Modern Orthodox Jews at American Colleges: History and Current Issues

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The history of Jews in American universities is far from simple. With their roots in Christianity, institutions of higher education were not always welcoming to Jews. Yet despite historical exclusions, Jews presently enjoy nearly unfettered access to higher education, becoming proportionally well-represented in student and faculty bodies. But acceptance and belonging has not and does not hold true across different types of Jews. A small subset of the American Jewish population, Modern Orthodox Jews – and specifically college-going ones – are worth careful examination, as a group of deeply faithful people who want to be part of broader communities.

Despite a well-worn narrative of rivalry between the ivory towers of higher education and the solemn houses of prayer, modern student affairs as a profession is increasingly embracing of faith and its role in student development. At a moment when questions abound about the future of American institutions of higher education, the Modern Orthodox experience may be a bellwether for increasingly diverse campuses. Or their experience may remain in the margins, misunderstood and mischaracterized.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, a general and brief history of Jews of all types in American universities will give broad context. Second, Modern Orthodoxy will be described in the present and through its emergence. Third, an analysis of how campus-based Modern Orthodox institutions have changed in the past few decades will shed further light on this population. Finally, these ideas will be put into context of larger trends in higher education.

Part I: A History of Jews in American Universities

Jews have been part of the broad multicultural fabric of society in America since its inception as a nation. The American Jewish experience has been a quintessentially immigrant one, as many arrived seeking refuge from discrimination, expulsions, or extermination elsewhere. Like many areas of American life, higher education was closed entirely or restricted greatly to Jews until relatively recently, an exclusion that seems shocking contrasted to today's reality. Currently, Jewish students are present in substantial numbers, and Jewish faculty are even more visible across numerous disciplines.

From a small number of colonial-era Jews based in New England and predominantly based in banking and merchant work, the Jewish American population grew and diversified through waves of immigration (Sarna, 2019). In the mid-nineteenth century, Jews from Central

Europe began to arrive in greater numbers, often working as peddlers or small-time shopkeepers. Later, more moneyed and educated German Jewish immigrants brought with them professional aspirations and the denominational schisms that had emerged alongside their economic attainments in Germany, both of which contributed to changes in the American Jewish community.

Throughout most of the 1800s, Jews were still largely absent in America's universities, even as higher education expanded in that century (Marsden, 1994; Sarna, 2019). By a combination of explicit exclusion and veiled quotas, Jewish numbers remained low. But higher education was not yet the pathway to success for most Americans, and many Jews were content to live relatively insular lives. Most importantly, institutions of learning on American soil – both secular and Jewish – did not have the aura of the venerated halls of Europe. Jews wanted their rabbis and leaders trained in the Old World, able to translate erudition into English only when necessary, so their exclusion from the American academy did not generate the ire it later would.

By the turn of the century, however, this began to change. Between 1881 and 1920, Jews began to enroll in greater numbers at many universities, most heavily at schools in and around New York City and at the Ivy League institutions that would accept them (Marsden, 1994). New generations of Jews – born and educated on American soil or arriving young with a hunger for education as a fulfillment of the American dream – flocked to campus (Thelin, 2011). The expansion of American universities created opportunities and these Jews took full advantage, vaulting to nearly 10% of the total American undergraduate student body in 1918. In New York City, then and now the population center of Jewish America, two colleges especially enrolled huge numbers of Jewish men (Gurock, 1988). At the City College of New York (CCNY), as many as 80% of students were immigrants from Eastern Europe or their descendants, with a large portion being Jews. In fact, New York University (NYU) was sometimes derogatorily referred to as "NY Jew" for its high proportion of Jewish students and faculty.

Orthodox Jews, though, faced an uphill battle for full participation as they felt unwelcome and unwanted in an academic environment intolerant of the religious Jew (Gurock, 1988). Committed to an extensive schedule of holiday observances, Orthodox Jews found it hard to persist in their studies; CCNY observed the High Holidays, but NYU did not. Neither school observed other Jewish holidays, which could interrupt midterms, finals, and homework. And, as Sabbath observers, Orthodox students could not take courses that met on Friday afternoons or evenings – or would learn from an informal network to avoid those professors who punitively assigned hours of extra work for missing those classes. All too often, those faculty were Jews

themselves who looked down on Orthodox students as insufficiently integrated into America and punished their co-religionists for this (Kraut, 2011).

Orthodox Jews also struggled to maintain their identity and devotion amid the excessive strains of the modern campus, which were harsh to those devoted to firm theologies. Coming from the sheltered Jewish parochial school system, these students were unprepared for the clash between the religious studies that many of them undertook off-campus, and college life (Gurock, 1988). One student described college life as having “antagonistic forces…and the dark abyss of unending conflict” (p. 86). Trying to find a more integrated balance, a group of students and supporters dissatisfied with the CCNY experience lobbied Bernard Revel, the head of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) rabbinical school, to start an academic institution that could rival others in New York City. By 1924, Revel was raising funds for a Yeshiva College, and in addition to financial support was inundated by letters from unemployed Jewish academics who, prevented by antisemitism from holding jobs elsewhere, hoped for positions at this new college.

At the same time, another factor in favor of Yeshiva College was the backlash against the “Jewish problem,” as the presidents of Harvard and Columbia openly called it (Thelin, 2011, p. 197). As numbers of Jewish students had steadily grown, subtle policies were put in place to stop this trend, but soon stronger strategies were employed. After measures of academic ability failed to keep out Jews, universities set maximum percentages of their student body that could be Jews. This backlash against Jewish enrollment is understood in several ways: colleges exercising greater selectivity as interest in higher education boomed; anxiety about preserving the “Christian character” of colleges; or a reflection of the rising antisemitism everywhere. The end result was the exclusion of Jews in many places (Marsden, 1994).

The exclusions of the late 1920s and 1930s reversed drastically following World War II. With Jews recast as important partners in American “Judeo-Christian” heritage, their numbers on campus boomed and their experiences changed (Marsden, 1994). Jews used their newfound clout and wealth to advocate for themselves and others. Jewish college students became vocal supporters of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and later, of Israel, especially following the Six Day War of 1967 (Sarna, 2019). The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) was founded in 1964 by college Jews as a movement to energetically, idealistically, and fervently condemn the injustice foisted on their brethren half a world away (Ferziger, 2015). In contrast to what they felt the previous generation had done during the Holocaust, these college students – led by a visible vanguard of Orthodox Jews – were the newly powerful voice of American Jews.

Jewish college students pursued political causes because of how positive their university

experiences had become. With exclusions being a thing of the past, hundreds of thousands of Jewish students enjoyed the full embrace of their campuses. As Hillel's leader noted in 1961: "They are third-generation Americans and at home in America. There is no underprivileged position. There is no quota system." (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018, p. 103). The flourishing of Jewish life on campus was also reflected in the classroom, on both sides of the lectern. The number of dedicated Jewish Studies professors nationwide went from a dozen in 1945 to sixty in 1965, and the Association for Jewish Studies, founded in 1969, enrolled hundreds of new academics over the following decades, boasting nearly 2,000 individuals and 70 institutions by 2021 (Sarna, 2019). A 2005 survey found that nearly half of Jewish-identifying college students had taken at least one course in Jewish Studies (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). As the "Christian character" of nonsectarian institutions have weakened, and as Jews have adopted complex, combined American identities, Jews seem to have firm footing in the modern American academy, poised to continue evolving with their American haven (Marsden, 1994).

Part II: Modern Orthodox Jews and Education

Modern Orthodoxy, as a distinctive sect that was rooted in an American attempt to bridge rabbinical traditions of Europe to a new home, emerged in the 1920s (Ferziger, 2015). In broad strokes, Modern Orthodox Jews philosophically believe in observance of traditional rabbinic law, or *halacha*, alongside participation in American culture.[2] In addition to the tension between *halacha* and what is often called "secular values," there is a third contending force: that of Modern Orthodox culture, with semi-insular communities tending toward the upper middle class and concentrated in certain major metropolitan areas. These tensions lead to numerous contradictions and complications, but it is especially in education – and higher education – that they can be seen.

The 2015 Pew Center Survey on Jewish Americans shows Modern Orthodox numbers as a small subset of America's relatively minor Jewish population. Of the 5.3 million American Jews, around 10% identify with Orthodoxy, the most traditional denomination, which is significantly fewer than Reform (35%), Conservative (18%), and Jews of no denomination (30%). Of the half a million Orthodox Jews, 31% describe themselves as Modern Orthodox, which puts estimates of their American population between 150,000 and 200,000.

Most other Orthodox Jews identify as Haredi or Ultra-Orthodox (Pew, 2015). Haredi Jews avoid shifts from ancestral practices of pre-war Eastern European Jewish life. By contrast, Modern Orthodox Jews claim that integration into American society need not come at the

2Because there is no consensus on a leader or founder of the movement, it is difficult to articulate the precise mission statement and values of Modern Orthodoxy, and this broad description does not encompass all views.

expense of religious observance (Ferziger, 2015).[3] For Modern Orthodox Jews, there were and are strict barriers to what innovations can take place. Synagogue services could be modernized to include singing and English sermons, but the text would not be changed, and seating would remain separated by sex. Holidays would not be abridged or abrogated, and the Sabbath would be kept, with electricity ruled to be forbidden. Torah study would be a necessary part of daily life alongside prayer. Dress, in the form of head coverings for men and more vaguely defined rules of modesty for women, was similarly restricted. And strict kosher observance was expected and facilitated by an expanding industry of preparation and certification. One avenue of expression with almost no restrictions, though, was education, and Modern Orthodox Jews embraced it wholeheartedly (Heilman, 2006).

In addition to demographics and history, any understanding of Modern Orthodoxy should also consider major forces currently shaping the community. The four themes outlined by Heilman (2006) are: 1) socioeconomic and class issues surrounding a movement that is largely for and of upper-middle-class Americans; 2) an unrelenting devotion to education in which children and young adults are expected to excel in both secular and religious studies at the most demanding levels; 3) a move toward fundamentalism that seems to be accelerating; and 4) unflinching support for Israel as a Jewish state and the associated role this plays in further shaping domestic political views. All of these directly impact the experiences of Modern Orthodox college students.

1) Socioeconomics of the Upper-Middle-Class

The upper-middle class status of many Modern Orthodox Jews is now almost necessary for living within the community. More than 37% of Modern Orthodox adults report annual household income higher than $150,000 (Pew, 2015). Any understanding of contemporary Modern Orthodox life must come with an appreciation for its costs. Practicing Modern Orthodoxy comes with bills that seem truly shocking to most Americans. Kosher food for a family of four costs about $8,000 more per year than non-kosher food, home prices within walking distance of a Modern Orthodox synagogue are typically 10-20% higher than those just a ZIP code away, and dues to various organizations can cost thousands of dollars per year.

The largest price tag on Modern Orthodox life is education, as more than 80% of Modern Orthodox Jews send their children to full-time Jewish day schools (Pew, 2015). With K-8 education often followed by private high school as well, and then further education during or

3These descriptions of Haredi and Modern Orthodox Jews are necessary simplifications that hide a more complex reality. These generalizations focus mostly on Ashkenazi Jews, rooted in Eastern Europe, without describing Sephardic Jews, originating in Spain, Portugal, and North Africa. And the boundaries between Haredi and Modern Orthodoxy are more permeable than ever, as described far more fully in *Beyond Sectarianism* (Ferziger, 2015)

before college, more than twenty years of schooling can expect to cost nearly a million dollars per child. With the pressure to be able to pay for this lifestyle, Modern Orthodox Jews need to earn, and they largely see higher education as the route to socioeconomic success. Modern Orthodox Jews currently attend college almost universally, with some reports indicating upwards of 80% of Modern Orthodox Jews starting college. 33% of Modern Orthodox adults hold post-graduate degrees, more than any other Jewish group and more than triple the rate of the U.S. public (Pew, 2015). In fact, fully half of Yeshiva University's graduating class of 2018 enrolled directly in a graduate program (Yeshiva University, 2020).

2) Devotion to Education

The intense devotion to a private education that is rigorous in both secular and religious subjects is a strong feature of Modern Orthodox development since the mid-twentieth century. After World War II, Yeshiva College, with its dual curriculum, was seen as a center of learning only for very few students (Gurock, 1988). But its enrollment doubled in the late 1940s, then doubled twice more in the early 1950s, which also saw the opening of Stern College for Women. The students arriving on campus reflected the rapidly changing Modern Orthodox community. In 1945, nearly half of Yeshiva College students had a public-school education; by 1955 it was fewer than three in ten, and by the end of the 1960s, it was fewer than one in ten. Modern Orthodox Jews – or their intellectual forebears without that title – had previously gone to public schools and received supplementary Jewish education through synagogue-based Hebrew schools, but by the early 1960s, they were educated within the robust community system (Ferziger, 2015).

This motivation toward high levels of education reflects other factors in addition to earning potential. The value of study itself is stressed endlessly throughout all aspects of Modern Orthodoxy. Though there is a hesitation to equate the value of learning secular subjects with sacred ones, there is an undeniable focus on being conversant with the highest levels of both (Riley, 2005). Statistics that reflect the extremely high rate of graduate degree attainment in the community do not even include the large number of Modern Orthodox men who are ordained as rabbis, many of whom do not serve professionally in that capacity (Ferziger, 2015).

For the average Modern Orthodox Jew, education is no longer just twelve expensive years of private school followed by college and likely a graduate degree; it also includes a year or more of full-time religious study in Israel following high school. More than 80% of high school graduates join an accredited program in Israel for a year or more (Berger, Jacobson, & Waxman, 2007). Environments at these "Year in Israel" programs are intensely rigorous, with ten hours or more of study per day, and students often undergo powerful changes during this

time.

3) Accelerating Move Toward Fundamentalism

For students and their parents, this Year in Israel is frequently assumed to provide the framework for increased religious devotion both short-term and long-term (Spierer, 2018). And it often does, through intense and insular environments. The environments of Year in Israel programs, which increasingly resemble more insular, Ultra-Orthodox institutions, are nearly all separate-sex, even though about half of high school graduates come from coeducational schools or will continue on to coeducational colleges. (Ferziger, 2015). The entirely closed campus, insulated from outside influences, creates an idyllic setting that is restrictive but also freeing from many previous limits, especially the presence of parents and the demands of any grades (Heilman, 2006). This, during a key time in adolescents' lives, sets the stage for incredible leaps in identity formation among these students. They emerge from the year – and go to college – seemingly having "solved the problem of their identity," (Heilman, p. 116) with future challenges seen as "trials to be passed," not spaces to incorporate future change.

The Year in Israel and the religious changes wrought on students is one of the contributing factors in an emerging trend over the last few decades: what Heilman (2006) calls the "slide to the right" as Modern Orthodox Jews become more insular and conservative. Modern Orthodox Jews are withdrawing from a public sphere that they increasingly view as hostile to traditional religious practice. This phenomenon is not unique to Modern Orthodox Jews; it can be viewed as part of a similar migration by several groups to a modern American religious right. Increasingly, American acculturation as a value is being replaced by defensive traditionalism. And it is not just the wider American sphere from which the Modern Orthodox are withdrawing; gone are the days of "Solidarity Orthodoxy" which emphasized partnering with or leading other denominations in common causes. This impulse has now waned, with Modern Orthodox Jews almost exclusively focusing on the issues most important to them (Ferziger, 2015).

4) Support for Israel

In addition to the religious environment of the closed campus steeped in study, the Year in Israel experience sharpens an emotional connection between Modern Orthodox Jews and the Jewish State. More than three-quarters of Modern Orthodox Jews profess a strong emotional attachment to Israel and a similar number (79%) say that attachment to Israel is a crucial part of their Jewish identity (Pew, 2015). No other Jewish group professes such a high degree of attachment to Israel, with less than half of American Jews agreeing with the same statement. Modern Orthodox synagogues, schools, and camps nearly all fly the Israeli flag alongside the

American one, as Yeshiva University does (Ferziger, 2015).

Attachment to Israel takes many forms for Modern Orthodox American Jews. Some offer political support, lobbying the US government or advocating for Israel on college campuses (Berger et al., 2007). For many families, frequent trips to Israel further their bond to the country, help the economy, or fulfill a religious obligation to visit (Ferziger, 2015). The devotion to Israel is inseparably political and religious: in addition to mundane methods of connection, Modern Orthodox Jews pray for Israel, fervently and regularly. Rare is the congregation that does not recite the Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel on the Sabbath, and a prominent New York City rabbi recently noted that it is the only time during Sabbath prayers that the entire crowd at his storied synagogue will be completely silent (Frieden, 2021).

Modern Orthodox Trends in the College Context

Modern Orthodoxy is, by many measures, a successful movement. The community's economic power has been channeled into a dizzying array of infrastructure, with schools, synagogues, camps, and community centers abounding. This is true not just of the population center in the Northeast, but also for vibrant and growing communities in Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Cleveland, Houston, and South Florida. Demographically, Orthodox Jews do not have as high attrition as the more liberal denominations, with most Orthodox Jews – but by no means all – remaining in the religious community in which they were raised.

Despite its accomplishments, Modern Orthodoxy is beset with divisions on all sides. The community's inclusion of LGBTQ members and the place of women in leadership roles are among the issues that demand a balanced and nuanced approach (Hain, 2012). Financially, the entire enterprise seems to balance on a knife's edge; as Ferizger (2015) notes, cost-of-living is so high that a major financial upheaval would leave institutions and families particularly vulnerable.

Even more troubling to Modern Orthodox leaders is a seeming dispassion among young adherents. The religious commitment seen during the Year in Israel is well-noted, but there is much alarm about those who seem to buck this trend, leaving behind their Orthodoxy during the "odyssey years" of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Ferziger, 2015; M. W. Sarna, 2012). Several writers and thinkers have begun to talk about the "passionless" practice, even among those who commit large portions of their days and lives to Modern Orthodoxy (Y. Sarna, 2012). These troubles may be the logical outgrowth of a relentless focus on economic ladder-climbing and building, with Modern Orthodoxy becoming a victim of its own success. Or they may be evidence of larger American shifts to which no one is immune. Perhaps most frighteningly, Modern Orthodoxy may have reached natural limits to its possibilities. Born into paradoxes, it

can never become a mass movement (Hain, 2012). But if the past century is instructive, it is most likely that new innovations will seek to counter the rising tides of troubles; the coming demise has been too often prematurely and wrongly predicted.

Part III: Modern Orthodox College Organizations in the Last Six Decades

To Modern Orthodoxy's great internal threat of youth attrition, the college campus is an all-too-easy bugaboo. Colleges, perceived to contain the twin evils of secularism and sexuality, are places where good Modern Orthodox Jews have been under assault. Acceding to an overwhelming demand for higher education and its earning rewards, Modern Orthodox leadership has not openly discouraged participation in that great symbol of American ascendance. Some students and parents opt for the safe environment of Yeshiva University, which blends Jewish and secular education through a dual curriculum, or for the similar but more right-wing Touro College. The community has also created a variety of supports for Modern Orthodox life on college campuses, replacing a grassroots system originally founded by students.

The first generation of Modern Orthodox Jews entering college in the 1950s encountered an unfriendly world and did so alone. Hillel had rapidly expanded to a robust shape by the early 1960s, with seventy-seven foundations by 1963 (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). But for Modern Orthodox students, Hillels, usually led by Reform and Conservative Rabbis, were not the havens they had become for other Jews (Kraut, 2011). After the rupture of World War II, each denomination tensely saw the others as enemies in the pursuit of their movement's future. Orthodox students' complaints about lack of accommodations were often seen as a lack of gratitude for newfound Jewish access and acceptance, especially in its institutions of higher education – or worse, a self-aggrandizing view typical of the Orthodox (Heilman, 2006).

Into this gap sprang a grassroots student organization founded in February 1960: Yavneh, the National Jewish Religious Students Association. Though not labeled "Orthodox," Yavneh was committed to Modern Orthodox life on campus, and not just maintaining but enhancing and growing it (Kraut, 2011). The organization protected Orthodox observances by sharing tactics for combatting reticent administrators, but it also brought scholars to campus for inspiring educational talks. Among various iterations of its stated goals were lofty statements like that of National President Zvi Gitelman's in 1962: "…the development of a constant religious consciousness which is not an artificial appendage or theoretical construct apart from a person's inner self but which is the very essence of his being." (Kraut, 2011, p. 38)

Yavneh was founded and run entirely by college students like Gitelman, who in 1962 was a Columbia University undergraduate, but the Modern Orthodox college experience of

today is far more ministry-driven. As the pre-college Year in Israel became more popular, students lost interest in discussion groups on Modern Orthodoxy's philosophical underpinnings, instead hoping to continue the Talmudic learning they had experienced in Israel (Kraut, 2011). As battles for basic accommodation faded into the past, Modern Orthodox students were more concerned with enriching their lives than with banding together to justify their place on campus. This could be done with local rabbis rather than with student representatives (Ferziger, 2015).

As Yavneh's presence faded in the early 1980s, institutions stepped in to address a different set of concerns. Responding to the student desire for advanced Jewish learning and parental worries about assimilation, the Orthodox Union (OU) partnered with Hillel to create the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC). According to their website, JLIC "places Orthodox rabbinic couples on over 20 college campuses in the U.S. and Canada to serve as Torah educators and role models" (JLIC, n.d.). On their 21 American campuses, the JLIC educators, always a husband-and-wife team "help young men and women thrive and observe key aspects of Jewish life in secular campus environments" (JLIC, n.d.). As a project of one of Orthodoxy's largest institutions, beholden to the board and donors of the OU, JLIC is the opposite of Yavneh's grassroots, student-driven model.

Serving almost exclusively Orthodox students on campus, JLIC also demonstrates the Modern Orthodox shift toward "inreach" at the expense of interdenominational dialogue. Gone are the days of the wide-appealing Orthodox-led Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry; now, Modern Orthodox institutions cooperate less with institutions representing other Jews (Ferziger, 2015). Nor does JLIC perform *kiruv* ("drawing-close") work of attempting to inspire Jews toward religion. The resources exist for the already educated post-gap-year college students to further and deepen their knowledge. More teaching also comes with stricter practices and often a more insular approach, another manifestation of Heilman's "slide to the right" (2006).

The denominational emphasis of Modern Orthodoxy is also seen in changing Hillel policies. Once proud to be the "all-inclusive Jewish agency on campus" (Kraut, 2011, p. 95) that would not countenance "divisive" programs, Hillel now allows under its aegis the factional work of JLIC. In the 1960s, Yavneh and Hillel struggled to find common ground, with Yavneh promoting what they perceived to be authentic and genuine Jewish practice while Hillel defended a Jewish pluralism of equally legitimate expressions. Hillel blocked some attempts by Yavneh to claim a monopoly on defining Jewish law, including at the University of Chicago, where the local Hillel opposed a strictly Kosher dining hall that would "serve a segment of Jewish students in such a way as to alienate other segments of Jewish students" (Kraut, 2011, p. 118). Today, the place of Orthodox groups within Hillel differs greatly: Hillel often hosts the

official campus kosher dining programs, and Orthodox groups have unfettered ability to host lectures in Hillel space that promote sectarian Orthodox views. Many Orthodox students, even while entering daily into Hillel buildings, see themselves as part of an Orthodox community on campus, not a Hillel one. In fact, the Orthodox Community at the University of Pennsylvania (OCP) is merely *housed* at Penn Hillel according to their website (OCP, n.d.,).

JLIC and Hillel both reflect a trend that is not solely Jewish but true across many faiths as the model of campus religious organizations has shifted. Religious ministries have replaced staid models of local churches on campus with "religio-cultural communities" that bring revived warmth to college students (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). Hillels focus less on promulgating a view of Jewish pluralism and more on engagement, a trend started with the 1998 new mission of "maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews" (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018, p. 116). Despite retaining sectarian elements and focusing strongly on learning, JLIC also emphasizes community: "If you are looking for a Jewish community on campus, OU-JLIC can be your place to hang out with friends and meet new people" (JLIC, n.d.).

Finally, the current discourse around Israel in campus-based Modern Orthodox organizations has shifted greatly from earlier hesitations about Zionism. As American Modern Orthodox Jews have become very emotionally and politically devoted to Israel, nearly all of their institutions reflect this (Pew, 2021). JLIC lists the goals of their activities as "to promote Jewish awareness, love of Israel and learning" (JLIC, n.d.). It is telling that love of Israel is second only to Jewish identity, and even ahead of learning. And when listing the resources available to Orthodox students on different campuses, a category of "resource" is the presence of pro-Israel student groups focused on advocacy, politics, or business (Dickter, 2016).

Criticism of Israel on college campuses may be one of greatest contemporary challenges for American Modern Orthodox college students. Discussions about Israel hit a sensitive nerve for students who built close attachments through years spent thinking about Israel and a year or more physically there. While advocates for Palestinian rights see this work as part of a constellation of progressive activism, Modern Orthodox students can see political support of Israel as part of a religious expression, and may view criticisms of Israel as antisemitic (Farber & Poleg, 2019). Jewish students of all denominations have faced discrimination on campus for pro-Israel views and have sometimes been held out of leadership positions because of these beliefs. Jewish organizations such as Hillel have been pushed by campus partners to distance themselves from political statements vis-à-vis Israel if they want to claim to be "Jewish."

Modern Orthodoxy's central challenge has always been attempting the contradictory, and this challenge is especially borne out on campus. While on one hand, Modern Orthodoxy preaches a full and uncompromising commitment to traditional rabbinic Judaism, on the other it attempts to articulate an integration with Western political, philosophical, and social thought. A myriad of challenges abounds in this effort to synthesize the incongruous, and even greater variety of opinions about resolving those challenges. Modern Orthodox Jews proudly go to the quads of American higher learning, for both the promise of practical capital success and the best secular education that can be offered. But they – and their parents and rabbis even more so – also fear the dangers and the fine tightrope they must tread in navigating their college years. More than ever, there is great emphasis placed on the formative time in Israel to inoculate students from these dangers, and campus organizations can boost these inoculations to ensure that students remain resistant to the pulls of the larger world.

Part IV: Modern Orthodox Jews and Religion's Role on the Contemporary Campus

Despite many claims to the difficulty of contemporary integration on campus, Modern Orthodox Jews have never been more present in the American higher education system. The numbers of Modern Orthodox Jews at elite colleges have grown rapidly, and they represent larger and larger groups at a widening circle of campuses. This has not come at the expense of faith-based campuses: Yeshiva University's student numbers have held steady for some time, and Touro University's colleges for men and women are smaller but not insignificant (Yeshiva University, 2020). Some campuses have become the sites of communities that are surprinsgly large given the small overall number of Modern Orthodox Jews: Queens College is estimated to have more than 500 students of Modern Orthodox background, an outsized representation by several orders of magnitude (Dickter, 2016).

These increasingly large body of Modern Orthodox students have access to more resources and acceptances than in the past. Kosher food is not only available on campuses but is often prepared fresh and at a reasonable price. Far in the past are the days of wrapped sandwiches in a vending machine being the only kosher option at City College of New York. As their communities grow larger, they advocate for accommodations that would have been unheard of in Yavneh's time. Yavneh students fought so that they could eat and not be punished for skipping class on Shabbat. Today at the University of Pennsylvania, the OCP has organized an *eruv*, a religious device encircling the campus that defines it as a community, allowing students to carry items between one building and another on Shabbat (OCP, n.d.). And at Yale in the late 1990s, students sued for the ability to not live in university housing if it was an affront to their sensibilities (Glaberson, 1997).

All of this points to changing attitudes toward religion on campus. Embracing religious diversity, colleges have made space for student practices (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). If work remains to be done, it is in the area of understanding and appreciating student beliefs, especially when such beliefs may run counter to the notions of diversity and pluralism that are needed to support them. The conflict of Hillel and Yavneh, though long since having passed, is yet to be fully disentangled on campuses as a whole: what does it mean to be tolerant of different views when some of those views reject tolerance? Put specifically, can campuses find a way to communicate about safe sex while also remaining sensitive to students who believe premarital sex is a sin and feel viscerally uncomfortable discussing sexual topics?

Scholarship and practice in student affairs have caught up to the idea of religion as an important part of students' identities and essential to their growth, but much of this understanding is still grounded in research based on majority religions. Where literature has ventured beyond Christian students, "Jewish" has often meant everyone but the Orthodox. While that does represent most Jews especially on college campuses, care must be taken to understand that Orthodox Jews can and often do differ radically from other denominations. So while Astin et al. (2010) report that Jews score the lowest of almost any organized religion on measures of "religious commitment" and "religious engagement," this is painting with a broad brush. Orthodox Jews would likely score incredibly high on frequency of attending religious service, reading sacred texts, prayer and discussions of religion/spirituality (Pew, 2015).

Additionally, many current models of faith development are oriented around beliefs and changes in those beliefs, assuming they are the basis for practice. Modern Orthodox perspectives, contrastingly, stress behaviors and ritual observances that bring about beliefs (Berger et al., 2007). Both Berger et al. (2007) and Spierer (2018), in studying Modern Orthodox Jews during the Year in Israel, found only very slight changes in belief in an all-powerful God or the historicity of the Bible. When they looked at behaviors such as setting aside daily time for Torah learning, though, they found significant changes.

The story of Modern Orthodox Jews on American college campuses is one of growth and gains. From the hard-fought battles of Yavneh in the 1960s, Modern Orthodox Jews have risen to a level of acceptance and accommodation that allows for a rich religious life during the college years. The question of the years ahead for Modern Orthodox Jews is whether fundamentally religious outlooks can continue to be compatible with the academy of higher learning, or if this too will fade into the past as a once-tenable synthesis that no longer works.

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