

Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community

Journeys, practices, beliefs, identity, community and relationships within the Modern Orthodox Segment

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**NISHMA
RESEARCH**

Marketing Research for the Jewish Community

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Preface

Many studies have been done among Jewish and Orthodox populations, but there has not been any valid quantitative research among those who have left the Orthodox world. And while there have been quite a few excellent memoirs written by people who have left the Chasidish and other Orthodox groups, the old saying “the plural of anecdote is not data” still rings true.

The goal of this survey was to give this group – a fledgling segment of the Jewish community that has not been quantitatively studied – a voice. We wanted to better understand the experiences of those who have transitioned away from their Orthodox community of origin, or who are grappling with the related issues.

To that end, the overall study included the broad swath of segments in the Orthodox world: Chasidic, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox. This report focuses on the survey respondents from the Modern Orthodox Segment, i.e., those who have left their Modern orthodox community.

The survey was funded by Nishma Research, a Connecticut-based market research firm serving the Jewish world. In addition to providing customized research services to clients, Nishma’s

mission includes conducting one pro bono study annually on a topic of interest and value to the Jewish people – specifically, research that will promote more listening, appreciation and cooperation among the diverse strands of the Jewish world. Nishma means “listen” ... and we hope to promote more listening to each other.

This survey was guided and assisted by knowledgeable subject matter and research experts:

- Professor Steven M. Cohen of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion;
- Rabbi Pesach Sommer and Mindy Schaper of Jew in the City / Project Makom;
- Prof. Mark Rosen of Brandeis University and Zalman Newfield, Ph.D., New York University;
- Tsivia Finman, Rachel Berger and Executive Director Lani Santo of Footsteps, and author and Footsteps board member Shulem Deen.

It has been a pleasure working with you all and I can’t thank you enough.

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Summary of Key Findings

Summary of Key Findings – The experiences, beliefs, practices, community and challenges facing those who have left Modern Orthodoxy

Introduction

Many of us have heard of the phenomenon of people venturing forth from the Orthodox world and trying to find a place in the broader American society. Often scorned by their families and communities for having gone OTD* (“off the derech” - off the path), their stories, as told in a number of recent memoirs, have been gripping.

What has been missing until now is quantitative data on this trend. Nishma Research, a Connecticut-based research firm that focuses on the Jewish community, has just completed the first-ever large-scale survey of this demographic.

With 885 responses from across the Orthodox spectrum, this survey gives voice to a growing segment of the Jewish community. Respondents provided deeply personal and poignant responses about the journey they have taken, their identity, practices, beliefs and relationships. They told us what they went through, what they might have done differently, and gave advice to others who are considering leaving their Orthodox community for a different lifestyle.

Survey Sample

Included in this survey were people who had an Orthodox upbringing, but who no longer consider themselves to fully be a member of the Orthodox community in which they were raised. Analysis was done for all 855 responses and separately for four segments (1) the formerly Chasidic excluding Chabad, (2) the formerly Chabad, (3) the formerly Yeshivish and (4) the formerly Modern Orthodox.

This report presents the results for the 230 Modern Orthodox respondents. Not unexpectedly, the Modern Orthodox responses differed for many questions from those of the Chareidi segments (Chasidic, Chabad and Yeshivish). Those wishing to explore these differences should download the full survey report (which includes all segments), which is available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>. The survey questionnaire and all study-related documents are available at that site.

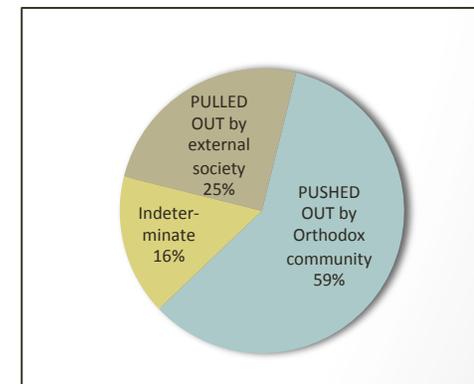
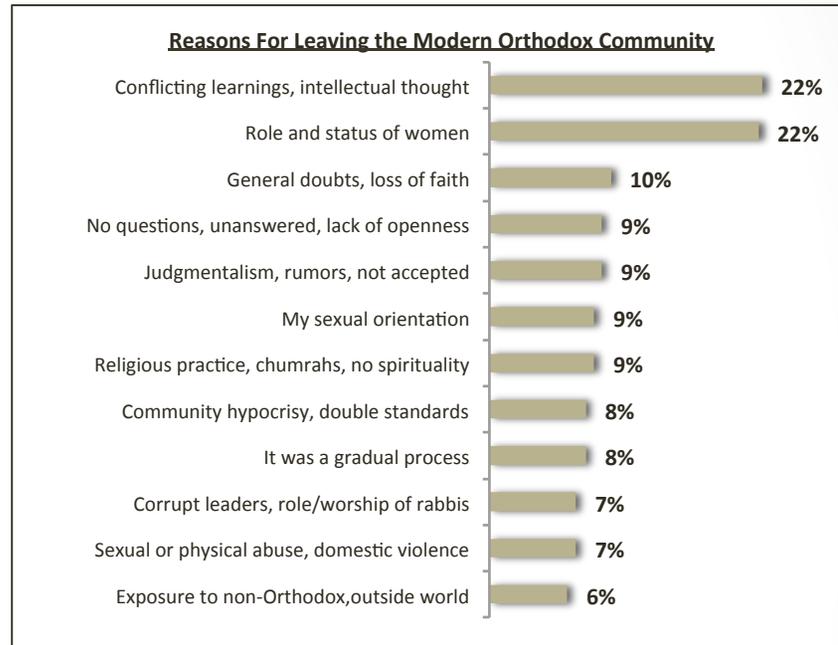
Community of Origin	Responses
Chasidic (excl. Chabad)	216
Chabad	97
Yeshivish	221
Modern Orthodox	230
Other	118
Total	885

* Those who have left Orthodoxy are often referred to as “OTD” and they sometimes refer to themselves that way. Some people like the term and some do not like it so much; but it’s become widely used and so we adopt it in this report as appropriate, as a shorthand appellation.

Summary of Key Findings *(Continued)*

Why People Left Their Modern Orthodox Community

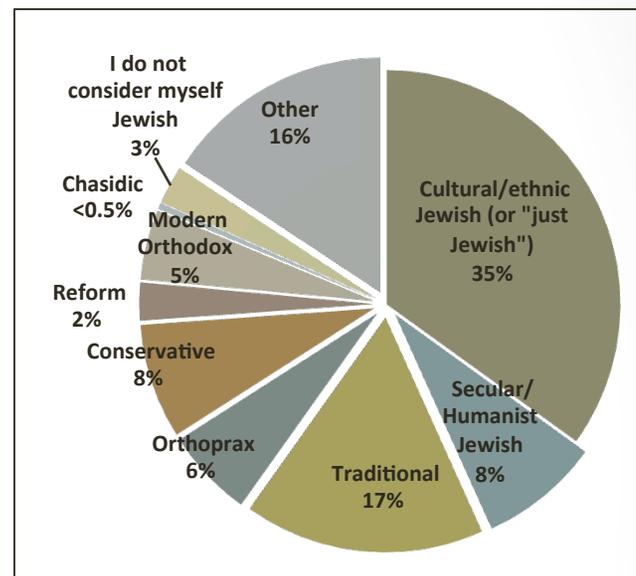
- Rather than having respondents fill out a “checklist,” the questionnaire included an open-ended question asking why people left their community, and giving them as much space as they wanted to tell their stories. The responses (which were often quite lengthy) were analyzed and coded against a list of 50+ reasons that people gave, with many giving multiple reasons.
- Some people were alienated by flaws they saw in the community or its leaders, and it turned out that by significantly more than a 2-to-1 margin in terms of reasons why people left, “community internal factors” were more influential in *pushing* people out than “societal outside factors” were in *pulling* people from the community. For many people, push and pull factors were both at work.
- The two most often given reasons why people left their community were intellectual thinking they had done about religion and the role and status of women, each cited by 22% of respondents. Personal curiosity and openness to the world often created a gradual process of grappling with modernity and knowledge in conflict with previously held beliefs.
- However, women mentioned the role and status of women as causing their beliefs and practices to change much more often than did men (37% vs. 7%).
- Other key factors were communal attitudes toward questioning, judgmentalism, respondents’ sexual orientation, communal “hypocrisy” (an often-used term), and the scope and stringent nature of Judaism as practiced in their community



Summary of Key Findings *(Continued)*

How Do They Now Identify Jewishly?

- The formerly Modern Orthodox (M.O.) are “post-denominational,” by which we mean that their Jewish affiliations were more self-defined than conforming to the common denominations: 60% labeled themselves as traditional, secular/humanist, cultural/ethnic or “just Jewish,” and only 15% identified themselves as members of a denomination. In contrast, the 2013 Pew Survey found that 70% of U.S. Jews identified with a denomination.
- A strong majority (78%) stated that being Jewish was very or somewhat important to them. However, women more often said that being Jewish was very important to them, 53% vs. 42%.
- Similarly, a strong majority (77%) stated they had a very or somewhat strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Again, women more often said this than men, 56% vs. 47%.
- Interestingly, across numerous survey questions, the formerly Modern Orthodox have retained more positive feelings toward Jewishness than the formerly Chareidi (the Chasidic and Yeshivish branches of Orthodoxy, often collectively referred to as “Ultra-Orthodox”), perhaps because their departure was less traumatic (because they already lived somewhat in secular society, spoke the language, dressed more modernly, etc.). For example, 36% of the Modern Orthodox keep kosher vs. 30% of Chareidi; and 78% of the Modern Orthodox say being Jewish is important to them vs. 59% of Chareidi.



Importance of Being Jewish	All M.O. Respondents	Men	Women	Pew Survey – M.O. Jews
Very Important	47%	42%	53%	N.A.
Somewhat Important	31%	35%	25%	N.A.
Total	78%	77%	78%	89%

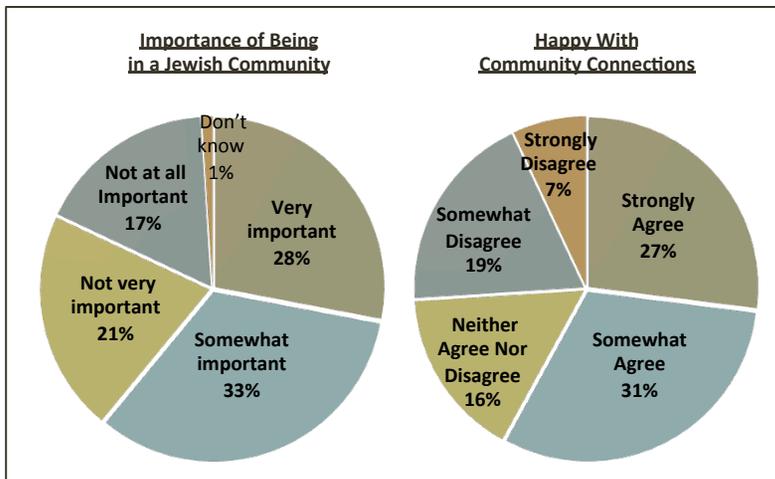
Sense of Belonging to the Jewish People	All M.O. Respondents	Men	Women	Pew Survey – M.O. Jews
Very Strong	51%	47%	56%	N.A.
Somewhat Strong	26%	24%	25%	N.A.
Total	77%	71%	81%	100%

Summary of Key Findings *(Continued)*

Jewish Beliefs, Practices and Connections

- Our survey respondents are not strong believers in God. But they like to keep connections to Jewishness and they maintain some practices at levels not very dissimilar from those of other groups of U.S. Jews.
- For example, 36% keep kosher, a level that is much lower than that of all Modern Orthodox Jews (83%), although in line with that of Conservative Jews (31%).

	All M.O. Respondents	Men	Women	Pew – Modern Orthodox / Conservative / Reform
Believe in God (% strongly)	21%	17%	24%	77% / 41% / 29%
Light Sabbath candles (% regularly/sometimes)	52%	51%	53%	78% / 34% / 10%
Keep kosher (% strictly/mostly)	36%	34%	33%	83% / 31% / 7%

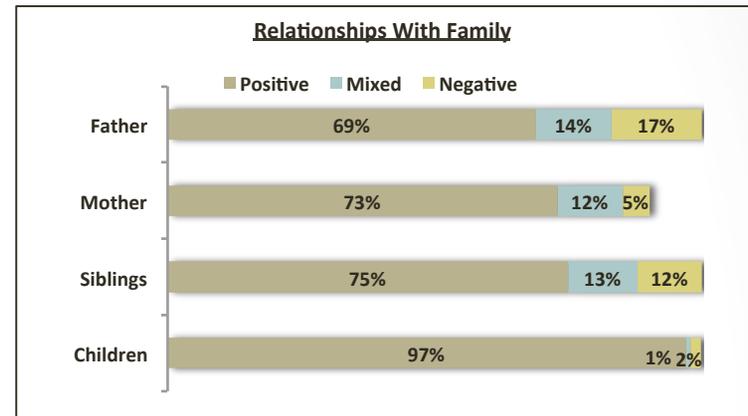
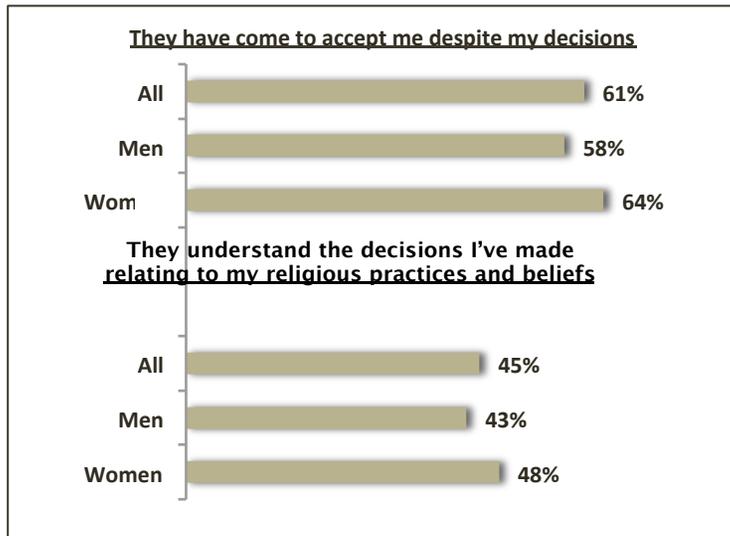


- In terms of their feeling of connection to various types of communities, more than half (61%) feel it is important to be part of a Jewish community, and more than half (58%) are happy with their community connections overall.
- Only 33% still feel connected to the Orthodox community where they grew up, while 53% feel connected to a different Jewish community and 47% feel connected to a non-Jewish community.
- Women are happier with their community connections than are men, 64% vs. 51%.

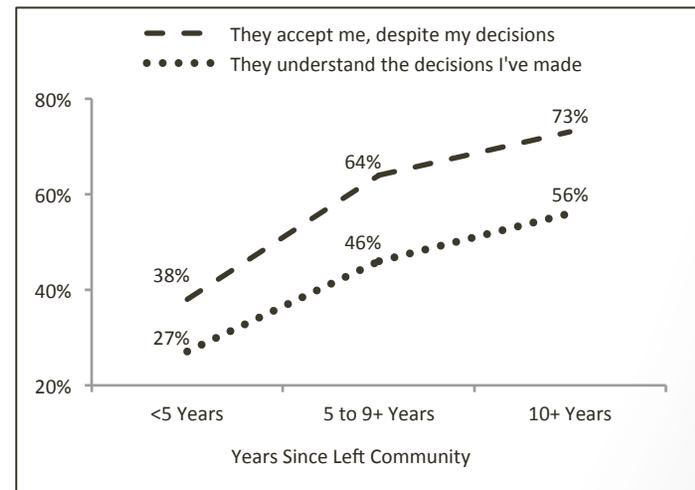
Summary of Key Findings *(Continued)*

Family Relationships and Acceptance

- Family relationships are challenging, but a majority have a positive relationship with their families (69% with their fathers, 73% with their mothers and 75% with siblings).
- Men have better family relationships with parents than do women: better with their father (73% vs. 63%); and with their mother (78% vs. 68%). Relationships with siblings and children are about the same for men and women.
- A significant majority (61%) say their families have come to accept them, but fewer than half (45%) say their families understand the decisions they have made relating to their religious practices and beliefs. Men's and women's responses to these statements did not vary significantly.



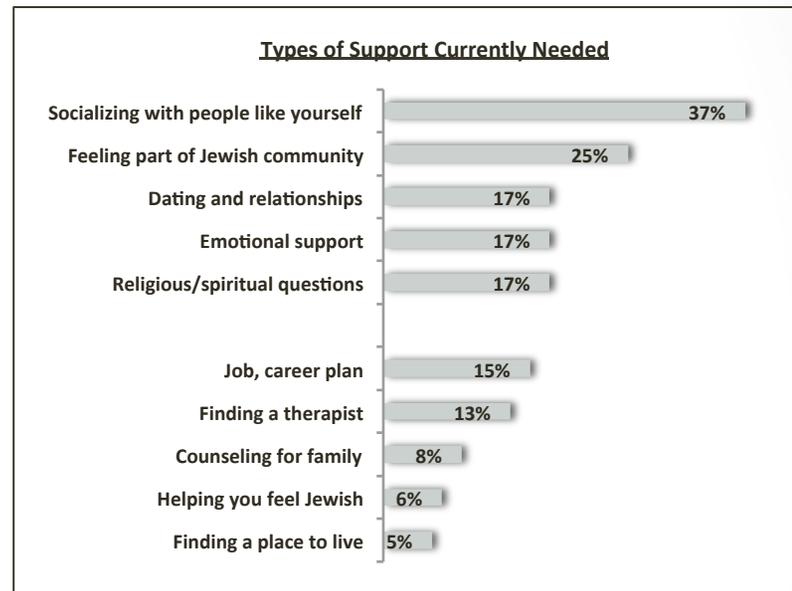
- Both families' understanding and acceptance do grow substantially over time.



Summary of Key Findings *(Continued)*

Support Needs

- Those who have left the Modern Orthodox community continue to face challenges. The most often expressed needs were in areas of socializing with people like themselves (37%), feeling themselves a part of the Jewish community (25%), dating and relationships (17%), emotional support (17%) and religious questions (17%).
- One area where there was a significant difference between men and women was in their seeking help to feel part of the Jewish community. 30% of women cited this as a need vs. 18% of men.
- The most frequent sources of past support have been friends (53%), Facebook groups or other social media (24%), relatives (22%) and community leaders and rabbis (16%).



Survey Distribution and Respondents

Survey Distribution

- Those who have left the Orthodox world are challenging to reach. No census (or “member list”) exists for this group, and its size and characteristics are the subject of speculation. Many of these people have had traumatic experiences in leaving their communities; some are reluctant to announce themselves as having gone OTD while others are less accessible as they have distanced themselves from their community of origin. A survey of larger Jewish populations seeking to screen for these individuals would require an extremely large sample.
- Opt-in surveys (which are presented to a large group and respondents opt to participate) are not ideal, but sometimes they are the only viable approach. We believe that that is the case here. Our approach centered around very broad outreach via physical and virtual communities. We cast a wide net through two agencies that service this segment (Footsteps and Project Makom) and through social media (including well-known Facebook pages with many thousands of OTD members).
 - Links to the survey were pinned to the top of a half dozen Facebook group pages and the Facebook pages of “OTD community leaders” frequented by our target audience.
 - The survey was distributed by the two organizations cited above to all of their members, including follow-up mailings and announcements at their events.
 - The survey had no mandatory questions (except for initial screeners), to minimize drop-outs caused by triggering questions.
 - The message that the survey was being done to hear this segment’s voice for the first time was emphasized.
 - The online survey was compatible with PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones (our target group skews younger than

the overall Jewish population and we have observed a high level of smartphone/device usage among them). An email address was provided to participants to report any difficulties in accessing or completing the survey. No calls were received reporting any such problems.

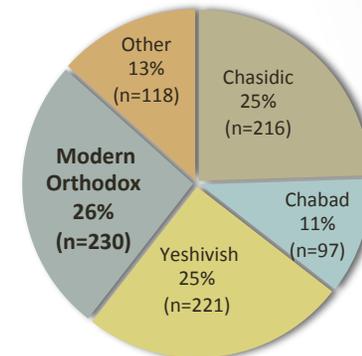
- We follow the guidance of AAPOR (American Association for Public Opinion Research) to the effect that opt-in surveys are not ideal ... but if there are no other options, they may be the best approach at the time. [See https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/AAPOROnlinePanelsTFReportFinalRevised1.pdf.]
- Consistent with our understanding and acceptance of AAPOR’s policies, we stipulate that respondents to this survey were selected from among those who are members of relevant organizations and social media groups. The data have not been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the overall target population of Orthodox OTD, inasmuch as such target population is unknown in terms of both size and composition.
- **The results of this survey are accurate at the 95% confidence level plus or minus 6 percentage points.** This sampling error should be viewed with the understanding that the sample is based on those self-selecting for participation rather than a probability sample.
- When we comment in this report on the statistical significance of differences between the Modern Orthodox and other (Charedi) segments, we do so under the assumption that we are unaware of any reasons why self-selection bias should differ significantly among the segments, given that the same approach was used to reach all segments. Finally, all sample surveys and polls may be subject to multiple sources of error, including, but not limited to sampling error, coverage error and measurement error.
- The survey questionnaire is available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>

Survey Audience – This survey was aimed at people who (1) had an Orthodox Jewish background and (2) no longer fully considered themselves members of their Orthodox community of origin, in terms of their beliefs and practices.

The total survey response was 885, as shown in the graph to the right. This report provides results for the 230 individuals who self-identified their community of origin as Modern Orthodox.

A full report is available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>, showing results for all four segments analyzed (Chasidic, Chabad, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox), including comparisons among the segments.

Q. What type of Orthodox community were you a member of? Chasidish; Yeshivish/Litvish; Modern Orthodox; Orthoprax; Other – Please describe



The two questions shown below (the first two questions in the survey) were the only survey questions to which a response was mandatory. Our approach of making responses optional was taken due to the sensitivity of this group, and a reluctance to require responses to potentially triggering questions.

Q. Raised as Orthodox?	Percent	Count
Yes - I was raised fully Orthodox	74%	170
Partially - Spent part of my life as Orthodox	26%	60
No	<i>Excluded from survey</i>	
Total		230



Q. Still Member of Orthodox Community?	Percent	Count
Fully	<i>Excluded from survey</i>	
Somewhat *	48%	111
Not at all	52%	119
Total		230

* Women have more often (60%) fully left their community, while men are more often (56%) still "somewhat a member" of their community.

Q. This survey is aimed at people who have had an Orthodox Jewish background. In your opinion, did your background include being Orthodox?

- Yes – I was raised fully Orthodox
- Partially – Spent part of my life as Orthodox
- No – TERMINATE

Q. Thinking about your current beliefs and practices, to what extent do you consider yourself to still be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised ... or that you were a member of?

- Fully - TERMINATE
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Summary Description of the Modern Orthodox Community

<p>Summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A heterogeneous group, covering a wide range of religious practice, from “Conservadox” to near-Yeshivish. • Adhere to halachah (Jewish law) but participate in the broader society educationally, culturally and in the workplace. • Primary language is English. • Men wear kippot, but some may eschew them in the workplace, and most women dress modestly (no pants, hair covering).
<p>Insularity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Far less stringent and more integrated into modern society and culture than the Chareidi (Chasidic, Yeshivish, etc.) groups, and more amenable to halachic leniencies.
<p>Role of Women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An expensive lifestyle, and many women work as part of two-income households. • They may have more prominent communal and professional roles, and more women are seeking to “break glass ceilings” in religious roles.
<p>Demographics, College, Income, Family Size</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most attend college, and many pursue professional occupations. • High incomes, but accompanied by a high-cost lifestyle (more expensive communities, day schools, summer camps, etc.). • Families typically with 2-4 children.

Perceptions of Their Current Membership in the Modern Orthodox Community; Double-Lifers

Thinking About Their Current Relationship to the Modern Orthodox Community

- An early question in the survey [“Thinking about your current beliefs and practices, to what extent do you consider yourself to still be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised ... or that you were a member of? Responses: Fully (survey terminated), Somewhat, Not at all” – See page 13] got respondents to start thinking about the extent to which they were still members of their community or origin or not, and the reasons why.
- The next page presents a sample of the verbatim responses. This early articulation in the survey of how people saw themselves with respect to their Modern Orthodox community not only categorized them in terms of their current status with respect to their community, but also helped to set the stage in their thinking for later questions that more deeply explored the reasons why they left their community. Those will be presented in the next section.

Perceptions of Their Membership in the Modern Orthodox Community

Those who saw themselves as still somewhat a member of their Modern Orthodox community

They often cited connections to or respect for family, and appreciation of the community and/or its values, while at the same time having lost their beliefs and practices.

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *I'm still friends with the people I grew up with who are a part of that community fully, but I am not in that community physically nor do I share their religious beliefs/morals. My values have completely shifted away from theirs, but I still keep in touch with them consider myself close with them and value those friendships.*
- *Although I no longer believe in god or have any personal drive to partake in religious ritual I still maintain a good relationship with my friends and family, many of whom are still orthodox and therefore I do occasionally join in holiday/sabbath celebrations in order to maintain the aforementioned interpersonal relationships.*
- *My closest friends are still modern orthodox as is most of my family. I keep my home kosher in order to be able to host my friends and family.*
- *I don't believe in God and I don't daven. I don't keep Shabbos anymore and I eat non-kosher. But I participate in Shabbos and holiday meals out of respect for my mother. I'm close to my family and am dating a religious girl. Both she and my family know that I'm not observant. I don't keep it a secret.*
- *I feel more comfortable in the orthodox world than any other Jewish community. I belong to a synagogue, and I follow most of the major public precepts. However, I don't really believe, nor do I pray or learn.*
- *I'm pluralistic. So I'll go to an orthodox institution for my family's events or for other external factors.*

Those who saw themselves as currently not at all tied to their Modern Orthodox community

They often stated simply that they are no longer religious at all, and often stated that they have left their community.

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *I have no connection, practical or emotional to any Jewish community beyond occasional visits to family.*
- *I no longer practice the religion, and therefore the community built around that religion has no meaning to me*
- *I do not lead a halachic life, I actively avoid orthodox shuls/spaces, I am in a gay interfaith relationship, my friends and community are mixed Jewish and non-Jewish, but entirely non-orthodox.*
- *I'm not at all religious and rarely ever associate with people from my orthodox elementary/high school or the synagogue my parents would take me to. I might go to someone's wedding if I was a close friend of theirs, but that's about it.*
- *I don't consider myself MO. I consider myself traditional, but I don't believe in God. I would say I am most connected to the liberal orthodox and the traditional Conservative communities. I'm not "out" about my atheism/agnosticism (it's hard to land only on atheism).*
- *I moved away to a more secular area, have no affiliation with any synagogue or other religious community and do not religiously practice any Jewish rituals.*
- *Theologically, I am not, nor am I in practice. However, I do plan on maintaining ties within my current (left-wing MO) congregation for certain communal reasons, but do not plan on living an Orthodox lifestyle- but will remain traditional, to an extent.*

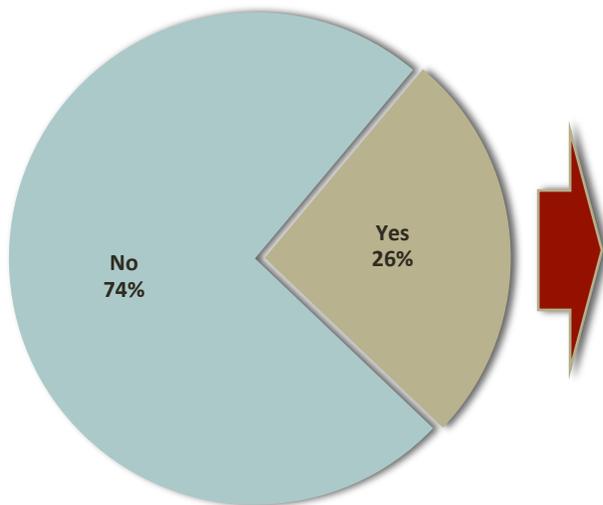
Based on response to Q Thinking about your current beliefs and practices, to what extent do you consider yourself to still be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised ... or that you were a member of?

Q. You indicated that you currently consider yourself to somewhat be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised (Modern Orthodox). Can you explain why you say that? (n=111, of which 102 provided comments)

Q. You indicated that you currently consider yourself to not at all be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised (Modern Orthodox). Can you explain why you say that? (n=119, of which 112 provided comments)

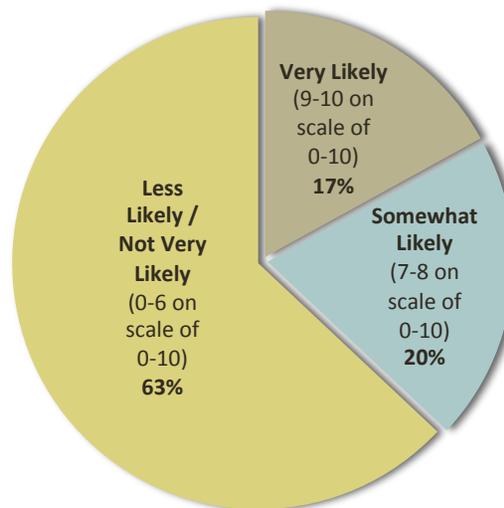
Double-Lifers – 26% of Modern Orthodox respondents said they were leading a “double life” (outwardly still a member of the community in terms of appearances and visible actions, but internally they no longer viewed themselves that way). Of these, 37% said it is very likely or somewhat likely they will leave the community at some time in the future.

Currently Double-Lifers



Men are slightly more often leading a double life (28% vs. 24%)

Likely to Leave Community



No notable differences between men and women

Q. Would you say that you are leading a “double life” – meaning that you are outwardly still a member of the community (e.g., in terms of appearances and visible actions), but internally you do not view yourself that way?

- Yes – Why do you say that? How do you see yourself internally? (Comments offered were very similar to those offered in response to Q: You indicated that you currently consider yourself to somewhat be a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised. Can you explain?)
 - No
- (n = 202)

Asked of those who responded Yes to Q. Would you say that you are leading a “double life” – meaning that you are outwardly still a member of the community (e.g., in terms of appearances and visible actions), but internally you do not view yourself that way?

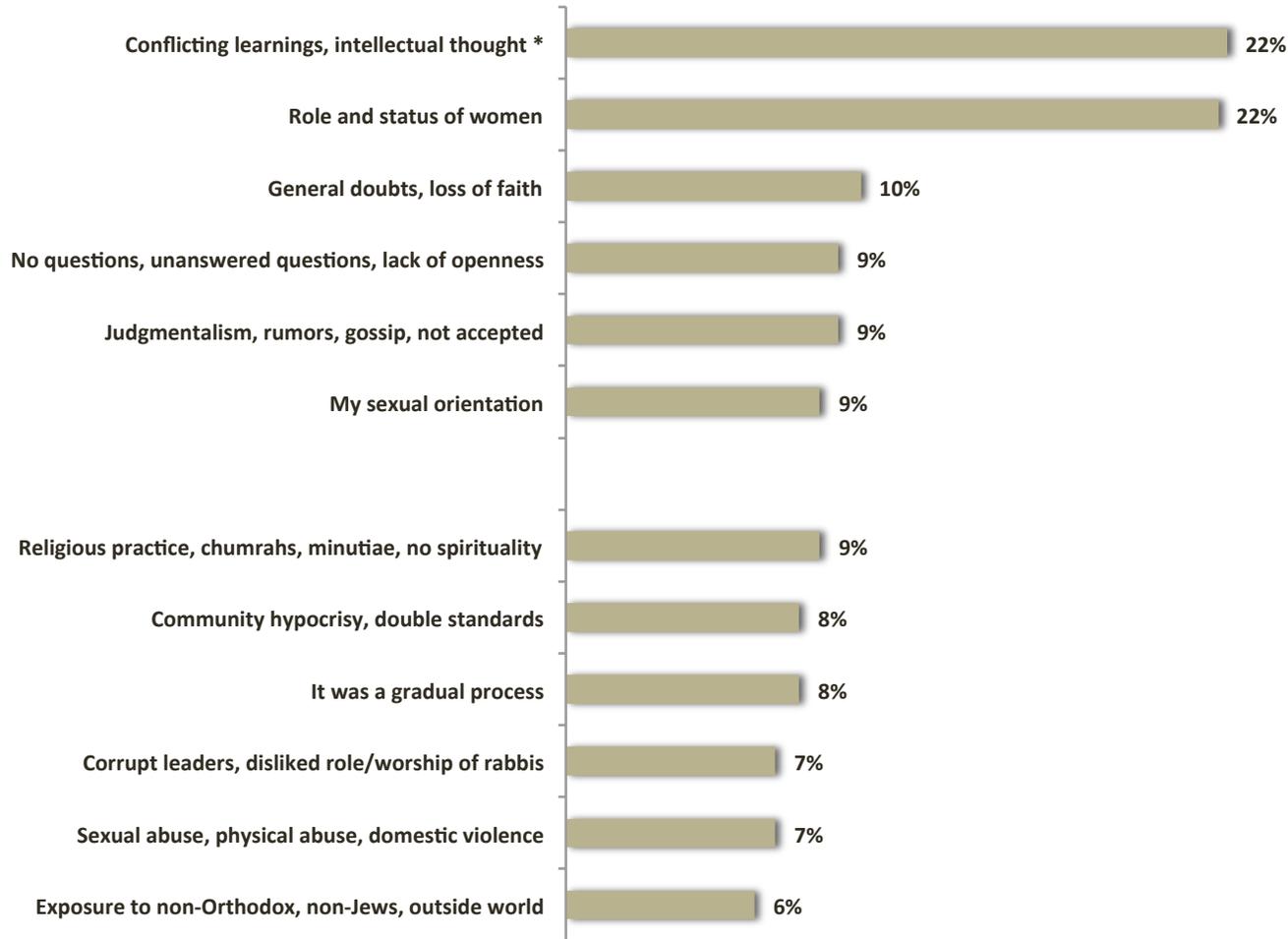
Q. What is the likelihood that you will fully leave your community at some point in the future, on a scale from 0 (you definitely will never leave) to 10 (you definitely will eventually leave)? (n = 50)

Why People Left Their Modern Orthodox Community

What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change

- A major objective of this survey was to quantify the reasons why people left their community. In order to avoid asking leading questions, we posed this as a fully open-ended question: “Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change?”
- Taking the hundreds of subjective responses and “quantifying them” was an eye-opening exercise. We read the full text of the responses and categorized them against a list we developed of approximately 50 reasons that people were giving, some of which were subtle variations of overlapping themes. Many respondents offered multiple reasons in sometimes quite lengthy responses.
- This section shows the results of this analysis, both the quantified data and a sample of verbatim responses.

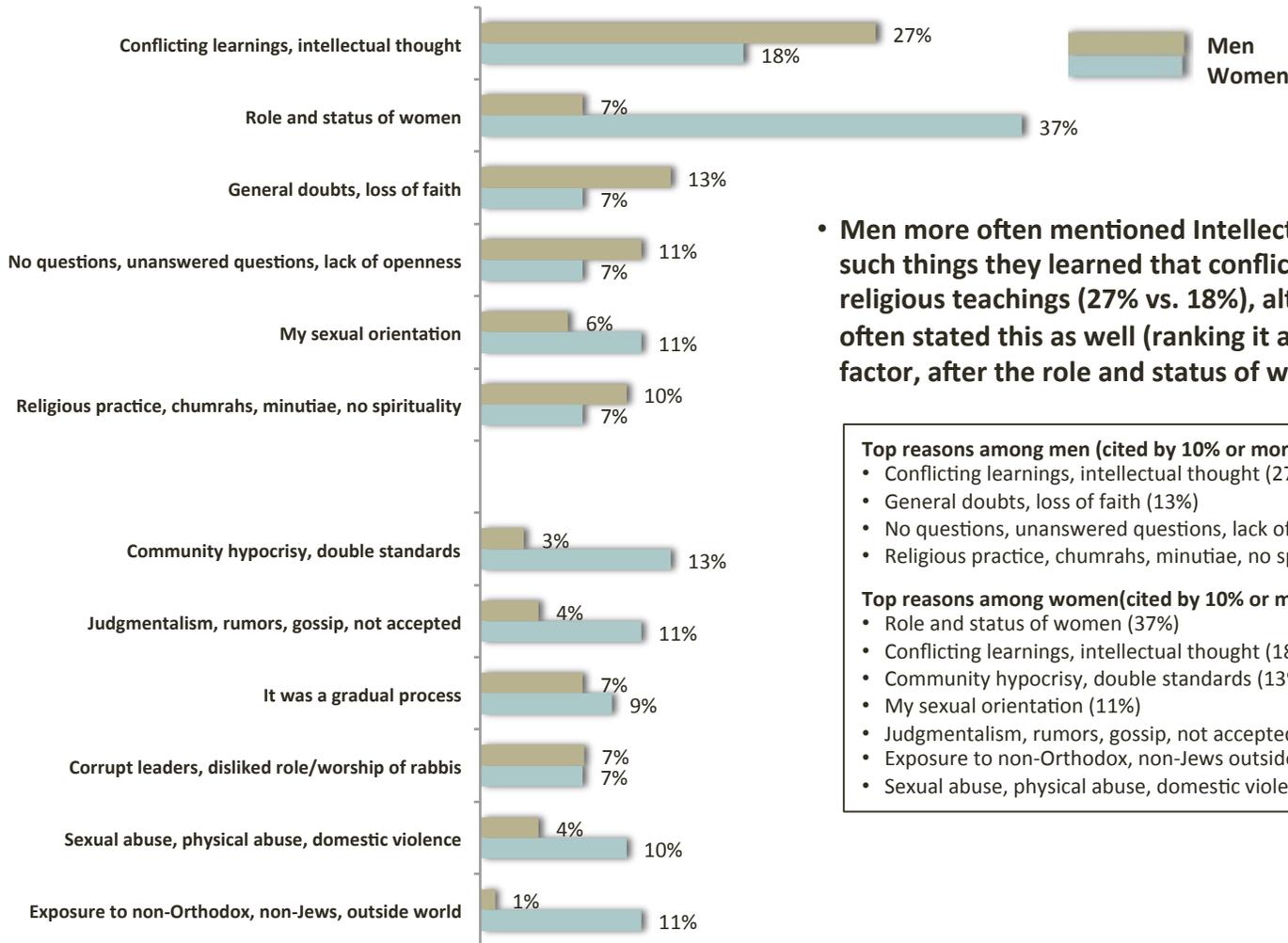
What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change – The most often given reasons why they left their community were intellectual thinking they had done about religion and the role and status of women, each cited by 22% of respondents.



Q. Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change? (n=191)

* The data shown here has melded two categories from the prior analysis of all responses, which we see as similar: “Things I read, learned, contradictions, no proof” and “Thought for myself, intellectual, preferred rationalism”

What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change: Differences Between Men and Women – Women mentioned the role and status of women as causing their beliefs and practices to change much more often than did men (37% vs. 7%).



- Men more often mentioned Intellectual factors, such things they learned that conflicted with religious teachings (27% vs. 18%), although women often stated this as well (ranking it as their #2 factor, after the role and status of women).

Top reasons among men (cited by 10% or more):

- Conflicting learnings, intellectual thought (27%)
- General doubts, loss of faith (13%)
- No questions, unanswered questions, lack of openness (11%)
- Religious practice, chumrahs, minutiae, no spirituality (10%)

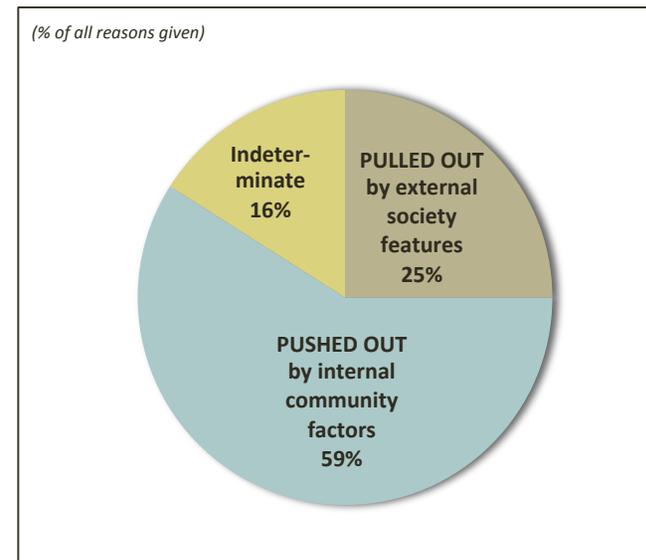
Top reasons among women (cited by 10% or more):

- Role and status of women (37%)
- Conflicting learnings, intellectual thought (18%)
- Community hypocrisy, double standards (13%)
- My sexual orientation (11%)
- Judgmentalism, rumors, gossip, not accepted (11%)
- Exposure to non-Orthodox, non-Jews outside world (11%)
- Sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence (10%)

Leaving the Community: Push vs. Pull Factors – Respondents were more often pushed away from their community by internal forces (59%) than they were pulled out by external attractions (25%).

- We divided the reasons given for leaving their community into:

- **Push Factors** – Internal conditions, perceptions or awareness that people dislike and that therefore “push” them away from their community, such as the role/status of women and community hypocrisy/double standards; and
- **Pull Factors** – External conditions or sources of awareness that are attractive to people and therefore “pull” them out the community, such as scientific knowledge or reading things that contradict beliefs.



- A few of the reasons given could not be definitively categorized, and are labeled as “indeterminate.”

- The Push Factors exerted more of an influence overall on people leaving their community. Thus, we can conclude that, generally speaking, the community is pushing people out more than the people themselves are seeking to leave.

What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change – Verbatim Responses

Responses by Men

- *Reading Spinoza. The conflation of class, status and religion in modern orthodoxy. The status of women.*
- *1) I was exposed to new worldviews and philosophies that I preferred to Judaism. 2) Following halacha made me anxious and made me feel bad about myself whenever I violated it.*
- *1. The immorality of the Biblical God 2. Biblical criticism 3. Lack of egalitarianism 4. Attitudes towards LGBT 5. Halakha man made.*
- *Did not feel comfortable in rigid structure of Orthodoxy, unsatisfied when my questions in class would be answered by the rebbe "because Hashem said so."*
- *Disagreement with elements of Orthodox theology, role of women, perspectives on non-Jews, attitude toward homosexuality.*
- *I learned too much and realized the the Torah was written by men and not by God. I also realized that most laws that we consider tradition from Sinai, were not really from Sinai. They were made up in later periods also by men, who gave a false facade (may be not on purpose) to the origins the laws.*
- *I never believed, and didn't follow halacha in private, but remained part of orthodox community because I loved the social part of orthodoxy (holidays, shabbat dinners, etc.). However, As I remained single, and my friends were all getting married and I was living on my own, I started to slowly stop attending Orthodox institutions and started practicing less and less as time went on. Once you hit a certain age (late 20s), there is no comfortable place within the orthodox social structure. Many folks I know stopped practicing when single and reaching their late 20s, though most of those returned to full orthodox practice once they got married and had kids, etc.*
- *Lack of belief in existence of God.*
- *My problem wasn't so much with Orthodox Judaism as it was with Orthodox Jews, clique-y, judgmental and obnoxious.*
- *No reason to continue. Crazy religion. Crazy restrictions. Just not so easy anymore.*
- *The corrupt and self serving rabbis and a general loss of a belief in god. There can be no living god in this world that would allow these rabbi to hold sway so tightly over Jewish lives.*
- *The orthodox community changed... It's like the Taliban took over Judaism. I used to go to concerts with my rabbis now everything is forbidden. Who let these idiots ruin Judaism ?*

Q. Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change? (n=95)

What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change – Verbatim Responses

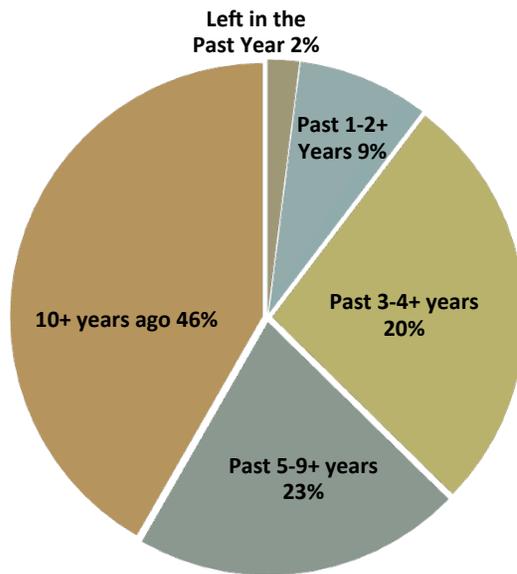
Responses by Women

- *I was appalled at the racism in the Orthodox community; I was upset about the inherent misogyny of Orthodox Judaism; As a queer person, I felt that the homophobia inherent in the Orthodox worldview was simply out of touch with reality.*
- *As a woman I could not face a life of being a second class citizen, or marrying an Orthodox man who would always see me as lesser. Without that, I would probably have found ways to reconcile my other problems with Orthodoxy.*
- *Couldn't deny my atheism any longer. Was tired of suppressing key parts of myself (bisexuality, atheism, supporter of biblical criticism). Being a victim of rabbinic abuse, and seeing the community's really problematic responses.*
- *Doubt in what I learn in yeshiva as the absolute truth. Judgmental behavior leading to my isolation by certain members of the orthodox community.*
- *Enforcement of little things like skirt length in school without penalizing major moral violations like stealing and cheating. Laws don't seem relevant to modern life.*
- *Feminism and lack of acceptable answers as to women's role in Judaism.*
- *Going away to college and feeling much too constrained by the rules of orthodoxy and seeing how "other" people lived much more freely without the constraints.*
- *I started becoming aware of the discrepancy between the beliefs I was "supposed" to have and the beliefs I genuinely felt. For instance, I became more aware of my disagreement with the role of women in Judaism versus the modern, western world, and the stance on gay relationships.*
- *I was 14 when I moved away to a religious high school. My parents raised me religious-observant. It was a big "u can't do this. You can't go here. You can't wear this..." Religion had no joy. It was restrictive and suffocating. In this "religious" school I was too modern. Expelled. This may have reinforced my view of religion in a negative light.*
- *Misogyny, sexism. No place for a single adult woman in the community.*
- *Seeing women as nothing but mothers and wives, maybe a teacher, and that's it. Seeing the double standard for men in Judaism and women are merely fluff.*
- *The way rules and life were explained away. No recognition that so much of Jewish practice is arbitrary. Based on the accident of the time and place of one's birth. Every group has another group to look down on that is not observant enough or too observant for them. No space for questions. Everything incomprehensible is part of God's plan.*

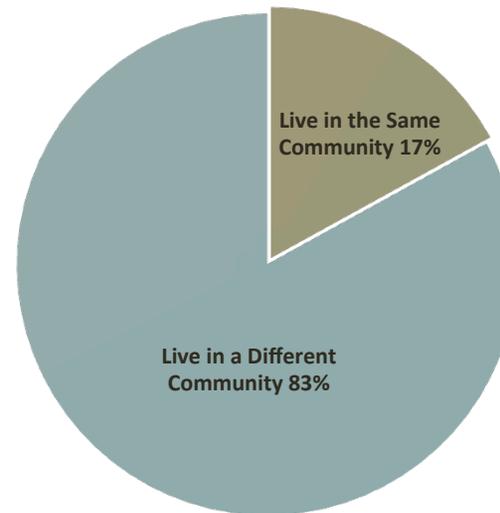
Q. Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change? (n=96)

Time Since Left Community – The median respondent left their Modern Orthodox community of origin 9.2 years ago. The vast majority (83%) no longer live within the same physical community as where they grew up.

Time Since Left Community of Origin



Still Live Within Same Physical Community



Q. At about what point did you feel that you were no longer fully a member of the Orthodox community in which you were raised?

- Within the past year; In the past 1 to 2+ years; In the past 3 to 4+ years; In the past 5 to 9+ years; 10 or more years ago

(n =229)

Q. Think of the Jewish community where you grew up (for example, Borough Park, Crown Heights, Williamsburg, New Square, Lakewood, etc.). Do you still live in the same Jewish Community?

- Yes; No

(n=228)

Q. Where do you currently live?

- In the USA; Outside USA – See data in Demographics section, page 64.

Sources of Support to Those Who Left Their Community

Sources of Support When They Started Moving Away From Their Community – The majority did not receive any types of support.

- **64% of Modern Orthodox respondents did not receive any type of support at the time they started moving away from their community.**
- **36% did receive support, most often from friends (12%) or Jewish congregations or organizations (8%).**

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *I had a strong community of friends, a few Jews but mostly not.*
- *A partnership minyan - which I consider orthodox and defines itself as orthodox, but most in my community do not view that way.*
- *I discussed my questions with many people, both Orthodox and not. It wasn't an organization, but a varied group of people.*
- *I had a strong community of friends, a few Jews but mostly not. During the decade when I was living a double life, they supported and affirmed the choices I made for myself when no one else would.*
- *I would say going to a liberal arts university, being a part of a diverse community, surrounded by different ideas and paths was key to helping me find my path.*
- *I've had understanding friends, but that's it.*
- *Meeting other gay Jewish men in the gay community.. Mostly in bars and dances.. But found a huge gay Jewish male community.*
- *No, it wasn't necessary. I grew up Modern Orthodox and was equipped with all the tools I could ever want for leaving, if I chose to leave entirely (which I haven't so far). Not really...nothing like Footsteps existed at the time, but I was very involved in my Hillel at UMD and learned how to be Jewish in other ways.*

Q. Still thinking about the time when you started moving away from the Orthodox community, were there any organizations or people that helped you in making that transition?

(n=206 comments, representing 90% of all respondents; percentages cited above are based on the 206 responses)

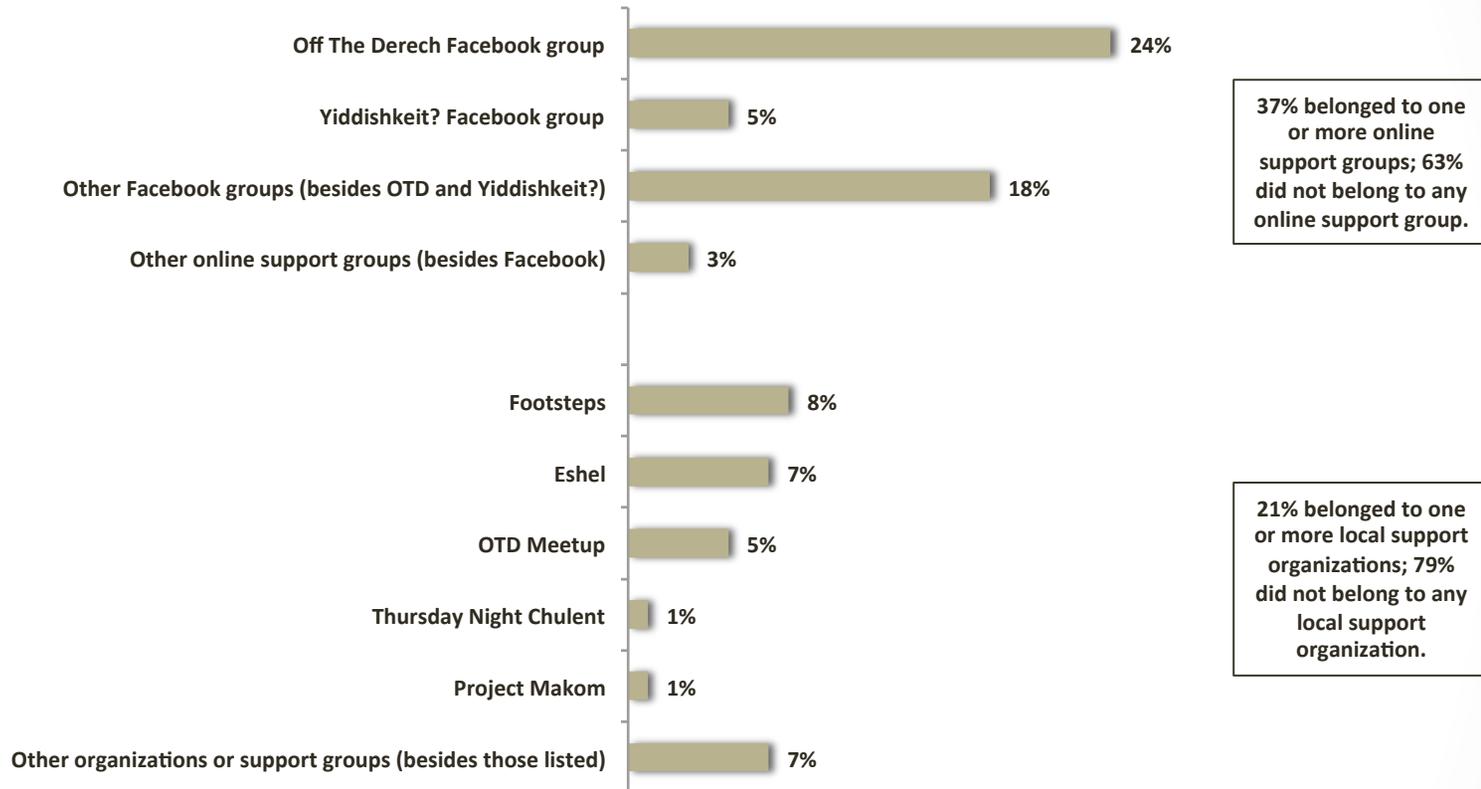
Desired Additional Support People Wished They Had When They Started Moving Away From Their Community – A majority would have wanted additional support.

- **55% of Modern Orthodox respondents indicated they would have wished for additional support, and most of these wanted a like-minded person, community or organization to interact with.**

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *A community of people who have gone through or are going through the same type of transition (people who are like me who get what I dealt with).*
- *Growing up modern Orthodox I found it easier to transition into greater American society. I had movies, music, TV, and other common Americana that helped me relate with others.*
- *Loss of family connections was so painful. Support groups or connection with other people with similar experiences would have helped a lot.*
- *I probably wouldn't have used them cause I just wanted to be free without having the sense that there was perpetually someone from the community noticing what I was doing or saying, ready to talk about me, tell my parents or whatever. I couldn't wait to be anonymous, something I would have imagined to be impossible had I joined some organization.*
- *No but my transition was not extreme. Many "modern orthodox" people live double lives. It's very easy to do.*
- *Yes. Wish there had been some kind of counseling services to help me cope with the grief of loss of community, friends, family, identity ... Also would have been nice to have resources to help me transition and figure out how to do holidays without religion and how to find some variation of cultural identity that was meaningful.*

Current Organizations and Support Groups – Current sources of support were more online (37%) than local organizations (21%); but a substantial majority did not belong to any support groups.



Q. Are you currently a member of, associated with, or receive services from any of the following organizations or support groups that deal with Jewish community issues? Please check all that apply.

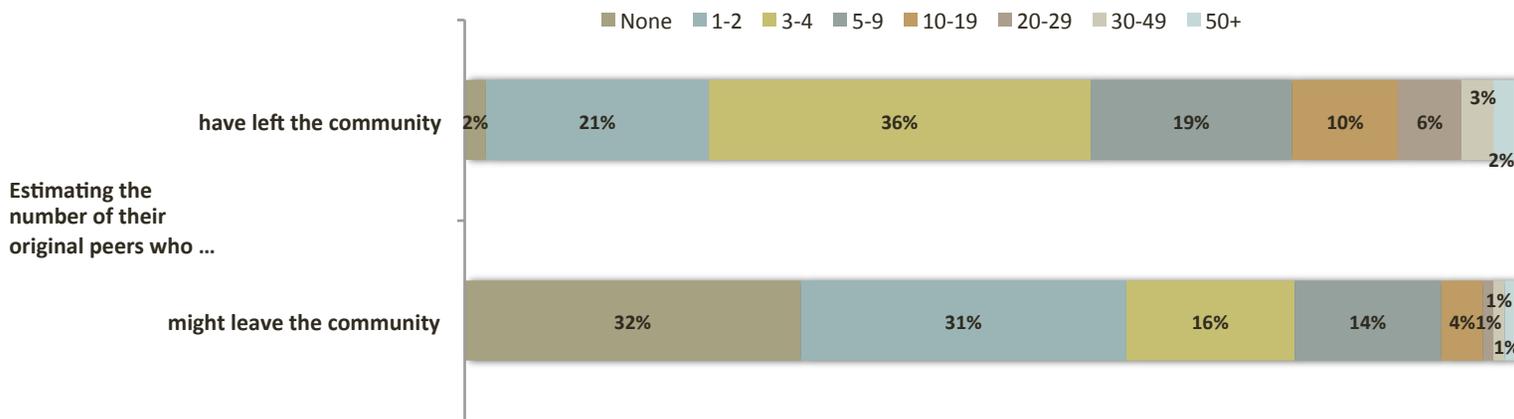
- Eshel; Footsteps; Kava Shtiebel; OTD Meetup; Project Makom; Thursday Night Chulent; Other organizations or support groups – Please describe; None of the above (n=222)

Q. Are you currently associated with or receive services from any of the following online groups that deal with Jewish community issues? Please check all that apply.

- Off The Derech Facebook group; Yiddishkeit? Facebook group; Other Facebook groups – Please describe; Other online support groups – Please describe; None of the above (n=217)

Shared Experiences – Respondents knew an average of 8.4 others who had left their community and 3.5 who might leave in the future, for a total of about 14 others “in the same boat.”

- In the context of possible emotional support, we sought a sense of shared experiences, i.e., did respondents know others of their close peer group growing up who had left their community, or might do so in the future?



Q. Think back to your close original peer group growing up, for example your family, classmates, etc. How would you complete the following sentence? Among my close original peer group growing up, I would guess that ___ of them have left their Orthodox community. (Please enter your best estimate/guess.)

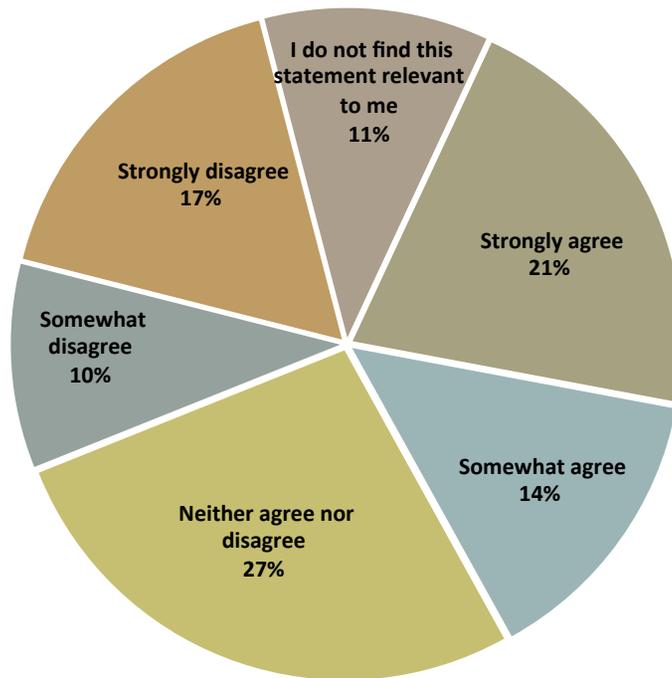
- None; One or two; Three or four; 5 to 9; 10 to 19; 20 to 29; 30 to 49; 50 or more; I have no idea (n=175; excludes those who responded “I have no idea”)

Q. Think back to your close original peer group growing up, for example your family, classmates, etc. How would you complete the following sentence? Among my close original peer group growing up, I would guess that ___ of them might leave their Orthodox community in the future. (Please enter your best estimate/guess.)

- None; One or two; Three or four; 5 to 9; 10 to 19; 20 to 29; 30 to 49; 50 or more; I have no idea (n=139; excludes those who responded “I have no idea”)

Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Belief in God – 35% of respondents stated they believe in God (strongly or somewhat), while 38% did not believe in God (either disagreeing with the statement or saying it was not relevant to them).



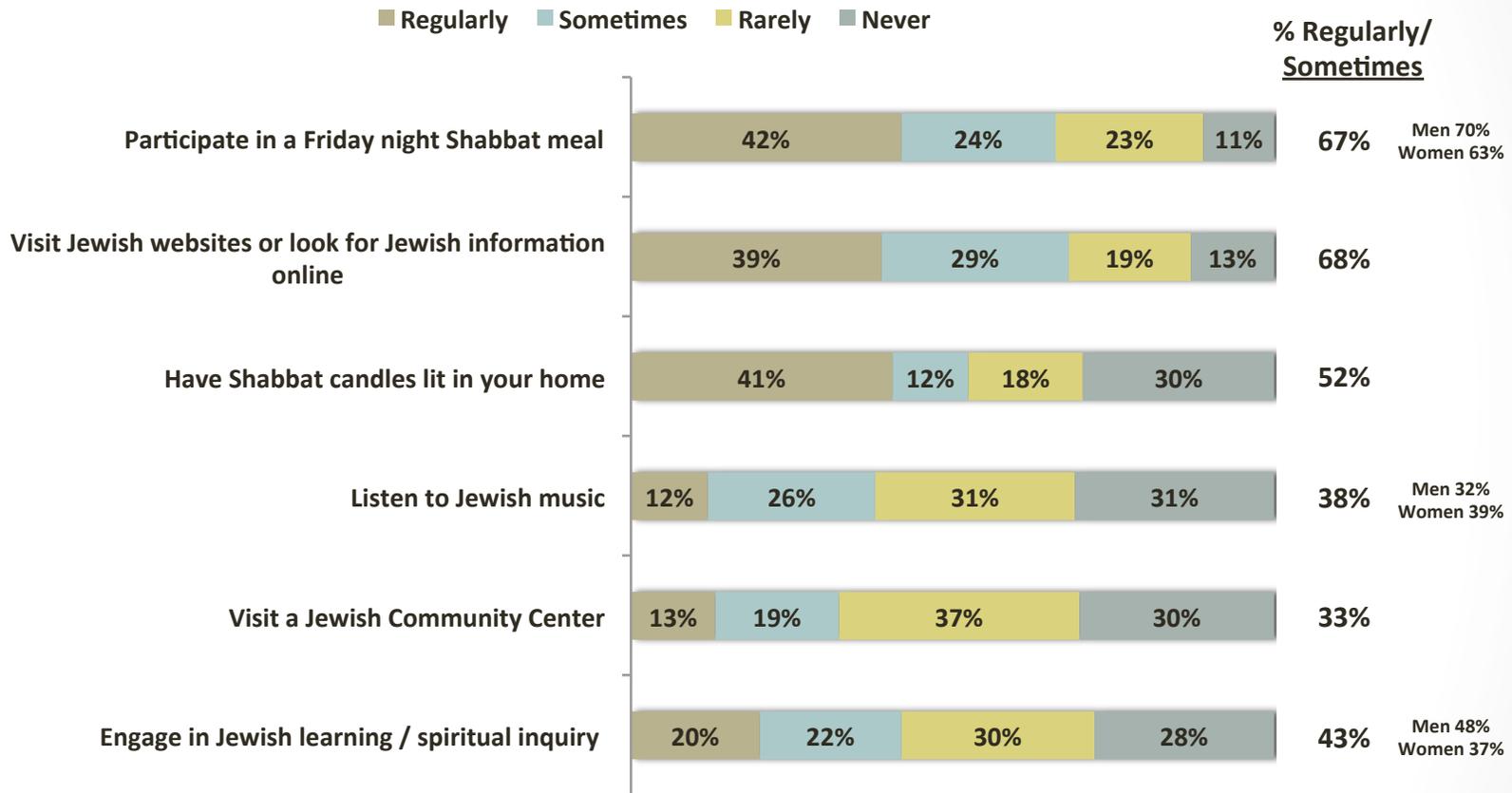
- Women more often believed in God than did men, by a margin of 42% to 30%. This is consistent with the finding that women more often left their community because of the role of women, while men more often left because of intellectual doubts.
- The 2013 Pew Survey* found that 72% of all American Jews and 96% of Modern Orthodox, respectively, believed in God.

Q. Do you agree with the statement: "God exists" ?
Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree; I do not find this statement relevant to me
(n=229)

* Source of Pew data throughout this report is A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, October 2013

Jewish Practices – Those who are no longer fully Orthodox have retained some of its practices. A majority of our respondents participated in a Friday night Shabbat meal, visited Jewish websites and lit Shabbat candles.

Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community



(A few differences between men and women are noted, although the differences are not statistically significant.)

Q. How often do you ...

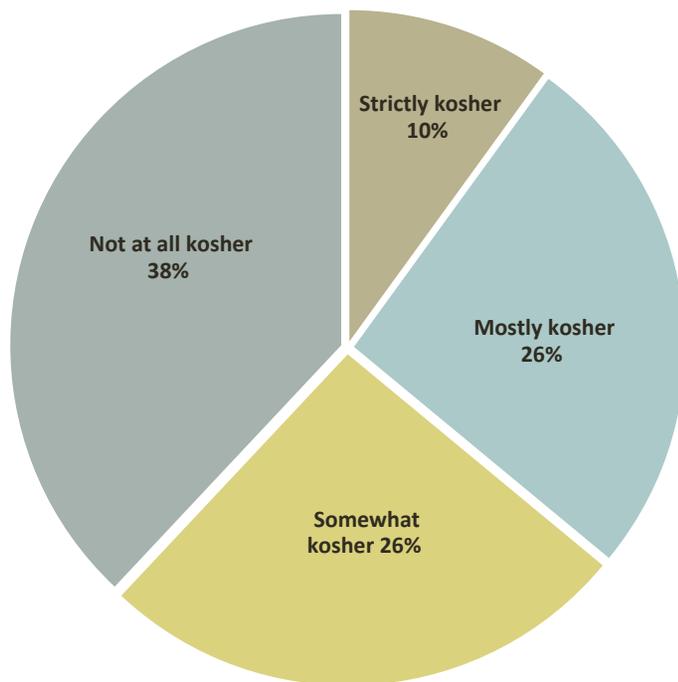
- Participate in a Friday night Shabbos meal?; Visit Jewish websites or look for Jewish information online; Have Shabbos candles lit in your home?; Listen to Jewish music?; Visit a Jewish Community Center?; Engage in Jewish learning / spiritual inquiry?

• **Scale:** Regularly; Sometimes; Rarely; Never

(The survey questionnaire used the word "Shabbos," a term more familiar to respondents.)

(n=223)

Kosher – 36% indicated they are strictly or mostly kosher.

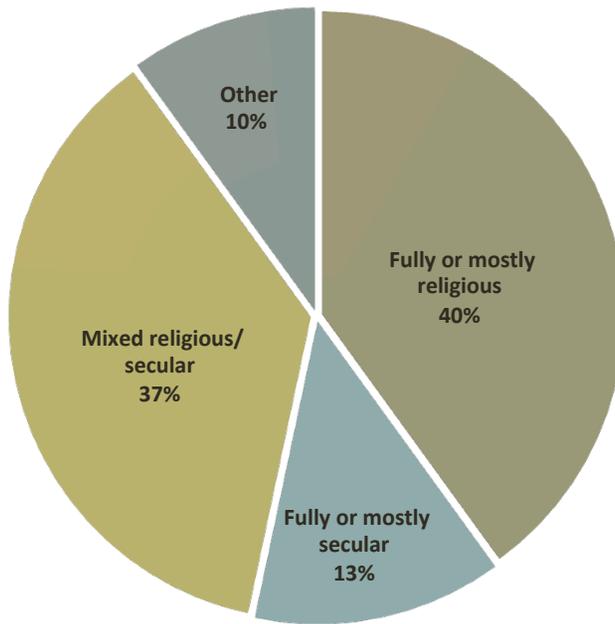


- The same percentages of men and women said they kept kosher.
- Pew found that 83% of American Modern Orthodox Jews kept kosher at home.

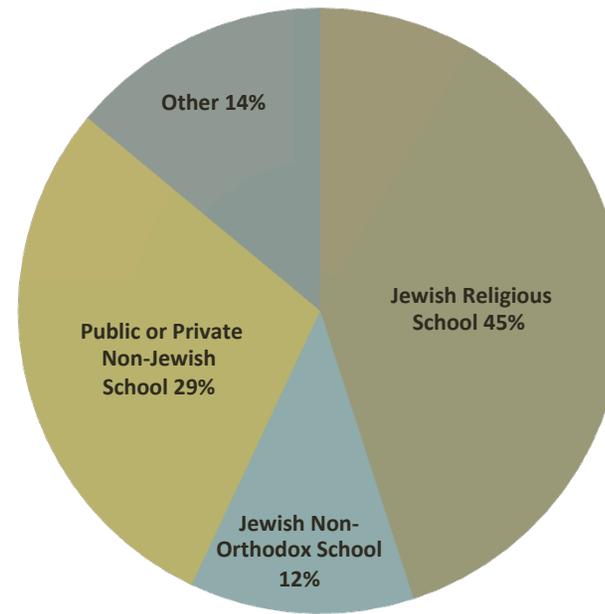
Q. Which of the following best describes you in terms of keeping kosher?
• Strictly kosher; Mostly kosher; Somewhat kosher; Not at kosher; Not sure / No response (n=223; excludes one respondent who answered "Not sure / No response")

Children’s Religious Orientation and School – Among those with children at the time they left, 40% said their children were fully or mostly religious. Among those with current school-age children , 50% said they sent the children to a Jewish religious school.

Children’s Current Religious Status



Type of School Children Attend



Asked of those who had children at the time they left the community (see appendix page 65):

Q. How would you describe your child(ren)’s current religious orientation?

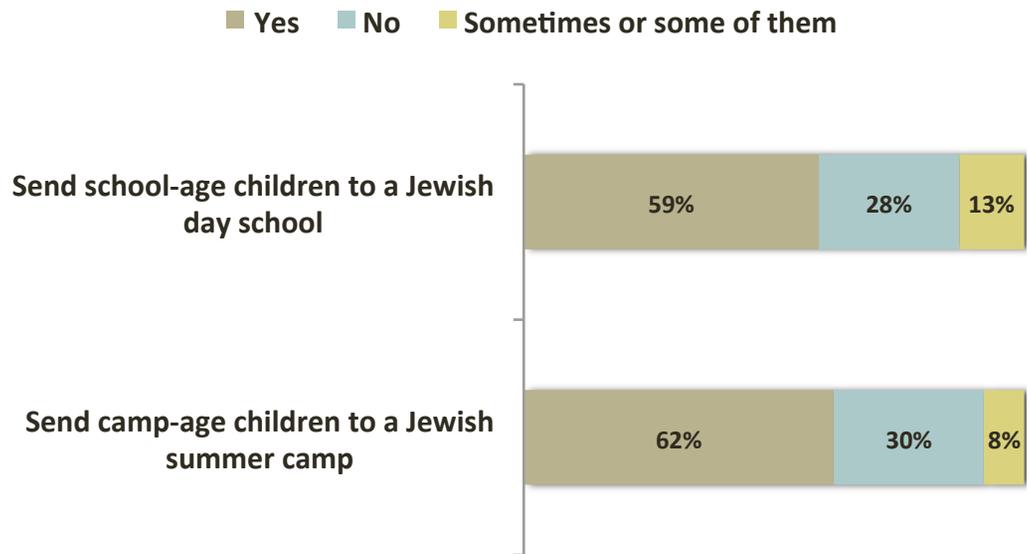
- Fully or mostly religious; Fully or mostly secular; Mixed religious/secular; Other – Please describe

Asked of those whose children are currently school-age:

Q. What type of school(s) do your child(ren) currently attend? Please check all that apply.

- Jewish Religious School; Jewish Non-Orthodox School; Public or Private Non-Jewish School; None – they are not school age; Other – Please describe (n=60 and n=44, respectively)

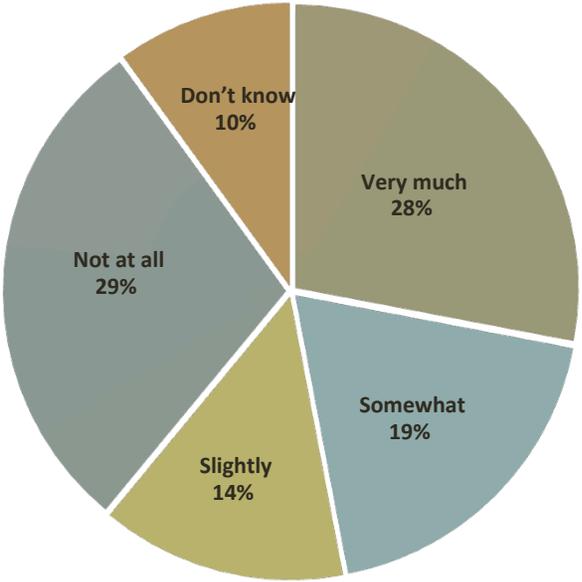
Children’s School and Summer Camp – Among respondents who currently have children, about 60% stated that they sent their children to Jewish day school and Jewish summer camp.



- This compares to the Pew finding that 81% of Orthodox Jews with at least one child at home have enrolled that child in a yeshiva or Jewish day school.

Q. Do you ... (Excludes those with no children currently age-appropriate for the questions.)
 a. Send your school-age child(ren) to a Jewish day school? Excludes those with no children currently age-appropriate for the questions.
 b. Send your camp-age child(ren) to a Jewish summer camp?
 • Scale: Yes; No; Sometimes or some of them; I do not have children of that age, or custodial decision-making
 (n=85 and 83 for parts a and b, respectively)

Views on Intermarriage – Nearly half (47%) indicated they would be very or somewhat upset if a child of theirs intermarried.

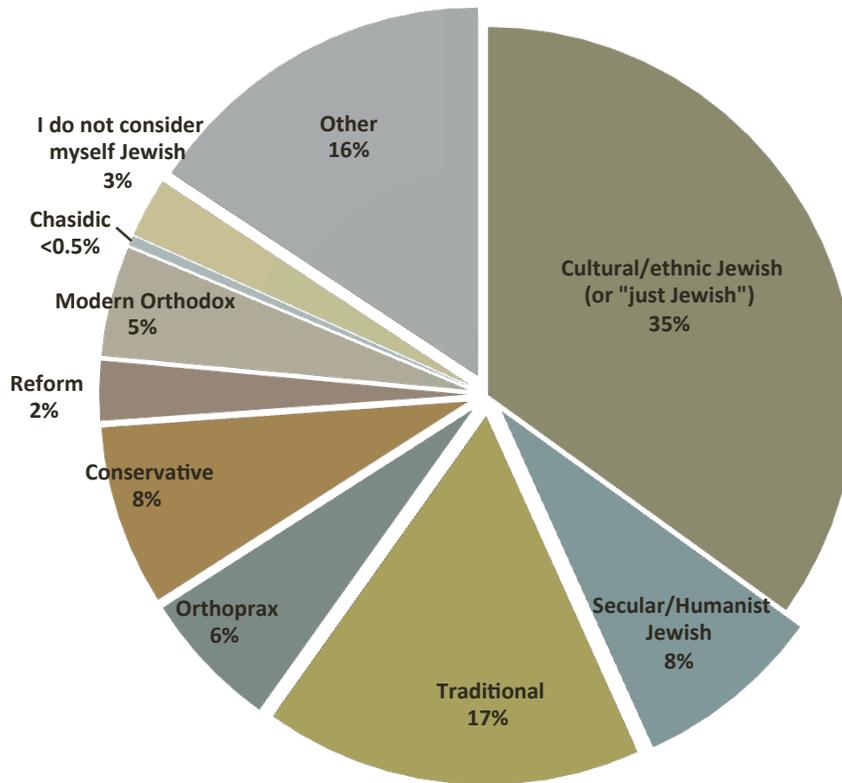


- Women (51%) would be more upset than men (41%) if a child of theirs intermarried.

Q. To what extent would it upset you if a child of yours married a non-Jew who did not convert to Judaism?
• Very much; Somewhat; Slightly; Not at all; Don't know
(n=228)

Jewish Identity, Relationships and Community

Current Jewish Self-Identification – Respondents’ Jewish affiliations were more “self-defined” than conforming to common denominations, with 60% labeling themselves as traditional, secular/humanist, cultural/ethnic or “just Jewish.” Only 15% identified themselves as members of a denomination.

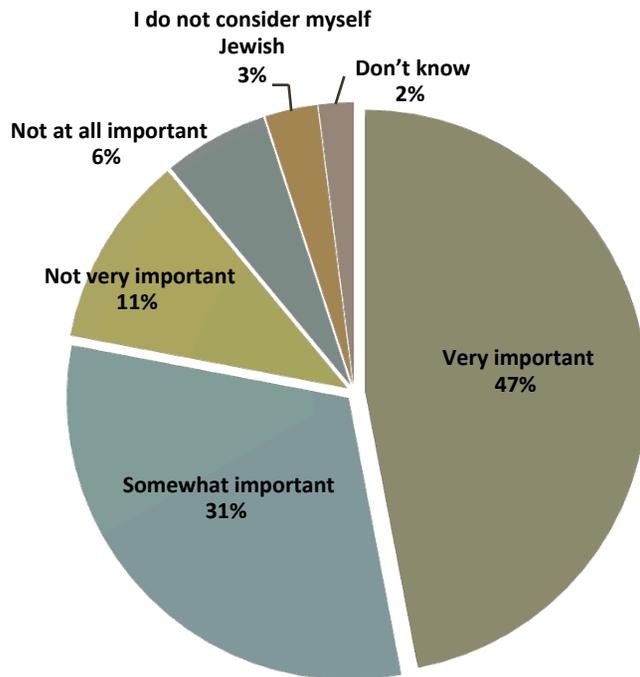


- There were only small differences between men and women.
- Pew found that 70% of Jews identify with a denomination (Reform 35%, Conservative 18%, Orthodox 10%, Other Denominations 6%), a much higher percentage than among our respondents (15%).

Q. Which of the following best describes how you see your Jewish affiliation at this time?

- Cultural/ethnic Jewish (or "just Jewish"); Secular/Humanist Jewish; Traditional; Orthoprax; Conservative; Reform; Modern Orthodox; Yeshivish/Litvish; Chasidish (spelled as Chasidic in the chart above); I do not consider myself Jewish; Other – Please describe (n=229)

Importance of Being Jewish – A very strong majority (78%) of survey respondents stated that being Jewish was very or somewhat important to them.



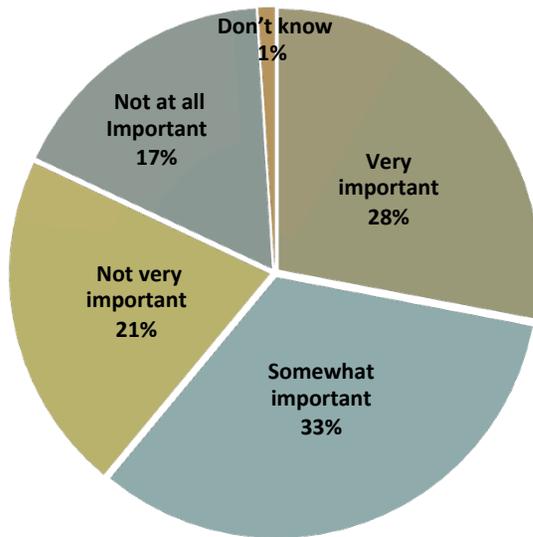
- Women stated that being Jewish is more important to them than did men; the percentage stating it was “very important” was 53% for women and 42% for men.
- Pew found that 82% of all American Jews and 99% of Modern Orthodox said that being Jewish is very or somewhat important to them.

Q. Right now, how important is being Jewish in your life?

- Very important; Somewhat important; Not very important; Not at all important; I do not consider myself Jewish; Don't know (n=228)

Importance of Being in a Jewish Community and Part of the Jewish People – Strong majorities stated that being in a Jewish community was very or somewhat important to them (61%), as was have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people (76%).

Importance of Being in a Jewish Community



- Being part of a Jewish community is a bit more important to women (31% say it is very important) than it is to men (25%).
- Pew found that 70% of American Jews and 99% of Modern Orthodox said being part of a Jewish community was an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them.

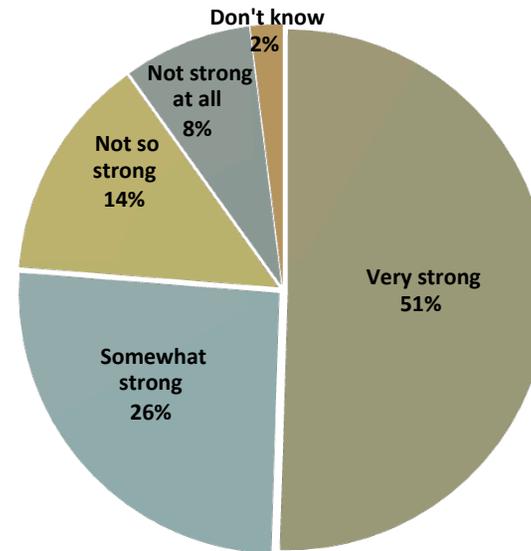
Q. Right now, how important is it to you to be part of a Jewish community?

- Very important; Somewhat important; Not very important; Not at all important; Don't know (n=228)

Q. Would you say your sense of belonging to the Jewish people is:

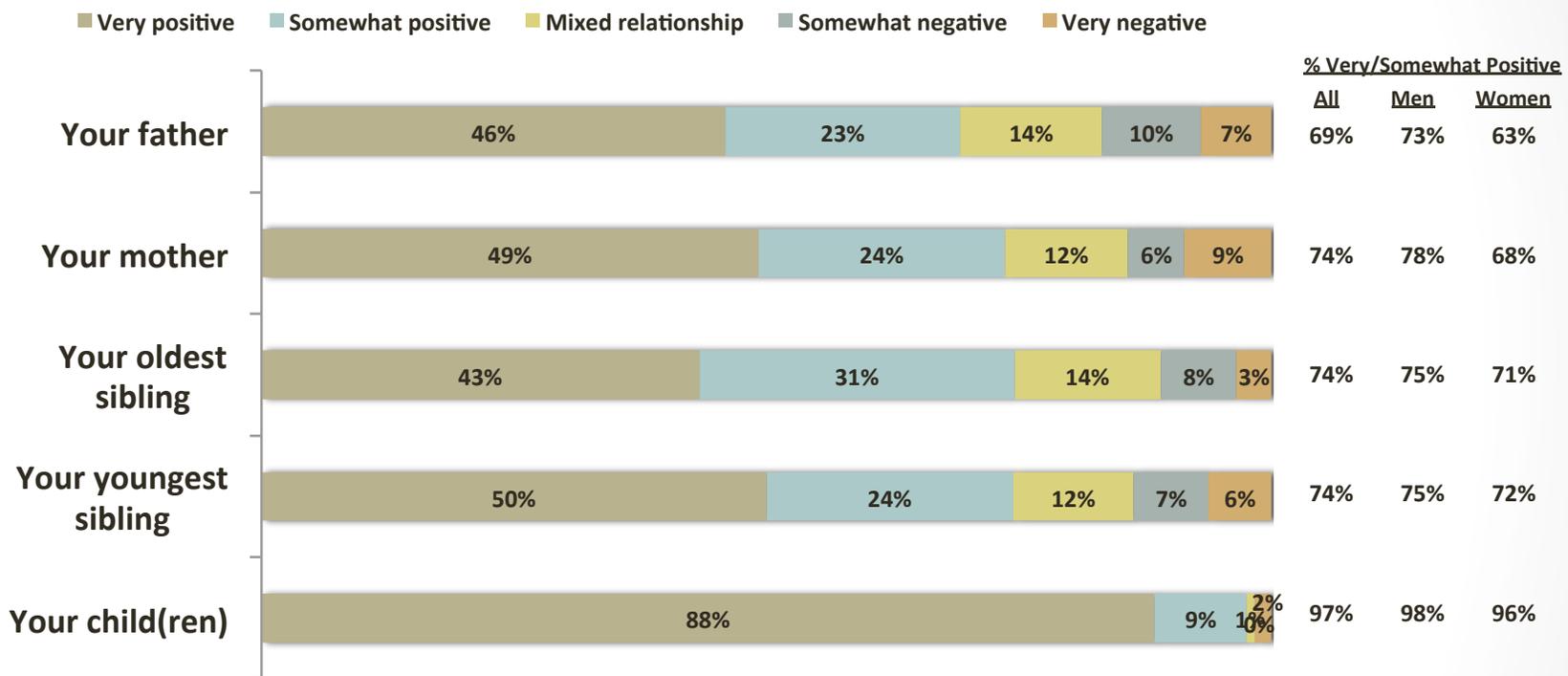
- Very strong; Somewhat strong; Not so strong; Not strong at all; Don't know (n=227)

Sense of Belonging to the Jewish People



- Sense of belonging to the Jewish people is also stronger among women (56% say it is very strong) than it is among men (46%)
- Pew found that 75% of all American Jews and 100% of Modern Orthodox agreed that they have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. (The question had agree, disagree and don't know options.)

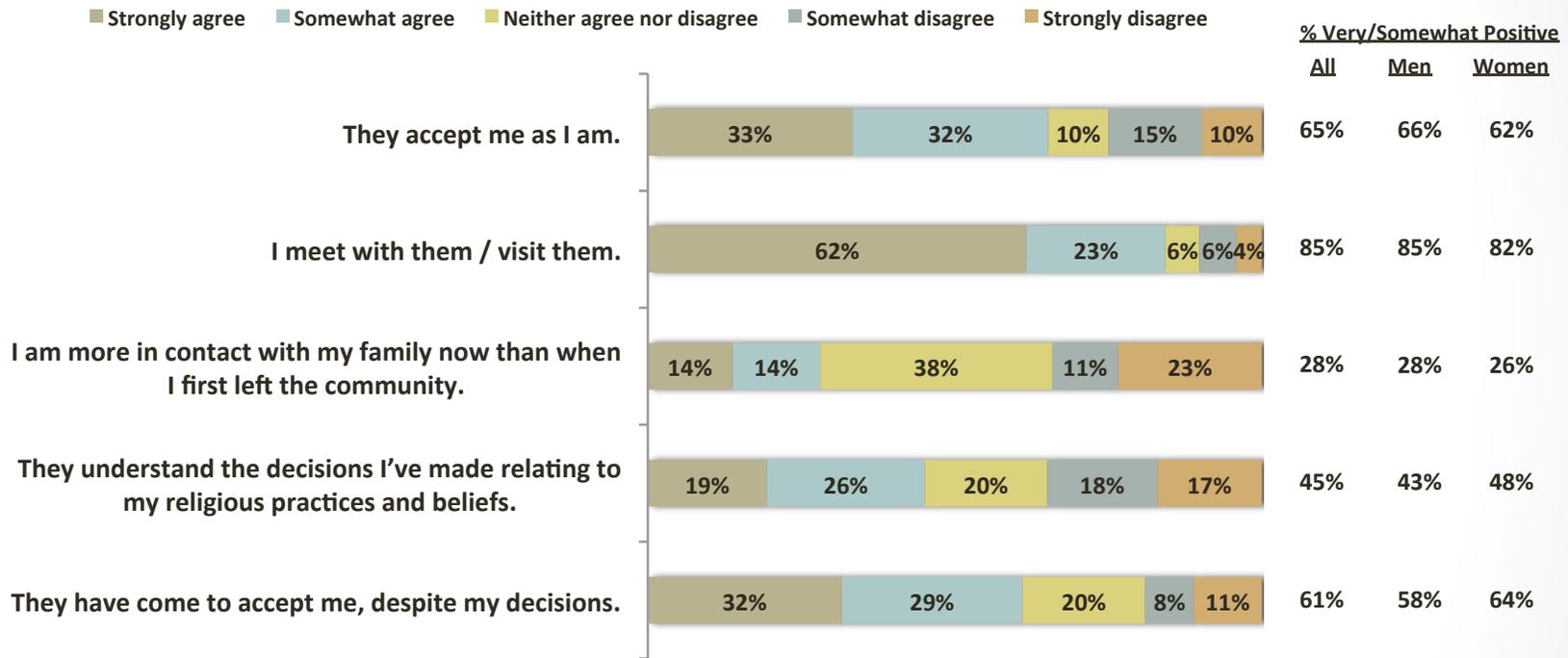
Family Relationships – Respondents’ relationships with their family were generally positive, although men had better relationships with their parents than did women.



- Men who have left their community have maintained better family relationships with their parents than have women: better with father (73% vs. 63% positive); with mother (78% vs. 68% positive).

Q. How is your current relationship with each of the following? (Percentages exclude those responding “Not relevant / no such person in my life”)
 • Your father; Your mother; Your oldest sibling; Your youngest sibling; Your child(ren)
 • Scale: Very positive; Somewhat positive; Mixed relationship; Somewhat negative; Very negative; Not relevant / no such person in my life
 (n excluding those responding “Not relevant / no such person in my life” = 185, 197, 173, 176, 118 for the five items, respectively)

Family Acceptance – Respondents often visit their families (85%), and while they have seen growing acceptance (61%), fewer than half stated that their families understand their decisions (45%). Differences between men and women are not significant.



Q. Thinking of your birth family, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Percentages exclude those responding "Statement not relevant to me")

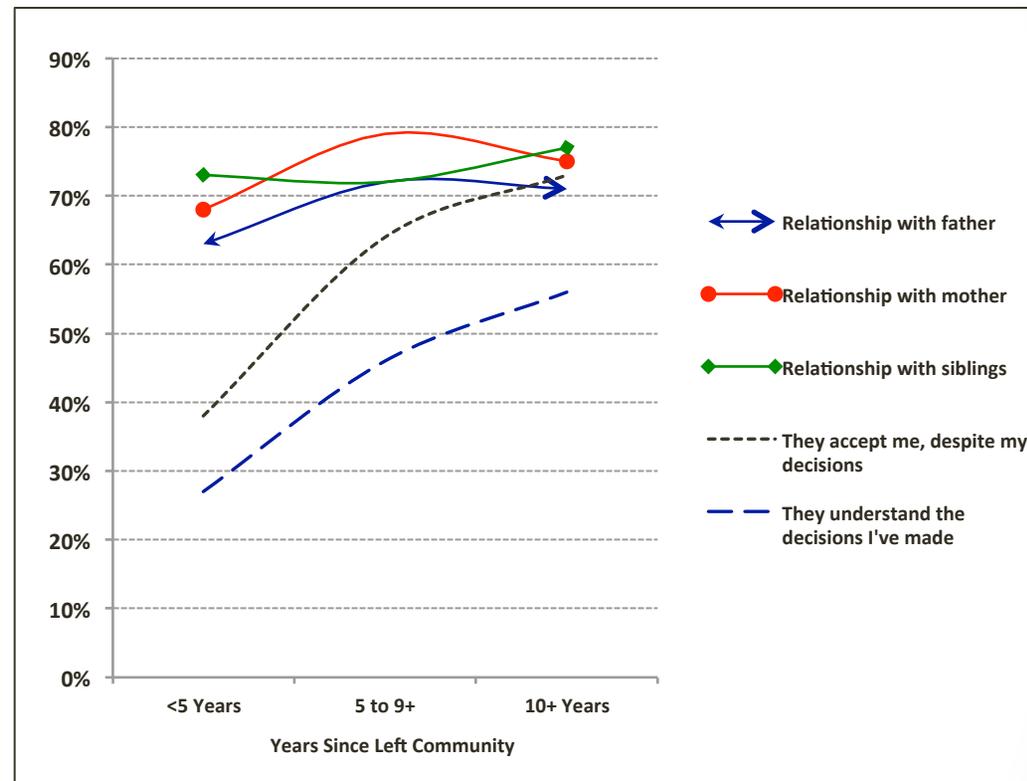
- They accept me as I am; I meet with them / visit them; I am more in contact with my family now than when I first left the community; They understand the decisions I've made relating to my religious practices and beliefs; They have come to accept me, despite my decisions.
- **Scale:** Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree; Statement not relevant to me (n excluding those responding "Statement not relevant to me" = 216, 217, 167, 206, 190 for the five items, respectively)

Family Relationships and Acceptance – Relationships with parents and siblings, as well as family acceptance and understanding improve over time.

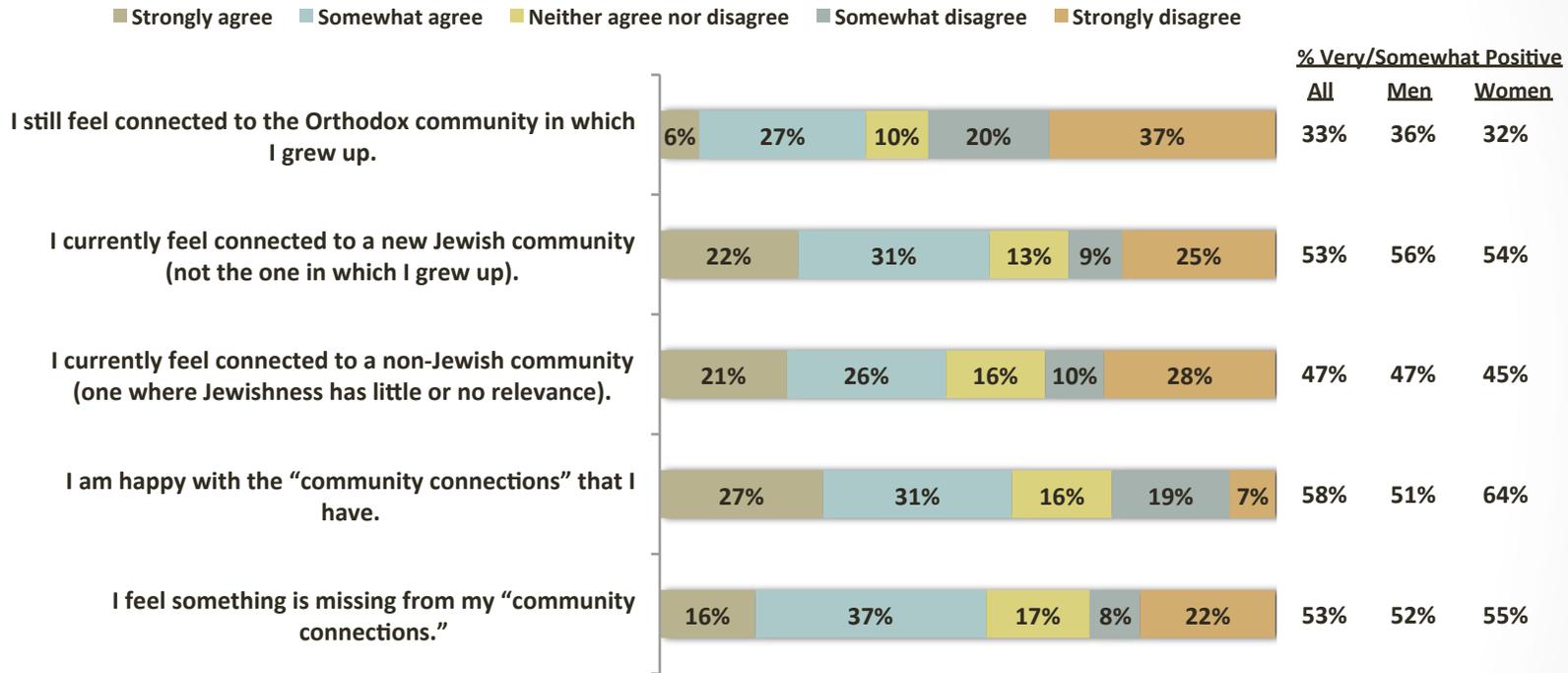
Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community

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- Relationships with parents and siblings improve over time, although they then plateau. Relationships with siblings are generally good for all time periods; relationships with children are not shown in the chart, as they are high (95%+) across all time periods.
- Family acceptance and understanding both increase substantially over time.



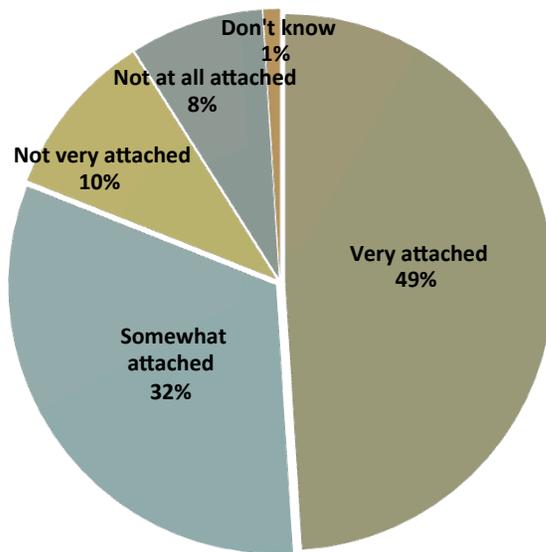
Community Connections – One-third of respondents stated that still feel connected to their Orthodox community of origin, and about half indicated they have connections to new communities. While more than half were happy with their current community connections (with women happier than men), about as many felt something missing from those connections.



Q. Do you agree with the following statements? (Percentages exclude those responding “Statement not relevant to me”)

- I still feel connected to the Orthodox community in which I grew up; I currently feel connected to a new; Jewish community (not the one in which I grew up); I currently feel connected to a community where being Jewish has little or no relevance; I am happy with the “community connections” that I have; I feel something is missing from my “community connections.”
- Scale:** Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree; Statement not relevant to me (n excluding those responding “Statement not relevant to me” = 218, 205, 198, 215, 219 for the five items, respectively)

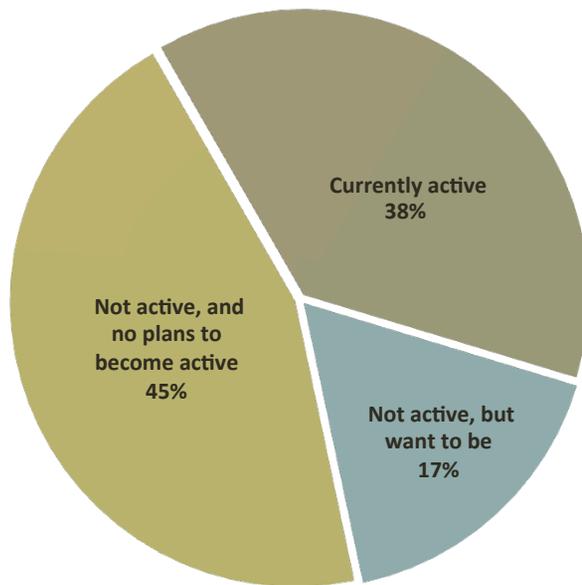
Attachment to Israel – Respondents’ emotional attachment to Israel was strong, with 49% saying they were very attached, and another 32% saying they were somewhat attached.



- **Women are more emotionally attached to Israel than are men, with 86% vs. 77% very or somewhat attached (and 54% vs. 47% very attached).**
- **Pew found that 69% of all American Jews and 99% of Modern Orthodox were very or somewhat attached to Israel.**

Q. How emotionally attached are you to Israel?
• Very attached; Somewhat attached; Not very attached; Not at all attached; Don't know
(n=225)

Jewish Community Social Activism – More than one-third of respondents said they were active in Jewish communal social issues.



Area Currently Active	%
Jewish education	20%
OTD community	13%
Women's role, issues	13%
Jewish organizational involvement	13%
Synagogue	13%
Israel	10%
Jewish issues, policy	10%
Progressive issues	10%

Women 19%
Men 3%

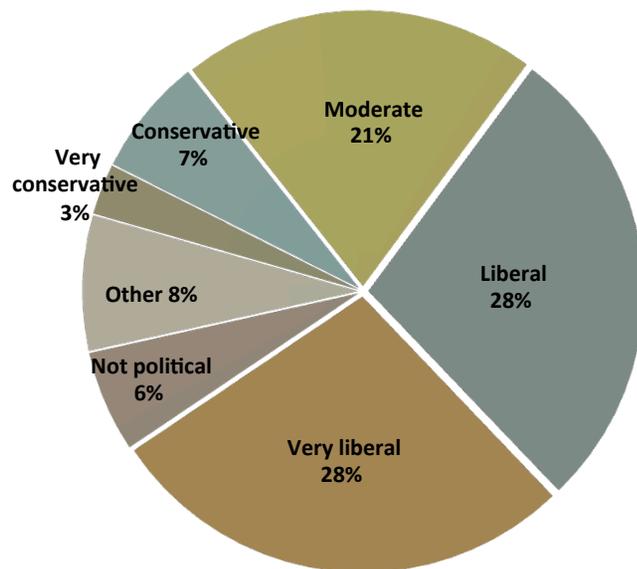
Area Wanting to Be Active	%
OTD community	22%
LGBTQ	22%
Education	17%
Israel advocacy, issues	17%
Abuse, advocacy for youth	14%

Q. Are you currently active in, or do you want to be active in, social issues that affect the Jewish community?

- I am currently active on Jewish communal social issue(s); I am currently not active, but I want to become active; I am currently not active, and have no plans to become active

(n=229) Note: percentages associated with areas of interest are based on small sample sizes and should be viewed as directional.

Political Leanings – Respondents were much more often politically liberal (56%) than conservative (10%).

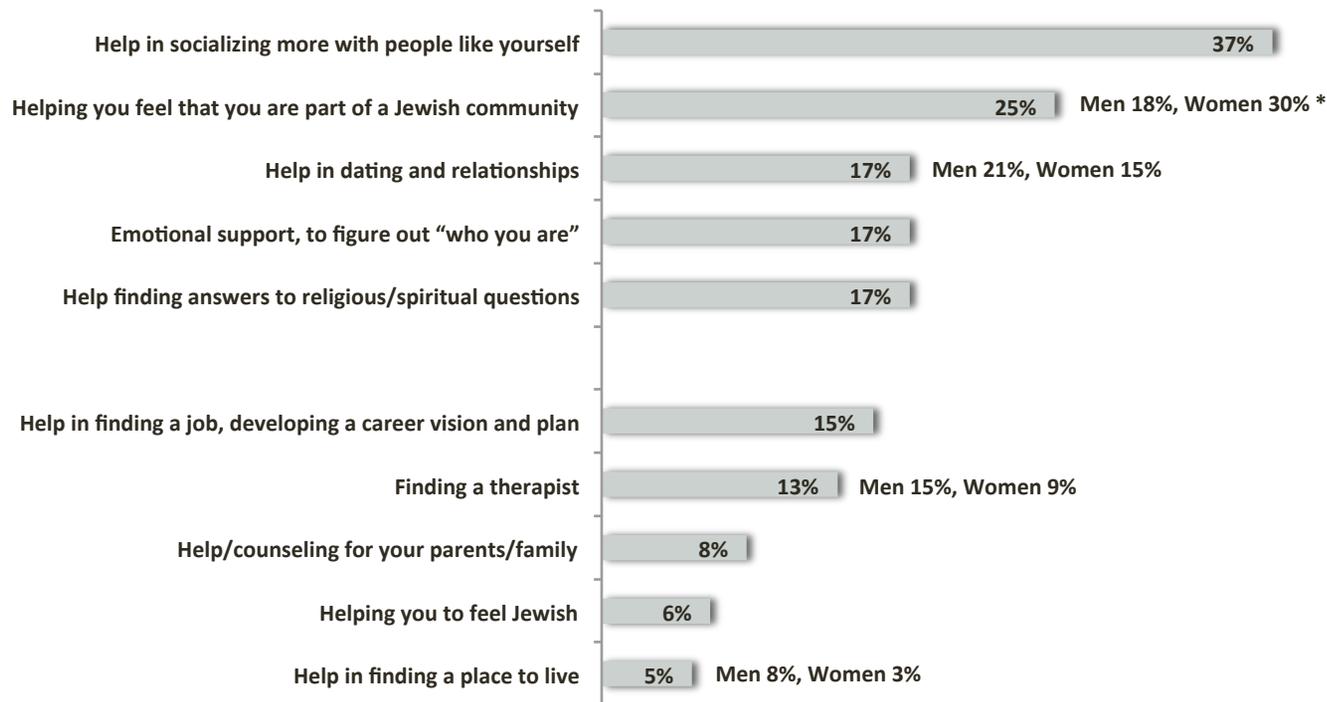


- Women and men had virtually identical political leanings.
- Survey respondents were more liberal than all American Jews, as was shown in the Pew Survey, which found 49% to be liberal, 29% moderate and 19% conservative.

Q. In general, how would you describe your political views?
Very conservative; Conservative; Moderate; Liberal; Very liberal; I am not political; Other – Please Describe
(n=225)

Current Support Needed Sources of Support Used

Current Needs – Respondents’ top needs are in getting opportunities to socialize more with people like themselves (37%), and help in feeling they are part of a Jewish community (25%). One area with a statistically significant difference between men and women was in their wanting help to feel a part of the Jewish community (men 18% vs. women 30%).



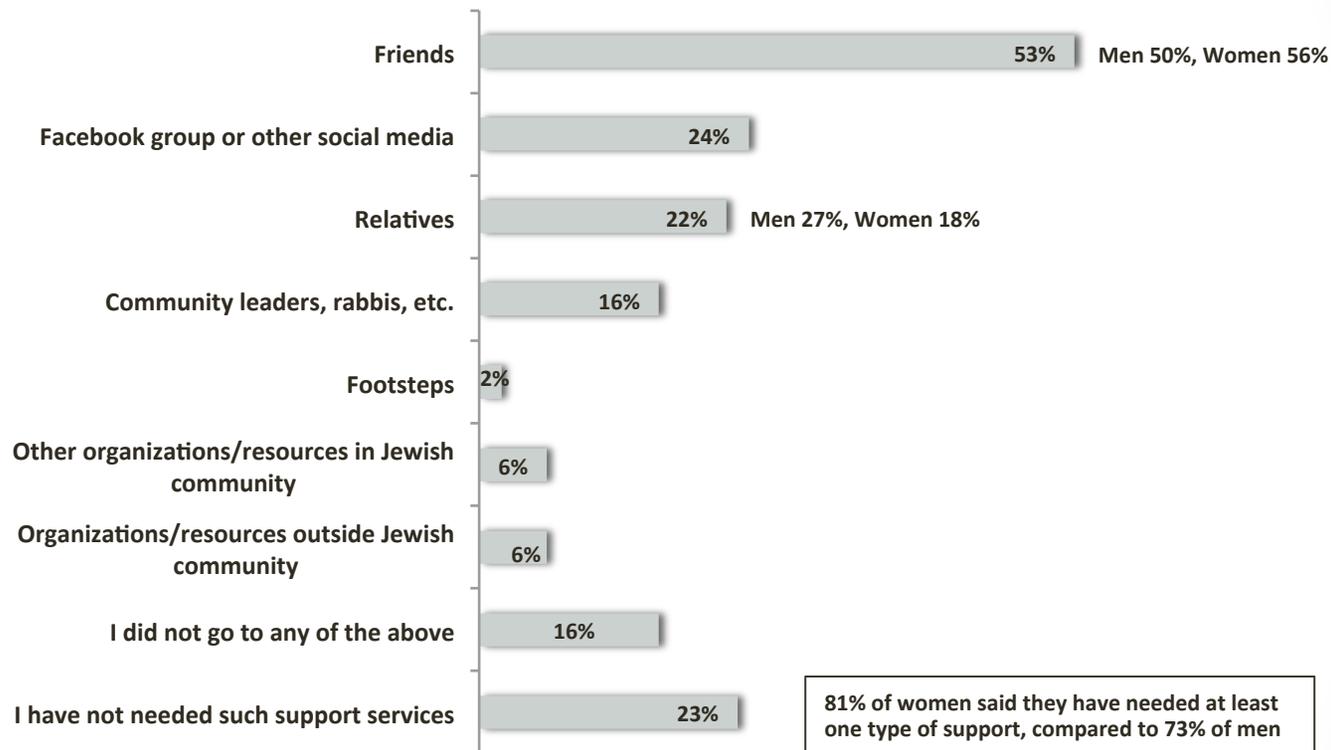
* Difference is statistically significant at the 95% level.

Q. In the list below, please check the most important needs you may have at this time (up to 5)

- Educational counseling, e.g., getting a GED/TASC high school degree, finding scholarship funding; Help in finding a job and/or developing a career vision and plan; Help in finding a place to live; Help in learning new skills and how to participate in society; Help in relating to dating and relationships; Help relating to divorce or child custody; Help/counseling for your parents/family; Finding a therapist; Helping you feel that you are part of a Jewish community; Help in giving you emotional support, to figure out “who you are”; Help in giving you referrals to people you could speak with for various needs; Help in giving you opportunities to socialize more with people like yourself; Helping you to feel Jewish; Help finding answers to religious and spiritual questions; Other – Please describe; None of the above;.

(n=206)

Past Sources of Support – 81% of women said they have needed at least one type of support, compared to 73% of men. The most frequent sources of support have been friends (53%), Facebook groups or other social media (24%), relatives (22%) and community/rabbinic leaders (16%). Overall, Women relied a bit more often on friends for support, while men relied more often on relatives.



Q. Thinking of the various support services you may have needed since you started moving away from your community, where did you go for such services?

- Please check all that apply.; Friends; Relatives; Community leaders, rabbis, etc.; Facebook group or other social media; Footsteps; Project Makom; Other organizations/resources in the Jewish community – Please describe; Organizations/resources outside the Jewish community – Please describe; I did not go to any of the above; I have not needed such support services

(n=207)

Final Thoughts and Reflections

- **Helping Others Understand You**
- **What You Might Have Done Differently**
- **Advice to Those Considering Leaving**

Final Thoughts and Reflections – Introduction

- The objective of this survey was to give respondents a voice – a chance to communicate their thoughts to the larger Jewish population – and to start a conversation. The following three questions, dealing with final thoughts and reflections, were in the form of open-ended comment questions, and responses were not mandatory. The vast majority of respondents took the time to reply, often in poignant and very thoughtful language, indicating that respondents valued this opportunity to be heard.
- This section presents a sample of verbatim comments in response to the three questions. We recommend that these comments be read, as they help create a better understanding of those who have left the Orthodox community. For that reason we are including two pages of verbatim comments for each of these three concluding questions.
- All of the verbatim comments will be made available in substantively unedited form (although we will do minor editing that might be needed to maintain total anonymity, i.e., anything that might lead to a concern about possibly being identified ... as we have done to the comments shown on the following pages).

Many people don't well understand those who have left, or may leave, their Orthodox community of origin. What do you want to tell people about this group?

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *Be more tolerant. More open minded in general. Too much judgement. Jews should feel connected and appreciated despite their affiliation or practice. Orthodoxy is too insular and fearful and controlling. Not really spiritual in practice.*
- *Community is great as long as you don't veer off set path- i.e. Go to same camp, school, synagogue, even vacation together. Non conformity is rejected Sheep following mindless herd.*
- *Everyone one is different Everyone has different levels of religion Everyone has different reactions to them It's impossible to generalize You can't force someone to believe You can't shame them You can't embarace them Maybe just accept them for who they are.*
- *I can only speak about the Modern Orthodox community, but people should realize that it does a lot to push people out— especially converts. The treatment of converts is abysmal; even communities that think they do a good job often marginalized them, give their rabbi unchecked power to abuse.*
- *I can't speak for all. It was excruciating. I miss it, but don't trust anymore. Domestic violence is a shonda.*
- *I don't know, I don't feel comfortable representing this group. I feel like this survey wasn't made for me. I feel really alone in that vein. I feel like I'm not supposed to be this way. Like I got caught up in a crack and was misassembled.*
- *I just don't believe in God. It's that simple. I believe the Torah was written by human beings desperate to understand a world that did not make sense, and interpreted by rabbis who may have done the best they could with the wisdom of their era, but who are neither holy nor entirely relevant in a modern era -- indeed, some of their beliefs are absolutely offensive to me. No one hurt me: I was not abused or addicted or molested or unloved; my parents are wonderful, and I was, and am, a productive and happy member of society. I just do not believe. And I am not the only one.*
- *I understand that going OTD may be a mistake. But the reason I did it was so that when I die I can claim that I've lived a varied life, and experienced as much as I possibly could.*
- *Leaving orthodoxy, even giving up a belief in God, does not mean giving up Judaism.*
- *Mostly people who were fed up with the ridiculous judgement and gossip that runs so deep in many orthodox communities when those same people pretend to be perfect Orthodox Jews- people who were sick of the hypocrisy. Also people who realized that women are not just vessels for having babies.*
- *My faith and observance changes all the time. It's not fixed. My feelings about my Jewish identity as well as my Jewish desires is always in flux. But no matter where I am in that roller coaster, I always feel different and not ever quite a part of anything.*
- *Not everyone leaves because of abuse, dysfunction, etc. Many leave because of genuine intellectual inquiry. I also became irreligious without fanfare or drama. Simply concluded that religion -or the theology behind it- doesn't do anything for me. I an also fortunate to live in an accepting modern orthodox community and have a wife and family that accepts who I am in spite of our religious differences.*

Continued



Many people don't well understand those who have left, or may leave, their Orthodox community of origin. What do you want to tell people about this group? (Continued)

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *That I am very happy and content with the life that I've built. That I'm grateful for those in the orthodox community in which I was raised who provided me with a wonderful cultural and secular education. However whatever positives I received is not outweighed by the mysogyny, racism, homophobia, and bigotry that was taught and lived as part of an orthodox curriculum and life path. It's not something I want in my home and while there are many wonderful values I learned growing up, I don't need to expose my son to those values.*
- *The idea of a Jewish God is simplistic, ignorant of both science and history, and most of all, false. Being proud of your traditions and heritage are fine as long as they don't contribute to evil in the world. Oppression of women, LGBT and belief in the "other" status of non-Jews is in my mind contributing to "evil." I don't think most orthodox people are evil but I don't think they face the reality that they do often believe evil things and contribute to hatred and oppression in the world ... They are "off the derech" if by derech we mean a loving and moral world. People who leave simply choose to reject falsehood and immorality. Not to mention prosciutto is f-ing delicious.*
- *The surprising thing is not why so many people leave, buy why so many people stay. The "Orthodox Lifestyle", perhaps best exemplified by the idyllic Shabbat meal, holds a lot of appeal for people. The prototypical Orthodox person is someone who has a family, and the Orthodox Lifestyle can only really manifest itself when a person has a spouse and children. People in my peer group (including myself) who were not especially successful in terms of dating within the Orthodox community (perhaps due to not conforming to Orthodox norms in various ways, despite being observant) tended to move further away from Orthodoxy.*
- *The universe is a far too complicated place to be explained away using bronze age mythology and moral lessons supposedly imparted by a deity but more likely conceived of and interpreted by intrinsically flawed humans. Some leave Orthodoxy as a means of resolving cognitive dissonance, others leave for emotional reasons. There is no one thing that unites everyone.*
- *There is a noticeable schism between the values of the Orthodox world and the values of the greater society. Living in a large metropolis, I was constantly faced with either Jewish people who refused to accept modern ideas like that of LGBTQ pride or feminism, or secular people that pointed out the ridicule in believing that every word of commentary written by a French scholar hundreds of years ago was undisputable true (Rashi). When measured with a decent amount of objectivity, the Jewish value will lose to the secular one ten times out of ten.*
- *We have realized that we were living a farce. The Bible was written by men, the laws are based on primitive ideas which for the most part are no longer applicable. There is no Messiah coming, there is no god watching over us.*
- *We're not all abused or mentally ill, and we're not all looking to live a life of hefkerus. A lot of us feel fulfilled without Judaism. I feel much more fulfilled in life now more than ever. In terms of the mental illness and abuse thing: there are, yet, many abuse victims and people with mental illness in the OTD community. One thing is for sure: if the Jewish community was a safehaven for people with those issues, they would not have left. It's on the Jewish community to change that.*
- *Your version of Judaism is not the only one in existence. And Judaism isn't necessarily for every Jew. The more repressive and restrictive you make Orthodoxy, the less appealing it is for those in the community, and especially those who choose to leave.*

Looking back at your experiences, what if anything would you have done differently?

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *Abandoned Shabbat observance sooner. Spent less time wasted in yeshiva.*
- *Asked my parents to switch me to a non-orthodox school.*
- *Been more involved in the community to foster a stronger connection to it/them*
- *Been my true self earlier*
- *Gone to co-ed high school and secular college (as opposed to YU) Spent less time learning Torah and more time learning math and science.*
- *Great question. I don't know. My move away from Orthodoxy was and continues to be hard for my parents but they are proud of me and my decisions. I regret that my house isn't kosher because I wish my father would eat my cooking. Thankfully, my parents have come over and we get Boro Park take-out and eat on paper!*
- *I likely would have stood up more for my husband that converted. Being accepted at all costs were such a big overarching theme in my life and it's an unhealthy mindset. Now there is no pretense and judgement when I meet new people.*
- *I was suspicious of our charismatic, molesting rabbi for years, but kept my concerns to myself. I wish I had expressed these earlier, and saved my family from the emotional abuse he inflicted.*
- *I wish I had found someone to validate my questions instead of being made to feel like a disappointment. Maybe I shouldn't have cared so much...*
- *I would have been more confident to be myself and expect to be accepted or they didn't deserve me. Hindsight is 20/20 and I wish I didn't have to go through the torment of doubting who I am and having to feel horrible for not sharing the beliefs of those around me.*
- *I would have been up front with my family earlier on.*
- *I would have "come out sooner". It would have been easier and less stressful on me.. And I may not have gotten married to the wrong man because I felt I had to be married to be worth anything*
- *I would have established myself in a modern orthodox community with a shul that I could enjoy and a rabbi I respect and a feeling of spirituality*
- *I would have finished college sooner. I got caught up in the emotional issues and negative coping behaviors as a young adult (that involved both OTD-related and non-OTD-related personal problems) and at times felt completely hopeless and like a waste. I dropped out of college, made a lot of bad decisions, and did some things I still regret. I wish I had coped better, stayed in school, and got moving on my career sooner. (As an aside, I did finally get control of my behaviors/emotions, finished school, and am working my way through a career, so things did work out in the end. I just wish I had figured these things out sooner so that I could be further along financially and career-wise at this point.)*

Continued 

Looking back at your experiences, what if anything would you have done differently?

(Continued)

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *I would have gotten out of my marriage or not gotten married.*
- *I would have skipped the decade of living a double life and just made a sharp break.*
- *I would've have gotten married so young - I hardly knew who I was at the time let alone another human being.*
- *I would have spoken to someone about my concerns and desire to explore activities that weren't always considered traditional for a good Jewish kid.*
- *Moved when kids switched to public schools. We love Judaism just not lots of Jews. Cannot stay in Ortho community of you take different paths.*
- *nope. I feel strongly that I am happy that i have a strong judaic learning background that has stood me well my entire adult and parenting life. it is important ot have that upbringing to be able to make decisions about religion form a strength of knowledge standpoint rather than a weakness of ignorance. How do you know if you dont want to be religious (or believe in hashem) if you don't even know anything about those concepts?*
- *Nothing. I had to transition while still married to a very spiritual and God fearing husband. So I did it discreetly and slowly so he would not freak out. He's come to terms with my beliefs and respects them.*
- *Nothing. I wish there were more support services for Modern Orthodox teenagers. Though we don't face the same magnitude of struggle as those from the ultra-Orthodox community, there are significant emotional challenges. Many individuals turn to drugs -- probably due to the lack of support network. This is something that urgently needs to be fixed.*
- *Nothing. I'm a very independent thinker and naturally bristle at constraints and rules, especially when they feel arbitrary. I do not believe that "God", whatever that is, came up with all these requirements for a "chosen" group of people. No, we are not chosen. But I enjoy cholent and babka and Israeli dancing and speaking Hebrew, and I only lament that there isn't a better way to pass these cultural aspects of Judaism down to my son. He'll just have to find his own path, whatever that may be.*
- *Questioned Rabbis and teachers when they were hypocritical or bashed other sects.*
- *Searched more actively to find others in my situation.*
- *Sometime I wonder why I never asked any hard questions during my primary and high school Jewish education. I never asked "how do I know this is true". It bothers me that I did not think critically back then. But in general, I do not regret my decision to leave and I would not have done anything differently. Sought professional help in coming to terms with my sexuality at a much younger age.*
- *Was afraid if I married a non jew my family would have been upset. Maybe disowned me. So I married the first jewish girlfriend who could stand me for more than 5 minutes. Not a great selection process for a life partner.*
- *Would have lost religion as a single man rather than married, in a religious community.*

In conclusion, what advice would you give to others who are considering leaving their Orthodox community, for a more modern lifestyle?

Sample Verbatim Responses

- *Ask what you want out of life truly. Once you can honestly answer, then you can make choices that will get you what you want. Most who leave completely are unhappy because that is NOT what they truly wanted. They want to be part of a close community with Jewish institutions.*
- *Be bold, be brave, and make choices for YOU. The people who support you will become immensely important in your life, and those that can't or choose not to were never really invested in your happiness for your sake anyway.*
- *Be rational when making decisions- not emotional.*
- *Be true to yourself and don't hurt anyone else in the process.*
- *Do it before you're married and before you have children who are 'plugged' into the community.*
- *Do it! The world is huge and fascinating. Don't be afraid. There are tons of ways to build community and non-Jews aren't scary and they don't all want to kill you! I wish I was more exposed to non-Jews and alternate ways of building community. I would just say religion isn't the only way to build a strong community.*
- *Do what makes you happy and feels authentic. There is lots of life beyond religious ritual. And your moral compass will continue even without the fear of breaking religious law. You don't need to be religious or God fearing to be a moral person.*
- *Don't feel you are abandoning yourself. Your Jewishness, morals, values and even traditions go with you. Rejecting "a view" doesn't mean you are rejecting your identity (and by identity I don't necessarily mean being religious). Embrace it even more and focus in bringing peace to your life and others by respecting. Life is too short, but seriously short, we don't even know if this is it, if there is another shot for us. If you love yourself and work in your happiness then that's what you will have to offer to the rest of the world.*
- *Education is crucial. Learning a way to make a living to support oneself is crucial. Therapy to acquire social skills and confidence that were not necessarily taught at home is crucial.*
- *Find people to connect to and keep some Jewish connections alive. If possible do not isolate or completely cut off from Judaism.*
- *Follow your star. Judaism, from atheist to hardcore haredi, is a DIY proposition.*
- *Get education and skills necessary for the real world.*
- *Get out now and don't look back. There is a whole wonderful world out there. And millions of Jews live in it very happily and well. You don't need to be submerged in 14th century Polish Mysticism (that was not the peak of human civilization) to be happy and full filled.*
- *I don't know that I have any advice to give. Everyone's journey is different. If a person came to me for advice about leaving Orthodoxy, I would want to listen to them, to hear their concerns and complaints. I would urge them to listen to their true selves, and figure out what would be right for *them*.*

Continued



In conclusion, what advice would you give to others who are considering leaving their Orthodox community, for a more modern lifestyle? *(Continued)*

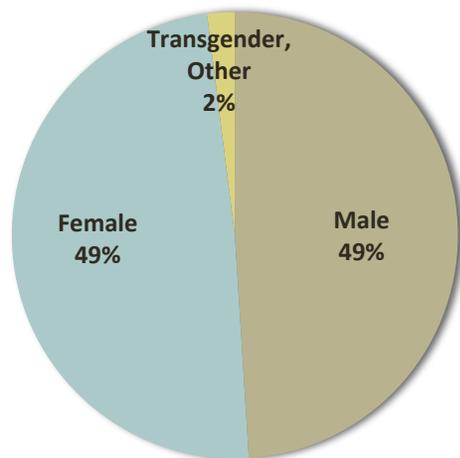
Sample Verbatim Responses

- *I think it is worth it. I think most people should consider therapy.*
- *I think that Orthodoxy is one modern lifestyle of many. I actually don't really find it less modern than any other lifestyle found in 2016, and think that the wording of this question is kind of strange.*
- *I think what I might say or not say would depend on who their individual needs and encourage them to expand their mind and experience honestly.*
- *if orthodoxy has anything meaningful to you, try to bring it with you or look for a more open community*
- *If you want control over your life, you need to get out. Make new friends. just understand what you're sacrificing by remaining within the community, and decide whether it's worth it for you to stay.*
- *It's really hard and really painful, but do you really want to lead a double-life or always fight an internal (or external) war between what you believe and what your community/family demands? My physical, mental, emotional, health have all dramatically improved since I became free.*
- *Judaism doesn't have to be an all or nothing. I recently went to one of these OTD bbq comprised of a lot of footstep member and was horrified that non kosher meat and pig products were being served. There's a big difference between choosing not to be a part of that life and completely disrespecting those who chose to remain. For me it was eye opening as it highlighted the great differences between those who leave from a place of intellectual/logical reasoning versus those from an emotional place or due a bad experience that harbor bad will towards others.*
- *Keep searching and finding the people you need to help you make the changes you want. Also it takes a long long time to do this. Years.*
- *That you can be Modern and Orthodox, in some versions of Orthodoxy 2. Do what your heart tells you- you have only one life*
- *There is a mourning process that must happen when you leave the community. You are leaving something very substantial behind. It is normal and healthy to take time to acknowledge this and allow yourself to mourn it. But once you have processed the loss, there is so much to gain: freedom to find your own way in life, with the people and ideas that excite you the most...your life becomes wide open, with no one else dictating its direction...and compassion becomes limitless and not just bound by the confines of who is Jewish. Its wonderful out here.*
- *Think critically. Be aware you won't suddenly find fulfillment. You may never find fulfillment. You won't suddenly be happy. Religion isn't the root of all evil. Determine what are the aspects of your community that make you uncomfortable and figure out if the issue is with religion, or with the people you're surrounded by. Your answers may surprise you.*
- *You can do it. you are not alone. you don't need other people to be strong--strength is within yourself.*

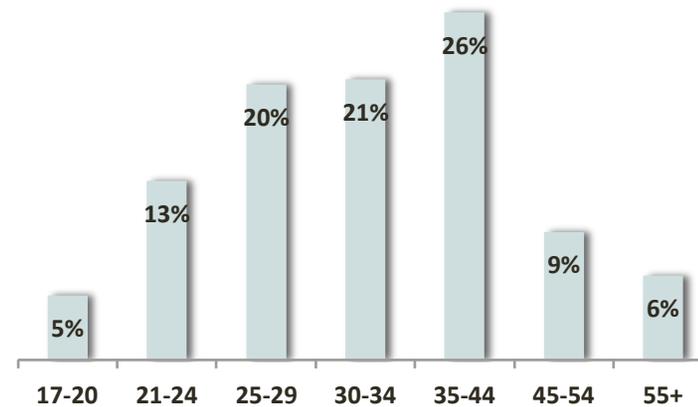
Appendix – Demographics

Gender and Age – Respondents split evenly between men and women, with a median age of 37 for each.

Gender



Age



- Survey respondents are younger than U.S. Jewry in general. Pew showed a median age of 50 for all Jews, and 40 among Orthodox Jews.

Q. What is your gender?

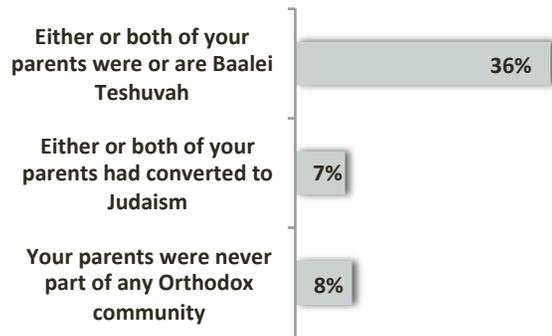
- Male; Female; Transgender; Other - Please describe (n=208)

Q. In what year were you born?

(n=202)

Family Background – More than one-third of respondents (36%) had at least one Baal Teshuva parent, and English was the primary language spoken at home (98%).

Baalei Teshuvah, Converts, Parents Part of Orthodox Community



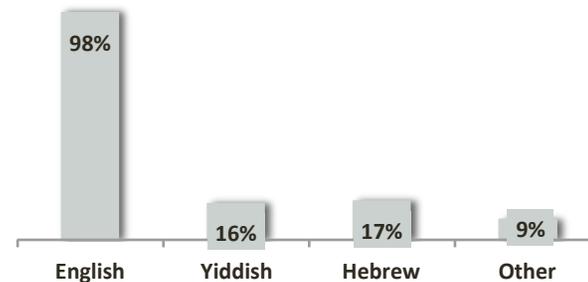
- 42% of women came from a “BT Family” (at least one parent Baal Teshuvah), compared to 31% of men. While not statistically significant, it is interesting, as we had previously observed that the women have less positive relationships with their parents.

Q. Please indicate if ...

1. Either or both of your parents were or are Baalei Teshuvah
2. Either or both of your parents had converted to Judaism
3. Your parents were never part of any Orthodox community

• **Scale:** Yes; No; Not sure / No response
(n =212)

Languages Spoken at Home, Growing Up



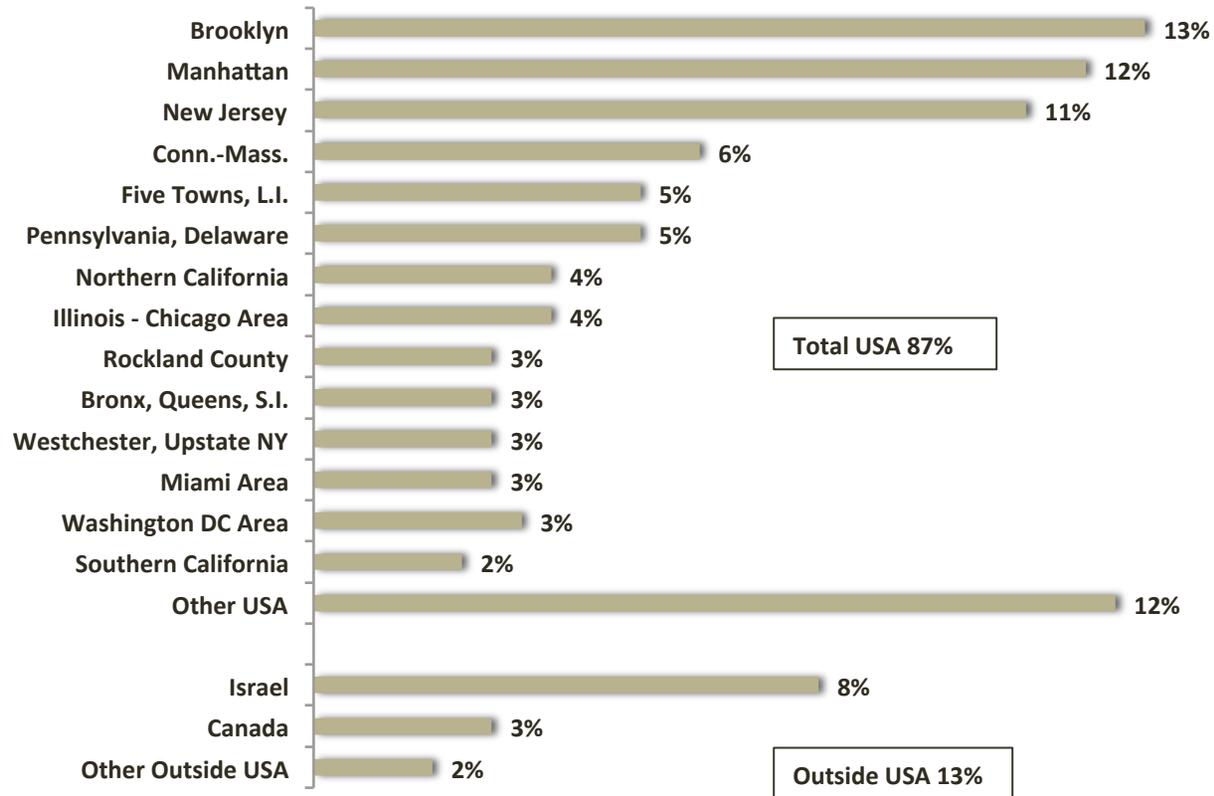
Q. What languages were commonly spoken in your home, when you were growing up?

Please check all that apply.

- English; Yiddish; Hebrew; Other(s) – Please describe

(n=212)

Where Respondents Currently Reside – Survey respondents are dispersed over 24 states and six foreign countries, with 51% residing in the Greater NYC area.

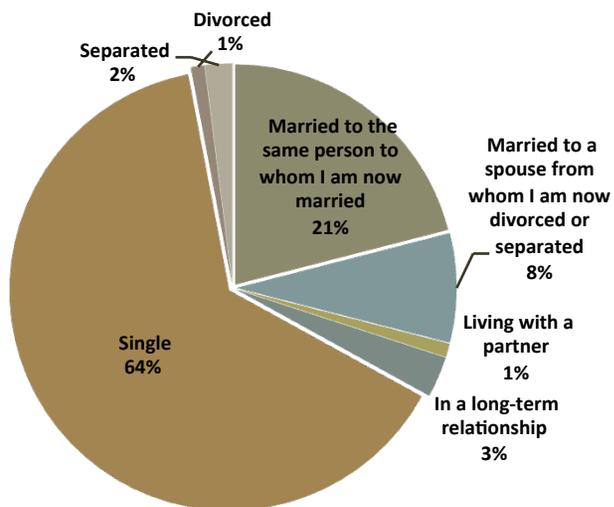


Q. Where do you currently live?

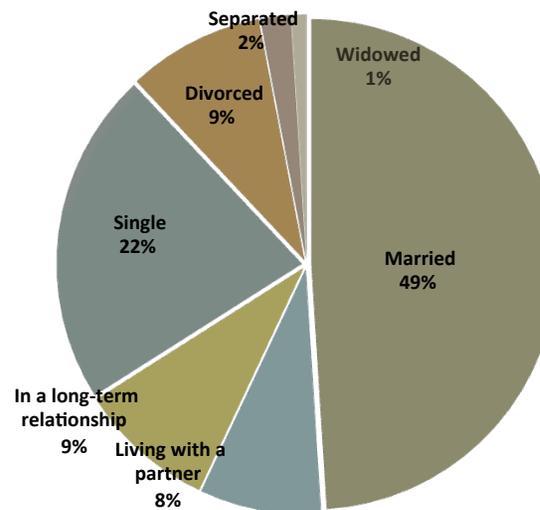
- In the USA - Please enter Zip Code; Outside USA - Please enter Country (n=221)

Marital/Relationship Status and Number of Children

Relationship Status When Left Community



Current Relationship Status



• Current total % married, living with a partner or in a long-term relationship is 62% for men and 68% for women.

Number of children when started moving away from community



• 26% had children when they first started moving away from their community, with an average among them of 3 children. The percentages with children and the numbers of children were virtually identical for men and women.

Q. What is your current marital/relationship status?

- Married; Living with a partner; In a long-term relationship; Single; Divorced; Separated; Widowed (n=228)

Q. What was your marital status when you first STARTED moving away from the Orthodox community in which you were raised?

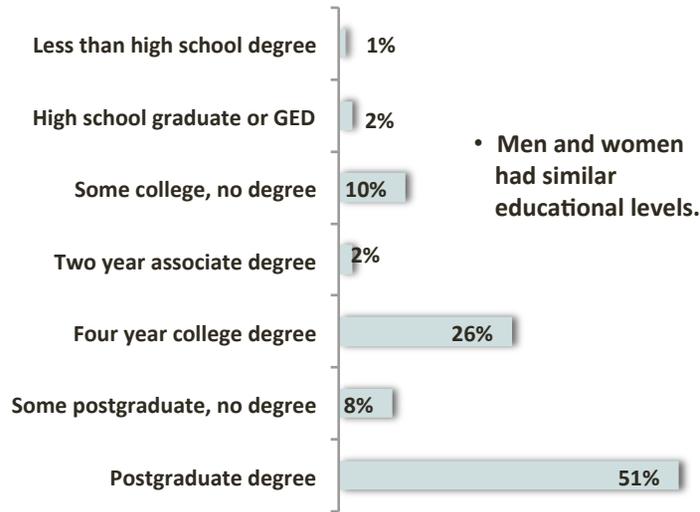
- Married to the same person to whom I am now married; Married to a spouse from whom I am now divorced or separated; Living with a partner; In a long-term relationship; Single; Divorced; Separated; Widowed (n=228)

Q. Did you have any children at that time (when you first started moving away from the Orthodox community in which you were raised)?

- Yes – Please enter number of children; No (n=228)

Education, Employment & Income – Respondents are very highly educated, with 51% having post-graduate degrees. A majority are employed full-time (55%), self-employed (11%) or employed part-time (10%), and they have a median income of \$101,000.

Education



• Men and women had similar educational levels.

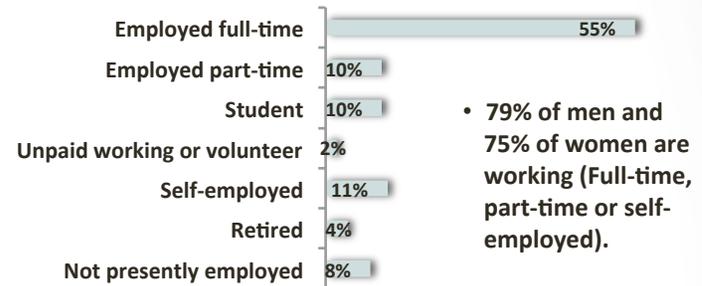
- Our survey respondents overall are extremely well educated compared to all U.S. Jews. Pew showed 65% of all Modern Orthodox Jews with a college degree or higher, compared to 85% among our respondents.

Q. What is the highest level of secular studies schooling you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

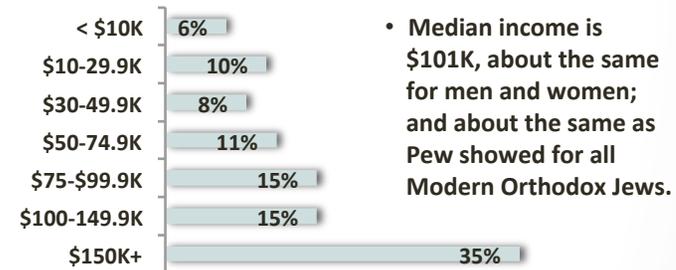
- Less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling); High school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with NO diploma); High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate); Some college, no degree (includes community college); Two year associate degree from a college or university; Four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree; Some postgraduate or professional schooling, no postgraduate degree; Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree

(n=206)

Employment and Income



• 79% of men and 75% of women are working (Full-time, part-time or self-employed).



• Median income is \$101K, about the same for men and women; and about the same as Pew showed for all Modern Orthodox Jews.

Q. Which of these best describes your current employment status?

- Employed full-time; Employed part-time; Student; Working or volunteering - non-paid; Self-employed; Retired; Not presently employed (n=206)

Q. What is your annual household income?

- Under \$10,000; \$10,000 - \$29,999; \$30,000 - \$49,999; \$50,000 - \$74,999; \$75,000 - \$99,999; \$100,000 - \$149,999; \$150,000 or more (n=193)



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