TRADITION AND INDIVIDUALISM IN SUBURBIA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN

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This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Orthodox Jewish women in suburban New Jersey, conducted in 2013-2014. The central goal is to analyze how observant, Jewish women negotiate maintenance of religious tradition and individual choice in suburbia. The dissertation identifies religious pluralism within Orthodox Judaism that can be attributed, in part, to the suburban location. These women reside in two central New Jersey communities of East Brunswick and Highland Park. The research showcases the changes that are occurring in religious practice of the observant Jewish women and how their lives reflect the changing nature of contemporary Orthodox Judaism.

The study uses ethnography to examine these women's sense of piety and how they apply Jewish law in several aspects of their lives. It examines how these women narrate their own backgrounds as Orthodox Jews or, in the case of *ba'alot teshuva* (newly Orthodox women), their turn to Orthodoxy as adults. It also looks at the role of feminism in their lives, their definitions of modesty, and their creation of a diversified and traditional religious environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

This dissertation represents a decade of ideas, study and analysis of traditional Jews. When I was halfway through my undergraduate years, I began contemplating a study of Orthodox Jews. This work represents the culmination of that undertaking.

Thank you to my professors, Dr. Adam Shear, Dr. Alex Orbach and Dr. Leonard Plotnicov. I have known all three of you since I was an undergraduate. Thank you for making me into the student I am today. Dr. Shear and Dr. Orbach, thank you for teaching me to think critically about Judaism. A special thank you to Dr. Plotnicov for your wisdom and insight; I will always carry that with me throughout my career. To Dr. Rachel Kranson and Dr. Clark Chilson, thank you for all of your time and thoughts, which have helped shape my dissertation into what it is today.

To my husband Jake, who has so compassionately given up our time together and has offered me unfailing support to allow me to pursue my dream, I express my most sincere thanks and appreciation.

I want to thank my parents for their never-ending cheerleading. A special gratitude goes out to my father for taking a real interest in my course of study.

And finally, to the Orthodox Jewish population, who inspired this dissertation. Thank you for your acceptance, time and willingness to bring me into your community and lives.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Orthodox Jewish women in suburban New Jersey.[1] The central goal is interpreting how Orthodox Jewish women negotiate tradition, individualism and choice, and how this affects and creates pluralistic suburban Jewish communities. These suburban Orthodox Jewish women have developed an environment that is flexible tolerant, and pluralistic out of the necessity for the religious community's survival. This study examines how the subjects understand their observance of Halakha (Jewish law), while living within selected suburban locales of East Brunswick and Highland Park both in Middlesex County New Jersey in 2013-2014.

My work considers the narratives of Orthodox women between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. These women are generally past the age of completion of undergraduate or seminary study and are settling into their careers and marriage. These Orthodox young women are part of a community that encompasses not only different types of Orthodoxy, but also non-religious Jews and people from various backgrounds and religions in the greater New York City area.

Participant observation and conversations with Orthodox women demonstrate how living in highly congested and developed urban environment allows the women to explore a multitude

[1] Ethnography is a methodology that analyzes people and their culture through participant organization and interviews. For more discussion of ethnographic study of Orthodox Jews, see Sarah Bunin Benor, *Becoming Frum: The Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism*, 31.

of expressions of traditional Judaism. As an ethnographic study analyzing women who consider themselves to be "Torah true" (more on this term later), this dissertation attempts to account for roughly equal numbers of individuals from the many (and overlapping) sub-groups within traditional Judaism that form the American Orthodox Jewish landscape.[2] Scholars often create classifications and categorizations of sub-groups in a community for analytic purposes. While such classifications are often based on common ways that participants describe themselves and the boundaries between different groups within a community, it is important to remember that boundaries are often fluid from the point of view of the participants. The women in this study are asked to self- identify their place within Orthodoxy.

1.1 PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX WOMEN

For analytical purposes, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have generally divided American Orthodox Judaism into three main groups depending on variations of religious practice: Modern Orthodox, Centrist (or simply Orthodox), and *Haredi* (Ultra-Orthodox).[3] As of 2013, the *Pew Research Center* found that ten percent of the Jews in the United States (out of 4.2

[2] Every Orthodox sub-group that was present in the community was part of the study.

[3] There are two major groups within *Haredi*: Hasidic and Non-Hasidic. The defining factor is deference to a *Rebbe*, main Rabbi. The Hasidim are members of a movement that started in the second half of the eighteenth century in Poland.

million Jewish people) self-identified as practicing Orthodox Judaism in America.[4] Nine out of ten of these Jews described being Jewish as "very important in their lives."[5] All Orthodox Jews agreed that they are '*Torah*-true," committed to following the precepts of the faith, articulated in both the written and oral tradition. What this ultimately means to the individual and to the synagogue community may vary. Orthodoxy today involves a wide range of piety spanning from liberal to more "*machmir*" (stricter) observances. Respondents in this study include members from each of the Orthodox categories defined.

When Charles Liebman used the phrase "Modern Orthodox" in the 1965 article he was describing the most liberal faction (least observant) of Jews that still attended an Orthodox synagogue.[6] Liebman defined Orthodox Jews as "all Jews who are affiliated with nominally Orthodox synagogues."[7] In the 1960's according to Liebman the synagogues that followed an Orthodox Rabbi Orthodox ritual and featured a *mechitza* (a divider between men's and women's seating in the synagogue) were considered Orthodox. He drew a sharp distinction between the less religious practices of the people who attended the *shul* (synagogue) that promoted laws and commandments that made up the foundation of Orthodoxy. He explained that the Modern Orthodox were upper income and well educated. Therefore, they saw the viability of Jewish life blended with a contemporary mainstream existence.[8] For Liebman, "Orthodoxy claim(s) the

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[4] Pew Research Study, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." *Findings from the Pew Research Center Survey of U.S.* Jews, 10.

[5] Ibid, 51.

[6] Charles Liebman. "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life." *American Jewish Yearbook*. 1965: 21-95.

[7] Ibid 22.

[8] Ibid, 48.

right to preserve the unity of the Jewish community by invoking the authority of tradition and charisma."[9]

In the late 1980's, Samuel Heilman and Steven Cohen studied a group they also called "Modern Orthodox." Like Liebman's subjects, their subjects were highly-educated, affluent city dwellers, who, although they followed the commandments, created an Orthodoxy that fit their own lifestyle.[10] These Jews were consciously acculturated, morally attached to contemporary life, relatively lax in religious behavior, individualistic in religious authority and creative in their interpretations of the traditions and expressions.[11]

In the same period, Lynn Davidman studied women and the *ba'alei teshuva*[12] experience within Modern Orthodoxy at the Lincoln Square synagogue in New York.[13] She described how women joining Orthodoxy as BT were re-defining themselves in light of a "new" type of Orthodoxy that allowed for stylish dress, chic homes, and glass synagogue barriers, but still regarded themselves as "*Torah* true."

Yoel Finkelman's application of the term "Modern Orthodox" in 2011, however, described a much more observant group of individuals than Liebman's subjects of 1965.[14] They attended Jewish day schools where they studied a dual curriculum of Judaic and non-religious subjects, lived in communities surrounded by other Orthodox Jews and followed the

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[9] Ibid, 50.

[10] Samuel Heilman and Steven Cohen. *Cosmopolitans and Parochial: Modern Orthodox Jews in America*, 31-33.

[11] Samuel Heilman and Steven Cohen. *Cosmopolitans and Parochial,* 18.

[12] *Ba'al teshuva* is a person who becomes religious. It literally means "returning" or "finding the path". (feminine *b'a lot teshuva*; plural *ba'alei teshuva* and plural women is *ba'a lot teshuva*) The abbreviation of the Ba'al teshuva is "BT" and this form will be used in this text.

[13] Lynn Davidman. *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*, 26.

[14] Yoel Finkelman. *Strictly Kosher Reading: Popular Literature and the Condition of Contemporary Orthodox Identity in Post- Modern Society*, 25.

commandments. But Finkelman argued that the Modern Orthodox still consistently downplayed their distinctiveness from the non- Jewish population. Unlike the rest of Orthodoxy, according to Finkelman, the Modern Orthodox placed more emphasis on personal experience than doctrine.

The research on Modern Orthodoxy by Liebman, Heilman, Davidman, and Cohen and Finkelman represents the evolving nature of Orthodoxy within the past fifty years. Liebman's group can be termed as 'nominally' Orthodox, barely following the commandments; their only affiliation with the Orthodox was their attendance at an Orthodox synagogue. Very few fit this category today as standards and expectations for observance have increased in Orthodox synagogues and among younger generations. Heilman and Cohen's Orthodox of the 1980's were part of a population steeped in non-religious culture, but still committed to keeping some of the Jewish laws. They contend that their informants were trying to live a dual life. This study will discuss how contemporary Jewish women try to combine such a religious lifestyle within mainstream society in suburban New Jersey.

The men and women studied by Lynn Davidman and more recently Yoel Finkelman dress modestly keep kosher and cover their heads (an act performed by women after marriage). These subjects are very strict in religious observance, but are able to do so in an environment that accommodates their observance without inhibiting their participation in secular education and business spheres. Davidman and Finkelman both remark on the growing multitude of options available for the Modern Orthodox community since the 1980's, as more kosher restaurants open, Jewish companies cater to Jewish dietary needs and retail stores offer stylish, modest clothing. [15] Finkelman describes a more pious Modern Orthodox; his subjects follow the laws to

[15] Finkelman, *Strictly Kosher Reading*, 32.

a higher degree than Liebman, Heilman or Cohens', for example, but they are also adapting to contemporary culture.[16]

Centrist Orthodox families often share characteristics with the Modern Orthodox. In fact, Yoel Finkelman uses the single label of "Modern Orthodox" for both categories. And many of the women studied in this dissertation who in many ways fit into the "Modern Orthodox" mold studied by Davidman and Finkelman call themselves either traditional, *Shomeret mitzvot* (following the mitzvahs or laws) or Centrist Orthodox.[17] However, some researchers see them as a more religious faction. Heilman and Cohen say that the "Centrist Orthodox are "*Torah*-true" Jews, who remain loyal to the formal doctrines and patterns of behavior associated with Orthodoxy, but who also reflect a practical and informal ideology that is something less than completely formed by the demands and expectations of the Torah."[18] They continue: "Thus Centrists are rather an aggregate of an ambivalent mass of people not completely aligned with traditionalism nor wholly in favor of settling for Orthodoxy in name alone."[19] This group adapts traditional Judaism to their own comfort level of religious practice.

The Centrist Orthodox analyzed by William Helmreich in his *The World of the Yeshiva* are individuals embarking on Talmud study.[20] Such individuals are also often labeled "*Yeshivish*" or "Modern *Yeshivish*." The meaning of these terms among Orthodox Jews can be complex and nuanced. A "Modern *Yeshivish*" believer is usually Orthodox, leaning towards

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[16] A breakdown of the number of women who claim adherence to each division in Orthodoxy will be discussed in chapter two.

[17] The word "*Shomer*" meaning the action of observing or following a law will be spelled "*Shomer*" unless it refers only to a woman; or women then it will be spelled "*Shomeret*."

[18] Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials*, 209.

[19] Ibid, 210.

[20] William Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry*. 267.

tradition, yet stylish and cultured, while a "*Yeshivish*" categorization is a more traditional adherent of the Centrist group.[21]

All of these groups—Modern, Centrist, and "*yeshivish*"—are engaged, to some degree or another, with general American culture. In contrast, adherents of *Haredi*[22] Judaism (Ultra Orthodoxy) tend to be the most distant from contemporary American culture. These *erlicher Yidn* (virtuous Jews) have a tendency to live in enclave communities distinct from the general American population and even other Jews. Heilman relates that the *Haredim* "view the surrounding modern world not as an opportunity but as a threat and seek instead to keep it at arm's length." [23]

They prefer to live as "*yisrael sabbah*" (the way of the grandfather). Many speak a combination of Yiddish and English.[24] Education, worship, shopping, socializing, and even matchmaking are all performed within the community. "Among *Haredim*, [religious] education was everything: the purpose of Jewish existence and at the same time a barrier against its decay. It was the essence of what they believed was demanded of them as Jews."[25] Learning Torah through traditional scholarly commentaries is a full-time occupation for men. Men continue to study for years after high school (in yeshiva) and after marriage in *kollel* (Torah study institution for married men). According to Nurit Stadler, "Yeshiva scripturalism assumes that all moral modes of everyday life can be found in the sacred Jewish canon."[26] The text functions as a

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[21] "Traditional" in this context means a person who follows more of the laws in Judaism.

[22] "*Haredi*," literally means "one who trembles before God" (an allusion to Isaiah 66:5).

[23] Samuel Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, 4.

[24] Samuel Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry*, 12.

[25] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 171.

[26] Nurit Stadler *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*, 167.

blueprint to follow for life.[27] There are strict social pressures and religious guidelines for the people in this community regarding marriage, career, child rearing, Torah study, and education.

More recently, however, some *Haredi* groups have sought more engagement with non-Orthodox Jews, but not with non-Jews. According to Adam Ferziger"… those *Haredi* Jews who once championed an enclavist/survivalist approach that sought to limit interactions with the majority of American Jewry have more recently adopted much of the outreach orientation that has long stood at the center of the American Chabad movement."[28] As Orthodoxy has grown in the past few decades they have moved from defensive survival mode to one of attempting to strengthen and engage the non-Orthodox Jewish community.[29]

Haredim can be divided into two large groups, Hasidim and non-Hasidim. And in turn, Hasidic Orthodoxy includes many distinct factions. The more isolated branches include Bobov, Ger and Satmar, all Orthodox groups in the United States. Hasidim are led by a *Rebbe,*[30] a *tzadik,*[31] who oversees the community as a spiritual advisor. In the Hasidic view, each person has the ability to personally connect with God through prayer. Another theme behind Hasidic worship is a joyful experience of worship while continuing to stay "*Torah*-true." Ideally, followers find happiness in performing all of the *mitzvot*. Hasidim feel that anyone can obtain a closer connection to God from any place. The most well-known of Hasidic groups in the United

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[27] 27 Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy." *Tradition*. 28:4. Vol. 16..

[28] Adam Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism: The Realignment of American Orthodox Judaism*, 146

[29] Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism* 145; 153; 208.

[30] A *Rebbe* is a master teacher or mentor of Torah. A *Rebbe* is a head rabbi in the Hasidic sects. In Chabad, it is often used to talk about the seventh Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

[31] *Tzadik* is a learned man, who is seen in the community as "righteous" or one who follows the traditions. Also the head of a Hasidic community.

States, Chabad, emphasizes outreach to other Jews. Chabad is an acronym for *Chochma*, *Bina* and *Daas* (wisdom, understanding, and knowledge), and is also known by the name Lubavitch, and was founded by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.[32] Chabad was last led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who passed away in 1994, and continues as a movement without a living leader in place.

Non-Hasidic *Haredim*, who trace their heritage back to the *Misnagdim* i.e. Lithuanian circles that opposed Hasidism in the late eighteenth century, represent another strictly pious group of Jews in America. This group emphasizes text study of the Torah as a conduit to the divine. The *Misnagdim* see man's spiritual capabilities as lacking, contending that "the truth of God's eminence must remain in the realm of mystical speculation, reserved for a small select and well-guarded spiritual elite."[33] In the contemporary era, the *Misnagdim* have built great schools called yeshivas or *kollels* in America, some with thousands of students, as a way to reenact the learning in pre-Holocaust Europe.[34]

1.2 Gender and Focus on Women

This dissertation focuses on a broad spectrum of Orthodox religious women. While Orthodox Judaism defines gender roles strictly and clearly based upon traditional texts and their interpretations by rabbinic authorities this study illuminates how a woman's personal choice functions within Jewish culture to create a platform for diversity within the communities.

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[32] Hella Winston, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, 172.

[33] Allan Nadler. *The Faith of the Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rupture*, 28.

[34] Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, 267.

In speaking to women in these communities, I asked many of them to tell me about issues important to them and their ideas involving both past and present. How a woman functions and how she views herself in society shape the areas most important in her life. Four topics were frequently discussed and seem paramount to Orthodox women in contemporary suburban America: education, marriage, childrearing, and career.

Both Lis Harris, in her account of her year with a Chabad community in New York,[35] and Samuel Heilman, in his discussion of *Haredi* Jews in Israel, have analyzed gendered formal education.[36] The subjects and focus of classroom teaching and, even the length of the day, differed for males and females. Janet Aviad's work on how women understand seminary learning (after high school) looked at the next stage in learning and how females conceptualized their education within their culture.[37]

The major lifecycle events including marriage (divorce) and children comprise the second theme of conversation. Marriage is a turning point in an Orthodox woman's life. Rachel Kaufman sees marriage as the pinnacle of community acceptance for *BT*s those who were born Jewish and decided to become religious.[38] The ultimate goal of matrimony and children is a major force in the lives of Chabad girls according to Stephanie Levine.[39]

In typical Orthodox relationships, childrearing follows marriage. Stephanie Levine[40] and Samuel Heilman[41] both study traditional Jewish cultures and its effects on childrearing. All of

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[35] Lis Harris, *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family*, 191.

[36] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 204.

[37] Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel*, x.

[38] Debra Renee Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughter's: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women*, 3; 79.

[39] Stephanie Levine, *Mystics Mavericks and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls*, 18; 204.

[40] Ibid, 196-198.

[41] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 175.

the women studied in this dissertation who are married for a few years have children. This step in lifecycle helps integrate the women in different ways into society.

A third topic is what the women do on a daily basis: career and gender interaction. Women often speak of their careers, working inside or outside the home. Herbert Danzger remarks that the career outlook for *BT*s changes with their transformation of religious perspective due to the influx of new beliefs in spending more time with family.[42] The works of Herbert Danzger[43] Lynn Davidman[44] and Rachel Kaufman[45] speak to the transformation of values for BT's toward traditional gender roles. Stephanie Levine in her study of Chabad girls states that a woman's career as wife mother and director of the household holds an innate value within *Haredi* culture. She also contends that some women wish for demanding careers, but do not pursue them because of cultural constrictions.[46]

As a whole the conversation with the women and participant observation exhibit the broad spectrum of an Orthodox woman's existence. By asking these questions, I seek to shed some light on the complexity of the lives of Orthodox females in suburban New Jersey. As participants in the wider suburban culture, yet committed to the observance of Orthodox beliefs, these women say they need to balance both aspects of their lives in suburbia. The Orthodox women often perform the dual role of raising the children and working outside the home to help support the family. They are both traditional and women of the modern world.

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[42] Herbert Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*, 233.

[43] Ibid, 27.

[44] Davidman, *Tradition in Rootless World*, 26.

[45] Kaufman Rachel's Daughters, 2.

[46] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks and Merrymakers*, 55.

For Orthodox young women, the rigidity of gender roles and modesty are some of the most critical female-centric issues they face. Their ideas on these subjects reflect their identity as women. As a result, most ethnography on Orthodox Jewish women touches on their ideas concerning gender roles and modesty. These themes become the starting point to develop personal choice for the women and how they relate to religion as self-identified Orthodox individuals and how they keep the *mitzvot* (laws). It also provides a backdrop for women to see how their gender functions in society and how they use these differences to formulate individuality. It helps to shape the picture of pluralistic belief and practice and the tolerance within the community for a variety of ideas.

As a female ethnographer there is also a practical and logistical reason I chose to study women. This is due to the religious stipulations against women being alone with men. As a woman, I would not have had access to the many Orthodox venues and institutions that are dominated by male constituents, but many Orthodox women did feel comfortable speaking with me privately. In the analysis of women I could show the entire view of my subjects and their lives, as I had unfettered access to women-only venues and the women's section at the synagogues; as such, interviews were not an issue. I was a part of their everyday lives and privy to many details of what went on in the year and half they allowed me to share their thoughts. - Like all ethnographers, I had to construct my study based on the social norms of my subjects.

1.2 GEOGRAPHY AND SUBURBIA

This study helps to gain further knowledge of the state of Orthodox Jewish women during the second decade of the twenty-first century. This research will serve as a snapshot-in-time of

Orthodox Jewish culture in suburban America in 2013-2014. In the suburbs, how do these women manage expectations of choice and Orthodox structure? This work analyzes how women come to terms with living in an "American suburban utopia," yet still attempt to maintain a traditional lifestyle, each with their own individual way of defining Orthodoxy. Etan Diamond describes suburbia as "… a place where community thrives and strong social networks connect strangers and friends…"[47] This ethnography sheds light on contemporary suburban, traditional Jewish communities that have built "mixed" Orthodox (many kinds of Orthodox) communities.

The suburbs are often regarded as the third stage, or third generation, of the American immigrant religious experience.[48] The initial stage of settlement was generally urban, with immigrants clustering near the location of first arrival. The second stage consisted of movement to more established urban locations in superior areas of the city. In New York and other large cities, such as Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, Orthodox Jews of various sects who remain in these second-stage areas often live in separate geographic neighborhoods within the cities that are encapsulated in an *eruv*.[49] And in places with very large Orthodox populations such as New York and other large cities in the United State and abroad, Orthodox Jews are often able to form enclaves of their particular sub-group. When moving to the third stage in the suburbs, circumstances compel observant Jews to bond together and live in the same area regardless of their religious suburban affiliation. Suburban Jews, by default, need to "mix" their communities in order to gain the sheer numbers needed to support the necessary components to live an Orthodox life, such as kosher butchers and bakers, day schools,

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[47] Etan Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst: Orthodox Jews in Suburbia*, 159.

[48] Sydney Ahlstrom, *The Religious History of the American People*, 981.

[49] An *eruv* is the area around a neighborhood where it is permitted to carry objects, keys or push a baby stroller on Shabbat or holidays.

synagogues and *mikvahs* (ritual baths). This allows them to maintain the institutions needed to sustain a traditional lifestyle. This dynamic applies not only to suburbs of New York, but more broadly to "out of town" (outside of New York City) areas with religious Jewish communities.[50] East Brunswick and Highland Park are representative of two "out of town" townships with large Orthodox populations they are situated between New York City and Philadelphia.

According to Etan Diamond, by 1990, Orthodox Jews spread to the suburbs of almost every American city. The metropolitan areas of New York, Connecticut and New Jersey contain the highest concentrations.[51] Central New Jersey, the area chosen for this research, is approximately forty-five minutes south of Manhattan, an hour from Brooklyn and an hour and a half from Philadelphia. Large Orthodox Jewish populations thrive throughout the New York metropolitan area with one survey showing thirty-two percent of Jews in the metro area are Orthodox.[52] Yet, there has never been an ethnographic study focused primarily on the suburban Orthodox population nor on suburban Orthodox women, who play an important role towards maintaining and possibly adapting the tenets of their religion in order to suit their specific reality.

Although some of the women consider themselves *haredi*, none of the participants live in an isolated environment. There are several communities in the United States in both rural and suburban areas that are predominantly *haredi*. Some of these areas have settled around a particular *yeshiva*; this study does not examine the lives of those Jewish women. In both of these cases, the *haredi* population is led by a single worldview from either a *Rebbe* (*Hasidim*) or the ideals of the *yeshiva* (*Misnagdim*).

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[50] East Brunswick and Highland Park are oftentimes called "out-of-town" community by the woman themselves

[51] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell*, 141.

[52] Steven Cohen, Jacob B. Ukeles, and Ron Miller, "Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011 Comprehensive Report" 212.

This study also differs from one based solely in an urban environment in the concentration of Orthodox as served by their synagogues. In the borough of Manhattan, for instance, there are upwards of forty Orthodox synagogues within thirty-three square miles. In Highland Park today, there are only seven Orthodox synagogues. In adjacent East Brunswick, there are two Orthodox congregations. Combined, they serve an Orthodox population scattered over 23.8 square miles.

As Orthodoxy moves outside the urban core, the number of congregations is small and the participants within the synagogues are, by definition, more diversified, creating a relatively pluralistic ritual experience. In the initial formation of the community, the primary concern is survival and growth. As the traditional population grows, the township creates more ritual opportunities. In East Brunswick, there is one synagogue that accommodates all Orthodox Jews and prides itself on acceptance.[53]

In the more densely Jewish town of Highland Park, the synagogue community has grown and diversified its offerings to the religious community. This accounts for maximum saturation in terms of both geographic area and the number of Orthodox synagogues. The traditional Jewish institutions, though separate, have learned to bond together. For instance, they hold community lectures, a community Purim Carnival, picnics for the holidays and a "Sukkah hop" (traveling to multiple Sukkot (ritual open-air structures) during the holiday of Sukkot).

This study reflects on both types of communities in different stages of Orthodox growth (but not upon an isolated *haredi* community or yeshiva-centered population). Both types of Orthodox communities in suburbia contain a greater number of Orthodox Jews than most urban

[53] The suburban community of East Brunswick is most likely typical of many suburban Jewish communities around the country.

areas, and because these traditional Jews are also taking part in the wider American society, their culture and religious choices make a greater impact on the surrounding environs.

These two geographic areas in central New Jersey are distinctive compared to the settings of other studies. Lynn Davidman, Stephanie Levine, Samuel Heilman and William Helmreich all conducted some of their fieldwork across the Hudson River in New York. Indeed, the fieldwork of Davidman on *BT*s and Levine on Chabad girls represents only a small fraction of the Orthodox population in a specific area of New York. Heilman's study much like this dissertation represents a cross section of Modern Orthodoxy, but strictly within the urban environment. William Helmreich is the lone exception to this urban pattern, completing some of his fieldwork in a Lakewood, New Jersey *yeshiva*. Both Levine and Helmreich analyze exclusively *haredi* enclaves that are populated around a *Rebbe* (Chabad girls) or *yeshiva* (Lakewood). This study, in contrast, treats all types of traditionalist Jews within East Brunswick and Highland Park.

Suburbia offers an the opportunity to express religion in a pluralistic manner due to either the small number of synagogue choices (East Brunswick), or numerous diversified options all within a small area such as Highland Park. In And I Will Dwell in their Midst, Etan Diamond traces the history of Toronto Orthodox Judaism in the second half of the twentieth century.[54] Diamond shows how Jews crafted a postwar suburban community. They transferred all of the commodities they needed from the urban environment to build an affordable place to live. Diamond relates how these Jews clustered religious infrastructure within specific neighborhoods, and, as one area became inundated with Orthodoxy and had no more room to build within walking distance to the synagogue, another deliberate community formed.[55]

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[54] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell*, 23-24.

[55] Etan Diamond, *Souls of the City: Religion and the Search for the Community in Postwar America*, 96.

In another work, *Souls of the City: Religion and Search for Community in Postwar America*, Diamond focuses on Indianapolis, Indiana and how religious communities changed from city-centric to suburban after World War II. He posits that in the post-war era, Jewish congregations moved out of the cities into suburbia, and that congregations in suburbia explicitly sought to create a connection to the community through religion.[56] My study builds on Etan Diamond's work by adding gender as a category of analysis and specifically highlighting how Orthodox women interact with the suburban environment and shape Orthodoxy in this setting.

Orthodox Jewish women in the New Jersey suburbs of Highland Park and East Brunswick function as the primary consumers and spenders in the area's free enterprise economy, yet still adhere to their very traditional roles in both the community and at home. Etan Diamond speaks to the benefits of a typical modern-day, suburban lifestyle including eating at restaurants and the interaction with popular culture through music and reading materials. He sees how these benefits intermingle with traditional religious beliefs for the Orthodox.[57] That interplay between two different value systems where Jewish law allows consumerism within specific boundaries, is a strong indicator of how mainstream American culture meets traditional Judaism.

Currently, Orthodox Jews comprise ten percent of the Jewish population in America.58[58] This analysis showcases how observant Jewish women blend traditional religious values with mainstream American culture. Young Orthodox women, especially the women in this study, practice specific cultural mores and favor ideals unique to modern American religion and culture. They found a way to stay true to their own sense of religion, identity, and create an atmosphere

[56] Ibid, 118; 123; 162.

[57] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell*, 130.

[58] Pew, *Research Study*, 10.

of pluralism and tolerance for all Orthodox Jews in suburbia. This makes them a vital component towards a better understanding of the suburban religious landscape of America in 2013-2014.

1.3 TOWNSHIPS

Suburbs, as seen in the towns of East Brunswick and Highland Park are "incorporated or unincorporated spatial communities of moderate density that lie outside the central city but within the metropolitan area. The area's primary economic activities are nonagricultural, and government is usually through independent and sometimes uncoordinated (units)." [59]

The Orthodox women routinely describe both areas of East Brunswick and Highland Park as "ideal settlements." These suburbs offer nearly everything Orthodox Jews may desire including affordability, larger homes, more space, and a perceived higher standard of living. In both of these towns, populations of non-Orthodox Jews that once flourished with the first expansion to the suburbs over sixty years ago are now seeing a decline while the Orthodox segment of the community is on the increase. It is an area in transition, as non-traditional Jews are leaving and being replaced by more pious, Orthodox Jews migrating from cities.

In 2008, a demographic study was conducted of Middlesex County Jews, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Middlesex County. The report examined the current trend of reduction on the younger generation of Jews. Their findings discovered that there were 24,000 Jewish households and 52,000 Jews in the county (this accounted for nine percent of all households in Middlesex County). Only two other counties in New Jersey have more Jews. Of these

[59] John J. Palin, *The Suburbs*, 13.

respondents, seven percent of the Jews identified as Orthodox, totaling 6,600 people.[60] The median age of Jews in Middlesex County was fifty-five, with over thirty percent of the population at sixty-five and older. The national average for the sixty-five plus age range was sixteen percent. The results also uncovered a decreasing birthrate over the past twenty years by analyzing the total number of children in each age range; 0-4, 5-9, and 10-14 years old. Their research found the fewest children in the youngest groups.[61]

The study found that only sixteen percent of adult children decide to stay in the community. This is the fourth lowest rate in twenty-five comparable Jewish communities. It is also an established community with forty-seven percent of Jewish households living in the county upwards of twenty years.[62] What is significant about the future of Middlesex County Jews is that the birthrate is lower than the death rate.[63] It is a population where the younger generation of non-Orthodox Jews is leaving when they reach adulthood. The future of Judaism in this suburb, especially for the Reform and Conservative communities, looks bleak.[64]

For the short term, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox live symbiotically in these suburbs in order to sustain their respective lifestyles. It appears the relationship between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox population and institutions may only need to extend to a working civility, as both non-Orthodox Jewish religious institutions in East Brunswick are losing members rapidly. Currently, Orthodoxy in the suburbs needs to find the proper balance with religions outside of

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[60] Ira Shenkin and Arnold Dashefsky. "Jewish Populations in the United States," 22-23. There was an increase in synagogue membership from 2000-2008, while there was a decrease in overall Jewish population.

[61] Ibid, 23.

[62] Shenkin and Dashefsky. "Jewish Populations in the United States,"-23-24.

[63] Ibid, 23.

[64] In both Highland Park and East Brunswick, synagogues were reticent to give official numbers on households within their synagogues, but the Young Israel in East Brunswick welcomed over twenty new families in 2012-2014.

Judaism, non-Orthodox Jews, and non-affiliated Jews in order for Orthodox Judaism to thrive among the wider culture. However, the infrastructure to accommodate traditionalist Jews is growing with the population, including new day schools, religious community-oriented sports, lectures and events, growing memberships at several synagogues (especially East Brunswick), and kosher stores and restaurants. Suburban Orthodoxy in this area, therefore, may grow to be self-sustaining.

Highland Park is a 1.8 mile-long borough and home to slightly fewer than 14,000 residents. It is approximately thirty percent Jewish with an *eruv*. In less than two square miles, it has seven Orthodox synagogues and a Conservative synagogue. It supports a kosher (Jewish dietary laws) dairy restaurant with a pizzeria, a *kosher* Chinese restaurant, a kosher bakery and butcher shop, a Judaica shop and a Jewish bookstore on one street. Highland Park has a large Jewish cultural influence as well, with several stores catering to the Jewish population. It has two *yeshivot* day schools and two Jewish preschools.[65] Sixty-three percent of its inhabitants have earned a four- year degree (2010 census). It lies directly across the Raritan River within walking distance of New Brunswick and Rutgers University, and many of its residents either work or study at the institution. Highland Park is known for the diversity of its population, with six churches, a multitude of Jewish worship opportunities with a third of the population composed of different ethnic minorities.

While Highland Park boasts a diversity of residents across the town as a whole, Jews are geographically located in only certain neighborhoods, creating a self-segregated community. Orthodox Jews buy the majority of the homes in and around their synagogues (within walking distance for the Sabbath and holidays). In several apartment complexes, one-third or more of the

[65] One of the pre-schools is housed in the Conservative synagogue, but cosponsored by an Orthodox synagogue.

tenants are Orthodox. One participant notes that on her single residential block, twelve out of the twelve families residing there are Orthodox. The religious Jewish population attempts to be exclusive in their buying and selling of real estate in order to preserve their community. One method used to maintain and grow the population in the area is the use of online message boards.[66] It gives local Orthodox Jews the opportunity to pool their resources while interacting and helping their neighbors.

East Brunswick, located approximately seven miles southeast of Highland Park, has slightly fewer than 50,000 inhabitants (2010 Census) and is over twenty-two square miles in size. It has four synagogues: Reform, Conservative and Orthodox and a Chabad Center. East Brunswick has two Orthodox congregations, Young Israel, which has a mixed Orthodox following and Chabad, a kiruv (outreach) synagogue. East Brunswick supports a Solomon Schechter Day School (a Conservative K-8 grade curriculum),[67] a Jewish pre-collegiate learning center (non-denominational, alternative school for 6-12 grades), a Hebrew-immersion charter school (public school K-5),[68] and three Jewish preschools (representing each denomination).[69] It is a quintessentially suburban community with many chain stores and highway links to most major New Jersey thoroughfares. Although most commodities one would expect to find in a highly populated Jewish area are readily available in East Brunswick, so, too, is every other modern, suburban convenience. Several of the women in my East Brunswick group attended

[66] Please see the chapter on Suburbia for a better understanding of online usage.

[67] This school closed in fall 2013 after thirty-one years in the community.

[68] In 2016-2017 this school will be k-8.

[69] The Reform Preschool closed in fall 2013. In fall 2014, a self-described Centrist Orthodox ssori opened in the former area of the Solomon Schechter School.

Rutgers University (which has the largest Jewish student population of any public University in the US), and they are all originally from the area.

According to the figures of this particular study for Middlesex County Jews, "the level of religious observance was very high" compared to fifty other communities around the country based on a percentage of Jewish homes who usually lit Hanukkah candles (eighty-three percent), had a mezuzah on the front door (twelve percent), kept *kosher* inside and outside the home (twenty-three percent), refrained from using electricity on the Sabbath (six percent), who always or usually participated in a Seder at Passover (eighty-three percent), and always or usually lit Shabbat candles (twenty-five percent).[70]In 2008, there were 10,000 Jewish children with twenty-three percent living in the Highland Park area in a cluster of Orthodox Jews in Highland Park/South Edison and East Brunswick. That same year, forty-nine percent of Highland Park/South Edison residents (considered one entity in the Dashefsky study) said they were Orthodox.[71] By 2008, forty-eight percent of the Orthodox people in Middlesex County lived in South Edison and Highland Park. Out of this forty-eight percent, there were 5,700 Jews in that area, and 2,793 were Orthodox.

Highland Park boasts seven Orthodox synagogues: Ahavas Yisrael (AY), Khal Chassidim (Hasidic), Congregation Agudah Israel (Agudah), Congregation Ahavas Achim (AA), Congregation Ohav Emeth (OE), Congregation Ohr Torah (OT) and Etz Chaim (Sephardic). There is only one Conservative synagogue and no Reform temple in Highland Park, and the Conservative synagogue is making an attempt to adapt and integrate itself as part of an informal partnership with the seven Orthodox synagogues. The Conservative Synagogue in Highland Park

[70] Shenkin and Dashefsky, "Jewish Populations in the United States," 23.

[71] Ibid, 24.

offers two services: egalitarian and non-egalitarian. The main service is egalitarian,and one non-egalitarian service is held in the *Beit Midrash* (a smaller chapel). Although this synagogue is a vibrant synagogue with many programs, it does not serve many young people. There is no Hebrew school and their children go elsewhere for their Jewish education because there are not enough public school age children for a viable Hebrew school. It also has an Early Childhood Center for babies aged six weeks through preschool.

Highland Park and East Brunswick are in close proximity to additional Orthodox pre-schools, a coeducational Orthodox elementary school, another yeshiva alternative school and yeshiva high schools. There are also a multitude of nearby options that students can commute to by chartered buses from the area.

In the central area of Middlesex County, which includes East Brunswick and a multitude of other towns, five percent of the Jewish population is Orthodox. In 2008, there were an estimated 24,800 Jews within Middlesex County. This would translate into approximately 1,280 Orthodox in North and East Brunswick (these two places were tabulated as a whole). The demographic study also found that there is a shift towards the older population that is slowly declining the membership of the Reform and Conservative synagogues. The study also concluded that fifty-three percent of the Orthodox Jews are under the age of fifty.[72] Because the Orthodox population, as a whole, was younger than the non-Orthodox population, it could be concluded that, in the next ten years, the percentage of Orthodox within the community would continue to rise even if no new families move in.[73]

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[72] Shenkin and Dashefsky, "Jewish Populations in the United States," 25.

[73] As this is speculation based on demographic facts a follow-up study would need to be done in 2025.

1.4 SCOPE

The scope of this study differs from prior ethnographies regarding Jewish women in three dimensions. It includes both the newly Orthodox BTs (an abbreviation for "baalei teshuva" or "baalot teshuva" literally "returnees to the faith") and the veteran FFB*s* (*frum*, [observant]-from- birth), women from both Ashkenazi and Sephardi backgrounds. It involves women between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. This research analyzes the spectrum of the religious population: Modern Orthodox, Centrist, and *Haredi* (both Hasidic and Non- Hasidic). Prior scholarship has done a lot to illuminate the history and contemporary situation of Orthodox Jews by broadening the scope to include women across the spectrum of Orthodoxy, of different ages, and in suburbia. As Orthodox women from all of these backgrounds co-exist and interact in these two suburbs, it is imperative that we study them together.

In *Orthodox Jews in America*, Jeffrey Gurock accounts for changes in the American Orthodox population over hundreds of years. Because his study gives a broad overview, individual people are not the focus. His complex narrative of Orthodoxy describes their diverse religious lives in America for the past three-and-a-half centuries of traditional Jewry and how they interact with other Jews and the population at large.[74] As a historian, he focuses on the events, people, and organizations that helped contemporary Orthodoxy in America. His overview creates a context for a contemporary religious study of women in the suburbs dealing with the issues of survival and tolerance.

[74] Jeffrey Gurock. *Orthodox Jews in America*, 79.

Broader studies of American Jewish history that include women have been written by Jonathan Sarna[75] and Hasia Diner. [76] Each of these histories places Orthodoxy in the framework of Modern Judaism in America. Orthodox Jewish women are seldom mentioned. In these accounts of Jewish history, women play a secondary role to the plot of history that is largely male-driven, like most general analysis of religious history. This dissertation places the lives and choices of women at the center of the analysis.

Most prior ethnographic and social scientific studies target only one sub-group of Orthodoxy. *Holy Days* by Lis Harris surveys an entire year of Hasidic followers in Crown Heights, NY by focusing mainly on lifecycle, ritual events, and the view of the Hasidic community about itself. [77] She looks at an enclavist Orthodox community that, while bringing others into Orthodoxy, still share specific contemporary culture and mores. These are much like Stephanie Levine's subjects, whom she describes as young girls (under eighteen) coping with the coming of age and Ultra Orthodoxy.[78] Levine details young Hasidic girls and their struggles to accept a pious lifestyle or risk exclusion. They are all FFBs, with some on a path towards leaving Orthodoxy. In my study, the population is in a suburban context and constructs a unique culture around their traditional value system, blending within mainstream society. Unlike prior studies where traditional women are part of an enclosed Jewish community, these women consistently take part in American popular culture. I also include both FFBs and BTs. The foundation of this dissertation is inclusion, and as such it includes Orthodox women from a variety of beliefs and backgrounds.

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[75] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, x

[76] Hasia Diner, *A New Promised Land: A History of Jews in America*, 90-126.

[77] Harris, *Holy Days*, 17.

[78] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, 12

Another example of Hasidic life in America is the recent book by Joseph Berger. His premise is that an individual's faith can be all encompassing.[79] This author discusses the social, cultural and religious aspects of the Hasidim. In many ways, his stories relate to the fifty women in this particular study; yet, instead of creating an American culture that fits with religion as found in Berger's study these women envision a piety that blends with mainstream culture. The defining aspects of their lives are religion relationships career *and* education.

In Tradition in a Rootless World, Lynn Davidman focuses on two communities of BTs,

one from the Bais Chana school in St. Paul, Minnesota and the other from the Lincoln Square synagogue in New York.[80] She seeks "to grasp the meaning of these women's attraction to Orthodoxy and the process of their transformation." [81] She begins her discussion by explaining that usually the home, rather than the synagogue, is the center of Jewish life.[82] It is the BTs' goal to confirm their individual behavior toward the collective, which is the reverse of this study, where the collective is shaped by the individual.

Herbert Danzger wrote an ethnographic study of BT males and females in the United States and Israel in the period 1975-1982**.** His work displayed the reason for the transformation of *BTs* as conscious rather than subconscious psychological motivations.[83] Through the lens of conscious acculturation, he learned that what Orthodox Jews practice was a defining mechanism in how they viewed themselves. The process of learning what was important, absorbing it and

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[79] Joseph Berger, *The Pious Ones: The World of Hasidim: Their Battles with America*, 2014.

[80] Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 26.

[81] Ibid, 26.

[82] Harris, *Holy Days*, 125-126.

[83] Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters*, 3.

taking part was vital.[84] In both Kaufman and Danzger's account, the individual *BT* was shaped into the larger society's culture and belief system. The *BTs* in this study will show a range of belief practice and cultural understanding and ultimately function as an important piece that creates a heterogeneous culture within traditional Judaism. Instead of becoming subsumed within the larger values, they add diversity.

More recently, Lynn Davidman has examined Jews moving in a different direction. Her more book, *Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*, details forty men and women who chose to leave Ultra- Orthodoxy.[85] She describes their fears, turmoil, and issues with sense of security through the intersection of religion, gender, identity and bodily practices." [86]Although some of my participants are BTs, none of the fifty women left or are in the process of leaving Orthodoxy. But, similar to her study, my participants describe the intersection between their gender, their sense of self and their particular relationship with religion. .

The ethnographic approach casts light on how these women perceive their existence and contributions in defining themselves as women within the challenges of Orthodox Judaism in the United States.87 This research enables a reader to see the diverse nature of women within Orthodoxy, the individual, spiritual practice shaped by their environment and their inner thoughts. It looks at their careers, educations, gender equality, marriages, and childrearing, all in respect to their belief systems, choices and their parts in the Jewish community. It answers how this promotes tolerance and leads to pluralistic acceptance of everyone in suburbia.

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[84] Danzger, *Return to Tradition*, 7.

[85] Ibid, 27.

[86] Lynn Davidman, *Becoming Unorthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*,7.

This study examines the pressures of negotiating Orthodoxy while still maintaining a sense of self. This ethnography addresses how individual choice may occur as a result of the location that a person chooses to call home. This became increasingly evident by examining how these women live. The ethnographic approach enables the researcher to better understand the entirety of a woman's life through participant observation, survey and interviews. The methodology allows significant comprehension of the subject. It also permits a better understanding of what they are actually doing and attempts to address the question of how and why.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This work is an ethnographic study conducted over a period of eighteen months involving fifty women in central New Jersey. I engaged in participant observation within synagogues in East Brunswick and Highland Park, and sought to describe this community through thick and detailed descriptions. I found the candidates through informal networking, email blasts, posts on Facebook pages, community boards and phone calls. In addition, all the women interviewed self-identified as Orthodox Jews. Those women who chose to be part of the project are members of synagogues in East Brunswick or Highland Park.

The specific informants for each chapter were chosen based on the importance of the subject in their lives. If they had a strong opinions about a certain topic or if it was a defining factor, for the informant toward their outlook about Orthodox Judaism. Several of the candidates chosen had compelling stories and ideas towards other chapters but the topic they were selected to represent was the most significant part of their identity and individualism.

The study does not attempt to examine "official" norms of Jewish law, as defined by Jewish text and by the Rabbis within the selected synagogues. Rather, the women rendered their thoughts regarding the laws and whether they believed they were abiding by them. By examining the women's ideas on the laws and their adherence to them a picture of the diversity of religious practice within Orthodox Judaism was painted.

I structured my interviews around questions of education, career, marriage, gender relations, and childrearing. My questions and ensuing discussions treated all stages of a woman's life as would be encountered up until the age of forty-five. The questions represented important milestones in an Orthodox woman's life, her background and her daily routine. Each conversation lasted one to two hours and was held either in the participant's home or at a mutually agreed upon location. I arranged some follow-up interviews if I found that further clarifications or expanded responses were necessary.

This analysis only targeted women between the ages of 18-45, the childbearing years. These women are mothers, caretakers and career women. For most of these women, their primary goals are to marry, have and raise children, and obtain the necessary certifications and degrees to have a career. This study examines what Generation X and the millennial generations believe and how this translates into practice.

Participant observation in Highland Park and East Brunswick occurred during Sabbaths, holidays and on weekdays. Research conducted in this ethnographic study of the women followed accepted and established protocols followed by authors of social-scientific studies on Jews. I also connected with various women's groups, lectures, and community-wide organizations, with which the women are involved, in both Highland Park and East Brunswick.

As a participant observer, I followed Facebook groups, online groups, and websites that involve the Orthodox community.

The names of the women who participated in this study remain confidential. The exact details of many of the women's lives were left out to preserve anonymity as much as possible. The synagogue names and town names are authentic.

In addition to my conversations with women and my observations, I also surveyed the literature written for Orthodox Jewish women, especially those popular in the communities I studied. These accounts were often normative, authored by Rabbis and Rebbetzins. Non-academic books for Orthodox women generally fall into two major categories, self-help and how-to. One very popular series are the books written by Rabbi Shalom Arush, based on a concept first introduced with The Garden of Emuna.[87] One book in this series is meant only for females. It is often referenced throughout the Orthodox community.[88] His ideas are viewed as a way of life, and Orthodox women often read his books multiple times.

Other titles by Lynn Schreiber [89] and Lisa Aiken's [90] are "how-to" guides. Schreiber describes how the ritual laws become a framework for a living world and how the mitzvah of head-covering enhances a woman through modesty. Lisa Aiken's guide is aimed at those who are becoming observant along with their family and friends. Using the books that the women read themselves and understanding their points-of-view, much like "dressing the part" to conform to modesty standards, allows an observer insight into the ideals of Orthodoxy from the participants' perspectives.

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[87] Rabbi Shalom Arush, *The Garden of Emuna: A Practical Guide to Life*. 3rd ed, 21.

[88] Rabbi Shalom Arush, *Women's Wisdom: The Garden of Peace for Women Only*, 18.

[89] Lynne Schreiber Ed., *Hide & Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, 18-19.

[90] Lisa Aiken, *Baal Teshuva Survival Guide*, 4.

What this study contributes to the existing scholarship on Orthodox Jewish women is four-fold: 1. it utilizes an ethnographic approach; 2. it involves a distinct yet diverse population of women between the ages of 18-45; 3. it trains its lens on a suburban location; and, 4. it is focused solely on Orthodox women in an effort to determine their role in a lived religion creating pluralism. It gives a unique analysis of how identity, religious observance and tolerance are perpetuated in contemporary suburban America. In the course of this dissertation, each chapter will include a general portrait of the topic, its place in this particular community and further discussion by three women who gave significant insight into the theme of each chapter.

2.0 ORTHODOXY AND LABELS

This chapter looks at the way that fifty suburban Orthodox women view the traditionalist Jewish community of which they are a part, their home lives, their professions, their careers, and their education. It also begins to show the nature of individual choice in Orthodoxy, and how this translates to different interpretations of observance that create a diversified and accepting Jewish community in the non-urban environment.

For the researcher, labels are important in order to form a baseline of the self-defined Orthodox and to discern how my subjects view themselves in light of the religious community.[91] On the other hand, the subjects of this particular study did not focus on differences unless they were expressly asked. My first question upon meeting a woman or upon introduction was, "Are you Orthodox and what kind of Orthodox Jew are you?" I received many varied answers. A common response to "What kind of Orthodox are you?" is "I don't like labels" or "I'm not really into defining myself." In Highland Park, however, there are seven Orthodox synagogues serving a diversity of adherents. In East Brunswick, there is just one main synagogue for the overwhelming majority of its Orthodox population. That synagogue prides itself on being open-

[91] Currently, some Jewish synagogues, schools, and education centers feel that some Jewish institutions have moved past "labels" because Jews are in the "post- denominational era," but for the purpose of this study, it was important for the subjects to self-define and for me, as the researcher, not impose categories.

minded and inclusive to everyone in the Orthodox population. On its website, it describes itself as "a warm and friendly one *shul* community."

For the purpose of this study, the groups are based on adherence to *Halakha* (Jewish law) and how closely the women follow the *mitzvot* (commandments), not on *minhag* (customs). A *minhag* is an accepted tradition (also group of traditions) or way of interpreting Jewish law in a particular community. There is not a single participant in the study who ever outwardly discussed *minhag*. All reference to "customs" was seen as personal preference and the word *minhag* was never used. Haym Soloveitchik contends that contemporary Orthodox Jewish, religious expression is controlled by text and how this influences practical observance.[92] For this population in central New Jersey, the emphasis is on the laws and the individual interpretation of them. Each woman presents some autonomy in how she behaves as an Orthodox Jewish woman and shapes her behavior into a framework for living in the world. Instead of determining a life bound by the rules, the women interpret the commandments concurrently to fit their needs and yet, in their view, still maintain proper observance.

Classification is a way to systematically acknowledge the differences in ritual and practice of individuals who live what they deem to be a "Torah true" lifestyle. Scholars often consider the different expressions of Orthodox Jews in America. The Pew Report found that in 2013, ninety-nine percent of Orthodox Jews attended a Passover Seder, ninety percent always or usually lit Shabbat candles and ninety-two percent kept kosher in the home. But the study further divided the Orthodox movement and found that, within Ultra-Orthodox communities, one hundred percent attended a Seder, ninety-nine percent lit Shabbat candles and ninety-eight

[92] Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction," 321-323.

percent kept kosher in the home. For the Modern Orthodox, on the other hand, ninety-eight percent attended a Seder, seventy-eight percent always or usually lit candles and eighty-three percent observed the kashrut laws at home.[93] The initial numbers were deceptive because the Haredi and Modern Orthodox did not always agree on which rituals to follow.

Out of the fifty women I queried, five said they were Modern Orthodox "left," meaning more liberal, thirteen were Modern Orthodox and three were Modern Orthodox "to the right." In total, twenty-one women called themselves some form of Modern Orthodox. This amounts to forty-two percent of the women who participated. This number included BTs, FFBs and converts. These women were the most relaxed in their religious observance. For instance although they all observed Shabbat and the holidays, most but not all of the women followed the modesty laws and basic family purity requirements. Although all kept kosher at home, some of the women ate out at non-kosher restaurants,[94] and thirty-three percent of the women with children chose to send their children to public school.[95]

Also, very few of the Modern Orthodox women were *Shomeret Negiah*, (literally "observant of touch"). That is to say that they do not touch anyone of the opposite sex who is not their spouse or close relative. Its origin is Leviticus 18:6: "None of you shall come near anyone of his own flesh to uncover nakedness: I am Lord." This verse is interpreted as the touching of a

[93] Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 77.

[94] A few of the Modern-Orthodox women kept kosher in the home, but ate vegetarian and fish out at non-kosher restaurants.

[95] Public schools or the local Hebrew immersion Charter (public) school instead of the Orthodox day schools

woman by a man, as no man should come near a woman with affection or desire, because this violates the Torah.[96]

Two of my informants labeled themselves Centrist Orthodox. Twelve others described themselves as "Orthodox," while another five labeled themselves as "observant." With these designations, they intended to convey that they were more strictly observant than the Modern Orthodox, but not as observant as the *Haredi*. The category in the middle represented nineteen women. These women, as a group, followed religious law more strictly. They almost always wore "virtuous" (modest) garments; they had a greater tendency to be *Shomeret Negiah*; and they followed the family purity laws in greater detail. This group also comprised both BTs and FFBs. These women attended the most religious synagogues and sent their children to day schools, unless they had a child with special needs. In the Tri-State area of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, there were many different labels and categories used to describe Centrist Orthodoxy, each pertaining to perceived levels of observance, modesty, and devotion to study.

Of the self-described, most religiously observant women, three said that they are Modern *Yeshivish.* Three women said they are *Yeshivish* (more strict) and less likely to follow the liberal opinion of their "Modern" counterparts. Three were Chabad, one of which labeled herself as Ultra-Orthodox. There were a total of nine that might be considered Ultra-Orthodox women which included both BT's and FFB's. The more religious women in the study followed every commandment to the best of their ability. "The one trait that seems to unite almost all Hasidim is the intensity they bring to every sacred act. Whatever God has commanded,

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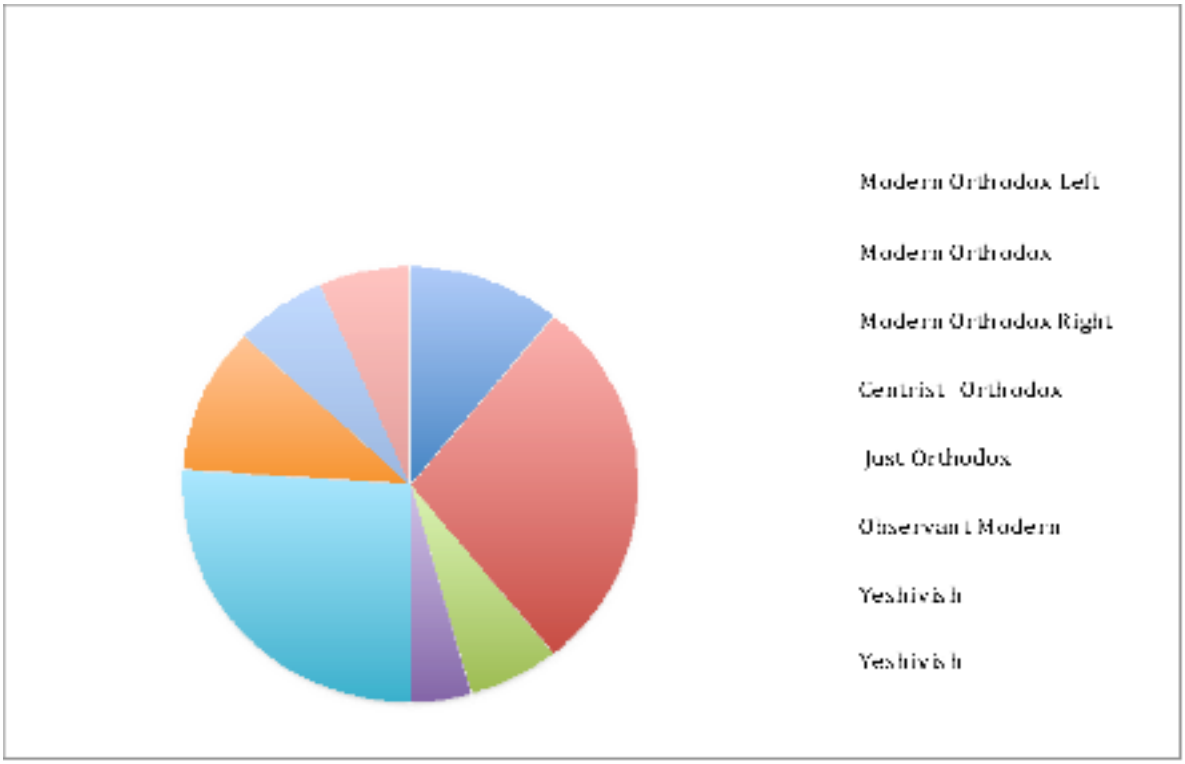
[96] Men and women are not allowed to touch outside the bounds of marriage. At this particular synagogue, they follow these rules strictly.

Hasidim will go the extra mile to fulfill." [97] These women put their religious observance above all else in their lives, but each woman still interpreted the laws in a distinct way, as each person was unique.

Figure 1: Orthodox Jewish Women in Study



The term that woman uses to designate herself does not always correlate with her actual views or how she practices Judaism. It may represent her synagogue, her parent's teachings, or

[97] Joseph Berger. *The Pious Ones*, 88.

perhaps the level of piety where she thought she should be. I made my own assessments of where these women fell within the spectrum of Orthodoxy based on the following areas: their self-proclaimed adherence to the code of modesty, family purity, gender relations, observance of holidays and Shabbat/ synagogue attendance, observance of kosher laws, and their level of education/ seminary.

For the Orthodox themselves, designations such as “modern Orthodox” and “Yeshivish” are common terms used to describe how observant they are and how they fit into the broader Orthodox population. These demarcations can be used not only to describe the followers of a particular synagogue, but also the Rabbi and the synagogue itself. This leads to group formation, conformity and, sometimes, ostracism. For the women in this study, certain labels placed upon them by either themselves or their community help to better define their religious community and social group. It establishes their children’s schools, synagogues, and social groups. It also determines how they will either be accepted by or ostracized from others for adherence or perceived departure from Jewish laws.

2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

2.1.1 Synagogues

The Yiddish term *shul* in Orthodox Judaism means house of worship or synagogue. Other terms that can categorize a Jewish house of worship are “temple” or “synagogue.” The word *shul* may encompass the actual ritual space, special event rooms such as a ballroom, kitchens (often one for meat and one for dairy), a bridal room, offices, smaller worship spaces, auxiliary classrooms,

a recreational gym, and the surrounding grounds, which may include basketball courts or playgrounds. All participants in this study are attendees or members of one of nine *shuls,* each congregation with its own unique identity that helped reflect the woman's own way of experiencing Orthodoxy.

The Pew Report found, "One in 10 Jews identify with Orthodox Judaism, including 6 percent who belong to Ultra-Orthodox groups and 3 percent who are Modern Orthodox." [98] The report continued saying that twenty-two percent of Jews in the United States belonged to Orthodox synagogues.[99] Of these Jews, seventy-four percent attended at least once a month "on par with white evangelical Protestants (seventy-five percent) and black Protestants (seventy-one percent)."[100] According to the Pew Report, the Orthodox Jewish population attended synagogue at about the same rate as many of the other traditional worshiping groups in America. The Ultra-Orthodox number was seventy-one percent, while Modern Orthodox was at eighty-one percent.[101] The smaller proportion of *Haredi* Jews who attend synagogue may be accounted for by the fact that many *Haredi* women do not attend synagogue because it is a time-bound commandment, and they are considered by their communities to be excused from those commandments due to the demands of children and other obligations. According to the study, Modern Orthodox found more of an allegiance to the synagogue as it became central to their religious identity. The *Haredi* women found meaning in the Orthodox culture and followed the home and personal laws to a higher extent than did the Modern Orthodox.

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[98] Pew Report, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" 48.

[99] Ibid, 76

[100] Ibid, 76

[101] Ibid, 76

In East Brunswick, a pluralistic Orthodox congregation serves the community. A separate Chabad congregation also offers a venue for those interested in a traditional religious service. In Highland Park, there is one Sephardic synagogue, one *Yeshivish* synagogue, one *shtiebel* (a tiny Orthodox synagogue), two *shuls* that seem to fall somewhere in the middle and two that are considered more liberal Orthodox. These synagogue descriptions are almost universal among the women. All of the women seemed to define their form of Orthodoxy by seeking the one that best fit their lifestyle, culture and ritual needs.

Five women attend congregation Ahavas Achim located in Highland Park. According to D.B., this synagogue "leans more to the left and is more liberal." Many younger families join this congregation as they have a Rabbi and *Rebbetzin* (Rabbi's wife) in their thirties. The *Rebbetzin* of the synagogue describes herself as Centrist Orthodox. The women at Ahavas Achim are dismissively described by E.G., who attends another, more observant synagogue: "[They] don't cover their hair, [they wear] short sleeves, but keep kosher and *Shabbat*." She questioned their *mechitza*, claiming it was "not kosher" because it wasn't high enough.

It is also known, according to D.B., as the "*shul* that is open to diversity, open-mindedness." She sees them at the most liberal end of the Orthodox movement in her town. The synagogue is often mentioned as the "wealthiest *shul*." Fashion plays a prominent role on Shabbat and in conversations. The name brands the women wear, how expensive their clothes are, the style of the *sheitels* (wigs), and the kinds of shoes are all open to a perceived scrutiny by other members of the congregation They have members who often display their upper middle-class tastes through their choice of clothes. It is said that if you *daven* (pray) there, you must "dress appropriately" and look your best. The women who belonged to Ahavas Achim describe themselves as Modern Orthodox liberal, Modern Orthodox and Modern Orthodox *Yeshivish*.

The women of Agudath Israel represent the opposite end of the spectrum. This is the most traditionally observant option of any of the locations. The women often refer to themselves as Orthodox, *Yeshivish, Haredi*, right wing and Torah observant. Eight women have membership at this synagogue. S.P. said it is "Black Hat *Yeshivis*h," with "lots of *ba'alot teshuva*." [102] There are members of this synagogue who grew up less religious or in non-traditional Jewish homes and later adopted *Halakha* (law). The synagogue has a small number of major contributors, but the majority of the population is not wealthy. It houses a traditional, religious preschool that serves children of the congregants; these children later go onto the local, yeshiva day schools. It is commonly thought of as the most "religious" of the local institutions. This *shul* also features gender-specific staircases.[103] N.S. also describes it as a "*Shomer Negiah shul*."

A third synagogue, Congregation Ahavas Yisrael, commands very little presence within the community. Even for insiders, many forget that this synagogue even exists, partially because its name is very similar to two others within the community.

Only two women interviewed for this study were members of Ahavas Yisrael. These women call themselves Modern Orthodox and Modern *Yeshivish*. Ahavas Yisrael is said to be a small, *heimish* (friendly and warm) congregation with a slightly older population as members. S.S. describes it as a *machmir* Orthodox community (learning more to the right, more religious) with some congregants who are perceived as Haredi.

The Sephardic synagogue is Congregation Etz Chaim. The women say it is friendly and accepting. Although it is not a very large congregation, it boasts significant diversity, as large

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[102] "Black hat" refers to the head covering that men wear. Men who wear the different types of black hats are considered more religious than men who wear the *kipa* (headcovering). The women define this religious institution by men's ritual garments and not by their own standards of modesty.

[103] Gender specific staircases are for modesty purposes.

portions of the members are not of Sephardic heritage. A group of young couples and singles attend this synagogue. Several of the worshipers are in the process of Orthodox conversion and some are converts to Judaism. Etz Chaim has six women who participated in this study. The women of Etz Chaim identify themselves as Observant, Modern Orthodox Centrist and Modern Orthodox left. The draw for outsiders to this synagogue is its welcoming nature and its growing population of young couples families. It also hosts various events for the "under forty" crowd.

The smallest synagogue is Klal Chassidim. It is sometimes referred to as a *shtiebel* (little house used for Jewish prayer). Many who worship there also attend services elsewhere. A.S. says, "Women oftentimes do not attend services here at all." Only two women claim to be members. Both women say they are Orthodox, without reference to any additional category. Yet the women who belong to this congregation do not go there to pray because *halakhically* they are not required to do so. Only their husbands choose to attend services there. There is a large mix of different religious observances involving their Orthodox worshipers. Many people in the community are not aware of the existence of this synagogue.

Congregation Ohav Emeth has many young families within the community. Ten women are members of this particular synagogue. It is a Centrist Orthodox synagogue. The vast majority of the women who attend call themselves Orthodox. Others said that they were Modern Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox. According to the synagogue's website, the congregation's leadership claims that it is located in the center of the observant community and its membership spans from "*Halakha*-committed" Jews to "religious tolerance." The community describes this synagogue as *heimish*. D.K. says that, "this *shul* has three minyanim (prayer groups of ten men or more) making it divided." It is also home to the local *kollel*, the married men's yeshiva.

Most of the local Jewish population considers Congregation Ohr Torah as Centrist Orthodox, and it is called an Orthodox synagogue. E.G. describes the people who attend this synagogue as Modern Orthodox, more religious than those of Ahavas Achim. At this particular house of worship, the women say that they are observant, but functional in mainstream society and also Orthodox. People say that although this synagogue building is impressive with an ambience of opulence, the congregation is not elitist. Five women in this study attend Congregation Ohr Torah.

Informants for this project stated that the religious landscape of Highland Park can be explained as follows: Congregation Ahavas Achim is the furthest to the left; then the synagogues move to the right as follows: Ohav Emeth; Congregation Ohr Torah; Congregation Etz Chaim; Congregation Ahavas Yisrael and finally the Ultra-Orthodox *shul*, Agudath Israel. Klal Chassidim is oftentimes forgotten because of its small size.

In East Brunswick, Chabad of East Brunswick is a *kiruv* synagogue. The Chabad movement is centered in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and utilizes the teachings of kabbalah mixed with traditional Jewish practice. It is important to note that this particular Chabad is unique because their Rabbi is not associated with the international Chabad organization. The Rabbi's father, also a Chabad rabbi, assigned him to this particular location. The creation of the independent Chabad synagogue generated competing Chabad prayer houses in this region.[104]

[104] None of the Chabad informants were willing to speak about why they were no longer related to the mainstream movement.

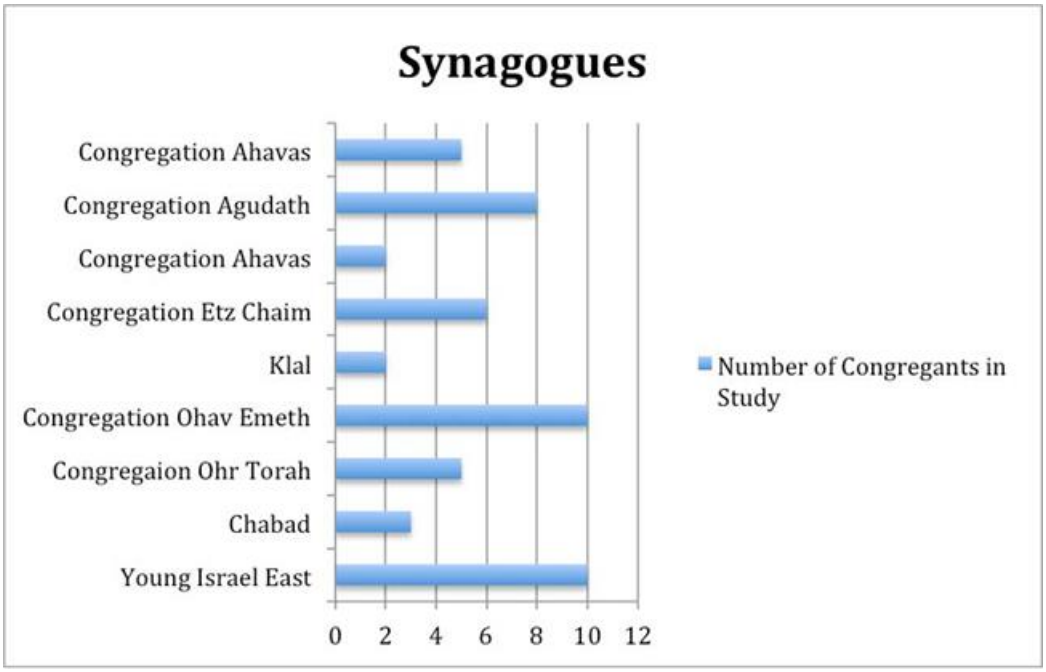
The congregation has established a preschool, a Hebrew school and multiple programs within the community. Three women interviewed call themselves Chabad, and all of them worked for the movement in some capacity.[105]

The final synagogue, Young Israel, is the primary Orthodox synagogue in East Brunswick. People who attend Young Israel range from Ultra-Orthodox to Modern Orthodox. Because of the variety of people who worship at this synagogue, the most differentiated responses regarding placement within Judaism came from this religious organization. Women said they were Modern Orthodox, Orthodox, and Ultra-Orthodox. In this study, it is clear; this synagogue reflects a cross-section of the traditional community.

At this location, Young Israel is best known for its pluralism within the Orthodox community. This synagogue has a reputation for its tolerant attitude toward other Jewish denominations. It participates in an Annual Purim carnival with the local Conservative and Reform synagogues, and is also involved with Jewish Federation projects. It has many young families and singles. Their Rabbi is in his early thirties. Ten women from the synagogue participated in the study.

[105] As employees, they drew a salary.

Figure 2: Synagogues



Of the fifty women interviewed for this study (who pray at these synagogues), forty came from traditional and religious backgrounds. These women self-identified as religious-from-birth, or *FFB*. Eight others shifted to Orthodoxy from some other groupings within Judaism and are termed as "returnees" in Hebrew, *Ba'alot Teshuva* or BTs. The final two converted to Judaism.

Forty-three of the women were from Ashkenazic backgrounds, while the remaining seven were Sephardic.[106]

Of those designated as "returnees," (*BTs*), two attended Agudath Israel; one was from Congregation Ahavas Yisrael; two chose Congregation Etz Chaim; and three were from Congregation Ohav Emeth. The two converts attended Young Israel and Congregation Etz

[106] If a woman switched from Ashkenazi to Sephardic or vice-versa because her husband was from the opposite background, her current choice of observance at the time of the study was added. The women, upon marriage, regularly accepted their husband's background as their own.

Chaim. There seemed to be no patterns as to where *BTs* or converts chose to go besides from a willingness of the particular Rabbi to guide them through conversion. Ultimately the choice of a particular synagogue was selected based on observance level and their social group.

2.1.2 Age

The women in this study are all between the ages of 18-45 years. This life-stage was chosen because it is approximately the first half of their adult life. It represents the time they are gaining higher education, getting married or becoming settled in a career. The following generalizations can be noted: the 18-21 year olds are in the process of completing their education; 22-25 year olds are in route to getting married; 26-30 year olds are establishing their careers and having children. By ages 31-35, the conversation tends to revolve around their career, children, and home life. Those between 36-45 years of age already have multiple children and are fully immersed in Orthodox Jewish life.

By setting age differentiation parameters, it is easier to obtain a better understanding of Orthodox life in suburbia today. It also allows an observer access into each stage of a woman's life in a relatively short amount of time. In my sample, there were nine women between the ages of 18-21. I interviewed twelve women between ages 22-25. In the 26-30 range, there were ten participants. Between the ages of 31-34, there were seven women and eleven interviewees were between ages 35-45.

2.1.3 Home life

Another key element in understanding these women is examining the logistics of their home life. Whether they are married or single is a major, defining factor. The presence of children offers significant difference in their home life as well. Do Orthodox women who are forty and have never married have different views than those with four children? It is important to understand the breakdown of single women, married women, and those women with children in order to better explore the themes of this topic.

One explanation of the Jewish values of families is by Hartman and Hartman:

On the one hand, the family is central to Jewish life and values, and much of Jewish life takes place within the family. Children are highly valued and not only are central to the transmission of Jewish identity, but also are related to heightened Jewish practice and communal involvement. The family's importance was strengthened by the Diaspora experience, as in the many settings the family was the only intact Jewish institution… In comparison with the national sample of the broader U.S. population, American Jews have a higher rate of marriage, a lower rate of divorce, and a higher proportion of individuals growing up in intact families.[107]

In Orthodox culture, marriage and children are considered vital to full integration in the community. This life stage helps women transition to full adult members. Nineteen of the fifty women are not married. All nine of the 18-21 year olds are not married. Eight of the twelve women between the ages of 22-25 are also not married, more than half of the group. Two of the remaining single women fell within the 35-45 category. Thirty-one subjects surveyed in this

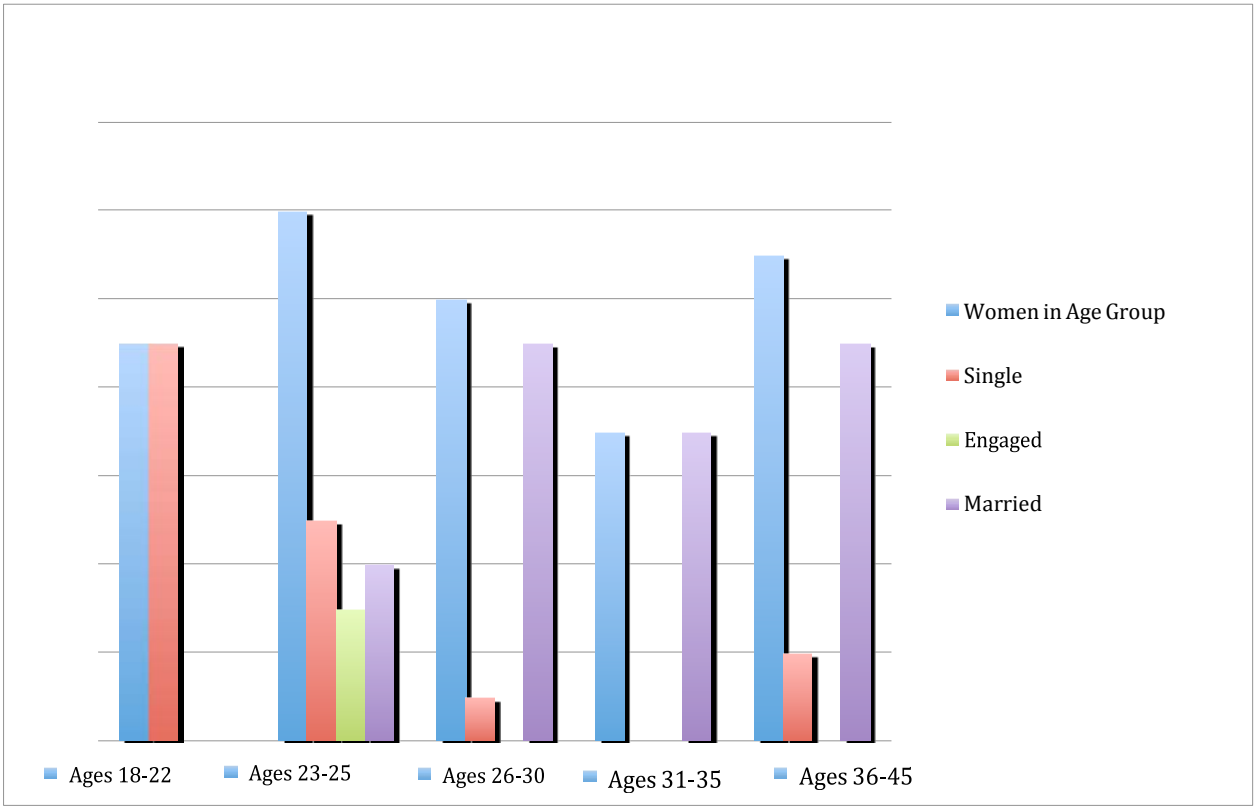
[107] Harriet Hartman and Moshe Hartman. Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education, and Family in Contemporary Life 25-26.

study are married. Three additional women married shortly after completion of this project and were considered single during the tabulation. They are between the ages of 22-45. There are four women who are married, but have no children.

Of the married women, only one has one child; three have two children; two have three children; four have four children; five women have five children; and one has six children. Those subjects with five and six children both have stepchildren included within their blended families. Only one mother adopted children, and they are twins. All of the women unanimously agreed that they were positive about adopting children if they were unable to conceive. In general, the consensus is, "…the Orthodox and those more strongly identified with being Jewish are more likely to marry younger and to have more children." [108] The family is central to the transmission of family values in the Jewish faith. Communal participation and children are paramount vehicles to allow individuals to become full, adult members of the community.

[108] Hartman and Hartman. Gender and American Jews, 169.

Figure 3: Home Life



2.1.4. Education and Career

Most of these northeastern, suburban, contemporary women are career-oriented individuals. Education is valued towards obtaining a career in the non-religious sector. All but one of the fifty women are either in school or have completed a bachelor's degree. As "*Torah-true*" individuals, they see education as a practical means to obtain a career to ultimately support a religious lifestyle and family, whereas the general population typically works to "…earn a fortune, enact high-minded ideals, and outperform a rival…" [109]

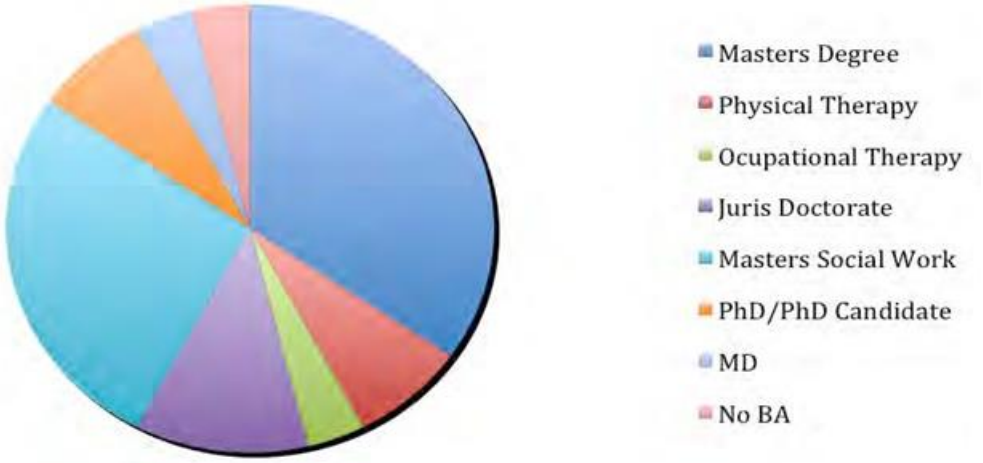
[109] Berger, The Pious Ones, 233.

One-third of all American Jews between the ages of 25-29 are enrolled in higher education as compared to 11.4 percent of the broader population.[110] Among the informants, twenty-four women have earned graduate degrees. There are nine women with master's degrees and two with physical therapy degrees and/or advanced degrees in occupational therapy. Three women have earned law degrees; seven have advanced certifications in social work; there is one PhD and one PhD candidate; lastly, there is one who has earned her MD. Many of the women either work or are in school full-time. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, not only are American Jewish women highly educated, they are active in the labor force and have high occupational achievement."[111]

[110] Hartman and Hartman, Gender and American Jews, 20.

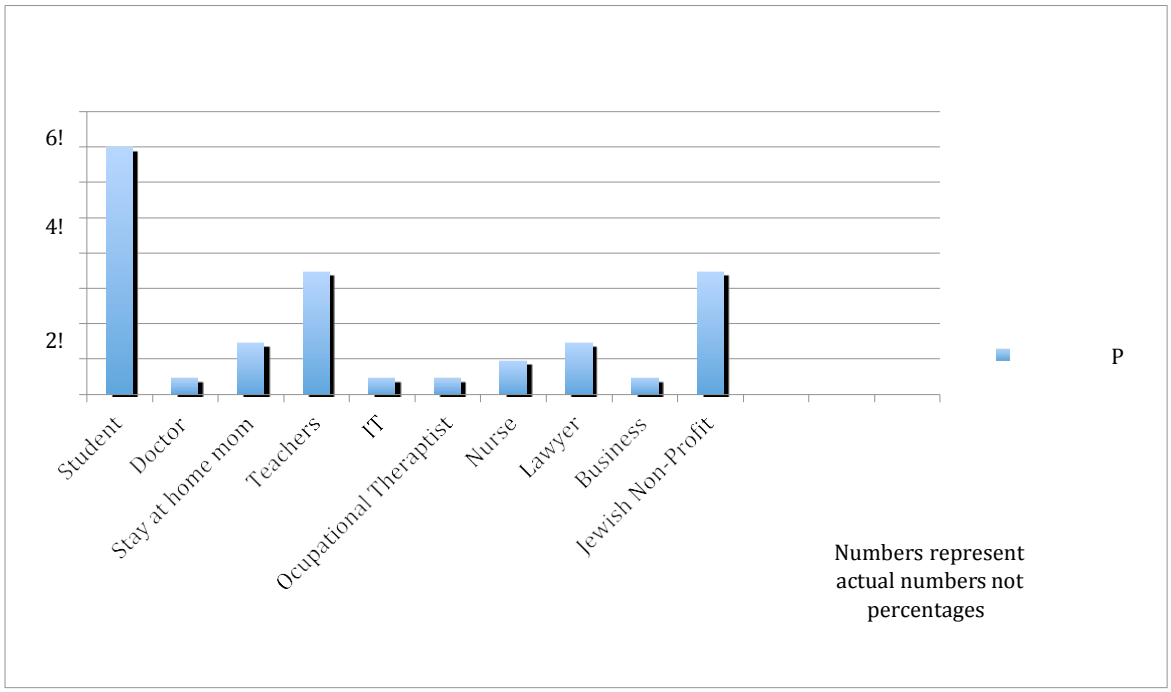
[111] Hartman and Hartman, *Gender and American Jews,* 44.

Figure 4: Degrees



Regarding their career breakdown, I spoke with: fifteen students at either the undergraduate or graduate level, one doctor, three stay-at-home moms, seven teachers, four administrators, one IT professional, two occupational therapist, three physical therapists, one nurse, three attorneys, two woman in business and eight women working in various capacities for Jewish and non- Jewish non-profit organizations. None of the women were in executive positions.

Figure 5: Professions



According to a national study of Jewish women:

The 10 occupations employing the most Jewish women also contain five professional occupations (elementary and middle school teachers, other teachers and instructors, registered nurses, social workers, and lawyers), two managerial occupations (lodging managers and managers, all others), retail sales persons, secretaries/administrative assistants, and office clerks. These occupations account for more than 40 percent of employment of Jewish women…[112]

Both Orthodox women and men will say that there is a certain proclivity for religious women to seek the following careers: occupational therapy, physical therapy, preschool teacher, teacher, dental hygienist or office administrator. Surprisingly, I did not meet any dental hygienists or office administrators. However, the pattern seemed to follow when I added together the number of PT, OT, teachers, and those women studying for those professions (18).

[112] Hartman and Hartman, *Gender and American Jews*, 66.

Several women reference values they learned in Orthodox day schools, seminary, and in continuing education and cited them as oftentimes carrying over to their careers. Forty of the fifty women I spoke with have spent time in a seminary. Some women attended seminary for a few months, while others went for a few years, attending multiple institutions. Out of the ten who did not attend seminary, two women are *BTs*; two are converts; and six are *FFBs*. The values inculcated there, about taking care of the family, the home, and oneself, while finding a balance within the three, may aid these women in defining their career track.[113]

In any discussion of women in suburbia, it is important to grasp their career their definition of observance and their worship, as subjects that are interconnected. Nineteen of the women graduated from either Stern College (the women's college at Yeshiva University) or Touro University, both Jewish schools, or they studied in Israel for their bachelor's or higher degrees (a third of the sample who attended college). Another five out of the twenty-five women with graduate degrees attended Jewish universities in the United States. Many of the women take education seriously. Every woman except one has earned a bachelor's degree (or is in the process), and many are pursuing, or have obtained, graduate degrees.

Multiple women work full-time and take pride in having a career. But there was a distinctly Orthodox feeling as to how the women spoke about their careers and education. The Orthodox women in the study seemed to commonly feel the need to justify working longer hours, in more demanding professions, or to provide explanations for their paths into such fields.

Although these women chose to go to school and become part of the mainstream workforce instead of becoming housewives, over a third of the women chose to do it within a

[113] This did not differ from contemporary ideals in mainstream (non-Orthodox) and non-Jewish arena about the balance between work and family.

Jewish environment. Two out of five women who pursued master's degrees at the Jewish schools did so after they first went to non-Jewish related undergraduate institutions. In total, twenty-one women went to Jewish institutions out of the forty-nine who went to college. Clearly, the selection of a Jewish institution is a determining factor when close to half of the sample attended just a handful of religious-related institutes of higher education. This limits the educational choices imposed on the individual by community ethos or parents, the ideals of the student and the culture they learn from the school. Stern College is a single-sex school and Touro University has gender-segregated classes on campus. These women all attend college in insular environments. R.D. said that she feels, "more comfortable on the campus in this type of environment after attending an Orthodox day school."

These schools have classes in Jewish studies, maintain campuses in Israel, have kosher food, and offer all-women's dorms. Their students are drawn from families with similar values.

S.G. talks about Stern (women's school at Yeshiva University) as the type of school where she would not feel out of place. She can outwardly display Orthodox culture by how she dresses in modest attire or by following the laws of *Shomer Negiah*. She says she feels comfortable using Jewish terms in class. Her friends are all dating the same group of men, and they frequent the same types of restaurants and social venues. There are similarities regarding scheduling by refraining from holding activities that violate the Shabbat and Jewish holidays, which the schools acknowledge in scheduling breaks and programs. To study at one of these institutions creates a high comfort level for an Orthodox woman as she is among her peers.

Attending a college or university that caters to this population is just one way an Orthodox woman can function both as Orthodox and modern in a continuous transition between Orthodox high school and seminary. When a pious Jewish woman attends an academic

institution that is not related to Orthodox Judaism, she must construct accommodations for herself. This can make her feel like an "outsider" in a typical collegial culture. Depending on how traditional someone may be, this oftentimes can be quite difficult. The women who attend college are divided between an exhilarating feeling to break out of the religious isolation of their childhood, while others feel the task of meeting new people, seeking out kosher food, learning to navigate holidays and Shabbat through the American academic calendar, maintaining modesty and "*Shomer Negiah*" can be quite daunting.

How can a woman maintain her religious standards, yet still obtain a high-quality education? The women consistently talk about the quandary of balancing their ambitions for careers and higher education with their commitment to Torah Judaism.[114] This is a question that dates as far back as the mid-nineteenth century (1850-70) with Samson Raphael Hirsch and the advent of the Modern Orthodox movement. But these women are not trying to re-interpret an old philosophical debate as none of the women ever mentioned the historical roots of the problem. They are simply attempting to answer the question for themselves, so that they might co-exist as both religious and as part of the greater American society.

Even women such as G.N., L.S, and R.S., who attend the most traditional synagogues in the community, speak about *Torah im derech eretz*, "Torah and the way of the land," because they cannot practice Judaism in a vacuum. Not a single woman who uses this term is aware of its origin. They interpret it as combining Torah Judaism with mainstream American culture. They use it to fashion a religious ideal that will allow them to remain traditional, yet take part in communal, non-religious activities. They will not be isolated as religious Jews, as they prefer to

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[114] Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Letters of Ben Uziel: Being a Spiritual Presentation of the Principles of Judaism*, trans. Bernard Drachman, 170-171.

be a part of the broader neighborhood. This may account for why the majority of these women, who after completing college and having chosen a career and marriage, migrate to the suburbs to begin their families.

2.2 INFORMANTS AND LABELS

2.2.1 "A.O."

"A.O." has blond hair that is pulled back, wears very little make-up and meets me wearing a navy jacket and skirt below the knees. She says that she lives alone, owns her own home and is very proud of this. She is thirty-nine years old and has never married. She is a transplant surgeon at a major medical facility and obtained her degree from an Ivy League institution.

She has membership at Congregation Ahavas Achim, the more liberal and wealthy synagogue in Highland Park, but does not attend frequently and does not go on the High Holidays, as she prefers to go elsewhere with her aunt and cousins. She does not feel like she is a part of the community. She chose her synagogue because it has the youngest crowd of highly educated, wealthy people along with a sizable, single population.

A.O. does not consider herself to be a *BT*, although for the first twelve years of her life, she was raised as a Conservative Jew. She is not the only woman in this study who became more religious and calls herself an FFB. All of her education, from grades K-12, was at a Jewish day school. She had her Bat Mitzvah in a Conservative synagogue and, at that time, read from the Torah in an egalitarian setting (men and women seated together). However, she explains, if she could do it all over again, she would prefer an Orthodox service. She also attended seminary for

a few semesters. She explains her family's religious observance as follows: "My grandmother is Conservative… my mother will dress modestly, but does not wear a sheitel and did not purchase one until my brother got married. In terms of some specific things about Orthodoxy, (she) does not feel as strong, but has decided on the life she will follow." A.O. says she adheres to the norms of modesty, but wears scrubs for work as a doctor.

She is not strictly *Shomeret Negiah*. She feels that keeping standards of restraint from touching men and vice versa is something for younger people. A.O. states, "I am not in a relationship. I have always been to a certain degree not touchy-feely, but, if I was, the law is more for the teens because it is very easy to touch."

A.O. keeps a kosher home. She has two sets of dishes, one for meat and one for dairy. She will eat non-kosher food out, such as dairy, vegetarian and fish. She prefers not to eat non-kosher food out of her home, but since she works long hours at the hospital, she feels it is impossible to keep completely kosher outside of her home. Her career and medical practice choices have seemingly modified her religious ideals. This is not to say that everyone would change their ideas if placed in her position, but she claims she was steadfast in her beliefs before medical school. Out of all the women who are interviewed, A.O. has the most demanding job.

She will subordinate her religious life in order to advance her career as seen by her reluctance to ask for time off for the Sabbath or Jewish holidays as doing so, in her view, will have a negative impact on her career. Keeping Shabbat is often an issue with her job, as she must be on-call. She must respond to phone calls, so she keeps her cell phone on. She is frequently assigned shifts on holidays and on Shabbat and will work and drive. There is a concept in Judaism called *pikuah nefesh*, which states that, when a life is at risk, one is permitted to disregard *mitzvah lo ta'aseh* (command to not perform/do). This concept allows emergency

personnel to work on Shabbat as it sanctifies human life above those injunctions which restrict certain work related activities on holy days. She feels that, as a doctor, it is necessary for her to treat patients.

A.O. does not know any other Orthodox Jewish women doctors. A.O. says that, if she were working in a more urban environment, she might feel differently because she might have other Orthodox women peers to support her. She says that, even at religious hospitals in Israel and America, on the High Holidays and Shabbat, doctors and other personnel have to work. She hopes that eventually she will be able to ask off for religious observance days, but, right now, she believes it would hurt her career.

A.O. has been career-focused much longer than most of the other women in the study, through college, medical school and residency. A.O. states, “Six years ago, I moved for my job. The job is what I wanted.” This took precedence over anything else in her life. Although she is still dating, her main focus is still her career. She has very different goals than most other Orthodox women, in that she wants a demanding full-time job and a family. She feels this is intimidating for the average Orthodox man. By the time she graduated from medical school in her mid-twenties, she was already on the older spectrum for marriage. She says that one of the benefits of this particular hospital was that “it was close to an Orthodox community.”

A. O. talks about wanting to have a family with a child. She expresses a desire to meet someone; in fact, most of our conversation revolves around this. I took it to mean that she feels as if she is older and wishes she had spent more time in her twenties or early thirties dating. She says, “I focused on school. I think that that was the time when most people meet. Now, the best way to meet is through friends and introductions.”

She claims to have dated 40-50 men. She started dating in her twenties. She says she feels like she is currently in a *Shidduch* crisis; there are not enough eligible men. According to my informants, a *Shidduch* crisis is typically defined two ways:

> 1.There are too many eligible women and not enough good men caused by the average man starting to date at 22, after they have finished yeshiva and sometimes college. Women begin to date at 19, right out of high school. It is further perpetuated by men wanting to marry younger girls .If a girl does not marry by the age of twenty-two, she has a much more difficult time finding a match.
>
> 2.In the Modern Orthodox community, women are waiting longer to find eligible matches, until they have completed [their] degrees and [started their] careers. Finding a suitable match is [more] difficult because they are now older.

A.O. explains:

> … I don't feel like I am intimidating to a lot of guys, but they don't seem to like a woman who can do all sorts of things that they cannot do. I may be on-call on Shabbat and have to work. I do not represent the typical picture of a wife and mother. Just because I am not right now [able to have time off], doesn't mean I won't have it -- it is hard to find a balance.

A.O. feels that her difficulties are atypical of an Orthodox Jewish woman. As an accomplished woman, her career creates a barrier to her relationships because of expectations of family, children, and holidays. A.O. is an example of a woman who believes she can accomplish everything: career, house, marriage, and kids. One popular idea among the women interviewed is that of the "superwoman" "who excels at the career and manages both a home and family..." [115] Although this would be her ideal life, she has yet to realize all of these objectives. She says, "In general and, for me, finding the right balance between work and home, and religion and fitting it all together is important." Her three dedications to religion, career, and finding a partner make her an anomaly in her community. Her career comes first then finding a partner and finally

[115] Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 193

Orthodoxy. According to A.O., although her career aspirations are the top of her list she would be willing to move for the right person if she could find a comparable position, and she would be willing to compromise some of her religious beliefs for the right man.

2.2.2 "D.B."

D.B. is fascinated with fashion. She only wears upscale brand names; trendy outfits with matching heels and spends a significant amount of money and time on her appearance. All of her clothing is purchased in New York City or at higher-end malls in the metro area. Some are also gifts from relatives. Everyday her outfits consist of designer skirts and blouses with matching jewelry. She has many luxury purses. She proudly displays her over a carat-and-a-half engagement ring. D.B. works hard to keep in shape by swimming and is mindful of health and diet. She relates that, as an Orthodox woman, she cultivates her *hadar* (inner splendor) alongside her outward appearance. The inner splendor is her *Emunah*, her faith.[116]

D.B., who is thirty-seven, has been married for eight years and has three children.[117] She made aliyah to Israel to be with her sisters, but moved back to New Jersey to be near her husband's family just a few years ago. When she lived in Israel, she did not speak Hebrew and neither did her husband. In Israel, she lived in the suburbs of Tel Aviv. D.B. calls herself a Modern Orthodox liberal. She keeps kosher inside and outside of her home. She wears pants and does not always keep her elbows and knees covered. She says, "I believe in modesty for the sake of keeping covered for yourself." She feels that this commandment should be followed by the

[116] Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller. *More Precious than Pearls: Selected Insights into the Qualities of the Ideal Woman*, 41.

[117] D.B. had her fourth child in the fall of 2014.

individual and not for the sake of the law or the Rabbi who preaches it. She observes Shabbat. She attends Congregation Ohr Torah and describes it as officially Orthodox, with many people in attendance calling themselves Modern Orthodox. She says the building is fancy and ornate.

Her children are early elementary school age and preschool age. They were all born in Israel. She sends her oldest child to the local Hebrew Charter School so that her child will be able to learn and speak Hebrew. She will supplement her children's Jewish education with Judaic studies at home. She learned Judaic knowledge from her parents in their home and plans to sit and tutor her oldest child. She says she had to pull her oldest child out of the local yeshiva because of an absence of commitment to teach her child how to speak Hebrew. She sees that as vital when her family moves back to Israel within the next few years. She makes an unpopular decision to not send her children to the yeshiva. Her younger two children attend the local Chabad preschool for the convenience of hours, closeness to home and religious beliefs. She feels that this school provides her children with a solid Judaic background.

D.B. worked part-time for a local Jewish organization, which closed a few months later. She is now a stay-at-home mom working part-time from home. Her husband works in the technology sector also from their home.

She describes her upbringing as liberally Orthodox. Raised in one of Judaism's most religious communities in the United States, she attended the local public school. For D.B., growing up around Ultra-Orthodox Jews helped her chart her own ideas about religion.

Her mother's Judaism is experiential; most of what her mother practices is based on her children's rituals. For her daughters, she provided a formal Jewish education based on text. All of D.B.'s siblings now practice Orthodoxy. They pick and choose which rules they want to follow and which Rabbi's rulings best suit their family. She says, "I grew up in a traditional

home; we [would] do Shabbat at an Orthodox shul, but then we would watch television. We would do Shabbat lunch and then we would go out as a family." D.B. describes her family's practice as "meaningful order in the ritual elements of one's religious community," but not as stifling or isolating as her *Haredi* neighbors.[118] She feels that the Ultra-Orthodox want to be guardians of ancient traditions of faith.

D.B.'s grandmother was a Holocaust survivor, who was traditionally observant before the war, but, after the war, chose not to remain pious. Her grandmother said that during the Holocaust, when everything was taken away and she had nothing left, she lost her faith. There is a general sense of the power of the Holocaust in Orthodox communities as a whole.[119] There is a sense of mutual suffering with the Orthodox. This is especially true among the Ultra-Orthodox where D.B. grew up, even though her family was not very traditional themselves.

According to Heilman and Cohen, the nominally Orthodox attend synagogue occasionally and are liberally kosher.[120] D.B.'s family represents this end of the spectrum, as they are not Shabbat observant; they use electricity and drive. "To such Modern Orthodox, post-Holocaust Orthodoxy had to be adaptive, based both ideologically and sociologically to the Torah and World Culture."[121]

D.B. says that, before meeting her husband, she went on thirty blind dates and had four prior boyfriends. Finding the right partner to live an Orthodox life and to spread her values was the pinnacle moment in her life. She jokes that she was picked up on a "street corner" on the Upper West Side. She met him walking to a Shabbat lunch and they happened to be going to the

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[118] Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition: the Social History of Orthodox Jews in Imperial Germany*, ix.

[119] Winston, *Unchosen*, 168.

[120] Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Patriarchs*, 65.

[121] Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, 33.

same one. They have been together ever since. They dated six months and were engaged for seven months before they were married. She feels this is fairly normal. She was married at 29.

Even though she is married with a family, she has strong feelings about the *Shidduch* crisis. She states, "Because of all the stupidity that mothers are putting on their sons on what to expect and daughters to do…ridiculous in the Orthodox world! Men think they deserve bombshell, brilliant women… men who are not really doing much. Find a typical guy: lawyer…will date gorgeous and young… most women are looking for sugar daddies." She feels that the unrealistic expectations of men and women in finding a partner are contributing to the *Shidduch* crisis. D.B. says that mothers perpetuate this problem of men wanting only smart, pretty, and young wives for their sons and place a premium on wealth for their daughters.

When speaking of her marriage, she says she cooks, cleans, vacuums and does most of the housework. She says it is a complete partnership. In a how-to book published for the Orthodox, the author notes: "One of the most basic rules of marital peace is that both husband and wife must recognize their respective responsibilities. Each must concentrate on his or her respective role instead of the extent his or her spouse is fulfilling their responsibilities."[122] In D.B.'s marriage, each partner fulfills a role. His opinion has become hers as a necessary part of their partnership. She will say, "Well, he believes…" but not in a derogatory sense, rather as a matter of fact and then will offer her opinion as well. This carries into all matters of their children's lives from schooling to activities. This is not a matter of Orthodoxy, but how their particular marriage works. As a wife, she will show respect for her husband in, not only her words, but also her actions. When her husband's birthday is coming, she talks for weeks about

[122] Arush, *Women's Wisdom*, 35

the gift she will give him to make sure it is the right one. Giving him the right gift is her way of showing him how much she cares. She will sit and look up recipes that he will enjoy.

D.B. feels that privacy is important in each couple's home. Her beliefs regarding *Niddah* (separation during menstrual period) and marriage show that she is open towards creating new ideas of how to shape the rules for their own marriage. She says that she follows the laws of *Niddah* in her own way:

> We have two beds that we slide together as a king-sized bed. It's a mitzvah to be together.[123] I go to *mikvah*. I don't believe in the extraneous laws about [not] passing the milk or kissing or sitting on the bed. We have sex during the other two weeks. I only asked the Rabbi once when I bled in-between the time. We were not *Shomer Negiah* when we dated. But we didn't have sex. Now, we think it's important not to have sex for the two weeks and to wait.

D.B. interprets the laws for her family even though her husband also was raised religious. As a self-proclaimed, intellectual woman, she thinks she has adequate knowledge to understand text and find the Rabbi's opinions. She wants to validate her own ideas by not completely violating the laws. "The Rabbi should not and will not tell me how to interpret the laws," she says, "I pass my husband the milk. We are adults; we don't have sex and we have devised our own laws." She often refers to the laws of family purity that govern what time a woman should avoid being touched during menstruation, and when she is not able to hand her husband objects.

D.B.'s life is a great balancing act between religion, career and family. As a mother, she seeks the very best for her children. She wants each of them to excel in his/her own way. She works to provide for them. She wants them to have a balanced life. For D.B., living in Israel is her goal:

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[123] A *mitzvah* is the commandment found in the Bible. Mitzvah literally means "command." Therefore, "doing a *mitzvah*" can be a good deed in line with the writings.

> I want for my children [to be] living back in Israel (in five years) as much as I value the diversity, I want my children living in the land of their people…walking in the land of their people, learning in the land of their home. I thank America for all that it has given to my family. I want my family back in Israel. America is too obsessed with work, not family -- too obsessed with materialism, not experiences. I want my children to enjoy all aspects of life not just work-school-work-school-work-things.

She never mentions how her personal style and choices are in conflict with her distaste of American materialism. She says she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness by living in the suburbs, in order to provide a better life for them in Israel in the long term. She feels that the suburbs in America have no culture or sophistication, but her family is able to save money by living here instead of in an urban environment. She is doting and constantly speaks about trips, summer camp, and other excursions for the children. She seems to truly want the best for her family.

D.B. says Generation X is creating new ideas within Orthodoxy. She says that her grandmother's generation suffered a profound loss due to the Holocaust. Her mother's generation did not have the opportunity to learn. Her generation has the chance to go to day school and beyond, and to earn an education. She wants to bequeath a solid education to her children.

In Modern Orthodoxy, D.B. sees women as the conduit for passing along such vital information. She says that men have the responsibility of supporting the household, and women are primarily responsible for raising the children. D.B. and her husband plan to return to Israel in order to complete this goal of raising their children in an environment they see as best suiting the ultimate, Jewish Orthodox life. She thinks that materialism and work too often get in the way of Jewish values in America although material values are of paramount importance to her at the present. She says that America is a secular nation, and it is too difficult to be a religious Jew. Though she is an American, she feels Israel is her true home.

2.2.3 "S.B."

S.B. is tall; with perfect, brown, ringlet curls. She wears a tea-length skirt with three-quarter length sleeves to our meeting. She is twenty-five and wears makeup with simple jewelry. She lives with her parents in a typical, suburban, two-story home, with a large dining room, a small living room and a simple kitchen.

She says she is Orthodox "somewhere in the middle." She attends Congregation Ohav Emeth, a Centrist-Orthodox, *heimish* synagogue that houses the local *kollel*.[124] She keeps Shabbat and observes the dietary laws at home and only eats in kosher restaurants.

S.B. grew up in this community. She attended the local liberal Orthodox day school from kindergarten through eighth grade and then transferred to an Orthodox high school. She attended a women's Orthodox Jewish college. She chose a seminary that stressed learning and keeping the mitzvoth (laws). She received additional technical certification to work in a science field. She is currently searching for a job.

She talks about the pressures to marry: "The overwhelming feeling is there. I don't think my community puts pressure that people should be married at a certain age, no given number… but the lower twenties are expected." She is currently dating and looking for the right person.

She feels that the Internet helps people find a match, but it can also be a hindrance as it may complicate the dating process. From her perspective, as soon as someone wants to find a match, they go to Facebook to check pictures, and sometimes the Internet gives the wrong impression.

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[124] A *kollel* is a place where married men study Torah. Generally a *yeshiva* is where younger unmarried men study.

S.B. is on the cusp of being beyond the typical dating age-range for her community. She is a candidate for a match, but she speaks of her family's faltering financial status (her father is out of work) as a possible reason why she cannot find anyone. She is worried about finding someone before becoming too old. At a recent chance meeting at a wedding she told me how she is stressed and has to find someone soon before it is too late. She speaks of community expectations, and how her time is running out. She wishes that she could quickly get married, and she asked if I knew any potential suitors. Her sister, two years older, is married with a child. For many Orthodox, life is not complete without marriage.[125] She plans to cover her hair after she gets married. She says that the reasons she obeys the modesty laws are:

> Honestly, part of it was ingrained in me from a very young age; part of it is comfort. I don't think there is anything wrong with not being tzinius. I don't think there is any issue with not wearing pants. I don't wear pants, because I don't like how I look in them. People in the Orthodox community will make assumptions based by (on) how you are dressed.

Keeping modest is a cultural norm for S.B and a clothing preference. She was brought up with a particular way of dress and altering this may be uncomfortable. She cites an example of people who usually wear tights to cover their legs and describes this as a defining factor of how religious a person is within the Orthodox community. For S.B., the addition of tights is outside her norms of modesty. She is not violating the laws of *tzinius* (modesty) because her knees, collarbone and elbows are always covered. Some Modern Orthodox women believe that wearing opaque tights is not necessary.

S.B. says that some of her friends initially started wearing *sheitels* (wigs made out of real hair) or a *tichels* (cloth hair coverings) when they were first married, but they eventually stopped. They made initial, religious choices based on their upbringing, but as married women, decided

[125] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*. 278. The Haredi see engagement as a contract between two individuals.

on a different direction. S.B. believes that once a woman is married and no longer under her parent's protection, she has a new set of standards and choices to make with her husband.

Although they see themselves as part of a "traditional society," a "society based upon a body of knowledge and a set of values handed down from the past,"[126] the women believe they have a choice within the bounds of the law or the interpretations by the Rabbis. Finkelman states, "While the community possesses no formal or legal authority it does wield quite a bit of informal power over members, who are called upon to willingly conform to strict religious standards and social norms."[127] There are covert social pressures on women to behave and dress in a certain manner, but if they choose to move to a different community, they are liberated from such societal standards they have kept since birth. As adults, they can live under their own rules and choose to follow the Jewish laws that best fit for the long term, not the rules that were dictated in their youth.

One of these choices is wearing a head covering. The *sheitels* look most like real hair. In S.B.'s cultural milieu, this is the favored way to cover one's hair. The wigs can be purchased in any hair color and cut to various styles. A variation on this is the *tichel*. The *tichel* is a cloth worn around the head. In America, a *tichel* is not the preferred hair covering, but in Israel they are widely worn by the Orthodox population.

S.B. has some Jewish and non-Jewish friends. All of her non-Jewish relationships have been formed in her academic experiences. As a child of a *BT* mother, she believes her community needs to be more accepting and less judgmental of others. S.B. is stylish and looks mainstream American in her choices of traditional clothing. She is outgoing, personable, and has

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[126] Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the end of the Middle Ages*, 3.

[127] Finkelman, *Strictly Kosher Reading*, 27.

the ability to converse about non-religious topics. She is comfortable traveling into Manhattan regularly by herself. She is familiar with contemporary cultural icons and is conversant with current events in the larger world.

For S.B., Orthodoxy is her innate culture. She adheres to the norms of modesty, observes the laws on holidays, and keeps kosher. The suburban town where she lives helps to perpetuate this lifestyle by offering everything she needs. She says she is content as an Orthodox Jew.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS ON LABELS

A.O., D.B., and S.B. all negotiate the suburbs in their own unique ways: a career choice as a doctor, an encounter between materialism and the norms of traditionalism, and the interaction with the mainstream, American culture. These women seek to find a balance between their expectations of staying true to their traditional religious beliefs and remaining mindful of their desires. These three women exemplify the range of individual choice, which relates to unique religious practice and creates a heterogeneous suburban Jewish community.

The interviewees break down into two basic groups. The older informants are devoted to career building or are married and face life challenges such as tensions with extended family, special needs children, and changes in culture. These experiences challenge the norms of Orthodoxy and they have instead chosen or are compelled by their immediate needs to find alternative ways of religious practice and thought. The second group of women, are those who are mostly unmarried and project an ideal for an expected future life without taking into account

challenges that may occur. This group symbolizes these Orthodox women's hopes and dreams for the future while the initial group is bound in the present.

A.O. has the most demanding career of all of the women interviewed. As a surgeon in the suburbs, she finds it impossible to keep Shabbat or maintain all the practices of kashrut (kosher dietary laws). Since she moved out of an urban environment, she feels more isolated.

D.B.'s recent relocation to suburbia is temporary. She feels she does not quite fit into the culture. She loves high fashion and mainstream materialism. She feels that she can adorn the exterior while working on the interior. D.B. feels that it is up to each individual to delineate for themselves the boundaries identified with Orthodox Judaism.

S.B. prides herself on her ability to relate to American cultural mores. She is well read and can speak intelligently about politics, popular entertainment, television, travel and fashion. She interacts with non-Jewish and non-traditional friends regularly in her classes and daily life. Although some of the materials she may see and read may be outside the bounds of traditional Orthodoxy, she feels that this is a necessary skill to survive within the suburbs. S.B. plans to stay in this suburban community long-term.

The suburbs permit each woman to practice and understand Orthodoxy to correspond to their own priorities. Pluralism is perpetuated in both East Brunswick and Highland Park by accepting each person's individualism. Pluralism in this context does not mean a "lack of conviction." Each of these women is challenging the norms of Orthodoxy in their own way: for the sake of a career, sense of vanity through fashion, or interactions with the non-Orthodox population. These are religious women within the larger American community in suburbia.

3.0 SUBURBIA AND CONSUMERIST CULTURE

The setting for this dissertation is the suburbs of central New Jersey; this is one of the defining features of this study. In this section, an examination of the locale will help to further reveal how location affects the women's personal expression of Judaism. Through examining the diversified structure of the suburbs, the various aspects of living in the area such as technology, transportation, and public education, along with the three personal accounts of A.S., S.K., and K.E., we will discover how American cultural norms are influencing Orthodoxy.

Highland Park began as a community in the beginning of the 1900's. It became known as a "streetcar and eventually an automobile suburb" by the 1920's. Private companies built their homes with specific design for outward expansion. East Brunswick represented the "sitcom suburbs." According to Hayden, these pre-fabricated homes were first conceived in the 1940's, and the construction was improved with vertical integration after the World War II. Initial homes sold for $6,990 or $7,990 as "cape cod" or "ranch style" developments in deliberate communities, starting in the late 1940's.[128] These suburban homes were built to encourage family activity and "strengthen family togetherness."[129] These homes were mass-produced. The landscape of America changed dramatically, as Americans moved out of the cities and into the

[128] Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820- 2000*□□157. A deliberate community or a "planned community" is a community that is set up in a specific way usually by a single builder or in a certain style.

[129] Ibid, 157.

suburbs. In the post-war "age of affluence," metropolitan suburbia became the "third" stage of settlement," leading to the return of the institutionalization of religion and construction of a new brick and mortar buildings.[130] The architectural planning of religious structures corresponded with the suburbanization of the nation in the late 1940-50s.[131] In the decades following World War II, Jews left the major cities for this type of living. The causes of urban flight included "housing shortages, white flight, and increased transportation …"[132] The suburbs became known for middle class status, home ownership and a longer journey to work. It also symbolized characteristics of contemporary American culture such as materialism, a reliance on individual cars, a clearer division between time spent at work and at home, and neighborhoods typically dividing areas based on economic circumstance.[133]

The suburbs formed from a patchwork of communities located outside of major cities. They allowed for people to have affordable options in purchasing land farther from mass, industrial areas. As these populations grew, businesses sprung up around them.

The suburbs, like urban areas, developed their own unique culture; they are characterized as a planned "… physical organization of neighborhoods, roads, yards, houses and apartments…"[134] With more space, people have the ability to accumulate more possessions, bigger homes and essentially more of everything. By the turn of the century, big business moved to the suburbs, buying the cheaper land and creating large building structures.

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[130] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 981.

[131] Finke,and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 225.

[132] Riv-Ellen Prell, "Community and the Discourse of Elegy The Postwar Suburban Debate" in *Imagining The American Jewish Community,* ed. Jack Wertheimer, 68.

[133] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 4.

[134] Ibid, 3.

As the American population turned to the suburbs, so did the American Jewish population. In the beginning, living in the suburbs was difficult for Orthodox Jews because of a lack of necessities for observance. Eventually, communities thrived as people invited their friends, neighbors and families to join them.[135] Various choices in kosher foods and wines began to be offered in the supermarkets.[136] The 1950's and 1960's also experienced a boom in shopping centers and chain supermarkets that began to carry kosher goods. Discount and big box stores soon followed suit as well.

Orthodox Jews imagined moving to suburbia as a viable opportunity for obtaining the American dream. In order to establish an Orthodox suburb, adherents require a kosher butcher and baker, an Orthodox synagogue (or at minimum, a *minyan* of 10 men), a Jewish cemetery, a mikvah (ritual bath) and eventually an Orthodox day school.[137] In areas that do not offer these amenities, they create them.[138] Suburban and more rural Jewish communities are imaginative when the basics for a community are not available. The new population will use a fresh body of water for a *mikvah* when it is a far distance to travel to one. They will make their own bread, slaughter kosher meat, wait for a traveling *shochet* (ritual butcher), or make an order with a kosher company.

In Orthodox areas surrounding synagogues, the population creates *eruvim*, demarcating a ritual enclosure usually made of string or fibrous material hung from telephone poles. This designated area allows Orthodox Jews to carry items on Shabbat. Generally speaking, all of the observant Jewish people live within an *eruv*. The *eruv* allows them to push baby strollers and

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[135] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 23-24.

[136] Ibid, 148.

[137] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst*, 54.

[138] Ibid 130.

carry prayer books and house keys on the streets during the Sabbath.[139] It permits worshippers with limited mobility to have better access to synagogues.

By the end of the 1990's, the United States became a nation dependent on its suburban population. In California, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania, the suburban population comprised more than half the populace of those states.[140] Randall states, "By 1990, the United States became the first nation to have more suburbanites than city and rural dwellers combined. Home ownership had reached its highest level in history, 66.7 percent of American households."[141]

By 2014, suburbanites dominated North America. The core was no longer the city; there was a new economic, organizational model.[142] The suburbs came in all shapes and sizes to fit every need, from enclaves with Ultra-Orthodox populations to the more liberal communities of Modern Orthodox. Consequently, by the end of the twentieth century, Orthodox Jews began to create definitive communities, as they did not want to live in just any suburb. Generally, these communities were adjacent to large metropolitan areas, or were at least within driving distance of an hour or two or were easily accessed by mass transit. This helped to supply these suburban areas with kosher food, jobs and additional places to shop. It also brought in fresh faces, young families and singles, as they migrated out of the cities.

As people moved into these suburban communities, they developed an ideology that helped confront the duality between mainstream and religious culture. Multiple women in the study referenced the works of Shalom Arush and even offered me copies. This movement does

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[139] Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*. 232.

[140] Palin, *The Suburb*s, 3.

[141] Randall Baxandall, and Elizabeth Ewen. *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, 251

[142] Palin *The Suburbs*, 92.

have some parallels to the Prosperity Gospel found in Christianity. This where God intends prosperity as a reward for good works, divine favor, as a response to prayer and tithing (giving ten-percent to the church). There is a message of faith, wealth, and health. A series of Emuna books written by Rabbi Shalom Arush could be found on the bookshelves of most women in this non-urban environment. Orthodox women, especially the *BT* population, will often refer to Rabbi Arush as an authoritative author on Judaism. The idea of *Emuna* or faith helps to combat materialism and consumerism.

Emuna offers the answer to many of the issues confronting suburban Orthodox Jews, including the challenges of consumerism and money troubles: "All of life's questions have one universal answer, *Emuna*… *Emuna* is the original biblical Hebrew term for a firm belief in a single, supreme, omniscient, benevolent, spiritual, supernatural and all-powerful Creator of the universe…"[143] People can transcend their own limitations through personal prayer and speaking directly to God.[144] It is based on the agency of the individual, the power of positive thinking and doing what is correct in accordance with traditional, Jewish law. If a woman is lacking something or has some material limitation, she should have *emuna* that it will come to her. If she or her family recently obtained wealth or a job, she should have *emuna*. All positive and negative acts should be thanked with prayer.

In an urban environment, the Orthodox population settles in particular neighborhoods, shops in distinct areas, and frequents specific restaurants. In the suburbs, although Orthodox women may still have their own synagogues, restaurants, and *shuls*, they no longer shop in isolation or dwell within their own grid. The Modern Orthodox, Centrist Orthodox, Chabad, and

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[143] Arush, *The Garden of Emuna*, 22.

[144] Ibid, 35.

some *Haredi* [145] deal with this phenomenon, especially within the suburban context, and form subcultures within the Orthodox community.[146] Oftentimes, one side is open to liberalization, while another might want a stricter interpretation of the laws. This has created a wider schism between Modern Orthodoxy and the *Haredi* population.

Unlike *Haredim* found in distinct regions, this study deals with an inclusive *Haredi* population. They promote integrating popular culture within traditional bounds in order to captivate a contemporary audience. This same idea is found in the suburban Orthodox environment. Even the most observant Jews find that a relationship with the non-religious community, replete with modern technology, potentially enhances their religious practice.

3.1 THE SUBURBS TODAY

The influence of suburban, mainstream, American culture is clear. This facilitates a society that enables nonconformity, made by unique people and expressed in some of the following ways: community interchange, shopping, daily activity, or women's perception of daily life. There is a community bulletin board online that sends out emails twice a day. Residents can look for rides, jobs and goods. They can ask questions, rent or buy homes or apartments and offer services, as there is a never-ending plethora of options. Boards like this one are also found in enclave

[145] Some Haredi such as *Satmar* and *Belzer* have formed exclusive suburban enclaves

[146] Etan Diamond contends that by 1990 the Orthodox are found in suburbs of almost every U.S. city. Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst,* 141.

communities and urban areas with a multitude of Orthodox Jews. The online Highland Park board has set the following guidelines for their message policy.

A) The following are some examples of messages that would be appropriate:

- Shiva announcements (mourning period)
- Looking for/giving rides
- Selling/giving away goods
- Looking for items, i.e. sukkah
- Lost and found items
- Houses or apartments for sale or rent can only be posted by the owner.
- Unemployed individuals looking for a job/students looking for work.

B) The following are some examples that would not be appropriate:

- *Lashon Hara* (gossip)
- Offensive or disparaging messages
- Business ads other than during the business week
- Organizational or institutional announcements i.e. shul announcements
- News, political items, political meetings and/or editorials.
- *Tzedakah* (charitable) organizations
- *Halakic* questions
- *Shidduchim* (match making)
- Recommendations for services without someone requesting it

C) All messages must be signed with your first and last name. *Messages without first and last names will be deleted.*[147]

When a person needs help in the community, when there is a special lecture or holiday event, it can be found on this bulletin board, and many readers often comment on each other's postings. This bulletin board is a virtual connector among the thousands of Orthodox residents who live within the area. It is facilitator for geographic discourse in an area that is too large for residents to communicate face-to-face. The explicit purpose of the online board is to allow Orthodox Jews in this particular area access to information about the wider observant community beyond their particular house of worship. Many of the goods and items are articles necessary for a pious

[147] This was the morning email that was sent out on Tuesday, Feb 18th 2014

lifestyle. Oftentimes rides to and from places are for ritual celebrations, trips to day schools or *yeshivas*. The majority of the job posting are within the Jewish arena or by Jewish owners. The posting to rent or sell homes to other Orthodox couples is in an effort to maintain certain neighborhoods as predominately Orthodox Jewish.

The examples of inappropriate postings include gossip, matchmaking, new and politics, disparaging notices, and charitable organizations seeking donations. This board is supposed to bring the community together not create schism through different ideas or individual interests including matchmaking, synagogue announcements and *tzedekah*. The board is an opportunity to bring common interests of the Orthodox population into one virtual environment. It is also not supposed to function as a Rabbinical source and clearly states that this is not a forum for Jewish law questions.

One example of a general notice reads:

> The [U.S.] Social Security Administration will be posting a number of entry-level jobs… many frum women work there. The jobs work well for women because at entry level they emphasize office skills, but there is a great opportunity to advance.

On that same day, these items appeared:

- Wanting to borrow a mustard yellow cap and gown for 5’9;
- Selling a dining room set and twin bed;
- Looking for a home health aide;
- A Pesach (Passover) cleaning service job;
- New toddler girl clothing for sale;
- Looking for a gymnastics/art/cooking teacher for an toddler program;
- Want to borrow boys size 8 and 6 dressy clothes;
- A free bed to giveaway;
- Looking for a ride to Crown Heights;
- Seeking a travel *aron kodesh* (Torah Ark) to borrow for a few days;
- Any recommendations for a caterer?

- A carpet place suggestion?
- A thank you to the community for a public lecture.[148]

This showcases the variety of announcements. The items listed include ritual, a query on people and place suggestions for items and work, borrowing and selling of items, a ride to another observant area, and an overall message to the community. Several of the postings are religiously or culturally oriented to this distinct community. By utilizing the Orthodox Jewish people in the area for ritual, transportation, suggestions for employment and retail, and giving or selling items within the community it helps to create an exclusive atmosphere with boundaries to who is a part of these messages.

Another popular online network is the local Oneg group that posts on Facebook. (This is the group with whom N.S. is active). The Oneg group meets monthly, targeting young singles and couples from different synagogues. It has over three hundred members. All fifty of the women participating in this study are aware of these services and frequently take advantage of the message board and the Oneg group. There is a dichotomy between making use of community technology and technology for personal pleasure. Sixteen women did not own a television. The majority of the women are connected with mainstream technology, using all sorts of devices and owning televisions. The more traditional women utilize technology at work only and are proficient, but still will not use it in their own homes.

All of the women are active in both Jewish and the non-Orthodox Jewish community activities. Traditional Jews (in non-enclave settings) often seek out similar, but not identical, individuals within the larger American society to be a part of their suburban communities. Since the Orthodox community is not large enough to be completely self- sufficient, they look to the

[148] This was the morning email that was sent out on Tuesday, Feb 18th 2014.

non-religious Jewish community and the population at large to aid with supplemental activities, educational options for the children and support for kosher bakeries and butchers.

Four of their children are enrolled in non-Orthodox institutions, one in a Conservative pre-school, one at the Hebrew Charter School and two in a special needs public school program. The public school system provides several special needs programs, which are funded by the state of New Jersey. The district provides a classroom aide, special classes, and if needed, busing to another school. The traditional populations in East Brunswick and Highland Park are dependent on the mainstream population for the education of children with learning disabilities, as the Orthodox system is not capable (or willing) to handle some cases. The public school system is mandated to educate every child until eighteen, or in some cases twenty-one, if they have special needs.

Orthodox children take part in community-wide activities after school. For instance, there is a basketball program that is housed at one of the Conservative synagogues for grades 1-6 for both girls and boys. Many of the Orthodox children play with Reform and Conservative children. One of the Orthodox Rebbetzin volunteers to lead the girls program for grades 1-3, specifically to allow the girls to play separate from the boys. In the older grades, girls and boys play together.

Along with activities at the synagogue, Orthodox children also enjoy the township soccer and softball leagues. Orthodox Jews are enrolled in ballet, gymnastics and swimming with non-Jews. They participate with other children as long as the activity does not conflict with the holidays or Shabbat.[149] The community calendar for sports is often set to accommodate

[149] The Orthodox community in East Brunswick has grown strong in their enrollment and has required many local organizations to tailor their schedules to the Jewish calendar.

Orthodox Jews. One may even find special "Girl Scout Orthodox troops." The schools provide a wealth of clubs and activities after school for the children to join.

There is a necessary automobile culture in the suburbs. When families transfer into the area, they "moved into a culture of consumption and became dependent on cars."[150] Although most towns are connected by sidewalks, complete with central shopping areas, it is usually too far to travel for shopping without driving. The consumerist culture of suburban America, combined with the large families commonly associated with the Orthodox, has created a supermarket and wholesale culture. People drive to the supermarket and buy items in bulk for their family. Instead of shopping at the local kosher butcher and small kosher stores, many go to the chain stores for better prices.[151] Consequently, the primary customers at the locally owned kosher deli are Conservative Jews and members of area synagogues whose population, in general, is not kosher. Many Orthodox choose not to shop here because the store is open on Shabbat (restaurant is closed, but deli is not). The deli has a *hekhsher* (kosher supervision) from a local Conservative Rabbi.[152]

Orthodox women in suburbia are the principal shoppers for their household. They cook for their family and entertain guests. These women construct the culture of where, how, and what is purchased and consumed. In the past few decades, they have shifted from purchasing their items at small, mom-and-pop stores to large chain stores. They show a preference for brand names and demand certain quality and luxury items.[153] This has been heightened with the influx

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[150] Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 147.

[151] Orthodox Jews are readily buying from non-Jews because they are being undersold.

[152] The restaurant is closed, but take-out is available from the bakery and butcher from 7:30am- 8:30pm on Saturdays. The Rabbinical supervision is under the local Conservative Rabbi.

[153] The experience of grocery shopping was not analyzed in academia in regard to Orthodoxy.

of computers and the ability to order almost anything online. If the local store cannot provide these items, the online shopping market is always open but, depending on the individual, they will not use it during restricted times. The availability of goods in the suburbs has changed the way that women relate to the urban centers. No longer do they need to rely on New York or Philadelphia as places to buy food, clothing, and ritual objects. This helps those living in areas outside the urban core. L.C. says that mail order allows for readily available goods.

Although there are some independently owned Jewish grocery stores, bakeries and delis, many of these women prefer to shop at the local ShopRite supermarket. This supermarket features an area called the "Kosher experience," which includes two full-aisle areas just for kosher dried goods, a kosher fish and meat area with a butcher, and a kosher bakery.

The ACME grocery store also offers many kosher options, including a kosher bakery and made-to-order kosher sushi. Also, there is a small kosher store in the community as well asa separate kosher deli. Stop and Shop supermarket has a kosher section. The local Costco stores have large kosher sections, but the meat is frozen. S.K. says that she does all her shopping for the family "at the supermarkets." This entire suburban area caters to its Jewish clientele. During the High Holidays and Passover, the local stores and the wholesale purveyors become a one-stop-shop for all required needs.

Similar to their food shopping habits, Orthodox women purchase their clothes at the mall, local discount stores, or online, not at Orthodox-run shops. S.K. says she shops in area stores and at the "mall, Lehmann's and Target. I rarely make the trip to Lakewood for my daughter for

clothes."[154] The mainstream culture markets to the Orthodox necessities. There is a significant influx of "modest clothing" in every brand-name store, at the large discount stores and higher-end stores in the malls. They carry key wardrobe pieces that Orthodox women can buy. People in the suburbs no longer have the need to travel to urban locations just to obtain food or clothing.[155]

R.S., one of the women who sells *sheitels* to the Highland Park and East Brunswick community, says she sells her wares in the "morning and evening" to the women. R.D. says whenever she needs to get her, "*shatnez* tested (mixture of wool and linen) or major alterations done to a garment to make it fulfill modesty standards…there are people who would come to the area."[156] Orthodox women in suburbia first turn to their surroundings to purchase items instead of specialty Jewish stores because of the cost savings.

The experience of women in the suburbs is a gendered one. For all Orthodox children, according to my informants, "the socialization process begins at birth; families usually treat newborns differently according to their sex."[157] If a family has a boy, there is a great celebration following the *bris* (circumcision), and many community members will attend. For a girl there will be a Kiddush. The first-born son of a Jewish mother, who has never had an abortion or miscarriage and who is neither the daughter of a Kohen nor a Levi and is not born via C-section, is also eligible for the ceremony of *Pidyon Ha'ben* (redeeming the child from a Kohen for five

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[154] The local discount stores seemed to stock a lot of modest options for women. In major city centers, discount stores are often on the city's outskirts, in one section of the city or in the suburbs. They may not be in the same neighborhood as the Orthodox populations. Loehmann's closed in spring of 2014.

[155] In questions over the prohibition over the mix of fabrics called *shatnez* (linen and wool), there are local people who handle this in Highland Park.

[156] The Orthodox population follows the law in Leviticus 19:19 that prohibit an individual from interbreeding of animals and planting together of seeds; this has been interpreted to prohibit the wearing of garments that are mixed in certain ways.

[157] Carter, "Gender Socialization and Identity Theory," 244.

silver coins, thirty days after birth). Many expectant mothers talk about wanting their first children to be boys so they can hold this ceremony.

As they mature, girls will learn the concept of femininity and how to "do" their gender, using their mother as a role model to identify with their community. Children will "learn" their gender from socialization with family and others they are connected. Their identity is formed through an understanding of specific behaviors that are and are not acceptable.[158]

Women play a crucial role in the education of youth. They also have a commitment to maintaining the balance between tradition and individualism. They are constructing their own sense of identity by living in a suburban community. They choose to live where American cultural influence is paramount and in a diverse environment with a strong Orthodox Jewish influence.

Women play a crucial role in the education of youth. They also have a commitment to maintaining the balance between tradition and individualism. They are constructing their own sense of identity by living in a suburban community. They choose to live where American cultural influence is paramount and in a diverse environment with a strong Orthodox Jewish influence.

[158] Carter, "Gender Socialization and Identity Theory," 6.

3.2 INFORMANTS ON SUBURBIA

3.2.1 "S.K."

By the time I meet S.K., I was rounding out my research. I had already met forty-seven other Orthodox women, and I was not expecting the details of anyone else's story to stand out from the prior informants. But, as I spoke with S.K., I was mesmerized by her story. S.K. is thirty-seven and wears a dress with three-quarter sleeves and black bob *sheitel*.

S.K. considers herself a person who endeavors to keep all of the commandments. She attends Ohav Emeth, the Centrist Orthodox synagogue that houses the local *Kollel*, a place where married men go to study. S.K. is strictly kosher by her definition; dines only in kosher restaurants and has a set of separate dishes for meat, dairy, "other or *pareve*" [159] and a fourth set for Passover.[160]

S.K. grew up in England in an Ultra-Orthodox *Hasidic* home. Her father was a *shochet*, a ritual slaughterer, and her mother was a homemaker. She went to an all-girls Orthodox school for grades K-12, where they spoke Yiddish that was translated into English. At seventeen, she graduated and was sent to a *Haredi* seminary in England. Within her first year of seminary, she became engaged. She met her future husband on a Thursday; they met three times and were

[159] *Pareve* refers to a kosher item that is neither specifically meat nor dairy.

[160] This set is strictly used for this holiday so it does touch *chametz* (bread products).

engaged by the following Tuesday. He was a *BT*, which was highly irregular for her community. Prior to seminary, she says that she had been restricted to whom she could date by her community and her parents. During her first year of marriage, her husband insisted that she continue on and earn her high school diploma with qualifying classes for college admission, a requirement in England. Although she was pregnant, she went back to school, a decision that her parents did not encourage.

S.K. feels that, within the traditional community, marriages are often maintained even if people are unhappy. She speaks about friends whose husbands lie about attending synagogue and, during that time, are unfaithful in marriage. An example she gives is a couple with five children, where the wife is aware of the husband's indiscretions, yet she is committed to staying. According to S.K., in the *Hasidic* community, married women are allowed to fantasize about sex with other men, but men are not allowed to fantasize about other women because it may lead to "spilling of the seed." *Hasidic* men may fraternize with a non-Jewish prostitute because they feel this is not a sin.[161]

In regard to touching, S.K. believes that a person should consistently obey the laws related to touch. In her view, marriage cannot always be about the physical. She maintains exact adherence to family purity and has two beds. She says this keeps her marriage fresh. She also believes in "modest dress, promotes modest behaviors. The way you dress can translate into external behavior." She keeps her hair covered with a *sheitel* or *tichel*. S.K. maintains all parts of modesty in the public and private sphere.

S.K. takes the helm in her household with the chores. She does all the shopping at the local grocery stores and supermarkets once a week, and she also goes to the kosher deli. She

[161] Berger, *The Pious Ones*, 176.

buys her clothing at the mall and discount stores. She sometimes travels to Lakewood, NJ to buy demure clothing for her daughter when she can't find it locally.

Material consumption is a novel practice from her upbringing, as her husband is a good provider. She did not grow up in the suburbs or in a community that had extra discretionary money, even when purchasing groceries and clothing. She says that, although men would buy their wives jewelry, they did it at the expense of necessities. Now, she enjoys luxuries. She comments on the ease of living in the suburbs, as everything is centrally located.

S.K. has three children. She is a stay-at-home mom, a practicing journalist and a returning college student. Her decision to pursue higher education is prompted by her oldest child who has learning disabilities, and she felt that he could not navigate college on his own. This year she will transfer to a four-year college for her second year, while her son begins his first year at the local community college, where she formerly attended.[162]

Two of her children currently attend public schools because they have special needs (her one son is graduating). She feels that the public school system is better equipped to handle individual circumstances. Her oldest child currently commutes out of the district and attends a special school.[163] Her youngest child still attends the local public school, but is also in a special needs program. The local Orthodox school rejected her youngest child.[164] This prompted her to look outside of her community for educational options for her children, and she thinks it caused her to become more open-minded about her religious beliefs. She does not share this with her

[162] She felt that she could utilize her first-hand experience on the campus and as a student to explain to him better than another individual.

[163] The district has provided her child the accommodation of a special needs school.

[164] According to S.K. her third child was rejected from the Orthodox school because of his special needs.

family abroad. She feels that "every *frum* household could benefit from the *BT* approach." One of the major reasons S.K. moved to this community, aside from her husband's job, is for greater opportunities for her children's education.

S.K.'s two children with learning disabilities both suffer from a Jewish genetic disorder caused by a recessive gene carried by both parents. She has decided not to have any more children because there is a twenty-five percent chance that her next child could have the same genetic trait. She does not believe in pre-marital genetic testing or genetic medical intervention. She is an advocate for the needs of her children and an expert on the topic. She allows her children to have all sorts of friends from multiple races and is open-minded regarding all activities her children are involved in.

Her daughter, the middle child, attends the local, more religious Orthodox day school. S.K. feels it is not fair that the Orthodox population is catering to those children who are able to withstand the dual curriculum, but are neglecting the needs of the rest of the students. S.K. does not intellectually comprehend why the Jewish educational system functions in this manner or why there is such a gap in the system.

S.K. is a woman who has opened up to the non-traditional Jewish community, a far cry from her cloistered religious upbringing. At seventeen, she married as a practicing *Haredi*, but in the past twenty years, her household has transformed its ideology due to life's circumstances. According S.K., she is maintaining an Orthodox home. How S.K. relates to the different elements as an American mother affects her relationship with traditional Judaism. She is still *shomeret mitzvot*, but embraces elements of mainstream American culture, and yet she does not feel comfortable sharing this information with her parents. She is aware of her ritual and

behavioral changes and assumes her family in England will disapprove of her new identity as a contemporary, Orthodox woman.

3.2.2 "A.S."

A.S. opens the door in simple clothes and no makeup. She lives in a large colonial home, with big glass cabinets for china and silver Judaica and bookshelves filled with Jewish books. There is a ten-seat, traditional dining room table. The house is best described as observant Jewish culture meets colonial American furniture and items. Her family attends the small synagogue, Klal Chasidim. She considers herself an observant Jew who is current with national and global politics, culture, arts, sciences, news, and technology. She keeps the laws of Shabbat and kashrut.

A.S. grew up Modern Orthodox and has never left her hometown. Her parents are highly educated. She talks about her upbringing:

> [We were] very cultured as children: Broadway plays, operas; taught to survive in the world; have education; to be in the world outside; find a career regardless of what it was - keep traditions and function in society. We went to Europe, Africa, and Australia. [We] traveled for the sake of travel. My father is an Orthodox Jew who has the hobby of game hunting and has over 300 taxidermy animals.

A.S. had a self-proclaimed exceptional childhood. Attending the opera, Broadway shows and theater were a common part of her upbringing. She says her parents wanted her to have the very best and "[it] just so happens that she was also an Orthodox Jew." She attended an Orthodox day school, for grades K-12. She went to a Jewish college. She feels that, for women, education needs to be in balance with religion, because they need to be able to survive in society and be able to transmit ideas to the next generation.

She met her husband through mutual friends. She first dated all of his friends before him. They dated for four months before they became engaged. At the time of their wedding she says that she was not in love; she claims that she was taught that love would come. They had five hundred guests at their wedding. He came from an Ultra-Orthodox background and was in the process of going off-the-*derech* (becoming less religious).[165] According to A.S., her husband's family disapproves of her because they feel that A.S. does not maintain an Orthodox household and "because his family is *Hasidic* and, in their eyes, we are not 'Jewish!" Her mother-in-law will not eat in their home because of distrust in their level of observance of the kosher laws. His family is not willing to financially support their marriage with rent, day-school tuition, or other money. This has caused an ongoing rift between her and her in-laws.

A.S. supported the household for many years because her husband had trouble obtaining employment with a GED. He eventually established his own company, but still maintains a second job in retail. In the past, a hierarchy within the home was established with her on top because she was the main source of income as a full-time therapist. She confides that this is "not a traditional Orthodox household."

In her household, she does all of the chores, except her husband cooks the cholent, the Sabbath stew.[166] She has a cleaning service weekly. Her husband does coupon shopping at the supermarket and whole sale stores and will return items if a better deal is found. They often shop at a discount for clothing as well because of her husband's job.

A.S. has elementary school-age twins. Now, she is primarily a housewife and caregiver to the children, but she also works part-time as a shadow in her children's school. There has been a

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[165] *Derech* means "path." "Off the *derech*" means off the path or straying from Orthodoxy.

[166] *Cholent* is a traditional Shabbat stew of meat and beans or some variation that is slow cooked.

shift in power recently because of her husband's new income, and the marriage has become more a partnership. A.S. had a hard time conceiving her children. She spent close to 8 years and had multiple surgeries trying to get pregnant. When she finally got pregnant, she spent almost the entire pregnancy in the hospital. In retrospect, she says she would now consider adoption, but would only adopt Caucasian children, because anything else would "stick out like a sore thumb."

A.S. is aware of another family in the community that adopted children of a different race. A.S. feels that this makes it more difficult for a family.

Although her children are twins, she finds that she could not send her kids to the same school. One of her children attends the local Orthodox school, and the other goes to a public school that offers a special needs program. In the special needs program, her child receives individualized attention and specialized curriculum; the focus is solely on non-religious studies.

Her children both participate in a variety of activities, including gymnastics, soccer, little league and a walking club. They have a variety of friends inside and outside the traditional community. Most of their activities are with non-Jewish organizations in an effort for her children to stay active and socialize.

A.S. says that she does not follow the modesty laws, the rules governing men and women touching or the family purity laws. In the beginning of her marriage, she wore a *sheitel* for five years. When she goes to a religious function, she will dress with a hat, *tichel* or *sheitel,* but when she is running errands in Highland Park, she will wear pants. She believes that *Shomeret Negiah* does not apply after you are married, and men and women should speak and act freely. She says that she will absolutely shake anyone's hand, as it is a bigger sin to embarrass the other person. She initially went to the *mikvah* when she first got married, but, over the years, has become disinterested in the law. She says there is no one incident that made this occur; it was a gradual

choice unrelated to pregnancy or menopause: “I find the concept of *mikvah* a demeaning process for women. All the women know what is going on at night, completely naked, that someone else is watching; all the women are watching and talking, this is your private life and it is made public.” She understands the reasoning behind the separation, but she finds the process degrading because she thinks it is too public, and that people know (when you attend). She does not want people knowing what is going on in her house.

A.S. is a woman who selects which *mitzvot* to follow within Orthodoxy. She does what works for her and will not follow it if she feels it will not fit with her lifestyle. She refuses to conform to what she calls “societal standards set by the community or her extended family.” She has not been ostracized for her beliefs and choices within this community and has a strong voice as head of the PTA at the Orthodox day school.

The lack of constraints associated with suburban life gives A.S. some latitude in her refusal to follow all of the precepts of the laws of Orthodoxy. In an urban setting, it would be harder to diverge from the mainstream tenets. The suburbs allow for each individual to experience Orthodoxy in her own way. The community may not be aware of the extent that she or her family is not following the rituals. The geographic boundaries of suburbia allow nonconforming individuals to still be prominent, highly regarded ladies because the others are unaware of what is going on in their individual homes.

3.2.3 “K.E.”

I first met K.E. in a coffee shop. Every time I see her, whether at a Shabbat Oneg event, a Tu Bishvat coffee and cake, or for a scheduled conversation, she always wears a *tichel*, minimal

makeup and layers of earth-colored colored clothes that compliment her bright green eyes and light brown hair.

She frequently attends Etz Chaim, the Sephardic synagogue in Highland Park. She considers herself to be Modern Orthodox and further describes herself as *Dati Leumi*, which is an Israeli term.[167] She recently moved back from Israel. She observes the kosher laws and Shabbat and keeps the laws of modesty.

K.E. grew up in a northeastern region of the United States where there were not a lot of Jewish people. She is a *BT*, and her parents are Israeli. As a child, she attended a Conservative synagogue. Her parents built a Sukkah, lit candles on Shabbat, and kept "kosher style," meaning no pork, shellfish, or mixing of milk and meat. Her grandparents were Holocaust survivors who escaped the Warsaw ghetto. They were religious until after the War, when they moved to Israel. Her mother does not believe in God, but maintained some of the traditions out of respect for K.E.'s grandmother.

K.E. attended public school until the eighth grade, and then she went to private school for grades 9-12. After completing school, she took a year off and traveled through California and Oregon. K.E. says she decided to become more religious during a visit to California, but had always been drawn to religion. While studying yoga at an ashram, she rediscovered her belief in Judaism. She claims that, when she was bowing to an idol at the Ashram, she felt it was wrong.[168] Before she became religious, she dated a Muslim Christian, and a Hindu individual.

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[167] *Dati Leumi* itself is a singular male or female meant to describe a religiously observant individual usually Modern (Centrist) Orthodox. The designation describes a religious Zionist or religious people supportive of building a state in the land of Israel.

[168] K.E. still avidly practices yoga and integrates Judaism and yoga together in creating all-women classes for the community.

She missed the Judaism and the religious services she had experienced during her childhood. She decided that she believed in God. She started to frequent a Moishe house (pluralistic Jewish organization for young adults to connect with Judaism), where the residents taught her what to do and what not to do on Shabbat. She then went to college in Israel, followed by service in the Israeli Army, where she joined a religious unit that combined army service and study.

K.E. met her future husband while attending college in Israel. They dated for two years and lived together before they became engaged. At first, she was afraid that people in the Orthodox community would judge her, but found that was not the case with her suburban group of friends. She says that several of her Orthodox friends also lived together before marriage. She got married at twenty-two.

K.E. works in online marketing. She also works part-time as a temporary administrator for the local public high school. She is thinking about going back to school to earn a master's degree in Judaic Studies or Jewish Education. She hopes to acquire some of the education she missed growing up in a non-Orthodox environment.

K.E. takes care of the chores and the cooking. She says this comes naturally to her. When K.E. was growing up, her mother was a stay-at-home mom. In the past year, K.E. and her husband moved back to America. Having returned to America, K.E. is embracing consumerism. She enjoys all of the choices available to her in the local supermarkets and the ease of online shopping.

Modesty is a mitzvah K.E. began to observe in her early twenties. She feels that dressing in a virtuous manner is more feminine: "I like the attention I got in the Army when everyone else was wearing pants; for me, it is a dress code. People know who you are when you are around

them." This modest, feminine style appeals to her extroverted personality. When she was in Israel, she liked her *tichel* because it was the normative standard, but, now in America, she is considering switching to a *sheitel* because it is more popular. The *tichel* makes her feel more informal and less religious because a bit of hair shows out the front.

K.E. is *Shomeret Negiah*. She began this practice at the age of twenty-two while serving in the Army with eighteen year-old boys. She will decline to shake a man's hand unless she is in a work setting. At this point, she feels the majority of her time is spent meeting new men in an Orthodox setting, so she will not offer her hand.

As a recent transplant from Israel, she has quickly made friends and is a regular at the Oneg group, where she assists by planning events. She says she hopes to return one day to Israel to live. She feels that this suburb is small enough to know people and, yet, big enough to always meet new ones. She is firmly planted in the group of "married without kids" for now.

K.E. is a second generation Jew after the Holocaust, who is committed to reviving Orthodoxy. As the children of the survivors chose to blend into the American culture, their children are now searching for the religious beliefs that were lost from their homes and lifein Europe. This new generation is growing fast and they are dedicated to exploring their religious roots. She sees differences from being a BT in Israel and being Orthodox in America, as Israel is more accommodating to tradition. She knows that this is a time of adjustment with the materialist, consumption culture of America.[169]

[169] K.E. welcomed a son in the spring of 2015.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS ON SUBURBIA

The suburbs have altered the landscape of Judaism in America over the past hundred years. After WWII, suburban sprawl changed the face of the American landscape. As the suburbs expanded, they brought in a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, and religions. Jews who moved into these communities "lived in mostly Jewish neighborhoods or side-by-side with others who migrated from city to suburb." 170It provided opportunities for Orthodox Jews to blossom out of the close- knit communities in urban neighborhoods of the urban environment and become part of the neighborhoods they lived in, no longer segregated by religion, but part of the greater melting pot of the suburbs.

In the 1970's, Etan Diamond studied Orthodox Jews in the suburbs of Toronto, Canada. He contends that the emerging community is creating a parallel structure to its urban counterparts.[171] The women attempt to replicate each detail necessary for an Orthodox lifestyle through their education, stores, food, and culture. The Orthodox Jewish community "transformed (the area) into a suburban and consumerist-oriented subculture." [172] They do not diverge from their practice of Judaism in the suburbs.

The Orthodox Jewish population in 2013-2014 produces its own subculture in both East Brunswick and Highland Park. S.K., A.S., and K.E. each relate to their environs individually, showcasing the support of different values and beliefs in this community. Both East Brunswick and Highland Park contain Orthodox communities that are inclusive of various situations. It is

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[170] Hasia Diner, Shira Kohn, and Rachel Kranson Eds. *The Jewish Feminine Mystique? Jewish Woman in Postwar America* ,38

[171] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell*, 5

[172] Diamond, *And I Will Dwell*, 17.

based on the philosophy of nonconformity. The large spaces of the suburban community encourage an open-minded Orthodox Judaism toward people who do not fit into defined ritual or communal standards, a culture of traditional diversity, and the need for the community to rely on all of its traditional population in order to flourish. Over the course of American Jewish history, "American Jews have had the optimistic hope they could accomplish what Jews had not successfully achieved elsewhere in the Diaspora. Instead of having to choose between competing allegiances, the great enlightenment dilemma here is they could be both American and Jewish." [173] These women are examples of two competing identities coming together. Heilman states,

"Modern Orthodox Jews wanted to remain planted in two worlds at once; ideologically anchored in Jewish law and tradition and culturally attached to contemporary America… This lifestyle of Orthodoxy might be characterized as "stabilized dualism." [174] These suburban women are choosing a unique approach to their piety and expression of their faith.

For both A.S. and S.K., a significant portion of their non-urban experience is through the education of their special-needs children. When they got married, these women said they could not anticipate the struggle between their traditional ideas and their children's best interests. Such hard choices were triggered by circumstances beyond their control.

S.K. grew up in a *Haredi* background and married a *ba'al teshuva* at seventeen, which, at the time, was an unusual decision. One of her compelling reasons to come to the United States, besides her husband's career, was the education of her two special-needs children with Jewish genetic disorders. Since her arrival in the United States, she has transferred their instruction from

[173] Jonathan Sarna, "Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture." *Jewish Social Studies*. Vol. 5.,72.

[174] Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, 37.

day school, started her own career as a journalist, and begun college. She feels that she would not have been provided with the same level of acceptance in other urban environments.

A.S. has followed a similar direction as S.K. She found it necessary to enroll one of her twins in the public school special-needs program. Although she is Modern Orthodox, her husband is from a *Haredi* background. She is proud of all of the activities in which both her children participate, as part of the broader neighborhood. She thinks that the lack of constraints that suburbia places on traditional Judaism aids in everyone getting along. Both A.S. and S.K. feel comfortable in their educational decisions; they feel that Orthodox Jewish values can be learned outside the classroom. The concept of right and wrong and the major aspects of religion are a core family experience.

K.E. is open about her non-traditional approach to Orthodoxy, but this has not been a deterrent to her popularity in the community. She tells people about living with her husband before marriage and her exploration into other religious traditions before finding religious Judaism. This has led to organizing an Orthodox women-only yoga group. Her manner of dress and covering her hair, although within the scope of acceptability, is definitely unconventional in this community, where a *sheitel* (wig) is the norm, rather than the *tichel* (head scarf).

A.S., S.K. and K.E. are attempting to find their own meeting of piety and mainstream culture and are helping to promote a new experience of traditional Judaism for each individual in the suburbs. They are examples of how individual practice and understanding promote diversity, in the community, and this leads to tolerance and pluralism. They are not transplanting the Orthodox experience from one city to a new location; instead, they are transforming how it functions in this new community.

4.0 FEMINISM IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN

This section examines how the realization of unique and personalized gender roles helps in the formation of a tolerant, suburban environment. The history of feminism throughout Orthodoxy, its current implications for the suburbs, and how three women view their dual roles as women and members of traditional Judaism are all part of an analysis of gender. The current ideas about equality of Orthodox men and women are at the forefront of the informant's roles in the home and in the workforce. The lives of C.S., G.M. and N.S. address this issue more in depth.

I questioned my subjects about their status as women. I asked them to speak about equality between the genders. For the purpose of this study as defined by my informants, "equal" is understood as individuals who enjoy the same standing and see themselves as capable of performing similar tasks in society, at home, and "before their Creator." A.E. says, "In the secular (non-religious) world, we have to compete with men to seem equal. In the Orthodox world, we are made different; men are built one way and women another."[175] Equal for A.E.means being of comparable station.

[175] Among those interviewed, the term "secular" is a commonplace to denote anything that is 'not religious' by Orthodox individuals. It can reference mainstream culture, non-observant Jews or non-Jews.

N.S. notes, “We each have our roles.” How Orthodox women view equality is seen through their lens of traditional religion. Is it two people doing an identical function or are there defined roles for each within the family unit? Is it up to the individual or community to interpret the rules?

One of the most transformative studies of American women was *The Feminine Mystique*, written by Betty Friedan, a fundamental text in American women’s history that helped spark the second wave of feminism. Her work characterizes the condition of American women in the 1960’s and many of her arguments about women’s roles share merit with contemporary issues with Orthodox Jewish women. In this work, she combined interviews with housewives, a working knowledge of psychology, and 1950’s-1960’s advertising; she sought to uncover the ailment that was plaguing the melancholy of the consumerist housewife. [176] Friedan said that American society demanded that the fulfillment of femininity be every woman’s highest goal. Friedan criticized that era’s ideal for women to “get married, have four children and live in a nice house, in a nice suburb.”[177] Despite these achievements, most women ultimately felt empty. The “feminine mystique” required that women ignore any ambitions outside of the domestic sphere.

The women’s liberation movement of the 1960’s, although not religiously based, helped spur all women including Jews, to think about their own place within Judaism in general and even within Orthodox Judaism, too.

The Modern Orthodox movement in the 1960’s offered women the opportunity to study written Torah. As the years went by, “accompanying changes in women’s roles in the public sphere were debates about women’s roles in religious society. These debates also dealt with

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[176] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 49.

[177] Ibid, 18.

women's roles in religious life, and rabbinic discourse initially accepted these changes as a necessity of the times…"[178]According to sociologist Hester Eisenstein, by the 1970's, the feminist movement focused on "socially constructed differences between the sexes as a chief source of female oppression." She said that sex roles help to create gender control. [179] She went on to the say, "Feminists in the early 1970's introduced the term gender in order to call into question any universalist claims about what it is to be a man or woman." [180] Women could only be released from their existing state by reframing the social roles between males and females.

Early Jewish feminists agreed with the mainstream movement on many issues, they looked to the Civil Rights Act, Friedan's work *The Feminine Mystique*, and women's liberation as helping to shape their movement. These women examined both their religious ideals and the wider American Jewish communities' social and political structures.[181] Women who were actively involved in Jewish communal life and congregations saw this as an opportunity to reexamine gender roles.

The Reform and Conservative movements within Judaism started to examine women's roles. In the past, religious feminists needed to develop their own language and understanding in order to link the observant Judaism and feminism. Susan Schneider contends:

> The basic patriarchal premise of Judaism has been that women and men are essentially

[178] Ilan Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study: Orthodox Religious Education and Modernity*, 217

[179] Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Xi

[180] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*, 629.

[181] Deborah Lipstadt, "Feminism and American Judaism," 292.

> different, and that gender differences extending beyond mere biology should be sanctioned and sanctified under Jewish law. This concept of difference allowed men [historically the ones assigning the roles] to exclude women unjustly from much that was important in Jewish life or, rather to determine that whatever it was that men were doing was defined as important: study, prayer and communal ritual responsibilities. The role of women was essentially other, enabling men and boys to perform their role with greater ease.[182]

As a Jewish feminist, Schneider feels that women need to perform the same rituals in order to have equal status. Otherwise, Schneider feels the Jewish woman is left in an "inferior or disabled" stage compared to their male counterparts. "In seeking to revise gender talk about God, women have sought to transforms the very language and liturgies that religious communities employ, and such transformation have been the source of both tremendous creativity an tremendous opposition...[183] This change in conception of language and liturgy helps woman envision themselves as having equal ritual value in the community.

By the late 1970's, the feminist movement was in its second stage. Early second-wave feminist scholars rejected biological determinism by presenting evidence of historically and culturally varied ways in which femininity and masculinity may be expressed and understood.[184] These scholars began to look at the differences between men and women.

They..."sought to isolate and define those aspects of female experience that were potential sources of strength and power for women..." [185]

The Orthodox feminist movement took its cue from these developments regarding the status of women in comparison to men. Blu Greenberg summed up the Orthodox feminist ideology of 1981:

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[182] Schneider, *Jewish and Female*, 33.

[183] Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *Religious History of America*, 386.

[184] Malti-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*, 629.

[185] Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Xii.

1.Women have the same innate potential, capability and needs as men, whether in the realm of the spirit, the word or the deed;
2.Women have a similar capacity for interpretation and concomitant decision- making;
3.Women can function fully as "outside" persons in broader areas of society beyond the home;
4.Women can and should have some control over their own destinies, to the extent that such mastery is possible for anyone. [186]

Greenberg published this explanation some twenty years after the beginning of the feminist movement in the United States and it remains influential among many Orthodox women. [187] Some Orthodox women see themselves with equivalent abilities and power within the decision- making process. Women can work, take part in the community, and be active in social affairs. Of most importance is the realization that a woman does not need to be led, but can be a partner in life. She has a choice as to where she attends school, whom she will marry, where she will live; she has control over all important life decisions. According to Blu Greenberg, all decisions do not have to be made by men, whether by a father, uncle, husband, or Rabbi.

More recently, Tamar Ross defined Orthodox Jewish feminism as "a movement for the advancement of women's equality, viewpoints and concerns. Such understanding may, or may not involve egalitarianism or allegations regarding deliberate oppression of women."[188]According to Ross, Orthodox feminists attempt to negotiate within the laws and sometimes create new meanings.

In her analysis of Orthodox feminism, Ross offered three stages. She said that Stage One was recognizing that gender was not innate, but instead, a cultural construction and was utilized as a tool of oppression. For example, women were exempt from most time-bound activities (the

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[186] Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View of Tradition*,39.

[187] Ibid, 39.

[188] Ross, *Expanding the Palace*, 3.

mitzvot that needed to be completed at an exact time). Ross also contended there were unequal gender obligations, such as *tzitzit* (the knotted fringes) on the *tallit katan*, (the everyday ritual prayer shawl worn by men under or over the clothes), and *tefillin* (small black boxes with prayers inside that are strapped by men to their arm during prayer).[189] Most importantly, a man alone could initiate divorce. This was a stage of recognition of gender bias.

Stage Two was "one form of adjustment open to Orthodox women who strive for minimal divergence from the [usual following of the] law [by] appropriating for themselves religious practices that were never forbidden, but were neglected, not for sociological, but *Halakhic* (Jewish legal) reasons."[190] This stage focused on actions for women to promote "separate but equal" within ritual and learning opportunities. Examples of this were women-only prayer groups and Jewish learning for women. Many times, this was found in Modern Orthodox institutions.

The final stage (Stage Three) was changing the situation to reinterpret the Bible in places that are androcentric. It was locating and revising the structures of patriarchy.[191] This has led to the Open Orthodox movement, a branch of Modern Orthodoxy founded by Rabbi Avi Weiss at his synagogue, Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, and at the new rabbinical school, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and the women's school Yeshivat Maharat, in New York. The movement has created innovative ways to form new religious spaces. In 1978, Rabbi Weiss began hosting women's prayer groups at his congregation. He wanted to "create a religious experience where women are praying together as individuals, but not as a *minyan*," in an Orthodox

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[189] Ibid, 15.

[190] Ross, *Expanding the Palace of the Torah*, 15

[191] Ibid, 107.

environment.[192]At, Yeshivat Maharat the first Rabbah, Sara Hurwitz, was ordained. Several other women have subsequently received ordination. Many of the major Orthodox organizations have condemned the ordination of women.

My informants were neither concerned nor even aware of the struggles within Orthodoxy to create a more gender-egalitarian ritual environment. Only one informant spoke of this movement and no other women knew about it when asked. [193]Some of the women did talk about the ideals such as women-led *minyanim* and taking larger roles in rituals but were not aware of the organized movement.

4.1 GENDER RELATIONSHIPS TODAY

All fifty women in my study talk about gender equality. Nineteen women say they are equal to men. That same number (nineteen) feels they are separate, but equal. The other eleven women say they do not feel equal to men. One woman replied that she does not know.

The women who say they are not equal explain that they do not feel the need to be equal to men. “In Judaism, a woman’s role is different from that of a man. They have different

[192] Gurock, *Orthodox Jews*, 275.

[193] Not every informant was asked about open Orthodoxy, but those who suggested values in line with the movement were asked if they had heard about Open Orthodoxy. About one-fourth of the informants were asked about whether they had heard about the movement, its Rabbis, or its institutions.

responsibilities and privileges."[194] They explain that stereotypes about the place of women and men run deeply within the Orthodox community.

One perspective on gender socialization is that gender is understood, and that women create and perform their own roles. Female activities include doing yard work, cooking in the kitchen, caring for children. A gender role becomes a product of "doing" a repeated action.[195] This idea of functional gender is self-constructed by the individual and the community and creates an understanding of what men and women participate in.

One woman says that she feels Judaism is innately patriarchal, and that women are expected to contribute more as the primary caregiver of the children while still working. Women are *ikaro shel habayit,* the mainstay of the home and say, "On the whole, while family means both man and woman, it is the woman who creates the environment in which family takes place."[196]

This traditional idea about the family creates defined gender roles between men and women with the wife as head of household. Steinsaltz's normative view directly correlates with the ideas of many Orthodox Jewish women in suburbia. Another woman says it is a man's responsibility to do more mitzvoth and take care of life's big decisions. This group, overwhelmingly, are not advocates for a change of status. Women are content with a lower community status because men have more responsibilities outside of the dwelling.

"We're both equal before God; therefore, we're equal… period." [197] This was a sentiment of one of Harris' informants in Crown Heights, NY in the 1990's. Fuchs says, "The *Haredi*

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[194] Adin Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew*, 144.

[195] Michael J. Carter, (2014). Gender Socialization and Identity Theory, *Social Sciences*. 3 (2), 242-263.

[196] Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah*, 148.

[197] Harris, *Holy Days*, 126.

approach sees change in women's roles as an attempt to uproot holiness from Jewish society, a characterization not quite as unequivocal in moderate Orthodoxy." [198]Therefore, women satisfy themselves with an apologetic ideology that explains these differences.

The suburbs of 2013-2014 reflect a changing and diversified Orthodoxy that no longer perceives the laws of the religion as ones with concrete answers of how women see themselves versus their abilities. About three-quarters of the study's population see themselves as equal according to Orthodox dogma. Yet, there was a resounding answer of "no" to the question of whether they had identical roles. The variety of ways in which women compare themselves to men in the suburbs is complex.

For this study, one of the topics is a series of open-ended questions exploring their relationships with men. There are twenty-one married women in this study who describe the dynamics of their relationship in terms of partnership or hierarchy. Single women were questioned about their parents, friends, siblings and expectations about their future. All of the women were specifically questioned regarding who was in charge of the household, they or their husbands.

Eighteen married women view their relationship as a partnership. The other three women tell me that that they are the person in charge in their household. The final seven say that their husband is in charge because of more income and more influence over the children and household matters.

The women speak about the expectations in the home. How are the chores divided between husband and wife?

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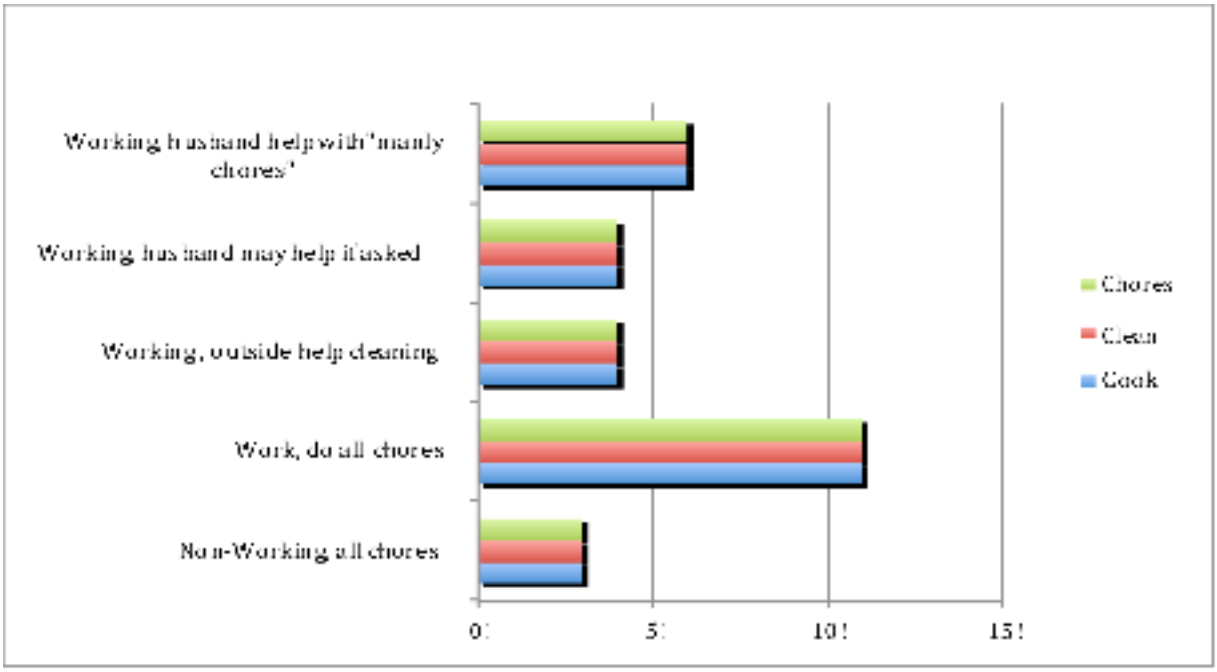
[198] Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, 218.

Figure 6: Household Chores Completed by Married Women



Most informants are career women; only three are stay-at-home moms who have more than one child. In most traditional Jewish households, "For a male to use his spare time assisting in the female domain of domestic work and child care would be *bittul Torah*, a waste of time better spent in study. The woman who freed her husband for such extra study time accrued honor for her passive contribution of Torah learning." [199]

Eleven of the women say it is her job to cook, clean and do the household chores. Half of the married women say they perform all of the household duties. Four of those women also say that it is the woman's expectation to take on those responsibilities upon getting married, and that her husband would help if asked. Four women say that they are in charge of the household duties, but also hired outside help for cleaning. The remaining six women say that their husbands

[199] Bonnie Morris, *Lubavitcher Women in America*, 103.

help with different chores: grilling, taking out the garbage, doing laundry, washing the floors and completing other miscellaneous tasks. A.S. describes her duties as “everything except the cholent [traditional Shabbat meal] and the cleaning lady.” Every household divides its labor differently depending on wealth, size of the household and home and involvement of the husband.

Equality is an evolving concept in Orthodoxy and is different for each individual. Women in suburbia understand gender roles as a defining attribute to their observant community. Gender relations help shape how individual women perceive themselves, their family, and their neighbors. It also exhibits the diversity of religious behavior in conjunction with the role in society and family the women choose to take based on religious conviction and individual choice.

4.2 INFORMANTS ON FEMINISM

4.2.1 “C.S.”

At age 19, C.S. is one of the youngest participants in the study. She has bold eyebrows, bright blue eyes and long brown hair. For our conversation, she appears in three-quarter length sleeves, a skirt and sandals. She belongs to Young Israel, the pluralistic Orthodox synagogue in East Brunswick. She labels herself Modern Orthodox “right” or *Machmir* Orthodoxy moving towards the right. Her choice to call herself Modern Orthodox is reflected in both her career and ideology about the value of an academic education from a non-Jewish institution while also maintaining

one's values in the home. She observes the Shabbat, customs of modesty, the kosher laws. She also refrains from engaging in physical contact with men.

C.S. grew up Orthodox. She attended an Orthodox day school and claims that she was more religious than her peers. She eventually went to Israel to study at seminary and now is at an Ivy League college. In her free time, she maintains a prayer schedule, reads books on Jewish self-improvement and Jewish history, and prays. She feels this is the right direction for her life. She speaks about adopting this lifestyle during her senior year of high school, when she decided that this was really what she wanted for herself. She feels that her parents always gave her the space to make her own decisions, though they sent her to Orthodox Jewish day schools. She has always respected this freedom.

She is the first generation in her family to be a FFB (Orthodox-from-birth). She says, "My mom didn't grow up *frum*." Her mother did not go to day school. C.S.'s ideas about religion differ from that of her mother. Her mother will wear pants and tank tops. Her mother, at one time, covered her hair with a wig daily, but now only wears a hat to synagogue. There is a mutual respect between mother and daughter regarding their disparate religious beliefs.

Her mother was an attorney at a large prominent law firm and, although she shifted to the Jewish non-profit sector, she has become less religious along with C.S.'s father. C.S. says that, "I saw my mom work full-time and still raise three kids. I think it is definitely possible." Both her parents worked while she was growing up. She says that women tend to be more involved in child rearing than men, but there is still equality. In C.S.'s home, it was the woman's role to raise the children, even when her mother had a demanding job. This was not based on expectations of Orthodoxy, but American middle class gender stereotypes. Coincidentally, he is also an attorney,

but the same expectations were not placed on him. Her mother had to balance both career and family.

At her Ivy League college, C.S. notes that many of the other women who also came from Orthodox backgrounds might follow the religious commandments, but do not necessarily believe in them. Although, she does not offer specific evidence to support this allegation, she defines this practice as "non-authentic" Judaism. For C.S., it is important to not only perform the action, but also to understand and acknowledge what you are doing. Perhaps this is because her parents are not as religious as they were when C.S. was younger, and she has chosen, instead, to take the steps to become more observant, similar to religious standards of the Orthodox day schools she attended.

What is most interesting about C.S. is that she is introspective about Orthodoxy, more thoughtful about religious Jews than the majority of the other informants. She sees herself at the forefront of a dialogue between disparate Jewish denominations on campus. She says that it was important to be open-minded to different practices and everyone's level of ritual participation.

C.S., at 19, does not yet see the dichotomy between the framework of the traditional place of the Orthodox synagogue and spiritual life and her newfound place on a college campus and in an urban environment. She believes women possess equality because she was born into a home where she was told that she could achieve anything she desired. She expects that same type of life with her current relationship, and for it to continue once she is married. She also anticipates that her children will learn that same belief system, as both men and women should be equal throughout their studies, life and culture.

She notes that she is dating seriously now, but is not dating for marriage yet. Her friends are still in the college stage of their lives. She currently has a long distance relationship with one

young man who also adheres to the values of Orthodox Judaism. When discussing her future, C.S. states:

> My parents gave me a lot of choices, [I am] very independent, trustworthy, not concerned. I am happy that I turned out that way [Orthodox]. I am also [happy] that my kids will turn out a certain way. I think I will innately impart certain values, and I would hope they would be good values. I want them to go to an Orthodox day school. I want them to go to an Orthodox seminary and yeshiva. I also want them to have non-Orthodox programs in life, so they are exposed to things other than Orthodoxy, like baseball, to see people different than they are.

She has constructed a concrete meaning to her religious expression, and how it will impact, not only her existence, but that of the next generation.

According to C.S., the goal is to become educated, have a family, and create financial stability. Her career goal is to become a nurse, and this will only require a bachelor's degree. She expects that her hours can be adjusted for keeping Shabbat, and she intends to work part-time while raising a large family. She picked this career because she feels it is family-friendly. For her, this will provide the balance that she needs in her life. She also says this lifestyle may include a house in the suburbs with two to three cars, a cleaning service, day schools for her children, vacations at kosher establishments and Jewish camp for her children. In reality, C.S.'s expectations and views for lifestyle may change in time or she may alter her religious values in the face of financial obligations. Her views represent how she envisions the future as a college student.

C.S. plans for her children to take part in non-religious activities, such as sports leagues. She will not allow her kids to play on Shabbat or to participate in any pluralistic Jewish leagues that hold games on the Sabbath. C.S. believes that women create social, economic and community changes within Orthodoxy. She says that, "The men don't care as much. The women

are really passionate and put up a fight about it." She helps create women's study groups and ritual groups on her campus along with volunteer opportunities.

4.2.2 "G.M."

I first met G.M., at a charity "scoop for youth" held at the local ice cream store. She was the center of attention. As the Rebbetzin of her synagogue, she commands notice and respect. She has an engaging personality. G.M. is tall with a short brown *sheitel* (wig) and a dark complexion. She appeared in long sleeves with a long skirt. She is thirty-five years old.

G.M. first moved to the community thirteen years ago when her husband accepted the position of Assistant Rabbi at an Orthodox synagogue in Highland Park.[200] He is now the Head Rabbi of the synagogue. She considers herself Modern Orthodox Centrist, although the synagogue caters to the Modern Orthodox left followers. It is also known for welcoming a younger, more liberal and affluent crowd. G.M. observes all of the laws regarding family separation and also teaches classes on the subject. She keeps all of the pre-requisite laws of a Rabbi's wife: Shabbat, the laws of modesty and *kashrut* (kosher).

G.M. has always lived an observant lifestyle. Her mother was a teacher at an Orthodox day school. G.M. was a member of an Orthodox synagogue and attended Orthodox day school from grades K-12. She went on to attend a *Haredi* seminary for one year after high school. She attended college at an Orthodox Jewish university and met her husband when she was nineteen years old. Between college and graduate school, they married.

G.M. has four children, ranging between the ages of five and twelve. In her household, she is the primary person who cooks and does the chores, such as laundry and errands. G.M. is the typical Orthodox "soccer mom" (literally and metaphorically). She also teaches *Kallah*

[200] 201 In order to provide confidentiality, the synagogue will not be named. It is located in Highland Park.

(brides) at the synagogue. She holds various duties as a mentor and Rebbetzin in the community, bringing her children to their various activities and managing her household.[201]

Her original intention was to go into a more intensive, science-related career, but she decided that it would not fit into her lifestyle. G.M. decided, instead, to follow one of the "five traditional careers for Orthodox women." [202] She chose the profession of physical therapist based on the demands of time commitment. She compared her work schedule and time it would take to complete her master's degree against the time it would take her to become a physician's assistant, as she originally planned. She feels that a practicing career as a physician's assistant is too rigorous a field for a woman who planned to head an Orthodox household.

She does not have a television in her home, but she does watch Netflix on the family computer. She believes that, "It is hard to erase an image once you have seen it." She thinks that everyone should monitor what he or she sees. She enjoys watching crime shows, such as "Law and Order," reality TV, extreme weight loss shows and other CBS programs. She allows her children to watch Netflix only on the weekends, except for Shabbat.

She sends her kids to the Modern Orthodox day school. She chose this school because the other Orthodox schools did not stress secular studies (non-Judaic) for the boys. It is known as the better of the two local day schools for college preparation. Her husband also teaches middle school Judaic studies there. She says that she feels that her family is more religious than most of the other families at the school.

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[201] *Kallah* classes are bridal classes for women who are becoming brides. These classes explain all of the rules and regulations between man and wife and the place of the mikvah in family life. Classes also review the rituals regarding family relations in detail.

[202] These include: physical therapist, occupational therapist, teacher, pre-school teacher, and social worker.

Education plays a big part in the formation of the Orthodox Jewish identity phase. "People select schools not only for the substance and the values inherent in the education they provide, but also for the social ties and the identity they generate and support." [203] She hopes that the next generation will continue them. She wants her children to marry other Orthodox Jews and to continue learning in their homes.

For her, the marriage is a partnership. She says, "We both recognize that one will rise when the other cannot." She gives the impression that she manages the household by herself. She says that her schedule lends itself to that because she works part-time. Her husband frequently lends a hand by helping her with the chores and does not expect her to do everything. The two have divided the children's subjects; she helps with math and science, while her husband assists with Judaic studies. G.M. believes that men and women are equal, but different in Orthodoxy.

She says that she doesn't think that equal has to mean the same. She claims, "I am not a feminist; I don't look for reasons to be upset with my life. I am very happy. I am not looking for roles to be the same as a man. On Shabbat morning, when my husband leaves, I am grateful to be in my PJs." She is content with this separation of roles. As far as gender roles, G.M. falls into the category of separate, but equal, within what Tamar Ross might call Stage Two of feminist consciousness. She labels herself a "non-feminist." She upholds the separate, but equal argument. She finds it liberating to not having to honor certain time restrictions. For instance, Orthodox men pray three times a day: in the morning, evening and at sunset, and she feels glad that she does not have to meet those obligations.

G.M. likes the idea of asking questions of her husband and other male figures about religious subjects. Currently, "the chain of deference places a spectrum of male authorities

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[203] Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials*,137.

between woman and God." [204] She feels that this helps strengthen each set of relationships and roles within the community, with the males dedicated to ritual and the females to the home. It gives each a chance to shine in his or her sphere, inside or outside the home (although each takes part in both realms).

G.M. understands Orthodoxy to be generational, in that it should be communicated to future generations through schools and the synagogues. Mordechai Breuer says, "…Orthodoxy's image of itself was that of bearer and guardian of the ancient Jewish faith and tradition."[205] G.M. views Orthodoxy in that light, as she hopes to continue the religion from previous generations and pass it down.

Her expectation for the future is that her children will go to college and become educated. She wants her children to obtain bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, or even beyond. She cannot imagine supporting them financially or in a *kollel*, a school for full-time or part-time study of Talmud for married men. She says, "I hope they stay Orthodox. I hope I can be that lucky, that they stay Orthodox, no guarantees though… sending them to Jewish day school, yeshiva one to two years." She sees the importance of living within an Orthodox community. For G.M, choosing the correct marriage partner for her children will help ensure their futures as Orthodox Jews and perpetuate the traditions, which she identifies as the true path to realizing God's will and life's goals.

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[204] Morris, *Lubavitcher Women in America*, 133.

[205] Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*. Vii.

4.2.2 "N.S."

N.S. is well known in the under forty-five Orthodox community. She is twenty-nine years old with long dark hair and an olive complexion. She often volunteers to help create community events with others. She is one of the monthly Oneg group organizers, a group that caters to Jews between 22-45 years of age who meet monthly for Shabbat and other activities. The Oneg group is open to members with a diversity of religious beliefs, but most of the members happen to be Orthodox.

N.S. is a member of the Sephardic synagogue, Etz Chaim. Her father is Sephardic, and she is a BT. She considers herself to be at the level of Modern Orthodox "left." She keeps kosher in the home, observes Shabbat and the holidays and prays daily. Since she only eats at kosher establishments, she is unable to dine with her non-Jewish friends in restaurants of their choice.

N.S. grew up in a Conservative synagogue and went to synagogue every Saturday. She went through Hebrew school and had a Bat Mitzvah. She reads Hebrew. Her family kept kosher in the home, but ate dairy and fish outside of their home. She went to a public school for grades K-12 and then to a non-Jewish college. She eventually went on to a prestigious law school.

She values her academic non-religious education. N.S. never had the opportunity to attend seminary and has no formal, Jewish education past age thirteen. She wishes she had found the time to spend a year in Israel. She says that, at that time in her life, she didn't realize that traveling to Israel to explore Judaism was an option. She admits that most likely she has large holes in her Jewish understanding of Orthodoxy. Most of her Jewish education has been self-taught through books. She describes her course of study as being completely dependent on her own whims and desires.

She has been dating a man for a few months whom she met through a mutual friend. She says that most people in her community date from three to six months prior to marriage, but she thinks that she will date longer than that. She says that she is looking for someone who is on the same religious level as she is. She notes that there are many more women looking for men to marry rather than the other way around. N.S. feels significant pressure to get married. She emphasizes that a lot of men are spoiled by what they are looking for and what they expect to find.

N.S. feels torn between mainstream American and Orthodox ideas about dating. She says that she hopes to become engaged soon, but she has career, marriage and lifestyle standards that stem from her non-religious background, and she is not willing to abandon them. She is willing to date either a BT or a man who has been raised religious. She realizes that, although she would have preferred to marry at an earlier age, her dream of marrying in her mid-twenties has passed her by. She now realizes having four to five children, although still possible, would be difficult.

In regards to her beliefs about gender relations, N.S. does not feel that Orthodoxy offers gender equality. She further explains:

> I think women are expected to do more, work and take care of the kids. I think Judaism is innately more patriarchal. Growing up less religious, I am more feminist. Some *shuls* have women upstairs, in the back with a curtain. Women are encouraged to come to *shul*. I like the glass *mechitza*. As a woman, I want to be seen and heard. I think there is a place in Orthodoxy for feminism. There are ways to be respectful.

As a BT, she feels her views on gender are informed by her past. N.S. is representative of the eleven women who did not feel equal to men, but she is the only BT in the group.

She thinks that women in Orthodoxy can be traditional and can have a place in the synagogue, where they sit alongside men, even if they need to be separated by a *mechitza.*

[206]N.S. does not feel comfortable with mixed seating. She does not advocate women reading from the Torah nor any sort of egalitarian changes. According to N.S., this does not undermine the status of either and makes both equal, while providing them with identical ritual space within the synagogue. Making a complimentary and aesthetically pleasing physical space is important in how someone perceives themselves and others.

Although N.S. is a leader of the Oneg group, she is active in forming a network of individuals that create community-wide events targeting all Jews: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform combined. She helps to bring together the different factions of the Jewish community. Although the majority of the people who frequent the events are Orthodox, they rotate between the various Orthodox synagogues and the Conservative synagogue in Highland Park. Each event is open to all of the different Jews in the area.

She explains that, at events, it is the men, not the women, who command the crowd, who welcome the guests and who give the speeches. Their wives and the single women stand to the side. The women sometimes chime in with a few words, but they never give an entire speech. From personal observation, N.S. works the crowd by talking to individuals; she does not address the crowd.

N.S. is a BT who welcomes all types of people into her life. As a single woman in her late twenties, her social life is centered on being invited out. She has created a social world in Orthodoxy which involves males and females, couples and singles, all in a Modern Orthodox, liberal context that allows males and females to meet on their own. She thinks it is important for young single people and young married couples in the suburbs to have a social outlet. She sees two distinct social circles for people with children and for those without.

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[206] This can be made out of a variety of materials.

N.S. considers herself a “private” Orthodox Jew. She plans to someday wear a hat in synagogue after she is married. She states, “It is not how you dress, but, rather, what goes on in your head that someone can tell if you are a Jew.” She is unsure whether she will follow the mitzvah of family separation and does not plan on having two separate beds. The way she observes the rituals reflects her personal beliefs about religion. Accordingly, everything she does has to do with inner thought, not external behavior or appearance.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS ON FEMINISM

The women of this community are divided over whether they are ‘equal’ in Orthodoxy. The creation of tolerance and a diversified religious population is born out of different perspectives on women’s roles in this society. In the United States, women were afforded equal rights in the 1960’s through laws focused on the workplace, reproduction, ability to participate in juries, and opportunity for an Ivy League education. However, Orthodox Jewish women in these two townships in 2013-2014 see themselves as: ‘equal’, ‘separate but equal,’ and ‘not equal.’ In this study, nineteen women perceive themselves as ‘equal’ and nineteen define themselves as ‘separate but equal.’ This totals 38 women at three-quarters of the study. In the participants’ view, both of the categories have positive connotations. Eleven of the women say they feel they are ‘not equal.’ [207] This is less than a quarter of the women.

Three perspectives are C.S., G.M., and N.S. C.S., the Ivy-League student, was raised Orthodox and believes that women are ‘equal’. Her parents were attorneys at a large law firm

[207] One woman said she did not know.

working many hours, but her mother left that lifestyle for Jewish non-profit work. Training to be a nurse, C.S. feels that it is the women's responsibility to take care of the home. This is a case of "doing gender," of maintaining separate spheres of women's responsibility.

The Modern Orthodox G.M. was raised in the *Haredi* system. She has four children, works part-time, and is a pillar of the community. She originally wanted to pursue a more intensive career, but she felt it was not realistic with her intended family and communal responsibilities. She feels that women are "separate but equal." G.M. says that women are intrinsically different (biological determinism) than men, and their responsibilities and duties are not the same; therefore, men and women cannot be identical. In her view, each gender is set to act a certain way, and this reinforces roles.

N.S. is a BT. She calls herself Modern Orthodox "left." In her opinion, women are 'not equal' in traditional Judaism because they do not have identical space to pray, even if there is *mechitza*, (the divider between men and women in the synagogue). She says that most men's sections are much larger and more luxurious. She also believes that women's voices should be heard in informal gatherings, and that they should not always defer to the men. N.S. is in line with the earliest feminists in the 1970's; she is calling into question the typical women's place in the synagogue. The earliest feminists adopted the term "gender" in order to question universalistic claims surrounding men's and women's roles within society.[208] She believes there should be more expectations, such as increased participation, for women in the ritual space. If the women participate in a different way, the boundaries will change.

As a growing number of women are devoting themselves to scholarship, study, and interpretation of Orthodoxy, women are becoming more involved in the second sphere, outside

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[208] Malti-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*, 629.

the home. Traditionally, especially in suburban homes, women stay home and raise the children. But in 2013-14, this is no longer the case, as there are only three stay-at-home mothers (out of fifty women). This change is shaping a generation, how they run their households and how this influences their children. Although these women may follow the lead of their husbands on Jewish law, they are not outwardly source-based (in Jewish law) by communicating why they follow the laws.

According to the fifty women in their suburban communities, the women chose these settings as an ideal place to live and raise a family. They take part in the spiritual community through their own worship and with their families. For those women who already have children, they consider living in suburbia as a backdrop to accomplish an affordable Orthodox lifestyle. They find a trade-off in the comparatively low cost of housing, food and day school against the trials and influences of settling in an interfaith neighborhood inherent to a suburban setting.

The suburban lifestyle also allows Orthodox women to assert a variety of ideals and to have divergent opinions from one another on issues regarding gender equality. This aids in the promotion of heterogeneous performance of practices within traditional Judaism, as women like C.S. and G.M. are content with their place within Orthodoxy, while N.S. maintained she is 'not equal.' East Brunswick and Highland Park are townships that respect their populations regardless of their level of piety. This is evident in East Brunswick by Young Israel's openness toward all Orthodox Jews and in Highland Park by how the community adapts to function as a one neighborhood with many religious differences in a small geographic enclave. [209] Both celebrate their diversity in different ways, East Brunswick as one main synagogue and Highland Park as one township, offering both in the spirit of pluralism and tolerance in the suburbs.

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[209] Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of pluralism in East Brunswick.

5.0 THE MODEST SELF

Modesty is a crucial part of a woman's Orthodox Jewish experience. Important Jewish laws and customs for Orthodox women all emphasize the adherence to *tzinius*, which is generally translated as "modesty." *Tzinius* (*tziniut* is the Modern Israeli and Sephardic pronunciation) is understood by one of the normative texts used by Orthodox Jewish women as a state of "not having a need for external definition of self, not being moved by what is happening externally."[210] It is internal beauty, not solely based upon outward features. Those who depend on others' thoughts for reinforcement will lack this quality.

In this chapter, modesty in suburban Orthodoxy is discussed in three forms: clothing and hair covering, touch, and the laws of *Shomeret Negiah*. I explain the background of the relevant laws, followed by a breakdown of how the community interprets the rules, in order to show how individual understanding of these particular rules helps to facilitate an individualized practice of Orthodox Judaism in suburbia. This is followed by how three women understand modesty: S.S., in how she adopts the laws as a *ba'alat teshuva*, S.F., who continues to interpret the laws from a *kollel Haredi* upbringing, and, finally, L.C., who confides that "no one" follows the commandments.

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[210] Heller, *More Precious Than Pearls*, 43.

Tzinius comes from the root *tzin'a*, which means "privacy." It encapsulates a woman's thoughts, speech, actions and clothing. One contemporary book on modesty for Orthodox women suggests that "the organs defining a female are inside [whereas a male's are largely outside] and it teaches us about the female soul: A woman's female spiritual expression more than a man's, is meant to be internal and private."[211] This is based upon the notion that a woman is built internally, and, therefore, she must express herself privately. One of the textual bases for this is from Psalm 45:15: "All the glory of the king's daughter is within." Many of the modesty rules have been derived from this verse. The ideal of the community is to follow this process from a very young age, as a girl is praised for her qualities, rather than her appearance. Parents will talk about a girl's *neshama* (soul) or how she has displayed the *middot* (character traits). An Orthodox woman is expected to protect herself and her virtue through discretion of her exterior self. According to Lynn Schrieber, "The parameters of *tziniut* apply most stringently to women. The reason that Jewish women are encouraged to follow these practices is to de-emphasize external qualities so that we may more clearly recognize the special, internal characteristics of an individual."[212] In this value system, the value of a woman is based on her internal characteristics: how she acts towards others, the values she portrays and education that she holds.

Stephanie Levine analyzed Chabad adolescents by addressing the meaning of dressing in a modest fashion. Girls in this community were supposed to see their glory as radiating to the outside; therefore, they must cover it up and save it only for their husbands. Modest dress helped

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[211] Gila Manolson, *Outside/Inside: A Fresh Look at Tziniut*, 55

[212] Lynne Schreiber, Ed. *Hide & Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, 21.

give the girls a sense of community, comfort, and direction, as part of Chabad. They were taking part in these religious groups' choices on fashion and observance.[213]

Modest attire for women includes covering the thighs, upper arm and the area below the collarbone. Covering the aforementioned areas is essential, for these are considered *eruvah* or sensual areas. [214] A woman must wear a skirt because pants are considered "male garb," as they show off the leg-outline. A woman may also cover her legs with tights and her feet with enclosed shoes. Married women cover their hair with a *tichel* (cloth), a *sheitel* (wig), or a *fall* (a wig that starts at the nape of head, usually with a headband).

Hair is a way for women to convey their ideas on religious practice. It visually exhibits to the community their level of observance and to which group within Orthodoxy they belong. [215] It helps to enable conformity for individuals and aid in separation of beliefs within Orthodoxy.

Differences in Orthodox women's hair coverings may depend on whether a woman is Sephardi or Ashkenazi, and on the woman's Rabbi and customs. It is currently the Hasidic custom to wear a *sheitel* with an additional covering such as a hat. [216] In February 2013, the Chief Rabbi of Kfar Chabad, Rabbi Mordechai Ashkenazi, issued a guideline on modesty that stated married women should wear wigs, instead of *tichels* to cover their hair. Wigs cover everything including their sideburns. The wigs should not be made of long loose hair; they should be a visible head covering, and their length should go longer than the shoulders. He also

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[213] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks and Merrymakers*, 196; 198.

[214] Schreiber, Hide and Seek, 21.

[215] Amy Milligan, Hair, Headware and Orthodox Jewish Women, 122.

[216] Schreiber, *Hide and Seek*. 22 This is considered a *minhag* (custom).

stated that all unmarried girls should wear their hair pulled back and not long.[217] This reflects a *Haredi* opinion. In these communities, the Rabbis have no police power; therefore, their power comes solely from community pressure. Berger contends, "That pressure, however, can sometimes be quite powerful in sects that have shadowy modesty committees, those self-proclaimed enforcers probably operating with the *Rebbe's* tacit approval, who may scold a woman for wearing a turban that does not conceal all her hair…" [218]

Rabbi Dovid Lebovits, formerly of Kollel Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, an Ultra-Orthodox leaning institution in Brooklyn New York, and more recently the Rabbinic supervisor of Kof-k a kosher supervision company, stated that a woman does not have to cover her hair in her own home, and she may have up to two inches of hair visible (a *tefach*), facial hair, outside the home. [219] He said that it is permissible for a woman to wear a headband with a *fall*, (hairpiece, a three-quarter wig). [220] A woman is not allowed to wear a *sheitel* made from her own hair. He said that each individual should consult with their own *Rav* (Rabbi) to find out what types of hair covering they are permitted to wear in their own community. Rabbi Lebovits ruled that, "lately it has become common for many women to leave a lot of their hair uncovered, so it is permitted according to *Halakha*."[221] This particular statement, posted in a newsletter, was distributed in both paper form and online to synagogues throughout Lakewood, NJ, Flatbush, NY, the Five Towns (in Long Island), Far Rockaway and Queens (NY).

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[217] "Chabad Rabbi's Modesty Letter On Married Women's Wigs and Unmarried Women's Hair Raises Hackles," last modified February 4, 2013.

[218] Berger, The Pious Ones, 242.

[219] Rabbi Moshe Dovid Lebovits, "Hair Covering for Women" Halachically Speaking. Vol. 7 (9): 1-12.

[220] Ibid, 7.

[221] Ibid, 7.

Samuel Heilman has detailed the differences in head covering depending on the level of religious conviction in contemporary Israel. He found that the colors and types of covering were determining factors in which group a woman belongs. For instance, the most strictly observant women shaved their heads and wore a black kerchief, while others wore patterned *tichels* over trimmed hair, colored or knit caps with the hair sticking out, or wigs with and without hats on top (real hair wigs were for the more religiously liberal and fake hair were for the more religiously conservative). [222] According to the Orthodox women surveyed, head covering and modesty helped to create a relationship based on a woman's inner qualities, rather than her outer qualities. By focusing on these inner qualities, the genders got to know one another through dating and during marriage without extraneous distractions. Modesty and head covering also promulgated the laws regarding touch, known as *Shomer Negiah*.

Orthodox *Halakha* pulls its laws directly from text. [223] It is interpreted that any physical relationship between male and female must be within the bounds of marriage. The response by *Halakhic* authorities warn that men and women are not permitted to touch once a woman is above the age of menstruation, because of the chance of an illicit relationship. A second component is added against *hirhur* (inappropriate sexual thoughts), which is distinguished from other acts like hugging, kissing and holding hands. The laws of *yichud* also prohibits males and females from being alone in a room together.[224] *Shomer Negiah* does not apply to practitioners in

[222] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 121.

[223] Locally, an area can be influenced by *minhag*, the customs in the interpretation of the laws by the Rabbis.

[224] The *Yichud* laws are complex and define who a man and woman may be alone with after the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

the medical profession or any other profession that requires Orthodox women to physically touch people of the opposite sex. It also is waived in the case of assisting any person in grave danger.

The issue of shaking hands between the sexes is contested within Orthodox communities. It is said that one might embarrass a person if refusing a handshake. According to Leviticus 25:17, "You shall not wrong one another." Nevertheless, the views vary significantly regarding what is permissible. A ruling by Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, head of Petach Tikvah hesder *yeshiva* says, "If a woman sticks out her hand, a man may shake it as not to cause her embarrassment."[225] He concluded that this is not an "expression of closeness," [226] that it is permissible, when offered a hand by another. Many modern Orthodox institutions follow this interpretation.[227]

A more stringent opinion states that no touching whatsoever is allowed. Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon says that, when soldiers of the opposite sex come into contact, the male soldier should not initiate the handshake. If a female initiates the handshake, the male "should elegantly refuse… but if that isn't possible, then you may return the handshake." [228] He continued with his explanation, saying that, if a male and female are in regular contact, the male should explain to the female at once that they shouldn't shake hands.[229]

There is a series of laws that govern marital relationships. *Taharat Hamishpacha*, the family purity laws, regulates the menstrual calendar for husbands and wives. Men and women should not touch during a woman's menstrual period, until after she immerses herself in the

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[225] "Hesder Rabbi: Men May Shake Women's Hand," last modified November 1, 2010.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid. This Rabbi has also ruled in past that women may be more included in services and in shul life and that blind people may touch their dating partners.

[228] "Torah Musings," last modified November 27, 2014.

[229] Ibid.

mikvah (the cleansing pool) because she is *tum'ah* (impure); thus, men and women are only allowed to touch during the *tehorah* (pure) periods.

Leviticus 15:19 states, "When a woman has a discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her impurity for seven days; whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening." Leviticus 15:25, continues by saying that, if a man lies with the woman during her status of impurity, it will be communicated to him and last seven days. In order to protect from this corruption of purity, Leviticus warns, "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanliness." Thus, a rule comes through Leviticus to counteract any misinterpretation of the previous verse. It is not acceptable for a man to become contaminated.

The Talmud also commands, "Let her be unclean for seven days so that she will be as beloved to her husband as in the hour when she first entered the bridal canopy… because a man may become overly familiar with his wife and thus be repelled by her."[230] According to Jewish law a woman is prohibited from intercourse and physical contact of any kind with the opposite sex during menstruation. There is a prohibition on touching, handing of objects to one another and avoiding all sexually attractive relations. For the entire time of *Niddah*, a man and woman cannot engage in any contact, even if it is not direct. This is realized by a physical separation between a husband and wife for the days of menses and seven consecutive days afterwards while the woman checks for additional fluids. Each party shall sleep in a separate bed, and the woman will be alone in the marital bed. They are entitled to continue to co-habitat without isolation, but must follow stringent behavioral modifications.[231]

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[230] *The Talmud Bavli*, Volume 2: Niddah. New York: Mesorah Publishers. Niddah 2a.

[231] The woman, if she is strictly following the law, will also do a certain amount of checks before going to the

Ideally, twelve hours before menstruation begins, all physical contact will stop. This interpretation is in opposition to Shammai in the Talmud that calls for a cessation of physical contact when menstruation actually begins. The Rabbis read and explain the text for the Orthodox. There is some trepidation on behalf of many of the women to contact the Rabbis directly about feminine matters. For instance, a woman may be reluctant to contact her Rabbi if she has a question about birth control, or whether she is or is not "kosher" to go to the *mikvah*.[232]

Tzinius (modesty), *Shomer Negiah* (no touching between genders), and *Taharat Hamishpacha* (family purity) are three sets of laws that help regulate an Orthodox woman's life. In their most basic form, *tzinius* are the laws of self; *Shomer Negiah* are the laws of self and one other; and *Taharat Hamishpacha* are the laws pertaining to the family relationship.

5.1 SELF, OTHERS, AND FAMILY TODAY

The outline of these laws involves clothing, touching and regulation of the body. This section offers an explanation of how the laws of modesty affect gender relations and women's roles, as told by the women in this study. It shows the various interpretations of the Jewish laws and customs that Orthodox women have adopted in suburbia. One of the major defining factors of the Orthodox Jewish community is modesty: how she looks, acts, speaks, and how she interacts and

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mikvah, change the colors of her undergarments (white or black), and prepare for the mikvah in a detailed fashion. If she has any questions, she will consult a Rabbi through her husband.

[232] Underwear may be brought to the rabbi if there is a question about the color of spotting and whether the woman can go to the *mikvah*. It is considered best to go to the *mikvah* as soon as possible.

expresses herself to the outer world.[233] Modesty is one of the factors separating Orthodox women from the non-Orthodox Jewish population. Out of the fifty women in this study, forty-six say they follow some of the modesty laws. Ideas on observance of modesty laws cut across age groups, marital status, children, and level of education and training depending on each individual. Two answer that they wear pants and one says, "I am not, but I am in my mind. I do not wear low cut shirts. It is subjective. I wear jeans."

The women use modesty as a way to promote their status as pious women. A woman's experience as a member of that gender is illustrated through her dress (women are not permitted to wear pants for instance) and behavior.[234] This can be presented in overt displays, such as head coverings and clothing.

In regards to hair coverings, twenty-one married women observe this custom. Eleven wear *sheitels* (wigs) as their primary head covering. Five women cover their heads with a *tichel* (scarf), but switch this off with a *sheitel* for Shabbat and holidays. Six women wear a hat on Shabbat and holidays, but do not cover their hair otherwise.

Shomer Negiah is a contested topic within contemporary Orthodoxy. The women do not want their peers, neighbors or community to know if they break tradition. While conversing with a woman in a public place, informants often pause before answering this question, waiting for reassurance that everything is confidential. Good values are important and not adhering to the tenets of tradition is breaking laws that people cherish. Depending on which synagogue one attends and with whom they associate, this could hurt their social status in the community.

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[233] If there has been a general break down in the following of these laws across the board, then this is outside the bonds of this study. There has been no consistent research to show evidence that this has occurred.

[234] Malti-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*, 628-629.

Fourteen women reported that they are strictly *Shomeret Negiah*: they do not touch anyone of the opposite sex outside the bounds of marriage. Of the fourteen woman, twelve are FFB with five women in their twenties, eight in their thirties and one in her forties. Three of these women are not married. Another eight women are willing to follow a slightly more lax ruling and indicate they are willing to shake hands with someone, so as not to embarrass them. Two of these women are BT's.

Some of these women will also shake hands with a relative, such as a cousin, who is not religious. This second category, of women, are those who base their observance on the principle of *derech chiba* (touching in an affectionate way). They are willing to touch others, but only in a non-sexual manner. Of these women: one woman is in her teens, five in their twenties, one in her thirties and one in her forties. Five of the women are not married and three are married.

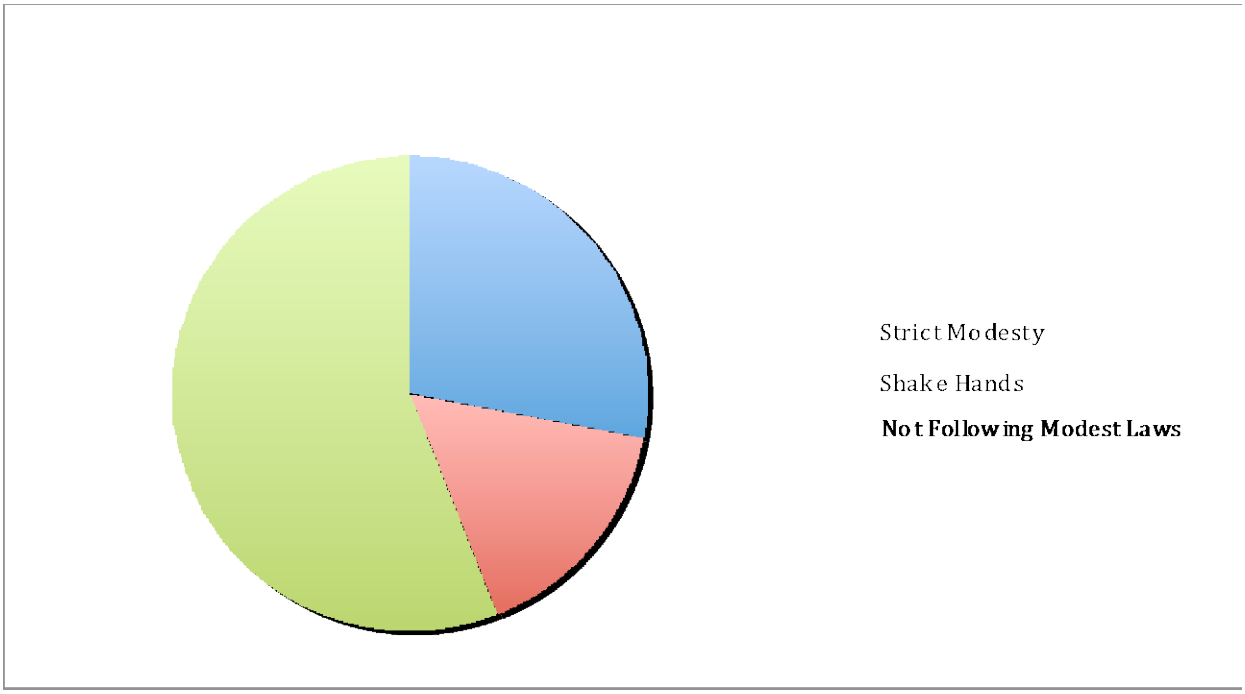
Twenty-eight out of the fifty women do not follow the laws of men and women touching. Over half of my respondents are creating their own ideas about gender relations and touch. Two of these woman are in their teens, thirteen in their twenties, eight in their thirties and four in the their forties. Nineteen of the women are FFB's while nine are BT's or converts. Exactly half of this group is married. Some of the women who are not *Shomeret Negiah* are willing to refrain from sexual intercourse until marriage. One of these women says she kept "*Shomer*" until she was engaged. In this instance, she followed the principles publicly, but, privately, did what she wanted. Another woman says that she lived with her husband before they were married.

The sociologist Samuel Heilman observes, "In traditionalist thinking, the new is never improved, only corrupted; our forbearers were greater than us and what they did must serve as

the model for us today, tomorrow and forever." [235] The women in this study make a conscious choice between keeping the tradition or not when it comes to *Shomeret Negiah*. The *Haredi* perspective is that traditional Jews should follow the laws to the most observant level. Therefore, any adjustment or accommodation, in terms of shaking hands, hugging only relatives, and so on, is a liberalization of the text. In spite of the fact that Orthodox Judaism prides itself on learning, following the written word, and interpreting the laws by the Rabbis, these women are ignoring the clergy and the books that represent the moral preserve for their culture. The women are making decisions based on personal feelings and non-Jewish mores. They are expressing their individualism.

[235] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 13.

Figure 7: Shomer Negiah and Modesty Laws



The *Taharat Hamishpacha* laws governing family purity help to regulate the calendar in each household. The Family Purity Laws are a complex set of rules. The ritual of going to the *mikvah* and observing the connected laws has been a way to connect Jews to traditional Jewry and family purity. By the mid 1800's, American Orthodoxy saw Jews straying from the precepts of traditional Judaism. A study was conducted in 1850 at Anshe Chesed synagogue in Buffalo, NY. The result found 200 women attended the mikvah out of 4,000 families polled.[236] A follow- up in the 1920's, found observance was at a low level due to the "influence of the Reform movement, lack of proper rabbinic leadership, the acculturation of the younger generation along with the

[236] Joshua Hoffman, "The Institution of the Mikvah in America." In *Total Immersion: A Mikvah Anthology*, ed. Slonim, 81.

move to new neighborhoods in which Conservative synagogues were dominant, and the unclean state in which the *mikvahs* were maintained."[237] In response, during the 1920's and 1930's, the Orthodox Union began to produce pamphlets to educate the public.

One of the Chabad movement's first initiatives, led by Rebbe Joseph Isaac Schneerson (6th *Rebbe*), [238] was building *mikvahs.* It was started in the 1920's and continued through the 1950's upon his death. This was followed in 1975 by Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson's (7th *Rebbe* and final *Rebbe* to date) commitment to build a *mikvah* in every community that requested one. There was a revival in *mikvah* attendance after the Holocaust, due to the influx of traditional survivors, and then, in the 1960's, with the BT movement.[239]

Towards the end of the 1980's, Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen surveyed a thousand women in New York City and found that ninety-nine percent of the Orthodox women identified themselves as "traditionally observant." Additionally, seventy-nine percent of those who say they are Centrist Orthodox attend the *mikvah* regularly.[240] According to Heilman and Cohen, "…[W]ithin the Orthodox community, observance of the family purity laws is on the increase."[241] Not all of the women follow the complex laws of family purity to its exact specifications. Some women go to the *mikvah* and abstain from sexual relations, but do not do the full number of required checks-in, do not wear black and white undergarments and do not have two separate beds during the period of *niddah.* Others choose to follow the minimal set of requirements. Of the twenty-one married women within the study, eighteen follow the family

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[237] Ibid, 84-85.

[238] An alternate spelling for his name is Yosef Yitzchak.

[239] Hoffman, "The Institution of the Mikvah in America," 88.

[240] Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials*, 60.

[241] Hoffman, "The Institution of the Mikvah in America," 89.

purity restrictions. Three married women do not follow family purity. They include: an FFB who is a member of the Centrist Orthodox synagogue, a BT who attends the Sephardic synagogue, a FFB who is Modern Orthodox left and frequents a pluralistic Orthodox synagogue.

5.2 INFOMANTS ON MODESTY

5.2.1 "L.C."

I meet L.C. on one of the first warm days of summer in the back of her parents' large, suburban home at the end of a quiet street. She is a twenty-four-year-old brunette of medium height; she wears jeweled sandals, shorts and a V-neck brightly colored shirt. L.C. is an FFB, and her family belongs to the Ahavas Achim. She says it is the "most Modern and progressive" of the Orthodox synagogues. She calls herself Modern Orthodox "much more to the modern side." She eats kosher, but eats dairy outside of her home in non-kosher restaurants, and will bike on Shabbat to services.

She grew up in Highland Park with two siblings. L.C. attended Orthodox day school from grades K-12 at the Modern Orthodox, coeducational school in the community. In 9-12th grades, she attended an all-girls, more religious high school outside of her hometown. Choosing to go into the national service in Israel instead of a traditional seminary, she gained a love and appreciation for Israel. She chose to attend a non-Jewish university for college and then went on to a prestigious law school, where she is currently enrolled as a student.

Considering her upbringing, her choices to attend a non-Jewish university and graduate school place her in the minority. She is intent on earning a worldly education and has a clear

career path. She speaks about the importance of a graduate education, which she learned from her parents, who have multiple degrees. In both college and law school, she lived with religious women, finding housing through an Orthodox web service. L.C. calls herself a "college frum," which she defines as comfortable with clothes that do not cover her knees or elbows. She will wear a bathing suit, but she will not wear sleeveless shirts or "short-shorts." When she visits her parents or attends community events, she dresses more traditionally than when she is away at law school. L.C. believes that her ideas regarding modesty are different than most other Orthodox women, but more conservative than the majority of her graduate school peers.

She thinks dressing in a demure manner should be "for you" to respect your body, not to meet community expectations. L.C. says that many girls are told that men cannot control themselves, and that is why women are instructed to dress a certain way. She feels that this is derogatory towards the community as a whole. She says it also portrays women as sex symbols in believing it necessary to create a barrier for protection.

She has been dating a non-traditional Jew from a Reconstructionist family for several years. She met her boyfriend in college. She says her parents are not particularly happy with his religious background and, consequently, he is becoming more religious (e.g. keeping Shabbat, always doing Friday night dinner and keeping a kosher house).

L.C. chooses not to keep *Shomeret Negiah* and has physical contact with her boyfriend. She says, "We share a bed, but I will not live with him until marriage." Interestingly, her mother works to help educate the yeshiva community about sex. L.C. explains that, in any long-term relationship, it is not possible to observe *Shomeret Negiah,* and that is why people get married so quickly. She does feel it is possible to stay a virgin. She notes a difference between those who do not touch at all and those who engage in sexual relationships. She wants to get engaged soon.

L.C. respects people who keep *Shomer Negiah*:

> Zero-percent of my friends keep it, and even my most religious friends make mistakes. I think there needs to be a more open and honest dialogue about sex, abstaining completely leads to sexual dysfunction and embarrassment. I think there is something (special) about not having sex until married. Personally, I didn't do that, and it was embarrassing and awful. Most of my friends were virgins (until marriage).

It is a bold statement to say zero-percent about anything, but she is adamant that no one else keeps the laws pertaining to men and women touching (*Shomer Negiah*). L.C. claims, "Laws are just laws… no one follows them." She says that there is a sense of "othering" within the general Orthodox population or a deliberate separation from "those people" who do not follow the laws. She feels that no one in this suburb follows this precept.[242]

She also feels that women and men are not equal in Orthodoxy. According to L.C., "The Orthodox movement is forty years behind the feminist movement." This is the second marriage for her mother, who got divorced at age twenty-two, and had to "buy" herself out of her first marriage (when a women exchanges money to her husband, for a get, Jewish divorce document presented to wife by husband.) [243] For L.C., equality is found in the public domain, not the private one. She likes the separation of roles between males and females in the private setting, but does not prefer this in public. In her ideal home, the woman lights the

Shabbat candles and the man says the *hamotz*i (blessing over the challah at the Shabbat meal).

She feels that Orthodoxy is afraid to break from this tradition because it would make them look like Reform and Conservative Jews. According to L.C. women need to take higher positions in the synagogues because there are no female presidents in Highland Park. For her, the

[242] Forty-four percent of the people in the study said they followed *Shomer Negiah* to some extent.

[243] L.C. is the product of her mother's second marriage to an Orthodox FFB man.

synagogue represents the pinnacle of the Orthodox world: "I want to be more included. I want to be more a part of the synagogue; I want to move towards a more egalitarian model, in urban settings. I have no problem counting [in a *minyan*]." Counting women in the *minyan* is almost universally condemned in Orthodox Judaism.

One of the Rabbis she turns to for guidance at law school is a graduate from Chovevei Yeshiva, which is linked to Open Orthodoxy [244] (described by Tamar Ross in the third stage of feminism). In Open Orthodoxy, women are allowed to lead an all-women's *minyan.* L.C. is looking to other branches of Judaism and to other types of Orthodoxy to explore women's roles.

L.C. says, "I would go to an all-women's megillah reading (reading done on the holiday of Purim) or an all-women's *minyan*." She wants to feel included in the broader synagogue community.. Her opinion most likely reflects her relationship with a Jewish man from a non-traditional background.

L.C. is leaving the suburban community again for law school. She says that, for a woman, a worldly education is more important than religious education: "I am definitely the only Orthodox Jew on campus taking classes in gender studies." L.C. creates her own ideas about *tzinius, kashrut,* and Shabbat observance. In this way, her views dovetail with a recent writing by Ilana Brumberg:

> Gen-X Modern Orthodox American Jews tolerate bending the laws of Shabbat and kashrut [dietary laws] for participation in the wider world; it features forbearance toward casual observance and non-observance of the obligations of prayer and blessings; it allows for a complete willingness to forget the call to study Torah; and it allows back flexibility when hungry young Jews silently engage in all things sexual with each other, so long as there is no result.[245]

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[244] L.C. is the one informant in the study who discussed Open Orthodoxy.

[245] Ilana Brumberg, *House of Study: A Jewish Woman Among Books,* 139.

L.C. sees her ideas and self akin to those of "Generation X." [246] According to Robert Wuthnow, this group practices religious tradition to fit with their personal lives. He says that adults between the ages of 21-45 are more likely to have delayed marriages, have fewer children, experience heightened financial pressure, are higher educated, are globalized, retain fewer social relationships and are part of the information explosion.[247]

L.C. questions women's roles and her own within Orthodoxy. At this particular juncture, she is highly critical of those Orthodox who are not as well educated as she is. She says, "Women should finish a college degree before marriage." She talks about Orthodox women being stuck in "under-valued vocations like social work, teachers, OTs, PTs, speech therapists, dental hygienists, nursery and Hebrew school teachers." She says, "Women are caught having a lot of kids and also making the money." She claims there is a divide between those women who chose to become educated and those who did not. "I have friends that are in bio-tech, PhDs, marketing etc. The people I lost touch with are the people that didn't pursue their education or do careers. Most of my friends who did those careers are still Orthodox and have some kids." In L.C.'s view, "her Orthodoxy" is more "progressive and informed," than the rest of the Orthodox population. Her intellectual and liberal interpretations of Orthodoxy are an anomaly among this population study.

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[246] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, 48.

[247] Wuthnow's Generation X is an age group of people 21- 45

5.2.2 "S.S."

S.S. lives in a small apartment around the back of her landlord's home. She is pregnant when I first meet her and excited about having her first child. She wears a red *sheitel*, and is twenty-six years old.

S.S. is a "Torah observant" BT, who attends Agudath Israel synagogue. She says that she tries to do all of the pertinent 613 mitzvoth, the ones you "can do, not the ones that are biblical." She only eats at kosher restaurants observes Shabbat and holidays, follows the laws of modesty and family purity, with the belief that this mitzvah is as important as keeping kosher and Shabbat.[248]

S.S. is part of a large family of six children and grew up Conservative. Her family held Friday night Shabbat dinner and she went to synagogue on Saturday; however she also watched TV and went to the mall on Saturdays after synagogue. She went to a Jewish day school until the fourth grade and then public school. She attended the local university and later obtained a master's degree in the field of science. By the age of twenty, she decided to become more religious, and a campus program assisted her in the *kiruv* process. She says she learned about "authentic Judaism" through the program.

She adopted one mitzvah at a time, first Shabbat, then the holidays, and then other Jewish experiences that helped her learn about a different kind of Judaism, which allowed her to become more immersed. That same *kiruv* organization also brought her to Israel, where she met her husband-to-be and, ten months later they became engaged and, later, married. According to S.S.,

[248] Rivkah Slonim, Ed.. *Total Immersion: A Mikvah Anthology*,. Xvi.

the theory behind the Jewish Orthodox Initiative (JOI) is "bringing Jews to other Jews to create Orthodox households."

Her husband grew up Modern Orthodox. In college, he considered rushing a Jewish-related fraternity, [249] as he was on the precipice of straying from Orthodoxy. He was drawn back to traditional Judaism through the same *kiruv* organization that initially drew her in.

Following the laws is important to S.S. Since she did not go to seminary or get educated in *Halakha* (law), "correct observance," is her way of proving that she knows the laws, and that she can observe them accurately. It also exemplifies her allegiance to Orthodoxy. Her speech pattern is dotted with many Yiddish words, and she references the collection of "self-help" books on the shelves of her living room. This conforms to the patterns that Sarah Benor identifies among BTs: When Jews become Orthodox, they often take on many of these home decoration practices. BT homes usually include large tables with plastic covers, prominently displayed bookshelves and Jewish themed art. But, as we might expect, there are some differences. For practical reasons, BTs usually have different books than FFBs. They rely heavily on English books to learn about Orthodox observance and *hashkafa* [worldview], and they often use prayer books with English translations and explanations. [250] Her answers are limited to sources of those teachers she has encountered in this small suburban area, at local synagogues, on campus and her books.

In this household, she does all of the cooking and cleaning, but her husband also helps with the laundry and vacuuming. She feels that it is a stereotype that women are looked upon as second-class citizens in Orthodox households. She feels strongly that men and women are

[249] She explained that this fraternity did not hold the values of Orthodox Jewish lifestyle because, although it was Jewish related, the fraternity brothers would party and not observe Shabbat or kashrut laws.

[250] Benor, *Becoming Frum*, 36.

'equal' within Orthodoxy. It has nothing to do with the tasks of the home or in public. It has to do with how individuals treat one another.

According to S.S.:

> If it is a good marriage, it is very much that the woman is held on a pedestal and treated as royalty, and I treat my husband in kind… I am his queen. Depending on which person that you encounter… I think there are some people in [this] community that are *Haredi* who think they are more entitled to things then women... but in reality, both men and women are equal.

S.S. says that, in her home, she is definitely an equal because she treats her husband with respect, and he gives her the same in return. This is rooted in all aspects of their married life; keeping the purity laws helps maintain the balance in their home.

They currently have a television in their home, but soon plan to hide it in the bedroom, away from their future child. S.S. and her husband want to be able to filter the content of what their child will see. She explains, "Eyes can be misused to look at polluted things and become dark windows of sin."[251] However, S.S. also feels that television is a welcome distraction in her household and does not wish to give it up completely.

Keeping modest and her body private are important. She wants to keep her body sacred and covered up. She says her body should not be exposed for anyone except her husband. She feels modesty allows her to cover up, but does not dictate what colors she may wear. She wears a *sheitel* on Shabbat and for work, but a *tichel* around the home.

S.S. follows the laws of *Shomeret Negiah*. She does not shake hands with men outside of work. She works in the medical profession in a job that requires her to touch males. She says, "At work, I will practice on males… from a medical standpoint I will help them." She does not consider this touching as she is medically treating them.

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[251] Stadler, *Yeshiva Fundamentalism*, 61.

S.S. and her husband moved to the suburbs even though it is far from both of their jobs. They feel comfortable with this community and its lack of materialism from their undergraduate college days nearby. They didn't want to stray from the friends they made at university and sought to stay connected to the same synagogue.

S.S. is a woman who has completely accepted Orthodox Judaism. She lives a pious and observant life. Being an Orthodox Jew has become her identity. S.S. believes that her non-religious job is only a means to financially support her traditional lifestyle. She says that "although everyone should obtain a good secular education for its own sake, their Jewish education should be prized." She never had the opportunity to study at a seminary, so she cherishes the value of sending her future children (to one) as a real mitzvah and her time to read Jewish books as precious.

5.2.3 "S.F."

S.F. meets me on a weekday afternoon in the dining room of her bi-level home, on a street with twelve other Orthodox families. She knows everyone on her block and chose this street because of the neighborhood. She is forty-two years old and wears a *tichel* with a long flowing skirt and a layered long-sleeve top. S.F.'s husband belongs to Khal Chassidim, the *shtibe*l, although she does not personally attend. S.F. calls herself Orthodox. She is kosher and keeps as many *mitzvot* as possible.

S.F. grew up in an "out of town" Orthodox community.[252] Her family was *Haredi*, and she feels as if they were the most religious family within their community. Her father studied at the *kollel,* and her mother was a stay-at-home mother to her seven siblings.[253]As a child, there was no TV; the girls wore tights with their skirts; and they ate dairy products labeled *Chalav Israel*. *Chalav Israel* is "milk that is watched and closely supervised from the moment of milking the cow, which is done by a religious Jewish person, through processing and packaging." [254]

She supports the *kollel* system depending on the individual family. She believes that it came into existence in America as a temporary response to the Holocaust. According to S.F., she will not judge those who partake in religious learning full-time, but she thinks that no one should be part of "that community" out of community pressure alone. Samuel Heilman describes the importance of a yeshiva education for the men's population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight. An Orthodox *yeshiva* will encourage full-time study by men up until marriage, followed after marriage by all-day study in the *kollel*. Men study for the sake of learning, which is called *lernen.*[255]

Her education growing up was in the *Bais Yaacov* system. This educational institution was *Haredi,* which has a strict modesty code, including wearing a pleated skirt and oxford shirt. According to S.F., the curriculum includes subjects such as *Chumash* (Torah), *Neviim* (Prophets), Hebrew language and Jewish history. It teaches Judaism for everyday Orthodox life, preparing women to be wives and mothers. She went to two seminaries in Israel, each for a year.

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[252] This name is commonly given to all rthodox communities that are not in the New York region. It is Orthodox "slang" to call communities "out of town." Although in scholarly literature communities outside of New York are named by their title, or suburbs.

[253] *Kollel* is the adult *yeshiva* for married men. *Kollel* men are given small stipends to help support their families.

[254] Lynn Davidman, *Becoming Unorthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*, 221.

[255] Heilman, *The World of Yeshiva*, 267.

She graduated college at a Jewish-related university and then attended graduate school in the same school system to earn a degree in social work.

S.F. works in another Jewish community with Orthodox (predominately *Haredi*) Jewish patients. She works exclusively with patients who have eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia and binge eating. She claims that this is a major issue within the *frum* (Orthodox) community. She says, "As a society we have a personality of perfectionism and the *frum c*ommunity is often to blame because some people ask women their size before dating." She says this is sometimes solved by a Skype date before a face-to-face meeting. She also believes that eating habits on Shabbat and other holidays help contribute to the large size of people within Orthodoxy. She said that this is her own personal opinion, as a person who treats patients with eating disorders in the community.

S.F. married at twenty-five, followed by a divorce at twenty-seven. They used the Internet as a tool to develop their relationship. She confides that she did not feel forthcoming about the details of the demise of her first marriage. As a divorcee, she says that she did not receive many requests to meet, but she eventually met her husband who lived abroad. She does not feel any stigma in divorce, even though it took her eight years to remarry at thirty-four to another divorcee. She says when she married her second husband, she only cared for him, but knew he loved her, and they had common values. Many Orthodox women I speak with, especially those who date for short periods of time, admit that they did not "love" their husbands before marriage; it is normally lust mixed with community pressure to marry and shared life goals.

S.F. has created a blended family in her suburban home. She has one young child and two older stepchildren, who are now being raised in a less observant household with their mother.

S.F. accepts a more progressive Orthodoxy than the one in which she was raised as a result of her stepchildren. She would like to have another child, but she had a major medical episode a few years ago and is now medically unable to have any more children.

Her household is unique; her husband works and does not attend *kollel*, and he does the majority of the cooking, including preparing the Shabbat meal. They hire help to clean. They do not own a television, but watch political and educational shows with no nudity, foul language or crude content on Netflix. She says that, "you cannot un-watch something." Her stepchildren, who do not live in the household, are allowed to watch movies and television at their mother's home.

A strict enforcement of the family purity laws is part of her family calendar. She has two beds and follows the exact nature of the laws and will not hand her husband objects during the time she is *niddah* (unclean). She is strict about going to the mikvah. She feels that even though following the *Halakha* is difficult at times, it brings blessings to her life, in that she is closer to God, and her family has a special connection to the Creator.

She believes that non-traditional people do not have these same connections with God. They do not have the same benefits within their marriages, that her marriage is refreshed each month through the abstinence and renewal period.

Shomeret Negiah is important to S.F. In theory, she thinks it is a wonderful set of laws that help to regulate gender relations between men and women. Even though she is a strict believer in the law, she has a personal issue following it. S.F. says, "I was *Shomer Negiah*, but I messed up with both husbands" before the *yichud* room.[256] This shows a clear division between law and practice - what someone is supposed to do and what they actually do. She wants her

[256] The *yichud* room is a place, where husband and wife are allowed private time after they are married.

child to be *Shomer Negiah* and believes that most women and men who are as religious as she is follow the law.

S.F. looks at the modesty laws with the same strictness as she follows the other rituals and ideas in her life. In order to guard herself from men, she has to cover herself from *hirhu*r (inappropriate thoughts) through dressing modestly. She says she learned this from the time she was a young child. As a young girl, she would wear closed-toe shoes and stockings, so there was absolutely nothing showing. Now she takes a more liberal approach, what the majority of the community call "*yeshivish*." She covers her knees, elbows and collarbone. She feels it prevents women from being "objectified." Her hair is covered with a *tichel (*head scarf) or *sheitel* (wig).

Her young son attends the local Centrist Orthodox Montessori School. She wants her son to go to college after high school if they can afford it. She believes that society is changing economically, and she is not sure that a college degree is worth it. S.F. does not see the value of non-Jewish subjects for the sake of knowledge alone. She says that, if her son chooses to study in *kollel* (full-time) and can maintain this in a financially responsible manner, she will be thrilled.

S.F. feels that the frustrations of being Orthodox are not very different from being a non-religious or a non-Jewish woman. She says that some parts of her life are more difficult, but the payoff is her connection with *Hashem* (God). She is happy as a religious woman, and she does not feel the need to be the same or equal to men.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS ON MODESTY

Modesty is one of the most observable ways to see the various modes of observance of Orthodox Jewish women in suburbia. Women are forthcoming about modesty and have strong views.

Almost all of the participants adhere to different degrees to the standards of *tzinius* and are accepted. In turn, this creates a differentiated Orthodox Jewish community.

Much like observing the laws of kashrut the entire community takes part in *Shomer Negiah*. The difference is that all of the women interviewed were kosher at some level and this was considered a baseline factor for individuals to refer to themselves as Orthodox along with belonging to an Orthodox synagogue and observing Shabbat. *Shomer Negiah* is a secret subject matter. *Rebbetzins,* especially those who teach classes, are happy to openly discuss this subject. Yet, all other Orthodox women seem embarrassed to answer simple yes or no questions about the *mikvah,* and they will lower their voices and whisper or send their children upstairs or on errands. They often check that their conversation is confidential. Women are genuinely concerned that their encounters in college, with either their future husbands or with their boyfriends, will make them seem like a less religious person. Women, in many cases, are quietly choosing not to follow the laws. In general, the women who are *shomer negiah* are more often married, in their twenties and thirties, and FFB. The majority of women who follow some of the laws are also FFB, but the majority are in their twenties and only a little more than half are married. The group of women who do not practice *shomer negiah* are about two-thirds FFB, the majority in their thirties with also an equal amount of women in their twenties and forties, and only half are married.

Mikvah attendance stands out as the most tangible of the modesty laws to track among family purity, *Shomer Negiah* and modest garb. Women seem to do this for personal, not communal, reasons or for the sake of conformity. At one point, during this study, I was approached about my willingness to take a poll to help count how many women in one geographic area were using a particular *mikvah*. Women are so discreet at that synagogue, they

are unable to determine the number of members versus the number the women who actually went to the *mikvah*. A poll is later sent out in a separate town via email about the state of the *mikvahs* and attendance. It explicitly states in that email that all responses are be confidential. Polling women's usage of *mikvahs* has a long history.

Today, the stories of L.C., S.S., and S.F. help to illuminate how women in East Brunswick and Highland Park are following the dictates of the laws of family purity and the other modesty rules including *Shomeret Negiah* and dressing *tzinius.* The fact that all of the women are accepted and even highly involved members of the community, regardless of whether they practice the laws, exhibits the commitment to tolerance of beliefs. L.C., although raised religious, now describes herself as "college *frum*." She says that her form of modesty is dressing demure for "you." L.C. states that none of her friends observe *Shomeret Negiah*, although many remained virgins until marriage. She has a serious boyfriend, is not *Shomeret Negiah*, but will not live with him until she is married. In L.C.'s view, the "laws are just laws," and they are antiquated for today.

S.S is a BT who believes that being modest, following the gender separation laws and keeping family purity are all valuable to her practice of Orthodoxy. She dresses in modest garb and dons a wig for Shabbat and work. She will not touch males except when required for her job in the medical field.

Finally, S.F. is an Orthodox woman whose views are shaped by her life experiences in an out-of-town (outside New York City) region, *Haredi* family and her own divorce. In her view, dressing modestly keeps women from being objectified, and she holds herself to a high standard in this realm. S.F. says that *Shomer Negiah* is important for gender relationships, but she has had

personal issues following it and is unsuccessful in observing it, until she was married. She follows the laws of family purity to its fullest extent.

Modesty links generations of observant Jews together as they follow common laws. In the suburban communities today where Orthodox pluralism flourishes, it connects women with a range of beliefs. Pluralism, in the Orthodox culture of suburbia, reflects a diverse spectrum of behaviors. It helps to mold a cohesive community built on common principles, while also respecting the integrity of individual choice.

6.0 BA'AL TESHUVA AND THE NEWLY RELIGIOUS[257]

While contemporary Judaism does not generally attempt to recruit from other religious groups, it does allow for *kiruv*, or outreach to non-observant Jews. This is based around the idea of *teshuva*, or the decision to abstain from acts that violate Jewish law, the *Halakha*, and a return to observance. According to Rabbi Steinsaltz's influential theological view, "All forms of *teshuvah*, however diverse and complex, have a common core: the belief that human beings have it in their power to effect inward change."[258] This is accomplished in two steps: recognition of a need to change and *le'atid*, a resolve to change direction. From a generational perspective, the return to observant Judaism, as a movement, has been growing since the 1960's. A sociological perspective according to Aviad, "The current [ba'al] *teshuva* phenomenon grew in response to the needs of those who were raised outside the framework of traditional Judaism and outside the authority of Jewish law."[259] This movement "recruits" those who are less religious and helps them observe the commandments and *mitzvot*.

This section examines the history of the BT movement from its inception to its modern application in this suburb. It explores the composition of current BTs and how they interact with

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[257] Those who have "repented, and found the path" and become observant, and FFB literally means, "*frum*-from-birth" those who have always been Orthodox.

[258] Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah*. 3.

[259] Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel*, 7.

the standing FFB population to aid in the initiation of a more accepting population, which generates diversity. This chapter depicts the variations of beliefs and backgrounds within the Orthodox Jewish movement, and how these differences generate non-conformity and tolerance in these suburbs.

The study also offers a portrait of three women: K.L., a woman whose entire family accompanied her on her journey into Orthodoxy; L.W., a woman who chose to take on more mitzvot, but did not consider herself a BT; and L.S., a woman who knew from the age of three that she was going to be religious.

In 1967, Rabbi Mordechai Goldstein and Noah Weinberg opened the first *yeshiva* targeted at BTs in Jerusalem, called the Diaspora Yeshiva. Rabbi Weinberg then went on to establish Aish HaTorah, an outreach organization, with a *yeshiva*, Ohr Sameah, in 1972. By the 1970's, Orthodoxy was at the brink of expansion.[260] *Kiruv* soon spread to college campuses, parks, airports, city streets, and to any other places with a Jewish population.

The Chabad movement is at the forefront in the *kiruv* movement. Maya Balakirsky Katz states, "Chabad outreach actively engages otherwise unaffiliated Jews to perform select mitzvoth (commandments)…"[261] Some of their major mitzvah campaigns include handing out Shabbat candles and helping non-observant men learn to put on *tefillin*. The purpose is to make religious practice as simple as possible for non-devout Jews. Chabad is renowned for its "*mitzvah*-mobiles," which distribute reading material from portable libraries on wheels, Sukkah-mobiles (trucks with a Sukkah in the back) around the fall holiday of Sukkot, giant public menorahs, and large Passover Seders. The late *Rebbe* also created an army of *shlichim,* An Orthodox emissary

[260] Gilbert S. Rosenthal, *Four Paths to One God*, 53.

[261] Maya Balakirsky Katz, *The Visual Culture of Chabad*, 174.

sent by Chabad to promulgate beliefs and educate people about the teachings of Judaism. The *shlichim's* goal is to make it as simple as possible for Jews to lead observant lives.

Kiruv organizations go into communities with Jewish populations and help to introduce and make readily accessible Orthodox traditions. They set up small synagogues or sustain declining congregations by providing a Rabbi and help gain access to kosher food and other necessities for Orthodox life. As the traditional population grows, they encourage fundraising in order to bring in additional necessities for an Orthodox suburb (e.g., Orthodox synagogues, *mikvahs*, kosher butchers, kosher bakers and Orthodox day schools).[262]

Additional outreach organizations with similar intentions allow Jews to have positive experiences with authentic rituals and to take on the *mitzvot.* When a woman ultimately decides to begin the transition from a non-observant lifestyle to Orthodoxy, *kiruv* organizations offer a smooth support system. It often begins with the Shabbat and holidays, and then progresses to additional *mitzvot*. Many women take on the additional commandments in their late teens and twenties. *Kiruv* organizations subsidize trips to Israel and multiple events each week, including classes, which may offer a stipend for the students. Classes and events range from baking, to learning, to playing sports.

The seminary provides them with a framework to learn and absorb the teachings. The *yeshivot* act as a framework for teaching, a community of students during the time of transition, and help with entrance into Orthodoxy.[263] The center of a yeshiva is the *Beit Midrash*, known as the House of Study. The women learn from the texts centered on women's issues: marriage,

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[262] Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 21-95.

[263] Aviad, *Return to Judaism*, 37.

gender and children. One is immersed in the Orthodox community during a time of transition. It is typical to do this right before or directly after college, for either a few months or up to a year.

Women choose to become a BT for their own individual reasons. According to Davidman, "The Orthodox world offers these women several important dimensions of life they felt they were missing in secular society."[264] BTs see their new beliefs as superior to mainstream society. They are abandoning their upbringing and seeking a new spiritual system. Indeed the "how-to" guides for the BT emphasize the notion of a shift in the direction of one's life.

> The *Ba'al teshuvah* is thus like a person on a journey who at some point decides to change direction. From that point on, their steps will be carrying (them) toward a different destination. The turn itself is accomplished in a second. Yet the new path, like the one abandoned is long and arduous.[265]

Aviad further explains, "*Ba'alei teshuva* are people who are interested in religion and who respond to religious calling." [266] They experience a religious conversion. Some reasons for women choosing to become more religious are: a sense of history, connection to their people, and interest in their religion and stability. They are all joining a community within a larger society.

The ultimate goal is to meet another Orthodox Jew (perhaps BT), marry, and start a family.[267] The BT is only fully integrated once she has married and settled with a family. In fact, Heilman goes further by saying that "having a family is more than a ritual obligation… it is an essential way of finding their niche in society. The single adult is an anomaly, the couple without

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[264] Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World,* 51.

[265] Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah,* 7.

[266] Aviad, *Return to Judaism,* 80.

[267] *Bashert* is a commonly used term to mean soul mate or "other half."

children is considered afflicted, the childless woman deficient…"[268] There is significant pressure from one's community to find a suitable match.

They also must learn a distinct culture that calls for a separation of the sexes and definite delineation between the tasks and responsibilities of gender. The BT's journey to find her place as a woman is based on acceptance of the perceived (and real) differences between the sexes. It also creates power dynamics between the two genders.

The BT is distinct in her views and ideology on Orthodoxy. As a new convert to Orthodoxy for a varied length of time, they view the ideas in different ways. Some of them have been formally trained, while others have taken on the commandments on their own, resulting in gaps in their knowledge. In light of this, their thoughts and impressions about Orthodoxy and the community are distinct within this examination.

6.1 BA'AL TESHUVA IN SUBURBIA

What BTs are ultimately and ideologically trying to overcome is the notion that "Jewishness is a program for life in America; that is the idea that Jews in America be defined not primarily by religion but by secular culture and quasi-national feeling."[269] After World War II, Jews moved to the suburbs, found prosperity and built an infrastructure of synagogues. The social revolution of the 1960's and 1970's led to the breakdown of the family, the overall disregard for authority and questioning of religion. During this time period, many Jews were raised in an absence of formal

[268] Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith*, 279.

[269] Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*,108.

religious doctrine, and this eventually led them to seek possibilities, which blossomed into a movement of return to traditional piety and practice. Yet, despite this lengthy effort, the BT of the contemporary age sees Orthodox Jews as diverse and distinctive from the overall American Jewish population. They add an additional layer of background diversity to a population already full of differing ideas about the policies by which they live, as long as they are allowed to maintain their Jewish life."[270] Future generations now become the hope for renewal of society, and the BT is an integral part of this movement.

A woman who chooses to become a BT is distinctive from FFBs, someone who has always been religious. The BT has disparate life experiences. She often attended public schools and perhaps a public university. She may have eaten *treif* foods. She has been exposed to a lifetime of various types of entertainment, TV and film, music; she may have a variety of friends. Her family is not religious, and one parent may not be Jewish. It really depends on individual circumstances. The BT may also have to contend with family and friends that are not happy with her decision to become religious. One author noted, "*Ba'al teshuvas* often find that God tests their most recent commitments to observance to see if they will stick to it."[271]

The difficulty of the process may hinge on her age when "conversion" or "transition" occurs and her religious background before change. They may come from a Conservative household or a completely non-practicing home. Which will effect the amount of transition but not ultimately on her level of observance.

In this study, ten women out of the fifty are BTs ranging in age from 21-45. Two of the BT women in the study call themselves Modern Orthodox; three say they are Orthodox; three

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[270] Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah*, 75.

[271] Aiken, *The Ba'al Teshuva Survival Guide*, 351.

say observant; and two say Modern *Yeshivish*. Six of the women are married, and four are not. Of the married women, three do not have children; two are pregnant;[272] and one has adopted twins. The youngest woman who is expecting a child or to have a child is twenty-six. The unmarried women are ages twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four and forty. Highland Park is an especially popular destination for young BT families and singles looking for a non-urban environment. Several of the local synagogues have a reputation for welcoming BTs. Their members include the most observant to the least, and there is a place for everyone on the spectrum in this suburb. It is also close to two major cities and more affordable than similar Orthodox suburbs.

Half of the women who became more observant attended public school. All the informants had some form of Jewish education. Six of the women attended seminary or college in some form after high school. The two women who now attend Agudath Israel, the most religious synagogue, did not attend seminary. Four studied Judaism on their own, through some sort of program in college or by an informal class. All of the women interviewed went to a non-Jewish university or college.

Not every person who fits the definition of BT chooses to embrace the title. According to the Orthodox, a BT is anyone, either man or woman, who does not grow up in a household that calls itself Orthodox and then becomes more religious or "finds the way" or a person who was observant and left and then subsequently chooses to return. One woman in the study grew up in a Conservative home and went to both Conservative Jewish schooling and public schooling. She is now Orthodox and considers herself to be an FFB. Although she does not see herself as part of

[272] She is pregnant with her second child, and she also has stepchildren.

this group, she does speak about a religious transformation in her life and becoming more religious as a teen; therefore, I have included her as part of this group.

Within the community itself, the FFBs say there is no hierarchy between the FFBs and the BTs. Another FFB in the study says that she feels BTs are more committed than FFBs, something she particularly noticed when she was dating. Although she senses there is no social structure, she mentions that they are often uncomfortable dating one another. The informants attribute this to the fact that the community is home to so many BTs, and the culture does not allow for people to act superior. A common consensus is that the community is not large enough to be subdivided like an urban environment. Each branch is interdependent on the other. One FFB woman commented regarding BTs, "Who is *a ba'al teshuva*? She has made herself. Who she was as a person helped herself into a new person." She continues, that "*Ba'alat teshuvahs* are on a higher level because of the sacrifices they have made. [I have] so much respect for them. [I can see] their fresh eyes and excitement. The Torah should be new and exciting." She feels strongly that a BT makes a conscious choice to become religious. She talks about the 613 commandments as 613 ways to connect to Hashem, or God. Although she personally claims to have always observed them, the BT on the other hand, selects this life, so they should be held in higher esteem among the community.

They test the boundaries of Orthodoxy with women's roles, modesty, and gender relations. The BT in the suburbs is distinctive in that her view of mainstream society affects her perception of traditional Judaism, but also correlates with her age of conversion. These women help create the diversity within Orthodoxy in suburbia.

6.2 BA'AL TESHUVA INFORMANTS

6.2.1 "K.L."

I meet K.L in a kosher coffee shop. She has curly black hair and blue eyes and is wearing a skirt and three-quarter sleeves. She is a twenty-three-year-old student at a local university and the boarder of another informant. K.L. describes herself as a BT who is now Modern *Yeshivish* and attends Ohav Emeth. She keeps "as many *mitzvoth* as possible" including Shabbat, kosher inside-and-outside the home, and *shomer negiah*.

K.L. is from a suburb of New York. She attended public school for grades K-12.

Growing up in an active Reform Jewish household, she was involved in her synagogue: she had a Bat Mitzvah; she had a confirmation; and she was the NFTY (Reform youth group) president.

Although she was always involved in the Jewish community, she did not become interested in Orthodoxy until college. She became a regular at Hillel, a Meor fellow (weekly leadership classes about Judaism) and eventually found an Orthodox Rebbetzin to tutor her one-on-one. She went on trips to Israel through the Orthodox outreach organization Aish HaTorah, and other heritage retreats.

K.L. believes that her studies of Judaism indoctrinated her on "what to wear, eat, (how to) speak." She is grateful that her parents have been supportive of her decisions. She now lives with a large Orthodox family, as a boarder in Highland Park, for her final year of college. She credits the family with helping her acculturate to Orthodox life.

She plans to live a *Torah* observant life, covering her hair all the time once she marries and keeping the purity laws. K.L. wants to have up to eight children and send them to Orthodox

day school. Her ideal household is "warm and loving, lots of Shabbat guests (that) are all different kinds (of Jews), so they can learn to judge everyone favorable."

Her future plans include graduate school. She deferred her program to attend a religious seminary in Israel for ten months. "Although secular education is what I want to do in my life, it (study of Judaism) is a very important aspect of my life." She is going to be attending a Jewish institution to pursue a PhD in the sciences. She says that she plans to live in a single-sex apartment that is kosher in her new city next year.

K.L. has started to date. According to Lisa Aiken, BTs need to be ready for marriage in more ways than just being the right age. They should know their life goals, qualities in a mate, their flavor of Judaism, the location in the country they wish to settle (or outside), plans for attending yeshiva/seminary, finances, and the amount of children they wish to have, before they even begin the dating process. The BT should date for at least a year before she embarks on finding a suitable match, which, in most cases, will be another BT.[273] K.L. feels restricted in whom she can date as a BT. She does not feel that marriage or maintaining an Orthodox lifestyle will interfere with her career plans. She says, "I think the person I want to marry, (education) won't hurt my marriage prospects… I don't think men will feel intimidated by women getting a career." Her long-term goal is not a full-time position, but working for a Jewish organization or another non-profit as a consultant. In her view, ideally a women should date around two to three months before engagement and marriage.

As of two years ago, K.L. is *Shomeret Negiah* in her relationships, but will shake someone's hand professionally. The laws of modesty "help everybody; girls, men and myself focus on more than just how I look." She contends that this permits her personality and intellect

[273] Aiken, *The Ba'al Teshuva Survival Guide*, 228- 229.

to project, and people will not be judging her for her external features. She feels that the "body is distracting and a private thing." She thinks it helps her self-esteem to "focus on what is important." She exclusively wears skirts and long sleeves.

She believes that men and women both have important and different roles; they are "separate but equal." The female's role revolves around the household and may include teaching the children, enhancing the household with spirituality, and helping to keep the mitzvoth.

According to K.L., "The father has more of a role in terms of financially supporting the family and being a team player and working with the mother. The father is working; even if the mother is working also, the father is working a more substantial job."

As a BT, K.L. has found Highland Park to be very welcoming location to house a diverse Orthodox Jewish population. The community is open to *kiruv*. She feels that this is an ideal suburban community because of good schools, the location, and lots of "growth opportunities" (programming for people becoming religious). She believes that the women in her community are excellent role models and mentors and aid her in the process of becoming religious. There is lots of hospitality, and she is regularly invited into people's homes for a meal. "Almost all orthodox women that I have met are very strong, capable women. They are like superwomen in that they are choosing their path in life." She has found Orthodox women who are happy with their lives. They do not feel they are "stuck at home," but they are career women.

In K.L's viewpoint, BT women and the FFB's status are the same, as they negotiate a distinct, but unique, sphere within the cultural milieu of Orthodoxy. Due to her own self-proclaimed insecurities, she sometimes feels that as BT that she is not as "good" as FFBs.

6.2.2 "L.W."

I talk to L.W. bi-weekly for almost a year. She is twenty-five, of medium height and has long light brown hair and blue eyes. She usually wears long skirts and long sleeves and little makeup and jewelry. L.W. describes herself as *Shomeret Mitzvot* (keeping the laws) and maintains the laws of modesty and Shabbat. She attends Young Israel.

L.W. attended the local Conservative day school from grades K-5 and then went to public school. [274] She attended Jewish camp every summer. She went to the local university for her undergraduate degree and now is earning a master's degree part-time at another non-Jewish university. L.W. teaches religious school at the local Conservative synagogue and works full-time for a non-profit organization that serves historically underrepresented populations.

As a child, her family went to the local, traditional, non-egalitarian Conservative synagogue in East Brunswick. This synagogue is a member of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and there is mixed seating, but women are not allowed to read from the Torah. Her father is involved within the Conservative synagogue as the *gabbai*, or the person in the synagogue who does various ritual duties in connection with the religious services. He often reads from the Torah and is the head of the ritual committee. This particular congregation is split between traditional and more progressive factions. This is evident in the prayer books they use, as they are divided between Conservative and Orthodox publishers.

Her family celebrated all of the Jewish holidays in her formative years. They did not keep strictly kosher and/or dress modestly. L.W. explains why she considers herself an FFB:

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[274] This school is no longer in existence; it closed in the summer of 2014. See a full explanation in a later chapter.

> I don't consider myself a *ba'al teshuva* because being Jewish was always important to me. We always had Friday dinner, always kosher (inside the home but ate dairy out), always had two days of *Yom Tov*.[275] I always stayed out of school (on holidays); I didn't go to the prom or run for my track team on Shavuot. A main difference is that we walked instead of drove [to synagogue]… Instead of eating pizza at Vinnie's, I only ate at Jerusalem's [kosher]…. My levels of observance have increased.

L.W. says she grew up with religion therefore, she does not perceive her transition to Orthodoxy as dramatic. L.W. came from a more traditional family and had some Jewish education was a regular at synagogue and attended Jewish camp; she does not consider herself to be in the same category as a person who lacks a Judaic background. The literal definition of a BT is that of someone who was not observant, but subsequently became Orthodox and started living according to the *mitzvo*t. Her mother does not observe the Shabbat, but her father recently started to follow L.W.'s increase in religious observance. Her father considers himself to be a BT, and yet he still attends the Conservative synagogue.

L.W. first became observant at eighteen, as an adult. She was diagnosed with a tumor and claims that she made a pact with God that, if she were found to be healthy, she would observe Shabbat and the dietary laws. She says, "To take on the commandments of modesty and keeping the Shabbat completely (as a child she drove to synagogue on Shabbat), I would no longer drive to synagogue. I would cover my body. I understood that I was becoming more religious. I decided to commit to "*teshuva*" to follow the path, to be more observant. She says she was found to be in good health and took on the additional laws. She feels more comfortable now that she has adopted more modest clothing because of her robust figure. She seeks refuge in layered clothes, baggy attire, and long skirts. She does wear pants to the gym. L.W. never went to seminary and chose not to continue her education once she became more religious. In college

[275] *Yom Tov* means holidays. It literally translates as "good day."

she participated in informal classes and attended programs through Jewish organizations that allowed her to study Judaism.

L.W. dated for fifteen months, because she wanted to see him "in all seasons," before becoming engaged and had her wedding a year later. She met her husband at her university's Hillel. She says that "there is a spark holding his hand. It feels special; if I couldn't hold someone's hand, I wouldn't know if they were the right person. What's to make us dating versus friends?" L.W. says that she only follows *Shomeret Negiah* fifty percent of the time. During the year of their engagement, L.W. was busy teaching two classes at the local Conservative synagogue, working a full-time job, going to school as a part-time graduate student and planning her wedding.

In planning for the wedding, she felt that she was being asked to serve as an example for the community by publicly addressing the issue of Orthodox divorce decrees and how they are handled. She was asked to announce that she would be signing a prenuptial agreement, which stated that she could initiate a *get*, a Jewish divorce. In Jewish law, only the man may bring divorce proceedings. In her case, the Rabbi expanded Jewish marital law to give the wife the option to initiate divorce proceeding. This eliminates the possibility of a woman becoming an *agunah*, the captive wife. [276]

She married in the spring of 2013 in an Orthodox ceremony, attended by over 350 guests. The seating during the ceremony was divided, with one side for men and the other for women. She wore a dress that came down to her elbows, but her bridesmaids were in short sleeves. Both of her parents walked her down the aisle. The ceremony and the reception were held at an

[276] *Agunah* means "chained" to her husband because in Jewish traditional law, a husband must grant the divorce (get, Jewish divorce document) in order for the woman to remarry or bear children who are able to marry other observant Jews.

Orthodox synagogue. The honors of the seven blessings under the *Chuppa*h (the marriage canopy) were performed by the Rabbis of Congregation Ohav Emeth, Congregation Ohr Torah and Young Israel. However, she did not offer the Rabbi of her former Conservative synagogue the opportunity to say a blessing. During the ceremony, every time a Rabbi walked down the aisle, his adherents would stand up to show their devotion. The reception had mixed seating, but one side of the room was for Orthodox guests, and the other side was for Conservative. For the majority of the night, dancing was not mixed between men and women.[277] Once the mechitza was removed after the meal, the Orthodox guests left the wedding.

In her marriage, she thinks, "It is expected that men do work and women do housework. It is expected that women prepare and entertain when people come over all the time. Religiously it is outlined what a man and women should do, this is a religious obligation." L.W. feels that both the husband and wife have related roles inside and outside of their home. If she cooks, he should help with the cleaning. She believes both husband and wife should contribute to the economic stability of the home.

She did not move in with her husband to Highland Park from East Brunswick until they were married and refrained from sex until after marriage. She has rented an apartment with her *chatan* (groom) and is excited to start newlywed life together. She has yet to decide which new synagogue she will join and she is currently "*shul*-shopping" to find the place of worship she will feel most comfortable. L.W. wears a hat to synagogue after marriage. She says, "I don't like *sheitels*. I didn't go through chemo; I can't wear a wig because I didn't lose my hair." Her

[277] During the ceremony, men and women sat at opposite sides. For the reception, the Orthodox and Conservative guests were "separated" at this wedding by the dance floor. During the meal, the Orthodox married guests sat as couples, but there were single sex tables for all unmarried Orthodox guests. The Conservative side was completely mixed between males and females. There was no mixed dancing until dessert was served.

parents are still prominent figures in the Conservative synagogue and, as an only child, she has agreed to spend the less religious holidays at her parents' home and the more religious holidays at her in-laws' home, since they are Orthodox.[278]

She plans to stay in Highland Park for the foreseeable future. She is happy living within the Orthodox community in the suburbs. L.W. and her husband grew up in the area. They agree that this is a good place to raise a family, as it has all of the necessities for them: good religious schools, synagogues, and affordable housing.

6.2.3 "L.S."

L.S. is a high-powered woman in the Jewish non-profit sector. I meet her several times in her own office at her organization. She wears a bright red, shoulder-length *sheitel* and modest clothing with minimal makeup and jewelry. She is a member of synagogue Ohav Emeth and an associate member of Agudath Israel, the most observant of the congregations in the township. She is thirty-nine, a BT, and observes the kosher restrictions, modesty laws and family purity laws.

She grew up in an area where there was an abundance of *Haredi* and Orthodox believers, but her family was Conservative with a strong belief in God. Her mother was a volunteer for the Jewish Federation. She went through the public school system for grades k-6, and then attended a Jewish day school for two years, before returning to public school. She had a Bat Mitzvah at a local Conservative synagogue. She went to a non- Jewish university and an Orthodox Jewish

[278] She has expressed that she no longer feels comfortable spending the High Holidays attending the Conservative synagogue services. On holidays when it is allowed by Jewish law to drive, she will spend these with her parents.

graduate school to earn her degree in social work before accepting a job in the Jewish non-profit sector.

She says she knew she was going to be more strictly religious from the time she was in early childhood. L.S. was the only woman interviewed who maintains that she was born with a pre-disposition towards Orthodoxy and knew this from her preschool years. "I always loved God and loved prayer; when I was three years old, I first stated that I wanted to be religious. I always understood that not everyone should feel the same way and you should respect each other." She felt a certain spiritual pull on her *neshama* (soul) to become more observant.[279] She took on the *mitzvot (*laws) at the age of twenty. Her parents respected the decision, although they remain non-observant.

She dated her husband for three months before they got engaged. She feels that she was in love with him as much as one could be at that point. They both come from similar backgrounds and share a common history of dating non-Jews for lengthy periods of time and breaking off those relationships when they became more observant. She married before entering graduate school at the age of twenty-six.

L.S. is not able to have children and adopted twins from Guatemala. She relates that there is an adoption story within the texts in the Purim tale, where Mordechai adopts Hadassah (Esther) … "[F]or she has neither father nor mother"… "and when her father and mother died Mordecai took her to himself for a daughter." [280] L.S. says that, "There is a stigma [to adoption]… we are who we are, and we don't care." She is an advocate for adoption and believes that unmarried single women should have the right to find a means to have their own families.

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[279] *Neshama* means soul.

[280] Ester, *TANAKH, 2:5-7.*

L.S. originally moved to the suburbs from a major city for the lower cost of living, educational opportunities, and chances for personal growth in the community. The cost of day schools in the suburbs is manageable as is the ability to lead an economically comfortable lifestyle. She sends her children to the more religious day school, where the boys and girls are separated. In the *Bais Yaacov* ideology, the children are taught a strict observance of the commandments and to never forget their heritage.

L.S. is well liked in the community. She states, "There is no divide between those people having been religious for generations, and those who are new to Orthodoxy." She is a connector within the Orthodox community, bringing people together for networking and social events. Her Shabbat table is always filled with guests, and she has become accustomed to opening her home to new BTs. L.S. says there are plenty of choices for an Orthodox person in this area and always plenty of new people to meet.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS ON BA'AL TESHUVA

The BT population in suburbia is diversified and its presence further expands differences in religious observance and tolerance of different ideas in these towns. Orthodoxy in the suburbs is also being shaped by the BTs and their approach to piety and social norms. BTs envision their contribution as an integral component to Orthodoxy in East Brunswick and Highland Park. Each woman who became religious in this study grappled with her gendered place within Orthodoxy and how this relates to men and the power dynamic. How these three women utilize this religious community for their religious goals influences the FFB population in creating new ideas on

marriage. All of these women ended up in the suburbs for different reasons: education, place of origin, and cost of living/quality of life issues. But they also chose to stay long-term.

K.L. grew up as a Reform Jew, the most autonomous and ritually liberal of the denominations. Her explorations in college led to an interest in Orthodoxy. Although she plans to pursue a PhD, she feels that she can handle her career expectations and future household responsibilities. K.L. hopes to return to this suburb after her education is completed.

The BT experience of L.W. is informed by her status as a newlywed. As an only childhood of a Conservative Jewish family in East Brunswick, she chose Orthodox practice as a response to an illness. The holidays, Shabbat, and certain modesty standards are important to her. She struggles with some of the women's *mitzvoth* such as modesty and the laws against touching. She now resides in Highland Park seeking a more dynamic and larger Orthodox community.

L.S. knew that she wanted to be Orthodox from the time she was a toddler, but did not alter her lifestyle until her early twenties. She now observes the dietary restrictions, family purity laws and rules for modest dress. L.S. moved to the suburbs because it provided all of the necessities for an Orthodox way of life without the high cost of living. She works for a Jewish non-profit which enables her to maintain a traditional lifestyle and adherence to Orthodox norms.

The non-Orthodox women comprise the core population of potential BT candidates. In 2014, the Pew Report noted, "One in five Jews now describes themselves as having no religion." [281] Many of the BTs in this study did not come of age in a traditional Jewish background. Yet, BTs choose another path by finding a religious partner and lifestyle. Traditional Jews make an impact on their surroundings and general mainstream culture. Orthodoxy is reaching further into

[281] Pew Research Study, "A Portrait of Jews in America," 7.

these new suburbs; “Jews of no religion” still comprise twenty-two percent of the population,[282] where three-in-ten American Jews do not identify with a movement.[283] Outreach organizations have a real opportunity, and the next thirty years could bring significant change within the landscape of American Judaism, especially in the suburbs.

[282] Ibid, 7.

[283] Ibid,10.

7.0 PLURALISM

This final chapter examines the current state of East Brunswick and how pluralism, realized through tolerance within Orthodox Judaism, unites one Orthodox community in suburbia. Here, we examine the stories of: S.W., a prominent figure at Young Israel; S.T., a woman employed by the Conservative movement, yet sending her children to Chabad and a Hebrew immersion charter school; and O.G., the Director of Early Childhood at Chabad of East Brunswick. Each woman contributes to the spectrum of what constitutes Orthodox Jewish life in these communities.

Residents of non-urban settings in the United States took advantage of a major demographic shift, which encouraged the decentralization of factories and offices to the suburbs after World War II. By 1964, industrial employment "was more than half suburban-based, and by 1981 about two-thirds of all manufacturing took place in the 'industrial parks and new physical plants of the suburbs."[284] Since 1995, the religious population of East Brunswick grew, and, as one participant notes, "It used to be the largest Jewish community no one ever heard of."

Over the past few decades, East Brunswick has expanded from a small suburban community to one that offers nearly every commodity, yet it still maintains the look and feel of a

[284] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 238-242

quaint town. It has sidewalks, small stores and houses with manicured lawns. The houses are in rows with grid streets, created in a planned structure. Most of the homes are either Victorian or colonial style with shutters and driveways.

According to Hutchinson in *Religious Pluralism in America*, there were three steps towards establishing a fully diversified neighborhood: "The first we can call pluralism as toleration; the second, pluralism as inclusion; the third pluralism as participation."[285] This community is an example of participatory pluralism. Hutchinson further explained, "pluralism as participation implied a mandate for individuals and groups (including quite importantly, ethnic and racial groups) to share responsibility for the forming and implementing of the society's agenda."[286] The traditional Jews of East Brunswick are now in the third stage because of their involvement in community activities, financial participation in businesses catering to their particular needs (for instance every grocery store has a kosher section), and contribution to the school system. They are fully integrated into the community. There is a definite give-and-take within the community to include the population and expectations of the mainstream society, financial, and otherwise.

Over the course of this study, the Jewish composition of East Brunswick and Highland Park transitioned as many organizations opened, closed and expanded. The most significant changes occurred within the Reform and Conservative Jewish communities of East Brunswick. This town was named by the Star Ledger, a state-wide newspaper, as the fourth best place to live in New Jersey due to its affordability versus median house income. Yet, following a national

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[285] Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism*, 6.

[286] Ibid, 7.

trend, this central New Jersey suburb is no longer a prime location for non-Orthodox Jewish settlement.

In 1980, there were 585,893 people in Middlesex County and 37,000 people in East Brunswick, with over 1,000 member families each at the Reform and Conservative synagogues. The Baby Boom generation (1946-1964) sustained East Brunswick, but it is failing to offer the refined, educated, and urbane atmosphere now gaining popularity with the newest non-Orthodox consumers of Generation X (1965- 1979) and the Millennial Generation (1980-2000). It does not offer solutions for a generation with delayed marriage, fewer children (also children conceived later in life) and uncertainty toward work and money.[287] By 2010, there were 54,000 Jews out of 811,000 people in Middlesex County. According to Shenkin and Dashefsky, 8.9 percent of the region's population is Jewish.[288] There was an increase in overall population of Middlesex County by thirty-six percent in the last thirty years, and an increase of people in East Brunswick of 10,000.

The Jewish population for East Brunswick (Central Middlesex County) and surrounding towns in Central Middlesex County is 10,100, a twenty-five percent decrease in the past eight years.[289] Fifty-eight percent of Jews in the East Brunswick area are over the age of sixty-five.[290] Eleven percent of all Jewish households in this area said they will probably or definitely move out of the county in the next five years.[291]

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[287] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*. 11; 17

[288] Shenkin and Dashefsky, "Jewish Population in the United States," 22-26.

[289] Ibid, 22-26.

[290] 23% of Jews in Central Middlesex County are ages 0-17.

[291] Ibid, 22-26.

By 2013-2014, the Conservative roster stands around 350 member families with eighty percent of the synagogue members at forty-five years old and over; [292] the Reform congregation has just over 200 families, and those numbers continue to dwindle. The two non-Orthodox synagogues in East Brunswick each support a Hebrew school, Hebrew High (supplementary religious school for grades 8-12), and a multitude of youth programs. However, in 2013-2014, the Reform preschool and the Conservative day camp closed. Two weeks before school was set to start, the blue-ribbon Solomon Schechter School, a staple in the community for 30 years, abruptly shuttered.[293] By 2014-2015, the Conservative synagogue was forced to combine some of their Hebrew school classes due to low enrollment, and the Reform congregation changed their full-time Director of Education position to a part-time position. The Conservative preschool will be closing due to lack of enrollment by 2015.

The local Conservative synagogue has dwindled by over sixty-five percent in the past twenty years. According to a statement in a newsletter dated October 2014 by the president of the congregation:

> Our membership is declining, our annual debt service remains at approximately $260,000, and at the end of the second quarter of 2015 we will have a cash deficit of $280,000… Long term we will need to make some tough decisions… choices we will consider among others, include selling a portion of the campus, including our houses

[292] Steven Schonfeld, Gene Brody, et al., "A Survey for our Future," East Brunswick Jewish Center.

[293] There is another Solomon Schechter in Central NJ in Marlboro. Some students chose to continue their education there, but the majority transferred to public school.

> [294]…developing our land, merge with another *Shul* in the area, share our *Shul* with another *Shul*, or open our building up to the full spectrum of conservative Judaism…[295]

During the fall of 2013, this president is one of seven leaders involved with a survey of over 500 individuals (in 299 families) at the synagogue, which found that fifty percent of the members preferred that the non-egalitarian synagogue change to egalitarian services.[296] But, by the fall of 2014, no additional services had been added. The Conservative population is evolving in a more liberal direction and leaving the area as the Orthodox population is growing.

Robert Eisenberg, states that in the mid-1990 there were estimated to be about a quarter million Hasidim in America. Their numbers are growing at a rate of about five percent per year, and each generation is advocating for more children per family. This group is also attracting members from outside the Hasidic community. In 2008, five percent of all Jews in the East Brunswick area defined themselves as Orthodox. In comparison, forty-nine percent of the Jews living today in Highland Park are religious. The Pew Report states the average number of children born per adult ages 40-59 is 4.1 for the Orthodox population.[297] For the rest of Judaism, the number is 1.9, and the U.S. general population number is 2.2. Therefore the Orthodox fertility rate is more than double that of the non-traditional Jews and the rest of the American people.

The Orthodox population in East Brunswick was still increasing in 2013-2014; in the past two years, the number of families joining the Young Israel grew by over fifteen percent, and the

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[294] The synagogue currently owns five houses.

[295] Eric Rabinowitz "President Report " EBJC Recorder. This statement was from the monthly newsletter of the congregation. It was published for public access online.

[296] Schonfeld, "A Survey for our Future" East Brunswick Jewish Center.

[297] Pew Research, "A Portrait of Jews in America", 40.

majority of these families came from outside the community.[298] The pluralistic (yet Orthodox run) alternative Jewish high school doubled its numbers by accepting middle school students, now 7-12 grades, yet the total number of students currently stands at only thirty. In the summer of 2014, a day camp run by Yeshiva University for academic achievement grades 1-6 opened in the space formerly occupied by the Conservative camp. In the fall of 2014, a "Centrist" Orthodox Montessori school, designed for babies through grade eight, from the neighboring community of Edison, leased the space left void by the Conservative day school in East Brunswick.

Ten of the women in this study attend Young Israel, and three women attend Chabad, both of which are located in East Brunswick. Together these represent over one-fourth of the total women in the study. East Brunswick has a working *eruv* and *mikvah*. It is driving distance to multiple day schools. It has a kosher meat restaurant and butcher shop and, in the summer of 2014, opened a strictly kosher dairy restaurant.[299] Both supermarkets in East Brunswick offer large kosher sections. One has a "Kosher Experience" section with a kosher butcher, kosher fish counter and bakery, and the other offers a kosher bakery and kosher sushi.

The Young Israel is a member of the Orthodox Union, which requires: a *mechitza*, closed parking facility on Shabbat and the holidays and Shabbat-observant officers in the synagogue. In addition, the Rabbi must be a graduate from an Orthodox Rabbinical school.[300] Young Israel

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[298] Since 2010, there has been no extensive quantitative study of East Brunswick in either demographics or the Jewish community.

[299] In the summer of 2014, a kosher pizzeria and Italian restaurant opened. This is the first dairy kosher restaurant to open in East Brunswick; it is also *Chalav Israel* and under the *Va'ad* of Raritan Valley. The owners do not live in the community; they are yeshiva educated (high school only) and in their early twenties.

[300] Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 163.

follows patterns that the Neo-Orthodox movement instituted more than a century ago: they offer a vernacular sermon, and Rabbis hold academic degrees in addition to Rabbinical ordination.[301]

According to L.H., Young Israel in East Brunswick began as a break-off faction from the Conservative synagogue in the early 1970's. The official start of the East Brunswick Young Israel was in 1975. L.H.'s parents were among the founding members and initially held services in their basement until they hired a full-time Rabbi. Young Israel grew from twenty original families to 220 families today. The congregation supports a *mikvah*, social hall, and daily *minyan* and study sessions; it also offers an expanding on-site preschool and kindergarten with thirty students and a summer camp with over 100 children.

Instead of being divided, members are unified, calling the synagogue a "warm and friendly one *shul* community." Within the boundaries of Orthodox understanding of *halakha*, they draw from a multitude of ideas and philosophies using their available resources and brain power. They believe this allows the Jewish community to function at its highest level. It also concentrates all-Orthodox financial support in one place. East Brunswick has a small, but growing Orthodox population with the mentality of inclusivity, not exclusivity.[302]

Young Israel is working hard to bring more traditional Jews to the suburbs through online marketing and in-person networking. The synagogue has devoted an entire portion of their

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[301] Robert Liberles. *Religious Conflict in Social Context: the Resurgence of Orthodox Judaism in Frankfurt am Main, 1838-1917*, 299. Liberles makes a comparison between Neo-Orthodoxy and the Young Israel movement in how they both incorporate vernacular into their sermons to attract more people.

[302] It is following the trend of religion in America as it is moving towards a more pluralistic ideology according to Gaustand and Schimdt in a *Religious History of America*. Since 1900, over one-third of the citizens in America have been members of a church/synagogue.

website towards attracting Orthodox Jews to the area, which includes information about schools, employment opportunities, and statistics about the benefits of living in central New Jersey. In the spring of 2013, they hosted a prospective member Shabbat and invited over twenty families to East Brunswick who were considering moving to town. The visitors were assigned host homes, and they learned about the benefits of the community. They are selling their lifestyle to young families and couples. They have come to the realization that their survival depends on long-term growth achieved by attracting new members to the area. By including all Orthodox Jews, Young Israel recognizes that diversity and inclusion will ultimately carry their synagogue into the future.

The two Orthodox synagogues in East Brunswick function according to different philosophies. Chabad's focus is on *kiruv*, bringing non-Orthodox Jews into greater observance of the Jewish laws. The general philosophy is to provide a welcoming arena for others to join and learn. This began under the Seventh *Rebbe*, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), as a worldwide campaign to encourage Jews to practice the mitzvoth.[303] The Rebbe believed that traditional Judaism on American soil was not lost.

The East Brunswick Chabad runs a school for infants and early childhood. While most of the teachers are religious Jews, most students are Jewish, but not Orthodox. It often attracts children from competing Reform (now closed), Conservative (closing in 2015) and other Orthodox preschools, because it offers more accommodating hours and age-range acceptance, plus lower tuition. The ideology of education by Chabad is that it is a lifelong pursuit that begins at birth. An education should be one where a child is taught to find answers for themselves and

[303] The Seventh *Rebbe* made it his mission to bring a more traditional lifestyle to secular Jews. Simon Jacobson, *Toward A Meaningful Life: The Wisdom of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, 30.

not to be solely dependent on the teacher, while the instructor is still imparting facts. It should also be a place where children understand and can relate to God.305 O.G. says the school is a chance for children to become involved with Judaism, to learn prayers and songs, to celebrate the holidays, and to begin to recognize the Hebrew and English alphabet, while meeting other Jews in a caring, enriching and supportive environment.

7.1 INFORMANTS ON PLURALISM

7.1.1 "S.W."

S.W. is an unassuming pillar of the Orthodox Jewish community. She is twenty-nine, Modern Orthodox, and has three children ages six, four, and a newborn. My first conversation with S.W. is in her colonial home, just a few blocks from her synagogue. She is caring for her young baby in the middle of the day, and she is in between her duties of housework and schoolwork.

She firmly believes that Modern Orthodox is not a separate denomination within Orthodoxy. She says that, although she is more religious than most of the congregation, she believes strongly that Modern Orthodoxy should be considered the "authentic true Judaism." She explains, "It is not about people keeping only some laws that are true and not the other laws… it is about educating people about keeping laws that are true and not those that are extra." S.W. does not view Modern Orthodoxy as the liberal faction within Orthodoxy. Although Young Israel is traditionally linked to Modern Orthodoxy, her interpretation of Modern Orthodoxy does not mean "less" religious, rather a "less stringent form of religion." She says that it is a religion

that allows a person to become one with the contemporary world and, yet, still be able to abide by the relevant laws.

She attempts to keep all of the applicable Jewish laws. [She follows the interpretation of the deceased Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the preeminent Rabbis on American Orthodoxy, in understanding the kosher laws. She believes that non-Jews are not contaminating the milk; therefore, she does not find it necessary to consume only *Chalav Yisrael*. When in the confines of her own home she will remove her *sheitel*; however, she will always wear it in public, and she observes the laws regarding body covering by covering her elbows, arms and legs. She is an advocate for the *mikvah* in her community and is concerned with actual *mikvah* usage.

S.W. believes that Judaism values questioning, learning and a more educated, diversified congregation, which she feels equates to a more accepting congregation. She believes the local Rabbi may not have the definitive answer to all inquiries and is willing to look outside of her suburb. As one may choose to think differently than their neighbor, she notes, this should too be reflected in the congregation. As an involved member of Young Israel, she says she needs to be knowledgeable, open-minded, and tolerant of all sorts of beliefs.

S.W. is an FFB who grew up in an Orthodox home with three siblings. She was raised in a Young Israel environment as an active participant of a synagogue with close to one thousand members. Her family was part of a group who initially formed a breakaway synagogue with 200 families in their home. Both of her parents were teachers and involved in Jewish education and summer camps.

She went to a Modern Orthodox day school from grades K-12. She attended seminary for one year, and she describes the place as a 'right-wing feminist institution.' Afterwards, she attended a *Haredi* college in Jerusalem for a short period of time. She went on to a Jewish

university, earned a master's degree, and is currently studying for a doctorate in the School of Education at the local university. Her formal education has always maintained a focus on Judaism. She continues to teach about Jewish studies at a local Orthodox school on a part-time basis. She also volunteers at Young Israel in various capacities.

S.W. met her husband while attending Jewish Orthodox camp, Morasha. They were both counselors and dated six months before becoming engaged. S.W. did not observe the laws of touch until high school; she says she had a boyfriend in the eighth grade. In her household, the family utilizes limited technology. She has a cell phone, but it is not a smartphone. She does not have cable, therefore the television streams from online accounts.

She describes herself as a "hands-on mother," who enjoys her time at home. She says, "Traditional women … are in the home, if the woman is not there, then the men would do the job." She believes that a woman can have a dual role as an educated individual and a mother. As a married couple, S.W. and her husband have lived all around the country and in Israel. She feels she has had the opportunity to observe, "best practices in Jewish education" and now demands this for her own children. She does not enroll her children in the Young Israel preschool but instead sends them to the local Orthodox Montessori School. As a very active participant in the Young Israel, she is concerned that her choice not to send her children to the early education center is not viewed favorably. Her children are enrolled in an array of activities "to become well-rounded," including: a pluralistic basketball league (she coaches the girl's 1-3 league), swimming, gymnastics, piano and online Hebrew education.

She says that she is trying to help perpetuate Jewish marriage by becoming a matchmaker on sawyouatsinai.com, an Orthodox Jewish dating website. She believes it is hard for people to meet "naturally," especially for overweight women. S.W. surmises that older people (thirty+)

tend to meet by chance, but the younger Orthodox are more in need of help. She says that internet matchmaking has become so commonplace that it is no longer a last resort for young people.

S.W. is content in this town, because it reminds her of where she grew up. Her family moved here a few years ago for her husband's job. She feels it is the ideal place to raise her growing family. She currently has three children, but she says she would like to have more. She can do her grocery shopping right in town and shop online for anything else that she may need. She says, "I think it's easy to be an Orthodox Jew in suburbia." She would like to attract additional transplant families to the area. It would provide a social outlet for younger families who already live here and allow the area to grow.

7.1.2 "S.T."

Over the dozens of conversations I have with S.T., it becomes clear that her life as an Orthodox Jew closely coincides with her involvement with all types of Jews. She taught preschool at the local Conservative synagogue; [304] one of her children attends the Chabad School; and she is a member of Young Israel. She accepts divergent Jewish beliefs. She has red, curly hair, which she wears uncovered, and is married and thirty-five with three children under the age of seven.

S.T. considers herself Modern Orthodox to the left (more liberal). Even though she is a Modern Orthodox liberal woman, she does not keep all of the mitzvoth, and she is not at all apologetic about it. She follows what she is comfortable with. She is kosher at home, but sometimes eats *pareve* (not dairy or meat) at non-kosher restaurants. She has two separate beds,

[304] Lost her job at the Conservative Preschool because of lack of enrollement.

but does not go to the *mikvah* anymore. She never feels the need to refrain from touching the opposite sex.

For S.W., the laws of modesty are a personal choice: "I don't dress *tzinius.* [But] I don't wear skintight clothes…When I light candles [on Shabbat], I light in what I am wearing, and I don't cover my hair when I light." She wears a hat to synagogue and in her own words she "dresses appropriately to *shul*," which means sleeves below the elbow and a skirt that falls under the knees. She says that the level of decency in non-Orthodox society "has gone out the window" and, as an educated individual, she is free to make personal decisions on modesty.

S.T. grew up in an Orthodox community. She is the oldest of six siblings, and her mother was "more to the right (religious)" regarding "details" of the religion. She also comments that several of her siblings have strayed from Orthodox Judaism. S.T. attended a non-Orthodox Jewish school from grades K-8 followed by an Orthodox day school for grades 9-12. After high school, she went to a Modern Orthodox seminary in Israel for a year. She then went on to obtain her bachelor's and master's degrees from a Jewish college. S.T. lived on her own during graduate school in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She feels this was a time of religious exploration, where for first time she no longer had anyone watching her.

At twenty-five, she met her husband on the holiday of Simchat Torah at the Carlebach Shul on the Upper West Side. They dated three months before they got engaged and got married during her last semester of graduate school. S.T. feels strongly that men and women are equal due to co-parenting. Both partners work, are respected, have opinions and contribute equally to the household.

Her children attend a public Hebrew immersion charter school with children who are not Jewish. The school does not teach religious education on site. They offer an extra Judaic studies

program, four days a week. She says she chose this school, because of the quality of the secular education:

> If you are teaching subject matter that needs to be taught well, one should not suffer for the sake of another. If you are going to Chumash they should know how to teach -- not just a Rebbe or someone from Lakewood, a qualified teacher for each subject. I would like Ivrit' b'Ivrit (Hebrew in the Hebrew language). I would like the children to be looked on as individuals in class and be challenged or supported as needed -- even if [it means] extra work for the teacher.

Both her girls will attend the school and the after-school, religious program. She is unsure about her boy, because she wants him to study Gemara.

S.T's home is a white two-story colonial with modern furniture and a manicured lawn. There is a minivan parked in her driveway, which is typical for her neighborhood. She moved to East Brunswick as a newlywed because she wanted to be close to one set of parents. On her block, she has a non-Jewish Caucasian family whom she describes as, "into tractors and farm equipment," a "friendly" Hispanic family, a Muslim family, whom she does not know, a "nice" Irish family, and one Jewish family who live farther down the block. She lives within easy walking distance of Young Israel. Unlike Highland Park, her block is diversified. She chose East Brunswick as opposed to Highland Park because she felt it was less judgmental. She lives with people of all different ethnic and religious backgrounds. She is friendly with two sets of Catholic neighbors (Irish and Hispanic). She does not discriminate based on color, race or ethnicity.

S.T. has been a part of the East Brunswick Orthodox community for close to a decade, and the community is warm and embraces her family. She finds that "no one seems to know or wants to know" what commandments she chooses to follow. This tolerant Orthodox atmosphere is "come-one-come-all." She describes the synagogue community as an "open and accepting place to live… I think it is because it is one *shul*, everyone has one Rabbi… no competition."

S.T. says how much she enjoys the community. As a Modern Orthodox, liberal woman, she wants an Orthodox community that is open enough to accept her choices. She says that she may not be accepted in every Orthodox Jewish community.

7.1.3 "O.G."

O.G.is thirty and wears a brown *sheitel* that falls to her shoulders. She describes her Jewish practice as "joyful and happy," and Shabbat excites her. Her dietary practices include only dairy products certified as *Chalav Israel* (i.e., those items produced under a more rigorous approval code of kosher supervision). She tries to keep all of the *mitzvot*, which includes observing the norms of dressing in a virtuous manner and keeping the family purity laws.

O.G. is from a very devout neighborhood in Brooklyn and the oldest child of many children. As the child of BTs, she was immersed in religious practice from a young age. She states that the religious laws are a vital part of her existence. She went through the *Bais Yaacov* school system (ultra-Orthodox), where her elementary through high school education was taught under a very stringent, religious headmaster. O.G. reminisces that, from the beginning of her childhood, her insular neighborhood promoted the belief that education was a foundation to employment that would support a religious lifestyle. After high school graduation, she went to seminary in Israel, where she learned the laws of Torah and Hasidism and how to convey enthusiasm to the Jewish community at large.[305] She received her bachelor's degree from the seminary and her master's degree from an online program.

[305] A *fabrengen* is a Yiddish word for a party.

At twenty-three, O.G. met her husband through a matchmaker. They dated for six weeks before they became engaged. O.G. explains that most women from her neighborhood rely either on a traditional matchmaker or chabadmatch.com to meet a partner. She recommends that two months is the maximum people should date before getting engaged. She says that, in Chabad, the marriage ceremony is the pinnacle of a jubilant occasion, as it is the formation of another Jewish family coming together under God. The "key to a successful marriage is appreciating its sanctity. Beyond just uniting man and woman, marriage must introduce a third dimension: God" [306]

O.G. did not move out of her secluded environment of Ultra-Orthodoxy until she relocated to the suburbs, as a *shliach*, with her husband seven years ago. She finds plenty of green space, different kinds of food and bigger supermarkets. She enjoys the convenience of driving to do all of her shopping and the ease of carrying her bags to her car. She says that she feels compelled by her mission of *kiruv* to follow her husband wherever he wishes to go. She feels that it is her destiny to share traditional Judaism with others. The last *Rebbe* Menachem Mendel Schneerson asked his *shlichim* to go out into communities and act as emissaries to the masses.[307]

O.G. views Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson as the great leader of Chabad. She says he showed his followers how to embrace all Jews and help them celebrate being Jewish: "They, [the *Rebbe* and his wife] were able to get things done. [They were] up to date with the latest ideas [and] they were passionate. He is the Messiah and he will return. [I] will be the last generation in exile and the first to be with the *Moshiac*h."

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[306] Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the *Rebbe* of Chabad, was thought to be the messiah by a faction of Chabad. This grew in popularity until his death in 1994. After he passed, less of the movement has held onto this ideal and it is now considered an alternative way of thinking.

[307] Jacobson, *Toward A Meaningful Life*, 49.

Her messianic beliefs place her outside the bounds of mainstream Chabad. The central beliefs of Orthodoxy are: God definitely exists; the Torah was given at Mount Sinai; and the Messiah is coming.[308] The belief that the *Rebbe* Menachem Mendel Schneerson may be the next Messiah did not enter the mainstream ideology of Chabad before his death. Because O.G. holds this belief, it places her within a distant, but vocal, group within Chabad, which is outside mainstream Chabad and Jewish beliefs.[309]

O.G. would like to have many children, with a maximum of twelve. O.G. currently has only one child, but she is optimistic about having many more, because she feels that God will reward her family for their efforts and for the work they are doing. She wants to help populate the observant Jewish community.

O.G. runs the Chabad early learning center, and her child also attends. The preschool is pluralistic and welcomes all Jews. She does not express her beliefs about the Rebbe in the school. She plans to send the child to the more religious day school in Highland Park after preschool, instead of a local Chabad School that is set up by another *shliach*. She believes sending her child to a school with people outside of Chabad will help him to socialize with Jews of different beliefs in the future.

The East Brunswick Chabad supports equality for men and women. She claims that everyone "has a domain and responsibility" in the ethos of "separate but equal." Menachem Mendel Schneerson said that the domains of males and females are both important to the

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[308] Typically, all Chabad *shaliachim* are assigned a location by Chabad headquarters. In this particular situation, a regionally located Chabad Rabbi decided that he wished for his sons to start Chabad chapters in nearby communities. Although normally Chabad Rabbis do not conflict in territory in this particular area, there are both assigned and non-assigned Chabads; therefore, there is an overlap.

[309] Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmpolitians and Parochials*, 87.

community. O.G. believes the *Rebbe's* campaigns involving family purity and *mikvah* creation [310]established an atmosphere of accountability and organization.

The Hasidic philosophy states, "Our focus in life, as a man or woman, must not be to satisfy our own ego or needs but to serve G-d. True women's liberation does not mean seeking liberation within a masculine world; it means liberating the divine feminine aspects of a woman's personality and using them for the benefit of all humankind."[311] Women's skills may include education, childrearing and household duties. This expert suggests that, rather than women asking for more rights, they should re-introduce spiritual values into their lives. Assuming gender roles collectively and individually helps to liberate women by "signifying the culture differences between men and women."[312]

7.2 CONCLUSIONS ON PLURALISM

East Brunswick no longer acts solely as a commuter settlement for the cities, but a place to live and work. As the urban enclaves are becoming increasingly expensive and out-pricing longstanding families, they are turning to these new neighborhoods and building communities. East Brunswick is representative of developing Orthodox communities in the suburbs. It is used as an example to illustrate the formation of a small Orthodox population and its experience with focusing on an ethos of pluralism constructed out of tolerance. Because the traditional population continues to grow, it will eventually diversify and expand, similar to Highland Park. Although

[310] Aryeh Solomon, *The Educational Teachings of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson*, 362.

[311] Jacobson, *Towards a Meaningful Life*, 185.

[312] Malti-Douglas, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*, 629.

these two communities are two distinct snap-shots of contemporary traditional Jewish life as far as the density and diversity, the overall Orthodox population in this area shares more similarities than differences.

In 2013-2014, the Jews in this particular community found tolerance of various religious observances and beliefs within Orthodoxy, which helped to bond this observant community. In places such as East Brunswick, the smaller Orthodox community (yet in a larger town compared to Highland Park) has led to a predominately one-synagogue atmosphere, where all Orthodox Jews are welcome. Eventually, if the community continues to grow, the diversity will presumably look more like Highland Park. Pluralism does not translate into one ideology. In early times "…majority support both in religious bodies and in society at large is that we should accept pluralism as a primary value, but must also deal seriously and studiously with pleas concerning social and moral cohesions."[313] It has become a value spectrum within traditional Jewish law.

S.T., S.W., and O.G. represent the spectrum of Orthodoxy in East Brunswick. Each woman's ideas toward religion and its individual expression, publically and privately, are unique. All three examples, S.T., a Modern Orthodox liberal, S.W., Modern Orthodox machmir, and O.G., the Haredi, are fairly new transplants to East Brunswick. Their different views and values represent the diversity of Orthodoxy within East Brunswick.

Both S.T. and S.W. are members of Young Israel. S.T. makes an effort to not be critical of others religious beliefs; therefore, she feels that the accepting community of East Brunswick was a good match for her family. S.T. speaks of her commitment towards experiencing all types of Judaism in the community, as a teacher in the Conservative preschool, member of the

[313] Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism*, 234.

Orthodox synagogue, and as a mother with children in the Chabad preschool. She is committed to following her own unique path.

S.W. is open towards acknowledging the questioning nature of Judaism. She says that she sometimes goes outside of her local Rabbi if she has a question. She also leads a multi-denominational basketball league as a volunteer. She serves as an active member on a committee with other members of the Reform and Conservative congregations to create a township-wide, annual Purim Carnival. She is the head of the welcoming committee for new members into the congregation.

Meanwhile, O.G. runs a religious preschool that caters to the multi-denominational population in her area. Although she holds divergent beliefs from the children, who are a mixture of Orthodox, non-practicing and non-Jews, her staff is Jewish. She is committed to running an educational institution based on Jewish values, but open to all young children in the suburbs. Tuition at the school also costs less than other area preschools, and so, it draws a wide range of students who are looking for a more affordable private option with longer hours.

O.G., S.T., and S.W. prove that these environs are now the destination as a place to live and work, as all three have jobs in the community. In fact, out of the fifty women, forty-six of the women in this study either work or attend school in the suburbs. Only four commute to a city for either a job or education. This allows for communities to flourish and nurture themselves based on the concept of staying within.

In East Brunswick, survival is dependent on the neighborhood bonding together. Therefore, it has developed a cultural norm of acceptance and overall tolerance. Hutchinson states, “(As) Catholic- Jewish- and African-Americans advanced toward full inclusion, even though halting and imperfect, not only had (they) provided models for imitation; they had

initiated a logical process that other minorities could apply in their own situations." [314] Whether an individual is on the periphery of Orthodoxy or fully engaged, all of the participants are fully supportive of each other. Having a Rabbi at Young Israel, a synagogue board, and members of the community who are committed to outreach and willing to welcome each member regardless of their level of religious belief seems to the long-term existence of the neighborhood.

[314] Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism*, 221.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This dissertation showcases suburbia as the newest American frontier for traditional Jewish living. The lives of the fifty women researched demonstrate how individual choice in how to practice Orthodox Judaism helps facilitate diversity and tolerance; which leads to pluralism. This study examines how fifty women understand their religious thought and practice while living within East Brunswick and Highland Park, NJ. The diversity of the selected informants - between the ages of 18-45, all three sects of Orthodox Judaism, FFBs, BTs, converts − and location of surburbia are all essential components to this study. Through an analysis of their understanding of feminism, the suburban landscape, modesty, BTs, and pluralism, it is clear how these women are shaping their own lives and creating an expression of Orthodox Judaism that is individually diverse.

Jeffrey Gurock contended that for the past sixty years, non-observance was a "way of life" within the Orthodox movement. Tentative Orthodox Jewish populations in the suburbs defied Shabbat law by driving to the synagogue and other religious obligations yet remained members of Orthodox congregations.[315] Orthodox women are now pursuing new understandings for their lifestyle.

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[315] Gurock, *Orthodox Jews*, 314-315.

The suburbs, today, permit each woman to practice and understand Orthodoxy to correspond to their own priorities. Orthodox women are playing a role to help the transition of maintaining suburban religious communities. As contemporary, Orthodox women living in suburbia, they have learned to adapt their traditional lifestyles to their own *Halakhic* barometers. These women fashion their own interpretations of religious life.

All of the women enjoy the tolerance and the inclusive spirit that these particular communities have shown them. Each of the informants attempts to create a non- urban environment that facilitates group integration and acceptance among all different levels of piety. Religious compromises in observances are not due to geographic constraints, because there are multiple options for synagogue membership in Highland Park. In East Brunswick, the majority of the Orthodox community worships together as one ritual group at the Young Israel where there is open-mindedness toward all Orthodox Jews. In Highland Park traditional Jews function as one community with many religious differences. Both celebrate their diversity in different ways, East Brunswick as one main synagogue and Highland Park as one township, offering both in the spirit of pluralism and tolerance in the suburbs.

The suburban lifestyle also allows Orthodox women to assert a variety of ideals and to have divergent opinions on how to practice ritual. This aids in the promotion of heterogeneous ways to perform religious acts within Orthodox Judaism. Suburbia facilitates an open-minded Orthodox community toward people who do not fit into defined ritual or communal standards. The individuals are shaping the community instead of the community shaping the individuals.

As important parts of these religious communities, the women are fashioning a self-reflective, Jewish identity. These women adapt to their new gender roles and maintain a growing recognition for the need of pluralism both within and outside their communities. In an era that is

accepting, the boundaries of piety are tested for the sake of pluralism and preservation of the Orthodox community.

This ethnography functions as a portrait of a generation who are living participants in the wider American experience of suburbia and Judaism. Out of the fifty women interviewed, eighteen of their stories are examined in-depth. They represent the diversity of Orthodoxy, and how each woman practices Judaism through an individual approach. This dissertation stands as a social-scientific examination of a current Orthodox Jewish religious culture. It is a functional representation of traditional Judaism. It looked at the "effects of religion on actual life" and the effects of everyday life on religion. [316]

Suburban Orthodox women in contemporary America are creating their own definitions of understanding and observance by showcasing their negotiation of the competing pressures between piety and choice. The suburbs deserve analysis and attention because they are the new landscape for religious Jews. As such, the geography, culture and limits on size of the traditional community are influencing Orthodox Judaism. Their perceptions of gender roles, modesty, suburban living and pluralism are establishing new and novel ways to practice an ancient religion. The fifty women in this study reflect the broad spectrum of beliefs and behaviors that can be classified under Contemporary Orthodox Judaism.

[316] Catherine L. Albanese, *America, Religions and Religion*. 4th ed.,Xxii.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Aron kodesh. The case in the synagogue that holds the Torah scroll.

Ba'al teshuva. A person who is becoming religious, "returning" to the faith.

Bais Yaacov. A *Haredi* full-time elementary and secondary school for girls that teaches Judaica in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon.

Bashert. Soul mate.

Beit Midrash. Smaller chapel in a synagogue used for daily prayer or a study hall in a *yeshiva*.

Bris. The circumcision ceremony.

Chalav Israel. The highest level of dairy *kosher* supervision practiced by traditional Jewish population, which begins with supervising the milking of the cow.

Chatan. Groom.

Cholent. The traditional stew made out of meat and vegetables and beans commonly eaten on Shabbat.

Chuppah. Marriage canopy.

Dati leumi. Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox Jew in Israel.

Daven. To pray.

Derech chiba. Touching in an intimate manner.

Erlicher Yidn. "Virtuous Jew," or observant Jew.

Eruv. The area around a neighborhood where it is permitted to carry objects, keys, or push a baby stroller on Shabbat or holidays.

Frum. Observant "Orthodox" in Yiddish.

Frum-from-Birth. Observant-from-Birth.

Gabbai. Lay person who assists the running of a synagogue service.

Get. Jewish divorce document presented to wife by husband.

Hadar. Inner splendor.

Halakha. Jewish law.

Hashem. Literally "the name," as it refers to God.

Hasidim. Multiple groups of *Haredi* Jews, also *Hasid* (singular) or *Hasidic* (adj).

Haredi. Ultra-Orthodox, the most traditional population of Jews.

Heimish. Warm and welcoming.

Hekhsher. The different *kosher* symbols representing the companies and various levels of observance.

Hirhur. Prohibition against having inappropriate sexual thoughts (in response to *shomer negiah*.)

Kallah. Bride.

Kiruv. The attempt to bring non-Orthodox Jews into greater observance.!

Kohen. Literally "priest" and also believed to be the direct biblical descendant of Aaron. There are specific rights and obligations.

Kollel. Place of learning for married men to study *Torah*.

Kosher. Dietary laws held by Jews, including the separation of milk and meat, not eating pork,

shellfish and other hooved animals, also called *kashrut.*

Le'atid. A resolve to change direction.

Levi. is a member of the Israelite Tribe of Levi, descended from Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. There are specific rights and obligations.

Mechitza. A divider separating men and women in an Orthodox synagogue.

Mikvah. Ritual bath used for family purity.

Minhag. Custom.

Minyan. A group of ten men needed to form for a ritual service; egalitarian synagogues will accept women.

Mitzvah or Mitzvot (plural) Commandment found in the Bible and Rabbinical texts. Mitzvah literally means "command." Therefore, "doing a mitzvah" can be a good deed in line with the writings.

Off the derech. "Off the path," the people who were formerly Orthodox now not following the laws.

Neshama. Soul.

Pareve. In *kosher* supervision, foods that are either meat nor dairy that may include eggs, fish, fruits, nuts and vegetables.

Pesach. Passover, the holiday that commemorates the Jewish people's escape from slavery from Egypt.

Pikuah nefesh. When a life is at risk, a person is required to help, regardless of whether doing it would normally violate a commandment.

Pidyon ha-ben. The ceremony to redeem a baby boy via the agency of a Kohen thirty days after birth. Traditionally the redemption price has been five silver coins.

Rebbe. A master teacher or mentor of Torah**.** A *Rebbe* is a head rabbi in *Hasidic* sects. In Chabad it is shorthand to talk about the seventh *Rebbe*, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Sabbath. The day of rest from Friday night beginning at sundown, when candles are lit, lasting until Saturday night at sundown (shown by a few stars in the sky).

Seminary. Post- high school program focused on Judaica usually in Israel, usually for females as alternative to male *yeshiva* study.

Shatnetz. The existence of a mixture of linen and wool in a garment which is explicitly prohibited by a Scriptural declaration (Deuteronomy 22:9-11)

Sheitel. A wig worn by Orthodox women to cover their hair.

Shaliach or Shlichim (plural). A Chabad representative who works with the non-observant population.

Shiurim. Lectures.

Shidduch. A match for a wedding.

Shochet. Ritual slaughterer for *kosher* supervision.

Shomer Mitzvot. Person who follows the Jewish laws.

Shomer Negiah. Person who follows the laws of gender separation between men and women; specifically touch.

Shomer Shabbat. Person who keeps the laws of the Sabbath.

Shtibel. A small house or room used for prayer.

Shul. Synagogue.

Taharat Hamishpaha. The laws of sexual separation and family purity.

Tallit katan. Jewish prayer shawl worn underneath clothing everyday by males only in Orthodox practice.

Tanakh. The Hebrew Bible which includes the *Torah*, *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings), it is the major book in Judaism.

Tefillin. Set of small black boxes that contain verses of *Torah*, worn by Orthodox Jewish males during morning prayers.

Tichel. A head scarf used by Orthodox women to cover her hair.

Torah. First five books of the *Tanakh* which includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Torah im derech eretz. "Torah and the way of the land" or observant religion and participation in mainstream culture.

Tum'ah and taharah. Impurity and purity under the family laws; the time when men and women may be together and not together.

Tzadik. A learned man, who is seen in the community as "righteous" or one who follows the traditions. Also the head of a Hasidic community.

Tzinius. Modesty.

Tzitzit. Ritual fringes attached to the *tallit.*

Yeshiva. Jewish secondary school that focuses on Talmud and *Torah*.!

Yichud. Laws of men and women being alone together before marriage, the room that bride and groom share after they are married is called the "*yichud* room."

Yisrael sabbah. "Way of grandfather," or living life the way past generations lived.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM (INFORMAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY AND INTERVIEWS)

TITLE: Tradition and Individualism in Suburbia: An Ethnographic Study of Orthodox Jewish Women

ETHNOGRAPHER: Rebecca Slavin-Phillips

PURPOSE: The purpose of this project is to determine how Orthodox Jewish women interact with suburbia.

INFORMANTS: 50 women between the ages of 18-45 in Central NJ.

PROCEDURE: If you agree to participate in this research study, you will take part in a personal interview. These tasks will take you less than 3 hours to complete. All interviews will be recorded through notes taken by Rebecca Slavin-Phillips.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS? There is little risk involved in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

You will receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study besides from helping in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY? All records pertaining to your involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential. Your name will be changed in publications and final research.

IS PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigator rfs21@pitt.edu.

Subject's Signature _____

Date of Informed Consent: _____

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR INFORMANTS

Establishing a Baseline

1. Name? Are you Orthodox and describe your level of Orthodoxy?
2. Where do you currently live?
3. What synagogue do you belong to and describe the level of observance at your synagogue?
4. Describe the mitzvoth you keep?
5. Are you kosher? Describe how you keep kosher.
6. Do you keep your hair covered? In what way?
7. Describe if and how you keep the modesty laws.
8. Are you *Shomer Negiah*? How?
9. Are you now following the separation laws?
10. Do you observe Shabbat?
11. Did you or your husband (if applicable) attend *yeshiva* (post-secondary)? Which one? What was the philosophy of that particular yeshiva?

Background

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Describe your family. (Present and background)
3. Are you Ashkenazic or Sephardic?
4. Are you *ba'al teshuvah*? Were your parents BT?
5. Describe the synagogue you attended growing up.

Career

1. What is your profession? How many hours a week do you work?
2. Is what you do during the day a career (long term) or a job (just for money)?
3. Does your husband work? (if married)
4. What do you think about stay-at-home mothers?
5. What do you think about women supporting a man in *kolle*l?
6. How often do you see your husband and children?

Child Rearing

1. What is the ideal number of children to have?
2. What if someone cannot have children? Is it permissible to adopt?
3. Who has the primary responsibility for educating and raising the children?
4. Where do your children attend school? What is the religious philosophy of the school? What do you look for in a school for your child(ren)?
5. What types of extra-curricular activities do your children participate in?
6. Will your children be allowed to have friends from other religions or other Jewish denominations (Reform, Conservative)? Were you allowed?

Education

1. What school did you attend growing up? Describe your education.
2. Where did you live while you were in school?
3. What Rabbi do you follow? Has this changed over time?
4. Did you attend college, graduate school, or have any professional training?
5. How important to you is your secular education?
6. What is more important for women -- secular education or religious education? Is it different for men?

Marriage

1. How did most people you know first meet their husbands or wives? Explain how you met yours (if applicable).
2. Do you think that technology helps or hurts this process today?
3. What is the average amount of time people “date for marriage” in your community?
4. How large was your wedding? Where was it held?
5. Did you feel restricted by your community, parents or your matchmaker regarding whom you could date?
6. How many potential matches did you meet before you found your *bashert*?
7. Do you believe there is a *Shidduch* crisis?
8. At what age do you believe women should start looking for marriage?
9. When do you think couples should consider divorce -- if ever?
10. In your house, whose responsibility is it to cook, clean, or do chores?
11. Is a marriage a partnership or a hierarchy -- who is in charge?

Gender Roles in Suburbia

1. Do you think that men and women are equal in your community?
2. Describe men's and women's roles in your community.
3. Would you change any ritual roles in the synagogue or otherwise?
4. Why do you think there are women's mitzvoth? What are the three? (lighting candles, separation of challah, and separation from husband during *niddah*?)
5. How do you feel about *Shomer Negiah*? Do most people you know follow it? Do you?
6. What do you think the reason is for dressing *tzinius*?
7. How do you feel about people who are BTs or FFB's?

Suburbs

1. What would you change (if anything) in your community?
2. Do you feel equal as a woman and why?
3. Have you always lived in the suburbs - how has this changed you?
4. Do you have non-Jewish friends, non- Orthodox friends? What community activities do you participate in?

Technology

1. What is the role of technology in your life?
2. Do you own a TV and what programs do you watch? Do you use internet/ own computer? Do you have special filters on the computer to monitor what comes in?
3. Do (Will) you allow your children to watch TV or go to the movies

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