

When the Schmalitz Hits the Fan:

How Modern Orthodox Jewish college students
include a fringe population and negotiate a paradox of community

Presented to

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University

Undergraduate Program in Sociology
Professor Wendy Cadge, Advisor

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May 1st, 2014

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Acknowledgements

Churning out 90 pages of academic investigation would simply not have been possible without some key individuals helping me throughout the thesis-writing process. I express gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Wendy Cadge, for first inspiring my interest in sociology and providing to me invaluable advice and guidance over my four years at Brandeis in various matters Brandeisian and sociological, culminating in this honors thesis. I'd also like to thank my external reader from Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, for developing my curiosity about Orthodox Jewry into a scholarly interest and offering helpful consultation and perspective to me on issues of Orthodoxy while I wrote this thesis. Professor Laura Miller, my second reader from the sociology department, graciously agreed to join my committee and, while I was in her Social Theory and Contemporary Society class, permitted me to regularly cite Orthodox Jews as a case study for whatever social theory we were studying. I also thank both Professor Karen Hansen, the undergraduate advising head for sociology, and Emily Sigalow, a PhD candidate in NEJS and Sociology, for providing academic guidance to this endeavor, and Judy Hanley for providing helpful administrative support.

My friends and family were very encouraging and understanding as I explained to them that I was writing my senior honors thesis on Orthodox Jewish college students. My parents and younger brother were enthusiastic about the idea of me pursuing a thesis project and were respectful of my need to spend many hours of winter break transcribing interviews. My friends encouraged me during every step of the thesis-writing process and charitably listened (and even

engaged me) while I pontificated about why I found the social structures of Orthodox Judaism to be so fascinating.

Lastly, I want to thank the Brandeis Orthodox Organization, and specifically the twenty individuals who agreed to speak with me for my thesis. The members of BOO welcomed me with open arms when I approached them with a curiosity for traditional religious practice, and many have since become my friends. When I decided to write a thesis about their community, they were equally enthusiastic about participating. The twenty respondents generously offered their time to share with me their experiences, both positive and negative, of being an observant Jew at Brandeis. I know many of them have anticipated the completion of this thesis, and I hope they find in it a new and useful framework for understanding their community.

Introduction

Modern Orthodox Jewish college students do not appear to be a typical research focus for an honors thesis. When I explain my topic to faculty around the school, I always detect a slight air of surprise in response, as if I had informed them that I had learned the new salary increase of the university president. I find this telling. As a (formerly) nonobservant Jewish student at Brandeis University, I often had found Modern Orthodox Jews on-campus (from hereon referred to as simply “Orthodox” unless otherwise specified) to be an unusual reminder of the university’s Jewish heritage. Orthodox Jews are accommodated and warmly welcomed on-campus, in line with Brandeis’ Jewish heritage, but at the same time are rather insular. They are apart and communal, living together, eating together, learning together, and praying together. Someone who is not in the community and has superficial knowledge of its activities might view it as foreign, a preconception easily reinforced by their distinct external appearance; many Orthodox Jews wear religious articles of clothing, such as kippot and tzitzit for men and long skirts and sleeves for women. Until my junior year, my interactions with Orthodox students were highly limited, coincidental at best, and unrelated to religion. I would very delicately guess that the faculty I spoke with had similar experiences. Thus, my decision to explore that community in-depth may have prompted some reactions of surprise.

At the beginning of my junior year, I went through a phase of religious questioning that led me to seek out the one Orthodox Jewish friend that I had at that time, whom I happened to know through the campus newspaper. With his guidance, I spent time with and navigated my way through the Orthodox Jewish community at Brandeis. As I befriended more Orthodox

Jewish students, the two-dimensionality of the community started to fade away, and I began to appreciate the dynamics, challenges, and politics of Orthodox Judaism. Specifically, my long-held supposition that Orthodox Jews all followed Jewish law like soldiers in the military was quickly shattered. I can vividly recall one conversation on a Sunday evening when a friend of mine, who was well-integrated in the campus Orthodox community but less observant, decided to order sushi from a non-Kosher restaurant for delivery to campus. Madeleine, a girl in the Orthodox community, asked to be included on the order. “Wait, aren’t you Kosher?” my friend asked. “When I want to be,” Madeleine replied sheepishly. She joined the order.

From there, I began to wonder how Orthodox Jews choose to follow or ignore Jewish law and how those decisions impacted their religious community. Why would Orthodox Jews break a Jewish law? Doesn’t it bother other Orthodox Jews? Would breaking laws create tension in the community? How does the community handle its own members’ movement away from traditional practice? Where is that fine line of “unacceptable” behavior to the rest of the community? These are all central questions that I attempt to address in this thesis. Theoretically, they relate to a basic sociological question of how a community responds to internal deviance. Empirically, they engage questions surrounding the practice of religion on college campuses, such as the importance of religious practice versus ideology and the way that college students’ religions are influenced by their newfound personal independence.

Emile Durkheim’s research on communal identity relates deeply to the research of this thesis. In his book *Suicide*, Durkheim writes how increased integration into one’s social groups, such as a religious group, decreases the risk of suicide,¹ clarifying the important role that participating in social groups plays in creating stable individual identities. Specifically, he

¹ Durkheim, 208-9.

explains that religion links people with a doctrine that dictates the way they live and how they think. People who follow the same doctrine together form a religious society based on these shared values from the doctrine: the more stringent the doctrine, the tighter the community.²

Durkheim further argues that it is the practice of free inquiry that leads men to commit suicide.³ This free inquiry, in other words, is the exploration of ideas outside the religious doctrine that community members hold dear. I explore how the campus Orthodox community manages the tension of upholding religious ideals of Orthodox Judaism on campus (Durkheim's doctrine) and aspiring to be inclusive and welcoming as a campus organization. According to Durkheim, decreasing the authority of the doctrine in the community should lead to a less coherent religious community. At Brandeis, decreasing the emphasis placed on traditional religious practice would, according to Durkheim's theory, lead to a less cohesive Orthodox Jewish student body.

Most important, however, is the question of what it means to be a "religious community" in Orthodox Judaism. Does it mean nurturing members so they can meet a set of religious ideals? Or does it mean being inclusive of people with differing practices and opinions of those who share in the same "common denominator" of religious practice? How can these two values coexist in the same community? This is a question that is not limited to small on-campus religious groups; any religious community has to manage the balance between valuing ideals and tradition and welcoming diversity. In a college environment where students are experiencing personal independence for the first time and in a religiously diverse environment where

² Durkheim, 159.

³ *ibid.*, 159.

Orthodox students are exposed to various options for practicing Judaism, this tension becomes very palpable and a community can struggle to maintain an appropriate balance.

My focus on community speaks to central tenets of both the college experience and the Jewish religion. I could have conducted my analysis with a focus on gender or religious social movements, but the emphasis on community structures more effectively elucidate the challenges I observed within the Brandeis community. Although both gender and religious social movements, for instance, greatly affect the larger American Orthodox Jewish community on a regular basis, their impact on the Brandeis Orthodox Organization does not seem to raise much concern among its members and was not a common topic of conversation in my interviews. Community, however, was a concern, as members all had different ideas of what they wanted their community to be. As Orthodox Jews, they want a communal space where they can share their religious practice with others who understand and appreciate it. As college students, they are looking for a core group of friends with whom they can stay connected, potentially long after college. The two identities, as Jews and as college students, to which Orthodox Jewish students must simultaneously hold on can create tension when the communities for each fail to properly overlap with each other. This is part of the tension that I explore in this paper.

Given the target research demographic of Orthodox Jewish college students, I decided to speak with members of the Orthodox community at Brandeis University as my case study. This certainly made subject recruitment and interviews much easier to conduct as an undergraduate student myself but also enhanced my understanding of the project. I had experienced firsthand and become familiar with the general rhythms of Orthodox Jewish life on campus at Brandeis, which allowed me to understand references made in interviews to other individuals and locations

as well as take into account changes in community politics (such as the arrival of a new Orthodox rabbi to advise the community) that I could miss in an unfamiliar setting.

This thesis explores Orthodox Jewish college students in six different chapters. First, I review the existing literature that explores religion in college, Judaism in college, and the current dynamics of Orthodox Judaism. I attempt to narrow down broader trends of religious behavior among college students to those among Orthodox college students and provide a statistical introduction to the American Orthodox Jewish community today. The literature review is followed with a methodology section to clarify the process by which I carried out my field work. I detail the demographics of the students I interviewed as well as my process for seeking out and conducting interviews.

My three empirical chapters each touch on a different component of my interviews. First, in “A Diverse Community,” I explore the varied backgrounds of the respondents and the sociological operation of the Orthodox Jewish community at Brandeis. Such operation includes how social networks form in Orthodox Judaism, how these networks relate to religious observance, and how these networks create an important foundation for membership in the Brandeis Orthodox Organization. Second, in “Expanding the Tent,” I consider the rationales that Orthodox students use to accept diversity within the campus Orthodox community and the rise of a “fringe” group that underscores the prominence of social networks over religious practice in defining “Orthodox membership.” Furthermore, I take into account the reality of students being in college as an antithesis to facilitation of broad standards of religious practice. Lastly, the third empirical chapter, “Party in the Mods,” explores a specific case study of Orthodox students attending a party on Shabbat that has music playing. Many students expressed ambivalence

about the nature of the party but still decided to attend, indicating the prioritization of the social component of Orthodoxy over the religious.

In the spirit of public sociology, I conclude my thesis by offering a prediction about the future of the Brandeis Orthodox Organization and presenting some suggestions to help ensure the community's cohesive nature into the future. This final chapter, "When the Schmaltz Hits the Fan," considers the overarching tacit acceptance by the community of differences in religious practice and considers how a tacit acceptance will serve the community into the future, especially in the face of a rapidly-changing American Jewish Orthodoxy. I also situate my findings in the context of broader existing literature related to religious practice and religious identity in college to make clear what my findings add to them and what future research in these areas is still needed.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature

The religion of universities and their students

The evolution of religion's presence at American universities has significantly impacted the ways that university students relate to and practice religion. Many universities that were formerly bound to religious traditions have since loosened their ties with their founding churches⁴ and have adapted to religious changes resulting from various political, social, and economic changes in America, such as immigration and war.⁵ As students from myriad different religions are accepted to and attend university together, these universities have become spaces where people of different faith traditions, or no faith tradition, can come together and learn from each other.⁶ In fact, many universities have seemingly followed a model of avoiding sectarian issues or religious preference, uncannily parallel to the church-state separation that is idealized in American government.⁷ For many of these schools, they are “neutrally supportive of [no religion.]”⁸ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield found that the university can help students develop a stronger religious practice.⁹ As they wrote in their introduction: “if social scientists are so sure of a widespread religiousness in the world, ... one has to suspect that the college campus may not be an exception.”¹⁰

⁴ Hartley, 113.

⁵ Borsch, 4.

⁶ *ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷ *ibid.*, 145-6.

⁸ *ibid.*, 146.

⁹ Cherry, 295.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 6.

Cherry et al. are able to effectively capture some of the contemporary religious turmoil that universities can experience, especially at those universities that identify with a religious tradition. In their book *Religion on Campus*, they conduct an in-depth study of East University, a university with a Catholic identification. Porterfield, the author of that chapter, writes that the university community was divided in how to interpret its religious identity. Some wanted to more aggressively affirm religious diversity on campus, while others wanted to continue to emphasize its Catholic identity. Similarly, the community was split over how to interpret teachings from the Church: one group wanted a more liberal interpretation that allowed room for social activism, while another endorsed a traditional interpretation. Despite these divisions, there were factors that helped unite the campus, such as a common devotion to academic rigor.¹¹

On college campuses, students may go farther than classifications of religious and secular and draw distinctions between religion and spirituality. One study recently found, in fact, that many undergraduates emphasized spirituality over religion. For those students, “religion” served as a reference to institutions while “spirituality” was a highly individualized value set or belief.¹² Religious institutions, therefore, did not necessarily serve as an anchor for their faith. Instead, their personal understanding of faith and its evolution was more important to them. In fact, most of the undergraduates in that study constructed a spirituality “without much regard to the boundaries dividing religious denominations, traditions, or organizations,”¹³ suggesting the organic creation of spirituality resulting from exposure to myriad religious traditions and backgrounds. Religious institutions and communities sharing a common belief appear to hold

¹¹ Cherry, 144-5.

¹² *ibid.*, 275.

¹³ *ibid.*, 276-7.

limited significance. When religious institutions do not provide sufficient support to young adults, they are forced to be independent and develop their religion individually.¹⁴

Recent research has shown that a college education does not impact students' underlying religious values but rather their religious practice and ritual. A study by Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler found that college education on the whole did not negatively impact students' religious values. Specifically, the authors wrote that "young adults are vastly more likely to curb their attendance at religious services than to alter how important they say religion is in their life,"¹⁵ and it is primarily those "respondents who did not go to college who exhibit the highest rates of diminished religiosity."¹⁶ In other words, students attending college are more likely to change their pattern of prayer service attendance, which could be the result of any of the myriad influences present during college life,¹⁷ than change their basic religious beliefs. A different study by Samuel Stroope found that "the more an individual's friendships come from his or her congregation, the more an individual will participate in religious activities."¹⁸ These studies largely focused on Christian students, who make up the majority of American students, instead of Jewish students, who are highly prevalent at Brandeis.

Given that many college students may have several friends outside of their immediate religious circle, Stroope's findings support those of Uecker, et al by suggesting a clear cause to the decrease in religious activity of belonging to a social group unrelated to religious practice. The students' religious values may not have changed; only the frequency of religious practice has

¹⁴ Wuthnow, 13.

¹⁵ Uecker, Regnerus, Vaaler, 1681.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 1677.

¹⁷ *ibid*, 1683.

¹⁸ Stroope, 282.

changed. Donna Freitas, in her book *Sex and the Soul*, presents a brief ethnography of Padma, a Hindu student attending a private secular college. Padma, who formerly fasted one day a week, stopped doing so in college and has a poor attendance record at both the weekly meetings of the campus' Hindu Council and weekly Hindu religious services. She recognizes, however, that this decrease in religious practice almost certainly stems from the absence of being surrounded by her observant family to encourage her religiosity; being a student at a secular college creates several other obligations that take precedent over religion.¹⁹

Mark Chaves explores the theoretical implications of behavior similar to Padma's. Chaves argues that congruence in religious practice, belief, and values is highly uncommon despite prevailing notions of links between the three. (In the case of Padma, her belief in her religion was still intact, but her practice had become minimized while attending a secular college.) He calls the prevalence of this belief the "religious congruence fallacy" and argues that true congruence is difficult to achieve in religious communities. He does recognize that congruence can be achieved through social forces, but he also points out that such a level of deference to religious sources of authority is rare.²⁰ Although colleges do permit the formation of strong religious communities, it would seem unlikely that students in a college – a space traditionally associated with experimentation and newfound freedom – would defer enough to religious authority figures to create the real yet elusive religious congruence that Chaves describes.

¹⁹ Freitas, 34.

²⁰ Chaves, 15.

Jewish college students and religious challenges

Jewish students in colleges have faced myriad challenges to their religious practice. Yares believes that there may be a "decline in the number of students from Jewish families that identify in a meaningful way with Judaism upon reaching college,"²¹ which could translate to a less religiously-engaged population of Jewish college students. Sales and Saxe of Brandeis University found that 41% of Jewish students become "less observant" during their college years.²² According to Uecker's study, which studied Jewish students alongside Catholic and Protestant college students, the Jewish college students had the lowest "decline in importance" of their religion among all the religious groups: only 13.3% of Jewish students reported such a feeling, suggesting that Judaism may be an important component of Jewish college students' identities. However, 66.8% of Jewish college students surveyed reported a "decline in prayer service attendance,"²³ a figure much more on par with the other religious groups. This decline in prayer service attendance was also reported in the 2000-1 National Jewish Population Survey, which found that Jewish college students attended prayer services at a "modestly" lower rate than the overall American Jewish population.²⁴ Uecker, et al. go on to explain that the very minor decline in importance of Judaism to Jewish college students may stem from the fact that Judaism has both religious and ethnic roots, the latter of which may serve as a stronger anchor in college students' identity.²⁵ However, the decline in prayer service attendance among Jews in college could plausibly be related to difficulty accessing the meaning of the prayer service, as Jewish

²¹ Yares, 41.

²² Sales, 18.

²³ Uecker, 1676.

²⁴ National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1: Jewish College Students, 17.

²⁵ Uecker, 1677.

prayer services are usually conducted in Hebrew, a language with ethnic connections to Judaism. Freitas provides a description of a Sikh college student named Madanjit who distanced himself from his family's tradition because religious services were conducted in Punjabi, which he did not understand (44-5). Orthodox Jewish college students on their own in the U.S. for the first time (many take gap years in Israel after high school for religious study) may be less inclined to attend religious services without the encouragement of family or the pressure of a religious social group. Orthodox Jewish prayer services are conducted almost entirely in Hebrew, which most American Modern Orthodox Jews cannot understand fluently.

Stephanie Wellen Levine, in her book *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, provides a different reason for religious deviation. Levine details her time with Chaya, a Hasidic girl living in the Crown Heights neighborhood of New York City who began to deviate from her traditional religious practice. Chaya began her deviation by watching TV on the Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest often called the Shabbos that carries the prohibition of touching electric objects (watching TV that is already turned on is technically within the laws of Shabbos observance but not considered to be within the spirit of those laws), after Chaya's friend changed the TV channel. The following Shabbos, Chaya changed the channel herself and, in weeks subsequent, began to eat nonkosher food.²⁶ This brief ethnography highlights the possibility of pressure from other less-observant friends in causing religious deviation. For Chaya, her deviation came as a result of her friend changing the TV channel on Shabbos, which led Chaya to do it herself. Chaya learned this behavior from someone within the community rather than an influence external to the community.

²⁶ Levine, 133-4.

Modern Orthodox Jews, universities, and coming of age

Orthodox Jews make up an unusual component of Jewish college students. They consist of about 10% of the Jewish college population as well as 10% overall American Jewish population.²⁷ Chaim I. Waxman defines Modern Orthodox Jews, as a subset of the larger Orthodox Jewish category, as having higher education, being committed to the larger Jewish community, affirming the value of Tikkun Olam, and strongly believing that Israel is the spiritual center of the Jewish people.²⁸ Orthodox Jews are also highly communal in nature; Jewish law prohibits Orthodox Jews from driving on the Sabbath, effectively requiring that they walk to prayer services, which in turn necessitates Orthodox Jews to live together in a communal style near a synagogue.

Sales and Saxe argue that communal engagement and actively being a part of a Jewish community has the greatest effect on religious observance.²⁹ To that end, active engagement with a Jewish group on campus would likely contribute to strong religious observance among the Orthodox students. However, Sales and Saxe also found that a quarter of Orthodox Jewish college students change their denominational identity at some point during their college experience, half of those choosing to identify with Conservative Judaism.³⁰

Students in college fit neatly into the newly defined age group of “emerging adulthood,” a period characterized as lasting “from (roughly) 18 to the mid-twenties,” according to Jeffrey Arnett in his book *Emerging Adulthood*.³¹ Interestingly, one of the key components that defines

²⁷ National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1: Jewish College Students, 15.

²⁸ Waxman, 3.

²⁹ Sales, 18.

³⁰ *ibid*, 17.

³¹ Arnett, 9.

emerging adulthood, a delay in getting married and starting families until the late twenties and early thirties,³² does not apply very well to Modern Orthodox Jews. The majority of them get married and start families in their twenties, frequently getting engaged while still enrolled in college (although there is push-back from the American “culture of postponement” that is beginning to delay marriage among some Orthodox Jews³³). In fact, Arnett’s description of emerging adults viewing marriage and families as “perils to be avoided”³⁴ is largely the opposite attitude of contemporary Modern Orthodox Jewish emerging adults, for whom marriage is a religious and social goal.

However, Arnett describes the period between ages 18 and 25 as “the nadir [lowest point] of religious participation in American society”³⁵ and further explains that some of these individuals perceive their religious participation as something “to be renewed after they [have] children.”³⁶ Thus, the time after high school can be viewed as a period of religious relaxation for some individuals as they exercise newfound freedom. This practice is a source of great concern in the Modern Orthodox community, especially when Modern Orthodox Jews attend secular universities. Samuel Heilman, in his book *Sliding to the Right*, writes that Modern Orthodox families feared sending their children to “sites of counterculturalism where the sexual revolution and an attitude of aggressive challenge to authority were rampant.”³⁷ The concern about challenging authority is highly significant to religious practice, as the challenging of a religious authority can plausibly lead to a decrease in religious practice. As Heilman put it, secular

³² Arnett, 3.

³³ Fishman, “Transformations in the Composition of American Jewish Households.”

³⁴ Arnett, 6.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 177.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 177.

³⁷ S. Heilman, 98.

campuses, which freed students “from the control of both their families and their communities ... sometimes led to a breakdown” of Orthodox practice.³⁸

In one sense, contemporary Modern Orthodox college students don’t enter an “emerging adult” phase, as they intend to get married and start families very soon after graduating from college. At the same time, however, Modern Orthodox college students have many of the same experiences as their less-religious peers, such as leaving home and gaining exposure to new ideas and influences, especially in college, where religious ideas and theologies learned at home can be challenged.³⁹ Statistical analyses that Arnett includes have shown that there is “no relationship between exposure to religious training in childhood and any aspect of their religious beliefs as emerging adults,”⁴⁰ meaning that significant religious education that one has as a child may be radically shifted during this emerging adulthood phase. Additionally, Arnett references a questionnaire he conducted about religious beliefs among emerging adults, which found that 17% of emerging adults considered their religious beliefs to be “not at all important” while 42% reported that it was “not all important” to attend religious services.⁴¹

It is very possible that Modern Orthodox students at a secular college gain new perspectives on religion that lead them to question their Jewish upbringings. Further, it seems more likely that their attendance record at prayer services would decline rather than their theology changing, a trend supported above by Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler. Heilman supports this idea of Orthodox Jews exploring new possibilities in a secular college, as he writes that many of them attempt to both remain committed to their Orthodox background but “experience

³⁸ S. Heilman, 99.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁰ Arnett, 174.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 172.

the liberation and breaking the taboos” as an American adolescent in a new and diverse environment.⁴²

Nuances and practices of Modern Orthodox Jews

Given that this research focuses on Modern Orthodox Jewish college students, it is worthwhile to provide some context on Modern Orthodox Judaism and its presence in the United States. The Pew Research Center survey entitled *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* found that Orthodox Jews make up approximately 10% of the American Jewish population, with 3% identifying as Modern Orthodox, although of Jews who are members of a synagogue, 22% identify as Orthodox.⁴³ In a co-authored 1989 monograph, Samuel Heilman and Steven Cohen identify that “Orthodox norms strongly emphasize practice,”⁴⁴ and that religious belief and faith must be contextualized within a consistent framework of action.⁴⁵ This consistent framework is known as *halacha*, which Heilman and Cohen define as “the normative pattern of observances and ritual practice [which constitute] the explicit element of Orthodox Jewish belief.”⁴⁶

In their monograph, Heilman and Cohen categorize Modern Orthodox Jews into three groups: traditionalists, centrists, and nominals.⁴⁷ These classifications are based on ritual practice, indicating a methodological significance to emphasizing ritual practice over theology and belief when it comes to understanding the diversity within Orthodox Judaism. To categorize the respondents in their study, Heilman and Cohen conducted a seven-question survey inquiring

⁴² S. Heilman, 180.

⁴³ *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, 48.

⁴⁴ Heilman and Cohen, 41.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 41.

about ritual practice and graded people depending on the number of rituals kept. Individuals who observed all seven rituals were categorized as traditionalists, those observing four to six rituals were categorized as centrists, and those observing one to three rituals were categorized as nominals.⁴⁸ Heilman even indicated to me in a phone conversation at the beginning of this thesis project that the survey was piloted with college students, suggesting their potential utility in research on Orthodox Jewish college students.

The survey *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* investigated some of the key practices in which Modern Orthodox Jews participate as baselines of Orthodox practice. For instance, attendance at religious services is an important measure of participation in the local religious community. Orthodox Jews also attend religious services at higher rates than other Jews. The Pew Survey found that 81% of Modern Orthodox Jews attend services at least monthly, the most frequent option reported, which is a much higher rate than Conservative Jews (39%) and Reform Jews (17%).⁴⁹ Regarding Kosher law, the Pew survey reported that 83% of Modern Orthodox Jews kept a Kosher home, compared to 31% of Conservative Jews and 7% of Reform Jews. The survey measured observance of the Jewish Sabbath by asking whether Jews handle money on Shabbat. Eighty one percent of Modern Orthodox Jews reported that they avoid handling money on Shabbat, while 13% of Conservative Jews and 4% reported similarly.⁵⁰ These three practices form an informal basis for measuring Orthodox practice comparatively to other denominations of Judaism: keeping Kashrut, observing the Jewish sabbath, and attending prayer services.

Etan Diamond, in his study of Orthodox Jews in suburbia, frames the social network component of Orthodox Jewry by describing a process of “experiential homogeneity” that

⁴⁸ Heilman and Cohen, 52-3.

⁴⁹ *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, 76.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 77.

meaningfully connects various communities of Orthodox Jews around the North American continent. The experiential homogeneity, or the parallel post-World War II suburbanization of Orthodox Jewish communities around the continent and the similarities of their practice, “fostered communication and interaction among geographically unconnected communities and enabled Orthodox Jews to create a broad religious network that encompassed the entire North American continent.”⁵¹ These connections were developed through national synagogue organizations that encouraged rabbis to visit different communities around the country, consistent day school curriculums and practices overseen by Torah Umesorah, a national association of Orthodox Jewish day schools, interschool competition, Orthodox summer camps where students spent the summers together, and a national Kosher food industry in which all Orthodox Jews were a consumer.⁵²

Modern Orthodox Jewish education

Relevant to the practice of adhering to *halacha* is that Modern Orthodox Jews have very high rates of secular education compared to Orthodox Jews who identify with more fundamentalist groups, such as Haredi or Yeshivish. In the Pew survey “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 65% of the Modern Orthodox Jews surveyed had graduated from college.⁵³ This means that strict Jewish practice is often coupled with a thorough secular education.

Many Orthodox Jews – Modern or not – send their children to Orthodox day schools, which are meant to combine secular and Jewish learning into one cohesive educational

⁵¹ Diamond, 132.

⁵² *ibid*, 134-138.

⁵³ Cooperman.

experience.⁵⁴ Following day school and the gap year described below, many Modern Orthodox Jews attend university. In the past, many Orthodox leaders encouraged high school boys to attend Yeshiva College and girls to attend Stern College, two Modern Orthodox Jewish colleges that could both insulate students from countercultural leanings and provide a solid education in Judaism and secular studies to its students.⁵⁵ Today, Orthodox students attend a variety of different universities, ranging from public to private and large to small, almost always with sizable and established Orthodox undergraduate student populations.

In order to help prepare students for this secular education in a university, most Orthodox Jewish students spend a gap year between high school and college studying Jewish texts at a yeshiva or seminary in Israel. This year is designed to cement attachments to Jewish practice and create stronger appreciation for Jewish learning before students attend American universities,⁵⁶ where they encounter ideas that challenge their Orthodox upbringing. These programs have been largely successful, both in their ability to attract students and their record for solidifying attachment to Orthodox Judaism. According to an article published by the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, approximately 65% of male graduates and 45% of female graduates pursued a gap year in Israel during the 2001-2 academic year,⁵⁷ reflecting their popularity among high school graduates. Shalom Berger, in his dissertation project to determine the year's impact on religiosity, concluded that the year abroad enhanced students' religious ritual practice, commitment to continued Torah study, and belief in Zionism.⁵⁸ Students in an

⁵⁴ Heilman and Cohen, 26.

⁵⁵ Sklare, 271.

⁵⁶ S. Heilman, 112.

⁵⁷ Schiff, 3.

⁵⁸ Berger, 177.

unfamiliar country far from their families and communities begin to rely on the Jewish texts for guidance and to adhere to the rather strict standards of behavior practiced in the yeshivas.⁵⁹

The development of the gap year in Israel speaks to a broader challenge of retaining Modern Orthodox Jews in the Orthodox fold as they navigate the secular world. The Pew Survey found that although 10% of American Jews today identify as Orthodox, 14% of American Jews say they were raised as Orthodox Jews,⁶⁰ indicating that a significant number of Orthodox Jews move to other denominations of Judaism. In fact, of those surveyed over 65 who were raised in Orthodox Judaism, only 22% still identified as Orthodox Jews, and in the age bracket of 50-64, only 41% still identified as Orthodox Jews. However, this stands in contrast to the age bracket under 30, of whom 83% still identify as Orthodox Jews,⁶¹ indicating that almost one in five Orthodox Jews has decided to identify with a different denomination soon after leaving their home Orthodox community. This statistic is encouraging, as it shows that more younger Orthodox Jews are retaining their identification with Orthodoxy despite the patterns of older generations to the contrary.

Brandeis University is one such popular nonsectarian school for Orthodox Jews. The university has a tradition of Jewish engagement and accommodation. The Orthodox community of Brandeis, known as the Brandeis Orthodox Organization (BOO), appears strong and close-knit, which may push back against the statistic by Sales and Saxe mentioned above that a quarter of Orthodox Jewish college students change their denominational affiliation. At Brandeis, Orthodox Jewish students have the opportunities to surround themselves with fellow Orthodox peers and maintain their faith or to abandon the Orthodox movement and embrace a secular

⁵⁹ S. Heilman, 115.

⁶⁰ A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 49.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 49.

learning experience. Given the larger trend of college students minimizing religious practice rather than religious values and ideals, but bearing in mind the highly close-knit nature of Orthodox Jewish communities, this study will intend to explore how Orthodox Jewish college students at Brandeis handle a diversity of religious practice within their community, specifically focusing on the inclusion of Orthodox students who have drifted from traditional religious practice.

My thesis will investigate the thesis question below, exploring methods of inclusion among Orthodox Jewish college students. Brandeis University's Brandeis Orthodox Organization (BOO), with its large Orthodox Jewish student population, will serve as a case study in this project. Although BOO's large size makes it suitable for sociological scrutiny, Brandeis itself is highly accommodating to the Orthodox population by observing Jewish holidays and expanding its Kosher dining areas. In that sense, the BOO community may be less assimilated than those at other secular schools.

Research Question

How do Orthodox Jewish college students include less-observant Orthodox peers within their religious community?

Chapter 2

Methodology

I gathered data through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with Orthodox Jewish college students at Brandeis University and included the brief seven-question survey used by Heilman and Cohen mentioned in the literature review. Inclusion criteria for participating was being a sophomore, junior, or senior student between the age of 18-23 currently enrolled at Brandeis University who self-identifies as an Orthodox Jew and grew up in an Orthodox home. I conducted twenty interviews total, ten men and ten women. Nine of the respondents were seniors, ten were juniors, and one was a sophomore. Interviews were conducted in a place of the respondents' choosing, although they were most frequently conducted in the office of the campus newspaper. This space was (ironically) one of the most private and quiet rooms on campus. (I preferred not to interview respondents in their dormitories, as I felt it was crossing a boundary of personal space.)

I posted a message on the Facebook page of the Brandeis Orthodox Organization, informing them of the study, providing my email address and asking for their participation. I also placed an ad in the weekly email newsletter to the Orthodox organization about a week after my Facebook post, again requesting participants. I found that the response to the Facebook post and email newsletter was weak (approx. 5 responses). Having spent time with the campus Orthodox community in the past, I was able to reach out to individuals in the community that I knew personally, asking if they would be willing to be interviewed. No one that I emailed declined to participate (although one student did not respond to follow-up emails to schedule an

interview time), and many students expressed enthusiasm for and interest in the topic of my project. One student even said that I should give a lecture on my thesis to the BOO community upon its completion.

At the interviews, I obtained informed consent from each respondent and recorded their responses to the interview on a digital audio recorder. No student declined to be audio-recorded, so my back-up plan of handwriting notes was not needed. The interviews lasted a variety of different times, with the shortest being a little over 20 minutes and the longest being over an hour. I also collected identifiers from each respondent, namely the respondent's name, gender, and high school, and state of residence.

Subjects are identified by an ID number on their interview transcripts and are given pseudonyms in the analysis below. Interviews were transcribed manually.

I analyzed data inductively, looking for common themes and concerns among my respondent's interview transcripts. Following the example set by Corbin and Strauss,⁶² I analyzed my data as I collected it, often altering interview questions to address a new finding. I also emphasized concepts in my analysis, often linking events from different transcripts through an overarching idea.

⁶² Corbin and Strauss.

Chapter 3

A Diverse Community: Orthodox Jewish Backgrounds, Networks, and Campus Life

In this chapter, I will explore the diversity that exists within the twenty student respondents I interviewed as well as the Orthodox student community at large. From an outsider's perspective, it may appear that all Orthodox Jews go through identical patterns of upbringing, education, and religious practice, but I hope to prove that fallacious. I have separated the chapter into three sections. First, I explore how Orthodox Judaism is present in the upbringings of my twenty respondents, highlighting the periods during which religious change and individuation can occur. Second, I step back to provide a background of how the social network of Orthodox Judaism is formed and then contextualize it within the experiences of my respondents to show how people are compelled to participate in the social network and, when coming to Brandeis, may even participate before arriving on campus. Third, I describe how Orthodox Judaism operates at Brandeis, considering the diversity of practices, the limitations that Jewish authorities on campus hold in setting a standard of religious practice, and how social status within the campus Orthodox community is independent from religious observance. In sum, I will conclude that individual religious development and practice during childhood and compulsory participation in a tightly-wound social network allow the Orthodox community to separate social status in the community from religious observance, thus allowing the community to fully embrace and empower less-observant Orthodox students. It is the intricate social network and the acceptance of a highly individualized practice that both develops at home and continues at

Brandeis that, as I will describe in the next chapter, I believe facilitates broad standards of Orthodox practice.

The Dynamics of Orthodox Judaism on an Individual Level

The students I spoke with had what, at first glance, may appear to be very similar backgrounds before college. They all grew up with Orthodox Judaism present in their homes, attended a Jewish day school during their high school years, and many of them took a gap year in Israel in a yeshiva or seminary. Within those similar backgrounds, however, is great diversity that can impact their religious outlook and experience when they arrive on campus at Brandeis.

In the Home

The manifestations of Orthodox Judaism in the lives of the respondents had significant variety, but there was an overarching trend toward a near-complete integration into an Orthodox community. As Madeleine, a senior, pointed out in her interview, “everyone who I was with in my life has been -- pretty much not just been Jewish but been Orthodox.” All of the respondents were sent to a Jewish day school, often ones that affiliate with the Orthodox movement. Many of them spent a gap year in Israel studying at a yeshiva or seminary, and some of them mentioned attending an Orthodox camp even though it was not a question in the interview. Within this participation in the Orthodox community, respondents reported varying attitudes toward Judaism within the home. Emily, a senior, reflected the sentiments of many students when she explained that her family didn’t fully observe Jewish law despite identifying as Orthodox.

Even though we got more immersed in the Orthodox community and all my friends are basically Orthodox Jews that I went to middle school [and] high school with, we still never kept Shabbat fully, so we would drive to synagogue. We don't live within the community; we live about a half-hour drive away. And then our home is very much Kosher, like only OU products, Chaf-K coming into the house. But in terms of eating out, we'll eat out vegetarian. --Emily

Many of the students interviewed expressed similar patterns of religiosity within their household. The family identified as Orthodox but may not stringently observe the laws of Kashrut and Shabbos, as Orthodox families are largely expected to do. This type of behavior sets a more individualized and lenient standard for religious practice among children of the households, one with which they may be most comfortable. For instance, I asked Nicholas, a junior, to whom he would pose a question about *halacha*, or Jewish law, and he told me he would ask his mother. When I inquired further, he explained that he merely wants to practice Orthodoxy the same way his family does, and his mother is a reliable source of advice for practicing to that standard. “She’s well-versed in how I want to be when I’m older. Like, I don’t want some crazy observant response. I just want what we do,” he said. Both Emily and Nicholas’ statement are in contrast to Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik’s article on the transformations of contemporary Orthodoxy, in which he argues that Jewish texts have become the primary source of authority for new generations of Orthodox Jews.⁶³

In my interviews, I very notably heard several descriptions from respondents of individualized religious practice among the members of their Orthodox Jewish families. Children often seemed to take the reins in molding their religious identity, some early on before high school, and become religious independently of their parents. Alexandra, a junior whose

⁶³ Soloveitchik.

parents ate vegetarian food at non-Kosher restaurants, explained that she followed the Kashrut observance of her older brother beginning when she was in middle school. “[A]s my brother and I got older, my brother decided not to eat dairy out anymore -- when I was in seventh grade, he was a senior in high school -- so I actually followed him and stopped eating dairy out. So that’s kind of the difference now between my parents and my brother and I,” she said. Alexandra decided to become more observant than her parents by following the example of her brother and has maintained that difference from her parents since middle school. Such action demonstrates a willingness to take control of one’s religious practice and to shape it as he or she pleases without necessarily conforming to the style of practice around them. It should be noted that it is also possible for students to become less religious than the rest of their family, but this is more unlikely, as parents will often require their children to observe the basic rituals that they do, setting an informal floor for religious practice.

A few of the students I spoke with also described varying degrees of image maintenance in their families. The families, who may not have stringently observed Jewish law, worked to create an image to the larger community of strict religious observance. Christopher, a senior, described his family’s practice of avoiding any public transgressions related to observance of the Sabbath. I asked him to describe his family’s religious practice.

Traditional, which is defined as not necessarily keeping Shabbat in the home -- within the confines of the home -- but no driving on Shabbat or Jewish holidays. No public displays of desecrating the Sabbath or the holidays. But inside the home, you can watch television. You can flick on and off lights and things of that sort. -- Christopher

Christopher's family is careful about the image that they present to the community. Activities inside the home that violate the Sabbath, such as turning on lights or watching television, are accepted because they were out of the public eye. Driving, an activity that takes place outside the home and can be seen by neighbors, is avoided. Such regular behavior inside a family can create a standard of religious observance along the lines of "it's okay to break laws if no one sees." Jennifer, whose family had a comparable practice to Christopher's, similarly said, "I've always done a lot of things in secret throughout my whole life because I've always lived in an Orthodox community and my parents always had this open mentality." By her own admission, she has carried her family's attitude of secrecy regarding religious observance into her adult life.

Religiosity in High School

When I spoke with students about their religious practices during high school, I found that students developed much more freedom in their religious practice, mainly as a result of spending time with friends away from parents and outside the home. While parents are able to set a "religious floor," or a minimal standard for religious practice while children are young and inside the home, it becomes much more difficult to continuously maintain that floor when children begin to spend time away from their family. I found that this newfound religious mobility could be roughly categorized into three groups: students who were consistent in their religious practice and followed the observance level of their school, students who became more religious while in high school, and students who shifted in their religious practice and may have engaged in religious deviance.

Some students described maintaining their level of religiosity during high school and being content with the religious practice of their high school and their family. Judith, a senior, explained her practice during high school as following her family. “I was always a very good kid. I did what my family did. I really enjoyed most of my Talmud and halacha classes,” she said. Similarly, James, a senior, described how he considered himself to be “a model student for my high school” because he “went to Mincha Ma’ariv even after school every night for a number of years.” Both Judith’s and James’ descriptions of being a good student in high school are based in consistent religious practice and education. Neither of them described becoming more religious during high school but rather described striving to meet with enthusiasm the religious standards of their respective institutions.

Other students described a process of becoming more religious during their high school careers, although these changes were usually the result of an organization outside the high school. In these organizations, students were encouraged by others to take on increased religious observance. Kathleen, a sophomore, reported becoming more religious in the middle of high school as a result of experiences that she had at camp.

My family actually would eat out dairy occasionally. In high school, I stopped doing that. In 10th grade, I stopped wearing pants outside the house, mostly because of the camp I went to, which was [redacted name of camp]. I started to appreciate the idea of being a frum Jew more than just it being something I do. I wanted it to be a part of my life, and I kind of wanted to separate myself a little bit from a lot of what went on at my high school. Like, there was a lot of partying and things that weren't my scene then. ... Why should I occasionally not keep Kosher, or keep Kosher by the certified standards that I usually do? So I stopped. --Kathleen

In Kathleen's interview, she described how a counselor with whom she grew close had encouraged her to become more religious. Kathleen subsequently followed her example, explaining her newfound appreciation for being *frum*, or observant. In contrast, Molly, a junior, said that her increased observance came from leading a youth group and being reminded to serve as "a model" for younger Orthodox students. For both students, however, the motivation to become more religious came from outside the high school and led to the adoption of observing more Jewish laws.

Lastly, some students reported religious shifting or deviance during high school. They may have begun to deviate from traditional religious practice or simply struggled to fit themselves within the Modern Orthodox mold. Daphne, a senior, told me about her difficulty fitting into a Modern Orthodox high school from a more religious background.

*So high school was interesting for me because I was coming from the Haredi elementary school. I got to high school and I was finally in a co-ed setting and I didn't have to wear uniforms, and it was like "freedom!" ... I had these intermittent periods of not really keeping Shabbat and using my phone and not really keeping Kosher and then I would spike back up to ultra-religious, and I would wear tights and black pleated skirts and kind of dress the part and be Haredi again and, like, be obsessed with my rabbis and my chumash teachers, and then I would fall out of it and use my phone on Shabbat and not keep Kosher, and then I would spike back up again and be ultra-Orthodox. --
Daphne*

Daphne represents a challenge of assimilating into a Modern Orthodox culture from a more religious background. Interestingly, she described fluctuating between deviating from Jewish laws such as observing the Sabbath and keeping Kashrut to becoming highly observant. These very distinct ebbs and flows were less common in other respondents, who described a more

general and linear decline in practice. However, Daphne's recounting is a notable example of independently searching for religious identity during one's high school years.

Gap Year in Israel

Most of the students I spoke with took a gap year to study in an Israeli yeshiva or seminary, and they largely described this year as having a significant impact on their religious life. During the gap year, students spend most of their day studying Jewish texts with rabbis and other Orthodox peers. It has been described by Samuel Heilman, a sociologist of Orthodox Jewry, as a space where "the Orthodox religious attachments that the day school might have been unsuccessful in implanting could be more successfully grafted."⁶⁴ Similar to high school experiences above, gap years experiences could be categorized into three main groups among my respondents: they became more religious in practice, they became more involved in Jewish learning, or they were unaffected by the experience. No one reported becoming less observant as a result of a gap year in Israel, although a few students did not take a gap year, which could plausibly impact their religious practice later on.

Students who reported becoming more religiously observant provided some very enthusiastic descriptions about how their gap year in yeshiva affected their religious practice. When I asked Robert, a junior, whether yeshiva influenced his religious practice, he responded incredulously, "yeah, of course! How can it not?" He elaborated on this description, explaining how yeshivas are able to influence their students through their close-knit environment.

⁶⁴ S. Heilman, 113.

[Y]ou're there with all the rabbis, you're with kids from similar backgrounds, easily influenceable, so I regained my practices of Judaism back and came into college stronger, I think. --Robert

Robert explains that by being engaged in Judaism together with like-minded peers and rabbis, he became more involved in Jewish practice. It was, in other words, the close-knit character of the yeshiva that impacted his religious behavior. Not surprisingly, parents are aware of the religious change that a student can experience during their gap year. As Alexandra, a junior, told me, her parents made her sign a contract saying that she wouldn't return to the U.S. wearing long skirts. She ended up returning as such anyway, affirming the ability of the yeshiva to influence religious practice, but her parent's decision to introduce a contract indicates a real fear of their children becoming too traditional in their practice.

In contrast, there were some students who didn't change their religious practice at all but rather were motivated to delve deeper into Jewish textual study upon their return to the U.S. As James, a senior, reported to me, he "definitely thought about things in a much more critical sense" as a result of his gap year, but he mentioned that he continued to wear "the same clothes, I still wore the same type of kippah, kept Shabbat in the same way." Similarly, Joseph, a junior, explained that his experience in Israel mainly altered his Jewish learning, which "became a critical part of religious practice, which is definitely carried on in my college life." Jewish learning can be, for some students, part of a religious practice, as Joseph explained, in that it becomes a very important part of one's Jewish identity.

In contrast to increased religiosity and Jewish learning, some students were unaffected by their gap year in Israel. William, a senior, explained how he perceived gap years in Israel to create a very temporary burst of religious energy in students.

Like, you get very hyped when you're in the moment and then it kind of goes away. So I think that, like, is something which carries with a lot of kids. They get very hyped, then they're into religion, then it goes away. --
William

William, who himself reported not changing his religiosity as a result of his gap year, expressed the contrary to Robert, who is quoted earlier. In contrast to Robert's opinion saying that students are likely to become more religious from the close atmosphere of rabbis and students learning, William says that the energy that Robert describes quickly vanishes. By this description, the religious energy is a fleeting moment which then dissipates, likely upon return to the U.S. This opinion stands in contrast to Berger, who argues that the the Israeli yeshiva programs have the capability to motivate more permanent religious change in its students.⁶⁵

Some students simply did not take gap years in Israel. There was no consistent reason for this; each student had their own individual motivation for going straight to college. Olivia, a senior, wrote that most members in her family didn't go for a gap year, while Nicholas, a junior, said that his parents thought the year would be wasted away drinking and partying. A couple of students reported being accepted to Brandeis as mid-years and using their mid-year semester to study in Israel, but on the whole, students who did not take a gap year were a minority within the respondent group.

⁶⁵ Berger, 134.

The Dynamics of Orthodox Judaism on a Network Level

This section will explore the tightly-wound social network of Orthodox Judaism in America. The Orthodox Jewish community operates many of its own institutions, ranging from restaurants to schools to synagogues, that keep Orthodox Jews in constant contact with each other and away from less-religious contemporaries. The formation of this close network is useful to Orthodox students when they enter college and continues to stay with them, regardless of whether they maintain Orthodox religious practices or not.

The Local Network around a Synagogue

First, I will briefly explain how Orthodox religious practice creates a local infrastructure that fosters relations with other Orthodox Jews and downplays relations with less-religious peers. Observance of the Sabbath is a critical part of Orthodox Jewish religious practice and, in adherence with Sabbath observance, Orthodox Jews walk, rather than drive, to synagogue for prayer services. Additionally, they may choose to live within the boundaries of an *eruv*, or a ritual enclosure, set up by their synagogue which permits Jews to carry belongings, such as house keys, on their person on the Sabbath. Members of individual communities, therefore, almost always live within walking distance of a synagogue in order to adhere to Sabbath law.

Orthodox Jews also strictly observe Kosher law, for which all food must be certified by a *mashgiach*, or Kosher supervisor. In many cases, they will only buy meat from butchers and eat in restaurants that have been certified as Kosher by a *mashgiach*. Thus, a community often has a surrounding marketplace near the synagogue that is intended for an Orthodox clientele. The community, through its dependence on this infrastructure to follow Jewish law, has less

opportunity to interact with those who are not Orthodox and create a close social network with other local Orthodox Jews.

The Regional Network around Day Schools

The social network becomes a regional one for Orthodox Jews upon entering day school. Most parents send their children to a nearby Orthodox Jewish day school and a yeshiva or seminary in Israel between high school and college. The Pew Survey, in fact, reports that 81% of Orthodox households with a child have enrolled them in Jewish day school or yeshiva.⁶⁶ The network within day schools is larger because students meet peers from other towns; day schools are not limited to enrolling students from one synagogue community. Within my respondent group, 17 of the 20 students that I interviewed attended a Modern Orthodox high school (as oppose to a community or pluralistic Jewish high school). Three pairs of students attended the same high school. Two both attended a school in Riverdale, NY, two both attended a school in Manhattan, and two both attended a school in Boston.

Further, this regional social network was useful for respondents when deciding what college to attend. When I asked the respondents about how they decided to attend Brandeis, a number of them mentioned speaking with graduated high school classmates who attended Brandeis to get a sense of whether it would be a good fit for them. Molly, a junior, described speaking with alumni from her high school who attended Brandeis before she decided to attend herself.

⁶⁶ A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 68.

Well, I knew some people who came here. There were two [redacted name of high school] alumni that were here that I talked to a little, and I figured that there was a strong-enough Orthodox community that I could kind of find my place within that. --Molly

Molly was able to use the Orthodox social network from her day school to learn more about Brandeis before deciding to attend by speaking with older classmates. Although this component of the social network is also common in more secular social networks, it should be noted that Molly used the social network to determine the religiosity of the Brandeis campus. The social network thus becomes useful because it facilitates Molly's adherence to religious law as she moves into college.⁶⁷

The First Shuffling of Networks during the Gap Year

Most of the respondents with whom I spoke also took a gap year in Israel, which perpetuates the social network of Orthodox Judaism beyond the local and regional communities. According to research by Rabbi Eliot Bloch and written about by Alvin Schiff, 82% of the graduates from the ten-leading Zionist Jewish day and yeshiva schools enrolled in post-high school study in Israel in 2001-2.⁶⁸ Students are independent from their parents for the first time and, simultaneously, in a foreign country. They study together at different yeshivas and seminaries throughout Israel and become friends with their new peers, a process facilitated by Diamond's concept of experiential homogeneity between different Orthodox communities in North America.⁶⁹ Only two of the respondents in my study, Andrew and Elliot, studied at the

⁶⁷ In addition to day schools, Orthodox Jewish summer camps also create an important regional social network. However, I did not inquire about camps during my interviews.

⁶⁸ Schiff, 3

⁶⁹ Diamond, 132.

same yeshiva, and they did not attend the same high school. However, when I asked Andrew for confirmation of the yeshiva at which he studied, he also sent me a list of six other Brandeis students, besides Elliot, who had all studied together at that yeshiva the same year. Similarly, Judith, a senior, told me that she had continued to study with some girls from her seminary who attended Brandeis together.

So two other girls from my year at [redacted] also were at Brandeis with me so for that first year, I started learning with one of them, that year's tractate, which took us both freshman and sophomore year. --Judith

Judith had been able to find peers at her seminary who also were enrolling in Brandeis the following year and continued her Jewish learning with them upon arriving. These gap years, therefore, serve as an important component of the Orthodox Jewish social network, especially before college, as it shuffles up the different high school graduates from Orthodox schools around the United States. New social connections are formed with Orthodox students from around the United States and elsewhere while in Israel. These connections can then, as Judith demonstrated, be taken on to college.

The Second Shuffling of Social Networks at College

Orthodox students arriving at Brandeis and other schools with large Orthodox Jewish populations come from all around the country and the world. In my group of respondents, there were students from high schools in nine different states around the country in addition to one international student. Through students participating in the Brandeis Orthodox Organization, the social network is shuffled once more to become a national and international network of Orthodox

Jews. These students know people from their local communities, their regional high schools, their gap years in Israel, and now from their community at Brandeis. All four settings can potentially serve as a point of commonality when meeting other Orthodox Jews. This social network is, as its name suggests, social: these individuals easily become friends with each other through both religious communal activities and other secular activities.

Compulsory Participation in the Social Network

Participation in this social network is not voluntary. As the Pew Survey indicates above, most Orthodox children are compelled by their parents to attend Orthodox day school. Given the high rate of post-high school study in Israel, it is likely that parents encourage their children to take a gap year. Parents who pay for their child's college tuition may also expect their children to attend a university with a large Orthodox Jewish population to ideally maintain their observant religious practice. Thus, up until high school graduation, Orthodox students have minimal say over the social network in which they participate, and some students may not have a say over their social network even upon matriculating to college.

Even if an Orthodox student attends college with a large Orthodox population, such as Brandeis, and decides that he or she wants to distance himself from religion, he or she will still find himself within the Orthodox social network. It is a very easy network to connect with upon first arriving on campus, and many students may include themselves in the Orthodox social network in the first semesters of college simply because it is culturally familiar or because they have friends who are a part of it. In fact, membership in the Brandeis Orthodox Organization is determined through subscription to an email listserv and lasts through one's time as an

undergraduate at Brandeis. Therefore, it is very easy for a student to become a member of BOO , especially in their first couple of weeks on campus when they may be inclined to sign up. Given the data from the previous section on students speaking with older peers before choosing to attend Brandeis, it is clear that students are identifying and seeking out people in the community with whom they can relate religiously before actually stepping on the campus.

The Dynamics of Orthodox Judaism at Brandeis University

I believe that the individualized nature of religious practice among respondents and the compulsory participation in the Orthodox Jewish social network, both described above, provides an important context for both the continuation and the acceptance of individualized practice within the Orthodox Jewish community at Brandeis University. My goal is to show which Jewish resources on-campus are used by the Orthodox community, how religious practice is highly diverse among the community, and lastly how there is a divorce between social status in the community and degree of religious observance. These three findings are especially important for contextualizing how the dynamics of Orthodoxy at Brandeis facilitate the broader standards of Orthodox practice on-campus that I will describe later on.

Presence and Limitations of On-Campus Jewish Authorities in Creating a Halachic Standard

Brandeis is host to several different Jewish organizations that provide support, both religious and personal, to Jewish students on-campus. Most directly intended for the Orthodox community is a rabbi-and-rebbetzin couple, known as the JLIC couple. The JLIC couple is sent by the Seif Jewish Learning Initiative On-Campus, a group in partnership with Hillel and the

Orthodox Union that describes itself as “a program that helps Orthodox students navigate the college environment, and balance their Jewish commitments with their desire to engage the secular world.”⁷⁰ Most of the respondents I spoke with identified the JLIC couple as a frequent source of *halachic* advice, or advice on how to properly follow Jewish law. Elliot, a junior, demonstrated this proclivity for reaching out to the JLIC rabbi quite clearly in our interview, saying that he would “definitely” approach the JLIC rabbi with a *halachic* question. Other students also reported reaching out to the JLIC rabbi for *halachic* advice and feeling comfortable speaking with him. A couple of students reported not knowing him well, but this also happened to be the JLIC rabbi’s first year at Brandeis, so the timing of the research was not conducive to all students having had time to build a relationship with him.

Despite the JLIC couple serving as a religious resource to many students, they do not create a *halachic* standard for the Orthodox community on campus or have any sort of monopoly on *halachic* interpretation, or interpretations of how to follow Jewish law. Some students expressed appreciation for the JLIC couple but simply preferred to speak with rabbis from home or do not feel that they regularly have questions to ask. As Olivia, a senior, said, she prefers to use resources based at home.

The truth is I don't feel that I have a Jewish authority on campus. I mean, certainly I've found help in certain things that [the JLIC rabbi] and formerly [the previous JLIC rabbi] sent out to the community before certain holidays or different preparation things. I definitely find that useful, and I enjoy going to Chabad as well, but if I have a halachic question, I generally-- I won't generally go to them. Once in a while maybe. But usually I'll either go to my rabbi [at home] or ask someone else. --Olivia

⁷⁰ “JLIC Overview”

Olivia's preference for using contacts other than institutional figures, like the JLIC rabbi, for *halachic* questions is representative of an important segment of the respondent population. Many respondents expressed appreciation for the work of the JLIC couple and others on-campus but made clear a partiality for their home rabbi, a rabbi from their gap year in Israel, or a parent. I believe this partiality comes simply from respondents preferring to receive an opinion from rabbis with whom they are very close rather than the JLIC rabbi, who they may only have known for a couple of years in a more sporadic fashion.⁷¹ This point is important because it reflects a very current diversity of practice that exists among Orthodox Jews at Brandeis that is based on students' different sources of information on Jewish practice.

The Chabad House at Brandeis also provides religious guidance and support to students on-campus, regardless of Jewish practice, although their use by Orthodox Jews seemed to be limited. As Chabad at Brandeis writes on their website, "[t]he Chabad House is a home for Jews of all denominations to learn, thrive, and most importantly, to connect,"⁷² demonstrating their goal of tailoring their services to the needs of all students rather than specifically the most observant. A few of my respondents said that they would turn to the Chabad rabbi or rebbetzin with a *halachic* question, such as Madeleine, a senior, who described her relationship with the rebbetzin as "really close." Although the interview guide did not explicitly inquire about students' relationship with Chabad, almost all students referenced, at some point in their interviews, going to the Chabad House for Shabbat dinners on Friday nights. These Shabbat dinners, therefore, appear to be the key method by which Chabad connects with the Orthodox campus community. Emily, a senior, was one of the few students who explained why she

⁷¹ It should be noted that, as of this writing, the current JLIC rabbi and rebbetzin had only been on-campus at Brandeis for the academic year and were still in the process of developing relationships with students. Seniors, who were a large portion of the respondent population, may have been less inclined to acquaint themselves with the couple because the relationship would be short-lived.

⁷² "Philosophy"

preferred not to seek guidance from the Chabad family, describing how she believed that Chabad “has a lot of different customs than non-Chabad people” and was not necessarily “a good source of accuracy for my sect.” Given the high level of Jewish education among the larger Orthodox population and in my respondent group, Orthodox students are likely more cognizant of these theological differences and prefer to reach out to an individual with a Modern Orthodox background for *halachic* questions.

Brandeis University does employ a Jewish chaplain, who is a female rabbi ordained by the Conservative Jewish movement. A few students alluded to her presence on-campus, identifying her as a Jewish authority for all students, but only three expressed any willingness to use her as a source for *halachic* guidance. Winston, a junior, explained that Orthodox students largely do not use her advice because she was not ordained in the Orthodox movement.

She probably still is [the most knowledgeable person about Orthodox Judaism on-campus] today actually. She knows her shit cold. ... Now obviously, she subscribes to the Conservative way of doing it, but it doesn't mean that she doesn't know the Orthodox way of doing it. The question is whether or not you're allowed to trust the halachic authority of a non-Orthodox rabbi. Many would say yes, many would say no. The way I was grown up, the answer is no. --Winston

Although Winston recognizes her knowledge of Orthodoxy, he explains that Orthodox Jews can only trust the “*halachic* authority” of rabbis ordained in the Orthodox movement. To that end, the three students who suggested that they may be willing to ask the Jewish chaplain a *halachic* question also identified the JLIC rabbi as the point person with halachic questions; the Jewish chaplain served as a secondary option.

I expected students to express concern about the Jewish chaplain being a woman, as the Orthodox Jewish movement does not yet grant women the title of “rabbi.”⁷³ That issue was, interestingly, only brought up by one student, who simply said that she wasn’t used to female rabbis.

Diversity of Religious Practices: Transitioning, Liberal, and Traditional

I also found the range of practices among Orthodox Jews at Brandeis to be wide-ranging. Broadly, they can be classified into three groups: transitioning, liberal, and conservative. Transitioning Orthodox Jews may have abandoned some religious practices and are currently searching for a level of religiosity with which they can be comfortable. For instance, Robert, a junior, expressed regret for breaking a variety of Jewish laws because it isn’t “the ideal I want to strive for.” Robert knew that he wanted to be more religiously observant and is currently transitioning to match his practice with his ideology.

The group that I am calling “liberal Orthodox Jews” consider themselves to be fully observant but may hold more progressive ideologies or interpretations of *halacha*. For instance, Andrew, a junior, described how he identifies as a feminist within Orthodoxy and expounded on his belief in “the ability of women to say kiddush. That women can and should learn Torah, the same Torah that men are learning. Co-ed education, for example.” Similarly, James, a senior, explained that he does not observe *shomer negiah*, or the practice of not touching members of the opposite sex with the exception of family and a spouse, because “I have a different idea as to what *shomer negiah* stands for, so I practice that.” Both Andrew and James have more

⁷³ There is a new, and rather controversial, seminary in New York called Yeshivat Maharat that describes itself as “the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy,” although its graduates retain the title of Maharat, not Rabbi.

progressive takes on traditional Jewish practices than others may. Andrew was the only student to explicitly identify as a feminist in the interviews I conducted, and James' observance of shomer negiah was more progressive because he rationalized his practice as being observant in his own way (I did not inquire as to how exactly he did that). I would use observance of shomer negiah as a benchmark for being a "liberal" or "conservative" Orthodox Jew. Although most Orthodox students at Brandeis do not observe shomer negiah, it is, I believe, an effective way to distinguish between more- and less-stringent populations in Orthodox Judaism.

Lastly, the group that I am identifying as "traditional Orthodox Jews" are fastidious in their practice and consider themselves to be fully observant. Although most respondents didn't explicitly describe themselves as more religious than their peers, a few of them gently alluded to just that. Joseph, a senior, tactfully explained how he believes that he is meeting higher religious standards than some of his peers.

[O]ther things like showing up to services with consistency and learning with consistency are things which ... people [don't need to do] consistently [and those people] are still for sure considered Orthodox on this campus. And I would say that there's a special community of people who have that extra level of commitment so that's why I say exceeds expectations. --Joseph

Joseph is identifying his consistency in practice as the manner in which he considers himself to "exceed" the expectations of being an Orthodox Jew at Brandeis. Interestingly, he notes that the standard for being identified on-campus as "Orthodox" is not directly related to practice but rather to consistency of practice.

The Divorce of Social Hierarchy from Religious Observance

One of the most interesting components of the Orthodox Jewish community on campus is that the social hierarchy is largely divorced from religious observance. In other words, it is possible to be popular within the Orthodox campus community without being religious. This phenomenon was most evident when respondents told me about a group of less-religious students who host parties in their suite on Friday nights. Madeleine, a senior, described how those students command social influence within the community as “the cool kids” who “all drink and party on Friday nights.” Elliot, a junior, similarly described that the students are “quite popular” but acknowledged that “[t]here are the popular kids in the more observant scene [and] the popular kids in the less observant scene,” indicating explicitly that it is possible to be popular and command social influence within the community without necessarily being stringent in religious practice.

This divorce between social hierarchy and religious observance is evidenced by the election of less-religious students to the Board of the Brandeis Orthodox Organization. BOO leaders are elected by the members of BOO, who identify themselves as members by including themselves on the club’s email listserv. Several of the respondents in my interview had served on BOO Board in the past and admitted to violating core Jewish laws. As one student elected to the BOO Board said in his interview, “I don’t wear tzitzit. I don’t daven two times a day. ... There’s a lot I don’t do.” Another individual elected to the BOO Board explained that he “eat[s] dairy out. I don’t like it. Preferably I wouldn’t want to do it, but let’s say -- it’s weird.”⁷⁴ Both of these students, who were considered capable of holding office within the Brandeis Orthodox

⁷⁴ I decided not to include pseudonyms for these two individuals, as they have both been mentioned by their pseudonyms earlier in the thesis and, given the small size of the BOO Board, I was concerned that their anonymity would be compromised.

Organization⁷⁵ by their peers, admitted to violating certain core tenets of Orthodox practice, namely wearing tzitzit and keeping strict Kosher. For the former, his non-attendance at prayer services would be noticed by his more-observant peers. Although Emily, a senior, did tell me about one conversation with more-observant students in which they would not support a less-religious candidate for a BOO Board position, it appears that students who are less religious can still be voted on to the BOO Board, either because they hold social influence among both the less-observant and more-observant populations, or because there is simply a far larger more-observant group of students.

Conclusion

My intention in this chapter was to illuminate how diverse student backgrounds and complex social networks contextualize the dynamics of Orthodox Judaism at Brandeis University. Through religious individuation and development while growing up and participation in the complex Orthodox social network, Orthodox students at Brandeis have many different levels of observance and sources of religious guidance on-campus. Brandeis fosters the continuation and acceptance of highly individualized religious practice alongside participation in the Orthodox social network. The methods by which individual students manage the individualized practices around them is explored in the next chapter.

⁷⁵ A rough parallel to serving on the BOO Board would be serving on the Board of Trustees of a synagogue.

Chapter 4

Expanding the Tent: Facilitating Broad Standards for Orthodox Practice

This chapter investigates the process by which the Orthodox community handles non-adherence to Jewish law and include students who are less-religiously observant within the campus Orthodox community. First, I will explain how individuals strive to avoid judging the religious practice of others and, as a result, take pains to indicate their tolerance of others. Second, I will explore the prevalence of “Fringe BOO,” a term used to refer to less-involved Orthodox Jews with social ties to the community and how that term operates to extend the campus Orthodox social network out to those students and keep them involved. Lastly, I will explore an antithesis of how students may view college as a time to religiously experiment, suggesting that deviations from Jewish law are not long-term transgressions but rather part of healthy religious growth. By tolerating the religious practices of less-observant Orthodox students and creating a space for them within BOO, the Orthodox community sets for itself broader standards of acceptable religious practice. The entire mechanism helps keep students in the community who may be tempted to move away from Orthodox Judaism during their college years.

Clydesdale, in his book *The First Year Out*, describes how very religious students interact with their less-religious peers. He writes that “strongly religious teens may denounce the morality of certain peers, but only among similarly religious individuals and never to the face of the ones whom they criticize.”⁷⁶ Additionally, Clydesdale develops the concept of a “lockbox,” in which students store away their religious identity during their first year away from home for

⁷⁶ Clydesdale, 58-9.

safekeeping,⁷⁷ meaning that students still hold the same religious identity, although it may not be so visible. His findings provide a foundation for the ideas that I will present in this chapter.

Individualized Facilitation through Tacit Acceptance of Broad Religious Standards

Kathleen is a sophomore at Brandeis and an active member of the Orthodox Jewish community on campus. Recently, she decided to cease observance of *shomer negiah* (observant of touch), a practice in which women and men cannot touch members of the opposite sex with the exception of immediate family and a spouse. The differing views between how Kathleen perceived the community's response to her change in observance, how her friend perceived the community's response, and the direct responses that Kathleen has received set the stage for this chapter.

People were excited when I told someone I could give them a high-five. You know, people were excited about me, but I don't think anyone was happy that I was turning over to the dark side or whatever, you know. I don't think people-- this is something that I actually only figured out today, because someone told me. I don't think people think I'm less frum. ... I had lunch with someone today, a girl who is considering starting to wear pants, and she was telling me how she doesn't think that anyone sees me as any less frum. I haven't felt that way. That's why everything I said till now was different, because people seemed to have been making comments and some of them are jokes, but there's a little truth to every lie. --Kathleen

Kathleen was very conscious of her peers judging her behavior, although, according to her friend, a discrepancy existed between how Kathleen felt she was understood by the community and how the friend thought Kathleen was understood by the community. The different angles of judgment – as the receiver of judgment, as the purveyor of judgment, and as a bystander – all have their individual politics. I will begin to sort through them in this section, namely focusing

⁷⁷ Clydesdale, 60.

on the relationship between the community as a purveyor of judgment and the individual as the receiver.

I also consider how perceptions of communal judgment lead people to create an image of tolerance and acceptance of others, regardless of their religious practices. Significantly, there is a difference between internal judgments and external judgments, in that respondents' internal judgments did not always match how they presented themselves externally. Despite internal judgments about others deviating from traditional religious practice, most students strive to be outwardly understanding to their peers to avoid causing feelings of embarrassment. Respondents often used this external image of being understanding to contrast themselves with the larger community, which they consider to be judgmental.

Exploring the Distinction between Internal and External Judgments of Others

The topic of being judgmental of others' religious practices came up regularly in my interviews, and I found it to be a source of concern among respondents, especially regarding how they were perceived by others. Many of my respondents claimed to not judge their peers who did not follow *halacha*. Robert, a junior, described to me his belief in the importance of being "very PC and be accepting and not judging. That's something I definitely learned in college: not to judge." Similarly, Alexandra, a junior, told me how she "[tries] to feel indifferent because it's not my place to judge others at all and it's their decision what they want to do." Both Robert and Alexandra emphasize the importance of not judging others' religious practice as well as the growth and striving involved in reaching that ideal. To that end, they are both committed to reaching that ideal of refraining from judging their peers.

Despite the effort to avoid making external judgments about their peers' deviations from following *halacha*, many of my respondents admitted to making internal judgments. These internal judgments were not especially critical or intolerant but rather concerned or disappointed. As James, a senior, said in regard to watching people violate Kosher law or use their cell phones on Shabbat, "I feel torn, actually, because to a certain extent, it's like 'okay, this is probably a part of their personal journey or whatever,' but at another point, at least for some people, it's like 'you're clearly rebelling' type thing." On a more personal level, Molly, a junior, explained how one of her friends had changed her style of clothing to be less modest by religious standards.

I noticed recently that one of my friends who used to wear skirts has stopped wearing skirts, and so it makes me a little sad just from the perspective -- not to say that pants are wrong and [that] I believe she's totally wrong, but it makes me sad that there was something she used to be careful about and now she's not, and it kind of makes me wonder like "what else isn't she following" and "did she have some sort of crisis of faith that led her to this decision?" So it bums me out a little bit, but I'm still going to be their friend and support them and it won't affect the relationship. --Molly

James and Molly's comments both demonstrate their attention to other's violation of certain Jewish laws and their subsequent conclusions about the person as a result of this behavior. Specifically in Molly's comment, she describes being "bum[med]" by her friend's shifting practice. This shifting likely saddens Molly because it reflects a shifting away from traditional Orthodox values that Molly holds dear. By having a friend move away from Orthodox Judaism, Molly both mourns the fact that she and her friend no longer share that religious stringency in common and that the presence of traditional Jewish practice on campus is, by that one person, diminished. Neither of them unilaterally condemned the peer breaking Jewish law, but they were

conflicted in their emotions. Although James expressed frustration and Molly expressed concern about a peer breaking Jewish law, they also expressed understanding: James recognized the individuality of religious practice, and Molly expressed an unreserved intent to continue the friendship with her peer. Thus, the internal judgment does exist, although it is mixed with sympathy and tolerance.

As a small community with traditional values in a secular and progressive setting, Orthodox Jews at Brandeis can face many pressures to question their beliefs and assimilate. Assimilation diminishes the religiosity of the Orthodox community and leaves more observant students with a smaller group to practice their religion. Orthodox Jews who see their peers beginning to assimilate, therefore, may feel sadness and concern toward that peer, as many students reported in my interviews. Simultaneously, however, exists a concern about embarrassing their peers and making them feel excluded. These purveyors of judgment do not want to cause strife in the community or among their social group, so the judgments are internalized. Molly's comments most articulately demonstrate this two-pronged response. She holds internal concern for her friend's diminished religious practice but tries to avoid externally expressing that concern for fear of causing embarrassment.

Accepting Non-Adherence to Jewish Law through External Toleration

Amidst the conflicting emotions of internal judgments but external tolerance, Orthodox students that I interviewed seemed to make a conscious effort to minimize any outward judgments that they had and avoid hurt feelings. Emily, a senior, described a situation where she apologized to her roommate for a comment about improper religious observance.

“On one of the three-day yuntafs that we just had, my roommate-- we were talking about how on Thursday, we should definitely shower, or on Friday we should definitely shower because that’s not Shabbat yet. But then Saturday came and my roommate was like “oh, I really want to shower;” and I was like “why didn’t you just shower when it wasn’t chag and then you’re not really breaking a law?” But that was like-- but that’s not even for me to say. She wasn’t asking my opinion. She was just saying that she wanted to shower. And after I said that, I was like “yo, take that back. That’s not nice.” --Emily

Emily feels that the criticism was not for her to say; her roommate’s religious observance is something that should not be subject to her opinion. Although she was frustrated by her roommate’s non-observance in the moment, she immediately regretted making a criticism. She, therefore, is trying to be conscience of how she expresses herself about other’s religious practice. Similarly, Judith emphasized her concern about making a less-religious contemporary feel embarrassed about his or her religious practice. She told me that she “wouldn’t ever want to make anybody feel bad. That just wouldn’t be a good thing to do. And so I’m just trying to make sure I know what my boundaries are and to keep them and not prevent anyone or casting aspersions on anyone who are doing different things.” Judith is very conscious of not imposing her own opinions on others and allowing people to practice Judaism as they feel most comfortable. A premium is placed on not hurting other’s feelings and tolerating people in their individual practice.

In the process of avoiding external judgments of peers breaking Jewish law, the students I interviewed very frequently, instead, legitimized religiously-illicit behavior with language of being in “different places.” Anne, a junior, integrated this geographic metaphor into her commentary very directly when she recognized that “everyone is at their own point and they

know what they're doing." Similarly, Gregory, a junior, recognized that everyone was observing religious law as they could. "They're doing their best. I'm doing my best. We all have certain things we've settled on. I know that they're working hard," he said. Such language allows students to take a step back from their own practice to contextualize their own practice within the diversity that exists in their community. However, it also indicates an attitude of tolerance, as oppose to acceptance. The idea of being in "different places" harks back to a "live and let live" philosophy; Orthodox students attempt to withhold individual judgment on their peers and simply coexist in peace without engaging with the fact that people observe the religion in different ways.

Communal Judgments and Contrasting Oneself from the Community

Some students that I interviewed made explicit their feelings about the disapproving nature of the Orthodox campus community. They expressed concern that the Orthodox campus community as a whole was highly judgmental, despite individual proclamations that they themselves were not judgmental. For instance, Jennifer, a senior, felt that if observant students "hear of someone who's not keeping to the nth degree of halacha, they think that-- I feel like, on the surface, [try] to be okay with it, but they're actually-- they're definitely not-- they definitely are judging you." Jennifer's comment speaks to the distinction between internal and external judgments described above. Students who notice their peers violating *halacha* may attempt to avoid making external judgments although internal ones still exist. Jennifer is referring in her quote to the internal judgments, noting that they exist and can be identified in the community.

These judgments from the community serve as a counterweight to assimilative temptations; less-observant students may be inclined to try eating non-kosher food and using their cell phone on Shabbat, but there is a knowledge that some of their observant friends will, in an unspoken way, be disappointed in them. I believe this disappointment comes largely from a loss in shared value and practice. In my interviews, students who were purveyors of judgment did not express concern about the community's religious presentation to other Jewish denominations on campus or some specific "red line" of observance within the community. Rather, many students expressed sadness that their peers were no longer engaged with Judaism as they had been previously and moved away from the tradition in which they grew up. Almost all of my respondents explained that they refrain from judging others' religious practices, so I would hypothesize that the perception of communal judgment could be the result of small and unintentional microinequities⁷⁸ by community members toward less religious students. I did not get the impression from my interviews that there was active policing within the community.

Given that students felt that the community as a whole is judgmental and, by Jennifer's explanation, fails in its attempt to hide its judgments, a few students with whom I spoke contrasted themselves with other community members to emphasize the extent to which they avoid judging other students. Winston, a junior, emphasized that "by all means, I don't judge. I really don't judge. As far as I can say that. A lot of people say they don't judge. I actually really could not care less what you do." Similarly, in response to my question inquiring how she reacts to students breaking Jewish law, Jennifer, a senior, quickly clarified that her reaction of surprise was "not because I judge them." Later, Jennifer explained her belief that the community

⁷⁸ Rowe, 2.

“[thinks] they’re in theory okay with [people breaking Jewish law], but to their core, I don’t think that they’re okay with it.” Jennifer draws that contrast to seemingly emphasize that she is more tolerant than the community of diversity of religious practice. Being tolerant of that diversity is, therefore, being presented as a virtue, while openly expressing disapproval of that diversity is frowned upon.

Facilitating Broad Standards through Inaction and Perceptions of Uniform Striving

This dynamic of accepting the practices of less-observant students through language of “different places” and recognizing the virtue present in tolerating the diversity of religious practice facilitates the creation of broader religious standards that include the practices of these less-observant students. The language of being in “different places” suggests a striving for a judgment-free coexistence with peers who are less religiously-stringent than the purveyor. In most cases, the respondents were, in fact, speaking about peers with whom they spent time, either socially or religiously. Thus, the language makes it easier to accept the less-religious behavior, as it implies a belief that everyone strives to adhere to a similarly stringent standard of *halacha*. Deviations, therefore, are seen as struggles along the way to meeting that standard instead of meeting a completely different, lower standard. Once it is believed that everyone is striving for that same religious standard, it is easier to include everyone in the community regardless of the stringency of their current religious practice. In reality, everyone is not striving for that same religious standard. Although students may hold very similar standards as an ideal, the rigor with which students work to achieve that ideal varies significantly throughout the community.

Most important about this acceptance of less religiously-stringent peers by the observant students in BOO is that it largely occurs passively. I found that students took note of their peers' deviations from *halacha* but never mentioned any instance of either expressing approval or disapproval. In fact, a couple of students referenced *halachic* laws stating a prohibition on embarrassing others. Winston, a junior, spoke to this challenge of giving *musser*, or constructive criticism on someone's religiosity. "So the question is asked often "when are you supposed to give *musser*?" And more often than not, the answer is 'if the person is willing to listen to it,' and I think that's a good way of thinking about it. ... it's a fine line. It really is a fine line about how far you're supposed to go. How far you're supposed to speak out against something," he said. By this standard, respondents likely assume that their feedback is not welcome or might cause embarrassment, instead choosing to refrain from external judgment. With the absence of explicit encouragement or discouragement, students passively tolerate deviations from *halacha* among their peers. The facilitation of broad standards for religious practice, therefore, happens as a result of inaction and allows the community to walk a fine line of including a variety of people with different levels of observance without explicitly condoning an observance level that violates *halacha*. For instance, the rise of "Fringe BOO" within the Brandeis Orthodox Organization is evidence of this fine line. The title of "Fringe BOO" is privately given to students who may not follow communal norms of religious observance but are still included within the community. The title functions as a mechanism to include those students by labeling them as part of BOO but also identify them as different and "on the fringe" of the community.

Curiously, these findings are a bit difficult to categorize in existing literature of religious communities given the politics of BOO. The BOO community functions as one unitary system

with a spectrum of religious observances that can be roughly and informally categorized into “more” and “less” observant groups, rather than the interaction of two independent faith groups as most literature on pluralism explores. Additionally, there is no overarching issue of intolerance or hostility in the BOO community between the two camps. To that end, there was no real conflict between the members of the community, as the BOO community lacks differing ideologies or oppositional groups that were discussed in scholarship related to schism.⁷⁹ Lastly, the less-observant students mentioned don’t qualify as “religious individualists.” Robert Bellah et al. write that criticism of both religious belief and religious institutions are very common among religious individualists.⁸⁰ Neither of those criticisms was present among the less-religious students I spoke with; they largely maintained a respect for and connection to the Orthodox Judaism belief system. They merely did not practice all of the rituals or follow Jewish law with the same rigor as their more stringent peers. A more proper name for them might be “religious disconnects.”

Phil Zuckerman, the author of *Strife in the Sanctuary*, describes his book as “the first in-depth case study of a religious schism on the congregational (micro) level.” Zuckerman additionally emphasizes the importance of personalities in creating a schism in the synagogue he studied.⁸¹ The dynamics of BOO certainly occur at the micro level, which leads Zuckerman’s book to be a close parallel to this study. However, as mentioned above, there is no outright hostility between the two camps in the BOO community, like there are between the groups in Zuckerman’s study. Rather, the politics of BOO are merely members of a religious group trying to keep less-observant peers in Orthodox practice without fanfare.

⁷⁹ Kniss and Chaves.

⁸⁰ Bellah, et al., 234.

⁸¹ Zuckerman, 217.

Fringe BOO and Facilitation through a Social Network

In this section, I step back to view the way that the concept of “Fringe BOO” expands the social network of the campus Orthodox community to include students who may not act to identify inside of the community. By using language of “different places,” the community positions itself to include students who are not stringently observant while still attempting to maintain a stringent communal norm for observance. Additionally, the term allows the community to include students who, through religious dissociation, may not be inclined to include themselves. The development and existence of the term indicates the difficulty that one could have in completely dissociating from the BOO community, as the term manages to create a space that includes those students in the community but appreciating their religious and often institutional distance.

Defining Fringe BOO

The term “Fringe BOO” is used broadly and rather sweepingly in the community to describe someone who is within the BOO social network but does not involve him or herself in BOO’s regular activities, either religious (prayer services, for instance) or social (group events organized by the organization). I did not inquire about it directly in my interviews, but a couple of students mentioned it in relation to other questions, and I found its existence to be very relevant to my central focus. Elliot, a junior, told me that “all [students who are considered Fringe BOO’s] friends are in BOO. They don’t really go to BOO events so much, but if they go to services, they’ll go to BOO. Their friend groups are BOO. They live with kids from BOO.”

Nicholas, another junior, was more direct with his description, explaining that “the kids in the Orthodox -- who are in BOO -- have a religious standard. Actually, there’s a lot of contention with how frum kids are supposed to be in BOO and things like that. And like Fringe BOO and the kids who aren’t.” Nicholas immediately categorized Fringe BOO students as not being *frum*, or traditionally observant, effectively “othering” them relative to the larger community. Lastly, Jennifer, a senior, described Fringe BOO as not fitting the stereotype of an Orthodox student at Brandeis who “[keeps] all the laws possible and to the T.” Collectively, these three students identify Fringe BOO as a group that is deviant from the traditional social and religious patterns of the Brandeis Orthodox Organization, either through absence from social functions or failure to meet certain unspecified religious standards.

I will attempt to provide my own definition of Fringe BOO, one that is informed by both the definitions provided above and my own experience in the Orthodox community as a participant-observer. I would set three qualifications to be considered “Fringe BOO.” First, the individual must be part of the Orthodox social network and be well-acquainted with members of the community. Second, the individual must not be thoroughly involved in the religious component of BOO and may not meet certain standards of “frum,” such as meticulously observing Shabbat and keeping kosher. Third, the individual is not involved in the day-to-day social life of the BOO community, such as attending club events or listening to lectures from invited speakers. I should clarify that individuals are not definitively labeled as Fringe BOO or not. Rather, individual students may privately categorize their peers as such. There is no formal identification of Fringe BOO.

The term “Fringe BOO” is largely used to identify others outside of a conversation; people rarely identify themselves as “fringe BOO” nor do they impose the label on others. The informality of the term and its somewhat arbitrary application makes it difficult to determine the size of the Fringe BOO population and its definitive makeup. However, its lack of definitive definition and rather broad application indicates that being a member of “non-Fringe BOO” is a narrowly-defined concept. Students who are considered to be Fringe BOO may be religiously stringent but socially disconnected or socially connected but religiously lenient, but they must have some sort of connection to the community, although the title is largely used to describe the latter category, which is more populous within BOO. Some of these students may have little interest in actively practicing Orthodox Judaism while others might be experimenting with their religious practice in college in an attempt to find a good fit for themselves.

Martin Marty writes in his book *When Faiths Collide* that “one of the problems with tolerance within pluralism is that those who tolerate often have the power or the will to remake ‘the other’ into some manageable image.”⁸² I find this to be a striking parallel to the creation of Fringe BOO. The more-observant crowd of students is able to “manage” their less-religious peers by “remaking” them as a fringe component of the existing system. Fringe BOO is the created image: one that allows less-observant students to be managed through inclusion at a distance. Thus, the tolerance that is shown to students of Fringe BOO can be the result of this management.

⁸² Marty, 124.

The Application of Fringe BOO as part of the Orthodox Social Network

It should be evident that the fact that this term exists and is widely used within the Orthodox campus community reflects the degree to which people are kept within the community. Individuals who are less stringent with their religious practice and do not make a concerted effort to participate in BOO communal activities are still considered to be a part of BOO through this label of “Fringe BOO.” It is applied to them by those more involved in BOO, indicating that it is the more religious individuals who attempt to keep the less-religious “in the fray.” Given that members of Fringe BOO still should have many friends within the Orthodox community despite irregular participation in BOO communal life and inconsistent religious practice, the existence of the “Fringe BOO” identity has a heavy basis in an individual’s participation in the Orthodox social network. In other words, people who may normally be outside of the community are granted the title of Fringe BOO because of their participation in the Orthodox social network.

Only Daphne, a senior, told me that she no longer felt like a part of BOO. This sentiment, however, stemmed from the fact that she changed her religious ideology. She told me that “the fact that I ... have kind of left the community ideologically-- I don’t know if they’re threatened by it, but they’ve made it clear that they don’t want to include me anymore.” Both Daphne and Fringe BOO individuals have their membership informally determined by the larger BOO community. Fringe BOO members still subscribe to the belief system of Orthodox Judaism, and as Elliot said above, when Fringe BOO students attend prayer services, they attend the Orthodox services, reflecting their unchanged ideology but diminished practice. In contrast, Daphne feels that she has been excluded as a result of adopting a different, more liberal Jewish ideology.

Daphne's concern raises an important question of what it means to be Orthodox in college. Although this question is not the focus of this thesis, it is worth considering its ramifications. From my findings in this college community, I found that being "Orthodox" largely consisted of growing up in an Orthodox community, participating in the Orthodox social network, and continuing to affiliate with the Orthodox denomination and ideology. Orthodox practice was, interestingly, not a prime concern. Thus, identification with Orthodox ideology and engagement in Orthodox practice were divorced concepts. Daphne felt that she was excluded from the community because she no longer affiliated exclusively with Orthodox ideology despite the fact that she was rigorous about many aspects of Jewish practice, such as keeping Shabbat and observing Kashrut. She had, in fact, publicly reevaluated certain components of her ideology. In contrast, other students who were less stringent about such observances described no such feelings of exclusion and, in some cases, were actively engaged in the campus Orthodox community.

Demonstrating the Paradox of Community

The concept of being in "different places" helps neutralize concerns about religious stringency within the BOO community and allows for the term "Fringe BOO" to include within the community those students who are less stringent with their practice. Religious practices, even those that may not meet common standards of Orthodox religiosity, are accepted as the result of someone being in a "different place" but striving for observance. William, a senior, told me about how he does not feel it is proper to correct his suitemates on their slip-ups on Shabbat. "Honestly, in the end, it's not my place to stop anyone from doing anything. What I believe is

not what anyone else should believe and vice versa, and I respect what other people want to do,” he told me. In his case, he is using the logic of being in “different places” to manage his living situation with students who he told me are less-observant and likely would be considered Fringe BOO. By refraining from judgment, William de-emphasizes the importance of their religious practice while also avoiding any embarrassment that can result from those external judgments. To that end, he, and others who similarly de-emphasize their religious practice, can keep them in the “Orthodox fold” without apprehension toward their practice or causing them to feel unwelcome.

It is the de-emphasis on stringent religious practice coupled with the “Fringe BOO” label that most clearly reflects the paradox of community that exists in the Brandeis Orthodox Organization. In the BOO Constitution, the organization describes itself as “exist[ing] to fulfill and further the religious, social, cultural, and educational needs of the Orthodox Jewish population at Brandeis University. We dedicate ourselves to the principles of Orthodox, Torah-Halachic Judaism.”⁸³ They have identified themselves as aiming to fulfill both the social and religious needs of Orthodox students. They must strive to promote and encourage traditional Jewish practice among their members. However, some students, who might be considered members of BOO through their participation in the Orthodox social network, drift away from traditional practice and participation in the community, which by many definitions, place them in the category of “Fringe BOO.” Additionally, some students may enter Brandeis eager to put their new independence to the test and aim to limit their participation in religious activities from the start. The desire to refrain from external judgment, a personal conviction about being in “different religious places,” and the creation of “Fringe BOO” help affiliate those students with

⁸³ “Brandeis Orthodox Organization Constitution”

the community. This is where the paradox exists. The community must promote these traditional religious ideals but simultaneously extends itself to Fringe BOO by tolerating their less-stringent observance. In sum, the focus on lack of external judgment suggests that the BOO community is more concerned with inclusion and allows people to practice as they please. Traditional religious observance becomes an individual goal, facilitated by club services and friends, but is not compelled to the point of exclusion from the club. The limit to inclusion, however, is evident in the title “Fringe BOO.” By designating those students as “fringe,” it recognizes their choice to lessen their engagement with the BOO community and also serves to identify them as not following certain social or religious communal norms.

The Reality of Being in College

In this section, I intend to consider alternative possibilities to the idea that a paradox of community among Orthodox students is problematic and the result of religious deviance that could continue beyond one’s college years. Specifically, I explore the possibility that rule-breaking in college may be part of natural religious growth that can contribute to an informed and more committed Modern Orthodox practice after college. As part of this growth, the community’s standards of practice expand, similar to a pair of sweatpants, to accommodate students that may be religiously “out-of-shape.”

As Arnett explains in his study *Emerging Adulthood*, 17% of emerging adults in his study said that religious beliefs were “not at all important” and 42% indicated that attending religious services was “not at all important.” Arnett further explains this finding by emphasizing the importance of individuality, writing that emerging adults do not want to compromise their

individuality by strictly adhering to a certain set of rules and expectations, such as those of a religious practice.⁸⁴ This distinction between emerging adults managing their individuality and religious beliefs helps create a standard for developing an adult religious identity in which one may need to break rules to affirm individuality.

Experimenting away from home

In college, it must be recognized that students might take advantage of their newfound independent to experiment and explore new opportunities. As Clydesdale points out in his study *The First Year Out*, teens out of high school have the same religious faith as they did in high school but their frequency of attendance at religious services drop for the purpose of “[focusing] on the more pressing management of daily life during the first year out.”⁸⁵ This experimentation can easily fall over into religious practice and deviance. Madeleine, a senior, took explicit note of this in her interview with me and endorsed the idea of college being a time to try new things away from Orthodox Judaism.

People also recognize that it's college, that people are exploring, that it's a time to YOLO [an expression for "you only live once"]. I think that the mindset of a lot of these people is that it's like "I have four years, I'm out of New York, no one's watching me, I can do whatever I want," so if I see someone breaking Shabbos or let's say-- it's like a trial period. Like when you're living in your Jewish home in your Jewish community, you don't have time to try to break these things and see what it's like, so I think we're all figuring it out and trying out different things. That's what college is for. --Madeleine

⁸⁴ Arnett, 172.

⁸⁵ Clydesdale, 60.

Madeleine's acknowledgement of independence is key, as she sees college as a time away from the restrictions of one's home Orthodox Jewish community. The Orthodox community on campus, therefore, is not a source of surveillance or communal pressure. Thus, for her, she sees non-adherence to *halacha* among her peers as acceptable because it is an act of trying a new lifestyle and part of the process of understanding oneself.

Winston, a junior, had a similar attitude to Madeleine, as he argued that having the opportunity to break laws and make mistakes could help students learn to better navigate their religious observance in a secular environment.

People are pushed towards going to YU or say Queens College ... because there's a yeshiva right next to it that you can learn in, for the sake of keeping you in that bubble. That's a big thing where you're supposed to be keeping people in the bubble. That way they're not exposed to different things. So the opportunity for me to eat non-Kosher dairy doesn't arise. I fundamentally think that is the wrong way of going about it and I fundamentally think making a mistake about eating non-Kosher dairy a few times and then knowing that you're not supposed to do it in the future and knowing how to handle living in the real world, which you will have to at some point, [is valuable]. --Winston

Winston's argument takes a slightly different angle to Madeleine's, as he sees rule-breaking in college as a form of religious growth that will lead to a more informed and observant self in the future. Madeleine, in contrast, sees rule-breaking as part of growth to determine the religious observance that one wants to adopt. In their interviews, both Madeleine and Winston were unperturbed by other students breaking *halacha*, suggesting that by their logic of personal growth, it is acceptable and even beneficial to facilitate broad standards on campus for Orthodox Jewish practice.

Winston also extended that argument to his own rule-breaking on-campus, explaining that “part of my reason for why I came to secular college was to expose myself to a part of society that is so integral in United States society. ... There’s growth that occurs when you’re drunk at a frat party, and I fully believe that.” Winston had mentioned that he often makes decisions that violate *halacha* when intoxicated, such as eating non-kosher food, and found that being in these situations helped him grow as a person and learn how to navigate a secular lifestyle. He, however, was one of the only students to do this. Madeleine was more direct about times that she had broken *halacha*. When describing why she attended Springfest, an outdoor concert that occurs during the Counting of the Omer, a series of days in which Jews are not supposed to listen to live music, she simply said “I wasn’t going to miss Springfest. That’s just not one of the top rules in my personal opinion.” For Madeleine, the decision to go to Springfest wasn’t based in some sort of philosophy about rule-breaking; she just didn’t want to miss the concert. It should be noted that the law that prohibits Jews from listening to live music during the Omer is *d’rabbanan*, a law derived from the rabbis, and is thus considered less important than a law that is *d’oraita*, or derived from the Torah.⁸⁶ Madeleine may be less concerned about religious stringency during the omer because the corresponding Jewish laws do not have the same legal weight as laws that are derived from the Torah.

I want to note that students who begin to drift from traditional practice are not simultaneously drifting from ideology. The vast majority of students who admitted to violating certain components of *halacha* still identified with Orthodox Jewish ideology. Emily, a senior, told me that a strict adherence to *halacha* is “something that I’ve always wanted to do. it’s something that’s easy to take on here, and it’s been an ongoing struggle trying to reconcile what I

⁸⁶ Fishman, personal correspondence.

want to do with what I believe. I really do believe in Orthodox Judaism, and I believe in keeping Shabbat. I think that that's something that's very important to do." Emily is actively affirming the value of an Orthodox Jewish practice and identifies her difficulty in achieving that ideal, although she explained to me that she is actively working toward it. Her previous drifting from practice does not also reflect any drifting from ideology.

As a result of an in-tact ideology, Emily also expects to resume certain observances upon graduating and starting her own life. She explained to me that she told her boyfriend from the beginning of their relationship that "when I grow up, I want to be shomer Shabbat and shomer Kashrut. But when does that start? You can't just talk abstractly about 'when I grow up' because you're always growing up." Emily's aspiration for a more observant lifestyle is notable given that she told me that while in college, she has not been as observant as she would have liked. It seems that Emily has a similar attitude towards college practice as Madeleine, as Emily told her boyfriend from the beginning of their relationship that she aspired to stricter observance when she was older. Thus, college was likely a time for her to try new things without fear of judgment from her home community.

Keeping Students in the Fray

By facilitating these broader standards for religious practice, it may help keep students within the Orthodox community during their time at college. Even if they may cease to practice, being involved in the Orthodox social network and being welcomed at services can certainly prepare one to resume practice upon graduating. I find myself thinking of this as "sweatpants Orthodoxy," in that Jewish practice is like wearing a pair of pants. Modern Orthodox Judaism is

a snug pair of jeans: comfortable but without much room for gaining or losing weight. The type of pants in an Orthodox campus community, however, may be more like sweatpants. As one becomes “out-of-shape” with their ritual practice, the sweatpants expand and continue to fit. Upon graduation, the student can get back in-shape and the sweatpants contract following their increasing level of observance. Thus, having broader standards may allow for experimentation and individuation during college years and permit students, through the sweatpants model, to resume practice later on.

Conclusion

These sections were meant to clarify the process by which the BOO community creates broad but informal standards for religious practice. These standards, formed by both a conscious effort to refrain from external judgment about others’ religious practices and an effort to include less-observant students within the BOO community through the label of “Fringe BOO,” allow for a wide variety of practice that reflects great diversity among the membership of the Brandeis Orthodox Organization. In my final empirical chapter, I will illuminate in-depth a case study of religious rule-breaking at parties in the Foster Mods. The case study will demonstrate the existence of a paradox of community in a common example of weekly party attendance on Shabbat.

Chapter 5

Party in the Mods: A Case Study in Prioritizing the Social Over the Religious

In this section, I will present a case study to more clearly illustrate my idea of the paradox of community and the inclusion in the community of Fringe BOO students that were described above. The case being presented is a Mod party. At Brandeis, a “Mod party” is a colloquial term that refers to a party being held in one of the units of the Foster Mods, a group of small on-campus townhouses near the university’s gymnasium that are inhabited almost exclusively by undergraduate seniors. According to a handful of my respondents, a group of students connected socially to the BOO community have been hosting parties with music and dancing in their Mod each Friday night, the time of the Jewish sabbath. Listening to instrumental music on a stereo on Shabbat does not violate Jewish law, although it is not traditionally in the spirit of the Sabbath. It should also be recognized that a student must turn the music on and off each week, the act of which would violate the Sabbath. My respondents explain below that the student hosts formerly held a weekly party that was in line with Shabbat observance, and the respondents enjoyed attending those parties. They also explain their attitudes on the change in the nature of space.

The Mod party is hosted by the students living in that unit of Mod housing. None of my respondents gave me a specific number of hosts, but most Mod units house four students, so it is likely that about four students host the party. A couple of respondents said that the parties used to be a nice space to hang out with friends on Shabbat and have a drink. Given that their current descriptions of the party focus on discomfort resulting from the music playing, it is clear that the nature of the party has changed from the past. The exact timeline is not clear, but following the

timing of my interviews, the change appears to have occurred toward the beginning of this academic year, if not as part of the transition of moving into a Mod housing unit.

I should mention that I did not inquire specifically about these Mod parties in my interviews, which explains the shortage of complete information about their nature. They were mentioned without my prompting by five students independently. Of these five students, four explicitly reported having attended the parties and being discomforted by the environment. Thus, none of my respondents told me in the interviews that they stopped attending the party when the hosts started playing music, nor did they tell me that they knew of the party but had never attended in the first place. This has a double-edged effect on my study. The negative is the lack of detailed and regular responses on this subject, as I only am able to include responses from the five students from a singular perspective, three of whom spoke about it in detail. Thus, my qualitative data on the subject is limited. However, the fact that this specific topic was brought up by a quarter of my respondents unprompted led me to believe that it is actively on the minds of my respondents. In fact, I did not find any other topic being brought up with the same high frequency. I felt that given its prevalence and importance among my respondents, it was worth including as a case study that illustrates the tensions explored in this thesis.

Tension between religious observance and social pressures at a Mod party

I will briefly explore the tension that my respondents described when attending the party in the Mods. Attending the party fostered social connections between my respondents and the hosts, but respondents also felt religiously uneasy by the music playing in the environment. My analysis below considers this tension in greater detail.

The students I interviewed expressed reservations about attending the Mod party on Shabbat, usually citing the music that was playing inside. Listening to music on Shabbat, although technically not in violation of Jewish law, is not in the spirit of the law. Emily, a senior, conveyed concern about these parties and noted the resistance that some students have felt toward them.

There's recently been some people who've started playing music on Shabbat in their suites, and they invite everyone over and are like "yeah, come party," but there are a lot of people who-- they're not necessarily like "you shouldn't be doing that," but they're like "no, we're not going to go to that. That's not what Shabbat is to us." -- Emily

Emily explained to me that many students disagree with the premise of attending a party playing music on Shabbat and prefer to seek out other social environments. Similarly, Madeleine, a senior, told me that "they started playing their music, and a lot of people -- we'll all sit and talk about it. Like 'I'm not comfortable with it, I'm not comfortable with it.'" Although Madeleine later acknowledged that her friends still often attend these parties, they do affirm their discomfort together with the setting and recognize that it does not align well with their values of religious observance.

Running up against this feeling, however, is the desire that students have to participate socially with their friends from the Orthodox community. In order to spend time with their friends, students will bow to social pressure to attend these Shabbat parties. Madeleine commented that she has "spoken to a bunch of people that have felt pressured that 'this is where all my friends are going, so if I don't go, then what am I going to do?'" Her observation reflects

the social pressure to attend this type of party in order to join other friends. Emily also agreed, saying that she will “still go over there because I want to hang out with my friends and some of my friends are there,” later explaining that she would leave “as soon as the whole environment changed.” This tension between joining friends and being *makpid*, or strict, with Shabbat observance was very evident to Madeleine and Emily and was not easily navigated. In my interviews, I did not get the impression that either of them had definitively resolved the tension. Additionally, the pressure to move away from strict observance of Jewish law does not necessarily come from outside the Orthodox community but often from inside by other Orthodox students who are still part of the community despite being minimally observant.

The incidence of these “Mod parties” were raised in my interview without my direct inquiry. Additionally, the topic usually arose in response to a question of mine regarding instances in which students break Jewish law on campus. This suggests that the Mod parties are an issue on the minds of Brandeis Orthodox students today as a space for religiously-questionable behavior on Shabbat.

Social pressures influencing religion

Despite these mixed feelings about the Mod parties, students still admitted to attending them, sometimes on a regular basis. In this section, I focus on the methods by which social pressures motivated my respondents to continue attending the party despite their discomfort. Social pressure was the key motivator that encouraged my respondents to attend the party despite their religious discomfort, thus lending respondents to favor the inclusivity component of the paradox of community.

Some of my respondents continued to attend the party despite feeling uncomfortable. Madeleine even expressed to me feelings of regret and disappointment in herself following her attendance at the party. She said that her friends will all confirm to each other that they are uncomfortable with the party, as mentioned above. However, she further states that when “push comes to shove, ... everyone’s still there,” indicating that people end up attending the party even though they may disagree with it on principle. In fact, when describing her own feelings, Madeleine expressed that the party “just, like, doesn’t feel right to me.” The paradox of community that I described earlier is playing out right here in this little Mod. On the one hand, Madeleine wants to participate in the social activities of community members, even if they are not completely in line with religious observance. On the other hand, Madeleine feels uncomfortable with music playing on Shabbat, as it is not in the spirit of Jewish law. The social end of the paradox ends up winning out, as Madeleine and her friends constantly return to the party. I should add that I did not speak with students who informed me of a decision to not return to the party; there is likely a population of that mindset that is not represented in this thesis.

Respondents also expressed a desire to avoid causing embarrassment for or appearing to cast judgment on the hosts of the party. William, a senior who has attended the parties, spoke directly in reference to these parties when he expressed his firm desire that “I respect what other people want to do.” William did not want to criticize the behavior of others, even when that behavior made him uncomfortable. Similarly, Elliot told me about his impression of the party, saying that “it upset me to see them putting on the music. But I wasn’t upset. I wasn’t judging.” Elliot’s quick reversal to clarify that he wasn’t judging those in attendance at the party indicates

the same aversion to judgment that I described in the previous chapter. He and William both want to be tolerant of others' religious observance and avoid appearing judgmental about these parties on Shabbat without actively condoning it. They proceed to walk a fine line of tacit acceptance without declaring it outright.

As I was listening to respondents talk about these Mod parties on Shabbat, I started to feel that many of them were experiencing a form of cognitive dissonance related to their attendance. Students such as Madeleine and Elliot recognized that the party was not in line with their religious practice and even expressed to me that being there made them feel uncomfortable. However, they still attended the party, sometimes on a regular basis. Madeleine and Elliot, therefore, were holding two contradictory beliefs at the same time. They attended the party to join friends and have fun but simultaneously regretted being there because it did not align with their religious observance of Shabbat.

I noticed in my interviews that the students hosting the Mod parties were considered, at least by my respondents, to be an established and popular crowd within the Orthodox Jewish community. When I asked Madeleine how the hosts were perceived within the campus Orthodox community, her response indicated that they were popular. "Just that it's seen in the Orthodox community that it's like the cool -- like kind of high school terms, like the cool kids," she said. Emily added that before they started playing music, the hosts had always "been a really nice place to go on Shabbat to drink with your friends and have a Shabbat party." The party, therefore, is considered to be a popular space to gather and spend time with friends in the campus Orthodox community. Even though the nature of the space had changed and began to play

music, students still related to the space in its social context of meeting with friends and acknowledged that they wanted to be there for that purpose.

Elliot even expressed his appreciation for the event, noting that it can actually yield some social benefits. For him, the religious complications did not necessarily take precedent over the social nature of the gathering.

I think it was like something like “yes, something that’s not kavod Shabbat, like honoring the Shabbat because music was playing,” but no one was breaking any laws. They were together, they were enjoying, they were in nice clothes and drinking. Camaraderie. So I think there was some good involved in that event. --Elliot

Elliot explicitly appreciates the benefits of students gathering together, noting that people were enjoying themselves and creating communal “camaraderie.” He describes the camaraderie alongside the concerns about *kavod Shabbat*, or honoring Shabbat, recognizing the presence of one and the absence of the other as similarly important. Elliot’s observation shows a willingness to value the social nature of the gathering at least equally to the religious complications inherent in the event, leading him to be comfortable at the event and see the benefits that it presents to the community. This logic helps keep the hosts, who are considered popular, within the parameters of the community: the fact that the party they host can contribute positively to the social life of the campus Orthodox community helps legitimize the party and, by extension, the hosts. I must also note that Elliot indicated that, by his standards, the event did not technically break any Jewish laws, which may have helped him more greatly appreciate the social benefits.

My respondents reported some specific components of the event that made them uncomfortable and did not reflect their religious values. Elliot, despite his earlier appreciation of

the camaraderie fostered by the event, commented that “post-Shabbat dinner they were blasting music and having salsa dancing in a drunken state.” The nature of his description is unflattering to the hosts and party attendees, as they are conveyed as being loud and rambunctious. I received the impression that Elliot wanted to present himself as being uninvolved in this behavior given his choice of words. Similarly, Emily described how the party quickly changed from “Shabbat-observant people” who were “dancing -- like friendly dancing” to “frat party-dancing” because “people heard the music and they came up because it’s the Mods.” In both of their descriptions, Elliot and Emily were cognizant of the dancing that was not in line with their values. Despite this, both Elliot and Emily reported that they continue to attend the parties, as the social value in attending takes precedent over religious concerns.

Their continued attendance may be reflective of a belief in the individuality of religion and that students need not adhere to traditional religious standards when away from home. Robert Bellah et al. write that many Americans “see religion as something individual, prior to any organizational involvement” and any organizational involvement would likely be “the local church.”⁸⁷ Madeleine, at a different point in her interview, paraphrases other students who believe that ““I have four years, I’m out of New York, no one’s watching me, I can do whatever I want.”” This language suggests that students may not be concerned about their religious practice while they are away from their “local church,” as Bellah et al. describes. For both attendees and hosts, deviating from previously-held norms, such as not listening to music on the Sabbath, may be more acceptable when students are away from their home synagogue.

⁸⁷ Bellah, et al. 226.

A Lack of Pluralism

The religious diversity that exists at the Mod party inherently suggests that pluralism would be appropriate and beneficial between the two groups present.⁸⁸ However, the dynamics of the Mod party do not meet standards for approaching intradenominational religious pluralism. Richard Wentz describes religious pluralism as involving respect and reverence for the other within the community as well as refining ourselves.⁸⁹ The dynamics of the Mod party do not involve any of these three qualities. Rather, the attendees are reluctantly tolerant, while the hosts impose their less-observant religious observance on the attendees. There is an uncomfortable religious coexistence on either side that does not even approach pluralistic feelings. Additionally, neither the attendees nor hosts would meet the standard of being a religious individualist, who more directly disagree with the “authoritarianism and paternalism” that some find in traditional religion. Religious individualism would involve rejecting Orthodox Judaism as a belief system, which neither the hosts nor respondents have done.⁹⁰ Instead, they simply have diminished their intensity of religious practice but still subscribe to the belief system of Orthodox Judaism.

Historically, Orthodox Jews have not endorsed pluralistic behaviors, especially toward other denominations of Jews.⁹¹ Today, there are many varieties of Orthodox Judaism within the United States, as American attitudes toward religion facilitate the creation of that diversity with Haredi Jews at the extreme conservative end and Modern Orthodox Jews at the liberal end.⁹²

⁸⁸ Evans, 44.

⁸⁹ Wentz, 114-6.

⁹⁰ Bellah, et al., 247.

⁹¹ Moore, 149.

⁹² *ibid*, 152

This “structural pluralism” within Orthodox Judaism, however, demonstrated by the varieties of Orthodox Jews in the United States, does not include a new commitment to “ideological pluralism,”⁹³ meaning a commitment to values of pluralism, such as those that Wentz explored of respect and reverence. Thus, the Orthodox Jewish students at Brandeis do not have a denominational foundation of pluralism on which to build. Instead, they engage in a tepid coexistence with the other in their midst that left my respondents feeling frustrated.

Facilitating the Party

I explore here the dynamic of responsibility for the party between the hosts and attendees in this section. The idea of who is responsible for the party’s regular occurrence, and how that responsibility impacts the relationship between the hosts and the attendees, is important for understanding the inclusion of the hosts within the campus Orthodox community.

Elliot made the important point of describing the hosts as “Fringe BOO” in his interview with me. Such a classification is important for my analysis because it provides the framework for *who* is being included. Elliot is identifying the students who host these parties as part of the Fringe BOO population, meaning that they are not consistently engaged with the community and likely do not stringently observe Jewish law. The inclusion of the Fringe BOO hosts by the more-observant guests in the larger campus Orthodox community occurs at these weekly parties. As I mentioned in the introduction to this section, I did not inquire directly about these parties to my respondents, and to that end, I did not ask my respondents whether they would classify the hosts as fringe BOO; Elliot did so unprompted. However, based on the definition that I provided

⁹³ Moore, 152

above, I feel confident using this term to describe the hosts in charge of these Friday night Mod parties.

While respondents explained to me their reasons for attending the Mod parties, they also expressed their opinions about the hosts, who grew up in Orthodox Jewish communities. As a result of their upbringing, the hosts are almost certainly aware that the party they hold is not in the spirit of *halacha*. Both Emily and Madeleine had explained that they had previously gone to the suite for post-Shabbat dinner gatherings that did not have music playing, indicating that including the music was a conscious change that the hosts made. James, a senior, told me that he finds it “upsetting that [the hosts] are [hosting the weekly parties] out in the open, because it hurts the community more, I think.” His openly critical remark, which stands in contrast to the tacit acceptance of being in “different places,” may stem from the fact that the hosts’ behavior affects many other members of the community and could create a greater division between those who are willing to attend the party and legitimize the music, and those who are not.

Further, it is likely that the hosts know that playing music is not acceptable among all of their Orthodox peers. James felt the hosts, who both were “playing music loudly” and “bringing other BOO people in” were making a “statement” about their own religious observance and the value they placed on Orthodox Jewish practice. Similarly, Madeleine expressed her belief that “there’s just something about it that they know what they’re doing is wrong and making people feel uncomfortable and they don’t have a problem with it. So that-- not even on a halacha basis, just on that principle, I think it’s wrong.” Both James and Madeleine felt that the hosts were being inconsiderate of other students’ religious practices by changing the environment of a space that was previously Shabbat-friendly without being more considerate about the needs of people

using that space. Despite the fact that the hosts live in that space and have freedom to determine its use, James and Madeleine felt that the hosts had a responsibility to accommodate the needs of their long-time guests.

Although I did not learn the hosts' perspectives on their weekly parties, I would like to offer an argument in their defense: it's their Mod. The fundamental issue over these parties in the campus Orthodox community appears to be a contest over space and for whom it serves a use. The respondents who talked about these Mod parties mentioned their motivation for attending as social; the space used to serve many students in the campus Orthodox community, making them feel comfortable and welcome. With the introduction of music on Shabbat, the space serves and is welcoming to a smaller cohort of students. It is the hosts' choice as to how their space will be used and whether it will accommodate a larger or smaller number of students. Although my respondents' grievances and frustrations are very understandable, the space is not theirs to control.

I present this conflict as a contest of space because it helps present another key point: the respondents with whom I spoke did not articulate a decision to stop attending the parties. Changing the nature of the space did not dissuade those respondents from attending, despite their new feelings of discomfort. They could have chosen to make their own Friday evening party or simply go elsewhere, but as Madeleine said, they often find themselves at this particular Mod each week. The social pressures that exist in the paradox of community win out over the religious pressures. It is this social pressure that motivates the inclusion of the Fringe BOO hosts.

Therefore, the hosts and the guests are equally responsible in perpetuating this event. The Fringe BOO hosts decide to throw the party, the nature of which makes religiously-observant students uncomfortable. Such an act should normally place the hosts of the party outside of the Orthodox social circle. The more-observant students, however, continue to attend the party regularly, thus legitimizing its occurrence. This regular interaction between the hosts and the observant students helps keep the hosts within the Orthodox social network. They are included in the campus Orthodox community through this largely social affiliation.

In detail, the observant students are motivated to prioritize their social relationships over strict religious observance despite their discomfort with it. The paradox of community exists here between the students observing Shabbat to their standards but desiring to spend time with friends in a less-observant environment. Party attendees prioritize the social-end of the paradox, which helps legitimize the less-religious environment and include the Fringe BOO hosts within the Orthodox community. Through their attendance, the more-observant students indicate that the behavior at the party, namely listening and dancing to music on Shabbat, falls within the realm of their religious practice.

Conclusion

I believe that the Mod party effectively exemplifies the central argument that I am putting forth about the paradox of community and methods of including fringe BOO students in the Orthodox community. The encounter in the Mods between students and the fringe BOO hosts reflects the inclusion end of the paradox and the religious difficulty that can be associated with that inclusion.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: When the Schmaltz Hits the Fan

This thesis was rather unusual to research and write because of the many different groups involved in its creation and evaluation. Each group has a unique perspective on what my findings mean and what use they serve, whether that use be practical or theoretical.

First, I have my two readers from the Sociology department, who see the Orthodox Jewish college students as a case study of a larger social pattern. Second, I have a reader from the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies department, who comes from a cohort of researchers engaged in the social scientific analysis of American Jewry. That cohort would likely view my thesis as an exploration of the contemporary dynamics of Orthodox Jewish college students that could be used to improve the cohesiveness of campus Orthodox communities. Lastly, I must consider my respondents, the Orthodox Jews themselves, who may want to understand what this means for their own community at Brandeis.

All of these groups are my publics. They are the groups to whom I present my research and whom I hope will determine a way to incorporate my findings into their own research and practice. Below, I have included the specific conclusions that each public can draw from my findings.

The Sociology audiences

For the sociologists of religion, the Orthodox Jews are a case study of the larger phenomenon that I present of handling religious inactivity within a larger and active religious

community. This internal division and acceptance is unusual, as it does not seem to easily fall into any existing sociological category. It is not religious pluralism, as it is absent of the intentionality inherent in pluralism. The inactive are not religious individualists, as they still subscribe to the basic belief system of the larger group. It is also not true religious conflict, as the community still exists as a whole.

I think it is easier to characterize the situation of my respondents as intracommunal tensions that are superseded by a desire for inclusion and friendship. Those intracommunal tensions stem from differences in religious practice; Fringe BOO students are less stringent in their *halachic* observance than the rest of the BOO community. However, the values of inclusion and social connections always win out over strict religious observance, as follows in the paradox of community that I refer to throughout my thesis. Thus, these tensions are largely smoothed over by desires for friendship and camaraderie.

Part of the emphasis on social connection can likely be attributed to the communal nature of Orthodox Jews. As I explained in my first empirical chapter, Orthodox Judaism contains a tightly-knit social network that is expansive and multi-layered. Additionally, Orthodox Jews are regularly a demographic minority, even at Brandeis, which reinforces the need for this close social network. It is unlikely that other religious groups, such as Catholics or Muslims, would prioritize the social component of their community as heavily as the Orthodox Jews because of those two conditions.

These findings are unique because of the setting in which they take place: college. As I identified in my review of literature, other scholars have found that students attending college often decrease their religious practice without abandoning their religion's belief system. That

exact pattern has happened here, especially with the Fringe BOO population, as they attended Orthodox services when they attended a prayer service. They just did not attend services very often in the first place. Furthermore, the more-religious students made their own efforts, albeit somewhat passive efforts, to keep these less-religious students within the boundaries of their community.

The unique part of the findings is that the less-religious students who are not attending services are still part of the same community as the more-religious students. I think the reason for this is largely social. Existing friendships and community relationships, which are reinforced through the complicated Orthodox Jewish social network, are emphasized. Students likely want to maintain these relationships rather than exclude people and cut ties with their peers over religion. Thus, sociologists of religion should recognize the importance of social pressures and relationships among students in college settings, as those pressures can trump the other values that a student holds, including religious ones. Future research could explore the degree to which this social pressure can trump other values and how Orthodox Jews, as a case, rationalize the prioritizing of social relationships over religion.

I would hypothesize that these patterns of behavior would be more intense on other college campuses. Brandeis is highly accommodating to its large Orthodox student population, such as through the availability of many different Kosher foods and cancelled classes on Jewish holidays. This is an anomaly, and Orthodox students at other colleges likely have to assimilate more into the mainstream secular culture in order to keep up with classes and, in smaller Orthodox communities, maintain a social life. Many other schools also do not have an Orthodox rabbi on campus to provide religious advice and instruction. Thus, expectations for religious

practice among Orthodox students on other campuses would likely be set lower. Because of the more skeletal infrastructure for practicing Orthodox Judaism, students would be less inclined to practice stringently themselves and would similarly refrain from judging peers. They would almost certainly, however, know each other well through the Orthodox social network.

The Jewish Communal audiences

Social scientists of Jewry should consider the on-the-ground implications of my findings for the Jewish community, especially Orthodox Jewish college students. As Samuel Heilman (a Brandeis alumnus himself) has identified, Orthodox Jews attending secular colleges can struggle to fit into mainstream campus life.⁹⁴

My findings indicate that more-observant students are acting passively to keep Fringe BOO students within the boundaries of the community, largely through social means. Currently, most universities with substantial Orthodox populations have a JLIC rabbi and *rebbetzin*, a rabbi's wife, on campus, who offer religious programming for Orthodox students. This programming may not appeal to Fringe BOO students, whose engagement with the community is largely social rather than a hybrid of social and religious. It may behoove the Jewish community to consider methods for connecting with Orthodox Jews who are not as engaged with traditional religious practice and learning.

Scholars of Jewry should also note the fact that Orthodox students acted independently to help expand the boundaries of their community. This is a positive development for Orthodox Judaism on campus. The community is not torn apart by religious divisions nor is it prone to detrimental categorization; I would argue that the term Fringe BOO keeps those less-religious

⁹⁴ S. Heilman, 195.

students within the community while maintaining a certain necessary religious distance to emphasize a higher standard of religious practice within the community. The fact, though, that most of the more-observant students were able to coexist with less-observant students without incident engenders confidence in the community's cohesion.

Given my extensive interviews with these students, I feel it is appropriate to offer my expectations on how Brandeis Orthodox students' religious practices will evolve following their graduation. In other words, how will Orthodoxy at Brandeis potentially impact students in the long-run? I expect that for those students who continued to practice Orthodox Judaism stringently, they will continue with that practice post-graduation. In fact, assuming they get married, their marriage will bind them to another Orthodox Jew and give them a partner to keep them religiously steady.

Other students, however, may drift away from Orthodox practice. They don't necessarily move to another denomination of Judaism, although if they do, it is likely Conservative Judaism. They maintain an affiliation with Orthodoxy and continue to appreciate its ideology but do not involve themselves in the community and cease to actively practice. I expect that many students who would be classified as Fringe BOO fall into this category.

For future research, social scientists of Jewry should explore how Fringe BOO students engage with Orthodoxy upon graduating from college. Additionally, research should also consider the extent to which this method of inclusion exists in other denominations. Although Orthodoxy has a very cohesive and tightly-knit community, as identified in my review of literature, it's quite possible that this method of inclusion exists in other denominations, such as Conservative Judaism, which has several frameworks in place before college to connect young

Conservative Jews around the country, such as United Synagogue Youth and Camp Ramah. A study from 2006 noted that the percentage of Jewish young adults who were Orthodox, 16%, was nearly double the percentage of Orthodox Jewish adults aged 30-39, which was 9%.⁹⁵ From those numbers, it is startlingly clear that young Orthodox Jewish adults will have an important role in shaping the future of both Orthodox Judaism and Judaism as a whole.

Although there are many published articles exploring the attitudes and connections to Judaism of American Jewish young adults, few of these articles investigate religiosity. One publication notes that literature about young adults tends to ignore Orthodox Jewish young adults, as the focus of research on Jewish young adults emphasizes engaging the unengaged and the Orthodox are already engaged.⁹⁶ That same publication measured observance of five key Jewish rituals, being attending a Passover seder, lighting Hanukkah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, and keeping a Kosher home, among young Jews between the age of 18 and 39. Each ritual had a compliance rate among Orthodox Jewish respondents of at least 95%, with the exception of lighting Shabbat candles, which only had 91%. These rates were significantly higher than the non-Orthodox respondent group.⁹⁷ It is important, however, to consider that the rituals measured were yearly events that many Jews observe. The ritual with the lowest level of observance, lighting Shabbat candles, is a weekly ritual that some Orthodox Jews, such as Fringe BOO individuals, may cease observing. Future research should tailor methodology to the observance level of Orthodox Jews to explore the nuances of practice after college within that specific population.

⁹⁵ Ukeles, 5.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 72.

It is additionally possible that some Orthodox Jews will get married much later than their peers, due to a larger culture of postponement in the United States. Fishman describes a coalescence of American and Jewish values that manifests, for instance, in a culture of postponement. She writes that many Orthodox Jews do not marry until their thirties and forties, suggesting that the culture of postponement has crept into the most observant sections of American Judaism.⁹⁸ Fringe BOO students, who are less-religiously observant and may be more assimilated into mainstream American culture, may be more susceptible to this culture of postponement in the future.

Orthodox Jewish College Students

My findings mainly speak to the ability of the Orthodox community at Brandeis to create a community that is both inclusive and upholds a value in traditional religious observance. The community walks this line rather finely by largely avoiding, on an individual basis, an outright acceptance or outright condemnation of the less-observant students' religious practice. It was simply a topic that my respondents were not eager to address head on. Language of being in "different places" was often employed instead.

What I think is most important here is for the community to be welcoming and inclusive, if nothing else for the purpose of keeping Fringe BOO students within the community. My findings suggested that this inclusion was very passive, but I believe this inclusion should be more active. Such an inclusion does not need to be institutionalized in any way; it should happen between individual students.

⁹⁸ Fishman, "Transformations in the Compositions of American Jewish Households."

The reason I named my thesis “When the Schmaltz Hits the Fan” is because I do not believe that the current structure of tacit acceptance and social connecting is viable in the long-term for the Orthodox community at Brandeis. Orthodoxy is evolving at a very fast pace, especially with the development of Open Orthodoxy, a new movement within Orthodoxy committed to ideological flexibility,⁹⁹ and partnership minyan, in which women can read from the Torah and lead certain sections of the prayer service.¹⁰⁰ As these movements become more established within Orthodox Judaism, the diversity of religious practice within BOO will almost certainly grow and the meaning of Fringe BOO in the community will change. Inclusion will be of paramount importance, especially as the differences in the community become ideological rather than merely practical.

One of the students I interviewed, Daphne, felt that she had been excluded by the Orthodox community for subscribing to a different ideology. She was not part of Fringe BOO; she felt like she was outside of the community. It can be easy for the Orthodox community to exclude a group when the number of students affected is minuscule. However, as ideology diversifies within Orthodox Judaism, the BOO community is going to have to make a decision that brings us back to the paradox of community. Will it include those students who hold a differing ideology from the mainstream or will it uphold its traditional values? I don’t believe that an unspoken acceptance can work forever.

⁹⁹ Weiss.

¹⁰⁰ U. Heilman.

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