidic way of life or Orthodox Judaism more generally. For example, some people who transgress describe themselves as generally contented and committed to the Hasidic way of life, while others are much more critical of it (even if they remain believers in the tenets of the religion) and would like to see some things change; among the latter group, there are even those who express the desire to leave the community altogether, but feel that the consequences of departure—e.g., hurting and subsequently being rejected by family and friends, losing contact with children and navigating an unfamiliar outside world alone and with little preparation—would be too much to bear.

What most of those who transgress do have in common, however, is a fear of being rejected by those close to them for their transgressions and—perhaps more significant—having their behavior publicized within the larger Hasidic community. Hasidim whose rule breaking becomes public knowledge run the risk not only of

being stigmatized themselves, but also of bringing shame and stigma upon their family members by association—what Goffman (1963: 30-31) referred to as “courtesy stigma.” Depending on their actions, people who transgress can be denied access to communal institutions (e.g. schools, community organizations, the *shul* or synagogue), and subject to loss of status, not to mention employment or business, within the community. The same sanctions can extend to siblings and children, who, for example, may be expelled from school if administrators become aware that their parents are violating official rules. Among those who transgress, one of the most feared consequences of public identification is the prospect of irrevocably damaging the marriage chances of one’s siblings and/or children³.

To the extent that they maintain the outward of appearance of conformity and their transgressions remain hidden from public view, those who violate communal norms are unlikely to face public punishment, even if others learn about their actions; under these circumstances, stigmatization and various forms of social ostracism are much more the norm. However, those who *publicly* violate norms might, in extremely rare cases, also experience public humiliation (in the form of having their names published and circulated throughout the community, for example), intimidation or even violence, carried out furtively by informal community “modesty patrols.”

According to those I interviewed, these modesty patrols are generally composed of self-appointed community “watchdogs,” and tend to address themselves exclusively to violations of communal standards of modesty as they relate to dress or

³ People who come forward to charge abuse, whether physical or sexual, also face similar consequences. For more on this issue, see Robert Kolker, “On the Rabbi’s Knee: Do the Orthodox Jews Have a Catholic Priest Problem?” *New York Magazine*, May 22, 2006: 28.

social relations between the sexes. For the most part, however, these watchdogs attempt to influence behavior through threats of public exposure, rather than actual punishment or public humiliation⁴. Indeed, the publicizing of names (via flyers, for example) and calls for public punishment seem to be tactics most commonly applied to those from *outside* the community, who are perceived by zealous insiders as somehow threatening their distinctive way of life (e.g., secular government authorities or members of other Jewish denominations, particularly the Modern Orthodox, who reject certain religious and social practices espoused by the Hasidim).

While clearly none of the above is sufficient to deter transgression altogether, it does motivate most people who do transgress to take great pains to hide their behavior from everyone but the most trusted members of their social circles (which, in many cases, means that they hide it from everyone). Given this—and the perceived risks of “outing” oneself as someone who transgresses even to an outsider—it is very difficult to get an accurate sense of how many Hasidic people are violating their communities’ behavioral norms and official prohibitions. There have been some studies regarding the prevalence of “kids at risk,”⁵ a term used in the Hasidic world to describe teenagers who are engaging in anything from aggressive behavior to vandalism, theft, credit card fraud, substance abuse, addiction, drug dealing, promiscuous sexual activity and the public flouting of communal rules and norms.

⁴ An exception to this seems to be campaigns that have been launched on the Internet identifying alleged child molesters and calling for action against them. See: theunorthodoxjew.blogspot.com and New York Magazine. Also the awareness center Web site: [get URL](http://getURL). This practice is controversial in the religious world: *loshan hora*; *mesira*; *chilul hashem*.

⁵ For more on this, see See Nacha Cattan, “Orthodox Rehab Programs: Too Much of a Good Thing,” *The Forward*, August 17, 2001; Michele Chabin, “On Their Own and Using Drugs,” *The Jewish Week*, January 28, 2005;

One study, carried out in 1999⁶, found that there were 1500 young people between the ages of eleven and twenty in the Orthodox communities of Brooklyn engaged in serious at-risk behavior and estimated that another two thousand young people were doing the same things, but had yet to be caught. If these numbers were accurate, the study concluded, this would have amounted to about 3.75 percent of the Brooklyn Orthodox⁷ teen population.

However, because the above statistics relate exclusively to teenagers and reflect behaviors that are, for the most part, of little relevance to this research (e.g., drug use, theft, vandalism, etc.), they do not provide much insight into the extent of Hasidic deviance as it is conceived here. In fact, while much of this “at risk” behavior might be regarded as “deviant” by mainstream as well as Hasidic society, the present research focuses (with a few exceptions) on behaviors that may be considered perfectly acceptable within mainstream society, but constitute serious violations of Hasidic norms. (As we shall see, among the Hasidim some behaviors that are considered deviant in “mainstream” society carry little or no stigma in the Hasidic world, like certain forms of sexual behavior and financial fraud.)

Regardless of the actual numbers, however, the mere fact that Hasidic transgression is necessarily such a private affair is noteworthy in and of itself. For one, it requires those who violate rules and norms to develop strategies for circumventing social controls, escaping surveillance and managing what for some

⁶ Stewart Ain, “Teen Crisis Detailed in Orthodox Brooklyn,” *New York Magazine* (December 20, 1999).

⁷ Because study did not distinguish between Orthodox and Hasidic teens (Hasidism being a subset of Orthodoxy), it is hard to know how these numbers relate specifically to the situation in the Hasidic world.

people can become full blown double lives. Of course, there are also social implications of the hidden nature of Hasidic transgression as well—namely, that regardless of their private feelings or beliefs about the Hasidic way of life, most Hasidim who transgress end up publicly supporting the official rules, norms and policies of their communities. Further, given the impediments to identifying and connecting with others who might share one’s point of view, organizing any kind of public resistance within these communities is also extremely difficult. (Although there is some evidence to suggest that the Internet might be changing this). Indeed, in the course of my research, I did not come across one instance where private rebellion was transformed into any kind of active, organized, public resistance (though I did become aware of a few examples of passive resistance, not to mention activism, which will be discussed).

This exploration of Hasidic deviance can contribute not only to our overall knowledge about these particular communities, but also to the theorizing of deviance, social control and boundary maintenance more generally. Of course, it is also likely that the Hasidic “case” will have implications for our understanding of similarly insular, rule-bound, ideological communities and cultures. Further, because this research also explores the various meanings of transgression—both among those who transgress and those who conform—it serves to illuminate something larger about the Hasidic project within the context of Jewish history, as well as the Jewish experience more generally.

In the most basic sense, transgression in the Hasidic context—almost regardless of its specific content—represents an assertion of personal freedom within

a social structure that is in fact dependent on its extreme restriction. While many who do transgress would not necessarily frame their behavior this way, their own discourse—and perhaps even more so, the “official” discourse *about* them—demonstrates the degree to which transgression (and its sometime logical conclusion, departure) is a focal point for a larger struggle over the meaning of freedom. More broadly, it is possible to see transgression within the Hasidic context as a means through which some of the central tensions of living a traditional religious life within a modern, pluralistic, individualistic society are expressed and negotiated, if not fully reconciled.

To the extent that this negotiation has been a central issue for Jews throughout history, and particularly since their emancipation during the Enlightenment, the phenomenon of Hasidic transgression contains within it echoes of a much larger Jewish story. However, because the tensions alluded to above are at the heart of the experience of modern life, this work may well illuminate something about that experience as it is confronted and navigated by all manner of individuals and groups.

Hasidic Transgression: The Literature

While there are scholars of Hasidic life (Kranzler, 1995; Rubin, 1997; Mintz, 1992, Wellen-Levine, 2003) who have acknowledged the existence of Hasidim who are discontent with their lives and/or violate their communities’ rules and norms, work in this area is quite limited. Further, it tends to regard this phenomenon as rare, and primarily a problem of individual adjustment. In fact, most of those who have studied these communities point to their continued reproduction and growth (due to

high birth rates) over time, and also to their well-developed social institutions, as evidence of just how successfully most members are socialized into Hasidic values and norms.

In this view, the fact that people are not leaving these communities in droves⁸ becomes evidence that members unquestioningly accept and believe in the Hasidic worldview and way of life. This assumption, however, fails to consider the possibility that outward conformity to values and norms does not automatically mean that members of these communities completely and un-problematically “buy into” the Hasidic worldview or social system, and that they are not violating Hasidic rules and norms in secret. Indeed, as this research has revealed, Hasidim may conform for a variety of reasons, not all of which have to do with a belief in the “system” or even the tenets of the religion.

One possible reason for this gap in the literature could be the fact that the most comprehensive studies of Hasidic life in America (Poll, 1962; Kranzler, 1995; Rubin, 1997) were first conducted in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, when these communities were still relatively young and filled with refugees committed to rebuilding all that had been destroyed by Hitler. It is quite likely that, in this context, the adoption of distinctive patterns of behavior and maintenance of separation from the outside world was experienced positively by most members, regarded as a means of recreating a world that had been lost.

Another possible explanation for the dearth of research in this area is the fact that all of the early researchers had personal ties to the Hasidic world and, as such,

⁸ In fact, because the Hasidim choose not to maintain a census, any reliable statistics that could indicate anything about community attrition are not readily available.

might have been disinclined to show them in what some might consider a negative light—by, for example focusing on the views and experiences of the “discontents.” Of course, there are many who have studied the Hasidim (and the ultra-Orthodox in general) who are not from ultra-Orthodox backgrounds (for example, Mintz, 1992; Wellen-Levine, 2003; Heilman, 1992; Helmreich, 1982; Morris, 1998; Davidman, 1993; Kaufman, 1990, 1991, 1995; Belcove-Shalin, 1995; Shaffir, 1995), though some are religiously observant. Regardless of one’s religious persuasion, however, there is little doubt that if a researcher wants to maintain a good relationship with his or her subjects over time, it is probably wise not to alienate them by airing what they could consider “dirty laundry.”

The failure of the literature to consider Hasidic transgression in any systematic way may also be explained by the difficulty of gaining access to what are, for the most part, extremely insular communities—although my experience demonstrates that it is certainly possible. In fact, much of the recent work on the Hasidim in North America focuses on the Lubavitch sect (Davidman, 1993; Fishkoff, 2003; Harris, 1985; Kaufman, 1990, 1991, 1995; Shaffir, 1995; Wellen-Levine, 2003), which is unique in the Hasidic world for its outreach to secular and non-observant Jews. Because of this emphasis on outreach, it has generally been easier for (Jewish) researchers to gain access to Lubavitch than to the other sects. While it is possible that a group which so many join by choice might have fewer members who violate norms than those into which most members are born, it could also be the case that, given its visibility and apparently sophisticated P.R. operation, Lubavitch is particularly skilled at controlling what researchers actually see.

Theoretical Overview

Given their members' rejection of mainstream society (despite living within and partaking of certain aspects of it), insularity and distinctive worldview and set of social practices, Hasidic communities are in some sense ideal "sites" in which to explore issues of boundary maintenance and boundary crossing, or deviance. In addition to examining what happens when members deviate from the rules and norms of Hasidic society, this dissertation will attempt to demonstrate how these communities go about drawing and preserving their boundaries—by for example, their distinctive styles of dress; use of Yiddish; rejection of secular culture; restriction of mobility, and particularly that of women; and by "selective incompetence," or not educating their young to be able to participate in mainstream society.

Indeed, all of these boundary maintenance mechanisms are further supported by the fact that these communities communicate their ideology of difference and distinction as a central and revered value. In fact, as this research will show, many men and women who do deviate from Hasidic norms and violate certain prohibitions do so while continuing to subscribe generally to Hasidic values and beliefs, which only highlights the power of the "ruling" ideology. Of course, even for those who privately reject this ideology and violate Hasidic norms and prohibitions, these communities' use of guilt and shame as mechanisms of social control is so effective that most members strive to maintain the outward appearance of conformity, regardless of their private behavior.

Of course, there is a rich sociological literature on both boundary maintenance and deviance—and their relationship to each other—that can help inform our understanding of the Hasidic “case,” even while the uniqueness of that case reveals some of the limits of the existing literature. For example, much of the contemporary sociological work on boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Lamont and Molnar, 2002) tends to explore these issues within the context of modern, heterogeneous societies, and focuses on the ways in which the process of making social and cognitive distinctions serves to foster, reflect and perpetuate various forms of social inequality (e.g. class, race, gender). While Hasidic communities differ markedly from such societies in many ways, and work to secure their boundaries in the service of ideological and social “purity” rather than the perpetuation of social inequality, the sociological literature does offer relevant insight into how symbolic boundaries are created, enforced and maintained. Further, there is also a good deal of scholarship in the sociology and anthropology of Religion that deals with boundary maintenance specifically as it relates to religious communities and groups in general (classic examples include Douglas, 1966, 1993; Eliade, 1959; Turner, 1969), not to mention the Hasidic world in particular (Blumen, 2002; Shaffir, 1995; Sivan, 1995 Heilman, 1992; Helmreich and Shinnar, 1998).

Of course, the study of deviance as a social phenomenon, and its role in boundary creation and maintenance, has been of concern to sociologists since Durkheim (1915), who theorized that rather than being a symptom of social pathology (as other theorists have suggested), deviance actually serves a necessary and positive social function. According to Durkheim, identifying and punishing

deviants is a means by which society (or the group) is able to reaffirm communal values and strengthen its collective identity. Thus, from this perspective, deviance “functions” as a way of maintaining the moral boundaries of society, though only through members’ confrontation with the representatives of the moral order.

Erikson (1966) applied Durkheim’s theoretical framework to his analysis of 17th century New England Puritan society, but took it a step farther, arguing that societies or groups may in fact “recruit” or create deviants for the purpose of shoring up flagging boundaries. In *Wayward Puritans*, Erikson attempts to demonstrate how three distinct controversies regarding “deviant” subgroups were really “boundary crises”—that is, the controversies emerged at times when social conditions required the Puritans to become a more homogeneous and cohesive group. According to Erikson, in these particular instances identifying and punishing criminals served to promote social cohesion and a sense of collective identity, thus drawing clearer boundaries around the group.

It is important to note that this perspective (generally regarded as functionalism) views deviance as an objective reality and, as such, assumes that there is a consensus throughout society concerning norms and values which makes deviance easily recognizable to all members. It also presupposes that deviance generally evokes negative sanctions against and attitudes toward the deviant and his/her actions (Rubington and Weinberg, 1987). While conflict theorists (see Goode, 1984; Rubington and Weinberg, 1987) have challenged this assumption of consensus (not to mention the broader contention that deviance serves a positive social function), emphasizing instead the power dynamics involved in determining who gets to

establish what constitutes deviance and how it should be addressed, the functionalist perspective is still useful in highlighting the link between deviance and the maintenance of communal boundaries. Indeed, the fact that Hasidic deviants are rarely punished publicly—or subject to what, in the literature, is sometimes referred to as “confrontation” or “shaming” rituals⁹—undermines certain functionalist claims about the role of deviance in promoting social cohesion. That said, however, there is no doubt that Hasidic reactions to transgressors serve to clarify and reinforce (both for Hasidim and for outsiders) what is considered within the bounds of acceptable behavior and belief—in other words, the boundaries of the group.

In fact, as we shall see, Hasidic responses to transgression seem to offer additional evidence that deviance within the Hasidic context often “works” differently than much of the sociological literature on the topic would indicate. In part, this likely has to do with the fact that, as Raybeck (1988) has noted, most of the seminal sociological research on deviance deals with issues such as crime, juvenile delinquency and addiction, and has been conducted on and within modern, heterogeneous, or “state,” societies. However, because what constitutes deviance in the Hasidic world generally involves behaviors that would be considered perfectly normal by “mainstream” standards, much of the existing theoretical (and to some extent ethnographic) work can be difficult to apply.

For example, much of the scholarly literature on deviance tends to focus on labeling (Becker, 1963; Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert, 1967; Matza, 1969), or the creation of

⁹ Examples of these would be trials, hearings, or other rituals that provide a forum in which a group confronts the deviant individual and symbolically draws the line between itself as “good” or “right” and the deviant as “bad” or “wrong”—in other words, outside its moral boundaries.

“deviants” by the group. While Hasidim who transgress may acquire certain labels, within the Hasidic context labeling does not seem to have the kind of effect (either on individuals or the community as a whole) that this work suggests. In general, labeling theorists argue that labeling offenders as “criminals” can result in a deepening of their criminal behavior, which ultimately leads to more crime. According to this view, the process of identifying and singling out an individual for punishment ends up stimulating or evoking in them the very behaviors for which they are being punished.

An early proponent of labeling theory, Lemert (1951) distinguished between what he called primary deviance (where individuals do not see themselves a deviant) and secondary deviance (marked by an individual’s acceptance of a deviant status). While primary deviance may arise for a variety of reasons, secondary deviance emerges as a kind of defense against or adaptation to the problems caused by societal reaction to primary deviation. Becker expanded on this notion, arguing that being a “criminal” will often become a person’s “master status,” overshadowing all others and ultimately controlling the way he or she is identified in public.

Although Becker concedes that public scrutiny can scare or shame a person into conformity, he argues that in most situations it has the effect of pushing the person to the point where her or she forfeits all further attempts at conformity. According to Becker, the individual so-labeled undergoes a change in self-concept and, with a deviant self-image now in place, loses any stake in further conformity. Such people begin to experience pressure to behave in deviant ways, and ultimately most lose contact with their conformist friends and start associating with similarly labeled deviants, thus embarking on a so-called “deviant career.”

While Becker's description of the labeling process and its effects may or may not accurately reflect what occurs in the context of contemporary Western societies, it has limited application within the Hasidic world. For one, while the Hasidim do have labels for those who fail to live up to ideal typical Hasidic standards of behavior, almost nobody is branded a "criminal." Indeed, as noted above, the Hasidim do not generally have formal, public rituals of punishment, or what Garfinkel referred to as "status degradation ceremonies" (1956). Further, within the Hasidic world, it does not appear that labeling itself causes someone to reject all attempts at conformity; indeed, Hasidic society is structured precisely in such a way as to maximize public scrutiny aimed at scaring and shaming members into outward conformity, regardless of their private behavior.

This is not to say that labels have no meaning within the Hasidic world; indeed, marriage and other social decisions are made largely on the basis of reputation, and labels (both positive and negative) are often used as shorthand to communicate information about a person's character and background. However, because Hasidim who "repent" are generally welcomed back into the fold, labeling within this context does not necessarily lead to permanent stigmatization, or a "deviant career" (those who become tainted due to divorce or illness, of course, do not have such an opportunity).

Braithwaite's (1989) work on shaming as a form of social control may shed some light on the Hasidic situation. Braithwaite identifies two types of shaming: re-integrative (when the offender is brought back into the fold of society) and disintegrative (when the offender is ostracized for good from society). Consistent

with the claims of labeling theory, he argues that disintegrative shaming creates a class of outcasts that can, due to their labeling and subsequent marginalization, become more entrenched in criminal or “deviant” behavior. For the most part, however, it is extremely rare that Hasidic transgressors are ostracized totally and completely—unless they themselves make the decision to abandon the community altogether, which may have something to do with the fact there does not seem to be a “class” of Hasidic outcasts, despite the existence of labels. (Notably, the Hasidic world seems to lack formal rituals of either “re-integrative or disintegrative shaming, as both social marginalization or reacceptance into the fold for the most part seem to occur “quietly.”) In fact, Lewis Coser’s (1962) work on deviance actually goes so far as to suggest that in some cases—of which the Hasidic case might be one—opposing certain kinds of deviance at all could have the undesirable effect of weakening the group.

Despite all this, the current research has revealed that some Hasidic people who do transgress often get involved in more transgressive behaviors, and do so with greater frequency, over time, and that some eventually “leave the fold” altogether (others, however, limit their transgressions, either because their interests are narrow, or because of guilt or shame). It is also the case that all Hasidic people who transgress necessarily go through a process of learning how to accomplish their behavior—although this process often tends to be more about logistics than content (i.e., it is not about learning “how” to become a drug addict or a thief, but how to use a library, a computer, to interact with non-Hasidim). Likely because of this, and the fact that such learning generally does not tend to occur through interactions with groups of other

“deviants,” some Hasidim who transgress do not develop a “deviant” identity, though many do come to think of themselves as “apikorsim” or “heretics.” Indeed, as we shall see, among Hasidim who transgress identity is a complicated issue in general, and people’s subjective understandings of their behavior serve to reveal the complex interrelationship among belief, behavior, identification and identity (ironically) characteristic of modern life.

Indeed, the very notion, explored by Sutherland in his theory of Differential Association (1978), that “deviants” learn their behavior from others in small, intimate groups is somewhat problematic in the Hasidic context. Given the consequences of discovery, most Hasidic people who transgress do so alone or with a very small number of trusted people, who are themselves often inexperienced in the behavior. Of course, as we shall see, this is not to say that some people are not influenced to transgress by others, or do not end up forming or becoming part of informal “deviant” subgroups or networks of people who engage in deviant behavior; however, the fact remains that much of the transgression in the Hasidic world—particularly because of the risks involved—tends to be largely private and not formally organized.

In fact, it appears that the Internet may be creating a “space” for such social learning to take place, providing a means by which Hasidim who are breaking rules can communicate and interact with one another under the cover of anonymity. Blogs and listservs are allowing people not only to share intellectual and emotional concerns, but also “techniques” for deviance online. In this sense, such people are able to find a kind of support and even legitimation for their behavior—which, as Sutherland theorized, can also make it easier for them to rationalize their actions,

even if the practical constraints and risks remain significant. (For those who have chosen to leave this way of life altogether, there is a formal organization called Footsteps, which not only provides emotional support, but practical help and guidance as well and, as such, functions as a kind of alternative “community” for former Hasidim.)

Finally, while it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine the so-called “root causes” of individual transgression, the research did reveal ways in which structural factors can play a role in such behavior. While it does not address itself specifically to religious enclaves or subcultures within larger societies, the work of Lewis Coser (1962) and Merton (1959) is relevant here, particularly in highlighting how and why individuals might be “socially induced” to transgress. For example, as will become clear, within the Hasidic world there are various personal and social characteristics (e.g., being divorced or childless; having a mental or physical illness or disability) that can automatically render someone marginal, and this marginalized status can have an influence on whether he or she engages in transgressive behavior.

The Research Process: Goals, Methodology and Access

The central aim of my fieldwork was to gain an understanding of transgression in the Hasidic world, beginning with how it is defined. I also set out to learn about the ways in which these communities attempt to prevent transgression (through the process of socialization and mechanisms of boundary main and social control), and how they respond to it when it occurs. Further, I was interested in

gaining information about transgressors themselves, including what they do and how they think about their behavior.

In order to pursue these research goals, I necessarily adopted a qualitative approach (as noted earlier, there are no official statistics on transgression within the Hasidic world. Indeed, because the Hasidim choose not to maintain a census, there isn't even any reliable information on attrition that might yield insights into the phenomenon of transgression.) I obtained my data through a variety of qualitative methods, including: one-on-one, semi-structured and unstructured interviews; participant observation (including attending lectures and social events both within and outside these communities); the use of cultural artifacts, such as fliers, newspapers, published speeches and writings, audio tapes and other media produced and circulated within these communities.

Unless participants objected, all interviews were taped and I also kept the recorder on during social events, though I always informed people that I was doing so, and agreed to turn it off when asked (which turned out to be very infrequently). When documents needed to be translated from Yiddish or Hebrew I enlisted the help of research participants.

The Internet was also a big part of my research, as it is one of the most important methods and means of transgression in the Hasidic world today; not only do people use the Internet to cross symbolic boundaries and learn about the "outside world" (and identify others with whom to transgress) but they also represent one of the only "public" spaces in which people can openly critique the system, and where

dialogues about what it means to be Hasidic actually take place in a way that can be observed.

While I did not interview community leaders (primarily to avoid drawing “official” attention to myself and my research), I was able to get an “official” perspective on transgression by using the published writings and speeches of rebbes and prominent rabbis, as well as newspaper articles and documents from community institutions, and public information obtained from lectures.

In order to learn about the individual and communal treatment of those who are caught deviating, I relied on the information given to me by people who themselves went through such experiences. Whenever possible, I tried to verify their claims from other sources (or confirm with others whether they had experienced similar treatment.) In some cases, independent confirmation was impossible, as when one woman told me that she believed her phones had been tapped.

Sample

Given the nature of this research (i.e., its focus on those who secretly break rules), and the Hasidic world’s typical antipathy toward outsiders, I was not able to obtain any kind of random sample—either of rule breakers or conforming Hasidim. Because of these issues, I had to rely on both convenience and snowball methods of sampling. This means that “open-minded” Hasidim were likely overrepresented among those I interviewed; among “mainstream” Hasidim, talking with someone like me (particularly for men) would in itself constitute a form of transgression. Despite this, I believe I was still able to learn about that point of view from reading official

documents and published works about these communities and attending public lectures and other events, as well as my own informants' knowledge and experiences in the community.

Another limitation of these sampling methods is the fact that some people in my sample know each other, making it possible that certain “types” of rule breakers are overrepresented (intellectuals, for example) in my data. However, because those I interviewed grew up in different physical communities and sects, and not all in fact knew each other, I am not sure how much of an issue the self-selection bias really might be. I did not, however, interview anyone under the age of 19 and purposely excluded anyone who could be considered part of a category of so-called “kids at risk”—i.e., anyone between about 12 and 18 who was having serious problems with alcohol or drug abuse, or had gotten involved in criminal activity.

Access

My first point of contact with the Hasidic world occurred through a doctor friend who treats a number of Hasidic patients. Upon hearing about my research interests, he offered to give my number to a Satmar woman, the wife of one of his patients. Within a few weeks, this woman called me and, after several phone conversations, invited me to her home for a dinner that included nine other women, all from her Satmar community. As a (direct or indirect) result of that dinner, I was ultimately able to conduct in-depth interviews with six women from that community, though I met and informally spent time with at least twice that number. At that time, I did not specify that I was seeking to meet women who were “rule-breakers” or “non-

conformists;” not only was I unsure of how to do this, given the high degree of secrecy within the community, but I also felt that, before I did, I needed to get a better sense from the women themselves of community rules and norms. Instead, I explained to potential participants that I was interested in speaking with them in order to understand how Hasidic women experience and make sense of their everyday lives.

Just at this time, and quite fortuitously, a young woman who had left her own (Lubavitch) Hasidic community and was starting an organization to assist others who had decided to do the same, made contact with one of my professors for some statistical information on the Hasidim. He referred her to me and, through her, over the course of several months; I was led to a variety of people (from a variety of sects, including Lubavitch, Satmar, Bobov, Belz, Pupa, Ger, and Amshenov), who were transgressing within their communities (while some of these people were actively seeking to leave their communities, others were not). Most of these people range in age from nineteen to about forty, and are overwhelmingly from the various Hasidic communities in Brooklyn and upstate New York (Kiryas Joel, Monsey and New Square). Through some of these people, I met others still—not only those who had already left or were in the process of leaving, but people who, despite their engagement in all manner of transgressive activity, were, for various reasons, opting to remain in the community.

I also gained access to a group of (almost exclusively) men, one of whom maintains an informal “safe space” on the outskirts of one Brooklyn Hasidic neighborhood, where mostly male Hasidim gather regularly to hang out, celebrate

certain holidays, or hold informal lectures and seminars organized by “regular” participants.

I also came to know personally a number of people through the Internet, from Web logs (blogs) and chat rooms. It took some time to actually meet these people in person, as they tended to be very cautious about risking exposure. One blogger ultimately agreed to meet me only after I unintentionally sent him an email on Shabbos, an act that he claimed made it clear to him that I wasn’t “a spy” from his community (the Hasidim are forbidden to use electricity or write on the Sabbath). He in turn “introduced” me (via a series of online communications) to others he had “met” through his blog and ultimately, I came to meet those people in person as well.

All in all, I met and spent considerable time with close to fifty people who were living within the Hasidic world but frequently and furtively violating its boundaries; I also came to know forty who had left it altogether. Ultimately, this research involved people ranging in age from nineteen to sixty-five, with the majority in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Of those I met who were living within Hasidic communities but engaging in transgressive behavior, about twenty percent were women. Among those I met who had left such communities, the percentage of women was slightly higher (closer to thirty percent).

It remains unclear to me exactly why I did not come across as many women as men during the course of this research, which was somewhat surprising, as I had been led to believe that the opposite would be the case. It is of course possible that fewer women transgress than men, and this question will be explored in greater depth in this dissertation. I did get the sense from speaking to women that there is a

higher proportion of women who transgress (using the Internet, going out to movies, reading, even having affairs) than are represented in this research. I also suspect that my gender and age also played a role in men's willingness to talk to me; forbidden from having contact with members of the opposite sex who are not their wives or close relatives, most Hasidic men I spoke with seemed very interested in getting to know women in general.

Issues Raised by the Research Process

An interesting issue arose during this initial stage of interviewing concerning my own status as a researcher. While very few of the women knew exactly what a Ph.D. was, fewer still had any knowledge or understanding of the field of sociology. As a result, several of the women assumed, despite my repeated attempts to explain otherwise, that I was a social worker—a category of professional with whom most Hasidim have had, in recent years, some degree of contact. I came to wonder whether this persistent “misunderstanding” was in some way intentional. I suspected that, for some women, telling others in the community that I was a “social worker” provided them with an acceptable “cover story” for engaging with someone from outside their community. Indeed, I got the sense that some of the women were eager to talk to me, not, as I had been told to expect, to teach me about their way of life, but rather to indulge their own curiosity and test their views about the outside world; more significantly, perhaps, it seemed that many welcomed the opportunity to talk about their lives with a “neutral” outsider, whom they believed would not be judgmental.

It also became increasingly clear that some people found my lack of ties to the community something they could use to their advantage. For example, one woman asked me to meet her brother, declining to say why, indicating only that I would probably be “interested in talking to him.” Somewhat baffled, I agreed to meet the brother (he invited me to his home one night after work) and his wife; as it turned out, he had been suffering from severe panic attacks and wanted me to prescribe medication for him. He made it clear that he was asking me about this because he did not want to talk to “a Jewish doctor”— which, I later came to understand, meant someone who was strictly Orthodox and, more importantly, from, or connected to, his community. Once again, I explained that I was not an MD, and thus could not prescribe, and nor was I a social worker, though I did offer to get names of Psychiatrists for him (which I did). Despite their initial disappointment at my lack of ability to prescribe, my offer to obtain referrals was greeted by the couple with enthusiasm and gratitude, and I was later invited, by the husband, to a holiday celebration at his sister’s home.

Many of the people I came to know during the course of this research approached me at one point or another for help and/or advice on matters ranging from writing resumes to buying clothes (one participant asked me to accompany him to The Gap to buy his first pair of jeans, fearing he would not know what size and style looked good on him). In one case, I was called by the family of one research participant to take him to the hospital on a Friday night; not being religious, I would be willing to ride in a car on the Sabbath, which they were prohibited from doing.

In fact, I was constantly aware of the ways in which I might be facilitating the rule breaking behavior of those who became my research informants. Just becoming friendly with me (especially for the men) already constituted a form or transgression in and of itself (for those who had already left the community, this was less of a concern); but I also wondered whether my accessibility as an “outsider” interested in spending time with them might be causing those I met who were still in the community to engage in more rule breaking behavior than might otherwise have been the case. However, being in this position allowed me to see just how important one’s social networks can be in facilitating such activity. For Hasidic people, having a contact on “the outside” not only creates more opportunity for transgression, but can also help create the conditions for actually leaving the community. With me, people did not have to be as guarded as they did with those in their communities, and I also became a source for information and guidance about how to navigate certain aspects of the outside world.

Chapter One

A Brief History of the Hasidic Movement

European Origins of the Hasidic Movement

Given the sweep of Jewish history, Hasidism is a fairly recent development, arising in the mid-eighteenth century in Central and Eastern Europe. The movement's founder, Israel ben Eliezer (1700-1760), or the Ba'al Shem Tov (also known as the Besht), was an eighteenth-century storyteller and folk healer in Central Europe. He founded the Hasidic movement as a reaction against what he perceived to be the overly hierarchical, rigid, and legalistic Judaism of his day. Drawing on sophisticated Jewish mystical (Kabbalistic) teachings, the Besht based his movement on two theoretical concepts: religious panentheism, (the view that God is immanent within all Creation or that God is the animating force behind the universe) and the communion between God and man. In this view, God is present everywhere, not just in the spiritual world, but in the material realm as well, and, while God surely influences the behavior of human beings, by focusing their thoughts, actions, and utterances on Him, human beings can influence God as well.

According to the Besht, the righteous man is one who is in constant communion with God, even in his worldly affairs, as God is present in the material world. He taught that this communion was best achieved through fervent prayer, as well as heartfelt and joyous song and dance. For him, the essence of religion rested in sentiment rather than reason and, as such, he placed ecstatic prayer even above

Talmudic study, which he felt was useful only when it served to produce an exalted religious mood.

By elevating these non-scholarly modes of devotion to the same level as formal Torah study, the Hasidic movement democratized worship as it sought to transform traditional Judaism into an ideology and way of life characterized by humility, charismatic leadership, and ecstatic devotion to God. While based on sophisticated Kabbalistic (mystical) teachings, the movement quickly gained popularity particularly among the less educated, common people, who were drawn both to the charisma of its leaders and to the spiritual and emotional appeal of their practical, yet mystical, message.

Within several generations, a variety of Hasidic leaders, each with his own particular worldview, emerged throughout Eastern Europe. In the Northeast, Rebbe Shneur Zalman founded the Lubavitch sect. Aiming to integrate the Ba'al Shem Tov's philosophy and principles with more traditional rabbinic teachings, Zalman re-elevated rational Torah study to its prior status, placing it on the same level as ecstatic prayer. Two still different strains of Hasidism developed in the South, one with a more humanistic emphasis, the other focused primarily on miracles. Within all of these sects, the figure of the rebbe retained a central importance, as he was considered "a divinely inspired mediator between man and God" whose soul was "constantly connected with the higher realms of the divine hierarchy of forces (Dan, 1991:178)."

As the Hasidic movement spread and gained adherents, it met with great resistance from the more traditional Jews of the time, who dubbed themselves "Misnagdim," or the "opponents" of the Hasidim. Unlike the Hasidim—whose

panentheism supported the idea that one could achieve a spiritual connection to God through engagement in even the most mundane activities, including work—the Misnagdim held that, having withdrawn His presence from the material world, God was accessible to human beings exclusively through religious scholarship. Thus the Misnagdim assigned a primary value to Torah study over and above everything else, and disdained the Hasidim for what they perceived as their contempt for the Torah, as well as their indecorous singing and dancing during prayer, perceived cultish devotion to the rebbe, and innovations in certain aspects of ritual observance.

Ultimately, however, the Hasidim were brought closer to their enemy when they banded together with the Misnagdim against the common threat of secularism (and, later, Zionism, nationalism, and socialism) brought on by the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment. The Haskalah, which lasted from 1770's until the early 1880's, originated in Berlin. One of its leading figures was Moses Mendelssohn who, along with his followers, promoted the acquisition of secular knowledge and advanced the causes of political emancipation and civic equality for the Jews by advocating the adaptation of Judaism to modern life.

A great many of those Hasidim who had successfully resisted the forces of secularization and assimilation throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries were unable to withstand the tremendous blows dealt them by the world wars of the 20th century. While World War I saw the destruction of many Hasidic communities, their inhabitants dispersed and isolated throughout Europe, the Holocaust ultimately decimated the remaining Hasidic centers of Europe. Those Hasidim who managed to

survive the Nazi camps settled elsewhere, predominantly in Israel and North America.

Hasidism in America

While there were a handful of Hasidim in the United States as early as 1875,¹⁰ with more arriving through the first decades of the 20th century,¹¹ it was not until after the Second World War that masses of Hasidic people arrived on American soil. What they found in America was a Jewish community in which the numbers of those who strictly adhered to orthodox precepts, and expressed their faith publicly, had been on the decline—largely the result of restrictions on Jewish immigration to the U.S. enacted in the 1920's.

Before the war, most Hasidic men in America did not wear the traditional garb, even on the Sabbath, nor did they cover their heads with yarmulkes outside of synagogue. Fewer women covered their hair with wigs, or attended the ritual bath monthly to purify themselves after menstruation. Among women, concerns for

¹⁰ In 1875, the “Sherpser Rov” (Rabbi Joshua Segal) arrived in New York City and became the head of some twenty small congregations called the “Congregations of Israel, Men of Poland and Austria.” Toward the end of the century, several more Hasidim came to America, including a Rabbi Hayyim Jacob Vidrovitz from Moscow, and Rabbi D. M. Rabbinowitz, a Lubavitcher rabbi who settled in Boston (Belcove-Shalin, p.8).

¹¹In 1903, Rabbi Pinchas David Horowitz, a nephew of the Lelover Rebbe, established the first “American” Hasidic court in Boston in 1916, calling himself the “Bostoner Rebbe.” In 1912, a descendent of the Talner Rebbe, Rabbi David Twersky, settled in New York City and, the following year, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, the Talner Rebbe, arrived in Toronto. Several other distinguished rebbes also made visits to the United States during this time, and, in 1923, Rabbi Chaim Avraham Dov Ber Levine HaCohen (“The Malach,” or Angel), a respected Lubavitcher rabbi, settled in New York City and became the rabbi of a Lubavitcher congregation in the Bronx.

modesty were trumped by an interest in the fashions of the day and, in this permissive environment, it became more acceptable for men to spend less time on Torah study, and for all Hasidim to attend movies and the theater, and to court openly without fear of community disapproval. The line separating the Orthodox from their more secular counterparts in America became increasingly blurred as most Hasidim—with a few notable exceptions¹²—had begun the process of assimilation.

After World War II, however, large numbers of Hasidic refugees came to the United States (and specifically, New York City), grouping themselves on the basis of their prior geographic, ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations. Led by a few charismatic rebbes who had managed to survive the war, they immediately undertook the common project of recreating the world that had existed in Europe before the Holocaust. Many felt that this was not only an obligation they had to those who had been murdered by the Nazis, but also a powerful affirmation of their refusal to allow their people and way of life to be annihilated. Crucial to the success of their endeavor was the fact that these new immigrants, as Jerome Mintz notes, arrived in the United States with a greater sense of social continuity than their predecessors, as they had not come primarily seeking employment, wealth, or adventure, but rather as often deeply traumatized refugees struggling to restore their communities.

Codes of modesty, long ignored in America, were now enforced, and the Hasidim adopted new, stricter kosher standards. Women's heads were shaved upon marriage and thereafter covered with scarves, turbans, or wigs; long sleeves and high-

¹² The Malach was widely known and respected among more “modern” Orthodox Jews of his time for bucking the trends in assimilation and staunchly maintaining the ways of the past.

necked tops also became standard for women, and sheer stockings were replaced by a heavier, opaque variety. Hasidic men began to eschew neck ties (they were considered too “*goyish*”¹³) and to wear full beards, long coats that buttoned from right to left, and black hats—all of which, while having roots in both Jewish law and Eastern European custom, also served to distinguish and separate these men from their secular and non-Jewish counterparts. Television and movies, acceptable leisure pursuits among American orthodox Jews at the time, were perceived by these new Hasidim as dangerous distractions from the “Torah life” and immediately banned.

Ironically, what made America (and, specifically, New York City) a potentially challenging place in which to recreate such insular communities—the temptations of its freedoms; its celebration of individual rights and expression; its tolerance of religious diversity and lack of religious persecution (so often the impetus for community solidarity)—was also precisely what allowed these communities to flourish in the United States. Unlike in Hungary, for example, where the appointment of the head of the Jewish community, and strict educational requirements, were under the ultimate control of the state, in New York, these burgeoning communities were given the authority to develop and run their own school systems. Apart from satisfying some basic educational requirements in subjects like English and math, and meeting city fire and safety codes, the curricula and organization of the *yeshivot* were the responsibility of the community. As a result, Hasidic schools focused almost exclusively on religious education, rendered in Yiddish and Hebrew, with tutors brought in from the outside to teach the basic, state required courses. Any subject

¹³ “Goy” is Yiddish word used to refer to a non-Jewish person, and “goyish” refers to attitudes or behaviors that are perceived as being “non-Jewish.”

matter that could be seen as contradicting or undermining the Hasidic worldview was excluded from the curriculum. Attending college and receiving advanced professional training in law, medicine, or science, all acceptable among the more “modern” Orthodox Jews, were not options for Hasidim, and even visiting public libraries or bookstores was officially prohibited, considered potentially too corrupting.

Despite their desire to keep their Hasidim apart from mainstream society, the rebbes also understood that their followers needed to make a living, and encouraged them to work. While teaching in the communities’ fledgling yeshivas remained a viable option for some men, others were forced to acquire new skills to enable them to find jobs outside the community, as cutters or tailors in the garment trade, as cutters and polishers in the diamond industry, or as electricians, plumbers, plasterers, or painters. Younger members of the community enrolled in courses in accounting or computer programming, and some became wholesalers and retailers of electronic equipment. Those who were able to raise the money went into real estate development, manufacturing, construction, or the diamond business. All of these jobs had the advantage of requiring only limited contact with outsiders and did not, for the most part, necessitate any alteration of Hasidic styles of dress or major compromises in religious observance.

Those Hasidim who were successful in business not only provided jobs for others, but also contributed large sums to create and sustain community institutions, and to support community charities. At the time, these growing communities required little financial support from the city and state to maintain their systems of education and justice; the private schools were run by the community, and charity provided

enough to support the poor and the sick. As had been the case for these Hasidim before their arrival in America, most disputes were settled in rabbinical courts.

The efforts of these new immigrants were so successful that, in less than twenty years, Williamsburg— and, to a lesser degree, Crown Heights—had become a thriving Hasidic community, with houses of worship and study for men, and ritual baths for women. By the mid-1960's, the number of Hasidim in New York City had grown to almost 50,000 with Satmar representing the largest sect at 1300 families (Belcove-Shalin, 1995:9). However, with their very high birthrates quickly driving up the population, and their paucity of educational credentials, the Hasidim had, in a sense, become the victims of their own success. In the decades that followed, Hasidic leaders began to have to look to federal, state and local programs to aid the poor and bring resources into the community. Strenuous efforts by the community leadership—bolstered by the successful cultivation of political connections and the acquisition of technical expertise—resulted in an influx of government and private sector support for job training and commercial ventures. According to Kranzler (1995), most notable among these achievements was the official designation in 1984 of the Hasidim as a “Disadvantaged Minority,” enabling them to benefit from the same programs that were available to other racial and ethnic minorities.

Though these statistics are notoriously unreliable, due to the fact that the Hasidim choose not to maintain a census (counting is considered akin to boasting and thought to attract the attention of the “evil eye”) as of 1995, it was estimated that there were 250,000 Hasidim in America, with 200,000 living in New York State alone (Eisenberg, 1995). As of the early 1990's, the Hasidic population was reported

to be growing by five percent a year, translating, at those birth rates, into a doubling of the Hasidic population every 15 years (Eisenberg, 1995).

It is important to note here that, as was the case historically, the contemporary Hasidic world is not monolithic and can, in general, be divided into the following groups: the various allied Hungarian sects, the largest of which is Satmar, but which also includes groups like Tselem and Pupa; the Polish sects, the most prominent of which are Belz, Bobov and Ger; Skver, which originated in Ukraine and is located in the upstate New York community of New Square; and Lubavitch, which, as has been noted, is unique in the Hasidic world for various reasons.

The differences among these sects manifest themselves in terms of their particular philosophies (*chasidut*), as well as their specific customs, degree of interaction with the outside society, and orientation toward the State of Israel. For example, the Satmar sect is known to be among the most insular and extreme of the Hasidic sects and is also notable for its fervent anti-Zionism (see Kranzler, 1995). The Lubavitch sect is the worldliest of all the Hasidic groups, with its focus on outreach to secular and unaffiliated Jews. Lubavitchers tend to speak more English than other Hasidim (in large part, because so many of their members joined the group later in life) and generally have more contact with the outside world. Despite their important differences, however, the myriad Hasidic groups share a tremendous amount in common—namely, their strict observance of Jewish law and the lifestyle that promotes, and their separation from the outside world.

As a variety of sociologists (Helmreich, 1982; Mayer, 1979; Heilman, 2006) have noted, over the past thirty years the Hasidic—and, in fact, the entire Orthodox—

world has undergone a marked shift to the right, manifest in the adoption of more “meticulous” observance of Jewish law and increased separation from the outside world. The reasons for this trend are complex, and involve a number of factors, including changes in both communal and external demographics, the overall success of the Hasidic world at creating and sustaining its own institutions, “competition” from other forms of Orthodoxy and pressures from the outside society.

These findings were supported by the experiences of those who participated in my research. The following, posted online in response to a question about this shift, makes the point quite well:

*My married children would be considered quite ultra and even chayukish (=ultra, ultra) We had our Chanike (our way of pronouncing Chanuka) party @ our home with BH [**Baruch Hashem, or “Thank God”**] close to a dozen grandkids. The phenom of ever greater seperation between the sexes is kind of new in the hasidic community. I think it comes from the ever growing fanatisim that even the Satmar Rav [**rebbe**] didn't dream of. Let any hasidic person ask their parants [**sic**], bubbes [**grandmothers**] and zeides [**grandfathers**] if this was the costum [**sic**] between the sexes. I assure all readers that abselutly [**sic**] not. A case in point; the present Satmar Rebbe's father died when he was a young man. His uncle Rebbe Yoiel took him in under his wings and lived in his home in the town of Satmar. If you beleive that the Satmar Rav as a bocher [**boy**] and later as a married man didn't converse with his auntie the Satmar Rebetzin or with Roize the Rebbes daughter in a normal fashion then I have bridge to sell you.*

Indeed, among those I interviewed whose families were here before the war, many noted how their own grandparents had attended public school and, in some cases, even college, read secular books and saw movies. Some even showed me pictures of their relatives wearing styles that would today be considered extremely immodest, but were apparently quite acceptable at the time.

A Note about Hasidim as a form of Orthodox Judaism

It is important to note here that while not all Orthodox Jews are Hasidic, all Hasidic Jews are considered Orthodox. In general, Orthodoxy is defined by an adherence to the laws and ethics first canonized in the Talmud (the oral law) and later codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*, or Code of Jewish Law. Governed by these works, as well as the rabbinical commentary of the last thousand or so years, Orthodox Judaism is characterized by the following beliefs: that the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and its laws were given to Moses by God at Sinai and cannot be changed by any human being; that God has made an exclusive covenant with the Jewish people, to be governed by the Torah; that there is also an oral law in Judaism, which is intrinsically and inherently intertwined with the written law of the Torah; that Jews must adhere to Jewish law as codified mainly in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Contemporary Hasidim regard themselves as “strictly” Orthodox, a term which not only refers to the strict interpretation of Jewish law they espouse, but also serves to distinguish them from their more modern Orthodox counterparts, who do not segregate themselves from the outside world. Indeed, within Orthodox Judaism there is a formal movement known as Modern Orthodoxy, whose adherents are characterized by the commitment to observing Jewish law while maintaining full engagement with secular society and modern forms of knowledge. Modern Orthodoxy places a high value on secular education and supports equal education for males and females. A commitment to Zionism as a political movement is also a central tenet of Modern Orthodoxy (Helmreich and Shinnar, 1998:2).

Chapter Two Contemporary Hasidic Communities

Social Hierarchy

In his study of the Satmar community of Williamsburg, Rubin (1997) identified a three-tiered hierarchy of social prestige,¹⁴ which for the most part still exists today, not only in the Satmar community, but within the other Hasidic communities as well. As noted earlier, every Hasidic sect is headed by a rebbe,¹⁵ who occupies the highest position in the status hierarchy. Rebbes are typically surrounded by *meshorsim* (servants), who act as administrators, arrangers, confidants and gatekeepers. The meshorsim derive their own high status from their association with the rebbe.

Just below the rebbe on the hierarchy of prestige are those community members Rubin calls “*sheyneh yidden*,” [literally, pretty or lovely Jews], or what many people refer to today as “*aidel yidden*” [literally, cultured Jews]). These people “by virtue of occupation, pedigree, or self-definition...occupy positions that are in varying degrees superior to those of the overwhelming majority of the membership (75).” They include those who are involved in maintaining the “smooth flow” of religious life (e.g. ritual slaughterers, scribes, rabbis, religious educators) as well as the “*eineklach*,” or pedigreed individuals whose claim to high status rests on their being descended from “holy seed,” or rebbes (76). (The former are also described

¹⁴ Rubin is careful to point out that prestige is not necessarily synonymous with power in this context.

¹⁵ In several courts, there are now two rebbes, as a result of unresolved succession issues; since the death, in 1994, of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitchers have had no rebbe.

within the community as “*rebbish*,” as they come from families descended from the rebbe.) The remaining members of this category include serious religious scholars, many of whom may work as educators, as well as those whom Rubin calls the “holier-than-thou zealots,” or self-appointed community watchdogs who monitor behavior to make sure it is in accordance with community standards (and, within the Satmar context, who lead anti-Zionist actions) (76).

The second social tier consists of what Rubin calls the “rank and file” members. Such people might devote themselves to study or work in business (the latter are referred to as *baalebatim*), but have no special status claims within the community. In the Hasidic world, “working” is conceived in opposition to studying, or religious “learning,” which is the most prestigious occupation a Hasidic man can engage in (many men who work for a living do spend a certain amount of time per day or week engaged in religious learning, which is considered a commandment). Thus, for the most part, the *baalebatim* gain their prestige through financial contributions to community charities and/or individual scholars. That said, however, according to many of those I interviewed, men who work seem to be becoming more desirable as marriage partners than they once were (girls are traditionally raised to aspire to marrying a religious scholar). This apparently reflects the fact that many Hasidic young people seem to be expressing an increasing interest in material comfort, which is thought to have been less common among the older generations.

In fact, it seems that wealth might be becoming more of a source of prestige than ever before within these communities (although many do concede that the wealthy always had high status). For example, one 26 year-old Hasidic man I

interviewed told me that he was trying desperately to become rich in the real estate business so that his wealth would neutralize, or at least minimize, the effect of his many transgressions on his children's marriage options, were he ever to be discovered. His hope was that "good" families would overlook his behavior in favor of marrying their children into a family of means. Another man made the same point when responding to accusations that his watching movies would prevent his children from finding marriage partners:

I am not worried about shdeechim [matches] for my kids for two reasons A. I have extremely good kids, even by the so-called Chasidisher standards B. I have enough money to buy any sheedech [match].

The third social tier of the Hasidic world identified by Rubin was the "lower stratum" and consists of those whose conduct is considered "substandard" and thus damaging to the community's image as it is projected to other members and, at times, to the outside world as well. This category is particularly salient here, in that it reflects an acknowledgment on the part of the community that there are people within it who fail to live up to ideal typical Hasidic standards of behavior. In my own research, I have discovered that such people are often referred to as "bums." According to those I interviewed, one can be considered a bum if he or she exhibits a "modern" appearance (e.g., if a man trims his beard, wears a stylish, name brand suit, "bent down" hat and more contemporary style of shoe) or certain kinds of behaviors that, within the Hasidic context, have come to be associated with a "modern" lifestyle and/or modern attitudes. As one man told me, "bums are people who smoke, drink, go to ball games, people who openly wear jackets, trim their beards, eat in restaurants,

drive in SUV's with sirens. There are many ways to define them. It's quite a hard task to do so. To be bummy means to be brainless."

In saying that "there are many ways to define them," this man was not suggesting that the category of "bum" is in any way contested, but that there are many types of behaviors that can be considered "bummy." What will become clear later, however, is that there are indeed some Hasidim who want to challenge the notion that the type of behavior described above should automatically mark one as a "bum." Not surprisingly, those making this argument tend to be people who engage in this kind of behavior, but who would nonetheless like to regard themselves—and have others regard them—as "good Hasids." In making their case, some such types have even suggested that this behavior is in fact "normal," by which they mean normative (rather than a statistical norm, which in fact might not be as far fetched as it sounds).

There is one additional social category that Rubin did not mention in his own work, but that has become apparent to me through mine, and that is the class of Jews known as *baalei teshuvah*, or "returnees" to the faith; this term refers to people who did not grow up in religious homes but made the decision to embrace a religious lifestyle later in life. While such individuals are theoretically held in high esteem for their religious commitment, their lack of *yiches*, or family pedigree, means that they will generally enjoy a relatively low status in the community (often reflected in their lack of desirability on the marriage totem pole). This seems to be the case even when such people have achieved important positions within the community.

While "*frum* [**religious**] from birth" Hasidim will often describe *baalei teshuvah* as simultaneously too zealous and blind to the nuances of community life,

their lower status might also have to do with the fact that such people spent a good deal of their lives outside the boundaries of the Hasidic world and, along with their lack of knowledge, represent (whether consciously or not) a threat to the perceived “purity” of the community, and possibly even its stability.¹⁶ That is, because they may retain ties to the outside society, such people have the potential to bring aspects of their old way of life into the community. Further, because these ties might allow such people the option of straddling both worlds without necessarily fully committing to the religious one, it might be “safer” to keep them somewhat on the margins of the community.

I also discovered that there are a number of personal and social characteristics apart from those discussed above that can stigmatize people and thus diminish their social status, regardless of their perceived religious commitment or behavior. Among those I interviewed, there was a consensus that divorced or older unmarried people tend to be perceived as “tainted” and are thus somewhat marginalized within the community. As one woman told me, “I can understand, at least in my community, not wanting to get divorced. It spins you into a whole other class, and makes it very hard to get married again.” A divorced Hasidic woman I interviewed described her situation this way:

HW: Is it hard in the community for you?

CG: It's difficult. Everybody's home, with their husband, with their familie.s If I walk out on the street. I do feel uncomfortable because

¹⁶ Of course, the Lubavitch community actively encourages people to become baalei teshuvah and, as such, there are many more of them within that group than within the other Hasidic sects, who are more suspicious of returnees. That said, I was repeatedly told that those who were born into the Lubavitch community still retain a higher status than baalei teshuvah.

it's just not the typical. There is not such a big variety. There is not such a big part of the community that's single, divorced, older. So I'm basically different. When I walk out on the street on my own, I can feel the stares coming out of everybody's cars. It's hard, but I deal with it. It's hard for people that are different in general to be able to have a place. Although I have a place, I have my job and I do my thing, but I really don't, all my friends have four to five kids and I'm really different.

Further, I learned that people who have illnesses (either physical or mental), or a history of illness in their families, are also considered “tainted,” and their status is clearly reflected in their position on the marriage totem pole. One woman who was unable to conceive described how difficult it was for her socially, given her childless status

My friends are all making Bar Mitzvah [for their sons]. I'm not going. I am not making Bar Mitzvah. I am totally different. I don't attend my classmates' functions.

Social Organization

One of the key organizing principals of the Hasidic way of life—and thus of these communities—is the Hasidic understanding of gender, which is essentialist and holds that men and women are naturally different from one another, and that from these differences flow distinct, though mutually complementary, religious obligations and social roles. Community members often stress that, within the tradition, women are not considered in any way subordinate to men (though, as we shall see, this is often the case in practice), and that women's God-given (i.e., “natural”) intuition and caring in fact place them on a higher spiritual plane than men (Indeed, this is often one of the reasons given for the fact that—in addition to their obligations related to

childrearing and the maintenance of the home—women are exempt from the “time bound” religious commandments that men are required to observe.) Indeed, this conception of gender differences echoes the view of so-called “cultural feminists,” who hold that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women (e.g., that women are kinder and gentler than men) that derive from biological differences, and that women’s differences are special and should be celebrated (see Epstein, 1990, for a critique of this perspective).

Socialization into gender roles begins at home and becomes more formalized with boys’ entrance into school around the age of three (Rubin, 1997). While Hasidic boys spend the majority of their time in school—and as much time as possible beyond their school years—engaged in religious study or “learning,” girls and women are actively prohibited from doing so (Rubin, 1997). Indeed, the Hasidic prohibition against women studying Talmud stems from the Hasidic belief that women do not have the “proper” mind for it. Though Hasidic children are required by U.S. law to receive a minimum amount of education in secular subjects (generally English and math), an important result of this gendered difference in educational emphasis is that girls get more formal training in English and other secular subjects than do boys (Rubin, 1997; Albarelli, 2000), making them generally more competent to interact with the outside world, when such interaction is necessary.

As boys grow into men, which is marked by the bar mitzvah at age thirteen, they become required to observe myriad “time-bound” religious commandments,

from which women are, for the most part, exempt.¹⁷ (Community members are taught that women's "natural" spirituality means that they do not need to be "reminded" to sanctify time as men do, through the performance time-specific commandments.) Women's exemption from these commandments is justified by the demands of her role as a mother and homemaker. Indeed, among the Hasidim marriages are typically arranged through a matchmaker, and are usually entered into after no more than one or two meetings of the prospective spouses.

Many people I interviewed told me that they were taught that romance was "ok for the goyim," but should not be aspired to for Hasidim. Marriages are understood primarily as a division of labor to ensure the perpetuation of the Jewish family and community. The expectation is that love between spouses will naturally grow over time, in pursuit of this common goal. As one Hasidic man, who had left his community, wrote to me:

What's most surprising to me is that most people in this community aren't aware how much they're missing out of life. You and I and most NORMAL people take the centrality and necessity of love, passion and intimacy for granted, around here people don't. If you ask them if they regret not ever having been in a loving relationship, most of them would say no.

I remember, I was once listening to some cheesy, pop love songs and I asked my mom to listen too. She said to me "I've never been in such a situation, those sentiments don't appeal to me." Shocking, but also sad. I feel so sorry that they miss out of so much of what it means being human. Love, feelings and passion is what distinguishes us from all other creatures.

I think there is some good old Darwinism involved. In order to survive, their bodies have evolved so that they don't have those needs; they adapted genetically, they don't have a physical need for any deep emotional

¹⁷ Women are required to observe three "positive" commandments of their own: separating and burning a piece of challah that is baked for the Sabbath; lighting the Sabbath candles; and attending the mikvah, or ritual bath, to purify themselves a week after the cessation of their menstrual bleeding.

attachments and experiences. Once you separate sex from feelings it's easy to see how some people become deviant. Sexual gratification becomes an animalistic pursuit, devoid of beauty and passion and meaning.

Whether or not his analysis is accurate—the notion of some sort of evolutionary adaptation is somewhat farfetched (and likely tongue in cheek)—his statements do reflect what many people interviewed learned about romantic love, and how it is “not for Hasidic people.” That said, the religious commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” is taken quite seriously in these communities and is interpreted to mean that women should bear as many children as possible, often resulting in families with an average of eight children (this statistic applies specifically to the Williamsburg Satmar community; for specific breakdowns, see Kranzler, 1995).¹⁸

This understanding of gender roles has, in general, resulted in a traditional, gendered division of labor. Within the Hasidic world it is typical that men go out to work upon completion of their full-time religious educations, while women focus their attention on the private, domestic realm, running the home and overseeing the socialization of the children. Notably, however, it is quite customary for Hasidic women to work for at least a year before marriage, and sometimes also for a time before the birth of the first child; further, in cases where the husband is engaged in full-time, unpaid religious learning, or if the family is very poor, a wife may continue to work even after having children. Also, in some cases, women whose children are grown will take jobs outside the home; indeed, as Mintz (1992) has noted, it is mostly older women who have taken advantage of the Hasidic world's increasing need for

¹⁸ There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that Hasidic women are increasingly using birth control and, as a result, having fewer children.

psychological counselors by getting outside training to qualify them to work in this area.

Their relative lack of in-depth religious learning, an emphasis on female modesty in both dress and behavior, and a primary responsibility for childrearing prevent the participation of Hasidic women in the public religious and political spheres of the community. They do not have a voice in the administration of synagogues, nor do they have decision-making roles in internal community politics (Kranzler, 1995). It is important to note, however, that, despite their relative absence from the community's public religious and political realms, Hasidic women tend to be involved in a tremendous amount of charitable activity within—and in some cases, beyond—the community (Kranzler, 1995).

Furthermore, Kranzler has noted that while women often indicate that they follow the political positions of their husbands and their rebbe, they do take part in certain public political actions, including demonstrations against policies, which are thought to threaten the welfare of their community. (For example, Satmar women were apparently very active and instrumental in bringing out the vote for President Bush in 1988. See Kranzler, 1995.) While unpaid charity work has long been associated with the female role, male religious scholarship is typically subsidized by the community or a benefactor, and is generally poorly paid. Indeed, today Hasidic poverty is a serious issue. According to a 1997 report (Sexton, NY Times), one-third of Williamsburg's then estimated seven thousand families were on public assistance. According to the 2000 Census, 61.7 percent of the families in the upstate New York

Satmar enclave of Kiryas Joel were living below the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Despite the tremendous amount of “boundary work” engaged in by these communities, there is evidence to suggest that certain values and practices of the host society have nonetheless found their way inside their symbolic walls—highlighting the “selectively permeability” of their boundaries. Heilman (1992) has observed that, while it may seem antithetical to their own worldview, the ultra-Orthodox in Israel often invoke modern, secular concepts, such as pluralism and choice, when, for example, explaining something like a decision to switch allegiances to a different rebbe’s court; indeed, the adoption of certain attitudes and practices of the outside society—when they are used in service of the communities’ aims—can actually serve to strengthen group boundaries (see Bilu and Goodman, 1997).

Heilman also notes the impact of the character of the host society on—and its interrelatedness with—its ultra-Orthodox communities when he highlights the ways in which the ultra-Orthodox in America differ from their Israeli counterparts. In this same vein, Kranzler (1995) emphasizes the quintessentially American spirit of entrepreneurship that has come to characterize the Satmar sect in particular in the United States over the last two decades. He notes that this “Americanization” is evidenced not only in the spirit of enterprise of the Hasidim, but also in the realm of their participation in political life, their emphasis on community self-help, and their embracing of much of modern technology and medicine. Further, while Hasidic communities openly reject the values of pluralism, democracy and tolerance for themselves, Hasidim nonetheless exploit those values of the larger society; indeed

their very survival as religious communities apart from the mainstream depends on America's tolerance of religious expression, not to mention its welfare policies. Especially notable has been the influence of outside attitudes about the causes and treatments of physical disability, mental retardation, and mental illness, which, as Mintz (1992) points out, were until recently understood as resulting from a deficiency in one's religious observance and led to profound stigmatization of those who were afflicted and their families.

All of this serves to show how enclave culture can be shaped by the surrounding culture, and how, at times, the enclave even goes so far as to adopt and adapt certain values and practices of the host society—particularly when *not* doing so might in some way threaten the maintenance and perpetuation of the enclave community itself. A specific example of this is the development of education for Satmar girls in the United States, which was heavily influenced by successful drives made by Satmar girls and their mothers, over time, for things like the addition of an eleventh grade, a graduation ceremony, and an American-style yearbook to, more recently, the addition of a twelfth grade, school trips outside the community, and typing and computer instruction geared toward enabling girls to do office work (Rubin, 1997). While internal community pressures—that is, the financial burdens of supporting such large families—no doubt played a role in this, it is also interesting to speculate about the influence of the broader women's movement, which most Hasidim officially claim to oppose (see Kranzler, 1995 and Morris, 1998), on these girls' and mothers' efforts to fight for changes in the school curriculum.

Laws, Rules and Norms

As has no doubt become abundantly clear, among the Hasidim almost every area of life is highly regulated. While many of these regulations derive from Jewish law (as interpreted by the religious authorities and leaders of these communities), others reflect Hasidic custom (with regard, for example, to styles of dress, dating practices, education); indeed, while Hasidic standards of appearance are informed to some degree by Jewish law (hair coverings, modest clothing, beards), they also reflect a concern about not appearing “too modern.” In practice, this means Hasidic people are not only supposed to dress modestly, but also eschew styles and accouterments (like backpacks) worn by members of “secular” society (One woman I interviewed told me that her grandfather was opposed even to little Hasidic boys wearing winter coats with gold buttons as, at the time, this was a style favored by “the goyim.”)

In addition, there are also myriad official prohibitions within these communities against activities that might bring members into “dangerous” contact with the cultural practices and products of the outside world (not to mention non-Hasidic people). The assumed danger here lies in the potential, at best, for such contact to distract members from the religious path and performance of the commandments and, at worst, undermine their commitment to the Hasidic worldview and way of life. As such, within these communities there are official bans against: reading secular books, newspapers and magazines; listening to secular radio or non-Jewish music; watching TV; seeing movies; using the Internet (with special exceptions for business use); eating out in restaurants; going to museums; following sports, frequenting bars or nightclubs; going to college; and even traveling to certain

places that might tempt people to sin (like beach resorts where there is mixed bathing). While participating in these activities is not in and of itself against Jewish law—Modern Orthodox Jews will engage in all of them—Hasidic rabbis and leaders often invoke traditional Jewish texts to justify their bans against them. The following, signed by several rabbis, is a typical example:

With Hashem's help, 1 Iyar, 5763

In response to the halachic query...about playing games and looking at all sorts of movies on computers, the following is our opinion:

1) Use of Computer for Playing Games

The [rabbinical commentary] (Brochos 28b) teaches us: "Prevent your children from [engaging in] higoyon." Rashi explains this saying of [the Rabbis of the Talmud] to mean: "You should not accustom them to study Chumash too much since it appeals to them."

If [our sages] instruct us to deter children from studying Hashem's [God's] Torah in an easy and appealing way since it prevents them from laboring over Torah study, surely they forbid children's playing various sorts of valueless games that cause them to detach their thoughts from Torah study. Playing such games cause a tremendous decline in the child's level of spirituality.

2) With Regard to Looking at Movies on Computers:

Even if the movies do not contain anything that is specifically forbidden to see, it is still forbidden to look at it based on what the [Jewish Code of Law] (307:16) rules: "It is forbidden to read war stories on Shabbos, and even in the middle of the week it is forbidden since it is a moshav leitzim (occupation of frivolous people), and by reading them one transgresses, "Do not turn to the elilim" (Vayikra19:4) — "You should not remove Hashem from your mind" (Shabbos 149a).

The Mogen Avrohom (par. 22) writes: "This includes visiting theaters and circuses that are types of entertainment as we find in Avodoh Zorah 18b." The Meiri (Shabbos 149a) writes: "These things (pictures of people fighting wars and the like) appeal to his

heart, cause him to waste time and make him despair of [service] to his Creator."

What difference is there if he goes to see a movie somewhere or instead he sits at home and looks at it, like those people who waste their time? See the gemora (Avodoh Zorah 18a) that teaches us that the punishment for this is tremendous, that Hashem torments him, and that his livelihood decreases, Rachmono litzlan.

3) Women and Girls:

Doing this harms even women and girls and distances them from yiras Shomayim. (See Tosafos, Avodoh Zorah 19a, that teaches us what is included as prohibited in the posuk, "How fortunate is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked . . . and sat not in the session of scorners" (Tehillim 1:1) does not exclude women from the prohibition.

4) The conclusion from all the above, is that halochoh forbids using a computer for playing games and looking at movies even if they do not contain anything that is intrinsically forbidden for us to look at.

5) Educators of boys and girls are well aware of the fact that computers distance the soul of the children from Torah and yiras Shomayim. We therefore warn parents and educators not to use the computer for entertainment purposes at all.

In general, within these communities the authority of the rebbe—which is traditional, in the Weberian sense—is considered absolute, and his teachings, along with the rulings of the rabbis, set the standard for normative behavior and guide the policies of community institutions (i.e., schools, synagogues, etc). This is not say, of course, that public opposition (or resistance) to certain kinds of practices or policies does not emerge, but that it will be considered legitimate only within certain parameters, outside of which the opponents will likely face sanctions.

This belief in the authority of the rebbe and rabbis to interpret the tradition is nicely illustrated by the following comments, made by a Hasidic mother to a reporter

for the *Jewish Week* (Cohler-Esses and Nussbaum Cohen, 2006), regarding the safety of a practice known as “oral suction” (done during the circumcision ritual), which has recently come under fire for being unsafe by the New York City Health Department:

“Of course my sons had metzitzah b’peh [**oral suction**],” said Surie Hirsch, 27, a Satmar chasid and mother of sons aged 4 and 2. Hirsch said nothing she has heard about the recent controversy over the procedure would make her decide differently today. “Our rabbis have been looking into it quite sufficiently,” she said. “They’ve been protecting us beautifully, so far. I don’t believe for a moment we’d be doing this if I felt I was putting my sons at risk. If there’s going to be any reason to believe it’s actually dangerous, then I believe our rabbis will come forth and stop it.”

The fact that even those Hasidim who admitted to me privately that they opposed the practice felt obligated to go along with it gives a good indication of the degree to which practices that are sanctioned by rabbinic authority tend to go publicly unchallenged in these communities As one man wrote to me:

My child had [oral suction] just a few months ago. I didn't like it one bit. The mohel's mouth had this foul smell only a chassidisher mouth can have at shabbos morning 12:30am without having had a coffee. I'm not even thinking of the teeth that never saw a dental floss and would be shocked to feel the foreign texture of toothpaste. I thought about [the risks of infection] when i saw him sucking away...But the chances are so slim. Besides, there is no choice in the matter.

It is important to note here that within the Hasidic world there is often a blurring of the distinction between religious law and historical custom. For example, while the practice of men wearing beards and side curls is traced directly to

scripture,¹⁹ as noted earlier, Hasidic male dress codes reflect 18th century Eastern European styles. (Ironically, the *shtrimeles*, or fur hats, many Hasidic men wear on the Sabbath reflect styles worn by Polish nobility.) Despite this fact, within the community, dress codes are treated as if they were in fact law, and, based on my discussions with Hasidim, only certain very minor deviations are considered acceptable or appropriate. In fact, there is actually a saying among the Orthodox that “that which has become custom is just like law (Helmreich, personal communication),” and members who try to oppose certain rabbinic rulings on the grounds that they are confusing custom with law tend to be viewed as “troublemakers” by the mainstream of the community and are likely to face sanctions.

While religious Jews are bound to observe 613 commandments,²⁰ among the most central are: Sabbath observance (for which women must fulfill several gender-specific obligations); observance of the kosher laws, the laws of family purity (*Taharas HaMishpacha*) and modesty (*tznius*); the commandments related to prayer and study for men; and the exclusively male practice of wearing *tzitzit*, a beard and peyos. This is not to imply, however, that these are the only commandments Hasidim observe; quite the contrary, Hasidic people distinguish themselves from those of other

¹⁹ Leviticus 19:27 states that “You shall not round the corners of your heads, nor shall you mar the corners of your beard.” Hasidim (and other haredi Jews) interpret this to mean that men should not be clean-shaven or cut off the hair around the temples.

²⁰ These involve 248 positive, or “thou shall” commandments, and 365 negative, or “thou shalt not” commandments. Many of these commandments, however, deal with the laws of purity and sacrifice, and were thus only applicable when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem. Therefore, of all the commandments, only 369 apply today. Of these, 126 are positive, and 243 are negative.

Even of these, however, many only pertain to special cases or circumstances. The total number of commandments which apply to everyone under all conditions is 270. Of these, 48 are positive, and 222 are negative

Jewish denominations in part on the basis of their commitment to observing a greater number of the *mitzvot*, and with more perceived stringency, than other Jews do.

It is also the case that certain practices related to religious observance can themselves be subject to legitimate debate within the community. For example, in recent years, the Hasidic community of Williamsburg has become divided over the practice of using an *eyruv*, (a wire string that is used to mark off a public space, thereby making it private). While Hasidim are not permitted to carry anything outside on the Sabbath, by privatizing public space, the *eyruv* makes it technically legal under Jewish law for people do to so (for more on this issue of the legal circumvention of Sabbath laws, see Dundes, 2002). While some rabbinic authorities support the use of the *eyruv*, others do not, claiming that it violates the holiness of the Sabbath and could lead religious Jews to ignore other Sabbath prohibitions—a kind of “slippery slope” objection. Some observers argue that this controversy is less about the *eyruv* itself than a struggle for control of the Satmar community, though the very fact of the dispute is evidence that certain religious practices can be subject to contestation and even subsequent revision (usually in the direction of greater stringency). Indeed, these revisions tend to reinforce—or, in this case, further delineate—community boundaries while simultaneously creating new “opportunities” for transgression.

Another recent example of this involves a ban issued by several Israeli rabbis on women wearing wigs made of human hair, a common practice among Hasidic women. The rabbis ruled that because the hair used to make the wigs had been shorn as part of a Hindu religious ritual, the wigs themselves were implicated in idol worship and thus could not be worn by Hasidic women, as idol worship is a violation

of Jewish law. While many women burned their wigs publicly in the streets of some Hasidic neighborhoods, or donated them to cancer patients, I spoke with several who refused to destroy, or even stop wearing, their wigs. These women claimed that it was both wasteful and “silly” to burn wigs that in some cases cost thousands of dollars, and which they felt were much more flattering than the synthetic wigs the rabbis were advocating. The resistance of women in this instance demonstrates how certain rabbinic decrees can be successfully ignored by community members; in this case, women who refused to stop wearing their wigs were not considered to be trouble makers or in any way transgressive, except perhaps by the most extreme members of the community. It is possible that this was the case because the issue itself is not one that touches on an essential aspect of Hasidic identity.

During the course of my research, I also came to discover that there are certain gendered behavioral standards that fall outside the realm of dress and ritual observance. For example, despite the fact that women are supposed to be more “private” than men,²¹ because men are considered less able to control their “animal urges” or lust, there are certain places that women can go to that would be considered too immodest for men. As one woman explained:

My daughter and I will go together to Miami, or Disney World, but my husband wouldn't go because he could see too many immodest things there, with the women half naked. Because men are men, they shouldn't put themselves in the way of temptation.

²¹ This understanding derives from a verse in Psalm 45 that states that “the entire glory of the King’s daughter is on the inside.” Within strict Orthodoxy, this has been interpreted to mean that the true nature of the Jewish woman is private, not only making her the keeper of the Jewish home and family, but setting standards for her public behavior, including dress, comportment and speech.

Further, not surprisingly, it seems that when issues of sexual behavior are involved there is a clear gender-based double standard. For example, many Hasidim I interviewed (both conforming and not) claimed that it is “normal” (if not a good thing) for a man to need/want to go to a prostitute, as long as he doesn’t “advertise” it within the community; if a woman were discovered to be doing the same thing (or actually having a full-blown affair), however, she would likely face divorce and the subsequent denial of custody (and even visitation rights) of her children, and possibly even be completely shunned by her family and the community. Indeed, I came to know one man who discovered his wife in bed with another man and, while he had been visiting prostitutes throughout their marriage (and this was known to his wife), it was her sexual transgression that was punished: he promptly divorced her and their children ended up being raised by members of his family.

When I asked those I interviewed the reasons for this particular double standard, they all invoked (what they claimed was) Jewish law, arguing that having sex with a woman other than one’s wife does not technically constitute adultery, as, according to *halacha* (Jewish law), only a married woman can legally commit adultery. I was also told that, because Jewish law requires there to be skin-to-skin contact for a sexual relationship to be considered consummated, as long as a man uses a condom, sex cannot “legally” occur. In such a scenario, the man would be understood to be having sex with the condom, rather than the woman. The following comments, written by a Hasidic man to a Hasidic woman he “met” online (and whom I know) provide a very good example of this kind of technically legalistic thinking:

how about fuck it all... lets go out now and just fuck the night away i will do you anal so "Halacha" youre all good i think its a

fantastic move what do you say be a sport.

(As the woman who received this email pointed out in her reply, this man's understanding of Jewish law pertaining anal sex may in fact be incorrect.)

These arguments have no support among the Hasidic community's rabbinic leadership and in fact many Hasidic people told me that having sex with someone other than one's spouse is indeed a violation of Jewish law (whether or not it constitutes "adultery," or is "technically" considered sex). Nonetheless, the fact that this behavior seems to go largely unpunished among men seems to be simultaneously rooted in and to reinforce the Hasidic understanding of gender (which is derived from a literal interpretation of Jewish law), which, as noted earlier, sees men and women as "naturally" different from one another. For example, one man told me quite matter-of-factly that: "Men are like animals. We all know they have needs and urges that women do not." He went on to explain that "even the rabbis understood this" and quoted (presumably) several rabbis' opinions that men whose wives are physically unavailable to them (because they are menstruating, for example) are legally permitted seek sexual satisfaction from a prostitute, or another "non-Jewish woman."²² This man believed that this was actually a positive thing because it prevented men from having to "bother" their wives to engage in sexual behavior they might consider "immodest" or unappealing.

None of the women I spoke with expressed approval of the practice of men seeing prostitutes. However, even they tended minimize the seriousness of male

²² Notably, Hasidic women are not afforded the same option under Jewish law, though a husband's failure to satisfy his wife sexually does give the wife legitimate grounds for divorce.

sexual transgression in general, also attributing it to men's "animal natures." One married Hasidic man even used this reasoning in paying what he regarded as a compliment to the Hasidic woman with whom he had been having an extra-marital relationship; while the woman was unwilling to sleep with him, their relationship had become very close and, in an attempt to show her how much he cared for her despite the lack of sex, the man told her (in my presence) that their relationship was "like a house without a toilet. And I can go use a toilet somewhere else. It's a little inconvenient, but I can do it." The implication was that, to this man, sex is primarily about "relieving" oneself and, while such relief was biologically necessary, it was not essential to the relationship. Notably, the woman appeared to agree with—and was even pleased by—this characterization of their relationship, and claimed that any woman who would be offended by it was obviously "a feminist."

Chapter Three A Life Apart

Boundary Maintenance

As we have seen, the social organization of Hasidic communities simultaneously reflects and reinforces Hasidic ideology and practice. In fact, in a broad sense, these communities might be understood as contemporary analogues of Durkheim's (1984) "traditional" societies, where members were bound together by a shared religious worldview and system of values that produced a high degree of internal cohesion. In such societies, according to Durkheim, the individual's role was set at birth, upon his or her entrance into the collective, and a kind of collective morality told members that it was their responsibility to perform specific tasks in order to ensure the survival of the group. Durkheim also asserted that the authority that guided individuals' actions within this social structure was "wholly a manifestation of the common consciousness, an authority that is vast, because the common consciousness itself is highly developed (1984: 131)."

While Durkheim posits that conformity in traditional societies was the result of each individual's internalization of the authority of a "collective consciousness," Coser (1991) contends that it was achieved as a result of the high level of social control exerted on individuals through social surveillance. Coser theorizes that in pre-modern societies, where social roles were generally fixed, an individual's behavior was more visible to the group, making transgression particularly difficult. By contrast, in modern—and particularly urban—societies, Coser argues, people inhabit

multiple, non-overlapping social roles, which makes it much easier to escape scrutiny and remain anonymous.

While it is impossible to actually demonstrate the existence of a collective conscience, it is not difficult to see how the social structure of pre-modern societies could have promoted conformity to group norms through social control. Of course, the fact that Hasidic communities are not artifacts of pre-modernity, but exist contemporaneously with and within a modern, pluralistic society means that they must do a lot more “work” than their traditional pre-modern counterparts to keep members securely in the fold and the outside world at bay. Indeed, as many scholars of modernity have noted, within the modern context it is practically impossible for religious beliefs and practices in general to assume the “taken for granted” character they had in pre-modern times. As Peter Berger²³ notes:

[M]odernity does not necessarily lead to secularism or decline of religion. What it does lead to, necessarily, is pluralism because all the basic movements of modernity — economic globalization, migration, urbanization, mass education, mass communications — all of this creates a situation in which every conceivable belief system and lifestyle rubs against every other. And I think that's inevitable. Now, if you look at what this means in terms of the individual, you can say that religion loses its taken-for-granted status. [T]his taken-for-granted status is lost with the coming of pluralism because you realize there are other possibilities of belief and of life. And therefore people are forced to make choices, and that is a very big change. I've described modernity as a gigantic transformation from destiny to choice. People must choose what they believe, how they define themselves, how they are to live, which is quite a burden.

Thus, it is precisely because they exist within the modern world they seek to reject that Hasidic communities must expend so much effort on defining and maintaining

²³ The transcript of the interview in which Berger made these statements can be found at:

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/globalization/transcript.shtml>

their boundaries and controlling their members;²⁴ indeed, one could argue that within the modern context, social control plays a crucial role in keeping people in the fold, particularly when the “collective conscience” or shared worldview fails to take hold in community members. In this way, Hasidic communities actually share something in common with “intentional” communities,²⁵ although they do not exhibit most, or even many, of their characteristic features.²⁶

Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas, Sivan (1995) describes the creation of the enclave itself—of which Hasidic communities are a good example—as a response to a community’s problem with its boundary.²⁷ The defining relations for the enclave, he notes, are “inside-outside,” or relations between the enclave and what lies beyond its boundaries, rather than “upside-downside,” meaning the relations between the hierarchy of social categories within the enclave community. Heilman (1992) supports this characterization when he writes that “the aspects of life [haredim] seem to emphasize and defend are determined in some measure by the world they see as

²⁴ Orthodox Judaism only became a self-conscious movement in response and opposition to the Reform movement.

²⁵ Alan Wolfe (1992 *Cultivating. Diff.*) makes the point that “the communitarian preference for boundaries, if taken to its logical conclusion, results in a society fundamentally at odds with modernity (312),” which is actually an accurate description of Hasidic communities.

²⁶ They do not, for example, eschew the nuclear family, or regulate emotional ties between parents and children in order to increase allegiance to the group. See the work of Stark and Bainbridge (1996); Kanter (1972); Coser (1974:136 49); and Zablocki (1980:146 88) on intentional communities.

²⁷ While most Hasidic communities are bounded spatially as well as ideologically, the Lubavitchers represent an exception, as their commitment to outreach takes them all over the globe. Nott surprisingly, their boundaries are much more porous. This is both necessary for their proselytizing, but also a result of it. In this way, the social structure of the Lubavitch “community” is unique in the Hasidic world.

²⁸ This is not to imply that Hasidic communities are egalitarian in nature; indeed, as we have seen, there is a fairly clear status-prestige hierarchy within the Hasidic world.

opposing them. Haredim are inextricably linked to the ways of life they oppose. And those are always changing (p.38).”

It is Sivan’s view that particularly when an enclave is created by “pull” (voluntary separation) rather than “push” (exclusion by the outside society), the main rewards it can offer its members are moral, rather than simply emotional, social, or even economic. As such, the enclave culture must stress the voluntary and specially chosen nature of its membership, minimize distinctions between members²⁸ while highlighting the value of each one, and place “the oppressive and morally defiled outside in sharp contrast to the community of virtuous insiders (p. 18),” thereby creating a symbolic—and in certain cases physical—“wall of virtue.”

What then goes on within the confines of this wall? Sivan notes that behavior is paramount within enclaves, and that claims on time and space serve to “regiment and punctuate the cadence of members’ lives (p. 32)” in a way that is markedly different from that of the host society. One need not be more than passingly familiar with the Hasidim to apprehend that some of the most basic ways through which they distinguish themselves—and maintain their separation—from the host culture (and other types of Jews) is through their religious practices.

For example, dietary laws and Sabbath observance effectively bar Hasidic Jews from interacting in certain ways, and at certain times, with those from the outside society (because they cannot eat nonkosher food, for example, Hasidim cannot “break bread” with Gentiles, unless the Gentile eats with them in a nonkosher restaurant; however, given the prohibition against socializing with non-Jews, this can only legitimately occur in business situations). The dietary laws, requirements for

daily prayer (for men) and ritual purification (for women), as well as restrictions on travel during the Sabbath, serve to reinforce the enclave character of these communities, as they make it necessary for members to live in physical proximity to places of worship, ritual baths, kosher butchers and, of course, one another.

In addition to their religious practices, the Hasidim also separate themselves from the surrounding culture symbolically, through their distinctive style of dress²⁹, their gender practices and their use of Yiddish, which is for almost all a first language,³⁰ regardless of where they are born.³¹ Indeed, all strictly Orthodox Jews emphasize styles of dress, both as a way to link themselves to previous generations and to separate themselves not only from non-Jews, but also from contemporary Jews who identify with other (and the implication here is less “authentic”) forms of Judaism. The following is an editorial written in a strictly Orthodox paper, which makes this point quite clearly:

The size of our lapels may change, even the style of our eyeglasses, but there are certain defining articles that link us to an ideology. That ideology includes a commitment to a generation that dedicated their lives to the concept of yeshiva education and the adherence to the directives of gedolei Yisroel. One

²⁹ As noted earlier, many Hasidic sects have their own particular sartorial conventions, which, though likely not easily discerned by the unpracticed eye, are well known to Hasidim in general. For example, Lubavitchers do not wear shtreimels (and also tend to keep their peyos short). Further, even within the sects clothing can be used a means of creating social distinctions; certain garments or styles mark an individual’s social and religious status in the community, and can also communicate something about his or her degree of “modernity.”

³⁰ Most American Hasidim reject the use of modern spoken Hebrew, which they consider debased by its divorce from the holy context of prayer and study. Hasidim reserve the use of (Biblical) Hebrew for textual study.

³¹ Albarelli (2000), in an account of his tenure as an English teacher in a Satmar boys’ school, vividly depicts his students’ resistance to learning English, revealing their well-learned lack of regard for the language and, by extension, the outside culture which it represents.

of these signature articles of clothing, if not the most distinguishable one, has been the fedora-style hat. The black hat. It is what marks a ben Torah, and distinguishes him from all other segments of Jewish society. From the time President John F. Kennedy shucked his fedora at his 1960 inauguration ceremony and replaced it with the new look of freedom, the black hat assumed a heightened significance in society at large. It is the declaration that we still cling to the old generation; we still embrace the old values that we were taught and are not embarrassed to be called 'old-fashioned black hatters.' Indeed, we are proud to be known that way. Wherever we go, we wear our hats. They identify us as members of the Torah community. Others may vilify and deride us. But our hats remain a badge of pride and many of us don't remove them even when we go places where the hat -and we, ourselves- are not especially welcome.

Yated Ne'eman Editorial (by R' Pinchos Lipschutz), January 13, 2006: 3.

Indeed, some people I interviewed were quite critical of this tendency of the strictly Orthodox to define themselves by what they are not. As one man said: "Much of what we do is determined not simply by what is right, but by what is 'not like the freier ["free" or non-religious] do.'" Indeed, this man's comments echo those of many people I interviewed who, as we shall see, have become increasingly critical of the leadership of their communities for precisely this reason.

In his research on Hasidic sects in Montreal, Shaffir (1995) identifies and explores three components of boundary maintenance that he views as central in helping to preserve the distinctive identity of the various groups and their members: the coordination of secular education; proselytizing among the Lubavitcher sect (particularly how the process of trying to recruit adherents, and occasionally finding success, serves to reinforce commitment on the part of the proselytizers); and the negotiation of public controversies. Several authors (Rubin, 1997; Heilman, 1992; Helmreich, 1982; Kranzler, 1995; El-Or, 1994; Albarelli, 2000) have given more detailed consideration to the role of ultra-orthodox and Hasidic educational systems

in reproducing the Hasidic way of life. Within these communities, secular education is seen not only as a distraction from the religious path but, owing to both its content and form (co-ed, non-Jews, etc.), an agent of assimilation. Thus, educating students in their own schools is a means not only of instilling Hasidic values and fostering a sense of Hasidic (or ultra-Orthodox) identity in students, but also of keeping them insulated from information and bodies of knowledge (e.g., historical, scientific), as well as those elements of the outside culture that might challenge their religious worldview.

The Hasidic rejection of most aspects of secular culture³² as “corrupt” and “defiling” (see Heilman, 1992) also serves to create not only a symbolic boundary between the Hasidim and the outside world, but also helps to define and reinforce physical boundaries as well: by officially prohibiting all but absolutely necessary involvement with most secular cultural practices, products and people, the Hasidim render physically “off limits” many of those spaces (e.g., movie theaters, bars, museums, libraries, nonkosher restaurants, etc.) in which secular culture is produced and expressed. As previously discussed, this rejection of secular cultural practices and products is often expressed through warnings or bans issued by rabbis and community watchdogs, which are typically published (in community newspapers and on fliers) and posted or circulated throughout the community.

For example, the following warning appeared some time ago on fliers posted

³² Many people erroneously believe that the Hasidim reject modern technology. This is in fact untrue; Hasidim tend to adopt those elements of “modern” culture in ways that can suit their needs. As Poll, Kranzler and Heilman (among others) have noted, they also take advantage of modern, democratic political institutions and processes, voting in local and national elections and forging links with politicians they feel can benefit their communities.

throughout various Hasidic communities.

The terrible sickness [a Hasidic euphemism for cancer] that is going around today and creating many orphans has never been such an issue as it is today. People are asking, why is it so? The reason is because of the Internet and magazines. Unfortunately, many Jewish homes have the Internet and it is like a burning fire that needs to be extinguished. If you know anyone who has the Internet convince him to drop it. And if you need it for business purposes you should just get J Net [an Internet filtering service].

It is interesting to note the alarmist “medical” angle that is employed here as a means of social control—that is, linking cancer to Internet use and magazines (and, with illness sometimes understood in these communities as a punishment for religious laxity, the implication that God might be involved). The endorsement of social pressure is also quite typical of such warnings.

Below is the text of a letter that was posted in the community, cautioning against a new CD which has become very popular in the Hasidic world, and features the songs of a Hasidic man singing on Hasidic topics, but whose musical style is considered “too modern” (“jazzy”) and thus dangerous:

December 30, 2005

We want to let know the esteemed parents of the kids that it is their responsibility to keep the house from all the jewish-goyish music, especially the new horrifying (jazzy rock and roll) tape [this refers to a new CD by Lipa Schmeltzer, which has been described as jazz with Hasidic lyrics] Keinine hora [name of the tape] which is very damaging to the "rochnies" [loosely understood as holiness] of it's listeners.

May god bless us to be saved of all bad influences that strengthens itself unfortunately with all different "clothes", especially in these holy days of chanukah in which god saved us from the Greeks and the "misyvanim" (Jews who behaved like Greeks). And we should merit generation of 'straight and blessed' without any bad influences in any way. And may we all merit the blessing of " who is used to lighting the candles will have scholered kids" amen.

-Flier attributed to Yeshiva Torah Ve'yireh of Rabeini Yoel of Satmar

In addition, the Hasidic practice of strict gender segregation also functions as a means of boundary maintenance. Not only does it distinguish the Hasidim from “outsiders,” but it also serves to maintain the status quo within the community, and its worldview; segregating members by sex, and assigning them distinct, sex-based social roles, not only reflects but can also be used to “prove” the Hasidic (essentialist) understanding of gender, and this in turn serves to justify and thus perpetuate such segregation. In addition, by preventing men and women from freely socializing (particularly before marriage), these communities guard against the formation of affective relationships that could be destabilizing to the social order. In other words, men and women could form bonds that end up overriding an individual’s commitment to the larger community and its way of life; further, allowing people to choose their partners on the basis of love would certainly undermine the entire *shidduch* system, which is based on reputation and, as such, acts as a powerful means of social control.

The Other: Demonization of the Goyim and the “Secular” World

Attempts to draw and strengthen community boundaries are also made through Hasidic discourse about and depictions of the outside culture. Indeed, in general, all outsiders—except more modern Orthodox Jews, who may be categorized by the somewhat pejorative “*moderne*”—fall into the category of “the *goyim*” (even more liberal Jews are referred to this way). While there are some individuals who are

held up by the community as exceptions, generally the goyim are portrayed as having values and lifestyles that are in direct opposition—and morally inferior—to those of the Hasidim (See Epstein, 1992 on dichotomous distinctions and the role they play in social categorization.). As one woman told me:

[In the community] you are taught that the secular world is so full of evil and schmutz (dirt), and people who do nothing but do drugs and have sex all day that you are not even remotely interested in it. You are actually disgusted by it, and even scared of it. And you feel so sorry for those poor people who don't have our beautiful Torah.

Through reading published documents, attending formal and informal communal events and speaking with community members, it became clear to me that this view of outsiders is promulgated by community leaders and educators, and often reinforced in the home (I did meet individuals who took issue with this distinction and were trying to counteract the instruction their children were receiving on the matter in school). As one man wrote:

I'm [the] "Shabbos Groups" [leader] at my Shul and every year when I teach the [blessings] and I ask what a goy is (in the bracha "se lo' asani goy") inevitably [sic] some child will say a goy is a bad person, or a non-jewish person who is bad (these are kids aged 3-7). It's very hard to undo a lifetime of indoctrination in an hour or two a week but I try.

I myself experienced this firsthand when I attended a women's lecture on modesty, during which the organizers showed slides of images taken from magazines, depicting scantily clad models of both sexes, as well as photos of young people kissing and smoking and drinking at rock concerts. These images were presented to the audience as representative of the "outside world," and used to highlight the clear moral superiority of Hasidic culture. Indeed, while the speakers on the panel did

acknowledge regretfully that the Hasidic world was also dealing with certain problems—like a growing emphasis on materialism, for example—these problems were always described as having “made their way into” the Hasidic community from outside it; there was no suggestion that any of these problems could have been generated by or within the community itself was not even suggested.³³

The Hasidic belief in the essential, almost ontological difference (See Epstein, 1992) of goyim is from themselves is reflected not only in how Hasidic people are taught to think about the goyim, but how to behave toward them as well. As one person wrote:

We all know that we are taught that "other" races are animals. And if they're animals, why should we treat them as human. We can steal from animals, we can do whatever we want to them. The sad thing is that when people mention this, you're labeled some sort of modernish person. As only a modern person believes to treat others equally.

Several people told me that this attitude actually has roots in Jewish law itself and indicated that, from the perspective of Jewish law, the life of a “goy” has less value than that of a Jew. One man gave the example that the Gemara (the second part of the Talmud) says that while a Jew is obligated to save the life of another Jew, even it means violating Shabbos, no such obligation exists with respect for saving the life of a “goy.” According to this man and others, the only reason a Jew would save a non-Jewish life on the Sabbath would be to avoid non-Jews finding out and exacting some kind of retribution.

³³ More recently, I have heard people within the community acknowledge that certain aspects of the “system” might be contributing to particular problems, like the fact that the pressure put on boys to be scholars might be leading some who cannot live up to expectations to abuse drugs and alcohol.

While it seems more than likely that this rarely becomes an issue in practice, the widespread view of the “goyim” as “the other” seems to legitimate behaving in certain ways toward them—and secular institutions more generally—that would be considered “deviant” (or criminal) by mainstream society. Indeed, many people I interviewed reported that there was no stigma attached, for example, to cheating the government, and one woman recounted how, as a young child, she was taught “the Torah says it’s ok to cheat a goy.” She explained how she was also told that the only way doing so would only be considered a *chilul hashem* (desecration of God’s name, and therefore a sin) was if the “goy” actually discovered he was being cheated, because this would “bring a bad name to the Jews.”

In this context, the term “goy” used to characterize not only individuals but entire institutions—most notably, the government. Several people I interviewed detailed elaborate schemes engaged in by themselves or others to evade taxes, illegally obtain government funds and launder money. For example, I learned that it is quite typical for community members to “donate” large sums of money to local yeshivas—from which the yeshiva takes a cut—in order to hide income. I also heard repeatedly from those I interviewed about how people who hide their income do so in part to take advantage of food stamps and other government benefits to which poor people are entitled. Several men I met who were in the real estate business described how they routinely engaged in bank fraud, paying kickbacks to appraisers for filing inflated appraisals of their real estate investments and thus enabling them to get

bigger mortgages; these individuals would then make some superficial improvements in the property and then flip it for \$10-\$20,000 above the recorded purchase price³⁴.

Some Hasidim I spoke with posited that these attitudes and behaviors might have less to do with this dichotomous view of the world as divided into Hasidim and goyim, and more with the sense that, among the Hasidim, there is a the belief that it is all right to do whatever is necessary in order to properly fulfill God's commandments. As one man hypothesized, for people who see themselves as commanded by God to have large families and by their leaders to avoid secular education, cheating the government by committing tax fraud is justified if it helps them fulfill religious requirements. Regardless of whether or not this explanation reflects the thinking of those who engage in such behavior, there is little doubt that sense of being "different" and separate from the outside society may play a role in people's less than strict adherence to the law of the land (even though Jewish law also requires this). As one Hasidic man wrote:

[Obeying the law of the land] is given at best lip service. when treated seriously, they limit it to tax-collection in the most narrow understanding of the context.... and then go ahead and dodge paying taxes anyway. they have zero respect for any non-jewish authority. it's the zeitgeist around here. jews good, goyim bad.

Indeed, these comments only attest to the overall success of Hasidic boundary maintenance mechanisms.

³⁴ For more on these various schemes, see: "Hasidic Scams Net Jail Terms: Judge Says Crimes Showed Chutzpah" The Houston Chronicle, June 15, 2003, A:13; "Man Gets Six Years for Fraud Involving Hasidic Enclave" by Robert F. Worth. The New York Times. May 23, 2002. B2; "Huge Tax Scam Exposed: Religious Group Issued Phony Receipts for Tens of Millions" by David Johnston. The Gazette (Montreal,Quebec), A1.

While this rather casual attitude toward civil law can be understood as a consequence of the cognitive boundary the Hasidim erect between themselves and the goyim, it might also function as a means of promoting social stability. That is, legitimizing fraud against outsiders may diminish the need to cheat or cut corners in financial dealings with insiders—a situation that could lead to the erosion of social trust and cohesion within the community. Thus, adhering to the law of the land when it applies to financial matters becomes less important than maintaining internal stability. This situation is not unique to the Hasidim, but might be characteristic of other “traditional” cultures and societies with similar social needs. As Raybeck (1988) writes of the Kelantanese³⁵:

[T]he emphasis on village integrity and the importance of village-level social life and values lead Kelantanese to take a relativistic position with regard to state definitions of deviance. The state regards certain acts as illegal and formally labels the actors as ‘criminals,’ yet villagers may take a very different view of these matters, especially if they involve indigenous cultural behavior...If the Kelantanese are rather cavalier about many behaviors that violate state and national laws, they are very concerned with behavior that endangers the solidarity and harmony of the village, and threats to village welfare (pp. 384-5).

From this perspective then, it is easy to see how something like openly violating religious commandments—the observance of which is a cornerstone of Hasidic identity—would be perceived as a greater threat to social solidarity and harmony than, for example, falsifying welfare documents.

Leavers as the “Other”

³⁵ Kelantan is a Malaysian state, located in the northeastern corner of the peninsula.

I have also discovered that communal boundaries are reinforced through both the official and informal discourse about and reactions to people who have abandoned the Hasidic way of life. One man told me that, when confronted with his decision to leave the community altogether, his father told him that he “was worse than Hitler” because he was a Jew who was “killing” his own Jewish identity by rejecting religion. Indeed, the language used to refer to people who leave is particularly revealing. They are variously described as having “gone off the *derech* (path),” or become “frei” (free) or “freid out.” Of course, in this context being “free” is regarded as a negative, the moral antithesis of someone who is on the religious path, “yoked” to the Torah. Notably, while as previously noted, Hasidim will use the term “moderne” to refer to someone who is religious but modern, there is no terminology with which to discuss other branches of Judaism. All non-Orthodox Jews tend to be referred to as “secular” or “frei,” which is a linguistic way of rendering the various other denominations non-existent.

People who leave these communities are also often described as having become “goys,” or are referred to as “*shiksas*” or “*shaigetzes*,” disparaging terms used to refer to female and male non-Jews respectively. Indeed, using such language to describe people who have left the community is essentially a way of linguistically denying or “revoking” their status as Jews, although Hasidim will acknowledge that no matter what one’s level of observance, having a Jewish mother means you are a Jew. It is interesting to note, however, that many who leave these communities will label themselves as *shiksas* or *shaigetzes*, re-appropriating these terms and wearing

them proudly. Indeed, one blogger calls himself “The ShaigetZ” and another uses an icon to represent herself that reads “Shiksa” in colorful letters.

In my discussions with “on the derech” Hasidim, those who had left the fold were typically described as being somehow “defective,” their decision to leave a result of “mental problems,” being “special ed” (i.e., stupid), a lack of ability to control their lust, or a desire to pursue “freedom” and “empty” adventure. As one blogger put it:

There are tracks already layed [sic] out to a certain secure destination...To simply hop off the tracks, in search of an ‘adventure’ and ‘freedom’ is foolhardy and unsafe.

Indeed, people who leave these communities are portrayed almost universally by and among insiders as living “meaningless” lives, despite any evidence to the contrary. The belief that anyone who leaves Hasidic life is destined for moral corruption is illustrated by the following comments, made on the blog of a woman who is no longer religious:

anonymous said...

Now that you consider yourself modern, do you screw around a lot?

anonymous said...

why does being modern mean you are going to screw around a lot? if that were true, thousands of chassidim would have to be considered "modern," what with all the prostitutes, strip clubs, swappers and swingers

Clearly, speaking about those who leave the community in pitying or disparaging terms, describing their lives as unsuccessful and using their experiences

as “cautionary tales” serves to make the option of leaving these communities appear supremely unattractive. It also serves de-legitimize such people and, by extension, any criticisms they might have of the Hasidic way of life. In essence, they become “misfits” and “freaks,” and are placed squarely outside the borders of the community.

In fact, many Hasidim I spoke with seemed to think that those who leave the community undergo a complete ontological transformation. One man’s father told him that he expected his personality to have changed radically after he had shaved his beard. Another woman, who moved away from her community and is no longer religious, told me that she often receives phone calls from men still in the community, asking her for sexual favors (including getting paid to join a threesome with them and their wives); according to her, most of these assume that because she left the Hasidic way of life, she will be willing to engage in any behavior that might have been considered “off limits” within the Hasidic world: “It’s like they think I am a whore,” she explained. “If their way of life is moral, anyone outside is immoral. To them it’s black and white.” This seems to attest to the effectiveness of Hasidic indoctrination about the larger society and outsiders.

This phenomenon of identifying those who have left the community as “goyim” or “shiksas” seems to represent a deviation from the historical communal response of traditional Jews to those who have abandoned Orthodox practice. With the advent of the Enlightenment and the Reform movement, Jews who remained observant of Jewish law were forced to grapple with how to deal with those who ceased to be religious. As a solution, Ferziger (2005) writes:

[A] perception evolved within Orthodoxy that accepted the idea that all Jews were part of a greater whole, yet by contrast to the “egalitarian” nature of the

enclave, an internal distinction was forged between those who behaved properly and professed traditional beliefs and those who deviated from these tenets... The result of the evolution of this process within Orthodoxy was that a certain type of labeling came into being, not one between those of equal footing who were “insiders” as opposed to those outside. Rather, one can speak of gradations within a shared system. There were “grade A” Jews, and “grade B” Jews and possibly even “grade C” Jews. As Mary Douglas puts it: “Whereas in an enclave, tension is explicitly on the relation inside and outside, in hierarchy it is on the up-down dimension of authority.”

(<http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/toc/14135.html>)

Ferziger goes on to explain the benefits of this strategy, both for the Orthodox themselves, as well as the larger Jewish world:

Within the realities of the modern world there were clear advantages for the Orthodox in adopting such a multi-tier construction of Jewish society. On a practical level it served two needs. It enabled the Orthodox to protest and deride the views and lifestyles that were becoming prevalent among the majority of the Jews, and to which they were absolutely opposed. This, in turn, engendered a process of strengthened group identity among themselves. But it also derived from a realistic appraisal of how modern Jewish society differed from its traditional predecessors. It represented a realization that in a world in which deviance had become normative, an absolutely exclusionary approach was untenable. Room had to be made for those who identified as Jews despite having abandoned traditional Jewish practice, without legitimizing their actions.

(<http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/toc/14135.html>)

There is no doubt that contemporary Hasidim are taught to “protest and deride the views and lifestyles” of non-religious Jews. However, with the exception of the Lubavitchers, this multi-tiered system no longer seems to exist for them, either linguistically or conceptually (nobody speaks of “bad Jews,” but instead of “the freier,” which, significantly, leaves out any reference to Jewishness). As we shall see,

this has some serious implications for those who transgress, and even leave these communities.

While all of the above has demonstrated the many ways in which the Hasidic community works to maintain and strengthen its boundaries, its efforts are necessarily aided and reinforced by those outside its borders. For example, politicians who rely on Hasidic votes (these communities typically vote in a bloc) will often promote policies and support legislation that protects these communities' right to maintain their distinctive practices, unhindered by too much government oversight. However, there has also been a history of opposition by outsiders to the expansion of various Hasidic communities, for a variety of reasons.³⁶

Social Cohesion

While their distinctive religious and social practices serve to create clear boundaries between the Hasidim and the surrounding society, they also function as a kind of performance of members' commitment to the community itself. Any deviation from behavioral expectations or norms becomes cause for suspicion within the community about the strength or seriousness of one's commitment not only to God and the tenets of the religion, but also to the community and its way of life. Indeed, during the course of my fieldwork, I often heard Hasidim claim that, within the community, acting "as if" is always preferable to abandoning practice, even if one is not sure he or she actually believes. The explanation for this seems to be twofold: 1) that abandoning practice implies an abandonment of the religion and of

³⁶ For an example of this see "Worlds Apart: Looming Land War Sparks Home-Buying Frenzy in Woodbury" by Chris McKenna. December 5, 2004. *Times Herald Record*, 01:03.

the religious or sacred community, and 2) that behaving “as if” can ultimately result in internal changes as well—a kind of religious cognitive therapy. Indeed, one woman who was interviewed for this research claimed that in her Lubavitch community the sayings, “Al tifrosh min hatzibor” (“Do not separate yourself from the community”) and “What isn’t for the sake of heaven will eventually be for the sake of heaven,” were often invoked to make this very point. Further, the Orthodox emphasis on behavior finds additional support in the concept of *maris ayin*, which holds that people should refrain from doing something that, while technically permissible under Jewish law, nonetheless gives the appearance of law-breaking (e.g. sitting in a nonkosher restaurant even if you are not eating the food).

Some of those interviewed for this study reported that they felt that within the Hasidic world, a preoccupation with outward appearances has come even to supersede concerns about personal character or ethical behavior. In fact, Helmreich (personal communication) has hypothesized that this emphasis on ritual practice even over ethics might function almost unconsciously as a means of distinguishing Hasidic Judaism—and its practitioners—from both other branches of Judaism (including Modern Orthodoxy) as well as other religions, which also address themselves to questions of ethical behavior. In this view, ritual performance becomes even more important than adhering to universal ethical values, as it is ultimately the religion’s distinctive ritual practices that set Judaism apart from other religions, and, as such, “make” religious Jews Jews.

Related to this emphasis on practice, Helmreich and others have also noted the effect on community cohesiveness of introducing new restrictions into the community

(Helmreich and Shinnar, 1998; Berger, 2004). Discovering new, potential violations of Jewish law represents a form of “boundary work,” as so doing allows community members to reinforce and emphasize shared common values, as well as demonstrate their own adherence to the tenets of their faith while separating themselves from their non-Hasidic co-religionists. While community members who do not recognize these new “discoveries” as valid may be branded “irreligious,”³⁷ such discoveries are also used to draw clearer boundaries around the Hasidic community and mark its separation from more modern Orthodox communities, whose members do not adopt them.

A recent example involves the controversy over the safety of a practice known as “oral suction,” which is used during the circumcision ritual in Hasidic communities. In insisting that this practice is mandated by Jewish law and thus cannot be altered, representatives of the Hasidic community placed themselves in direct opposition to secular health officials, who were attempting to regulate the procedure because of its demonstrated health risks to the baby. Not only did this serve to draw a clear boundary between the Hasidic and secular worlds, but also between the Hasidic and Modern Orthodox communities, the latter of which does not engage in the practice and is generally portrayed by Hasidim as insufficiently religious and too “modern.” Of course, it is important to note here that Modern Orthodoxy represents a clear threat to the Hasidic way of life as it presents an alternative to the Hasidim’s strict segregation from secular society.

³⁷ In the situation, previously described, where many women resisted the ban on Indian wigs, the women were not in fact branded irreligious. This may have had to do with the fact that so many seemed to ignore the ban, or—perhaps more likely—that it is hard to tell by sight precisely what kind of wig a woman is wearing.

Preventing Deviation from Rules and Norms

The Belief System

In order to foster conformity and prevent deviation from rules and norms, Hasidic communities tend to rely mostly on informal means of social control, established through the process of socialization and expressed through customs, norms and mores. Of course, one of the most basic means of social control is the ideology, or belief system itself and, specifically, the fear of incurring punishment from God for violating His commandments, or straying from “the righteous path.” Indeed, within these communities, both communal and individual suffering and tragedy tend to be interpreted (at least “officially” by rabbis) as punishment from God. The most striking examples of this are the Satmar and (penultimate) Lubavitcher rebbe’s respective views on the causes of the Holocaust; while the former believed the Holocaust was caused by the Zionists for attempting to bring Jews back to Israel before the coming of the Messiah, the latter held that it was punishment from God for Jewish assimilation in Europe.³⁸ Even today, individual tragic events are interpreted as “lessons” from God. As noted earlier, a car crash in which three young Hasidim were killed led rabbis in Williamsburg to exhort women to wear longer skirts and more “modest” head coverings. In another instance, after a woman was accidentally killed in Monsey, the rabbis there decided that there should

³⁸ See *Va’Yoel Moshe*, the Satmar rebbe’s work, in which he “blames” the Holocaust on the Zionists. Also, the 6th Lubavitcher rebbe’s belief that the Holocaust was God’s punishment for Jewish assimilation in Europe.

be separate streets for men and women; perhaps mixing of the sexes on the sidewalks had angered God.

Predicating Access to Communal Institutions on Conformity

Of course, there are myriad ways in which Hasidic communities exert control over their members that are not related directly to Hasidic theology. In his seminal work on the Hasidic community of Williamsburg, Solomon Poll (1962) describes the variety of informal social controls that existed at the time of his study, including: restricting congregational membership to those who promised total conformity to Hasidic norms; requiring members, for example, to state that they did not have television or radios in their homes; the “indoctrination and socialization” of young people toward conformity; the encouragement of young men to continue their religious study after marriage; the prohibition against contact with the outside society via secular media; and the discouragement of contact with “outsiders.”

There are a variety of social controls that are employed specifically for the purposes of discouraging prohibited contact with the outside world. For example, most Hasidic yeshivas require prospective parents to sign a document stating that they will *not* engage in a whole list of behaviors if their children enroll in the school. For example, I learned through an informant that the Bobov Yeshiva in Boro Park requires parents to sign off on the following, if they plan to enroll their children in the school: they will not bring any secular books, magazines or newspapers into their homes; they do not own a TV or radio, or have access to the Internet in their homes (if they need it for business purposes, they are required to get a special dispensation

from a rabbi, approved by the yeshiva; they will not listen to the radio in the car; that they will not allow their children to use the Internet outside the home. The document goes on to specify the size of the husband and male children's yarmulkes and the type and length of wig the mother must wear. It also prohibits children from eating in neighborhood kosher pizza stores, allowing them to enter only to pick up take-out meals. There are also questions about where the husband *davens* (prays), both during the week and on Shabbos. The application makes it clear that the violation of any of these rules can result in a child's expulsion from the school.

Gossip

Much of what Poll described continues to apply today. Despite the Jewish prohibition against gossip³⁹, it is in fact rampant in these communities (indeed, gossip is the engine of the most basic agent of community reproduction: the Hasidic system of marriage). As noted earlier, those who become known to be violating Hasidic norms can expect to be gossiped about in the community, which generally leads to feelings of shame on the part of the subject, and possibly the loss of one's "good name." (Indeed the community has a variety of terms to describe such people, ranging

³⁹ Within Jewish law there is a prohibition against gossip, or *lashon hara* (Hebrew for "evil tongue") Lashon hara can be either spoken or written and generally refers to true statements (although untrue gossip is also prohibited). The main prohibition against *Lashon Hara* is derived from Leviticus 19:16 [1], which states: "Do not go as a gossiper amongst your people." The Talmud (tractate *Erchin* 15b) lists *lashon hara* as one of the causes of the Biblical malady of *tzaraath* (leprosy). In Sotah 42a, the Talmud states that habitual speakers of *lashon hara* are not tolerated in God's presence. Similar strong denunciations can be found in various places in Jewish literature. The two major halakhic works on lashon hara are: *Chafetz Chayim* and *Shmirat HaLashon* (guarding the tongue) both by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1873). *Chafetz Chaim* lists 31 speech-related mitzvot mentioned in the Torah.

from the vaguely pejorative “moderne” to describe those who may have a more modern appearance to “bummy,” “rebellious,” “*oisvorf*” [outcast; lowlife] and “grubber ying” [rough neck], to name only a few.)

One woman told me that she hides her English language books for fear of being called “too modern” by neighbors who might visit her house. Another noted that if you did not have a child within a year of your wedding, or if too much time had passed between the births of your children, people in the community would gossip about you, speculating about what might be “wrong” with you and whether you were taking birth control pills.

One man, whose transgressions (including the fact that he has a Web site) were discovered by some of his close friends, described his experience with gossip this way:

I get the disbelieving phone calls from people "some idiot, and I'm not going to name him, called me up, telling me that you have a website that decries the Rebbe" was one version I heard. Thank God that he didn't believe the bad-mouth, For if he would, I'm certain that his next phone call would not be to me, but to his other good friend—what else are friends for if not to exchange gossip?

Things have become ridiculously funny too. I would have a laughing. Fit for weeks to come had the joke not been on me. Rumor has me Involved in every little scuffle that has the potential of a scandalous Show. Sometimes I wish that I were just a paranoid nut with the desperate need of some anti depressant, but life is stronger than wishes of that sort.

Last week my cell phone blurted out the voice of one misfit who I Have been told was in some sort of disagreement with the establishment in his shul. Word has gotten around that I am involved in it too. Naturally disowning the imaginary tale didn't help me much, trying to resort to joking about it only fuels the gossip, but I refuse to Give up. That was until the misfit in his glory had the nerve to call me Up asking me to please share with him the in depth sketch of my contribution to his sorry state. I had hoped to convince him that He should know better, that his whole debacle has nothing to do with Me and that rumors are just that, rumors. But Mr. Misfit wouldn't hear any of it. Having a persuasive nature almost convinced me that I caused him all this

trouble.

The System of Marriage

Without a doubt, however, one of the most important mechanisms of informal social control in these communities is the Hasidic system of marriage. As noted earlier, within the Hasidic world, arranged marriages are the norm, and a family's pedigree (*yiches*) is of paramount importance in the selection of mates (among other things). Being known as someone who violates "official" prohibitions and crosses boundaries can damage not only one's own reputation, but the *yiches* of the entire family (and, by association, even close friends). Goffman (1963: 30-31) describes this as "courtesy stigma."

As a result, community members expend a great deal of effort not only to maintain their *yiches*, but also to investigate the *yiches* claims of others (this is often done through surrogates: typically, professional matchmakers). This, of course, promotes a high degree of social surveillance within these communities and, as such, motivates people to become adept at hiding their own transgressions. Indeed, the fear of damaging their children's *yiches* is the reason many give for remaining in the community to begin with.

I had a personal experience with this when I was asked by his family to take a Hasidic man to a hospital for psychiatric care on Shabbos (Friday evening). Even though he was barely able to stand, his relatives insisted that I walk him to the outskirts of the neighborhood before hailing a cab, so that the neighbors wouldn't see him violating Shabbos and wonder why. I was also instructed to make sure that the taxi driver bringing him home from the hospital drop him at least three blocks from

the house, for the same reason. The family was ultimately concerned not about the violation of the Sabbath, but the possibility that if anyone in the neighborhood saw him emerge from a cab, people would immediately begin investigating what had happened, ultimately discovering that he had gone to the hospital. Keeping this information off the community grapevine was considered paramount as several of this young man's younger siblings and cousins were entering the marriage market and his relatives believed this would be a decisive strike against them.

Modesty Patrols

This social surveillance is employed not only in the service of ascertaining the wishes of potential mates, but also to ensure that members are not threatening social stability by their non-conformity. Many people told me about the existence of community "modesty patrols" (*mishmeris hatznius*) whose members (usually self-appointed) monitor people's dress and behavior within (and even outside of) the community.⁴⁰ One divorced woman I interviewed received repeated phone calls and letters from such a group, apparently because word had "gotten out" that she was hosting divorced men in her home for Shabbos meals. The woman was warned that this was "inappropriate" behavior and was threatened that her young children would be thrown out of school (because such groups have no legal authority to physically evict people from the community, they have to rely on denying them and their families access to community institutions). This is how she described the situation:

⁴⁰ Many people told me that the main focus of these patrols was the monitoring of "inappropriate" sexual behavior.

But for me, it breathes down your throat, everything you do. They tap your phones. They tapped my phones. The people in the community. I am pretty sure they tapped my phones because they came back at me with things they wouldn't know without tapping my phones.

They tapped the phone and they threatened me not to go over to this friend and that friend. People telling me where to go. I said, make me a list of all the people you think I should go and I should not go and I'll check it off. Send it to me. Come on. It's my life. And these people shouldn't come to your house. It's our shtetl, our community. My husband brought over some friends for dinner and they found out and it's not so kosher for them. And some divorced guys. But in my house I'm the boss and if you don't like it mind your own. I don't come over to your house and tell you who to take. I'm hurting people? I'm going around listening to other peoples' phone conversations?

Of course, in a community whose perpetuation depends in large part on its ability to channel young people into early marriages and childrearing, allowing single people to socialize freely (and to experience romantic love) could pose a serious threat to social stability (See Goode, 1959).

During the course of my research I also became aware of the ways in which people's actual bodies are controlled within these communities, and how this can serve to prevent deviation from norms, as well as "risky" boundary crossing. As previously discussed, Hasidic people must adhere to a strict code of dress, dictated both by religious interpretations of modesty and sartorial custom. As noted earlier, Hasidic men are forbidden from shaving their beards and must grow peyos. Women are required to dress in a manner that does not expose their knees, elbows, collarbones, or, if married, hair (which they typically cover with scarves, hats, or wigs, depending on the custom of their particular sect and family). In many communities it is customary for married women to shave their heads completely, to avoid even the accidental exposure of hair. Concerns with modesty, or *tznuis*, also

dictate that women in general should not seek to draw attention to themselves, by, for example, laughing loudly or appearing to enjoy themselves too much in public.

Social and sexual relations are also highly regulated in the Hasidic world. Extreme sex segregation is employed to prevent people from forming friendships with members of the opposite sex, or romantic relationships before marriage. (Indeed, this segregation also serves as a means of undermining social solidarity in general, preventing members from organizing “movements” of resistance and/or for social change.) Pre-marital sex is forbidden, and, once married, couples must adhere to the laws of family purity (*TaHaras HaMishpacha*), which dictate that they refrain from any physical contact with each other when the wife is menstruating, and during the week after her period has ended. Women must also attend the *mikvah*, or ritual bath, to purify themselves after menstruation. Indeed it is possible to see the practice of arranged marriage and the emphasis on large families as means of controlling people’s bodies as well.

One blogger I came to know during the course of my research described, in writing, the process by which he came to internalize the Hasidic understanding of gender and sexuality. His account demonstrates the effect of that process not only on his thoughts and actions, but also on the very way he carried and related to his own body:

This state of perplexity only got worse, when after a few months later I entered mesivta (equivalent to high school) it didn’t take too long and my Rosh Yeshiva (dean of the school) started preaching this crazy nonsense with far greater silliness. He used to explain to us how a chasidsher (Hasidic) bucher (boy) needs to refrain from any contact with women, be it physical, or even looking, or more so one shouldn’t even think of them. Now that I look back I realize that he enjoyed himself immensely in the shoveveim period (it’s a six week period when it is understood by Chasidim that time to be prone to

repent on any sins one committed in the field of sex) where he got to speak his mind on this topic with far greater detail and zealousness. As a result of his shmoosin, I started walking the streets with my hat pulled over my eyes and my eyeglasses removed for the duration of the walk and for extra protection I was hunched over looking at the ground as not to - god forbid - catch a glimpse of any of gods beautiful creations. The psychological damage that this caused was huge. It took me years to somewhat recover.

I have also found that the female body in particular is a “site” over which many community controversies are played out, including the wig ban alluded to earlier, and the response to a fatal car crash, which involved pleas from rabbis and watchdogs to women to dress more modestly and suggesting that the deaths might be a “warning” (presumably from God) about the dangers of relaxing female standards of modesty. Recently the upstate New York community of Monsey issued a “reminder” that women should not drive, or even ride bicycles, which was explained by a concern with female modesty (see “Hasidic Village Keeps Women out of the Driver’s Seat.” By Stephen I. Weiss. *The Forward*, Oct. 14, 2005. Online). The prohibition also claimed it was improper for women even to sit in the front seat of cars, and to go outside wearing the long housecoats that many Hasidic women typically wear when at home.

Indeed, in the wake of this announcement, the following was posted on the message board of a Web site frequented by disaffected Hasidim:

Apparently, there is a new evil to be battled. I am referring, of course, to the horribly immodest practice that is tearing down the walls of decency in our society: Women driving automobiles. Several stern paragraphs detailed the unspeakable atrocity of this behavior, and warned in the strictest terms against allowing it under any circumstances. The poster was signed by a dozen or so chassidish [rabbis].

In fact, one woman who had left her community 10 years ago reported having stones thrown at her car by young boys as she drove down the community's main road.

Of course, prohibiting women from driving serves to control them by severely limiting their mobility, something these communities attempt to do in other ways as well. In fact, recently leaders in Williamsburg considered adding extra grades to high school in order to prevent women from going to work (and thus potentially being exposed to the outside world) before marriage, a practice that is somewhat common in the Hasidic world. The following was written by a man who attended a meeting where this issue, among others, was discussed. He wrote:

THIS JUST IN.....

At the "Asifah" last night, in Ateres Avrohom, there were 2 speakers. Rabbi Tauber (Ezriel Tauber's brother) and Rabbi Berel Katz.

The hall was packed with men from the neighborhood.

Topics under discussion: They are recommending and deciding that girls continue to go to school, 13th grade, 14th grade - up until the wedding. NO MORE WORKING for the girls. Too dangerous, too many temptations.

After the wedding, instead of sitting and learning, the boy must go to work, give up the kollel, because his wife should be at home, and not in an office where she is open to temptations....Cell phones out; it was mentioned that there are yiddish porn 900 numbers, so no cell phones - Internet out - obvious reasons.

Control of Speech

I also discovered that there are several traditional concepts that also exert control over community members, particularly with respect to their speech. These include the prohibition against gossip (*loshan hara*), the concept of *chilul Hashem* (desecration of God's name) and the traditional antipathy toward informing (*mesira*). In many cases, community members who wish to air legitimate grievances against

community leaders or members (with respect to illegal or abusive behavior, for example) are accused of *lashon hara*. Often, making negative, public comments about the community can lead to accusations of “making a chilul Hashem.” Going to the outside authorities to report criminal behavior or other wrong-doing is frowned upon in the Hasidic world, and those who do it are branded “informers,” a sin which at one time was punishable by death⁴¹, and is now often met with efforts to discredit and ostracize the “informer” within the community. Of course, all of this serves to discourage contact with outsiders and the outside world—even when such contact might actually benefit individuals within the community (victims of sexual abuse, for example).

Limiting Secular Education

In addition to its aforementioned role in the creation and maintenance of group boundaries, the Hasidic educational system also functions as a means of social control. In limiting its students’ secular education (very little beyond the state mandated “basics”) and failing to grant credentials that have meaning in the outside

⁴¹ There are several places in the Talmud where it is stated that it is prohibited to inform on Jews to the secular government, even when their conduct is a violation of secular law, and also when their conduct is a violation of Jewish law. While there are a number of exceptions to this prohibition, Jewish law prohibits such informing absent specific circumstances. An informer is called a *moser* and classical Jewish law treats a person who repeatedly informs on others as a pursuer (a *rodef*). A *rodef* may be killed to prevent him from informing, even without a formal court ruling. The prohibition of informing apparently derives from three different talmudic incidents (For more on this, see “Informing on Others for Violating American Law: A Jewish Law” by Rabbi Michael J. Broyde. In *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 41:5, 2002.)

world,⁴² the Hasidic system of schooling not only prevents community members from entering most of the professions, but also leaves them ill-equipped to navigate the outside world more generally, were they wont to do so. One man I interviewed liked to refer to his community as a “gateless ghetto,” and noted that, while nobody could “force” you to remain within it, the lack of preparation for dealing with so many aspects of the outside society made it very difficult for people to transgress in any serious way, let alone leave. As one man said:

Hasidic people they don't know English, you can break your teeth on it. I went 4 years to English when I was a little kid and the teacher knew less than me...Even though I am a Yankee like four generations here in America. But it's my second language. I can't speak it normally, I'm not reading it.

The Fear of Sanctions

Within the Hasidic world, those who transgress run the risk of rejection (possibly even permanently) by loved ones (particularly spouses) and sometimes friends who believe that their behavior is a serious affront to the core values and practices of the community. Even those who might be able to accept or excuse such behavior from a loved one are often motivated to distance themselves from him in order to avoid what Goffman (1963) refers to as “courtesy stigma,” or the tendency of an individual’s stigma to “spread” to others close to him and “contaminate” their yiches. Further, those who become publicly identified as transgressors can be denied access to communal institutions and generally ostracized in the community—consequences that can extend to their children and other family members.

⁴² In the past 10-15 years, more and more vocational programs have been created for Hasidim. There are also courses in accounting and computer programming. Among women, education and social work or counseling programs are gaining popularity as means of acquiring skills and credentials. These programs are often offered through institutions that serve a primarily religious clientele and are set up to reflect their particular needs (e.g., single sex classes).

Indeed, more than anything it seems to me that the fear of bringing shame to oneself and one's family, and the subsequent social ostracism one may experience, play a tremendous role in keeping Hasidic people from transgressing, or at least keeping their transgressions hidden and private. One Hasidic man I interviewed summed it up best when he wrote:

If my wife or family only knew what I think of the Torah, if the Rabbi or my friends would see what I do behind closed doors, life as I know it would cease to exist. I would be ostracized by the community, divorced by my wife, shunned by my parents, boycotted at work, and rejected by my friends.

Chapter Four

Responses to Transgression

Introduction

Despite all the effort these communities put into maintaining their boundaries and exerting social control over their members, their methods are, of course, not foolproof. The fact is that Hasidim can and do violate communal norms, and exploit the inevitable cracks in their communities' symbolic walls (why and how they do so—as well as the issues it raises—will be the subject of the next several chapters). While the majority of Hasidim I interviewed have managed to violate norms and cross boundaries without being discovered (at least by those who would take action against them), I also met those for whom this was not the case.

Sanctions within these communities tend to be informal and primarily involve shame and stigmatization rather than concrete punishments or penalties. While the Hasidim do have their own system of justice, made up of rabbinical courts which rule on all manner of disputes within the community, these courts' power rests on community reaction, as they lack the ability to impose concrete punishment, such as jail time. In other words, the courts derive their power from the fact that those who disobey their rulings may be ostracized from the community: they will not be called up to the Torah, will have trouble finding a *shidduch*, and their family name will come into disrepute. A newspaper like the *Jewish Press* might issue a “*seruv*” which means that their recalcitrance (e.g., the refusal of a husband to grant his wife a divorce) is published, and others are discouraged from having contact with them.

Despite all this, the rabbinical courts do not have the power to physically expel someone from the community. Further, there is evidence to suggest that these courts are not impartial and that people who are guilty of violations are not always found so by the rabbinical court.

Individual and Institutional Responses to Deviance

Tolerance for Private Rule Breaking

As previously noted, I have found that some families/spouses seem to be more tolerant than others of certain kinds of officially prohibited behavior (like watching movies or reading newspapers), as long as those engaging in it are able to keep it private (so it will not negatively affect the family's reputation in the community). The following, written by a Hasidic man, describes an interaction with his wife around his plans to go out to a movie with a friend:

I made sure the kids were not around and turned to my wife and asked her if it is ok with her that I go watch a movie tonight. "I don't mind you going, but call home at eight to make sure the kids are behaving and going to bed," she said. I assured her that I will call.

As I picked up the phone to call my friend I murmured, "I'll call Betzalel and tell him that you said it's ok if I go watch a movie tonight. "Hey!!! I never said that" my wife protest. Puzzled, I looked at her for an explanation, "I don't want your friend Betzalel getting the impression that I said it is ok to go to the movies" she explained, half smiling. "Oh sorry, you're right; I'll tell him that you said it's ok with you that I go out tonight. And I will add that you don't condone a chasidisher yingerman going to the movies" I reassured her.

I called my friend, and confirmed that I will be going with him.

Of course, this kind of private tolerance does not, in my experience, tend to extend to people who violate religious commandments or express heretical views,

with the exception of the apparently extremely rare circumstances where a sibling or spouse shares the heretical point of view. With a few exceptions, I have found that the more tolerant families—which are often referred to as “more modern” or “open-minded”—are baalebatish (their members work in business for a living), and thus are not involved in the religious administration of the community. Indeed, it is possible that this relative open-mindedness is a direct result of engagement with the outside world through business. Of course, it is also possible, that, as noted earlier, because such people are not dependent on communal institutions for their livelihood, they are less concerned about holding themselves to the high standards of those institutions, at least privately.

One particularly striking example of this kind of tolerance came from a woman I spoke with, who recounted how she discovered that the father of her daughter’s fiancé had a reputation for being a “swinger” (i.e., he and his wife have sex with other couples). In this woman’s view, such behavior apparently did not merit enough concern to call off the engagement, and she noted that: “Everybody has their *shtick*. Why ruin a good shidduch (match) over it?” The implication here was that the father’s wealth was ultimately a more important consideration, at least with respect to this marriage, than his sexual proclivities.

Of course, I have no sense of whether this woman’s point of view is in any way typical (although, as we have seen, there does seem to be some anecdotal evidence to suggest that Hasidic attitudes toward sexual morality may differ from those of mainstream America, and this might be at play here). Nonetheless, her comments are significant as they suggest that, at least among a certain subgroup of

Hasidim, material wealth can outweigh other considerations in determining an individual's suitability for marriage. Indeed, if this point of view becomes more widespread, and wealth is seen as more desirable in a mate than religious scholarship or even yiches (pedigree), the role of the marriage system as a mechanism of social control could be seriously undermined.

Attempts to Bring Deviants "Back in Line"

There are, however, many situations I became aware of in which an individual's private non-conformity or transgressions were not tolerated by family members, both because the behavior itself was perceived as sinning, and also because of the fear that family's reputation could be damaged if the transgressor's activities were made public before he or she could be brought back "in line." I found that in cases where the offender is young and still living at home, he or she might be subjected to interventions by parents and, if this does not work, teachers and rabbis. (Of course, once such people get involved, it becomes harder to keep the behavior secret.) In the case of married couples where one spouse is transgressing to the chagrin of the other, the relatives on both sides can get involved in attempts to bring the offending party back in line.

For example, one young man I interviewed described how he had bought a television set in the hopes that watching rental movies together would save his deteriorating relationship with his wife. Within days of his bringing the TV home, his relatives and relatives of his wife began pressuring him to remove it from the house. After he refused to comply, his uncle entered the house when nobody was home and

removed the TV himself. Subsequently, the man and his wife were pressured by their respective families to enter marriage counseling. As the man described the situation:

People in the community got involved. Let's say my uncle [and] marriage counselors that are supposed to be considered respected people in the community [started pressuring me to stop what I was doing]. And I saw they're a bunch of bullshit.

I also heard about and personally observed several situations in which various people in the community were mobilized to help bring someone who was not conforming back in line. One young man I came to know in the course of my research was sent to a psychiatrist because of his non-conformity—which was paid for by a leader in the community—and also offered jobs tutoring newly observant boys in religious subjects, which he felt he could not refuse because he needed the money. While there is no doubt that those who stepped in to help this individual believed that they were in fact helping him, it also became clear that their primary interest was to keep this man in the community and conforming at least outwardly, rather than actually help him address the issues that were of concern to him. Indeed, his repeated attempts to “reject” this help were met with assurances that he would be “completely disowned if he did not comply.

Sending Transgressors Out of the Community

While expelling someone from the community altogether is virtually impossible, I became aware of many situations in which teenagers who were openly non-conforming were removed from their homes by their parents. Usually, this was a last resort, when all other attempts by community members to bring the person back

in line had failed. In some of these cases, the young people were sent to relatives' homes in other neighborhoods or communities, or to some sort of institution or residential program for "troubled" teens with the goal of bringing them back into the fold. Young people in this situation are also often sent to Israel.⁴³ One young woman I interviewed, who became "rebellious" at the age of 14, was sent to a girls' seminary in Europe. A handful of people I spoke with (approximately 6 or 7) were forced by their parents to leave their houses without a place to go and ended up sleeping in city parks or on subways until they managed to find other accommodations (quote letter). In these situations, the reason for the removal seemed just as much about removing the source of courtesy stigma as about "rehabilitating" the offender. The former was of particular concern if the young person's behavior had become public knowledge throughout the community.

Informal Social Ostracism

If attempts to bring people back in line fail, often people who are not conforming and/or crossing boundaries can be socially marginalized, excluded from social events and other activities as a result of their non-conformity. A married woman whose clothing was considered "too modern" (she wore a long wig and favored "immodest" high heeled boots), and who often chatted openly with non-Hasidic people on the street outside her home, found that her children stopped receiving invitations to play at neighbors' homes. I also interviewed a man who was not invited to the *bris* (circumcision ritual) of his best friend's son because he had once

⁴³ See Nacha Cattan, "Orthodox Rehab Programs: Too Much of a Good Thing," *The Forward*, August 17, 2001 (Online) and Michele Chabin, "On Their Own and Using Drugs," *The Jewish Week*, January 28, 2005 (Online).

shaved his beard (although by that time it had grown back); notably, however, the two friends continue to meet each other outside the neighborhood, in places chosen specifically for the remote chance that anyone from the community might see them there and report back to the friend's wife or family.

Outright expulsion from Hasidic communities seems to be exceedingly rare, though sometimes an individual or family is made to feel so marginal that they make the decision to move away on their own; indeed, this was the case with one couple whose son was refused a place in several schools after word got out that she had been spotted outside the community dressed in immodest clothing. The fact is, however, that these communities have little formal power to actually physically expel people who are not conforming. Even if they could do so, there is reason to believe that they might not, as such a practice could ultimately end up undermining social stability. As Coser (1962) notes, "When a group's norms are discordant with outside reality, the lack of ability to tolerate deviants can have dysfunctional consequences for the group, including its further fragmentation." In other words, in groups that are invested in distinguishing themselves from the outside society, but discourage recruitment of outsiders (though high Hasidic birthrates somewhat mitigate concerns about retaining membership), a certain tolerance for those who deviate may be socially necessary in order to maintain the viability of the group. Retaining members is not important exclusively in terms of group maintenance, but also because any significant reduction in size would certainly weaken these communities vis a vis the host society, given that their political power derives in large measure from their ability to deliver blocs of

votes. Given the social, economic and political “needs” of these groups, it is not difficult to understand why expulsion might be a last resort.

Rejection by One’s Spouse

For those who are married, being rejected by one’s spouse—and even losing contact with one’s children—is a serious possibility. While some spouses will tolerate such behavior, others will not. One man I interviewed reported that when his wife discovered that he was sneaking into Manhattan to go to the library, watch movies and visit museums, she asked him for a divorce (which he ultimately granted). She not only disapproved of his actions on the grounds that he was becoming “too modern,” but also feared that their children would be permanently stigmatized were others in the community to find out about his behavior. Indeed, the rabbi who oversaw their divorce took the wife’s side and, on this basis, awarded sole custody of the children to her. I heard similar stories from several other people who ended up divorced as a result of their involvement with transgressive behavior.

Difficulty on the Marriage Market

Those who become known as transgressors will often have trouble on the Hasidic marriage market. One young man I interviewed, who had become known within the community as someone who frequented libraries, read secular books and listened to the radio, found himself having a lot of difficulty finding a woman who would agree to marry him, despite the fact that he was also known as an excellent religious scholar. He ultimately met seven women before one agreed to the match, a situation he described to me as follows:

A: Even, when I was an older teenager already I didn't do what everyone else did. I wasn't a regular run of the mill. I didn't want to let's say sit a whole day in the mesifita, or in the school, I didn't feel it was what I was really interested in doing.

I: What did you do?

A: Then I was into doing more research on Jewish history. That was more, I mean, I didn't want to be restricted to what the school had to say, so, because of that, a shiddach, a match, didn't go that easy because people want the regular schmuck, the regular run of the mill. So, I used to go to the library. There was a Jewish library in there that was called Heichel Menachem. I used to sit there.

I: Did other people from your community go there?

A: Whoever went there was considered a weirdo.

Denial of Access to Communal Institutions

I came across several people—both men and women—whose public non-conformity actually got them kicked out of school, and others who reported that their own behavior had caused their children to “have trouble” in school (i.e., they were singled out for punishment in school and sometimes even expelled). One man I interviewed was asked to see the principal of his children’s school, who threatened him with their expulsion because he had heard that the father had an Internet connection in his house. While the school did not ultimately expel his children, they have since established a formal policy allowing them to do so under such circumstances. Another woman who had begun dressing in slightly more “modern” outfits than was standard in her community, was told that her child would not be able to enroll in his school the following year. Yet another woman, whose child was denied access to several schools, wrote the following to me: “What hell we had with the schools just because they found out I drive! and don't shave my head how

pathetic...”

Several people have told me that often, if a child is kicked out of one school, other schools are unlikely to accept him. I have heard of several situations in which children who have been sexually or physically victimized by teachers have been told that they if they report the abuse they will be denied entrance into any other school. No one has ever confirmed such a case to me. Perhaps that this is because in none of the cases I heard of did the child ever report the abuse. On the other hand, if they prove to be true, recent reports of alleged child molestation by Rabbi Yehuda Kolko (Kolker, 2006), seem to suggest that those who try to report sexual abuse may be subject to intimidation.

In addition to being denied access to schools, people who become known transgressors may be ostracized in shul. For example, they may not be called up to the Torah, which is considered an honor. They may even be subject to loss of business in the community. This occurs largely informally, as it is apparently very rare for someone to be formally censured. In fact, as an example of the degree to which he had been marginalized, one man I interviewed told me “Since I shortened my peyos, no yeshiva will take my money anymore.” Further probing revealed that as a result of his becoming a bit “more modern” in his appearance, this man’s wife left him and he is now his “donations” to yeshivas (he explained to me that such donations are a means of hiding his income) are apparently no longer accepted.

Harassment and Threats

I also discovered that within these communities, public non-conformity—or public knowledge of private non-conformity—can result in people being subjected to harassment and even threats. Indeed, I interviewed several people who reported being threatened—either physically, or otherwise—by self-appointed community watchdogs. For example, one woman who lived in the upstate Satmar community of Kiryas Joel described to me how she began to receive letters and anonymous phone calls from various men, declaring her outfits “immodest” (her skirts were about an inch shorter than “regulation” and had a bit of a flounce in them; one of her shirts apparently revealed a little of her collarbone) and advising her that, if she wanted remain in their ‘beautiful village,’ she would have to begin dressing more modestly. After she refused to adjust her wardrobe, someone called her house and instructed to her to come to a meeting, which she reluctantly attended. At the meeting, she claimed, were “a bunch of bearded old men,” who told her that if she did not change the way she was dressing, there would be “trouble” for her and her family in the community (she and her husband ultimately moved to a different community).

Another woman reported a similar experience to me, noted earlier, wherein she received many anonymous phone calls from a man, telling her that, as a recently divorced woman, it was immodest of her to be inviting divorced men to her home for Shabbos. This woman had no idea who was making the calls or how word got out that she often hosted divorced members of the community for Shabbos meals. The same woman also told me that she suspected someone in the community of tapping her phone line because these anonymous callers seemed to know the content of phone

conversations she was having with people she had met online; however, neither she nor I were able to confirm her suspicions. Ultimately, she too moved out of the community. A Hasidic man who lives in Williamsburg told me that he spoke with a Verizon technician, who claimed the he is often called out to homes in the Hasidic section to repair cable lines. In fact, he man reported a disproportionate number of severed cable lines, and had been told by residents that they believed that “watchdogs” in their community had begun cutting them in order to prevent Hasidic households from accessing the Internet (of course, people can still use dial-up service).

Several men I interviewed reported that they had been “beaten up” for their failure to conform, either by teachers in school, or members of the modesty patrols. One man reported being “roughed up” by someone who had heard that he had been visiting a bar on the outskirts of his neighborhood. He was also instructed that he should not return to the bar, as it was “inappropriate” for a “chasidishe yingerman” (Hasidic young man) to be seen in such a place. Of course, it is important to note here that I was not able to confirm these particular incidents. However, many people confirmed the existence of these “modesty patrols” to me. The number of people who reported similar experiences—or who had heard of others who had experienced this kind of treatment—suggests that these things do happen. The degree to which they occur remains unclear, however.

Over the past few years, a number of Hasidim have started anonymous blogs, which they use to vent and express their views about all sorts of issues related to life in their communities. People write about everything from their religious questions

and doubts, to what they perceive as the hypocrisy of their leaders to their own likes and dislikes as well as popular culture and sexuality. I did speak with several of these bloggers who asserted that people claiming to be hackers had threatened them with exposure. One Hasidic woman, who wrote extensively about her struggles with her sexuality, wrote the following to me:

I have opened my own blog and had to close it 3 times due to hackers, stalkers and haters my blog was all about frum garbage and BI sexuality.

It seems that just as non-conforming Hasidim are using the Internet to write about their own lives, Hasidic watchdogs are also employing the same technology to crack down on Hasidic violators. In the course of my research I became aware that a blog had been set up that was threatening to expose the identities of Hasidic men who were placing ads for sex online, requesting trysts with “frum” (religious) women, and also picking up prostitutes on the fringes of Hasidic neighborhoods. While the anonymous nature of the blog made it impossible for me to verify the seriousness of the threats, not to mention whether they were ever carried out, what was most notable was that it was not the behavior itself that was at issue, but the fact that these men were giving the community a “bad name” by identifying themselves as “frum” women or men, or failing to leave the neighborhood to look for sex. This is just one of the many warnings that appeared on the blog:

Warning: If you post on Craigslist, you will be exposed.
We are getting sick and tired of people posting frum ads on Craigslist and causing a chilul hashem. We are warning all those that continue to do so, we will expose you, and the embarrassment you suffer will be great.

Avoid the chilul hashem.

Yes I am sure that we will get alot of nasty comments about our tactics, but its nothing compared to the sickening chilul hashem.

*As we have stated on many occassions, we are not looking to stop the fact that people will act as people, and sleep around, etc. We are only concerned with chilul hashem. We are not here to bust everyone that uses a hooker, or every couple that swings, etc. That is not our purpose. Our purpose is to avoid chilul hashem, and there is no greater chilul hashem than a posting: "**Frum married man seeks a Frum married women to keep me company when my wife is in the country**". If the ad would have read, "Lonely man seeks company" we wouldn't bother.*

What is important to note here is that the idea of hiding one's transgressions has some basis in the religion itself. As one Hasidic man explained (in writing):

*The Gemara says that if a talmud haham [**Talmudic scholar**] is overcome by the urge to sin, he should dress in black (a sign of mourning) and go to a community where no one recognizes him and sin there. He can then return to his place, repent and continue his studies.*

The writer then goes on to interpret this, saying that "It argues this to, a) allow the [Talmudic scholar] to remain w/in the community with his reputation undamaged, and, b) to stop people from saying things like "the rabbi went to a prostitute -- why can't I?""

To what extent this way of thinking is pervasive, or actually guides behavior in the Hasidic or wider Orthodox world is hard to determine. However, it was nonetheless invoked among many Hasidic people I spoke with (though some of the more critical one did not necessarily agree with the idea), including the one who said: "Rashi [one of Judaism's classic Biblical and Talmudic commentators] says that if you are going to do something wrong, go to a place like China where there are no Jews and sin there." In this formulation, sinning itself is not understood to be as much

of a problem as avoiding being seen sinning by one's co-religionists. As the first man's comments suggest, whatever the actual intention, the effect of this is to allow community members (or, more accurately, Talmudic scholars) a way to indulge in "sinful" activity without facing expulsion from the community. Clearly, this seems to suggest that it is more important to allow the scholar to attend to his "needs" than to expel him from the community altogether.

As discussed earlier, this preoccupation with avoiding sinning in public is also supported by the concept of *chilul Hashem*, which is understood in the vernacular to refer to public or conspicuous misbehavior (particularly by a visible, Orthodox Jew) that lowers the image of Jews among both Jews and non-Jews alike. While this concept is often invoked to encourage people to hide unpleasant or unflattering things about the community itself, it is also used to characterize any public behavior that goes against community values and norms (including, of course, religious laws).

The following exchange, between myself and a Hasidic man, his wife and sister, illustrates the Hasidic propensity for focusing on hiding transgressive behavior rather than on the ethics or morality of engaging in that behavior in the first place. This exchange is also notable (not to mention rather hilarious) for what it reveals about just how familiar these people are with aspects of secular culture that they are, as Hasidim, not supposed to know anything about:

Husband: If you want to write a book about Jewish people you don't want to even touch the subject of Britney Spears. It's not Britney Spears, it can be.

Sister: Celine Dion?

Wife: No, not Celine Dion.

Sister: Eminem?

Husband: No not Eminem. What's her name, Britney Spears' friend?

HW: Cristina Aguilera?

Husband: Cristina Aguilera. You don't want to touch the subject that Hasidic people even know who Robert DiNiro is. It's better if you leave that out. You can come up with 10 or 20 books not even touching that subject and have it as interesting as possible with so many other topics. But in reality if you're going to ask me, it's not the village, it's Hasidic people all over the world, how many people know every player in the Yankees, how many players in The Red Sox.

Wife: He's very into the Yankees.

It is interesting to note how, despite his clear admission that he and many others in the community transgress by listening to popular music and following professional sports, this man tries to discourage my publicizing of this fact through the writing of a hypothetical book. Though he did not express it directly, there is nonetheless the implication here that to do so would represent a chilul Hashem. What is particularly interesting here is the fact that these anonymous watchdogs decided to make their threats via a blog, given that the use of the Internet, for all but business purposes, is banned within these communities.

Labeling

Of course, as previously noted, within Hasidic communities those who publicly deviate from accepted norms may indeed be labeled by others as “bummy,” “rebellious” or “too modern.” One woman even told me that in her community, women whose wigs are considered “immodest”—meaning too long—may be referred to behind their backs as “trailer trash” (an interesting example of an expression

making its way into the community from outside).

Non-conforming young people/teenagers are often referred to as “troubled” and, depending on their behavior (if they get involved in drugs or alcohol, or even sex) might even come to be labeled “kids at risk.” With the exception of those youth who are labeled “at risk,” it is not clear that there really is a formal labeling process within these communities along the lines of what Goode (1984)⁴⁴ and others have described with respect to modern, heterogeneous societies.⁴⁵

Indeed, when I asked people who were described to me by others as “bummy” about whether they considered themselves to be “bums,” very few accepted the label; those who did seemed to do so tongue in cheek. Again, with the possible exception of those deemed “at risk kids” (which is often accompanied by some kind of diagnosis,) it does not appear that, within the Hasidic world, people easily internalize these labels (or always even know that they have acquired them), or that a label is likely to become an individual’s “master status” and propel him or her to embark on a “deviant career” (Becker, 1963). This is not to say, however, that such terms as “bummy” or “too modern” are not socially useful, however, as they are employed within the community as a kind of shorthand for marking certain kinds of social distinctions.

⁴⁴ Goode (1984) enumerates a variety of symbolic ceremonies that are involved in the labeling process in our society, such as receiving a diagnosis, being arrested or being admitted to a treatment centre or jail. He also points out that there are no equally powerful ceremonies which destigmatize and reintegrate the person who chooses to relinquish the deviant behavior.

⁴⁵ One notable exception to this seems to be the label “frei,” which is used to describe those who have left the Hasidic world and abandoned Orthodoxy. In the case that someone acquires this label, it does seem to become, as Lemert (1951) would suggest, the central way through which that person and society views and judges him or herself..

Indeed, this may have to do with the fact that, as has been noted, these communities are structured and operate more like traditional than modern societies. As Raybeck notes, the labeling of “deviants” might be less likely to occur in “simple” or “traditional” or “stateless” societies than it does in modern, complex ones. Drawing on the work of Pfohl, Raybeck writes that “stateless societies are more apt than state societies to have effective ‘rituals of primary ordering,’ which prevent trouble by stabilizing the definition and nature of social life and by promoting a sense of shared social membership. Indeed, he argues that the very characteristics of state societies, especially their heterogeneity, increase the probability of social conflicts over ways of thinking and acting (Raybeck: 374).” In stateless societies—to which, for this purpose, Hasidic communities might be likened—Raybeck writes that the emphasis is usually on reconciliation of the offender with the group. In state societies however, reconciliation is more difficult to achieve due to social and cultural heterogeneity and to the threat such reconciliation might pose to those in control (Raybeck on Pfohl: 374-75).

As such, Raybeck predicts that the labeling of rule breakers would be far less common in “simple” (or stateless) versus complex societies for two basic reasons: 1) labeling rarely accomplishes social benefits in the former of the sort that can be argued for the latter; and 2) labeling usually involves social costs that are higher in simple societies than in complex ones (Raybeck: 375). Raybeck argues that “one of the functions of labeling individuals...is to increase the predictability of social life by adding information to the social context (for example, one should not leave a “thief” alone with one’s best silver). (375).” Social life in simple societies tends to be

characterized by a number of crosscutting interpersonal networks that promote a great deal of face-to-face interaction. In such an environment, Raybeck argues, a great deal of information already exists about co-residents, including their positions in the social order, their personality characteristics, and their past histories. Because, in this context, elements of personal life are highly predictable, labeling individuals does little to enrich the social context (Raybeck: 376).”

A Note About Gender Differences

As noted earlier, within the Hasidic world there are a variety of behaviors that are considered acceptable for men, but “inappropriate” for women. Indeed, because women’s bodies (through strict codes of modesty and limits on physical mobility) are generally subject to more control than men’s, women may find themselves branded as transgressors for behaviors that might go unremarked among men (e.g., smoking, driving, etc.); in effect, women have more “opportunity” to become transgressors. While there is no doubt that both men and women who transgress can be subjected to ostracism, harassment or worse, I have found that women’s perceived transgressions tend to generate more of a “public” or “institutional” response. For example, as previously noted, watchdogs and even the leadership routinely issue pronouncements on the importance of female modesty. Women who deviate from the prescribed dress code often become targets of harassment, and their appearance is used as “evidence” of their moral laxity in other areas (and particularly with respect to their sexual behavior). Indeed, the particular focus on the control of women’s bodies highlights

just how important the social control of women in general is to maintaining communal boundaries within the Hasidic world.

Responses to Leavers

Arguably, making the decision to abandon the Hasidic way of life altogether represents the ultimate form of transgression possible (aside, perhaps, from conversion, or intermarriage⁴⁶). It must be noted here that while most Hasidim I interviewed conceded that, in theory, those who abandon the community but maintain an Orthodox lifestyle should be looked upon more favorably than those who reject the religion altogether, in practice rejecting the Hasidic way of life tends to be regarded as tantamount to rejecting the religion; given the disdain that most Hasidim I interviewed seemed to express for Modern Orthodoxy, this attitude was hardly surprising. However, it is true that the Modern Orthodox are the only other Jews (aside from their strictly Orthodox non-Hasidic counterparts) that the Hasidim believe are legitimate practitioners of Judaism and, as a result, when people make the decision to leave the community they are often told by relatives and friends that they should “just become a little more modern.”

I have discovered that those who do choose to leave their communities are often subject to efforts by family and friends to get them to change their minds and return to the fold. As discussed in an earlier chapter, an individual’s decision to leave the community tends to be attributed either to a desire for adventure and easy freedom

⁴⁶ Many Hasidim I interviewed told me that the only situation in which they could see their parents sitting shiva (the ritual of mourning when a relative dies) for them would be if they married a non-Jew.

or uncontrollable lust, and is generally construed as the product of faulty thinking, bad character or even mental illness. Because of this, those who make the decision to leave their communities are often subject to various kinds of “interventions” aimed at treating or fixing the “problem,” and convincing the individual to change his or her mind.

For example, one young woman I interviewed reported how, when she left her community, her father arranged meetings for her with several rabbis and counselors in the hopes that these professionals might help her understand that she had come to the wrong conclusion. Her parents also made sure that someone delivered kosher food to the apartment where she was staying, even though she made it clear to them that she no longer kept kosher. Another young man told me that, upon his decision to leave the community, he was sent for therapy with a religious therapist, who told him that he should try to pray and put on tefillin (the leather phylacteries that men bind to their arms and head during prayer). Of course, if someone is over the age of eighteen it is impossible to force them to participate in these kinds of interventions, and I did find that this tended to occur more in situations when the person leaving was in his early twenties and unmarried. However, I also discovered that even older people were subjected to this kind of pressure from their families.

Indeed, most people I interviewed who left altogether experienced some form of rejection by family members and friends: One woman described the experience this way:

It's the worst feeling in the world. Imagine the pain of losing a real good friend, doubled and tripled by the sudden loss of everyone who was in your life. You feel uncomfortable, not knowing where you stand with the people who are the most familiar to you.

Several people I interviewed who had left are no longer welcome in their parents' homes or invited to family celebrations. From what I could gather, the reasons for this tend to be some combination of disapproval, fear that they will negatively influence other children and concern about courtesy stigma.⁴⁷ In some of these cases, family members—and particularly siblings—will agree to meet the departed relative, but only outside the neighborhood or in a place where they will not be seen by other community members.

There were those I met who reported that they were still welcome in their families' homes and at family celebrations, provided they dressed according to Hasidic standards and refrained from introducing topics that might be considered offensive to Hasidic sensibilities. One young man went so far as to grow his beard back temporarily so that he would be allowed to attend his sister's wedding. A woman I interviewed described what it is like for her to visit her parents' home:

One of the many concerns that I have is: how am I going to dress up so that I look tzniusdig (modest) I just got a hair cut- normally I put my hair in a pony tail, with a hat to cover my hair, and I'm good-but now my hair is too short, and I'm concerned about it sticking out, this might upset them, or be seen as disrespectful from my side. I think my best choice is that I will put on a snood or a turban.

I keep my negative feelings - comments to my self, even if at times I want to really scream damn it- can't I just be ME? But than of course its just a feeling - is it valid? Yes - But, in this case not realistic of me to expect.

⁴⁷ I did find that this kind of rejection by family seemed to be less common among those leaving the Lubavitch community than some of the other Hasidic groups. However, because my information is somewhat anecdotal, I cannot confirm this. Nonetheless, given Lubavitch's openness to different level of observance, it is not difficult to see how this might be the case.

In the course of my research I became aware that sometimes family members and close friends of a person who has left will actually meet that person in another neighborhood, in order to avoid detection and courtesy stigma. I interviewed one married mother of three who takes regular trips out of her community to meet her sister, who has herself left the community altogether. This woman has never told her husband about these visits as she believes he would ask her to stop making them, given his own stated fears that the sister is living an “immoral” life and could negatively influence anyone who comes into contact with her.

I learned that people who have children and decide to leave these communities are often denied access to their kids. I came to know several men who, because they had moved away from the community and shaved their beards (a visible sign that they were no longer Hasidic), were denied contact with their children (one of these is currently involved in a civil case in family court to try to gain visitation rights). One woman who had made the decision to leave the community altogether was threatened with having her children taken away by her former husband’s family. She explained:

I was actually in court for 2 years. His family were basically behind him trying to tell me they were going to take the kids away. They were trying to give me money to take the kids. You’re not talking about monkeys here, you’re talking about kids, my kids. It’s like my left and right arm. They can’t be divided into two. They were willing to put them with a [non-related] family in Monroe.

I also interviewed several women who had left their husbands for reasons of abuse and, while all of them had remained in the community, and continued living as Hasidim, were prevented from seeing their children. In the community’s eyes, having come forward publicly and reporting their experiences to the secular authorities

represented a form of transgression and seemed to taint them to such a degree that in many cases they were labeled as “unfit” mother. This is actually one of the few situations in which a stigmatized label does, as Goode (1984) writes, become “sticky”. Some people even told me that while being the victim of domestic violence alone can stigmatize a woman and her children (the effects on the abuser seem less clear), informing is worse. Thus, the treatment of such women not only reflects their subordinate status in the rabbinical courts, but also the Hasidic world’s traditional antipathy toward “informers” (mesira), or anyone who goes to the secular authorities.

Even people who give up the Hasidic way of life but remain religious can be subject to similar treatment. As one divorced woman wrote:

I am raising my kids and giving them a Secular as well as a Jewish education. But do you know the price for that? My family has not spoken to me in 5 years. My x-husband learned how to lie and cheat and steal from the government [sic]. He even learned [with the help of his rabbis] how NOT to pay child support. I was young with no education, however I was TAUGHT that I have to get married to a boy I meet once....Need I say more about this LACK OF EDUCATION?

Of course, among the Hasidim giving one’s children a secular education represents a serious deviation from communal norms; indeed, such behavior goes beyond marking someone as merely “modern,” “bummy” or “rebellious,” but represents a “deviant” lifestyle that places him or her outside the borders of the community. In this case, the rejection by insiders is likely not only a way of avoiding courtesy stigma, but also a sincere expression of disapproval of the “deviant’s” way of life. Indeed, as discussed in a previous chapter, these communities do employ a variety of labels to describe those who leave and, in general, such people tend to be portrayed negatively by the community. However, in most cases, these labels do not tangibly affect the lives of

those so labeled. More than anything, these labels serve as a means by which those still living within the community distance and separate themselves from those who have left.

While it seems extremely rare, I did learn of several cases where people who had left one of these communities were subjected to harassment and threats; however, in these few situations, the harassment appeared to be connected to the fact that the individuals involved had spoken negatively and publicly about their experiences within the community. One such situation involves a young man who is making a film about people's experiences leaving Hasidic life, and which apparently includes unflattering comments about these communities. He claims to have received repeated threats that he would be subjected to violence if he did not drop his project violence.

In one case an eighteen year-old boy, who was still in the community but was hoping to leave and was looking for guidance, contacted a man who had left his community. Somehow, someone in the boy's community learned that he had made contact with the older man and began making harassing phone calls to the latter, telling him to stop talking to the boy and threatening unspecified harm if he did not. Again, while the details of this particular story remain vague, it demonstrates the threat those who leave can pose to these communities, if they are perceived to be "airing dirty laundry" or helping others to leave.

There are also certain instances in which the relatives of people who had left the community were marginalized or rejected solely because they were related to someone who left. For example, one woman who left her community told me that her

six-year-old sister stopped receiving invitations to play at other people's houses after it became public that she had an older sister who had left the community.

Theoretical Implications

Based on the above, one could argue that the way in which the Hasidic world responds to transgression seems to present an implicit challenge to Durkheimian (1984) perspective on deviance. Briefly, Durkheim argued that the public punishment of deviants is not about deterrence, but about fostering social cohesion, as identifying and publicly punishing "deviants" provides an opportunity for communities to reaffirm shared values. Indeed, because he attributed this positive social function to the public punishment of deviants, Durkheim believed that deviance was actually necessary for the maintenance of society. He wrote:

The deviant act then, creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feeling. Like a war, a flood, or some other emergency, deviance makes people more alert to the interests they share in common and draws attention to those values which constitute the "collective conscience" of the community. Unless the rhythm of group life is punctuated by occasional moments of deviant behavior, presumably, social organization would be impossible (1984).

Taking Durkheim's position a step farther, Erikson (1963) argued that societies actually create or "recruit" deviants for the specific purpose of fostering social cohesion, particularly at times when community cohesiveness seems to be under threat.

Leaving aside the methodological challenges of determining whether publicly punishing deviants actually fosters social cohesion (however this would be

measured), because the Hasidim tend not to deal with deviants this way—there are generally no public shaming rituals or even trials, and the community does not have the power to physically detain members—a Durkheimian analysis may be difficult to apply here. This is not to say, of course, that the Hasidic “community” as such does not collectively condemn certain behaviors, or that those who are identified as transgressors do not suffer social consequences. However, in this context punishment, which mainly takes the form of social ostracism, is primarily a reaction to deviance. In other words, while strengthening communal values may well be a byproduct of ostracizing deviants, to argue that this is its actual “function”—rather than marginalizing or ridding the community of potentially “dangerous” influences—seems dubious at best.

Indeed, the fact is that these communities engage in a constant and explicit process of affirming and communicating shared values. As such, one could argue that they hardly “need” to use punishment for this purpose (although, as noted above, marginalizing those who do not conform can certainly strengthen the sense of belonging among those who do). That said, my research revealed that within the Hasidic world, the threat of ostracism does play a significant role in promoting conformity, which is not surprising. However, it is important to distinguish here between cohesion and conformity: while the former tends to imply a sense of shared values and affective bonding, the latter does not. In other words, while witnessing the social ostracism of deviants may or may not foster a sense of belonging or identification among committed community members, it is likely to motivate those who may have similar inclinations to at least maintain the appearance of conformity,

lest they incur the same fate.

In fact, one could make the argument that holding up deviants for public punishment or expulsion could actually undermine, rather than promote, social cohesion. Raybeck's (1988) writing on the Kelantene provides a useful analogy:

[Among the Kelantene] The initial reaction is to curb the deviant behavior by employing a variety of sanctions, which range from gossip and social pressure through increasing social exclusion to expulsion from village society. Mitigating the concern with conformity to village norms is an intense interest in maintaining functional interpersonal networks within the village...publicly labeling someone a deviant tends to place that individual at the periphery or outside village society and, because of the many cross-cutting kindred ties, this can have serious consequences for village solidarity (385).

Like the Kelantene, the Hasidim also have to balance concerns about conformity with an interest in maintaining “functional interpersonal networks.” In other words, because Hasidic communities are so insular, and because their members have multiple, overlapping social and familial ties, it is not hard to see how attempting to curb deviant behavior could be a more socially effective way of handling deviance than even ostracizing or expelling deviants, not to mention punishing them publicly.

Further, because the strength of these communities ultimately rests in their numbers, and because they do not (with the exception of the Lubavitchers) recruit from the outside, expelling or totally rejecting anyone who deviates from ideal typical standards of behavior could have disastrous consequences for the group. However, one can certainly see the logic in keeping at bay those whose behavior and beliefs are so antithetical to the Hasidic worldview—those who openly flout norms, or have left, for example—as to be legitimately destabilizing. Thus, given the conflicting “needs” of these communities, it might actually be “functional” for them to tolerate some

private deviance so that members can indulge certain interests and desires without feeling forced to leave the community altogether, a kind of Mertonian “safety valve”).

This is not to imply, however, that leaders in the Hasidic world openly advocate any level private tolerance. Indeed, for the most part, their response to the increased threat of contact with the outside world (particularly via the Internet and wireless media) has been to issue more bans and to attempt to instill more fear in their Hasidim by linking undesired behavior to illness and even natural disaster. This may not turn out to be the best approach, however, and could result in even more private deviance. Just how much of such behavior these communities can abide before their characters are irrevocably altered is a serious question that only time will answer.

Another interesting question raised by this research is whether Hasidic deviants can or ever do become sources of innovation, as some theorists of deviance have observed of “deviants” in other social contexts. In my experience—at least given the definition of deviance employed here (i.e., violating official rules and norms)—this does not seem to be the case. People who become known as transgressors generally become too discredited to exert any influence on the group as a whole. This is not to say that innovation does not occur within these communities. However, the kind of innovation that does take place tends not to be propelled by those who deviate from communal norms, but is sanctioned by the leadership, in response to the perceived needs of the community. For example, over the past decade or so a variety of vocational training programs have emerged to respond to the challenges of supporting large families.

Chapter Five The Transgressors

*I live in Williamsburg, and I do a lot of stuff thats not in the guied [sic] lines of willy , and I'll admit I can't share any of this stuff to my family or to my not so close friends.....I think there is nothing wrong with having some [rules] and I respect the [rules], but most ppl don't follow the rolls these days and hide it from one another, the reason is simple, they main focus in School/Chider today is Tsneiz [**modesty**] (excuse my spelling never learned how lol) what you should wear, that's all they talk about all day, and Torah and Yiddishkeit is secondary. This story will prove the point you all were trying to say. I went to a blockbuster close to willy one M"Y, it was full with chassidish/willy ppl (a lot of them which I would never believe they even know what a movie is) everyone was trying to hide from the others, looking over every second to the other row if the other chosid is coming there [sic] way, lol no more commends [sic] needed. Enjoy, Life.*

-Hasidic man, online

communication

* * *

Introduction

Through my experience in the field, I came to understand that just as one can be a non-believer and continue to conform to the norms of the community, one can also identify as a “normal” Hasid and violate those norms. Indeed, I met many Hasidic people who openly acknowledged that while some or even much of what they do is not “officially” condoned or accepted within their communities, they nonetheless *consider themselves* to be contented and “good” members of those communities (and also “believers”). Some of these people even go so far as to argue—without being able to provide hard evidence—that violating certain official rules and norms (like watching movies or using the Internet) has in itself become the

norm in the community; although this may be a self-serving exaggeration, my impression is that the number of people secretly engaging in this kind of behavior is much higher than even those who do so would imagine.

Not surprisingly, I also became acquainted with transgressors who are much more critical of “the system.” Some of these “critics” evince a desire to leave the community altogether, but feel they cannot do so, while others are more sanguine about remaining—either because, despite their criticisms of it, they have found a way to live happily within the system, or because they are in some way committed to maintaining tradition. Some of these people even engage in efforts to create “alternative” communities, which, though not aimed at changing the system, seem to provide outlets for others who share similar feelings about it.

The fact that those who transgress do not comprise a monolithic group is not necessarily surprising. Indeed, what is most significant is the fact that of those who do, very few seem to either want or feel able to leave their communities altogether. Among other things, this suggests that there are many Hasidic people who, despite having serious criticisms of “the system” or not believing at all, nonetheless support the status quo by remaining within the community and at least publicly adhering to its rules and norms.

The Defenders

We have tznius rules. Modesty. How to dress. Some of them we think it's bizarre, or some people think it's not, but the reason they have to be very strict is because you can't go telling people you could wear it, you can't. So they make this general rule for everybody so they don't run into problems with anyone. Like more recently, they came up with this rule that girls can only wear shirts. The first thing they can wear is a shirt. What they can wear on

top of their shirt is ok. So they don't come into school wearing a t-shirt, or a tight shirt... We feel that rules are, we believe in them because they basically conform to what we teach our kids at home and what we teach our kids at school. It's a common belief between us. Rules are ok. Of course, rules are meant to be broken.

S, Satmar woman

* * *

Many of the rule breakers I interviewed described themselves as generally contented with and committed to the Hasidic way of life, and tended to talk about their behavior in a way that suggests that their transgressions are motivated primarily by the desire to have fun and experience a little freedom. None felt that their behavior in any reflected or was motivated by a lack of belief in the religion or commitment to the Hasidic way of life. Indeed, such types generally attribute their behavior either to minor personal weakness, or justify it (somewhat paradoxically) by asserting their internalization of Hasidic values; in other words, they often claim that it is precisely their strong “foundation” in Hasidic values and norms that ensures that any involvement in officially prohibited behavior will not undermine their religious commitment or tempt them to “go off the path.”

It is, of course, impossible to know for certain whether or not people communicated their true feelings to me, or whether presenting themselves this way in interviews could represent a form of impression management calculated not only to put themselves, but also their communities, in a positive light. Openly criticizing the community, particularly to an “outsider,” could be seen as a airing of “dirty laundry” and a betrayal of the community—or even, in the view of some, a chilul Hashem. However, based on extensive interviewing and participant observation, it is

my sense that those who claimed to be contented with their way of life genuinely seemed to be. Of course, the only way to know for sure would be to see what people would do if they were given the option to live differently, without facing any negative consequences.

A good example of this attitude is reflected in the following comments, made by a Hasidic man I interviewed who liked to read the daily tabloids and listen to secular music, which he downloaded on his computer at work and also played in his car. This same man also regularly called me on my cell phone to discuss his crush on Jennifer Aniston and his obsession with the Yankees. When I asked him why he had no problem reading *The New York Post*, and listening to Britney Spears and Eminem, considering that this was against the “official” rules of his community, he replied matter-of-factly: “[Because] I can handle it.”

He gave a similar explanation for why he also believed that there was nothing wrong with his attending a co-ed, technical college in New Jersey, to learn about computers, even though there is a strong Hasidic prohibition against freely socializing with members of the opposite sex, not to mention outsiders:

It may be not every person is ready for this, not every person can go outside and learn, men and women together. But to the individual that is ready for this, and feels it's the right decision that he's making because it's going to help him for getting a better job, better paid, it's normal. Within where we live...we raise our kids to keep them as far away as possible from the outside world. But when you're on your own, when you're mature enough, when you understand what's really happening here, it's really normal to work with other people, whether it's man, woman, or in colleges.

To a certain extent, this view reflects the social reality in these communities, previously discussed, that “businessmen” are in fact generally allowed more leeway

in their behavior than others. Notably, however, this man does not draw on that fact, but rather invokes personal characteristics—i.e., being “ready” and “mature”—to explain and in fact justify his behavior. His explanations may be attributed to the fact that most people generally do not interpret their behavior in social terms; however, they also reveal something more about how those who violate communal norms can justify behavior that is against the official rules of the community and thus retain a sense of themselves as “good” Hasidim.

Another woman revealed a similar way of thinking in her comments:

MA: Some people may not be exposed to certain things and once they are exposed they go crazy.

HW: But then is that a problem with your values or something else? I mean, is it better to be exposed so you know what it is, or is it better to just avoid it?

MA: Just avoid it. Young minds are not ripe and ready to decide and to be able to...

HW: But as an adult do you think you can...

MA: I personally think I know exactly where I belong and what I am supposed to do and what I am not supposed to be doing and I am very strict about it. I am very clear. Even people at my age, some of them are not as clear. I don't know why it is, so they do get carried away and lead them in different directions.

There is also a very clear sense among people who think this way—and in fact throughout the community more generally—that children need to be more “sheltered” than adults. The following is an exchange among myself and two Hasidic women I interviewed together:

MM: Our community is sheltered. This is something I would want to censor...I am very, very adventurous. I do watch movies. People in the

community don't really do that. But I do it and I find that there is nothing wrong with it.

GG: I have to interrupt. If she had a family of children she wouldn't, because she would not want to bring that influence into the house. [Note: MM has three adopted foster children, all of whom are severely developmentally disabled. As I gathered, through this and subsequent conversations, while she refers to these children as "my kids," it appears as though both she and others in the community do not actually regard them as her children in the way they would if they were her biological children.]

MM: I wouldn't.

HW: Would you do it if your husband and you were at a hotel somewhere?

MM: Yes. Absolutely. I would never want to expose my own children to this. So I do things that I wouldn't let my children to do.

GG: Most adults know our limits, know what effects things are going to have on us, what the risks are.

MS: The reason why the rules of the community are so strict is because the majority of the community do not know their limits. They do not. I, for example, I'm not so sure that I'm 100% right, but I think I know my limits. I know what, when and where. I think I know my limits. Maybe I go off limits sometimes if I go to a movie, which is totally not accepted in the community.

According to this way of thinking, children are understood as being more at risk for being "tempted," "confused" or "corrupted" by contact with the outside world and, as such, are to be sheltered from it until they "have the proper foundation" in Hasidic values and norms, apparently believed to occur (somewhat magically, it seems) at marriage. Interestingly, I have heard more than a few Hasidic people attempt to justify doing things they would never let their children do by appealing, of all things, to secular research that "shows" watching TV is bad for children. As one Hasidic man wrote:

[A] movie doesn't belong in a chasidisher home, for the same reason I think, it shouldn't be in a non-chasidsher house. It has been documented many times how destructive a TV is in a house with kids. However, I don't see anything wrong for an adult to watch a movie.

Reflected in this man's comments, of course, is the sense that a "chasidisher" home should be "pure," uncontaminated by any polluting influences that might corrupt the children (of course, by definition the polluting influences consist of anything that comes from outside the community). The fact remains, however, that many people I interviewed owned TV sets (mostly used as monitors to watch movies), which most hid in their bedroom closets and watched only late at night after their children were in bed.

It is easy to see how thinking about children as somehow ontologically more susceptible to temptation than adults not only provides a rationalization for adults who break rules and hide their behavior from their kids, but also serves the community's needs as well. There is little doubt that exposing children to the outside world before they are, in a sense, "locked into the system" through marriage and children can be risky, as leaving altogether is much easier without the baggage of a spouse and family. As one Hasidic man, who is desperate to leave his community but feels he cannot because of his family, wrote:

When young enough, the societal pressure is overwhelming; when at an age where you may be ready to disregard this pressure to some extent, you find yourself with familial responsibilities -- moral, financial, and above all emotional which can never be disregarded and forces you to continue to conform.

In a more general sense, of course, the idea that some people cannot be trusted to know their own limits ultimately supports the idea that limits need to be imposed

from without. For example, even though “MS” refers to herself as “adventurous,” and declares that she feels there is “nothing wrong” with watching movies (or seeing Broadway shows, which she also does), she ultimately rationalizes her behavior not by criticizing the Hasidic “system,” but by claiming that, unlike “the majority of the community,” she “knows her limits.” In asserting that the community’s rules are so strict precisely because most people *don’t* know their limits, she is actually legitimizing, rather than challenging or calling into question, those very rules. In this way then, such people end up perpetuating the status quo even while flouting the rules and norms that define it. Thus, for people who feel this way, breaking the rules is not the issue, as much as hiding the fact that they are doing so:

GG: We couldn’t go to the movie theaters around our community. But if you went, you would find at least a handful of Hasidim there. But it’s not that condoned, it’s not what we’re raised to do. And it’s rather shunned. But there are that people do it. It’s not typical to do it.

There are people who, despite claiming to be contented members of their communities, did not explain or attempt to justify their transgressions in terms of the strength of their commitment to Hasidic values, but actually “blamed” their behavior on (albeit) minor personal weakness. Abdicating responsibility for their actions, these types tended not to be serious questioners, and their behavior (more than those described above) mainly involved things like going to strip clubs, watching movies or going to places like Atlantic City or Las Vegas; reading books and grappling with religious issues tended not to be part of their repertoire. Most often, such types dismissed their behavior as “harmless,” and in no way in conflict with their commitment to the Hasidic way of life.

The Critics

I don't think you can have the best of both worlds! It doesn't work that way in a ortho upbringing. Well maybe you count your blessing and think positive some of us who don't even desire to leave yiddishkeit but just change a few things in every day life such as wearing pants, uncovered hair etc. can keep on dreaming most of us don't have guts maybe its the guilt the brainwashing since birth or just scared that we will be judged as fucked up in the head or we are for sure condemned to hell despite the fact we are more frum [religious] then the ones who dress frum but lead double lives in secret... It is soooooo freakin complicated that one can suffocate out of pure frustration. can you imagine how hard it is for one to just pick themselves up and drop it all the own home/own business/a loving husband/children in some cases/family/friends and just vanish into thin air? leave it all behind why? because of desire not to dress frum WHY? WHY should I leave family and friends behind for those two reasons? because the commuinty makes the rules? and judges or decides who is frum or holier than thou? yes I will admit no matter how much i am ashamed to I am very scared, scared of the future and kind of angry why I aint naive, close minded why so I have desire to deal with? why cant I stick to sheital or thick pantyhose? why do I want to be my own mind my own person???? many questions nobody could answer me. who should I ask my friends? those who are far better then me and dont even deserve me as a friend since I am a shiksa in my mind? who should I ask my parents? parents who are so frum who just the thought of me being wanting to be with another woman or desire to leave the commuinty will take them straight to their grave. what are we frum girls taught? that we think of them first before ourselves! so my dear BG it aint so easy as it sounds! For those who did leave I envy them yet i don't know what holds me back? I am dying to know what keeps me here in the heart of ultra ortho freakin chassidish lifestyle.

Married Hasidic mother of one

* * *

In an altogether different category from the “defenders” are those, like the woman quoted above, whom I have come to call the “critics.” Generally, these are people who find fault with much about how their communities are organized and

function socially and/or the way the leadership interprets the religion. While some of these people clearly would leave these communities if they felt they could, others seem committed on some level to maintaining the Hasidic way of life, albeit in a slightly altered form (such people also tend to differentiate between the community and the idea of Yiddishkeit, or “Jewishness,” which in this context refers to combination of Orthodox religious practice and Ashkenazi Jewish culture).

Ironically, in rejecting aspects of the Hasidic “lifestyle,” these critics might actually come closest in spirit to the original Hasidim, who deemphasized the rigid adherence to the law and the importance of the rabbinic hierarchy that characterized the Judaism of their day, and instead advocated an unmediated experience of the divine. (This stance actually places them in a somewhat analogous position within Judaism to the original Protestants within Christianity). Take the following, written by an anonymous blogger who calls himself “Also a Chussid”:

... I do believe in a creator namely GOD. I feel quite comfortable with the Jewish religion (even without proof to its veracity) so it will be in this context that I will try to worship the almighty. However I have no feeling and don't believe at all in Hasidism as part of the religion rather it is only a cultural lifestyle that I got to despise for obvious reasons. In a way I made peace with myself to continue living a Hasidic life and still pursue my dreams. I happen to successfully combine a Hasidic lifestyle and a more open-minded and worldly culture. For that's the true meaning of freedom.

While those in this group might feel justified in rejecting or privately challenging certain aspects of Hasidic ideology or practice, this does not necessarily mean that all are as sanguine as the man quoted about living what amounts to a kind of double life. Indeed, as will become clear below, many people who find themselves

in this situation are torn between not wanting to live as hypocrites—outwardly conforming to norms they privately question—and protecting their families and children. Further, many evince frustration (and even anger) that they are publicly supporting and thus perpetuating a “system” in which they do not necessarily believe.

For some of the so-called critics I met, transgression is limited to their beliefs, although I did encounter many who also engage in behavior that violates the rules and norms of their communities. However, unlike the “defenders,” those “critics” who do violate behavioral rules and norms do not justify their rule breaking behavior by citing their own exceptionalism, but rather by asserting that the system itself is flawed. Of course, this is not to say that those who defend the system do not believe that there may be some problems with the system as well. However, the latter do not necessarily view those problems as problems *for them* (because they can break the rules and rationalize their behavior) and thus they do not tend to express feelings of frustration with their way of life and communities, or the desire to change or leave them. The critics, however, tend to focus much more on how they believe the system needs to be changed.

Generally, those critics who take issue with the way their leaders have interpreted Judaism have arrived at this conclusion through a long process of clandestine self-education, which generally included reading in areas like philosophy, history, sociology and biblical criticism. Overall, I met fewer women than men whose critiques dealt explicitly with issues of the interpretation of the religion. While this may well be an artifact of my methodology, it is also possible that because women receive a very limited education in the theoretical aspects of Jewish law, they do not

have the knowledge and/or the confidence to challenge the Hasidic interpretation of the religion. Indeed, in most of the instances where I asked a Hasidic woman a question related to Jewish law, she would tell me that she would have to check with her husband or a rabbi for the “correct” answer. That said, I did meet some women who had educated themselves in this area, not to mention many who harbored serious criticisms of “the system,” based on their own experiences with and analyses of it, even apart from those issues related exclusively to Jewish law.

The following is one man’s description of how he came to adopt a critical stance toward his own community’s way of looking at the world and in particular other forms of Judaism. His account is particularly significant for the role the Internet played in this process (for many without access to computers, libraries played the same role), and the degree to which his beliefs changed through it:

*The first things I discovered on the Internet were newsgroups and chat rooms where I'd discuss and argue all matters of religion and politics to no end. I was a passionate advocate of Orthodoxy then, and spent many hours arguing with those who would criticize us or our way of life. My political views were solidly conservative. I'd get my daily fill of Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity and defended their positions passionately. I spent countless hours arguing with proponents of other forms of Judaism and political beliefs, pointing out their inconsistencies and their lack of substance. I recall I once emailed Naomi Ragen [**an American born, Modern Orthodox writer living in Israel, who often writes negatively about the ultra-Orthodox**], outraged at her vitriolic weekly columns in the JPost against Chareidim [**strictly Orthodox Jews**], and determined to knock her out of her obsession with finding fault in us. I actually received a long response, plus she addressed one of her subsequent columns to my email. But a strange thing happened after a while. I realized there were many sides to the issues that I thought I knew, but didn't really. Looking back, most striking to me is that in all my time then I don't remember ever conceding outright to another's point of view. The reason that's so surprising is because now I hold views that are so close to those of my then-adversaries.*

Hasidic Rebel, Blogger

I found that many people in this category jokingly refer to themselves as “*apikorism*” (literally, heretics), even though they continue to observe the commandments. (One such man even told me he wanted to open a kosher café where Hasidic men and women could socialize, and which he wanted to call the “Apikoris Café.”); indeed, the very frequent use of this term among those who are critical of the system suggests that this may not merely be a description of belief (or lack thereof), but signify an identity (particularly when it is invoked as a way of indicating membership in a larger group of “*apikorsim*”).

Often, those who have come to these kinds of conclusions about the religion attribute the problems to the fact that they believe that the Hasidim conflate religion with custom. As one strictly observant, though self-proclaimed “open-minded” (meaning he reads secular books, watches films and engages with outsiders) Hasidic man in his forties told me: “[The] way [the religion is] being transmitted to people [in the community] is very empty, in certain ways very non-nuanced. So when it’s transmitted that way, it’s received that way.” This man firmly believes that if people “were able to separate the religion from all the community craziness” they wouldn’t “fetishize the clothing so much, or get so worked about being contaminated by the outside world.”

What is interesting about this man’s comments is the implication that while the system itself may be flawed, finding a way to live comfortably within it might only mean changing one’s attitude about it (i.e., the “community craziness”). Significantly, however, this man is not married and has no children, which may go a

long way toward explaining his position; it is likely much easier to change one's mental relationship to "the system" when one is, for all practical purposes, fairly insulated from its influence. Ultimately, while this man acknowledges the need for change, he does not advocate public activism, but a kind of private resistance (indeed, he himself hosts weekly gatherings for people who in some way or another do not feel they "fit" into the system.) Ultimately, it is not clear, however, that this does anything more than create a kind of "safety valve," while leaving the "system" firmly intact.

Among the people whose criticisms are directed more squarely at "the system," there are those who tend to focus on what they perceive as the corruption (both moral and financial) of the leadership. As one man wrote to me:

In the last 5 years there's been a serious erosion in the trust the Orthodox man on the street puts in the pronouncements of these leaders. "Bugs" in the water, Indian hair shaitels, book bans, and now this have conspired to severely weaken respect for them. There's a lot more eye-rolling, jokes, etc. nowadays.

Whether his assessment is correct, there is no doubt that his comments accurately describe at least the feelings of the critics, who focus not only on the leadership, but also on what they see as the flaws in Hasidic systems of education and marriage (the "shidduch system"). The following are the thoughts of a married Hasidic mother of four:

I don't have the magical solution to reconstruct the framework and foundation of our society. I cannot single-handedly get rid of those "leaders" who claim to worship Hashem [God] yet bow down to the idol of green. I cannot change a Chinuch [education] system that caters to the minority while neglecting and even shunning the majority. A system that believes in eradicating talents and skills that don't fit their mold. I cannot change a school system that is bend on

producing mass productions and carbon copies. Girls that were never taught how to question or think. Girls whose brains are empty, save for the skills of dressing up to kill. A pit can never be empty. If there ain't no water, there will be scorpions. I cannot change a shidduch [matchmaking] system whose definition of compatibility is a left boot with a right glove. And neither can I stop parents and teachers from Bsing and bluffing to their children, pretending that their Rebbe is second only to Moshe Rabenu [Moses].

Many people I came to know during the course of my research echoed this woman's sentiments about the system of arranged marriage in particular. Specifically, they expressed resentment about not being able to select a mate on their own, or to date in a way that allowed them to really get to know the other person before becoming engaged (typically, Hasidim have no more than two "dates" before they get engaged, which usually last no more than 40 minutes). They also tended to decry Hasidic attitudes toward the open expression of affection and lack of emphasis on intimacy.

As one woman wrote:

Where's the love, speaking of love there's no open affection to go around, my brothers freak out if I try to hug them. ye ye ye, love is so precious you need to keep it private, blah, blah, blah, if u don't portray proper affection how can children learn how to love properly? we get married they say love your husband, lol, love? man he's a stranger. how bout the first night whew! No girl in her right mind would have sex like that. lol, well u get to love him after a few yrs or so. Besides the whole marriage thing is crazy. They are just very lucky that the youth is extremely niave [sic] and brainwashed.

Ironically, the desire to experience romantic love and companionate marriage, expressed by so many Hasidic people I interviewed, has echoes in the experiences of an earlier generation of American Jewish immigrants. As Riv-Ellen Prell (1999) writes, during the mid-19th century in the United States "attitudes toward love were very much a matter of public discussion in the lives of both immigrants and their

children...[I]mmigrants and native-born Jews encountered transformed expectations and opportunities for love, courtship and marriage in every quarter (64).” Analyzing letters that appeared in the *Daily Forward* in the early years of the 20th century, Prell notes that the “central theme [of the correspondence was] that matters of the heart were inseparable from the process of becoming American (65).”

Indeed, while Hasidic people themselves may not frame their criticisms of the marriage system in such terms, there remains a sense in which their discontent with the Hasidic approach to love and marriage reflects a tension between adhering to tradition and embracing the “new.” Indeed, while almost none of the young Hasidim I interviewed were literally immigrants, their struggles with these sorts of issues highlights the similarities between their social situation and that of their co-religionists who came to American in the 19th and 20th centuries. Indeed, some people I interviewed expressed the view that the Hasidic “way” of doing things actually causes people to “rebel,” presumably because it works not on “love” (which could be seen as a contemporary, American value), but on fear. As one man commented on a blog:

The bottom line is: For the last 25 years there was only way of CHINUCH [education] in the heimishe [Hasidic] schools " do it my way or i'll beat you up" "Do it my way or god is gonna cut your fingers." Everything was done out of fear there was no "Love" involved in anything, so once the kids grow up (myself included) you automatically rebel. I picked up my first prostitute when i was 19 yrs old, not because i really knew much about sex, just because the famous clinton once said "I could". and my whole life since the age of 12 all i heard was "Zera lebatala" So in other words every one in the community can fight and i cant squeeze my member?? and thats how the cycle begins (at least for me, and many friends i know)When they will learn that we are in a different world today and you dont build a jewish neshame [soul] based on fear, maybe things will change.

While it was not uncommon for me to hear the theory that the strictness of the system itself can cause people to “rebel,” I found that most of the “critics” do not view themselves negatively as “rebellious,” even though they are well aware that their attitudes and behaviors would mark them as such by the leadership of the community (as well as their conforming counterparts). This does not, however, mean that such people live happily in this situation. As one woman said:

*I don't consider myself a rebel. I'm not rebelling against anyone, I just think that the system is terrible for certain people. Better said: this system is made for innocent girls who are sheltered and don't even know what a date is, they don't comprehend the idea of going out, and they are so completely and hopelessly dependent on their parents being close by while they meet their chosson [groom].
What I'm saying is that the minute a girl is a little more open minded she sees that system's flaws right away, and since the Hasidic community is so tight knit, she better keep her mouth and brain shut.
Got it?*

I also found that because the “critics” tend, in one way or another, to draw a cognitive boundary between “the community” and “Yiddishkeit,” many of them maintain a belief in God and a commitment (if somewhat skeptical) to the practice of Orthodox Judaism. However, because such people take issue with certain Hasidic customs, they tend to feel justified in covertly engaging in certain activities that are officially prohibited within the “system.” For example, a number of women I met no longer shaved their heads, but grew out their hair under their wigs. Some even wore pants in the house. One woman wrote the following email to me, after a vacation she took to Israel during which she stopped wearing her wig:

Sad how I could hardly take any pictures of me if anyone just saw what i looked like life will be over in this community i will be condemned to hell and my daughters life will be ruined.. for me I dont give a shit since I

wouldnt mind living on another planet with the woman i am in love with...but of course its all about my daughter (and husband) I aint that selfish besides my parents will die of a heart attack lol.....

I don't plan to leave. I just dress a different way and I desire women that is all i do follow all the rules and observe everything. I dont hate god. i love him. in fact I hate the freakin close mindedness and stricked [sic] fucked up rules the community has.

What is interesting to note here is the way in which this woman rejects the community's way of life while still professing a belief in—and indeed love for—God. Further, the fact that she jokes about going to “another planet” as perhaps her only viable means of escape is also significant, as it suggests that she sees no acceptable alternative to living this kind of double life (particularly given her sexual desires⁴⁸) as openly rejecting the Hasidic way of life “ruin” her daughter's life and give her parents a “heart attack.”

Much of this frustration with the “system” is expressed anonymously on blogs. The following post, written by a Satmar woman (whom I met in person) who created a blog for the explicit purposes of “defending” the Satmar way of life, received many angry responses:

I was looking for the disillusioned, unhappy faces that are said to be so dominant in our awfully ghettoed community. I wondered where those that have been disenchanted by our 'restrictive rules' were sitting. And then I realized that had they been upset with the 'system' they probably never would have shown up at this party. So apparently I was right all along. The rebellion that is so active online is practically non-existent within the community. There was an auditorium filled with over 2,000 beautiful, talented, intelligent women - who were living the lives they wanted to, and occupying themselves with what they wanted to do.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, it is not technically against Jewish law for women to engage in homosexual behavior, as there is no “spilling of seed” which is the justification for the prohibition against male homosexuality. Of course, it is not possible to live openly as a lesbian within the Hasidic world.

I have a classmate that has 5 sons. FIVE! She is 26 years old and she has 5 kids! I was about to get mad. Seriously mad. No woman should be subjected to that kind of life! When it suddenly dawned on me... She wanted it. Every woman at the table was discussing the pros and cons and above all the 'Why did she?'. Yes, every woman at the table was aware that they have a choice in the matter. But the woman in question - who is said to be one of the most relaxed mothers there is - actually commented that she would have no problem having five more sons. Foolish? maybe. Forced into anything? not at all. Many of my friends are relating that their husbands are the ones suggesting that they've done their duty (at least for the time being) in 'being fruitful' - but THEY are the ones who want another baby to hold... to cuddle. There are some who love motherhood - not because they were raised to admire it, but because it truly gives them satisfaction. Just like there are those who do not have the patience for it.

This woman was berated in subsequent comments, written by people claiming to be Hasidim and who accused her either of naiveté or dishonesty. The following reply was posted by a married, Hasidic mother of five I interviewed for this research:

Hello everybody, let me introduce myself. I am one of those so called "happy and adjusted" chasidische woman. I am so happy and in love with the way I dress. I think the colorful kerchief on my head is oh so sexy. I am so happy that I literally measured the length of my new earrings before I bought them, and still feel anxious that perhaps it looks too hip. I am so happy that I never take my wig off in my parent's home so they should God forbid not realize that I don't shave my hair off no more. I am so happy that I still wear a turban with all that hair underneath because wearing a snood will make it official to all the neighbors that "she is becoming so modern." I am so happy that I will never be able to drive a car. I am so happy that if my daughter goes to school and tells her teacher that "Mamy bought this dress on-line," the school will give me a call and I will get so much attention from them for the rest of her school years. I am so happy that my 9 year old son's English language skills are almost as good as my Polish cleaning lady's. I am so happy that the most exotic vacation I will ever get to go to is Miami Florida, and even then, without my husband, "viel es past im nisht" [because it is not appropriate]. I am so happy that NONE of my family members and NONE of my kids will ever know that I go to the movies. I am so happy that once my baby is about two years old my friends and relatives start shushkening [whispering] to each other, "what's going on with her, you think she's on birth control"? I am so happy that even though some of you readers recognize my style and know who I am, I am posting all this benign info about myself, under Anonymous I am so

Nobody gives a shit that 90% of these couples are miserable, and live a life in hell. Even the affected ones will arrange their kids marriage for they still believe in the system.

It seems like the system itself recognises that the system will crumble if it's touched, even if just a minor change.

What this comment fails to acknowledge, of course, is that, as we have seen, these communities have in fact changed and adapted in different ways over time, although the trend has been mostly in the direction of greater stringency (both in terms of religious observance and separation from the outside world). However, despite this man's feelings, there does seem to be some evidence that there some people who are trying to change the system, and others who are creating alternative communities. For the most part, this is happening on the Internet. This will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Apikorsim

Many of the people I came to know who transgress no longer believe in the tenets of the religion and identify (privately) as “apikorsim” or heretics. Generally, because of their lack of belief, they do not feel bound by religious laws. Such people also tend not to believe in the legitimacy of the “system” as a whole. Indeed, in many cases it is in fact the “system”—and particularly the leadership of these communities—rather than the contemporary Hasidic interpretation of Judaism that draws most of their ire. (This might be understood as a kind of neutralization technique—that is, a form of “condemning the condemner”—described by Matza [1964].)

Like the critics, there are, of course, some apikorsim whose deviance “manifests” itself not in their behavior, but primarily in their “heretical” views (generally fed by forbidden reading, in some cases the only transgression they commit). This may be the case either because they fear the risks of discovery that outward deviance carries with it, or because they are generally comfortable living as Hasidim and thus do not feel compelled to act on their disbelief. For such people then, adhering outwardly to norms of behavior while “deviating” in their minds becomes the standard *modus operandi*. As one man wrote to me:

I play your regular pious Chussid -- with all the accouterments -- rather convincingly, in appearance, actions, and conversation (if I can say so myself). There are definitely no outward signs of my "rebellion", no modification in appearance, no visits to bars while changing into secular clothes, no escaping into the secular street, and no dramatic change in behavior.

The changes are mostly hidden well enough to be practically impossible to recognize from the outside. Things like spending most of Yom Kippur day not in the synagogue praying, but hidden in the bathroom of the synagogue reading most of Darwin's "The Origin of Species" in one sitting -- on a palm pilot -- while not breaking the fast. (Yes, this sounds uproariously funny, even to me.) (I must say that having a Eureka! moment, or rather a Eureka! couple of hours while locked in a bathroom stall is a very spiritual experience :-))

Of course, I also met a significant number of people who identify as apikorsim who violate more than the prohibition against reading secular material. For them, as well as those who limit their transgressions to reading and thinking, becoming a non-believer was typically the result of a process of education that may or not have been motivated by prior questions or doubts. A number of people told me that they had not sought out literature presenting critical interpretations of Orthodox Judaism per se,

but were ultimately led to it by exposure to others kinds of information or people. I did come across a very few people who claimed that many aspects of the belief system had “never” made sense to them before they ever read anything that held Orthodox ideology and/or practice up to critical scrutiny.

For example, one young woman I interviewed told me that she first started questioning the religion because she did not believe that God would deem half of his “creations” (i.e., women) to be “unclean” for half of the month; indeed, this belief led her to reject the tenets of Judaism but retain a belief in God, which she ultimately gave up altogether several years later. Another man I interviewed told me he became an atheist in part because he believed that the Orthodox belief system was “racist and sexist.” For most people, however, being exposed to certain kinds of new information eroded what was previously an unquestioning belief in the tenets of the religion. As one man wrote: “I started to think, really think after I read some of [blogger] Godol Hador’s stuff and also [blogger] Mis-nagid. Until then I think I seriously believed everything I was told.”

While in most cases the erosion of belief was the result of clandestine reading or even interaction with others (primarily anonymously on the net), for a number of people spending time in Israel for the purposes of religious study—a legitimate course of action within these communities—did the trick. Those for whom this was the case claimed that being far away from the watchful eyes of their families community enabled them to feel more “free” to cross boundaries than they ever did at home. While for some, this newfound freedom led them to visit bars and nightclubs,

for others it meant being able to read material they never before had any access to. As one man I interviewed explained:

In Israel, it wasn't so much about behavior for me. I never felt like I'm dying to go to bar, dying to smoke. I never knew why. A combination of being overly cautious and a loner. It's not my beat. The philosophical stuff was extremely attractive in terms of the theology. In Israel you get columnists talking about theology. In America it never happens. You open a New York Times, you see politics, you see sociology. There it's because a lot of the secular people have religious backgrounds. And it was wonderful. To read the column and it was really heretical, really offensive, but stimulating. You could relate to it. Basically undermine every primitive religious assumption. Arguing on their terms. There was this Sephardic rabbi he always used to apply it to contemporary issues. Most of the time it comes out sounding kind of awkward, ridiculous. Can you use an elevator on shabbos? Only if you weigh less than 50 pounds because if you weigh more it needs an additional energy source. And in Israel something like that would be reported in the paper. And then it would be debated.

What this man fails to note, but which is an important factor in the above, is the fact that haredim in Israel have much more power and influence in Israeli society than they do in America. To a large extent it is because of this that religious issues do tend to be debated in the papers. While there was nothing technically stopping this young man from reading a secular newspaper in Brooklyn, doing so may have seemed much less attractive, given that American newspapers rarely cover issues central to haredi life, belief or practices. As another man who first began reading secular material in Israel told me, "I never even tried to read the papers in America. I didn't have a good English, but I also didn't have the feeling for it, for what they were writing about. It's not my culture."

The same man went on to describe the role of language in creating opportunities for him to gain exposure to "forbidden" ideas. Unlike in the United

States, where many Hasidim do not learn English well, in Israel even the haredim learn Hebrew. And because American Hasidim also learn Hebrew through their religious studies, they can understand the dominant language in Israel, and thus much more fully participate in the culture. Thus, even though the conceptual boundary remains between the haredim and secular Israelis (Orthodoxy is the only religious denomination in Israel), the common language tends to erode the social boundary:

A: So the people in Israel, they have a problem. Because over there the people all speak the same language and they're much more together.

I: So you mean the secular people?

A: Secular people there, they have much more contact. Over there it's much more a problem. Much more Hasidic people there go off the way.

I: So you think it's the language mainly there that does it?

A: The language, yes. They're much more together. The language makes a togetherness.

I: But they still speak Yiddish, right?

A: No, mostly not.

I: Really?

A: Even the people with the long peyos.

I: Speaking Hebrew? Even though you're not supposed to speak Hebrew.

A: No, they're very against. Depends also where. Only in the Mea Sh'arim, the real, real extreme places. There they only speak Yiddish. They also know very good Hebrew.

Having a facility with the language, combined with freedom from the kind of surveillance he experienced in his native Brooklyn, this man was able to go to

libraries and read, something that he would not have dared do in the United States (nor likely even had an interest in). The experience of going to libraries led him to meet people, who in turn, introduced him to more reading material. For this man, reading ultimately shook his belief in the Hasidic way of life.

A: And also I was very into, I was into researching. I loved to look old seforim. So I went to a lot of universities and met the other people and other people. And the bucherim, they guys over there, they didn't have any feelings for it, to research old stuff. As soon as you do research in old books you come to the realization, cause these books they didn't reprint, so if they were to reprint these books today, probably, you would have...

I: So you think when you read this old stuff, you get exposed to, but what do you think sparks the interest in, like why are you interested in researching the past?

A: It's a feeling thing...just kind of a feeling. You see you get the taste that life wasn't always this way. Because if it would have always been this way, it wouldn't have lasted.

I: So what is that like when you're sitting and learning and you're just going crazy, because you're bored, or, so you start thinking, alright I'm interested in something else. How did you first, before Israel did you ever explore anything?

A: Nothing. No. I was in the cage. I always felt tight. But I never had any idea of anything.

For both of these men quoted above, being exposed to new information, including new ways of interpreting their religious tradition, clearly ignited a desire for more knowledge. Ultimately, it led both to question the tenets of the religion. As one of them explained:

Because again, before Yom Kippur they do this thing with the chicken. I remember going and doing that. And then you come to Israel and you see this guy writing that a lot of primitive cultures have this kind of tradition. And then I thought, idolatry. I thought this was beautiful

Judaism. And I remember coming back that next year embarrassed. And I couldn't take this stupid chicken. Before it was the holiest experience. Elevating the mundane to the sacred. When the mundane drops the sacred drops too and everything becomes equally insignificant.

The fact that more than a few men I interviewed identified Israel as the place where they began to have doubts about the tenets of Orthodox Judaism is significant for several reasons. For one, it highlights the difficulty of creating and maintaining a symbolic boundary between the Haredim and the rest of society in a country where the majority is Jewish, and everyone speaks the same language. Even in New York, a heavily Jewish city, the fact that most people who live outside these communities do not speak Yiddish helps support the boundary between the Hasidim and not only the rest of the society, but even other Jews. Further, because the ultra-Orthodox community is much more (overtly) involved in the political life of Israel than in the United States, Israeli newspapers tend to report in much greater depth and breadth on the Haredim than their American counterparts. As a result, religious positions are held up for scrutiny and even debated in mainstream Israeli publications. While Israeli Haredim might not be susceptible to the alternative points of view expressed in the Israeli papers, it is not difficult to see how someone who had grown in up America and whose community newspapers presented only the strictly religious point of view might be.

While those who identify as apikorsim reject the tenets of Orthodox Judaism, I have found that many do not necessarily shed certain ways of thinking and behaving cultivated in their communities. For example, one Hasidic man I interviewed who no longer believes in the tenets of Orthodox Judaism still maintains that it is the only

legitimate form of Judaism. This is, in fact, the Hasidic (and Orthodox) position. Further, many people I interviewed who no longer believe in the religion continue to engage in practices common to members of their communities, like not paying income taxes or committing other kinds of financial fraud. I have also found that non-believers may nonetheless retain a Hasidic understanding of gender, sexuality and relationships in general

Of course, the fact that non-believers would continue to evince ways of thinking and acting reflective of Hasidic ideology and culture is not surprising. A person can rationally conclude that God does not exist, or that the Bible is metaphor, without these beliefs having any significant effect on his or her deeply ingrained attitudes and social practices. The fact that this is the case speaks to the persistence of the impact of culture on people's ways of thinking and behaving, even when they reject aspects of the belief system that to a large degree created and reflected that culture. This is not to imply, however, that among Hasidim who reject Orthodox Judaism as a belief system there are not those who undergo a significant transformation in their ways of thinking and acting. In fact, I found that particularly among those who have actually left the Hasidic world altogether, such a transformation seems quite common—not only because such people were forced to confront ideas and practices radically different from those with which they were raised, but also because successful integration into mainstream society required them to come into contact with different kinds of people as well. For some people, this process of confrontation actually prompted them not only to rethink certain deeply

held beliefs about the world and people, but also to reevaluate the specific religious beliefs and practices of their former communities.

The “New” Hasidim

A number of the people I met who were violating their communities’ official prohibitions argued that despite these prohibitions, it was in fact “normal” (i.e., the norm) to do things like watch movies, use the Internet for purposes other than business, or vacation in places like Las Vegas or Atlantic City. Indeed, such people contended that engaging in these kinds of behaviors should not and in fact does not make someone a “bad” or “lesser” Hasid, but represents a perfectly legitimate way of being Hasidic. As one man (with whom I had personal contact) wrote on a blog:

The silent majority, the ones who enjoy life, the ones who adapted to the culture we live in..[y]ou see them in the public library’s happily emerged in obtaining knowledge. You see them in restaurants enjoying a good night out with their spouses. You see them going on vacation to places, once declared off limits.

For the life of me I don’t understand why a Chasidisher yingerman who dresses as a Chussid and davens two or three times a day should be called a hypocrite for going to the movies, or taking a vacation with his wife to Las Vegas or with his wife and kids to Disney World.

It is, of course, impossible to know whether this man is correct in his assertion that the “silent majority” of Hasidim violate the official prohibitions against things like watching movies, eating in restaurants (which is considered immodest) or taking vacations to “tempting” places like Las Vegas. Certainly, I did hear from many people that it was becoming more and more “typical” for those in the younger generation (and particularly baalebatim) to violate certain well-established norms

away from the community (i.e., engaging in mixed bathing at resorts or watching movies in hotel rooms).

Indeed, in August of 2004, the Jerusalem Post devoted an entire issue of its Upfront Magazine to the “New Haredim” in Israel. One of the articles described how many young, strictly Orthodox Jews in Israel are no longer willing to live in the self-imposed isolation (and resultant poverty) advocated by previous generations, but are instead open to exploring the outside world, although not necessarily with the aim or desire to leave the community altogether. What the pieces seemed to suggest was that while the rabbis and community leaders may still consider such people “lesser” haredim, the views of these authorities were largely irrelevant to such people themselves. Indeed, one article posited that, at least in Israel, there are now two types of ultra-Orthodoxy: one that fears that any engagement with the outside world will destroy these communities completely, and another which believes that the haredim have a productive role to play in larger society, both in terms of work and participation in the civic and political life of the country.

While this may also be true of the strictly Orthodox in the United States as well—as the man’s comments quoted above seem to suggest—the lack of hard data makes it difficult to confirm. Nonetheless, the following remarks, posted by an American Hasidic woman, seems to support his point:

There has been a remark by one commenter that he saw registration forms for the local yeshivas, and if anyone were to be found with the internet then the children would subsequently be expelled. Every yeshiva has registration forms where they clearly state that children from homes that have a TV will not be accepted – yet any survey will reveal that this rule is not necessarily abided by. And no one would accuse a Flatbush resident with TV of being ‘not typical’. These guidelines are just in place to portray the ideology the leaders want

for their 'community'. As a rule, leaders tend to be more to the 'right' than the rest of the members.

Despite my sense that this might be true, this assessment was challenged many times, not only, as one might expect, by conforming Hasidim, but also by those who transgress or who have left the Hasidic world altogether. Take, for example, the following comment, written by someone who might be considered a “critic” (whose real life identity I was able to confirm):

Saying that you can watch movies, check out all the books in the local library, have everyone know about it, or at least not sweeping it under the rug, and still being perceived as regular upright typical member in any Chasidic society in Willi-town or anywhere else over the world is an outright lie, Nothing less, maybe some more. Which one of us doesn't know of the new decree which was recently announced by all prominent Chasidishe and Litvishe rabunim, that anyone who has a computer at home with internet, (in some places a pc itself is enough) will have his children expelled from school. So what do you call that? Is there still no need to fear retribution for these indiscretions? Whom exactly are you trying to fool?

It is of course possible to interpret the comments of those who claim that there is a “silent majority” violating the rules as attempts to “fool” both themselves and others. Trying to pass themselves off as “normal,” rather than “bums” or “outcasts” might be a tactic that Goode (1984) refers to as “normalization,” or when someone attempts to neutralize their behavior by trying to pass it off as normal and claiming that the rest of the world (in this case, the other bloggers judging them) is wrong. However, because in this particular situation at least, those making such claims in this did so using pseudonyms and thus could not be identified, it is unlikely that their comments reflected a desire not to avoid sanctions (that is, their anonymity already

protects against them being sanctioned for their expressed deviant beliefs and/or practices.)

While many Hasidic people I spoke with reject the idea that a Hasid could actually “get away” with living this kind of life, others expressed the opinion that to even want to do so constitutes a supreme form of hypocrisy. The following is a reaction to comment written by a Satmar woman (whom I have met) on a blog, who claimed that despite watching movies, television and chatting online, she is still a “proud Satmar woman:”

*Gosh! ur a hypocrite... you don't only catch an occasional movie secretly but are familiar with all the shmutz [**dirt**] out there and you call urself satmar?? “the representative of satmar” Ur the enemy of satmar. Ur what my teachers called the snakes, the worms. U give the impression of being all righteous because u wear ur seams [**seamed stockings**] and daven [**pray**] every day and listen to shir [**religious lecture**] tapes or whatever. But really with ur big mouth, ur “honesty” and your worthless 145 iq u manage to convince everyone around u that what u do is ok. What ur really doing is causing the disintegration of satmar at its core. Do u know that even brucha sima teitelbaum [**a relative of the Satmar rebbe**] is too modern and wordly for satmar? And im sure she doesn't know half the shmutz u know. Ur encouraging “honesty” among parents regarding yeshiva boys watching stuff?? What the hell is that supposed to mean?? On whose screen? Should they have a vcr at school or at home. That all yeshiva bochurim [**boys**] should have access to shrek or whatever else u deem kosher? What kind of standards are u following?? They're not satmar. so don't u be acting like some sort of representative.*

In one sense, it is not difficult to understand why someone who grew up and continues to live within the Satmar community would feel that she has legitimate claim to a Satmar identity, despite not conforming to all of the “official” Satmar rules. Indeed, that such a person would identify as a Satmar not only suggests that the community is likely much less monolithic than the official rhetoric would indicate,

but also supports the symbolic interactionist position that meaning is not fixed or imposed externally, but constantly created and recreated through the processes of social interaction and interpretation. Of course, this is not to imply that “being Hasidic” is open to endless interpretation, or that there are not certain behaviors and beliefs that would automatically place someone squarely outside the bounds of the group. What it does mean, however, is that among “everyday” Hasidim (that is, not the leadership), what is meant by “Hasidic” seems to be subject to a fair amount of variation.

Somewhat ironically, this fact seems to be particularly troubling to those who were raised in these communities and ultimately made the decision to leave them altogether. The following comment was written by a woman I interviewed who left Hasidic life several years ago:

A real chussid does not go to the movies, does not hang out in casinos, and does not hang around las vages [sic]

*A real chussid does not sit on line and chat around instead of sitting and learning the heilige [**holy**] torah.*

A real chussid does not read non kosher books and magazines.

A real chussid treats his kids like god wants them to be treated. □

*A Real chussid makes a kidish hashem [**sanctification of God's name**] when he walks down the street.*

A real chussid can only be a real chussid when he is not a faker and is honest with him self and others.

What is particularly significant about this woman’s response is that it demonstrates that it is not necessarily only the leaders, watchdogs and conforming Hasidim who

seem to have a vested interest in promoting the “official” understanding of what it means to be Hasidic. Indeed, such a redefinition can also threaten someone who left the community; claiming one can be a Hasid and indulge in all sorts of officially prohibited behavior certainly calls into question the necessity of leaving the community to pursue these freedoms. In a certain sense then, this woman’s reaction can be understood as an attempt at boundary maintenance, but in this case imposed from the outside.

Of course, all of this raises the question of why those who do violate norms but continue to observe the religious commandments do not make the decision to become Modern Orthodox. Indeed, when confronted with this option, those I interviewed told me that, within their communities, becoming Modern Orthodox would be considered almost as bad as “going frei” and might subject them to the same social consequences as leaving altogether. As a blog commenter who calls him/herself “Human Before Jewish” wrote:

i dont purport to speak for all chassidim, but in my experience, as soon as one deviates from the chassidic customs in which he/she was raised, he/she may as well become modern orthodox as far as the family and community are concerned. there is very little room, if any at all, for deviation in the chassidish velt.

Further, most claimed that they did not identify in any way with what they perceived to be Modern Orthodox culture. Indeed, one man told me that he felt that, unlike the Hasidim, Modern Orthodox Jews have no “heart” and no “fire,” a sentiment that was echoed by many of those I interviewed.

What is striking about the apparent pervasiveness of this point of view is that it reflects just how effective the Hasidic world is at creating a cognitive boundary between themselves and the Modern Orthodox, as even those who might actually prefer to live a more Modern Orthodox lifestyle seem to feel socially and culturally alienated from them. However, there are in fact real cultural differences between these two groups, which likely would make it hard for former Hasidim to integrate into Modern Orthodox circles—in particular, the Modern Orthodox belief in secular education and working for a living.

Leavers

While the phenomenon of leaving these communities could (and indeed should) be the subject of its own study, given that such people might be described as the ultimate Hasidic “transgressors” their experiences and insights are relevant here. Pretty much by definition, all those who leave these communities can be characterized by a lack of belief in and commitment to the Hasidic way of life. While many also no longer believe in the tenets of Orthodoxy, others remain religious (though in a more “modern” way). Indeed, I have found that for all who leave, refashioning their relationship to Judaism and their Jewish identities seems to remain an ongoing project.

Among those I interviewed who left their communities, criticisms of Hasidic life and/or the religion were, in most cases, also accompanied by expressions of the desire to “be” and live like “normal” Americans. For most, this decidedly vague term seemed to refer to everything from being able to dress in contemporary styles to

possessing certain kinds of cultural and social capital (e.g., language, education, knowledge of popular culture). In fact, for many people, being a normal American was not about knowing or doing specific things but more fundamentally about the ontological condition of being “free.” (Indeed, many people had so little familiarity with American culture that they were hard pressed to tell me what they wanted to know or do in all but the most general sense.) One woman framed her desire to leave her community (though, notably, not give up the religion itself) in terms of wanting to be able to “dance on a bar in stiletto heels, holding a martini with an olive in it” and drive to the beach in a convertible, with “my real hair blowing in the breeze, like a typical all-American girl.”

Another man I interviewed described his own feelings this way:

A: I always felt that [life in my community was] very restricting. Maybe for some people it works, some people feel good about it, but for me, I figured I was born here in America, I was born, why can't I enjoy?

I: You wanted to live like an American?

A: Yeah. I figure like this, I used to go out of the community and saw people lived, like they looked happy, and they're really enjoying life and a whole different, diverse, every day they could have done something else, they're not tied down to anything. And they're not under the pressure of people in the, the pressure of society isn't that strong in the secular community than it is in the chasidische community.

I: I mean, there are still pressures.

A: Yeah, of course, but it's not, you don't have to live like in the 18th century or something.

I: Just like the clothing alone in the summertime must be so hot.

A: It's hot like hell. You sweat bullets. I stunk like a skunk. And you're the only guy walking around who is dressed hasidische. And everyone's going half naked. And you have to schvitz.

This man seems to define “Americanness” as the absence of restrictions and the freedom to live exactly as one pleases, which is in direct opposition to Hasidic life, which he characterizes being “in the 18th century.” Others I spoke with echoed this man’s disdain with having to live “in the past,” referring to the Hasidic community as a “gateless ghetto” or, as one man put it, “a living museum.” What is particularly interesting here is that, while within the Hasidic world the notion of modernity is regarded as anathema and a threat to the survival of these communities, to those who leave, being “modern” takes on almost exclusively positive connotations.

To a great extent, the specific desires of those who leave these communities reflect the particular restrictions under which they have lived all their lives (i.e., the desire to dress in ways or engage in activities that were formerly forbidden). However, in a larger sense, these people are also expressing the more universal aspirations of immigrants who have come to this country seeking freedom, education and the opportunity for a better life. As one Hasidic man wrote to me, after attending a dinner hosted by a couple who themselves left the Hasidic world:

Reading a lot of times stories about emigrants who sacrificed themselves and emigrated with the support and wishes of their families from impoverishment countries and sneaked in to the United States in order to pursue the Great American Dream I taught that this is the true definition of a Great American Dream and admired them on how brave they are.

But After Friday night dinner, I came to the conclusion that there is another deeper definition and a much more emotional story about young people pursuing the Great American Dream. These are not

young people from a foreign country or even another state with in the United States but young people who emigrated from New York to New York. These are not young people who had any support from their community or families and where happy to see their brave children sneaking in to the United States in order to pursue the Grate American Dream.

These are young people who are coming from different tight knit Chasidische communities in New York for Exempla, Boro Park, Williamsburg, Crown Heights, New Square, Monsey and Monroe. The schools in these communities because of many fanatical reasons don't believe in any secular education as a result they don't teach their children any secular studies. As a result many young people tired with this system are leaving their communities and families behind in order to pursue a true Grate American Dream.

Those young people don't want to steal or live their lives on government programs, but getting a college education and supporting themselves. With... help they are on their way to their Dreams. We should be amazed of the grate sacrifice of these individuals in order to pursue the real Grate American Dream.

Gender Issues

To what degree gender might be a meaningful factor in any of the above is difficult to determine, given the small size and non-random nature of my sample. However, one of the things I did find was that, as previously noted, women's criticisms of Hasidic life tended to focus more on the Hasidic "system" than on issues of religious interpretation (although I certainly did encounter some women who took issue with the latter). This may have to do with the fact that within these communities women are, for the most part, denied access to primary religious texts, and must rely on men (male family members and rabbis) to answer their religious questions. Because of this, I have often heard women say that they "don't know enough" to even question the tradition. However, Hasidic women are indeed experts in everyday life

(raising children, organizing a home, etc.) and thus in a very good position to offer criticisms of how the “system” works “on the ground.”

I also found that fewer women identified as “apikorsim” than men, although I did meet women who claimed that their ideas about God had changed and no longer reflected their community’s understanding. Of course, because I met fewer women than men overall, this might well be an artifact of my methodology. Further, it also may be the case that, for a variety of reasons, women are less comfortable admitting to a lack of belief in God than men are. Indeed, the emphasis on female modesty may make women temper their comments more than men, although I did not find Hasidic women to be particularly shy in my private interactions with them, or their interactions with one another. However, I did notice on several occasions that women who posted particularly scathing or “sharp” comments on blogs were often automatically assumed to be men, which certainly indicates the different expectations within the Hasidic world for male and female public speech.

Chapter Six Crossing the Line

Introduction

Because this research was not designed to include a matched control group of people who do not violate norms and cross boundaries (in fact, the difficulty of openly conducting research on this topic in general would have made accomplishing this extremely difficult), the data cannot offer any insight into what might distinguish those who transgress from their more conformist counterparts. It is also beyond the scope of this research to determine what background factors (psychological or social) might be involved in predisposing or “causing” a particular individual to transgress, if such a predisposition even exists. (It may be the case, as Jack Katz’s (1988) work on crime suggests, that some people are even drawn to break rules and violate norms because of what they experience as its sensual, emotional and moral attractions.)

My own research sample included people from a variety of social backgrounds, ranging from the descendants of prestigious scholars (and even rabbis and rebbes) to those from more baalebatish or working families. Further, within the sample there were people who came from what they described as “dysfunctional” families (where, for example, there was verbal or physical abuse) as well as those who reported being raised in loving homes.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, I did find some evidence

⁴⁹ This is important to point out because, within these communities, the “common wisdom” is that those who deviate (and particularly who go “off the path altogether”) do so because they are unstable mentally, or came from “deficient” families or homes. (for an example of this perspective see *Off the Derech: How to Respond to the Challenge*. Devorah Publishing, 2005 by Faranak Margoless). Further, within the Lubavitch community in particular, there is a view that those who deviate and/or

to suggest that a person's position with respect to the larger social structure *may* play some role in at least his or her initial involvement in transgressive behavior.

Inducements and Opportunities

A number of people I interviewed found themselves in circumstances that clearly placed them on the margins of Hasidic society—for example, they were divorced, unable to conceive, had a very small number of children due to illness, etc. In some cases, I found that such people were also engaging in activities that would be considered non-normative—though not necessarily in a way that constitutes serious transgression—by the community. While it is impossible to know whether there is a direct causal relationship between being socially marginal and engaging in behavior that violates norms, there is reason to believe that those who lack a clear social role, or *staus* within the community may be “structurally induced” to depart from prevailing social norms. As Coser (1962) writes:

The social structure puts pressure on some of its status-occupants to engage in innovating rather than conforming behavior. For example, as Veblen and Simmel, among others, have pointed out, marginal individuals are likely to be highly motivated to engage in innovating behavior because they are structurally induced to depart from the prevailing social norms. ‘With the least opportunity for full participation in the most valued activities of their own society,’ they may be stimulated to make new responses, which depart from the habitually required. Being less tied to the system of wont and use

leave tend to be the children of “returnees” to the faith. The implication is that such people do not have a “solid” enough foundation in the religion and way of life to prevent them from being vulnerable to the temptations of the outside world. While there is no doubt that having relatives “on the outside” can expose such people to different ways of life and even provide them with a viable means of egress, so to speak, from these communities, there seem to be many who leave the Lubavitch community who come from families with *yiches*.

which regulates the lives of insiders, they may see alternatives of action that escape the latter's attention. (pp.179-80)

Within the Hasidic context it is difficult to know where to draw the line between innovation and transgression, as these communities officially reject innovation in so many areas, even while simultaneously allowing it to occur when doing so is adaptive for the community. Nonetheless, I did come across certain people whose behavior would be considered less positively “innovative” and more negatively “transgressive,” at least by the mainstream of the community. For example, in the course of my research I came to know a (strictly religious) Hasidic man who runs an informal “safe space” on the outskirts of a Hasidic neighborhood in Brooklyn. He hosts weekly gatherings attended mostly by Hasidim men who are older or divorced (the host himself is unmarried and childless). However, outsiders (including women) are invited to these gatherings and usually there is secular music, both of which would be considered serious violations of communal norms (most of the people who attend these gatherings also read secular books and newspapers and watch movies, all of which become topics of discussion at these gatherings). Of course, it is not clear whether such people would have been interested in these kinds of activities were they not somehow marginalized within the community, or whether it was their marginal status that propelled them to get involved in such behavior.

I did get the sense that being divorced can in fact lead a person to explore the world outside the borders of the community. As one man explained to me, “Most Hasidim are on the Express Train. They get married young and start popping out kids. If you are a divorced older [boy], you kind of don't fit, and you find other things to

fill your time.” Further, as noted earlier, being divorced is a source of stigma in the Hasidic world and divorced people often have a difficult time finding another spouse within the community. As a result, such people have very limited options for sexual expression and intimacy if they choose to live an “acceptable” Hasidic way of life.

Indeed, as one divorced man in his forties told me “All I get from the *shadchen* (matchmaker) are women with mental or physical disabilities, or crazy baalei teshuvah.” According to him, because of this, he had begun secretly dating women from outside the community, whom he found “much more passionate and lively” than most Hasidic women he was introduced to by the matchmakers, but whom he claimed he could never bring “anywhere near” the community (and certainly never marry), given what a serious transgression dating a non-Jew is within the Hasidic world.

It must be emphasized that there is nothing to guarantee that this particular man would not have sought out such relationships were he not divorced. Even if he had, however, he might not have had the same relatively unfettered opportunity to do so. However, it is not particularly difficult to see how someone whose life circumstances place him on the fringes of Hasidic society might feel alienated from that society and its normative expectations, and might even seek to distance himself from it. Indeed, Merton’s (1959) work on social strain may offer some insight into this situation. Merton argued that those who lack access to the institutional means or opportunities to pursue cultural goals likely experience frustration, which can lead to a weakening of the commitment to culturally defined goals or norms, or both.

In addition to divorcées, I also interviewed several women who were either unable to have children, or who got divorced before having them. All of these women, interestingly, had pursued serious careers within community institutions and organizations, which also brought them into contact not only with outsiders, but also with mainstream culture and social practices that deviated quite significantly from Hasidic norms of behavior. Having such a career would have been much less likely, if not impossible, had they had the responsibility for taking care of a house full of children.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with two Hasidic women, the first of whom was unable to have children and the other, who is divorced and childless. Their comments reflect the way in which their unchosen social situation has influenced their lives more broadly:

MS: Oh sure. I love to work. I love to work. She's [referring to ML] going now for a lifeguarding course.

ML: I like to learn and I have to do something with my time now also, to fill my time. Because I have a lot of time. It's not like we go out. There's no, like my social life is limited. I like to do something that I feel like I am doing something with my time.

MS: We wanted to go to Hudson Valley School for beauty school.

ML: Yeah!

MS: One thing about the 2 of us is that we are totally, totally not the normal, the general run...

ML: The general run of the general run.

MS: Because of my situation. My situation where I got married and 9 months after my wedding I didn't have a child, which is...So and now I'm married for 15 years and I still don't have children. I am the oldest—I'm not talking about the 50 something—I am the oldest

graduate from the school who doesn't have children. And she is [referring to ML] you know, separated now.

ML: I didn't get married until I was 24, almost 24, which is also not the general, run of the mill. Our lives are basically very, outside the norm. Although we belong to the community and are still a part of the community, but our lives are different.

MS: The thing is that sometimes your problems make you a stronger person, or breaks you. And my situation really made me into a totally different person. I was a very, very quiet kid in school. Very, very quiet. I was overweight. I didn't have too many friends. Then I got a job. I went to work in my father's business.

Notably, even though both of these women acknowledged the difficulty of their situations, both also indicated that marginalization also has its benefits. MS went so far as to say that because she did not have children—which generally makes one a source of pity in the community—she had more time and freedom to develop and pursue certain interests than the average Hasidic woman, something that led her to begin going to spas, something quite atypical—although not necessarily considered transgressive—among Hasidic women:

So I started going to a spa, something that hey, a massage and what and someone else touching you, and what are you talking about. I'm very not selfish. I share my experiences. And I'm proud of it. And not only that, I wanted my mother to go to a spa. I spoke about it, the beauty of it. I took her, I paid for her massage. Now she'll say, when are we going again. And I talked to other people about it and it's becoming more and more popular in the community. Now listen to this one. I am a service coordinator for these mentally retarded children and I deal with the parents on a daily basis and I know what they need and I know what they're lacking. I went to the [head of the organization] I told him that I have a dream, the dream is to take parents, overworked, overwrought, exhausted parents, to a spa for three days. And guess what? He granted my request. He's giving me thousands and thousands of dollars, about \$100,000, to pay for it for twice a year. Now this is something that is becoming more popular in the community, and the mothers are calling me and they're driving me off the wall, when is this going to happen? They are going to thank me

and bless me and kiss my feet for doing this. Now if I wouldn't do this years ago, starting going to spas and looking into it and feeling the feeling of feeling good, that good feeling, I wouldn't recommend it to you because I have no idea what you're talking about. Now I know how good it feels and can recommend to others and now they're waiting for it, and once they feel it, wait till my phone calls start coming.

This woman went on to suggest that she was actually creating social change in her community:

I am 100% creating change. Because I tell my mother, I tell all my cousins, I tell my aunt. Once you start talking about it, here and there, you start to hear people say oh I've been doing this. But they are so quiet about it because maybe they are doing something wrong, something outside, that people wouldn't accept. But there are people quietly that did do it but it is becoming more and more acceptable and you could talk about and not be looked at like oh, an outcast.

It is possible to see from the experiences described above marginalization can lead someone to depart from communal norms. Whether the form the departure takes constitutes transgression or innovation seems to be a function both of circumstances and individual choice. Indeed, within the Hasidic context there is a fine line between what might be considered acceptable innovation (like getting other women to get massages) and outright transgression.

Of course, to attribute some peoples' deviation from communal norms to their marginalized status implies that, were these people more somehow more integrated into the community, that they would never had sought to violate those norms. While in individual cases this may no doubt be true, I also interviewed and met many people who were violating norms and crossing boundaries who could in no way be considered marginal with respect to their social position, and were in fact living what would outwardly appear to be ideal typical Hasidic lives.

Indeed, as the following sections will attempt to demonstrate, many people, despite violating their communities' official rules, claim to be very committed to those rules, and to the Hasidic way of life more generally. This is not the case for everyone who breaks rules, however and, as we shall see, there are those who transgress who are much more critical not only of certain rules and norms, but also the "system" that produced them. It is important to note here that the categories described below are useful primarily for analytical purposes; in reality, they are not discrete, and not only is there some overlap, but also movement between them. For example, I have interviewed some people who claim to have begun transgressing while being generally committed to the Hasidic way of life, but who became much more critical of it after having been exposed to new experiences, information and people.

While opportunity no doubt plays a significant role in *whether* or not someone transgresses, understanding *why* one person makes or takes the opportunity to violate norms and cross boundaries and another does not seems a task better suited to psychologists. Despite this, I was able to learn something about the ways in which people were first exposed to the outside world, and the salient findings are presented below.

The Role of Social Networks

Many people I interviewed reported that they were first introduced to aspects of the "forbidden" outside culture through friends in the community who already had access themselves. For example, one woman told me that her first exposure to the "secular" world came through her best friend, who herself had secretly been listening

to Madonna on a Walkman and reading tabloids sneaked home from the supermarket.

Another woman reported the following experience:

When I turned 16...I befriended [a Hasidic girl] and she had a video machine. I watched videos behind my parents' back at [this] neighbor's house. The first movie I saw was Mrs. Doubtfire. A culture shock. Seeing this guy dressed like a woman. That was my first drama. And then Not Without My Daughter. I was so glued.

What is particularly ironic about this woman's experience is the fact that the first movie she saw was about a man who dresses in woman's clothing (albeit in a way that is presented as morally "justifiable"). Within Hasidic communities, the biblical injunction against dressing like a member of the opposite sex (Deuteronomy 2:25) is strictly observed, and so for this woman, *Mrs. Doubtfire* was an extremely subversive character, and the film itself an implicit challenge to everything she had been taught about gender roles. Indeed, while this woman told me that she had long had "issues" with the way things were done in her community—and particularly related to gender (e.g., the fact that girls were not allowed to run around and play the same way boys were, and that they had to wear dresses and skirts, which she considered restrictive of her mobility)—she believed that it was watching movies that helped her to better understand and even articulate her criticisms to herself.

I also interviewed a young man who told me that he first became exposed to the outside world through his grandmother. Though religiously observant, the grandmother had grown up in an era that was much less strict (in terms of ritual observance and separation from the outside world) and thus felt there was nothing wrong with exposing her first grandchild (she would ultimately have close to 60) to things like Three Stooges videos and family photographs from her youth; apparently,

she also often talked to him about TV shows, books, movies and other activities that she had enjoyed as a young woman, as well as what it was like to grow up in Brooklyn in the 1930's and 1940's.

Based largely on his interactions with his grandmother, this man began to reject the ahistorical approach to Judaism and Jewish culture promoted within his community and embarked on his own (well-hidden) intellectual quest that ultimately resulted in his rejection of the Orthodox system of belief. Indeed, this man believes that a direct effect of his explorations was the development of a desire to live “like a normal American.” (He also recalled how his own father had attempted to re-write family history by denying that he had ever celebrated the “goyish” holiday of Thanksgiving as a child, which in fact he had.) Of course, not everyone who transgresses is interested in, not to mention open to integrating new information they might encounter into their worldview, and not all who do will decide to abandon the religion or the community based on their new understanding.

The role of family members in facilitating boundary crossing is particularly salient among the Lubavitchers. Because so many people join that community by choice, and as adults, most tend to have non-religious relatives outside the community with whom they have at least occasional contact. For example, one Lubavitcher woman told me that she first began venturing beyond the borders of her community in unsanctioned ways with a secular, gay cousin who occasionally came to visit her family in their Brooklyn home. According to this woman, through these visits, she and her cousin became quite close through those visits and he would talk to her about music and art. Eventually, he even began “sneaking” her out of the community, to

concerts and other cultural events (she remained religiously observant during this time).

For many people I interviewed, the experience of going to work provided the first opportunity—and in some cases, desire—to transgress. (This was the case both for men and women, though generally women in these communities do not typically work after they are married.) Being exposed to outsiders either at or through work put them in contact not only with other ways of living, but sometimes provided the impetus for relationships which served as “bridges” to the outside world. For example, one woman I interviewed taught in a school for disabled children, which, while located within her community, also employed specialists from outside the Hasidic world. This woman became friendly with one of her co-workers, who ultimately invited her to see a movie, something this woman had never done before, and claims she would have never dared do with anyone from her community (lest that other person reveal to anyone else that she had done this).

Ultimately, this relationship not only exposed this woman to secular culture, but also caused her to think more critically about the Hasidic way of life and belief system more generally. In fact, she told me that because he co-worker often asked her questions about Hasidic philosophy and practice, she was forced not only to think more explicitly and critically about her way of life, but to talk about it with someone whose point of view was different from any she had heard within her community. While this woman has remained religious and committed to the Hasidic way of life,

as we have seen, such experiences also have the potential to undermine belief and commitment.⁵⁰

Other people I described the way outsiders they had met at work became conduits to the outside world. One man, who worked at B&H, a camera store in Manhattan owned and operated by Hasidim, told me that some of the non-Hasidic employees would leave copies of the *New York Post* and other newspapers around the company cafeteria, which he and other Hasidim would read. Some of his non-Hasidic co-workers would also secretly supply him and other Hasidim with magazines and music, as well as porn videos. In fact, one Hasidic employee of a successful Hasidic-owned business actually met a non-Hasidic woman through his world and actually began a relationship with her, which led to marriage (the woman ultimately converted to Judaism and the whole episode generated much gossip in the community).

Of course, it must be emphasized again that, while some people who become exposed to the outside world do begin to question their own way of life and beliefs, other do not. Further, even among those who start to question or doubt there are those who do not develop a desire to leave their communities altogether—either because they do not want to endure the potential consequences of leaving, because they are committed to tradition, or because they are generally content to remain within the community and indulge their needs and desires privately.

Travel

As noted earlier, many people I interviewed described how they, or others they

⁵⁰ For example, Blumen (2002) found that among female Israeli haredim, working outside the home led them to develop questions about ultra-Orthodox conceptions of gender and gender roles.

knew, first engaged in prohibited activity while on vacation. In some cases it appears it was the vacation itself that prompted the transgression, while in others, vacations were scheduled with the ability to transgress already in mind. For example, I spoke with many people who arrange vacations specifically so that they are able to watch movies in their hotel rooms, or do other kinds of things are impossible to do, or carry too much risk, in their home communities. One woman described her experience while on vacation with her husband in Israel, where she shed her wig and wore pants:

You can do so much more with pants. Lol. I went horse back riding/mountain climbing/all kinds of water sports boating/dancing/ Much more things I cant say... lol...

Further, many young Hasidim I met told me that they or others they knew especially enjoyed Atlantic City. While there are men who go to these places only with their male friends, it appears that more than a few couples hit these destinations as well (several have told me about how they take in decidedly immodest shows and soak in hot tubs).

The fact that some Hasidim actively “schedule” opportunities for transgression is striking, as this behavior clearly supports the notion that it is to some extent all right to transgress as long as it is done away from the community where nobody you know will see you. Indeed, those people who spoke to me of doing this tended to be those who had no intention of or even desire to leave their communities, and seemed to use travel as a kind of “safety valve.”

The Role of Technology

As has no doubt become quite clear, technology (particularly the Internet) is playing a huge role in eroding the boundaries between the Hasidic world and the outside society, creating opportunities for Hasidim to explore and participate in the world beyond their communities' virtual walls, not to mention forge relationships with outsiders. While many people who became involved with Internet told me that they had already violated other rules and norms, a few claimed that they had never transgressed until they went online, which is in and of itself a form of transgression (although many people's first exposure to the Internet came legitimately, through work.) For example, one man I interviewed told me that he had never transgressed in any way and was in fact a "true believer" until, at about age 22, he went to work for a business owned by Hasidim, which had Internet access. While at work he began surfing the net and before long he was using it to read about Judaism, history and science, and to download music and movies and chat with all kinds of people, including women. Within several months, he had begun to question his belief in the religion and the Hasidic way of life. His online "friendships" went offline, and he began to meet women in person, initiating a romantic relationship with one. Today, this man remains in his community, but keeps his beliefs and activities well concealed from others. Of course, not everyone who goes on the Internet goes this far, although this man considers himself the "best argument for banning the Internet" there is.

Significantly, I found that many Hasidim who use the Internet tend to gravitate to Web sites, blogs and groups that are written by and/or for other (non-conforming) Hasidim or Orthodox Jews. In one sense, this is not at all surprising, given that there are almost no opportunities for such people to gather offline (and that

there are serious risks that are associated with doing so). Indeed, these online venues function like virtual communities, “safe” spaces, where people can openly air their views and vent without fear of reprisal. Further, the way these blogs work seems to make the medium uniquely suited to those with a background in Talmudic study, as the technology allows for endless threads of commentary, including links to other sites.

Oddly enough, the whole culture of Hasidic blogging feeds into the Hasidic obsession with hiding and secrecy, while simultaneously encouraging people to be more “open” than they ever could be offline. Of course, there are those who decide to take their interactions offline, which in some cases has caused serious problems, particularly in cases where people made the decision to reveal their true identities to those they meet. One man I know made an arrangement to meet a woman he had been communicating with online, and even though neither gave the other their last names, the woman wrote down his license plate number and obtained his real name through the Department of Motor Vehicles.

In one case I became aware of, a blogger actually threatened to reveal the identity of another’s girlfriend. What follows is the text of an email communication between the two:

You say that it's easier to get a goody-goody, which I question, but let's say it's true. I hear your 'true love' plays the part of goody-goody very well. Except the difference between me and her is that she's got a hell of a lot more skeletons in her closet than I do. Wait, no, actually, I just checked my closet - there isn't a single skeleton in there. That's just the beginning of the list of my advantages over her. Hmm, let's see, there's the fact that her husband, as opposed to mine, knows nothing of what she's done and continues to do. (I don't need to reiterate the fact that she's doing a whole lot, and I'm doing a whole lot of nothing, right? I think that's pretty clear by now.) There's also the fact that her family, as well as her husband's, are both well known and

respected. Unfortunately, I can't boast the same for myself. You mentioned the possibility of blackmail in one of your emails. I guess that's your usual modus operandi, and I'm sure it works great with the usual people you come in contact with, but unlike them, I have nothing for you to blackmail me with, so it just won't work with me. I guess you're in unfamiliar territory now.

I hate that it had to come down to this, but the ball is now in your court. The next move is yours. You can either walk away, or you can start something really nasty. The question is, are you and your tragic love ready to deal with the repercussions?

Some Observations About Gender and Transgression

Overall, although I interviewed more men than women for this research, it is impossible to say with any certainty whether more men actually transgress than women. Many men I interviewed tried to convince me that this was the case, mainly by giving me examples of all the men they knew whose wives disapproved of their behavior. However, I suspect that this might be more male perception than female reality in these communities, though at this point there are no hard data to prove it.

In general, I found, that, in terms of actual behavior, men and women tend to do the same kinds of things when they transgress, though I did encounter more men than women who were involved in sexual transgression. This could be the case not necessarily because fewer such women exist than men, but that women who are involved in this behavior are less likely to be open about it, possibly because they are likely to face much harsher sanctions than men in this area. Thus, if my findings are in fact reflective of actual gender differences with respect to such behavior, these differences could be related both to issues of opportunity and/or the ramifications of discovery.

Indeed, there is little doubt women's responsibilities for child care and the home, as well as the limits placed on their mobility by prohibitions against driving, make it generally much harder for them to venture physically beyond their homes and communities. However, all of the women I did meet who transgressed noted the importance of the Internet in their lives. This technology has enabled even those women who are living in rural communities without access to public transportation, to "explore" the world beyond the borders of their enclaves.

Chapter Seven

Scaling the Walls

For 24 year-old Yossi, leaving his Brooklyn Hasidic neighborhood on a Saturday morning requires both the cunning and stealth of a spy and the preparedness of a Boy Scout. Before leaving his grandmother's house, where he has lived since his divorce, he tucks his second-hand jeans into black socks and then, over them, pulls on his black suit pants and laces up his black leather shoes. Into one pants' pocket he shoves his cell phone and a brown plastic bag folded up to the size of his palm; it is forbidden to carry anything, including money, on the Sabbath, so the bag must be hidden, along with his wallet, which usually contains only a few dollars and a Metro Card, and finds its place for now in his other pants' pocket. He then buttons a long-sleeved, white shirt over a tighter blue t-shirt (another ill-fitting hand-me-down) and over both fastens his bekishe, the long black caftan—embroidered to look like silk, though it is polyester—that men from his Hasidic sect wear on the Sabbath. After tucking his peyos (side-curls) behind his ears, he puts on a brown Budweiser cap, over which he adjusts his shtreimel, a large, round hat made of mink tails that is also customarily worn only by married Hasidic men on the Sabbath and holidays.

Because riding on the subway on the Sabbath is also forbidden, Yossi cannot walk to the nearest subway stop, the one he uses during the week, for fear of being spotted by anyone from the community. Instead, he wends his way through the local streets to what he calls the “outskirts,” where the bearded men in black hats and women in long skirts and wigs give way to Korean and Latino families who mind their own weekend business and barely give him a second look. Not until he is safely on the subway can Yossi let down his guard. If anyone spots him, even on the platform, word could spread through the community—ultimately landing on his father's doorstep—that he is lost, rebellious, crazy, worthless, a bum. He's made enough waves already; in fact, it wasn't long ago that he shaved off his long, spindly beard and trimmed his side curls, landing him, against his will, in the office of a religious therapist.

Once on the train and at a proper distance from other riders, Yossi first removes his shtreimel and places it on the empty seat next to him. Then he undoes his bekishe and puts that on the seat as well. Moving on, he removes the plastic bag from his pocket and stuffs the shirt and bekishe inside it. Next are his shoes and then the black pants, which go into the bag as well, topped off by the fur hat; the bag is now bulging. Yossi sits down again and puts his shoes back on.

Finally Yossi can relax. He is on his way to Manhattan, to the Rockefeller Center stop, where he will bound off the train and up the stairs, and buy himself a couple of (nonkosher) hot dogs and maybe a coke from a street vendor. And then he will walk a few blocks north to the Museum of Television and Radio, his current “second home.” There, settled into a comfortable private booth—with a TV monitor, VCR, and a pair of padded leather headphones— he will spend the day watching

episodes of “*The Goldbergs*,” a television show about a Jewish family in New York that aired (after 17 years on the radio) from 1949 to 1956. Yossi will be in “seventh heaven.”

* * *

Usually, when Moshe and Estie get together, they meet on the outskirts of their neighborhood, where Estie can climb unnoticed into the passenger seat of Moshe’s van. Moshe and Estie “knew” each other for a few months before they actually met in person: they were both frequent commenters, under a various screen names, on a variety of blogs written by Hasidim. Mutual admiration for each other’s writing styles and perspectives led them, finally, to exchange phone numbers, despite their fears that the other might be a “spy” who would expose their transgression to the whole community. (A few months after Moshe and Estie first met, Moshe discovered that another blogger with whom he had exchanged many flirtatious emails was in fact his very “frum” landlady, whom he could never imagine even owning a computer, let alone use it to flirt with men. To this day, he has not told her that he knows her true identity.)

Usually, Estie and Moshe will drive around in his car and “fool around,” sometimes going to a bar or the movies. Even though Moshe no longer believes in God and secretly violates many of the commandments, Estie is observant and so will not eat in a nonkosher restaurant. Once, however, Estie made Moshe take her to a strip club, just so she could see what the fuss was all about.

Even though Estie believes she is in love with Moshe, she knows they can never really be together. Divorce is a source of great stigma in the Hasidic world, not to mention how it can harm one’s children. And Estie is married, with four young children. And so is Moshe.

While Estie knows that what she is doing is not necessarily “kosher” by Hasidic standards, she also believes she is not doing anything against Jewish law by having a male friend, even though she thinks she might be in love with him. After all, she is a religious woman, who observes all the commandments. But she also feels very confined in her community, and longs to live a life that is “more modern.” Mainly, she has dealt with her frustration by going online, after she finally convinced her husband to buy a computer a year ago, she discovered the world of Orthodox blogging and now her life has changed dramatically.

For his part, Moshe would like to have a physical relationship with Estie. He has done so with other women—both religious women and non-Jews he has met online, as well as the occasional prostitute. But even though he believes this is ok because he and his wife did not marry for love, out of respect for Estie, he isn’t pushing it. Mostly, this is because, no matter what, he really enjoys her company. Indeed, Moshe never before believed that a man and woman could be attracted to each other and best friends all at once. And while he and Estie both know their relationship might not be able to continue this way forever, for now they couldn’t be happier.

* * *

Whenever Steinmetz has a day off from work, he always knows exactly how he is going to spend his free time. Unlike many guys his age (23), he won't go to a ball game, see a movie, or hit the gym (in fact, in his entire life he has never done any of these things); instead, Steinmetz will go to the library. Not to the big public library with the lions on 42nd Street, or to any of the smaller branch libraries throughout the city. No, Steinmetz will head straight for the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. And he will bring with him a big empty suitcase on wheels to hold any books he decides to check out.

Born and raised in one of Brooklyn's Hasidic communities, Steinmetz is descended from a well-known and respected Hasidic rabbi. Married (at 19) and a father of two little girls, he works in a religious bookstore in his neighborhood, helping mostly other Hasidic men find books on specific aspects of Jewish law, Hasidic philosophy, and Hasidic lineage. He has become quite learned in these subjects, and also very knowledgeable about where to find rare books the store does not carry; often people come in or call asking specifically to speak to him.

But on his days off, Steinmetz immerses himself in a very different body of Jewish literature. Armed with a card that allows him borrowing privileges, and dressed as he is every day in his black suit, coat and hat, with curled peyos down to his chin, Steinmetz wheels his suitcase onto the subway and uptown to JTS. Once there, after submitting to a required security check, he heads upstairs to the library and begins to go through the stacks, usually until closing time at 9pm.

As elated as he always is to be there (though his face, half obscured by his beard, rarely registers any emotion), Steinmetz can never completely relax, plagued by the constant fear that someone with connections to his community will spot him and report back to his father, his grandfather, or his unsuspecting, though "narrow-minded," wife. What exactly is wrong with what he is doing? He is certainly not breaking any religious laws. The problem is that JTS is a Conservative seminary, its library filled with books containing information and ideas that could severely threaten a belief in, and commitment to, the Hasidic way of life.

For example, there are whole sections in the library devoted to books on the Haskalah, or the Jewish Enlightenment, the European intellectual movement that lasted from about 1770 to 1880, which is characterized by a scientific approach to religion in which secular culture and philosophy are a central value (the Haskalah ultimately influenced the creation of the Reform and Zionist movements within Judaism). The Hasidim fervently reject the ideals of the Haskalah, blaming it for Jewish assimilation and the abandonment of a "Torah life" (some Hasidim even believe that the Holocaust represents a punishment from God for Jewish assimilation, and use this logic to justify their religious practices and social segregation). In the eyes of the Hasidic community, these books are filled with dangerous lies, and looking at them is nothing short of heretical. And Steinmetz plans to read every word.

* * *

In a barren garden behind a run-down tenement on the outskirts of Boro Park, several men in Hasidic garb are arranging hot dogs, corn, and chicken wings on a kosher charcoal grill. The plaintive sound of the Muslim call to prayer from the mosque down the street has been drowned out by The Gypsy Kings' version of "Hotel California," blasting from a boom box that sits on a nearby table, next to tins of Spanish rice, "Southern" vegetarian cholent (a modified version of a classic Eastern European Jewish dish), and bottles of ketchup, mustard, and Pepsi. One of the men—overweight, with suspenders and a big, dark beard—is opining on the recent, untimely death of a 1980s pop star. "I loved her songs because they were so much about longing and disappointment, both things that are to me deeply familiar," he says in his thick Yiddish accent, to no one in particular.

As the food grills, more people make their way down a dirt path from the side street: groups of men in Hasidic "summer" dress (black pants, white shirts, black velvet kippahs, tzitzit, and peyos, but no coats or hats), and others in more contemporary attire (shorts, jeans, khakis). Some of these more "modern" types sport beards and baseball caps, while others are clean-shaven, their heads uncovered. By the end of the night, close to fifty people will fill the small patch of dirt, almost all men, of varying ages and religious commitments, some not even Jewish. (A subsequent night here will include a Korean cyclist who heard about the place via an e-mail on his BlackBerry from a friend in Japan, and decided to stop by for a hot meal before resuming his around-the-world bike tour.)

This barbecue is one of many that Chaim hosts throughout the summer. Those in attendance make up a motley crew of Chaim's friends, acquaintances, and friends of friends, all of whom receive the invitation by phone call, word of mouth, or e-mail. While these outdoor gatherings have become a staple of the summer months, Chaim maintains an office space in the building that abuts the garden, where people are welcome all year long, anytime, day or night. In this ramshackle three-room apartment with sloping floors, peeling paint, a few desks, two worn couches, stacks of bulging boxes, an Internet connection, and no readily identifiable signs of industry, the group can hang out and eat pretzels, fruit, and fireball candies; drink iced tea, soda, vodka, or schnapps; strum an old guitar; surf the Net; read books and magazines; and discuss and debate whatever happens to be on their minds.

Tonight, while two guys over by the cholent are considering the possibly Arabic derivation of the name "Ferengi" (an alien race on Star Trek with suspiciously stereotypical medieval Jewish traits, according to some aficionados), Chaim and one of his other friends are enlightening me on the implications of the differences between ancient Greek and Jewish law pertaining to slave ownership. With the addition of a TV and constant talk of sports and women, this place might seem like any local bar or social club, except that many of its "regulars" were raised and continue to live in Hasidic communities, where watching Star Trek—let alone discussing it while listening to The Gypsy Kings and mixing freely with women and the nonreligious—would surely mark a man as a lowlife to be both pitied and shunned.

Introduction

Among many other things, the above vignettes demonstrate just how porous these communities' boundaries really are. Ultimately, the “walls” that separate the Hasidim from the outside world are symbolic, not physical, America is still a “free” country and the Internet allows any Hasidic person who can afford a computer (or a PDA) and a phone line to explore and interact with the outside world in the security and privacy of his own home—not to mention forge offline relationships that, before the advent of this technology, would have been infinitely harder to create or sustain.⁵¹ Indeed, the experiences of those Hasidim who cross boundaries not only shed light on what people actually do when they venture beyond the borders of their communities, but how they do it, including how they circumvent social controls and navigate the outside world as well as what effect the experience has on them. They also allow us to understand something about the meaning(s) of this behavior, both to those who engage in it and also within the larger context of the Hasidic project.

Playing the Part

As has no doubt become quite obvious, depending on the nature and degree of a

⁵¹ Methodological Note: a young man I know who lives in Boro Park recently purchased a laptop with a wireless card. His wife will not allow him to get an Internet connection, but he has told me that he has been able to log onto the Net nonetheless, picking up wireless signals from a variety of neighbors, all of whom are Hasidic and technically prohibited from using the Internet, except for business purposes. This man's experience suggests that home Internet use at least in his community might be quite widespread. I also heard from another Hasidic man who lives in Williamsburg that the technicians from Verizon told him that when residents in that neighborhood request service, they ask that the Verizon employees park away from their buildings, so that nobody will know they are getting cable service.

person's rule breaking behavior, and the relative tolerance of those in their immediate circles, some people inevitably become what Goffman (1959) refers to as "cynical performers" within their communities and even their own homes. For example, those who privately violate Shabbos and the kosher laws will generally observe them publicly, "playing the part" and comporting themselves as if they find meaning in the Hasidic way of life and religious practices. As one man wrote to me:

I "came out" to my wife several years ago. She was initially horrified and probably thought me a little bit nuts. Her main concern was that I would go off the derech completely and ruin my kids' shidduchim etc.. Once she realized that I have no intention of destabilizing my family and am willing to remain outwardly frum she started getting used to the idea of me being a nonbeliever and, while she won't admit it, I think she's coming around. Other close friends and family members probably suspect my views, but I have not had any explicit discussions with them.

It seems notable that this man likens his revealing his lack of his to belief to his wife to "coming out." In fact, many people I interviewed made this same analogy, and seemed to feel that there were probably significant parallels between their experiences and those of "closeted" gay people, as well as their processes of "coming out."

Indeed, for parents who no longer believe, hiding this fact from their children can be difficult, and the urge to try and influence them to become more open-minded, almost irresistible, despite being fraught with danger. A fascinating reversal of the typical parent-child dynamic, one Hasidic woman explained her situation with her daughter, whom she has been urging to go to college, even though her daughter is apparently uninterested, both because she fears being perceived as "different" from her friends because she does not want to do anything to hinder her own marriage

chances, particularly because marriage and children are her main life goals:

This role reversal is a constant theme in our relationship, although my daughter and I enjoy a warm and close one. She often tells me she wishes I were more careful about my halakhic observance. For example, she has offered to wash the dishes on Shabbos so that I do not desecrate it by squeezing the sponge (her God really disapproves of this and will send me to Hell for this infraction). I can give you a million examples of how she tries to make me a better person, even when her personal comfort is inconvenienced by this. I don't know how we did this, but for a pair of apikorsim, we managed to raise her to be a deeply religious young woman who has a deep knowledge of what God approves and disapproves of.

Even without children, a lot of effort can go into maintaining appearances. One man I interviewed, who identifies as an atheist, explained what he went through to conceal the fact that he had used moisturizer on his hands on Shabbos. Apparently, using moisturizer is against Jewish law, as doing anything that promotes healing (but does not involve life and death) is prohibited on the Sabbath. After purposely using what was advertised as a fragrance-free moisturizer, the man realized it did in fact have a scent and that someone in shul might smell it and become aware that he had violated a commandment. This man's solution was to seek out a congregant who had a strong body odor and sit next to him, thereby "drowning out" the scent of his hand cream. While certainly humorous, this anecdote also illustrates just how much thought can and often needs to go into the circumvention of social controls.

Of course, even those who do believe must still work to hide all signs and evidence of their transgressive behavior. For example, I have interviewed men who rent movies at BlockBuster, but make sure to transport the offending DVDs to and from their homes in a plain black plastic bag. Many people spoke of sneaking television sets and computers into their houses in plain cardboard boxes or garbage

bags, and then hiding them in places where they would not be visible to visitors (like closets). One woman described covering her windows with towels so that neighbors passing by her house in an upstate New York Hasidic enclave would not be able to see the light emanating from her television set. Another wrote to me:

it is funny that i do watch movies with earphones out of fair [sic] from neighbors!!!! I do walk around the house with pants and long hair I am afraid one day ill forget and just walk out the door like that lol...

I also met several men who explained how they hid tiny radios in their rooms at home or at yeshiva, and listened to them, surreptitiously, through headphones at night; one explained how he concealed them in his peyos, and listened to Yankee games during class.

Of course, all of this raises important questions about the potential psychological impact of leading what can in some cases become a full-blown double life, not to mention the implications for one's sense of identity (and possibly for the theorizing of identity more generally). It could be argued that Hasidim who find themselves having to conceal their behavior and indeed some aspects of themselves are not terribly different from the rest of us. As Goffman (1959) sought to demonstrate, everyone engages in varying degrees of "impression management," and the norms of a given context are likely to have a significant influence on the way we present ourselves within that context, no matter who we are. Further, many contemporary theorists of identity (e.g., Stone 1995; Turkle, 1995; Epstein, 1996) reject the notion of a fixed and stable "self" in favor of a view of identity which is fluid and multiple, suggesting that to some extent, we all lead "multiple" lives.

In the course of my own research, I came across those Hasidim who seemed

able to negotiate their double lives quite smoothly, and who did not seem particularly bothered by having to lie or “fake it.” Some people even expressed a certain degree of pleasure in being able to “pull it off.” In fact, one man I came to know, who gave a religious lecture every night in his native Hasidic community before changing his clothes and heading out of the community, described the almost giddy feeling he got from knowing how horrified his students would be were they to discover the truth about him.

In fact, based on my own observations, many people who transgress seem to experience a combination of great stress and tremendous excitement, both at the mere thought of transgressing, and of course in the process as well; indeed, the resulting “adrenaline surge” may be an explanatory factor of the behavior. Beyond enjoying the activities themselves, and even the sense of “getting away with” something many people seem to relish more than anything the (albeit temporary) sense of freedom that seems to be at the heart of this experience. Indeed, one man with whom I traveled out of New York City began singing “Born Free” as he skipped down the streets of the New England town we were visiting; having changed out of his Hasidic garb into jeans and a t-shirt, he experienced a dramatic sense of liberation, particularly because he was somewhere where he had no fears about being recognized.

Another man I interviewed detailed the ingenuity that can go into transgression, as he described the lengths to which some Hasidic men will go to make sure they have the right “equipment” to transgress. Below, he explains what he claims many of his friends do during the summer months, when their wives are away at bungalow colonies all week with the children:

Then you have those who don't have access to movies the whole year and their summer consists of watching everything netflix could produce. Those miserable beings who I really love during the rest of the year would meticulously plan how to order a DVD capable computer from Amazon and still return it before the 30 days are over without forgetting to order the second one from Dell so that no minute without a DVD is possible. Some even elevate, with AOL's three free months, to join the World Wide Web. If you think that you can see them on the blogs or they google up information, you are totally mistaken. I highly doubt that they even go to porn sites, nope, all they do is chat! Sometimes I can't believe that I'm even friends with them. Those can be spotted very easily. They don't sleep much, for there is always someone that will respond positively to "HotChassid" or "YoilyLongdick". You women out there can check how sleepy your husbands become all of a sudden, on Shabbos.

Of course, those who lead these kinds of double lives can also experience a great deal of remorse about lying and shame about living in a way that makes them feel as though they are "hypocrites." and actually begin to erode or completely call into question a person's sense of self. As one man I know, who spent about a year blogging anonymously about his double life online wrote:

Living a lie might be a sport, a bragging point to a welcoming blogging audience, but at the end of the day it is me who is going through sheer hell trying to keep up with my old, good kid image combined with my new rebellious self-image. I can assure you that it is no easy task at all.

Another man I interviewed described the experience of living a double life as a "slow death:"

It is strange then to feel oneself die slowly, but I ensure you that this is exactly what is happening to me. See, I always believed, based on previous experience, that death will be sudden, that a life change takes a swift something, something indescribable, to make it happen. I believed that one day the whole world will find out that I am just a fake living amongst them, living a pious life while making a mockery of the pious. Or perhaps it will be my wife, with whom I have

shared so many years and produced so many offspring, that might get the hang of me one day, one gloomy day, and end it right there and then.

Alas, I became the man lying in bed with a promised average life span of two months to sixty years. Nobody knows, nobody cares, nobody but me that is. For how can one care without understanding the full ramifications of death, of change, of cutting of ones existence replacing it with promises of a second world, of a better place to live. Hell, who has ever been there? Yeah, I know, many people are there, I see them every day, but who knows if I can fit in there. What are the consequences to me, to my family? How much of guilt can I tolerate. How can one know the answer without giving it a shot.

[...]I [have] realized that I'm not alive anymore, yet not dead. A sad realization, I can assure you. I'm there, I'm exactly at the point where I imagined for the last five years of my life, but the guillotine will not drop on my head, not yet. Fate is having a good time playing with me, and sometimes it makes me laugh and marvel at its' cleverness. I love fate, divinity, luck, or whatever you care to call it. It takes the pressure of ones shoulders to make a decision. That is why I always envied the believers and as they say, "if you can't find it join it", I let chance take care of it too, thus a slow agonizing death.

Sexual Transgression

In the course of my research, I did come across a good number of people whose rule breaking involves a search for sex or intimacy. One man I met claimed that he and his wife each respectively had a girlfriend and boyfriend in the community, and that they took turns babysitting while the other was out with his or her “date.” As shocking as this sounded to me when I heard it, conversations with other Hasidic people revealed that this kind of behavior is not unheard of among a certain, though likely small, subset of Hasidic people. I was told more than once that, for reasons that were never fully explained, most of these types are baalebatish “Hungarian” Hasidim (that is, from Satmar and Pupa and other Hungarian sects). I learned that many such people refer to themselves, or are referred to by others, as

“swingers” or “swappers,” which in this context seems to mean that they and their spouses seek out sexual relationships with other people/couples.

I have also been directed, by Hasidic people, to a number of web sites and chat rooms that cater to “swingers” and on which Hasidic people are apparently involved in soliciting couples or individuals for “swinging.” Several Hasidim have also told me that a particular Catskills bungalow colony is well known among this set as a place for wealthy swingers. In fact, I heard that bungalow colonies tend to play an important role in facilitating extra-marital affairs. Generally, women and children spend most of the summer months in these colonies, while their husbands come up on the weekends. Not only do many men seem to take advantage of their “summer bachelor” status, engaging in a range of behaviors they could not even dream of were their wives around (from relative innocent activities, like watching movies or reading forbidden books to pursuing sexual relationships with other women), but apparently so, too, do the women indulge in their relative freedom as well. In the absence of men, Hasidic women do not need to concern themselves with modesty issues and often do not. One woman described the situation as “Bungalow Colony Orthodoxy,” where:

[W]omen wear Tichels, but [parade] during the week when the hubbys [are] in the City in their flimsy bathing suits while their hair was covered by a Tichel/ head Scarf! My Grandma used to say why do you cover your hair when your chest is out for all to see!!

Indeed, I even heard rumors that this “immodesty” is in some cases taken beyond matters of dress. A 36 year-old former Hasidic man I interviewed recounted an episode from his boyhood where two Satmar sisters tried to seduce him after he delivered groceries to their bungalow, which was his summer job.

Those with whom I discussed this issue (including those who were involved in such affairs, and those who were not) responded in a remarkably similar fashion—essentially noting that because Hasidic marriages are arranged, and that people are very young, sexually inexperienced and not generally in love when they marry, marriage is not necessarily associated in their minds with romantic love or passion. As one married woman—who was very committed to her husband and children, but who still liked to “make out” with guys in bars—told me: “I didn’t marry for love, so why should I be made to act that way? I respect my husband and even love him, but that has nothing to do with me going out to bars.” In fact, the man who claimed that he and his wife openly “dated” other people told me that he believed that this arrangement gave him “the best of both worlds,” as he was able to fulfill the mitzvah of raising a Jewish family with his wife, while obtaining sexual gratification from his extra-marital affairs, which he insisted would never erode the commitment they both felt to the common project of raising their children.

One of the things that all of this behavior highlights is the degree to which romantic love tends to be separated from sexuality, not only within Hasidic ideology, but also in everyday practice as well. In an ironic sense, this actually seems to demonstrate the success of Hasidic socialization; that is, while I certainly met people who expressed a longing to be married to someone they loved, or even found physically attractive, many still seemed to be committed to the idea of marriage as primarily a means of raising future Jewish generations, a project that should and could not be sacrificed for anything so mundane as “love” or “sexual attraction.” Of course, the fact that people seek and even create opportunities for extra-marital sexual

and romantic expression within the borders of the Hasidic community (that is, with other community members) also shows that Hasidim are not willing to forego such emotions and experiences altogether.

Indeed, the fact that such opportunities exist within the Hasidic world is fascinating, as one might be inclined to believe that involving oneself in sexual and emotional relationships with other community members could present a serious danger to social stability—not only if people get caught, but if they actually fall in love with one another. However, I found that the desire for familiarity can trump any such concerns on the part of those who engage in this behavior. The following is an (Instant Message) exchange I had with a Hasidic man I “met” in a Hasidic chat room. Many others with whom I spoke echoed his view:

XXX: ... i contacted u cuz i thought ur a frum [**religious**] lady, im looking for a frum and willing lady
Me: willing for sex?
XXX: no intercourse, but other sexual play
Me: she has to be frum?
XXX: i like to go with someone that understands me
XXX: im a frum married guy
Me: i see ok
XXX: and only a frum married woman would understand me

Others I spoke with told me that conducting such relationships with others from the community was also “safer” than with an outsider, because the commonality of background and experience would ensure that neither party would expect the other to leave his or her spouse and children. Indeed, a perusal of the Craigslist “casual encounters” section yields numerous ads in which “frum” men are seeking “frum” women and vice versa. Some ads, like the one that follows, use Yiddish, which makes it clear that the poster is looking for someone from his background:

looking for a geshmack time with a girl. before yom hadin one girl from craigs made my mokim milah gezunt n shtarck. she had grosa set of double D's. id like another one to the same or better before the zman starts so i can give it over to my chavrusah during first seder. maybe well meet during chol hamoed for some fun. send a pic ill be sure to reply before yomtov!

In the course of my research I came to know a few Hasidic people who considered themselves bisexual or gay, and who sought out and engaged in homosexual relationships, which are not sanctioned within the community.⁵² In some cases, these (extra-marital) homosexual relationships were with other community members. However, I did meet some people who had sought out relationships with outsiders. One woman I came to know described in an email to me the torment of being a lesbian in the Hasidic world, and the cost she felt she would have to bear were she to decide to “come out”:

1000% I cant live like this its messing with my head who am i fooling? i am tormented by lesbian desire 24/7 i eat sleep dream think breathe women!!!!

I told [my husband] he can leave me he refuses and laughs it off! he doesnt mind. why should he? i give him sex every day more then any straight frum exhausted woman! i cook everyday, i clean, i do laundry and its safe to say LOL i think im a great mom to my daughter. lol

absolutly NO WAY can i go on like this. thats why i am so not relaxed. I am so [all] over the place its going to burst one day i know it!

i hate stereotyping but most run away [and] leave everything behind or go thru bitter divorce with custody etc. so i dont want to be like that! he will

⁵² In fact, I was told by many people that, while it was a sin for a man to engage in homosexual activity because it involves the spilling of seed without the chance of procreation (this is why masturbation is also a sin), there is nothing in the Torah that prohibits women from engaging in homosexual behavior. Further, many gay people expressed the desire to remain in the community (for an in-depth treatment of this issue, see the film Trembling Before God.)

never give me a divorce. besides i am sick to my stomach for the pain i might cause my own daughter. so i guess it will just have to be like this, meeting women in strange places or going to strip clubs!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

While there is no doubt that there are many non-Hasidic lesbians and gay people who find themselves in similar situations, living in a strictly religious community is only likely to exacerbate the problems. Indeed, as this woman concludes, it makes more sense for her emotionally to lead a double life than to try to separate from her husband and live as a lesbian.

Navigating the Outside World

In addition to the challenges imposed by the need for concealment within the community, for those whose transgressive behavior involves engaging with the outside world (whether physically or even via the Internet), there is the additional task of “decoding” and navigating the largely alien, outside culture. For those whose activity involves little more than going to movies, bars, bookstores or even strip clubs, the additional knowledge needed to feel comfortable navigating the outside world is fairly limited. However, it is difficult to overestimate the lack of familiarity many Hasidim have with the ways of the outside world. One Hasidic man, who began sneaking out of his community to the library, described his first encounter with a computer:

I heard there was such a place as a public library [where you could get Internet access]. I didn't know what it was a mouse, or how to use it. I just started tapping my fingers on the screen.

Of course, things can become more complicated for those who begin to actually interact with outsiders in any depth. Indeed, one woman I interviewed described her

fears about not knowing how to engage with outsiders:

But there was still the problem of fitting in I had never talked to a goy before, or even any other kind of Jew, and I had no idea what to say. All I knew was how to make an excellent kugel, and gefilte fish for 15. Who was going to care about that?

One Hasidic man I interviewed described the following encounter he and his friends had with some women they met at a bar:

So, we go outside with them and after sitting for a few minutes on a bench my friend asks one of the girls, 'Can I touch your breast?' He had no idea this was a wrong thing to say. She slapped him.

Another man, who had been chatting for some time with a non-Hasidic woman he met online, wrote to ask me the following question:

Stupid question but i don't know who to ask. if someone asks me to be her valentine, what does it make me? What are my obligations? My first lessons in secularism...

One of the interesting things I discovered is that among those who venture out of their communities, there seem to be some who feel compelled to at least moderately alter their appearance so as not to “look Hasidic” (by wearing baseball caps, rolling up their peyos and/or beards, wearing jeans) and those who seem to have absolutely no problem appearing in the garb, even in places where Hasidim are clearly not supposed to be (like in bars, or movie theaters or strip clubs). (This tended to be an issue more for men than women, as women’s garb is much less distinctive than men’s.) Notably, I found that those who identify as generally contented Hasidim seem least concerned with changing their appearances in public, precisely because they regard their garb as central their identity, even if they are breaking rules.

Indeed, more than a few people told me that they felt perfectly fine transgressing the garb, and these people tended to be those who still “felt” Hasidic

and did not seem to think that they should have to alter their appearances for anyone else's comfort. Indeed, this embracing of multiculturalism is particularly ironic, given that the Hasidim as a group tend to reject pluralism within their communities (though they will invoke it in defense of their own right to live as they do). The following is an exchange between two men on a blog about this very issue of appearing in “nonkosher” public places in their Hasidic garb:

Commenter #1: As a shtikel moderna [person who is a bit modern], I used to get really upset to see Chassidshes such as yourself at the movies. I felt it was hypocritical and went against everything that chassidism stood for. Then a chassidshe cousin of mine told me that the only reason he wears the garb is because his father wants him to. I was bowled over. My opinion changed 180 degrees. I couldn't get over that for kibud av [honoring one's parent] my cousin was willing to live an outward life that didn't represent him.

Commenter #2: As a chussid why am I, not allowed to dress as a chussid and still go to these places. When I dress as a chussid, its not a statement of saying, look at me I am better then you. It's more like a culture thing. I don't feel or think that I am any better than a modereneh, because I dress and acts like a chussid. It always puzzled me why it would bother a person like you, if you saw me there.

What is interesting to consider here is the prospect, mentioned by Commenter #1, that some Hasidim might maintain appearances primarily to honor their parents. Indeed, for some of the people I interviewed, it seemed that the prospect of hurting or showing disrespect for one's parents—not to mention the Jewish people as a whole—loomed larger than any of the other negative social consequences of openly non-conforming. Indeed, as one man who no longer considers himself a believer, but who continues to wear the garb and observe the commandments, told me: “Why should I

abandon the traditions my grandparents died to preserve merely for the taste of a ham sandwich?”

As noted above, I did come across people who do in fact change their clothes or otherwise alter their appearances when they leave their communities. For example, I interviewed several women who reported changing into less “modest” clothing and/or exposing their hair (for the women) away from their communities. For one of these women, changing clothes was motivated by a desire both to “fit in” with the mainstream and to experience life as a non-Hasidic woman. The following comments, made by a Hasidic woman who changes her clothes on vacation, capture the complex emotions surrounding this issue:

As for vacation I hate the double life and i hate even more the fact that I had to go oceans away to be one I desire to be...I wore pants/jeans/ my own long hair from the moment i left my house till I came home of course there was frum ortho men on the flight some thought my husband is cheating on me (wife) with a shiksa hahaha that was so freakin funny.. one guy did not give up and demanded to know who i was till my husband almost punched him in his face It aint your god damn business and stop looking shes mine lol.. It felt so liberating I felt freedom I was utterly relaxed It was shocking how different I felt Like new, like someone I have dreamed of in my dreams....I was amazed at my guts, guts I dont have here at home in this community.....

The whole notion of changing clothes is particularly interesting in this context, given the degree to which Hasidim are defined and define themselves by their distinctive manner of dress. Of course, for many who no longer believe in the religion or the way of life but continue to maintain the outward appearance of conformity, the garb serves to conceal rather than reflect who they “really” are. For some people, the garb becomes a kind of costume—wearing it, as one man described it is, “like being a Hollywood actor who changes his look for a part”— while others experience it as a

kind of “disguise” (providing cover for wrongdoing). For some, it is almost like a uniform.

Many people who abandon or modify the garb when outside of their communities described the sense of liberation they feel from doing so. For women in particular who feel that the Hasidic restrictions on dress are themselves part of the larger problem, changing clothes can be particularly liberating. (In fact, one man, who wore a Sikh’s turban to a party on a Friday night in order to conceal his identity as an Orthodox Jew told, me that not dressing as a Hasidic person had actually freed him from having to be conscious of how his actions might reflect on his people as a whole; dressed as Sikh, he explained, he no longer felt like his actions needed to stand for those of his whole group and thus he was able to feel comfortable not tipping a bathroom attendant, something he said he would not have been able to do were he dressed in the Hasidic garb.) Of course, for most people who change clothes, it is not just the absence of the garb itself that creates a sense of freedom, but also the sense of having shed its myriad negative associations and meanings.

Indeed, I interviewed one man who lives in Hasidic Williamsburg, but works in a Modern Orthodox institution outside the community in another part of the city; while he wears the garb in Williamsburg, where he continues to live mostly for the sake of his children (he is divorced), once he leaves the community, he ties his peyos in a knot under a baseball cap and slips on jeans on other “modern” clothes. Even though this man no longer identifies with the Hasidic belief system, he still feels that when he is in Williamsburg, it is his duty to his children to blend in, in order to prevent them from being ostracized. In fact, despite feeling that his “modern” clothes

more accurately reflect his beliefs and values, he also concedes that there is a part of him that continues to identify with Hasidic culture and because of this, wearing the garb in his community does not feel like a big sacrifice (although having to wear the garb outside the community would be).

This whole issue of clothing serves to highlight a broader point about transgression in the Hasidic context. That is, for many who transgress, such behavior is not necessarily exclusively about doing things that they cannot do in their communities, but can also be a means of expressing different, and in some cases competing, parts of themselves. For some people, straddling two worlds becomes having “the best of both worlds” and a way for people to indulge and express various sides of themselves. In other cases, such behavior leads to a more radical and permanent transformation, not only in terms of lifestyle but also identity.

Implications and Conclusions

One of the central questions to emerge from this research is what the deviance described in this dissertation might reveal about the state of these communities more generally. Because it is impossible to determine its exact extent, however, this question is difficult to answer fully. Nonetheless, what seems clear is that the Hasidic world is quite successful at forcing transgression underground and limiting departure. That this is accomplished not through overt force or a formal system of punishment is especially significant, particularly because these communities exist within a larger society that is hospitable to Jews; at least in theory, members can leave at any time. Indeed, the fact that so many people who do transgress seem to remain genuinely committed to remaining within the Hasidic “fold” is not only testament to the effectiveness of the Hasidic process of socialization, but also indicates that identity—at least in this context—is not necessarily inextricably linked to behavior or even belief.

Of course, as this dissertation has revealed, there are those who transgress (and even those who do not) who are extremely critical of the Hasidic system and would like to see their communities change, or find a comfortable way to leave them altogether. However, as we have seen, it is not exclusively the process of socialization, or issues of identity, that keep people “in the fold,” but also myriad informal mechanisms of social control, most notably the fear of stigma and subsequent social ostracism. Absent significant changes in various Hasidic cultural practices (e.g., the system of arranged marriage) and institutional policies, or the

development of a grassroots revolution, it appears unlikely that such people will find relief anytime soon. Indeed, over the past few years the response of the Hasidic leadership to perceived “new” threats (the Internet, cell phones) has been to issue more warnings and bans.

There are those who argue that increasing numbers of Hasidim are privately violating their communities’ rules and norms, and that it is possible to do so without experiencing serious social repercussions. While this may in fact be true—provided one keeps his transgressions private or out of the community altogether—it fails to address the personal and psychological implications of living what is more or less a double life. There is a serious question as to how long individuals can abide such an existence—not to mention what it might mean for these communities as a whole if they come to be characterized by a gap between their official ideology and policies and the everyday lives of “regular” Hasidim. Perhaps it will be, or already is, the case that a “new” kind of Hasid is emerging—one who, in an inversion of Moses Mendelssohn’s famous dictum, is a Jew in the street but a *mensch* at home.

Even while these changes seem to be occurring on the ground, most people I interviewed were highly skeptical about the possibility of systemic change initiated by the leadership. However, there is one thing above all others that may have the power to force the leaders in these communities to reexamine at least some of their policies and practices: the Internet. Despite the official bans against it, as we have seen, Hasidic people are in fact using the Internet, not only to access “forbidden” material, but to make contact and even form more serious relationships with people they would likely never have had access to before the advent of this technology.

Indeed, until now, Hasidim who were discontent with certain aspects of life in their communities, or who may have wanted to leave them altogether, had no way of identifying let alone communicating with others in the same situation. For such people, this technology is not only providing a “safe” space to vent, but also the potential for much more: the organization of grassroots movements for social change and/or the development of alternative communities that may be moved offline. As it does to any society that controls information and suppresses public dissent, the Internet presents an inherent challenge to the status quo in these communities. A blogger friend of mine put it best:

The Orthodox Jewish community's obsessive compulsion for hiding issues under the rug has lead to more failed marriages, abused children and wives, problems with intimacy, learning problems, genetic disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, and poverty than there should ever be. I'm not saying we are suffering more than the outside world. I am saying we are suffering well more than is necessary. Much could be avoided. This is because if more Orthodox Jewish people could just talk to each other, if they weren't so deathly afraid of what revelatory discussion might lead to, they could understand that they are not alone, that there is practical action they could take, that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and most of all -- that they are not hopelessly abnormal. Blogs allow people to talk and resolve issues that the community, by virtue of its misunderstood conception of loshon horah and over protecting of our children for shidduch purposes, would ever allow. Because we do not talk or admit our failures in public, we have bred disfunction and abetted the dysfunctional. So I believe that blogs are opening doors and bringing sorely needed information, validation, and normalcy to people who are sheltered and suffering the forced myopia that the cloistered orthodox community has brought upon itself over the past 30 years. If you have believe that Hashem has his hand in everything, then maybe you could conceive that communities built on blogs are the blessed right event at the most opportune time.

Of course, it is extremely difficult to gauge how many Hasidic people are participating in this kind of activity online, and whether it is having any impact in the

real world beyond making people feel less alone. One Hasidic woman I have communicated with online offered her thoughts on the matter:

I am really unsure about whether or not the jblogosphere[Jewish blogs] is really having any effect in real life. I vacillate between thinking there really must be an underground, grass roots neo-haskalah movement, or maybe it's just a few heretics preaching to the choir. Hanging out at these forums and blogs gives me the feeling that change is in the air, that my community's narrow worldview is expanding, that Orthodoxy can one day evolve into a pluralistic, syncretic religion, but then I realize that maybe this train gathering steam is in my mind only. I see little correlation to any such changes in my real life.

While it is perhaps too early to gauge the effect the Internet is having in real life, recent events have demonstrated its potential. For example, for the last few months an anonymous blogger calling himself Unorthodox Jew (or UOJ) has been waging an online campaign to remove an alleged pedophile from a yeshiva where he has been teaching—and allegedly molesting boys—for almost 40 years. His efforts have resulted not only in the filing of a lawsuit against the yeshiva by several of the alleged victims, but coverage of the situation by a national, “secular” magazine (Kolker, 2006). While many in the strictly Orthodox world have decried his methods, accusing him of loshan hora and making a chilul Hashem, many others have applauded him, and noted the critical role blogging played in his efforts. A blogger, who goes by the name of Dov Bear, offered his thoughts on the matter:

Actually, we who [blog] are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

And now it seems that UOJ has inspired others to enter the fray. Among them is a man who has recently started a Web site called TakingBackJudaism.com, which describes its mission thusly:

Initially, this site may take a hard look and expose many of the destructive and unjust actions practiced by leaders of, and institutional establishments created by, Brooklyn Orthodoxy. This approach is necessary to pierce through the 'wall of silence' established by the Brooklyn Orthodoxy Mafioso.

If this man's intentions are any indication of what is to come, the rebbes and leaders in the Hasidic world are going to long for the days when the worst they had to fear from the Internet was pornography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albarelli, Gerry (2000). *Teacha! Stories from a Yeshiva*. Vermont: Glad Day.
- Bainbridge, William Sims and Rodney Stark (1996). *Religion, Deviance, and Social Control*. New York: Routledge.
- Becker, Howard (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press.
- Ben-Yehuda, Nachman and Erich Goode (1994). *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bendix, Reinhard (1960). *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. NY: Anchor Books.
- Berger, Joseph. "The Water's Fine, but is it Kosher?: Crustaceans from Faucet Ruffle Orthodox Jews." *The New York Times*, November 7, 2004: B1.
- Billu, Yoram and Yehuda C. Goodman (1997). "What Does the Soul Say?" Metaphysical Uses of Facilitated Communication in the Jewish Ultraorthodox Community." *Ethos*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 375-407.
- Blumen, Orna (2002). "Criss-Crossing Boundaries: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women go to Work." *Gender, Place and Culture* 9, 2: 133-151.
- Bolak, Hale Cihan. (1997). "When Wives are Major Providers: Culture, Gender, and Family Work." *Gender and Society* 11, 4:409-433.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Braithwaite, John (1989). *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Briggs, Robin (1996). *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*. New York: Viking.
- Clinard, Marshall B. and Robert F. Meier (1992). *Sociology of Deviant Behavior* (eighth edition). Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Cohler-Esses, Larry and Debra Nussbaum Cohen (2006). "Opposition Builds Against City on Brit Procedure." *The Jewish Week*, January 20 (Online).
- Coser, Lewis (1962). Social Functions of Deviant Behavior and Normative Flexibility." *American Journal of Sociology*, 68:2, 172-181.

Coser, Lewis (1974). *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*, New York: Free Press

Coser, Rose Laub (1991). *In Defense of Modernity: Role Complexity and Individual Autonomy*. Stanford, Ca : Stanford University Press.

Daly, Mary (1973). *Beyond God the Father*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Dan, Joseph (1992). "A Bow to Frumkian Hasidism." *Modern Judaism*, 11:2, 175-194.

Danzger, Herbert M. (1989). *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Davidman, Lynn (1993). *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davidman, Lynn and Shelly Tenenbaum, Eds. (1994) *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

De Certeau (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Douglas, Mary (1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London and New York: Ark.

Douglas, Mary (1993). *Into the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, Emile (1965 [1915]). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, Emile (1984 [1933]). *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard (1992). *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Eisenberg, Robert (1995). *Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

El-Or, Tamar. (1994). *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and Their World*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.

Eliade, Mircea (1959). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs (1990). *Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender, and the Social Order*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs (1996). "The Protean Woman: Anxiety and Opportunity." In *Trauma and Self*. Strozier, Charles B. and Flynn, Michael (Eds). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs (2000). *Border Crossings: The Constraints of Time Norms in the Transgression of Gender and Professional Roles*. Working Paper.

Epstein, Shifra (1999). "Going Far Away in Order to Better Understand the Familiar: Odyssey of a Jewish Folklorist into the Bobover Hasidic Community." *Journal of American Folklore* 112, 444: 200-212.

Erikson, Kai T. (1966). *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Ferziger, Adam S. (2005). *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Fishkoff, Sue (2003). *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*. New York: Schocken.

Friedland, Roger (2002). "Money, Sex, and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism." *Sociological Theory*. 20:3, Nov. 2002 pp. 381-425.

Garfinkel, Harold. (1956). "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies." *American Journal of Sociology*. 61:420-24.

Goffman, Erving (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Knopf.

Goffman, Erving (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Goode, Erich (1984). *Deviant Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Goode, Erich (1990). "Crime Can be Fun: The Deviant Experience." *Contemporary Sociology*, 19:1, 5-12.

Goode, William J. (1959). "The Theoretical Importance of Love." *American Sociological Review*, 24, 38-47.

- Greenberg, Blu (1981). *On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Harris, Lis (1985). *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family*. New York: Touchstone.
- Heilman, Samuel (1992). *Defenders of the Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heilman, Samuel C. (1995). *Portrait of American Jews, The Last Half of the Twentieth Century*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Heilman, Samuel C. (2006). *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Helmreich, William B. (1982). *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Judaism*. New York: The Free Press.
- Helmreich, William B. (1992). *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives they Made in America*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Helmreich, William B. and Reuel Shinnar (1998). "Modern Orthodoxy in America: Possibilities for a Movement Under Siege). In *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*. No. 383, June 1998:3, 1-7.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russel (2003). *The Commercialization of Intimate Live: Notes from Home and Work*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hoch-Smith, Judith and Spring, Anita, eds. (1978). *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*. New York: Plenum.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss (1972). *Commitment and Community*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press
- Katz, Jack (1988). *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil*. New York: Basic.
- Katz, Jacob (1961). *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House.
- Kaufman, Debra R. (1990) "Experiencing Hasidism: Orthodox Women's Perspectives on Sexuality and Domesticity." *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*, 12, 1-2:1-5.
- Kaufman, Debra R. (1991). *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

- Kaufman, Debra R. (1995). "Engendering Orthodoxy: Newly Orthodox Women and Hasidism." In Belcove-Shalin, Janet S., Ed. *New World Hasidim: Ethnographic Studies of Hasidic Jews in America*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Kitsuse, John (1962). "Societal Reactions to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method." *Social Problems* 9 (Spring): 247-256.
- Kranzler, George (1995). *Hasidic Williamsburg: A Contemporary American Hasidic Community*. New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson.
- Lamont, Michele and Marcel Fournier, Eds. (1992). *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, Michele and Virág Molnár (2002). "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167-195.
- Lauderdale, Pat (1976). "Deviance and Moral Boundaries." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 41 (August): 660-676.
- Lemert, Edwin (1951.) *Social Pathology: Systematic Approaches to the Study of Sociopathic Behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lemert, Edwin (1967). *Human Deviance, Social Problems, and Social Control*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Levine, Stephanie Wellen. (2003). *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls*. New York: New York University Press.
- Marks, Stephen. (1977). "Multiple Roles and Role Strain: Some Notes on Human Energy, Time and Commitment." *American Sociological Review*. 42: 921-936.
- Marty, Martin and Scott R. Appleby, Eds. (1991). *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Matza, David (1964). *Delinquency and Drift*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Matza, David (1969). *Becoming Deviant*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Mayer, Egon (1979). *From Suburb to Shtetl: The Jews of Boro Park*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- McKenna, Chris (2004). "Worlds Apart: Looming Land War Sparks Home-Buying Frenzy in Woodbury." *Times Herald Record*, December 5, 01:03.
- Merton, Robert K (1959). "Social Conformity, Deviation and Opportunity-Structures." *American Sociological Review*, 24:2, 177-189.

- Mintz, Jerome R (1992). *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Morris, Bonnie J. (1998). *Lubavitcher Women in America: Identity and Activism in the Postwar Era*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Myerhoff, Barbara (1978). *Number Our Days: A Triumph of Continuity and Culture Among Jewish Old People in an Urban Ghetto*. New York: Touchstone.
- Plutzer, Eric (1988). "Work Life, Family, and Women's Support of Feminism." *American Sociological Review* 53, 4: 640-649.
- Poll, Solomon (1962). *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg*. New York: Schocken.
- Prell, Riv-Ellen (1999). *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Raybeck, Douglas (1988). Anthropology and Labeling Theory: A Constructive Critique, *Ethos*, 16:4, 371-397.
- Reuther, Rosemary Radford, Ed. (1974). *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian traditions*. NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Rigg, Bryan Mark (2004). *Rescued From the Reich: How One of Hitler's Soldiers Saved the Lubavitcher Rebbe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rotem, Judith (1997). *Distant Sisters: The Women I Left Behind*. Philadelphia. The Jewish Publication Society.
- Rubin, Israel (1997). *Satmar: Two Generations of an Urban Island*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Rubington, Earl and Martin S. Weinberg (1987). *Deviance: The Interactionist Perspective*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Sanders, Jimmy M. (2002). "Ethnic Boundaries and Identity in Plural Societies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 327-357.
- Schilling, Chris (2003). *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Shaffir, William (1995). "Boundaries and Self-Presentation Among the Hasidim: A Study in Identity Maintenance." In Belcove-Shalin, Janet S., ed. *New World Hasidim: Ethnographic Studies of Hasidic Jews in America*. New York: SUNY Press.

- Simmel, Georg (1959 [1906]). *Sociology of Religion*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Sivan, Emmanuel (1995). "The Enclave Culture." In Marty, M., Ed. *Fundamentalism Comprehended*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stone, A.R. (1995). *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sutherland, Edwin H. (1978). *Criminology*. New York: Lippincott.
- Thompson, Linda and Alexis J. Walker (1989). "Gender in Families: Women and Men in Marriage, Work and Parenthood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51, 4: 845-871.
- Turkle, Sherry (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Touchstone.
- Turner, Victor (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Valins, Oliver (1993). "Stubborn Identities and the Construction of Socio-Spatial Boundaries: Ultra-Orthodox Jews Living in Contemporary Britain." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, 2: 158.
- Weber, Max (1963 [1922]). *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Weissman, Jenna Joselit (1990). *New York's Jewish Jews*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert (1988). *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War Two*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zablocki, Benjamin (1970). *The Joyful Community*. Baltimore, Penguin Books.
- Zablocki, Benjamin (1980). *Alienation and Charisma*, New York: TheFree Press.
- Zborowski, Mark and Elizabeth Herzog (1952). *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl*. New York: Schocken.