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SPECIAL SECTION

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish interiority, the Internet, and the crisis of faith

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This article argues for a recuperation of interiority. Rather than conflate interiority with belief, as immaterial and individualized, research with ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York reveals interiority to be as public and political as is the material. Over the past fifteen years, ultra-Orthodox Jews have been increasingly concerned with religious doubt. Many communal leaders have called the current moment "a crisis of faith," with the perception that there are new challenges to ultra-Orthodoxy, especially from the Internet. In response, leaders have turned to explicit communal talk about interiority in their attempts to strengthen faith and therapeutically treat those with religious doubts. Public talk, where certain forms and locations of interiority are cultivated and others disciplined, shows efforts by ultra-Orthodox leadership to defuse the power of secular epistemologies, such as psychology and technologies, while harnessing their potentialities for religious authenticity.

Keywords: Judaism, religion, interiority, technology, language, digital media

Over the past fifteen years, ultra-Orthodox Jewish leaders in New York have become increasingly worried about secret religious doubt, heresy, and defection (e.g., Winston 2006; Davidman 2014). Despite few reliable statistics, many have been warning—in communal publications, schools, synagogues, and public gatherings—about what they have called "a crisis of *emune*" (locally translated as "faith").[1]

1. I have heard various estimates of the number of those living double lives in the United States (by those living such existences), anywhere from a hundred to ten thousand. An online survey sponsored by Footsteps, a nonprofit organization supporting ultra-Orthodox Jews who are questioning or who leave, reported that out of 885 respondents, 33 percent (290) reported living double lives (Trencher 2016). However, given the problematic of self-reporting, it is unclear if these statistics are reliable.

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Many described newly vulnerable Jewish hearts corrupted invisibly by intractable doubt. There was the sense that more and more were either leaving their communities altogether, going "OTD" (off the *derech* [path]), or living what community members called "double lives": practicing religiously in public for the sake of families, while secretly exploring secular socialities and subjectivities online and off. In response, an emerging group of ultra-Orthodox leaders began focusing attention on *pnimiyus* (interiority).[2] They did so in order to help those "at risk" of growing what they called "*kalt tse yiddishkayt*" (cool to Judaism) or for those with *emune kashes* (questions of faith). There was acknowledgment that unlike even a decade earlier, exterior embodied signs and practice (*khitzoynius*) could no longer cultivate an interior affective trust in God (Fader 2013; cf. Mahmood 2005).

Many of these community leaders, at least partially, blamed the Internet for this change. Thus, the current crisis of faith can also be understood as a "crisis of mediation" (Eisenlohr 2011). Gershon and Manning (2014) describe crises of mediation as historical moments sparked by the introduction of a new medium. This leads to contested notions about the very nature of media and mediation, with the potential to change interaction itself. As Rabbi Weinberger, for example, noted in the popular ultra-Orthodox magazine *Ami*:

> Nowadays we have the Internet, where everyone is anonymous and no *levush* [marked ultra-Orthodox clothing] can act as a shield. . . . Before, *levush* was enough. . . . [Today] if you don't have a connection to *hashem* [God] and feel the warmth, then you'll *glitch* [slip, i.e., in your faith]. (2016: 62–63).

In this article, I analyze efforts by rabbis, activists (*askanim*), educators, and therapists to protect against and "cure" religious doubt by talking and writing about interiority. The invisible complex terrain of interiority, as an anthropological project, refers to the hidden self that is made legible to others and constituted through interaction (Duranti 2015: 5). Doubt may be experienced by the religious subject as an "internal discourse" that becomes unpersuasive or inarticulate (Lambek cited in Engelke 2005: 783). In contrast to this interior self-talk, here I consider public talk about interiority evident in two contexts: an anti-Internet rally for women and a religious therapists' convention. Borrowing Giddens' concepts of practical and discursive consciousness (1984), I develop the term "discursive interiority," that is, talk about interiority that simultaneously mediates it.[3] Discursive interiority highlights occasions of perceived crises or transitions, when community members in public and private use language to explicitly focus attention on interiority, articulating and debating what had previously been implicit and so, perhaps, unelaborated. I suggest

2. The Hebrew term *pnimiyus* refers to interiority, what one rabbi described as a person's "hidden core." Note that the term can also refer to the interior of the Torah. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

3. I do not mean to imply that there is a preverbal interiority, some kind of psychological construct. Interiority is always mediated. However, with the term "discursive interiority" I hope to emphasize that there are moments of change when there is a communal and conscious effort to focus on interiority and to engage in public discourse on interiority rather than self-discourse.

that ultra-Orthodox rabbis and therapists in these contexts drew on competing notions of interiorities: the theological, based on rabbinic and kabbalistic Jewish texts, and the psychological/therapeutic, rooted in liberal Protestantism. They framed religious doubt either as contamination from the Gentile Internet or as a mental illness requiring treatment. I emphasize that interiority is not only private and individualized, as is often implied, but in fact can be a way to shore up hierarchies of authority, reject certain forms of sociality, and discipline others. Among ultra-Orthodox Jews, interiority became publicly visible and audible through discourse, with political implications.

The current moment among the ultra-Orthodox in New York may appear to be a piety movement, one focused on an ideology of sincerity, where interior intention is transparently mediated by language in exterior practice (Trilling 1972; Keane 2007; Seligman et al. 2008). Keane notes that sincere intentions usually privilege a language ideology that focuses on individual interiority (2008: 122). Indeed, the rabbinic expression in Hebrew for sincerity refers to an alignment between the heart and the mouth, intention and deed (*ekhad balev, ekhad bapeh*). However, there were, as I discuss, key differences in how an ultra-Orthodox ideology of sincerity was enacted, particularly in the relationships among intention (*ratson*, interior will), ethical agency, and authority. An ethnography of interiority, I suggest, can decenter what Taylor (1989) and anthropologists of Christianity (e.g., Robbins 2004; Keane 2007) have defined as the modern Protestant subject by accounting for other modern religious subjectivities, including nonliberal Jewish ones.

More broadly, this article foregrounds religious doubt, a topic that has not often been central to conversations in the anthropology of religion (Engelke 2007, 2008, 2014; Luhrmann 2012b; Pelkmans 2013; Schielke 2012). To investigate what Pelkmans calls "lived doubt" requires a focus on the "relational and temporal dimensions of conviction and doubt" (2013: 4)—at historical moments, across the individual lifecycle, or within a particular ritual (Severi 2002; Keane 2008: 116). Among the ultra-Orthodox, *emune* (faith) meant that despite inevitable uncertainties or doubts, individuals were willing to continue to practice the commandments (*mitzves*). Lately, however, ultra-Orthodox leadership had become preoccupied precisely with questions of faith that disrupted practice, in secret or in the open. For doubters and those living double lives, these questions of faith were less about belief in God per se. Instead, many told me they questioned the literal truth of the divine revelation (*matan toyre*) with its narrative of unbroken continuity. They stopped adhering to the commandments in private once they began to doubt the legitimacy of what they called, "the system" (the structure of religious leadership and its institutions). The Internet, with its opportunities for anonymous sociality, critique, and exploration, amplified the threat of doubt that obstructed practice, leading it to become a central topic for leadership's production of discursive interiority. Crises of faith and mediation, like encounters of missionization (e.g., Robbins 2004, 2012), often include explicit debate over competing ethical systems and a heightened sense of boundaries between self and other. In the ultra-Orthodox context, leadership focused on reinscribing the moral boundary between ultra-Orthodox Jews and Gentiles, rather than addressing more subtle differences among Jews, which they did in other contexts.

Data comes from fieldwork conducted from 2013 to 2016 with double lifers and those who ministered to them, including ethnographic interviews with therapists, life coaches, and rabbis; participant observation at the annual religious therapists' convention and four anti-Internet rallies for women and men. All of the material was audio-recorded and transcribed. The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, I provide background to ultra-Orthodox Judaism and its relationship to new media, broadly conceived. This is followed by the first context of discursive interiority, an anti-Internet rally. Next, I provide background on the emergence of religious therapy and notions of mental health, followed by the second context of discursive interiority, a religious therapists' convention. The production of discursive interiority to protect and cure religious doubt was a proxy for wider struggles over the right to define authentic ultra-Orthodox Judaism at a moment of religious change.

Ultra-Orthodox semiotic ideology and the mediation of interiority

After World War II, ultra-Orthodox Jews successfully rebuilt thriving communities in major cities diasporically, especially in the United States, where they encountered a growing tolerance for public religion. The term "ultra-Orthodox" refers to two major iterations of Ashkenazic Jewish orthodoxy, Hasidic and Misnagdic/Yeshivish (opponents of Hasidic Judaism). Both were traditionalist movements which arose in eighteenth-century Europe in response to the rapid social changes modernity brought (e.g., Hundert 1991; Rosman 1996). In the context of rebuilding after the Holocaust, though Hasidic and Yeshivish communities continued to be marked by differences of language, religious practice, and engagement with the "Gentile" world, they have grown less oppositional. I suggest that the current crisis of faith and mediation has led Hasidic and Yeshivish Jews, especially educators and therapists, to work ever more closely toward the shared goal of maintaining the institutional structures of ultra-Orthodoxy. The local Yiddish term "*haymish*" (homey, familiar) exemplifies the blurring of boundaries among traditional communities, pointing to a baseline of shared practices and beliefs in the face of other denominations of Judaism, such as the Modern Orthodox or even Conservative and Reform Jews.

Many have documented the unexpected move toward increasing religious stringency from the postwar period on, despite predictions of assimilation by social scientists. Nevertheless, the past fifteen years has seen a backlash against this increasing religious stringency, owing, in part at least, to a number of events which delegitimized leadership. These included: political in-fighting among Hasidic rebbes (leaders of Hasidic courts) over succession, with groups splintering off (e.g., Mintz 1992; Rubin 1997; Heilman 2006; Heilman and Friedman 2010); the sexual abuse scandals and charges of molestation, especially in boys' yeshivas (schools of higher learning) (Fader 2012); an increasing embourgeoisement, marked by the need for greater incomes and higher education; and, not least, the incredible popularity of the J(ewish) Blogosphere (2003–9), where anonymous bloggers living double lives (mostly Yeshivish) created a vibrant counterpublic, mocking and parodying ultra-Orthodox leadership (Fader 2014, 2017).

In this climate, a central "semiotic ideology" (Keane 2008) has begun to change. Semiotic ideologies are cultural beliefs about language and other "semiotic modalities" (including materiality) that have temporality (Irvine 2012). As Keane (2008) notes, semiotic ideologies are public entities and are not confined to inner or subjective experiences. Until recently, a semiotic ideology allowing ultra-Orthodox communities to flourish was that Jewish material signs could transform Gentile media, broadly defined. Thus, most media could be uplifted by transformations of sounds, appearance, content, or use to become appropriate for cultivating ultra-Orthodox Jewish interiority. This allowed ultra-Orthodox Jews from the 1970s on to participate in the languages, cultural forms, and technologies of what they called "secular" or Gentile society, while continuing to condemn that society as morally bankrupt. For example, a Gentile language, such as English, could be made to look, sound, and feel ultra-Orthodox, to be appropriate for cultivating ultra-Orthodox piety, to "*kasher*" it (make it kosher). I have described how ultra-Orthodox teachers were instructed that if they did not know a word in Yiddish, they could just make English words "sound" Yiddish (e.g., using a distinctive Yiddish sound, such as a trilled /r/).

Different communities of ultra-Orthodox Jews engaged this semiotic ideology to varying degrees, speaking to the diversity of ultra-Orthodoxy. For example, Yeshivish Jews have historically been more open to new media and its transformations. In contrast, Hungarian-origin Hasidic Jews (Satmer, Pupa) were more reluctant to transform new media, preferring to censor instead. Lubavitcher Hasidic Jews were unusual in that they were early adopters and adapters of all kinds of new media for outreach purposes. Thus, despite differences among the ultra-Orthodox, material transformations of media could often protect the purity of Jewish souls (*neshumas*), described as "perfect jewels." This semiotic ideology emphasized the Talmudic notion that distinctively Jewish external practice (*khitsoynius*) cultivated the innate potential for interior piety in all Jews (for comparison to Christian Orthodoxy and Islam, see Luermann and Haeri, this collection). These processes were part of the way that ultra-Orthodox Jewish and Gentile boundaries were continuously negotiated.

Limits on individual agency informed these material transformations, which were generally overseen by rabbinic leadership. That is, individual intention to uplift a medium was not especially relevant;[4] instead, individuals had to exercise their moral agency to conform to rabbinic decrees regarding media. Hasidic rebbes, for example, frequently circulated rulings that instructed their followers about the acceptable uses of media or modesty requirements, or even appropriate behavior on the streets of New York. In this way, institutions (schools, families, rabbis) and individuals were all ethically responsible for protecting ultra-Orthodox interiorities from the potential contamination of media that had not been made Jewish.

Until the last five years, the medium of the Internet was similarly made kosher, as were other technologies, languages, objects, or epistemologies previously.

4. The Hebrew/Yiddish concept of *kavaune* (intention) is associated with prayer. In contrast to other media, there is no need to uplift the medium of prayer since it is already in Hebrew, a non-arbitrary, sacred language (for a similar stance to classical Arabic, see Haeri, 2003).

There were many Hasidic and Yeshivish communities that used the Internet to create, for example, an ultra-Orthodox English online news outlet (e.g., *Vos iz Neies*, "What's News"), inspirational lectures online, and gender-segregated chatrooms, which censored any *kfira* (heresy) (e.g., ImaMother or *ivelt*). Similarly, cellphones were transformed to limit individual access and publicly shame users without filters (Barzilai-Nachon and Barzilai 2005; Campbell 2007, 2010; Deutsch 2009). For example, kosher phones were given official circular stickers, which publicly and visibly certified that rabbinically approved filtering devices were installed to block polluting images.

However, this "media ideology"—what Gershon (2010) describes as cultural beliefs about media and mediation—has begun to change for some rabbis and activists. Rabbinic leadership has been stymied by both the necessity of the Internet to ultra-Orthodox livelihoods and the dangerous opportunities of social media for doubters, especially those living double lives, to find each other. As I discuss next, leaders at anti-Internet rallies began to produce discursive interiority to articulate the particular dangers of the medium itself to the individual and to *klal yisroel* (the Jewish nation).

Discursive interiority I: The will, the evil inclination, and the Internet

In 2012, Yeshivsh and Hasidic leadership began collaborating to take a much more active stand against the Internet, blaming it as one factor in the crisis of faith. In an unprecedented move, rabbis rented out Citifields Stadium in New York, where forty thousand ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox men attended; the secular space of the sports stadium was transformed to become a publicly visible display of Orthodox Jewish leadership's strength and solidarity around this issue.

At the Citifields rally (*asife*), there was evidence that the conceptions of the Internet and its threat to ultra-Orthodox interiority were beginning to change. Initially, many rabbis had emphasized the danger of access to Internet pornography, with attendant fears of masturbation: that is, Gentile content, "*schmuts*" (filth), could tempt and lead ultra-Orthodox men to sinful practice. The emphasis was on behavior, rather than interior affect. At the same time, however, other rabbis began to warn about the Internet's potential for "infecting" a person's affective connection to God, even while that person continued to look and act like an ultra-Orthodox Jew, that is, living a double or orthoprax life. As one Yeshivish rabbi warned at the Citifields rally, "Even those who look the same outside, same *levush* [ultra-Orthodox men's clothing], but inside they're burned. They're extinguished . . . [they have] no feeling for anything Jewish, any *mitsve* [commandment]." From this perspective, interiority was newly vulnerable and newly obscured by its encounter with the Internet. After the Citifields rally, anti-Internet rallies became relatively common contexts of discursive interiority where communal leaders made explicit the Internet's threat to innate Jewish affect (for *mitsves*) and its loss ("they have no feeling for anything Jewish"), both of which could lead to religious doubt with the potential to disrupt or threaten Jewish practice.

Despite doctrinal differences among and between ultra-Orthodox Jews, speakers at anti-Internet rallies drew on shared theological beliefs about Jewish

interiority and threats to it. For example, many ultra-Orthodox Jews referred to an innate, even racialized, distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The Torah notes that Jews—all Jews, even the unobservant—are distinct from Gentiles in their innate potential for fulfilling God's commandments, despite not necessarily understanding God's intentions. According to kabbalistic texts, Gentiles lack the *nefesh elokis* (the godly spirit). Talmudic and *mussar* (philosophical) texts elaborate that within each Jew there are two inherent inclinations, one for good (*yeyster hatoyv*) and one for evil (*yeyster hore*) These inclinations guide or tempt/confuse each Jew, who must struggle to use their *ratson*, their individual will or intention, to elevate the material world and discern a moral pathway to self-growth (Fader 2009: 36–41).[5]

By 2012, many men still had not installed filters on their smartphones, so rabbinic leadership began to focus its efforts on limiting Internet in homes. They began having rallies aimed at ultra-Orthodox women, who were responsible for rearing the next generation of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Speakers at these rallies began to articulate a changing semiotic ideology, conflating the medium of the Internet with the inclination for evil, and the threat to the individual with the threat to Jewish continuity. As one rally speaker recently said, "We are waging an outright war [on the Internet] because we . . . realized that it is tearing pieces out of the Jewish community." In these rallies, speakers emphasized the importance of the individual will, enacted through the ethical agency to conform to rabbinic authority despite individual desires to the contrary. Agrama's discussion of *fatwas* in Egypt offers a helpful way to think about rabbinic authority here by linking individual interior intention and "self-constituted sensibilities" with broader structures of religious power. He writes, "Ethical agency . . . would not be opposed to authority, but rather an expression of it" (Agrama 2010: 14). The threat of the Internet was its disruption of the ethical agency of individuals in their struggle with their evil inclinations to submit to rabbinical authority, potentially harming them and their families.

One of the women's Internet rallies I attended in Boro Park in 2014, for example, was a mandatory event for Pupa Hasidic high school girls and their mothers. Women received automated phone calls to remind them to attend, underlining the continuity across contexts between homes, schools, and Hasidic leadership. A woman leading a double life whose children went to the Hasidic school told me about the rally, and we went together. The rally was three hours long and was held in a huge wedding hall to accommodate the fifteen thousand attendees. The assembled speakers, Hasidic and Yeshivish activists, rabbis, and rebbes, sat in a row on a dais behind one-way glass to preserve modesty. Many of the speakers recited from religious texts in Yiddish and Hebrew, reminding women of the key role of the "*mame in a yidishe shtib*" (the mother in a Jewish home). Similar to the more common inspirational lectures (*shiers*), the act of listening to holy words from religious authority figures was supposed to strengthen interior trust in God or *emune* (Fader 2013).

5. Theological elaborations of Jewish interiority are complex, with a diversity of rabbinic sources and time periods. Different ultra-Orthodox communities choose to foreground particular sources at different historical moments. In the crisis of faith, I argue, Jewish philosophical writings (*mussar*) and Chabad (Lubavitcher) literature have both been increasingly drawn on by other ultra-Orthodox communities.

Eventually, Rabbi Feldstein went to the podium, reminding the audience of the relatively new Technology Awareness Group's office, which had recently opened a branch in Boro Park, Brooklyn. TAG was a charitable organization funded by the Committee for the Purity of the Community in (Yeshivish) Lakewood, NJ. The offices all over the New York/New Jersey area installed filters on smartphones for free. Making an explicit comparison between a physical illness, the structure of authority for decision making, and the danger of the Internet, Rabbi Feldstein said:

> If you have even a question or even a *shayle* [a question for a rabbi] or suffered a doubt that maybe something's unhealthy, that there's a possibility, don't wait until you're sure that it's not good. When you have to call *hatsula* [the private Orthodox Jewish emergency response corps] and there's a question, you don't hesitate. You dial the number . . . don't take the risk, *kholile* [God forbid], and be sorry later on.

Note the comparison of the Internet to an emergency requiring the equivalent to a 911 call in a crisis. The physical threat of bodily harm, of an emergency, was compared to the "unhealthy" and equally dangerous threats posed by the Internet. Indeed, the Internet was often described in rallies for women as an external virus, which could infect ultra-Orthodox Jewish interiorities, despite any good intentions or absence of bad ones.

In the face of such danger from external Gentile infection, Rabbi Feldstein also emphasized the established practice of asking for help or support from religious authorities. If an ultra-Orthodox Jew had a *shayle*, a question about religious practice or a decision to make, they knew to ask a respected rabbi rather than trust their own judgment. Women with questions generally asked their husbands, who either made a decision or asked their rabbi. However, in the context of the "emergency" of the Internet, Rabbi Feldstein authorized women to occupy a new authoritative role: to recognize the external, physical emergency posed by the Internet when their husbands or children could not or would not. Women consulted new male authorities, ultra-Orthodox technology professionals at TAG. Women's ethical agency was the recognition of danger from external threats (especially after learning about these threats from authorized rabbis at rallies) and then turning to alternative approved male authorities to remove the danger. This model of individual authority emphasized the importance of the will to submit to an authority authorized by a rabbinic leader. Those living double lives or those who left challenged this model of ethical agency because they rejected the legitimacy of ultra-Orthodox leadership to make decisions for them. For example, someone living a double life wrote me a sarcastic text about the efforts of TAG: "With the onslaught of technology, we can't follow these things constantly, that's why we organized a group of 'experts' [i.e., TAG] who will make sure our devices are kosher and only what they approve can be used. We can't be trusted or left to our own devices." For those living double lives, in fact, ethical agency was based on their insincerity, that is, their commitment to public religious practice, despite doubting, for the sake of their families.

The final speaker was Rabbi Cohen, a well-known Yeshivish anti-Internet activist, who explained exactly how the medium of the Internet could harm Jewish interiority. First, drawing on non-Jewish sources, a common communal tactic, he

warned of the potential for cognitive damages. He focused on ultra-Orthodox boys in particular, for whom focus and memory are key in their religious studies. After quoting from the findings of a popular journalist, Nicholas Carr, Rabbi Cohen noted:

> The *gedoyle roshey-yeshives* [the heads of yeshivas] of our generation said that the thought of raising *khas-vesholem* [God forbid] *bokherim* [boys who study Torah], who cannot learn a *toysfos* [a page of religious commentary], who cannot learn the *Rashba* [early Talmud commentator], who cannot *fartif zikh in di toyre ha-kedoyshe* [immerse himself in the holy Torah] . . . his mind is a bigger threat to the *kedushe of klal-yisroel* [holiness of the Jewish nation] than all the *shmuts* [filth] on the Internet.

According to the highest rabbinic authorities, it was the invisible "minds" of these boys, their cognitive deficits, that posed a danger to the continuity of the Jewish nation. The corrupted capacity for deep thought and concentration as they studied Torah was more dangerous than any online images which might lead to sin.

In addition to cognitive damage (the mind), the Internet threatened affect, the heart, and the soul in its conflation with the inclination for evil (*yeyster hore*). As Rabbi Cohen explained, "We are talking about a harmful medium. We are talking about a *shtik yeytser-hore* [part of the evil inclination]." That is, the Internet as a medium (regardless of content) was actually part of Satan's efforts to trick well-meaning Jews into doing the wrong things. This temptation did not have to do with individual intention or rational thought. As Rabbi Cohen said, "*Farnemt nisht de kop* [the head doesn't understand this]." By naming the Internet as part of the inclination for evil, Rabbi Cohen placed the new medium in a familiar category of threat to the purity of Jewish interiority.

Social media, in particular, disrupted God's protective design for ultra-Orthodox interiority: private reflection and individual struggle with oneself. Rabbi Cohen explained that Facebook, texting, or Whatsapp created the potential for an anonymous public sociality with others who had questions, doubts, or desires that were not acceptable.

Rabbi Cohen called social life online a "*kinus lereshoyim*," a biblical term for a community of evil-doers. He explained, "Good people can have bad thoughts. Everybody can be assailed by a *tayve* [a lust] or a *yeytser-hore* [inclination for evil] or *khas-vesholem, a khibur* [God forbid, a romantic connection], *a krives vos kimt arayn in di harts* [a call that comes into your heart]." However, God created the world, he continued, so that when a person thinks a bad thought he does it alone. He said, "*Er sheymt zikh fun dem. Er meynt az er iz der eyntsiker meshugener af der velt* [He is ashamed of that thought. He thinks he is the only crazy person in the world]." Though every Jew might have bad thoughts or impulses, God created the feeling of shame when a person experienced forbidden feelings alone, in private. The Internet, however, disrupted this God-given affective protection, where shame for certain thoughts or desires led to self-censorship.

Social media, in contrast, allowed the interior self with its evil impulses to be public and social, not private and isolated. Social media allowed a person to explore impulsively and find others, a counterpublic, with the same "inappropriate *makhshoves* [thoughts]." Rabbi Cohen continued:

> When a person has *khas-vesholem,* a *shverer tog* [God forbid, a hard day] un *se falt arayn yene* inappropriate *makhshove in kop un er geyt* online [and an inappropriate thought pops into his head and he goes online] and he googles it, there are *reshoyim* [evil-doers] out there who have thought about the forum, and instantly he feels that he has a support group. There are other people there who feel like him. *Er iz dortn a normaler mentsh. Di ale andere zenen kranke* [There, in the forum, he is a normal guy. The others are the sick ones].

The Internet not only provided a public "support group" for a person's bad thoughts. More important, "forums" made the person seem "normal," a communal term for someone who conforms or fits in. The sociality of the Internet, especially as a subversive and anonymous space, interrupted the possibility for private shame, invoked in solitary contemplation, so that forbidden desires might be rejected. Social media could make the truly "sick" person seem "healthy" because of the new opportunities for anonymous sociality. Khan (2016), writing about pietist Tablighis in Pakistan, similarly notes that the egalitarian sociality and sensibilities of online interactions created "moral chaos" by threatening the legitimacy of religious hierarchies.

The notion of intersubjectivity, drawing on Duranti's (2015) discussion, offers a helpful way to think about this kind of mediated interiority. I suggest extending intersubjectivity to how people understand not only each other's and their own interiorized minds (i.e. ,what Luhrmann [2012a] calls "second-order knowledge"), but also their hearts, where Jewish affect, such as shame or desire, is located. In terms of interiority, theories of mind emphasize the interactions by which people come to imagine others' interiorities. This includes theories of knowledge, evidence, and intentionality, but also, I suggest, religious affect, for example the ways that shame can control one's impermissible ideas or desires. Further, the concept of intersubjectivity might be extended not only to interactions among people, but also to affective ties between people and technology, as well as other inanimate objects, crossing ontological divides. In fact, this is precisely one of the problems with social media, which distorts the proper affective forms of intersubjectivity between people and objects; this is a trait attributed to Gentiles. For example, Rabbi Cohen concluded:

> The main thing is not an action . . . the main thing is in our heart. . . . Too many of us walk around feeling just like a *goy* [Gentile], that technology is a blessing. It's a wonderful thing. People love their iPhones. If they weren't embarrassed they would kiss them. The main thing is to change that feeling in our heart. We have to recognize that this is something, which is out to destroy us.

In order to fight the inclination for evil, to control bad thoughts through the feeling of private shame (as God intended), one has to stop having positive feelings for technology (control the heart), something Gentiles are unable to do. Ultra-Orthodox women's challenge, then, was to recognize that technology was part of the inclination for evil, part of Satan, whose goal was to inflict harm on them and their families. Discursive interiority was a way to reinscribe one of the most salient community boundaries, that between Jews and Gentiles, as those with

morally distinctive interiorities. As I noted, however, not all Gentile media were imagined as animate, an active tool of the devil to lead Jews astray. The English language, for example, though sometimes called a "*goyishe sprakh*" (Gentile language) by Yiddish teachers trying to get children to speak more Yiddish, was not portrayed as part of the inclination for evil. In contrast, clothing which violated modesty standards for women was, such as an "insidious slit" in a skirt (Goldman 1993). Rabbis even had begun calling smartphones "*shmad*phones" (conversion phones), as if the use of one actually led an ultra-Orthodox Jews to convert. Note that the Yiddish term *shmadn* (baptize) implies a forced, violent conversion.[6] Media or material objects that could not be successfully made Jewish were often made animate, as if reminding ultra-Orthodox Jews of their agentive possibility for sin by threatening the boundary between Jews and Gentiles.

To fight against the danger of the Internet, women were exhorted by rabbis to use their "will" (*ratson*), their intention. With rabbinic instruction, they had to recognize how the Internet worked as the inclination for evil. Then they had to use their will, despite any desires to the contrary (i.e., any love for their iPhones), to submit to rabbinic decrees limiting Internet access. This involved allowing ultra-Orthodox technology professionals to filter their computers and phones and forbid computers in their homes altogether. The ethical agency to submit to religious leadership would ensure sincere subjects whose interiors (*pnimiyus*) were aligned with their exteriors (*khitsoynius*). As a rabbi concluded at the end of another anti-Internet rally:

> We prayed, *bashefer* [creator]. You created an inclination for evil, but also ways to defeat it. Nothing happens without your help. God, how do we manage with this inclination for evil? Help us God. Help us raise our families with piety . . . we can compete with this inclination for evil. With a strong will, we will beat it.

What happened, however, when, despite warnings and rallies, religious doubt was discovered, confessed, or suspected? To treat religious doubt, communal authorities turned to a competing model of interiority, one that had emerged from the integration of popular psychology with Jewish theology, *Frum* (religious) Therapy.

Religious therapy, mental illness, and doubt

For many in ultra-Orthodox communities, religious doubt had been equated with insanity and mental illness, which was considered a black mark, like any other inherited illness, against an entire family during matchmaking. Even in the late 1990s, very few ultra-Orthodox Jews would admit to going to therapy. Medication for mental illness back then could be grounds for divorce and certainly hidden in matchmaking proceedings (Fader 2009). However, the crisis of faith has required innovative explanations for religious doubt. Many rabbis and activists have, thus, begun to use the therapeutic framework to both explain and treat religious doubt. This was possible only because of the emergence of "Torah Therapy" or "*Frum*

6. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this nuance of translation.

(religious) Therapy" from the late 1970s on, as a new authoritative discourse (Asad 1993).

Psychology (since Freud) has often been described as a replacement for religion (Rieff 1968). A number of scholars have, however, shown how, in fact, religious communities, including ultra-Orthodox Jews, gradually began to adapt psychological frameworks for their own purposes from the 1970s on in the context of the self-help movements of that decade and, later, the recovery movements of the 1980s and 1990s (Herman 1995: 162; see also Bilu and Goodman 1997; Erzen 2006). As they had done with other "secular" media and drawing on the same semiotic ideology, a generation of Orthodox therapists (Modern Orthodox and Yeshivish) began to adapt psychology. They did so, as a double lifer, Yossi, clarified, "not necessarily to pull one over on the rabbis, but because they themselves were pious Jews and needed a framework for seeing therapy as not heresy, and also a way to see it as rooted in psychological insights of the great sages [*tsadikim*]" (author communication, May 2016). Psychology could be "kosher" if its perspectives could be reconciled with previously existing Jewish religious sources, which had their own theories of the workings of human psychology. In this way, reconciliation of the new confirmed the authority of previous religious sources.

For example, one of the most influential figures of the religious therapists was Rabbi Aharon Twersky (Heinze 1999, 2004). Twersky was born into a Hasidic family in Milwaukee in 1900, where he attended public school, not uncommon at the time, especially outside New York City. After receiving both rabbinical ordination and a medical degree in psychiatry, Twersky bucked the emphasis on psychoanalysis in the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States. Instead, he began to develop what he saw as a connection between Jewish philosophy (*mussar*) and the twelve-step program, with its emphasis on self-esteem and growth. For example, *mussar* notions of human nature were often severe and pessimistic, with some believing that only fear of punishment in hell kept observant Jews in check (Heinze 1999: 5). Traditional *mussar* located emotions in the heart, and emphasized the importance of the will (*ratson*) in self-improvement, particularly in struggles with the inclination for evil (*yeyster hore*). Those with problems, including religious doubt, were blamed for their weak will in fighting the inclination for evil; issues of mental health in this schema were framed as moral failings of the individual, similar to the ideas invoked by rabbis at the anti-Internet rallies.

Twersky and other religious therapists, instead, emphasized that emotions were found in the brain, so that the will could not always help those with psychological illnesses. He and others came to embrace treatments with measurable and swift outcomes, such as cognitive behavioral therapy or medication (e.g., anti-depressants, anti-anxiety, etc.). As Heinze notes, Twersky developed a "more nuanced and empathetic" treatment of human addictions and other psychological problems (ibid.: 9). By the late 1990s, as psychology and self-help gradually became sources of authority, communal understandings of negative emotions and mental illness began to change as well. What had previously been interpreted as individual theological weaknesses of the will began to be defined as a psychological condition that needed treatment by experts. For example, Jeremy Stolow's (2010) study of Artscroll, an ultra-Orthodox printing house, showed that many contemporary ultra-Orthodox Jewish self-help books drew on psychology as an authority source comparable to

religious sources. Similarly, today one of the mainstream ultra-Orthodox magazines, *Bina*, has a regular "Therapy Corner" by Mindy Blumenfeld, a religious social worker, and there are countless advertisements in ultra-Orthodox magazines for life coaches, therapists, and degree-granting programs in social work. What Hoesterey calls "the social life of psychology" (2016: 2) has shaped contemporary ultra-Orthodox Jewish interiority, bridging interior self-formation and the politics of community building. This emerging notion of interiority had implications for communal experts responsible for treating doubt, as I discuss next.

Discursive interiority II: Ethics, health, and the medicalization of doubt

As religious therapy gained traction, questions of faith were increasingly treated by experts, creating a division of labor between ethics and health. If a person brought up theological doubts with a rabbi or a spouse, they would first be sent to talk to a life coach or outreach (*kiruv*) rabbis, those who specialized in helping those "at risk," and were often from the same ultra-Orthodox community as the person with doubts. Both coaches and outreach (*kiruv krovim*) rabbis were considered communal experts on doubt. Neither, though, had much formal training or education. Rather, a person was said to have a "*khush*," a feeling, for such work. This meant they were able to answer difficult theological questions through rational argumentation or they were good listeners. They were also able to discern if there might be psychological issues, such as depression, that might be pegged as the cause of the doubts. At that point, these experts might recommend a religious therapist.

But do religious therapists and rabbis understand themselves as ministering to different interior aspects of the person? And what does that tell us about shifting notions of interiority more generally in the context of the crisis of faith and mediation? I suggest that religious therapy has contributed to the emerging ultra-Orthodox notion that emotional health forms the foundation, indeed creates the eventuality, for religious faith. Religious doubts or questions, then, have underlying emotional pathologies, which can be treated in psychotherapy or with medication. Of course, doubt often does bring emotional problems, like depression and anxiety, because it is a personal crisis. However, religious therapy, with its treatment of emotional health, tended to define religious doubt or questioning as an issue of wellness, rather than ethics. This medicalization had the potential to relieve morally blaming the patient for doubt, and yet it also tended to pathologize nonconformity.

We can see these dynamics at play in the religious therapists' conference I attended in 2014. Ruach is an international organization founded in 1992 by an interdisciplinary group of Orthodox Jewish mental health professionals. The website notes its aim is "to bridge the work of rabbis and therapists toward the shared common goals of the Torah observant community." The website further states, "Together we are developing timely and effective approaches that are based on widely accepted mental health principles, within a Torah perspective and *halachic* (Jewish legal) framework."[7] There were a diversity of Orthodox Jews in the organization

7. The name "Ruach" has been used to preserve the organization's anonymity. For the same reason, a website reference has not been included here.

with a huge range of training and qualifications. The majority were modern Orthodox and Yeshivish, as Hasidic men less commonly go on to higher education. Most of the male members were also rabbis, having attended yeshivas. Some had PhDs and a few were psychiatrists. Many had Masters degrees, although students and life coaches also attended the meeting.

The conference I went to took place in a hotel on Long Island. I sat in a crowded conference room, listening to the two keynote speeches: "When a rabbi refers to a therapist" (Rabbi Twersky) and "My therapist told me to go to a rabbi" (Rabbi Cohen). Each spoke to a new division of labor between rabbis and religious therapists. Rabbi Twersky said:

> I believe it's generally safe to say that a therapist should not make decisions and a therapist should not give advice. Our job is to help a person clarify his or her thinking, to get rid of some of the distortions that may be leading the person to making some maladjustments in their life. But to tell them, "You should divorce. You shouldn't divorce." That's not our job. We deal with health and illness in terms of emotions. We don't deal with right and wrong. Right and wrong is the area of the *rov* [a rabbi who advises].

The therapeutic sphere was medicalized. The psyche, emotions, were the realm of therapists and the institution of medicine. Rabbis, in contrast, advised about ethical decision making and actions, about what was right and what was wrong and what actions to take.

According to a number of religious therapists and rabbis I observed and spoke with, a religious therapist worked on mental health problems, not religious issues. For those who doubted, mental health issues were often understood as the cause of religious doubt. When treated, the patient would be able to return to participating in their religious community. Note this is not necessarily the goal of so-called "secular" therapies, where self-actualization or self-knowledge, rather than accepting one's position, might be the focus. By drawing on both theological and therapeutic explanatory frameworks, practitioners also had multiple explanations for "failure," in much the same way that Erzen describes for failure to renounce homosexuality in evangelical reparative therapy (2006: 181–82).

However, there were times when a rabbi, the dominant moral authority, had to determine if an emotion deviated from religious morality, both for the therapist and for the patient, in terms of a form of heresy (*apikorsus)*. This was an issue because both patients and practitioners were Orthodox Jews, bound by shared religious laws. For example, Rabbi Twersky, still speaking to therapists, said:

> In cases where someone is very angry at God and then feels guilt at that anger . . . that anger is not an *apikorsus* [heresy] because it is ok to be angry at God. But you might need to bring in a *rov* to *pasken* that [i.e. the therapist might have to ask a rabbi to determine that the anger is not heresy for the patient and the therapist]. Then the therapist can just deal with the anger, not the guilt.

The rabbi in that case would determine for the patient that the emotion of guilt was unnecessary because religiously the anger was not a sin. The therapist could then deal with the anger at God without compromising their own morality as an

observant Jew. Rabbi Twersky noted that guilt could be a healthy religious emotion making the person repent for a sin, or it could be a problematic psychological issue, when, for example, a person felt guilty for something that was beyond their control. Discernment, with both a psychologist and a rabbi, could determine if an emotion, guilt, was a "healthy" religious one or an unhealthy psychological one.

The ultra-Orthodox emotional register has become increasingly elaborated with its adaptation of psychology and the turn to interiority more generally. There are now, for example, Yiddish books for ultra-Orthodox children, emotional encyclopedias with brief stories, which present a range of different emotions (happiness, disappointment, anger, loneliness). Discursive interiority has included new vocabulary to describe affect (in Yiddish and English), which previously was quite limited (happy and sad, good and bad). This remained contested, however, as the emotional register could trouble the boundary between Jew and Gentile. A double-life parent recently told me that he was upset when his daughter's Hasidic teacher told her, "Feelings are goyish [Gentile]."

The process of diagnosis negotiated between a rabbi and a therapist often delineated separate spheres of authority. For example, Chaim Feldman, an ultra-Orthodox therapist, told me that one of his roles was to "diagnose" a problem so that a rabbi could then legitimately prescribe therapy. He said:

> They [rabbinic authorities] see therapy as a medical cure. So I have a few rebbes and rabbis that consult with me. And they always want to know the diagnosis . . . because if they know the diagnosis, then it's somehow kosher. . . the minute it gets converted into a diagnosis; they're able to work with it. Because they got a box for it.

Rabbi Feldman understood his own therapeutic approach as helping patients form healthy attachments, but he would make a diagnosis for a Yeshivish rabbi or a Hasidic rebbe so that his patients could continue in treatment. If an emotional problem was medicalized (i.e., given a diagnosis from the *DSM*, *Diagnostic and statistical manual IV*), then seeking help for it was kosher, as was treatment. Of course, this is also true for health insurance purposes, but the difference here is that a rabbi needed the medical diagnosis rather than Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

A point of comparison is the evangelical Christians Tanya Luhrmann discusses. An evangelical therapist, Martha, claimed that every issue a client came in with was really about a faulty conception of God, thus bringing the religious relationship between a Christian and God into the therapeutic relationship (Luhrmann 2012b: 124). By working with a rabbinic advisor, Jewish religious therapists, in contrast, were able to claim that the therapeutic context exclusively worked on emotional issues, separate from religion. Jewish normativity was ultra-Orthodox faith. Problems of faith or refusal to conform were diagnosed as emotional problems, not religious ones.

A common diagnosis for those living double lives, often made by those with less professional training, was "Internet addiction." This diagnosis highlights the importance of unpacking the notion of sincerity from a comparative perspective. For example, "addiction" as a category of mental illness for the ultra-Orthodox contrasts to E. Sumerson Carr's research in a drug treatment center in the United States. Carr describes a congruence between health and sincerity. She analyzes a

semiotic ideology where drug addicts must learn to use language to reflect their "inner self" as a way to perform health and be discharged (Carr 2014: 4). Patient and practitioners used language to produce certain kinds of persons that American society valued. In contrast, ultra-Orthodox therapeutic talk about Internet addiction was not about sincerity or individual interior intention. Instead, the addiction diagnosis emphasized the limits of individual intentionality and the danger of Gentile media that were not made kosher. Addiction was the cause of doubt, where an inability to control a medium (the draw of the Internet) created a mental health psychosis. It was the medium, however, that contaminated or infected (using metaphors of illness and contagion) Jewish souls and made them unable to fight their innate inclination for evil. Seeman similarly talks about the rejection of *buna* (coffee) as an addiction among newly converted Pentecostals in Israel. He writes, "Addiction is a religious problem for Pentecostals in part because it is perceived as an external agency or compulsion set up over and against the sovereignty of God" (Seeman 2015: 737).

However, for ultra-Orthodox Jews who doubted, and, most important, their families, the language of addiction removed doubters' moral culpability exactly because there was an outside agent responsible for contaminating their pure Jewish soul. Indeed, religious therapists, life coaches, and rabbis seemed invested in proving that religious doubting was rarely "intellectual," that is, it was not really a rational rejection of belief in the divine revelation. Religious psychological diagnoses focused on the indexical signs and experiences of mental distress, such as depression or anxiety, preventing a person from participating in ultra-Orthodox life. A professional should treat these mental health issues as quickly as possible, which would then allow a person to return to ultra-Orthodoxy.

Emotional problems, like the medium of the Internet, could block an individual's agency to submit to authority. As I noted above, a sign of Jewish distinction was the willingness to submit to God's commandments despite not always understanding why. A healthy ultra-Orthodox person with doubts should similarly continue to practice, despite feelings to the contrary. The promise was that by submitting to authorities and practicing, eventually faith would return. Discursive interiority in therapeutic contexts was a way to remove ethical culpability for religious doubt from the individual and reframe it as a form of mental illness.

In fact, the religious therapists I have spoken to who have treated those with religious doubts (and depression and anxiety) have generally asserted that if emotional issues were addressed effectively, that person would probably return to believing in ultra-Orthodoxy. So, for example, Rabbi Brodsky, a Hasidic outreach rabbi who frequently counseled those who doubted, told me that questions about faith (*emune kashes*) were a direct symptom of dissatisfaction with the rest of one's life. He explained to me: "If your life is not going so well, if you have *parnusa* [financial] issues, you're not successful, or you have problems, then you have *emune kashes* [questions about faith]. *Emune kashes* are a symptom of other areas in your life not working." Religious doubts, then, arose when one was not able to fully live out the promise of ultra-Orthodox ways of life. In fact, one person living a double life who was found out by her family told me her mother came to her recently, upon the advice of a religious therapist, and asked her if she had been sexually abused (she had not). Her mother needed to find a reason why her daughter had lost trust

in ultra-Orthodoxy. Abuse, family problems, depression, anxiety, addiction—these were all external communal explanations for blockages to faith.

Conclusions

When interior faith was no longer legible or reliably produced through practice or material transformation, ultra-Orthodox leadership began to develop a different semiotic ideology: discursive interiority could cultivate sincere intention to protect the Jewish heart/soul from contamination, bringing bodies and hearts into alignment. Thus, anti-Internet rallies for women emphasized that an individualized struggle against the inclination for evil, the will, could protect unsuspecting (and unintending) Jewish souls from Gentile contamination. One rabbi even suggested thinking about smartphones as infected by the Ebola virus. "One click," he said, "and ten years of work [raising a child] is wiped out."

When, despite embodied practice, a person lost faith in the revelation at Sinai, ultra-Orthodox leadership adapted structures of authority to include experts to treat depression, anxiety, or "Internet addiction." These new authorities almost exclusively addressed issues of mental health, not ethics or theology, which were left to rabbis and rebbes. In this way, those who were sent to therapists, activists, or outreach rabbis for their inability or unwillingness to conform were pathologized. In fact, many of those living double lives have told me that when they began to have questions of faith, they assumed that they were going crazy. Psychological discourses (including medication) mediated troubled interiorities.

At first glance, it might seem that ultra-Orthodox leadership, perhaps influenced by the therapeutic framework so prevalent in the United States, was moving toward the liberal Protestant value of sincerity, with its emphasis on transparently mediated faith. However, discursive interiority among ultra-Orthodox Jews differed in an important way. Individual intention, "the will" to protect interiors, was enacted by submitting to communal hierarchies of authority. Ultra-Orthodox sincerity was a response to the danger of the anonymous sociality of a disaffected network of doubters, who practiced insincerely or left their communities altogether. Doubt, in the crisis of faith, was framed as the inability to engage one's will, the ethical agency, to continue to follow rabbinic authority. In contexts of discursive interiority, rabbis and activists made the case that this was caused by infection from Gentile media or by a mental illness. This allowed the faithful to place explanations for intractable doubt on external causes, outside of pure Jewish hearts and souls.

My attention to doubt through discursive interiority builds on the material turn in the anthropology of religion, particularly religion and media scholarship. In their recent volume, for example, Meyer and Houtman trace how anthropological studies of religion have historically privileged immaterial belief over the material, the "tangible," and the political (2012: 2). This has been a productive critique of what, so many have shown, is actually a Protestant legacy, with its rejection of materiality and its universalizing histories in missionization and colonialism (e.g., Asad 1993, 2003; de Vries 2008; Meyer and Houtman 2012). Drawing on these insights, I have reconsidered interiority as complementary rather than oppositional to exterior practice (e.g., Haeri, introduction to this collection). I have shown that rather

than immaterial and individualized, interiority is mediated by semiotic ideologies that change and invoke ethics (Keane 2008). This allows for a historical and ethnographic contrast of how interiorities are as much part of the public and political as is the material. If, as Meyer and Houtman (2012) suggest, following de Vries (2008), we adopt a "deep pragmatism" in our approach to religion, then I argue similarly for attending to the forms that mediated interiorities take at particular moments in time and space, especially during moments of moral crisis—such as the crisis of faith and mediation—where what was previously invisible may be made explicit. Further, by looking beyond explicitly religious contexts and language, struggles over the nature of interiorities within communities emerge (e.g., Handman, this collection). Among the ultra-Orthodox in New York, public talk, where certain forms and locations of interiority were cultivated and others disciplined, defused the power of modern epistemologies of interiority, such as psychology, while harnessing its potentialities for religious (Jewish) authenticity.

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L'intériorité, l'internet et une crise de la foi dans une communauté juive ultra-orthodoxe

Résumé : Cet article propose de revisiter la notion d'intériorité. Plutôt que de considérer l'intériorité et la croyance comme des synonymes dans leur manière d'évoquer l'immatériel et l'individualité, nos recherches auprès de la communauté

ultra-orthodoxe juive de New York suggère que la notion d'intériorité peut tout aussi bien se faire publique, politique et matérielle. Durant les quinze dernières années, les juifs ultra-orthodoxes se sont souciés du doute religieux de façon croissante. Plusieurs représentants de la communauté ont appelé le moment actuel une crise de la foi, et ont évoqué de nouveaux défis pour l'ultra-orthodoxie, associés notamment à l'internet. En réponse à cela, ces représentants ont initié un dialogue communal explicitement centré sur le sujet de l'intériorité afin de raffermir la foi et d'apporter une aide thérapeutique aux fidèles dans le doute. Le dialogue public, où certaines formes d'intériorité sont cultivées et d'autres disciplinées illustre les efforts entrepris par les autorités ultra-orthodoxes visant à l'atténuation du pouvoir des épistémologie séculières, telles que la psychologie et les nouvelles technologies, tout en canalisant leur potentiel pour l'authenticité religieuse.

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