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Lived Experiences of Orthodox Jewish Professionals Working with At-Risk Youth in the Orthodox Community

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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ORTHODOX JEWISH PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH AT-RISK YOUTH IN THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY

by

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ABSTRACT
LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ORTHODOX JEWISH PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH AT-RISK YOUTH IN THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY

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Under the Supervision of Professor Susan D. Lima

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experience of Orthodox Jewish professionals (mental health practitioner, high school rabbi, mentor) trying to break the resistance and connect with the at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish community (OJC). OJC at-risk youth was defined as a) youth experiencing life disruptions (in family, school, community, and/or religious contexts) related to psychological issues and reflected in externalizing (e.g., "delinquent") or internalizing (e.g., depression) behaviors, and b) excluding a youth experiencing life disruptions due to non-compliance with parental and societal expectations (i.e., religious obligations) when devoid of a significant psychological component. Thirteen textural narratives illustrate the culture-specific manifestations of successful and unsuccessful attempts to connect with at-risk youth. In addition, four structural narratives offer insights into the essential components of the connection phenomenon, including, 1) Being non-judgmental, 2) Not "taking it personally," 3) "Being real," and 4) Focusing on well-being, not religion. The study concludes with reflections on the findings together with communal recommendations to help the OJC address its at-risk youth phenomenon.

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Helen.

She is the healthiest person I have ever met.

If only everyone could have a

Helen in their life,

the world would be so

calm and content.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a concept in Judaism of *Ein oed m'lvado* [there is nothing more besides Him], meaning that *Hashem* (G-d) is the essence of all existence and experience. I thank *Hashem* for everything He has done, continues to do, and will do in the future. During times of perspective I appreciate that all the help I acknowledge below are but manifestations of His kindness.

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Author Preface

The present study is designed to learn more about the experience of the Orthodox Jewish professional working with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish community (OJC). I have to admit, I was unaware of how many "land mines" were involved in the present topic. Admittedly, I have been surprised, even shocked, by intense emotional reactions to the topic of at-risk Orthodox Jewish youth. After noticing that I had been providing similar clarifications to several different people regarding my dissertation topic, I realized that an *Author Preface* might be helpful. The *Author Preface* is split into two sections. First, a *Notice of Intent* is offered to clarify the intentions and address potential misunderstandings. Second, a *Personal Narrative* is offered to provide insight into my subjectivity, an important variable to assess when evaluating qualitative, phenomenological research.

Notice of Intent

I am writing to audiences with different levels of familiarity with Orthodox Jewish culture, clinical psychology, and qualitative research. In addition, it seems best to address controversial issues at the beginning so readers will be focused on the research question. Consequently, this *Notice of Intent* is designed to orient readers by clarifying my goals for this research and, along the way, address potential misunderstandings.

First, Chapter 2 provides a literature review to understand the research phenomenon: Orthodox Jewish professionals trying to connect with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish Community. Given the cultural-specific nature of the study, the research question requires a certain familiarity with Orthodox Jewish culture, which I do not assume readers possess. I hope that by the end of Chapter 2, those with less

immersion or contact with OJC culture will feel they have sufficient understanding to understand the research question.

Second, I think it is important to orient readers to phenomenological research methodology, used in this study, because it has unique characteristics which can be confusing to readers unfamiliar with its approach. Prior to my introduction to phenomenology, I viewed qualitative research and the utilization of a subjective, reflective process as an analytic necessity; but otherwise qualitative research correctly followed strict standards of objectivity. A phenomenological study, however, embraces subjectivity at all levels of the research process: from the literature review to analysis to interpretation. This is done as a methodological necessity.

To explain, a phenomenological worldview asserts that objective reality exists but it can only be known through human experience, which is subject to human bias (i.e., subjective). By implication then, the researcher does not know true objective reality; the researcher can only know an experienced, or lived, reality. Stated in phenomenological terminology, the researcher cannot objectively study another person's lived experience; as their "objective" research is also a lived experience (i.e., the lived experience of researching another person's lived experience). Thus, a science of human experience would incorporate both a) the lived experience of the participant and b) the lived experience of the researcher (investigating the participant's lived experience).

As such the goal of this phenomenological investigation is to explore the lived experience of Orthodox Jewish professionals trying to connect with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish Community in a way that *also* accounts for the lived experience of the researcher researching this topic. This is accomplished by:

(a) Sharing my lived experience of the research phenomenon prior to the study by offering a literature review which blends referenced material with my personal perspectives (see *Chapter 2: Overview of Cultural Context).*

(b) Open-ended, probing questions of the professionals to draw out a rich description of their lived experience trying to connect to at-risk youth (e.g., thoughts, feelings, behavioral reactions, reflections, etc.).

(c) Sharing my lived experience *interviewing* the participants (e.g., personal attitudes toward participants) by introducing each participant narrative with a *Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant* (see *Chapter 4: Textural Narratives*)

(d) Sharing my lived experience *interpreting* the participant's *described* lived experience by presenting textural narratives of each participant's described lived experience (textural narratives are described in *Chapter 3: Methodology* and presented in *Chapter 4: Textural Narratives*)

(e) Sharing my lived experience *reflecting* on the meaning and essence underlying the researched phenomenon by presenting structural narratives of the phenomenon (structural narratives are described in *Chapter 3: Methodology* and presented in see *Chapter 5: Structural Narratives).*

Phenomenology thus reframes "bias" from being an obstruction of data to representing an essential source of data. In particular, readers may be surprised by my honest disclosure of how deeply and positively affected I was by the professionals interviewed. I found them to be very special people. I treated my personal reactions as important sources of data, which I incorporated during analytic and interpretative stages.

Third, I wish to briefly address what may be a controversial issue, at least in the Jewish world. I want to clearly differentiate at-risk youth from what the OJC frequently call the "off the *derech*" phenomenon (literally "off the path), in which individuals choose to reject Orthodox Judaism. To be sure, given the rebellious aspects of at-risk youth, a strong correlation between the two exists, but this study conceptualizes them as different. At-risk youth struggle with psychological issues as reflected by externalizing (e.g., so-called "delinquent" behaviors) or internalizing (e.g., depression) behaviors which are self-destructive and often aggressively anti-authority (See *Chapter 2: At-risk Youth*). This study is addressing the unique challenge of Orthodox Jewish professionals working with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish community and does not address those dealing with off the *derech* youth who are merely noncompliant with parental, religious, or societal expectations without any psychological struggle. Likewise, my intentions are *not* to suggest that the correct, culturally-sensitive intervention is to make at-risk youth more *frum* (observant of ancient rabbinic Judaism). The goal is not the opposite either; the goal is resolution of psychological distress and adjustment issues related to disruptions in school, home, and community functioning.

Hopefully, these clarifications will be helpful in focusing readers on the ultimate goal of the current study: to increase understanding of the lived experience of Orthodox Jewish professionals trying to connect with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish community. With the these clarifications in place, the remainder of this *Author Preface* elaborates on the above mentioned challenge to share the researcher's person (i.e., subjectivity) to help the reader understand my relationship with the topic and research approach and take these into consideration when interpreting findings.

Personal Narrative

I am a *baal tshuvah* Orthodox Jew (i.e., I was not raised an Orthodox Jew but chose to become Orthodox Jewish in my adulthood) and have adopted a Chassidic, so-called Ultra-Orthodox worldview (see *Chapter 2: Orthodox Jewish Community* for description). Despite philosophical and worldview differences with some members of the scientific community, I agree that the scientific method can and should be used to help improve the world. That being said, I believe my primary mission is to develop a relationship with *Hashem*[1] (G-d) through learning and living out Torah laws and ideals. As such, under the guidance of my Rabbi, I am careful not to let anything, anyone, or any livelihood disrupt my relationship with *Hashem*, as defined by *mesorah* (traditional rabbinical Jewish law and traditions).

I had been formally trained in quantitative research with an emphasis on behavioral approaches to psychotherapy for depression. This made the choice to conduct a qualitative dissertation unexpected. Originally, the goal was to conduct a quantitative research dissertation consistent with my training while, at the same time, bringing my research training in clinical psychology to bear on mental health issues affecting the OJC. As such, I decided to develop and evaluate an online depression treatment (based on Behavioral Activation; Baruch, Kanter, Bowe, & Pfennig, 2011; Kanter, Bowe, Baruch, & Busch, 2011), culturally adapted for Orthodox Jews.

[1] Literally means "the name" in Hebrew. The actual name of G-d in Hebrew is not pronounced out of respect and another word "*Adonei*" is read in its stead, which means "My lord." Given that this word for "My lord" is utilized formally (e.g., in prayer), the word *Hashem* is used in relatively informal contexts. To respect this practice, the word *Hashem* will be utilized here.

To improve the likelihood that my work would attract extramural funding in the future, I conducted a quantitative questionnaire study on Orthodox Jewish stigma toward mental illness and preferences for a culturally-adapted treatment for depression. The goal was to experimentally test a common belief among Orthodox Jews that stigma toward mental illness is highly prevalent in the community. Results confirmed that this "truism" held up to group statistical analysis – Orthodox Jewish participants reported higher levels of mental illness stigma (see *Chapter 2: OJC views on Psychotherapy* for more detailed review of findings).

Like many scientific endeavors, however, one of the most fascinating outcomes of the study was unplanned. As almost an aside to the on-line, multiple-choice survey I invited participants to provide general feedback about their participation. Unfortunately, due to an error in programming, feedback was cut off after 255 characters. As such, in an effort to compensate for loss of depth, several interrupted voices are offered to provide breadth. The participant feedback appears below (spelling corrections or comments are added in brackets):

"Very difficult to give black or white answers to some of the questions, with some of the questions I wanted to say, 'yes, but'"

"Did not answer many questions as the offered choices did not fit my answer, or did not make sense to me. i [I] *think the questionnaire needs serious re-thinking, and do not believe that based on your quesitons* [questions] *you will be able to make any reasonable conclu*[sions]*"*

"A few questions in the beginning did not portray the full me. I answered that I don't attend religious services regularly and answered a similar question in the same vain [vein], *simply because I am a mother with young kids. Before I had kids I davened* [prayed] *with-"*

"Its [It's] *hard to answer the questions as I don't know which religious sect Miriam belongs to* [reference to survey question]. *For example if she is Charedi I would say that she should never tell anyone except a dr* [Dr] *that she is depressed - if she is a more modern then the answer woul*[d]*"*

"Some of the questions were hard to answer because there were not enough details provided. I may have responded differently had I had more information."

"I think that surveys such as these address very complex issues in a somewhat simplified manner and hence, I would question the accuracy. Nevertheless, not knowing everything, I feel I owe it to professionals (of which I am also) to enable them to attempt"

"Many of the questions could be answered differently depending on the severity of symptoms. [For] *for example, if I was suffering from mild depression, I might talk about it with my family or with my primary care physician. If I were in severe depression, I-"*

"Many times questions can not [cannot] *be answered - there are no choices for 'grey areas', not every answer can be a definitive 'yes/no'.* [T]*there is also the problem that what 'should be' is different from what is - I would like to see society relate in one way-"*

"Some of the questions are too black or white. Many were dependent on situations, and you did not give that opportunity. The answers were too simplistic, I don ['t] *feel they can be normalized. You should also have the possibility to go back not only NEXT."*

These and other similar comments had a profound effect on my research approach, which to date was entirely quantitative. I understood that the comments were not directed at a poorly designed study[2] but to the design itself. I heard people struggling to have their voices heard and deep frustration when they realized that the purpose of the study was really confirmation ("is your opinion closest to my option A, B, C, or D") rather than curious exploration ("what do you think?"). From a methodological perspective, the feedback helped me realize that by providing close-ended questions and restricted answer choices, I was limiting the breadth of the findings, which counteracted my exploratory agenda for the study. It begged the question, what might we have learned?

I reconsidered the depression treatment development study – it was a logical next step given my past research experiences but was it what the community needed most? I began discussions with Orthodox Jewish rabbinical leaders, counselors, and community members about helpful avenues of research. A topic of deep concern that emerged was

[2] The questionnaires used in the study were standard, psychometrically-strong measures and the survey design followed established procedures approved by quantitative experts.

at-risk youth. One Rabbi told me explicitly, "honestly, the exact question doesn't matter – anything on this topic will be helpful."

Given the limited academic knowledge-base in this area, I chose to qualitatively explore the experience of OJC professionals working with this population. The qualitative approach would allow me to ask open-ended questions and learn about the at-risk youth professionals' experience. I chose the phenomenological approach because it not only describes "what" but seeks to understand "why" (see *Chapter 3: Phenomenology* for more detailed review of the methodology and scientific worldview).

I hope that this research will help professionals (Mental health practitioners, high school rabbis, mentors), parents, and other community members effectively address the at-risk youth phenomenon and open up future avenues of study for researchers. I pray the project will help bring about *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctifying *Hashem*), mental health, well-being, and family reconciliation, and may the process inspire us toward deeper connection with *Hakodesh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One, blessed be He).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Significance of the Study

There is a perception in the Orthodox Jewish community (OJC) of a rising number of Orthodox Jewish youth struggling with at-risk behavior (*see Chapter 2: At-risk Youth Conceptualizations* for description). Several Orthodox Jewish professionals, ranging in their field of expertise, have emerged to service OJC youth. Some professionals serve as mental health practitioners (i.e., psychotherapists or counselors) while others are Rabbis serving in an educational role (i.e., high-school teacher, principal). In addition, several Orthodox Jews are professional mentors to at-risk youth,

associated with drop-in centers, schools, and other areas in the community. OJC professionals who work with at-risk youth invariably confront resistance as they are perceived as aligned with authority figures in youths' life. An essential initial task of the professional is to somehow overcome the resistance and connect with the youth.

As Orthodox Jews, religious obligation is central to potentially every aspect of the professionals' lives. In fact, religion is so ubiquitous in the OJC that is it is woven into the very fabric of the culture (e.g., its language, ideals, and prescribed and proscribed worldviews, diet, ritual activities, and social activities, etc.) and all combine to form the identity of the Orthodox Jew. Orthodox Jewish youth are raised with expectations to continue the OJC's sense of mission to fulfill divine commandments and follow its traditions and customs. Given the rebellious nature of at-risk youth, it is unsurprising that OJC at-risk youth resist or reject religious obligations and cultural practices. As such, in addition to mental health issues related to at-risk behavior, these youth can also experience shame, perceived invalidation, and a sense of feeling disenfranchised (Margolese, 2005).

The Orthodox Jewish professional faces a unique challenge. Due to the distrust Orthodox Jewish families often have of secular society, parents most frequently seek Orthodox Jewish professionals for help; however, Orthodox Jewish professionals may elicit distrust and resistance. That is, not only can OJC professionals be perceived as aligned with authority figures in youths' life, they may be perceived as representing the OJC. In this way, the participant contends with an added layer of distrust as the youth is leery of a religious agenda (i.e., religious compliance) or may simply associate the

professional with disliked and distrusted OJC members and negative OJC experiences. This phenomenon poses the question, how do these professionals "break the resistance?"

The current study explores the lived experience of OJC professionals trying to connect with OJC at-risk youth. To accomplish this, participants were interviewed to learn more about experiences in which they successfully connected with at-risk youth and instances when they failed to do so. The ultimate aim is to better understand the essence of the phenomenon and along the way generate insights about the professional and the at-risk youth and to generate recommendations to help OJC members address the needs of its next generation.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experience of OJC professionals (Rabbis, mental health professionals, and mentors) trying to connect with OJC at-risk youth. The second goal was to understand their approach to religion in their work (i.e., do they address the topic and, if so, how?) and the third goal was to offer communal recommendations and enhance resources to help the OJC address the at-risk youth phenomenon.

Research Questions

The general research question is "what is the lived experience of OJC professionals trying to connect with OJC at-risk youth?" The present study focuses on three questions. First, "what can we learn from the lived experience of OJC professionals trying to connect with an OJC at-risk youth?" Second, "how do OJC professionals approach religion when working with OJC at-risk youth?" Third, "what recommendations or guidelines emerge from the study's findings?"

Definition of Terms

The following terms are provided with operational definitions to aid understanding:

Lived experience: Objective reality is experienced subjectively by means of perceptions, cognitive appraisals and interpretations, feelings, attitudes, behavioral reactions, etc. The "lived" experience" is a phenomenological term meant to capture this entire subjective experience.

OJC at-risk youth: The Orthodox Jewish at-risk youth is defined as: a) a youth experiencing life disruptions (in family, school, community, and/or religious contexts) related to psychological issues reflected in externalizing (e.g., "delinquent" behaviors) or internalizing (e.g., depression) behaviors and b) excludes a youth experiencing life disruptions due to non-compliance of parental and societal expectations (i.e., religious obligations) when devoid of a significant psychological component (e.g., depression).

Initial contacts: This may occur across a) one long 45-minute meeting as in the case of a therapist-client relationship, b) several brief meetings across a week as in the case of a high school Rabbi-student school relationship, or c) across several months as in the case of a mentor-youth mentorship relationship.

Connection Experience: Wherein the OJC professional perceives that he/she successfully achieved open communication and the youth displays indications of trust.

Disconnection Experience: Wherein the OJC professional perceives that communication barriers persist and the youth continues to display indications of distrust.

Methodology

Empirical phenomenological methodology was employed to qualitatively describe and assess meaning underlying the experience of OJC professionals trying to connect with OJC at-risk youth. The analytic design largely follows Giorgi's (1985; 1997; 2012) formulation for conducting an empirical phenomenological investigation, which involves, 1) open-ended interviewing to create a description of the professionals' experience, 2) phenomenological reduction procedures to create a textural narrative of the experience (i.e., researcher interpretation of the described experience), and 3) a reflective process to create a structural narrative of the phenomenon (i.e., exploration of the essence and meaning underlying the lived experience).

Assumptions and Limitations

Qualitative research is suitable to address some research questions but not others. Specifically, this approach is poorly suited for research questions which require internal validity (i.e., prediction and control) or external validity (i.e., generalizability). Likewise, is not designed to generalize results of a sample to a larger population, reject hypotheses, nor support the efficacy of a behavior or intervention. As such, the qualitative design used in the present study can add understanding to an area of research but not be used for a validity agenda mentioned above.

Two general assumptions were made to complete the present study. First, it was assumed that participants provided honest and accurate descriptions of their experience and were capable of remembering past events, interactions, and personal reactions well enough to assign meaning to them. A second assumption was that the conceptualization of OJC at-risk youth framed the phenomenon adequately and accurately when asking participants to describe their experience with the phenomenon.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Given the unique cultural backdrop of the phenomenon in question, Chapter 2 includes overviews of relevant aspects of Orthodox Jewish culture to help frame the experience of Orthodox Jewish professionals working with OJC at-risk youth. Chapter 2 sub-sections include an overview of *American Jewry* (to help differentiate the OJC as a distinct Jewish culture within American Jewry), *the Orthodox Jewish Community* (to provide an introduction to the religious and cultural beliefs and norms in the OJC), *American Jewry Mental Health Needs and Service Utilization* (while not specific to OJC, this is provided as the closest data available about OJC mental health needs and patterns of utilization), *OJC View on Psychotherapy* (to help appreciate the historical stigma toward mental illness and treatment utilization), *At-risk Youth* (to understand the cultural manifestations of OJC at-risk youth), and finally Chapter two concludes with, *The Unique Challenge of the OJC Professional* (to explain the specific barriers to connection facing the OJC professional) .

The remaining chapters in the dissertation describe the phenomenological methodology used to conduct the study (Chapter 3), present the data in the form of textural narratives (Chapter 4), offer interpretation of the data in the form of structural narratives (Chapter 5) and concludes with study reflections and communal recommendations (Chapter 6). An index of Hebrew words is provided as an appendix. As such, frequently used Hebrew words are defined only the first time they appear.

Chapter 2: Overview of Cultural Context

Introduction

Chapter 2 is designed to provide a context to understand the cultural variables that contribute to the challenges of the OJC professional working with OJC at-risk youth.[3] While a comprehensive introduction to the OJC is beyond the scope of the present study,[4] Chapter 2 provides an introduction to OJC culture, history, religious belief, and relationship with mental illness and treatment. The ultimate goal is to provide necessary cultural knowledge to understand the unique challenge of the OJC professional trying to connect with OJC at risk youth.

American Jewry

Demographics. The world Jewish population has been estimated at 13.5 million (.2% of the world population) with approximately 5 million Jews living in America (1.69% of the American population; DellaPergola, 2010). Other reports estimate the number of American Jews at approximately 6.5 million (Sheskin & Dashefsky, 2011; Tighe et al., 2011). A meta-analysis of approximately 150 Jewish demographic surveys between 2000 and 2008 indicated that 4.2 million Jewish adults self-identify their religion as Jewish with 5.3 million reporting Jewish heritage (Tighe et al., 2011). According to Ament (2005), approximately 13% of American Jews self-identify as Orthodox Jewish (approximately 567,000).

Denominational differences. Prior to the 19th century there were no distinct Jewish denominations. During the European "Enlightenment," societal opportunities (e.g., vocational, educational, cultural) were made widely available for the first time to an

[3] Jewish historical and sociological perspectives emerge from a lifetime of cultural transmission (e.g., personal conversations, experiences, and observations with parents, family, Rabbis, teachers, community members, readings, Torah study, and classroom and synagogue lectures and recordings, etc.).

[4] Interested readers are referred to Gurock (2009) and Bunin-Benor (2010).

extremely impoverished Jewish people. Many Jews departed from traditional Judaism, identifying instead with newly established Jewish denominations (i.e., Reform movement) or completely left the Jewish community. These same trends were transported to America as Jews emigrated from Europe (Sarna, 2004).

According to the National Jewish Population Survey (2000-2001), three quarters of American Jews identify with a particular Jewish denomination, such as Reform (34%), Conservative (26%), Orthodox (13%), and Reconstructivist (2%). The remaining 25% identify as "Just Jewish." Theological differences can be organized around the role of the *Torah* (Jewish bible) and *halacha* [Jewish Law] in modern life:

a) Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah was divinely conferred, obligates the Jew to follow *halacha,* and most closely follows legal precedent established across previous generations (see *Chapter 2: the Orthodox Jewish Community* for description).
b) Conservative Jews also believe that the Torah was divinely conferred and obligates the Jew to follow *halacha;* however, *halacha* is believed to be open to reinterpretation to reflect contemporary values and to accommodate modernity.
c) Reform Jews believe that the Torah is a human construction and cultural inheritance, which can guide one toward a religious, moral life, but the individual is given authority to decide which aspects of the faith will guide their life decisions.
d) Reconstructionist also believe Torah is a human construction and cultural inheritance and formally place modern, western morality systems above Jewish

philosophy, comparing Judaism to a civilization that must naturally evolve by incorporating surrounding cultural influences.

e) Jews who identify as "Just Jewish" are open to interpretation. Many secular Jews do not identify with a particular denomination yet self-identify as a "culturally" Jew in the sense that they may embrace Jewish cuisine, humor, etc. and follow Jewish ideals and humanistic worldviews.

Ament (2005) re-analyzed the National Jewish Population Survey (2000-2001) to explore religious and sociological differences across several Jewish denominational sub-groups. These data highlight cultural differences between the denominations; in particular differences between Orthodox Jews and Non-Orthodox Jews (Conservative, Reform, and "Just Jewish;" see Table 1). For example, Orthodox Jews reported the highest rates of marriage and highest rates of children per household and reported lower rates of secular education and lower income. Socially, Orthodox Jews tended to interact less with non-Jewish people, as they were least likely to report a closet friend who is non-Jewish and least likely to have a non-Jewish spouse.

Acculturation. Overall, American Jews are highly integrated into American culture, with many sharing mainstream American worldviews, values, and lifestyle. Smith (2005) analyzed data from General Social Surveys (National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago) collected between the years 1972-2002 to compare American Jews and other American ethnic and religious groups. American Jews appeared to be one of the most "secularized" religious groups in America (see also Cohen, 2002). Compared to the non-Jewish population, American Jews were the least likely to attend religious services weekly (7% vs. 27%), believe that G-d exists (27% vs. 65%), believe in

an afterlife (43% vs. 74%), or believe in the inherent truth of the Bible (11% vs. 33%). Smith (2005) goes so far to state that, "*the distance of Jews from other religious groups is underscored by the fact that their beliefs are much more closer to those without any religious preference than to those of any of the other faith groups."*

As can be seen from the Ament (2005) description of denominational differences, while the Smith (2005) report may represent the majority of American Jews, it fails to appreciate the complexity of Jewish sub-cultures. Comparatively speaking, Orthodox Jews distance themselves more from acculturation sources which are seen to reflect different values than ancient rabbinical Jewish values and worldview. Comparatively speaking, non-Orthodox Jews has been open to American acculturation.[5]

A significant marker of acculturation (and highly controversial one among American Jews) is the degree to which Jews marry outside of the faith (i.e., intermarriage). Reflecting OJC insularity, Orthodox Jews have the lowest intermarriage rates among American Jews. The rising rate of intermarriage among non-Orthodox American Jews ignites significant controversy. Currently, most estimates that utilize "couple" intermarriage rates[6] indicate that approximately 50% of Jewish American couples are intermarried and this rate increases to approximately 75% among the

[5] An illustrative study of this divide was conducted by Weisbrod and colleagues (1980) who reported that Reform Jews ascribed to several American values such as freedom, independence, physical comfort, aesthetics, and self-respect to a greater degree than Orthodox Jews. In contrast, Orthodox Jews rated self-control, helpfulness, wisdom, accomplishment, and salvation as more important.

[6] A wide range of intermarriage rates have been reported. Recently, it was noted that studies that report lower estimates are utilizing an "individual" intermarriage rate, which will decrease the rate compared to a "couple" definition (Sheskin & Dashefsky, 2011). For example, if 10 couples are surveyed and 5 couples are intermarried then the "couple" intermarriage rate is 50%. However, on the individual level the rate is 25% as only 5 out of 20 individuals are intermarried. The "couple" definition was found more appropriate for this discussion, given that assimilation is being used as a proxy measure of acculturation.

subsequent generation produced by intermarried couples (Fishman, 2004). These findings are consistent with the national trend that children raised in a two religion household are more than twice as likely to identify with no religion (Groeneman & Tobin, 2004).

Adding complexity to the debate, while intermarriage rates are reported at very low rates among Orthodox Jews, Ament (2005) reported that among non-Orthodox Jews, intermarriage is least pronounced among those with higher reported religious behavior (e.g., synagogue membership) across *all* denominations. Thus, heated debates persist as Orthodox Jews view intermarriage as a byproduct of assimilation (i.e., unrestrained acculturation) while Jews from other denominations counter that the challenge is not acculturation but rather low levels of religious behavior (Chertok, Phillips, & Saxe, 2008).

The intermarriage phenomenon has created perhaps the greatest internal rift in Jewish history as it relates directly to the definition of a Jew. That is, up until the last two centuries, all Jews were defined according to traditional rabbinical Jewish law whereby an individual was Jewish by virtue of being the offspring of a Jewish woman. In the late 20th century, both the Reform and Reconstruction movements ruled that offspring of a father (and non-Jewish mother) are also Jewish as long as they were raised with a Jewish identity. This decision was extremely controversial as some warned it could ultimately lead to two different Jewish religions, instead of merely two cultural groups within the same religion.

Summary. Orthodox Jews represent a unique subset of American Jews. As a group, they have displayed the greatest resistance to acculturation of non-Jewish cultures and value-system and intermarriage. This impacts the ability to generalize research on

American Jewry to the OJC in particular as Orthodox Jews can be expected to have different worldviews, perspectives, and cultural experiences.[7] The OJC at-risk phenomenon emerges within a distinct Jewish experience and therefore it faces unique challenges.

The Orthodox Jewish Community

Introduction. The goal of this section is to introduce relevant aspects of the Orthodox Jewish community to help understand the cultural context of the phenomenon. As noted earlier, a full description of OJC rituals, lifestyle, community interactions, language, cuisine, and value system is well beyond the scope of this work. However a brief description is provided to provide sufficient understanding needed to understand the research question and subsequent analyses.

Orthodox Judaism. In general, Orthodox Jews (a brief description of Orthodox Jews is provided below) structure their lives around *mitzvos* (commandments) perceived to be *Hashem*'s Will (the Will of G-d). The OJC has a diverse infrastructure of rabbinical leadership and lack a central authorized institution, leading to diverse practices and traditions. To clarify, there is total agreement on the *mitzvos* themselves. For example, all members of the OJC follow *kashrus* (dietary laws), *shabbos* (abstaining from work on the Sabbath), family purity laws, etc. Yet, nuanced differences in opinion and tradition exist in how they are followed, together with important *hashkafa* (worldview) differences (e.g., appropriate levels of integration in secular society). This occurred as a product exile from

[7] American Jewish cultural and demographic studies (e.g., Smith (2005) and Ament (2005) reviewed above) use the most liberal definition of the Jew (i.e., Reform and Reconstructive definitions).

their Jewish homeland (over two thousand years ago) in which the transmission of *mitzvos* differ across communities.

The transmission of *mitzvos* across generations requires a trusting relationship whereby individuals trust that the authority of the previous generation. This transmission is comprised of both the written and oral Torah traditions (which detail and explain *mitzvos*)[8]. Thus, all OJC members hold sacred the obligations to observe *mitzvos,* learn Torah, and to continue the transmission of *mitzvos* to ensuing generations. Due to their Torah knowledge, OJC Rabbis are seen as a primary vehicle for passing on *metzvos.* Ultimately, OJC parents have the daily responsibility to mentor their children to value the unique relationship with *Hashem* through His *mitzvos*. The at-risk youth phenomenon represents a particular challenge to continue this transmission.

Life snapshots to illustrate Orthodox Jewish lifestyle. A few Orthodox Jewish experiences are provided to offer a sense of Orthodox Jewish lifestyle:

Waking up. Each morning I wake up at 4:45am to attend the early *shachris minyan* (morning prayers). While a later *minyan* (prayer group) is available, those who must attend their professions early attend the early *minyan* as prayers last 45-60 minutes. Sleepy eyed, I do my best to say a prayer of gratitude to *Hashem* for returning my soul and giving me another day. I debate going back to bed yet I nevertheless rise and ritually wash my hands to prepare myself for morning prayers said before leaving for *shul* (synagogue). I am wearing my *yarmulke* (head covering) to remember that I constantly live in the presence of *Hashem*. I am wearing my *tzizis* (intricate pattern of knots and

[8] The *Torah* was transmitted in written (e.g., Five books of Moses) and oral form, whereby the oral tradition provides context and explanation of the written law.

strings worn on a four cornered garment underneath one's clothes) to perform and remember *Hashem*'s *mitzvos*. I even go to the bathroom with the explicit intent to clean my body before saying formalized prayers. Admittedly, some mornings I am so tired I do these things by rote; however, the morning routine is established in such a way that the potential is available to make mundane life activities sacred by using them to connect to *Hashem*. I constantly work on maximizing these opportunities.

Grocery shopping. When my wife calls me at the grocery store to buy more cashew butter I must find one with the appropriate *heksher* (sign) which denotes that the item is Kosher (Food, utensils, cooking items prepared or used in a way consistent with Jewish law). I find only one brand with a *heksher* but it is not one I recognize and I am not sure we follow it. I call her back, trying to describe it. I eventually take a picture of it with my cell and wait for her to do research on whether we follow the *heksher* or not. She texts affirmative and I buy it. Sometimes she texts back "no go" and I can tell she is disappointed; not that it is un*kosher* but that the store failed to carry a kosher brand.

Shabbos[9]. Several activities must be completed before *Shabbos* after which time many activities are proscribed. It is a day held sacred from worldly responsibilities yet the final hours prior to its arrival is hectic: Are the kids bathed? Are the clothes ironed? Toys cleaned up? Tables set? Dishes done? Food cooked? Dry cleaning picked up? Electronics put away[10]? Lights set? Candles prepared[11]? Confirmed with guests? Enough

[9] Every seventh day is held sacred in which several activities are prohibited (e.g., earning a living, driving a car, writing, etc) to protect the day for religious activities (e.g., praying, learning Torah) and family/community interaction.

[10] Given that manipulating electrical current is not done, appliances are moved to avoid mistakes (e.g., forgetting it is *Shabbos*)

wine? What time is candle lighting? I still have to take a shower! When is *Mincha*[12]? Can you run out to the store, I'm out of onions! Did you shine your shoes? Is the challah[13] made? Is the *Cholent*[14] turned on? Is the refrigerator light tapped? Uh oh, time is up! Sorry I didn't do _____! Good Shabbos!

Sub-group differences. For the purposes of the study, a gross overgeneralization of OJC members will be adopted to provide a sense of distinct OJC sub-groups.[15] The three most discussed categories among Ashkenazim (Jews from European descent) include a) Yeshivish Ultra-Orthodox, b) Chassidic Ultra-Orthodox, and c) Modern Orthodox[16]. Across all three, OJC members may be born as an Orthodox Jew or be a *Baalei Tshuva* (raised as a non-Orthodox Jew, chose Orthodox Judaism later in life). These three groups generally follow different *mesorahs* and will attend separate synagogues and schools and may live in different neighborhoods. A brief overview of these groups is provided below.

Modern OJC are the most integrated with non-Jewish society believing that it is possible to follow *halacha* and still maintain cultural distinction without compromising either (i.e., pursue secular professional and academic knowledge and be exposed to

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[11] Women say a prayer over candles to welcome in the *Shabbos.*

[12] Afternoon prayers, often said immediately preceding *Shabbos.*

[13] Special bread made for *Shabbos* and festivals.

[14] Stew traditionally made on *Shabbos*.

[15] Like many generalizations, OJC members fall on a difficult to define continuum

[16] These categorizations do not accurately reflect Sephardim – Jews who descent from Spain, Africa, and the Near East. The current study did not assess whether the professionals or the at-risk youth were Ashkenazim or Sephardim as a means to protect confidentiality (see *Chapter 3: Participants*).

mainstream media sources such as books, movies, TV, etc). Comparatively, Modern OJCs emphasize Zionism more strongly. Both *Charieidi* groups integrate cautiously with non-Jewish society by interacting on a vocational level but distancing themselves from cultural influences. Yeshivish Ultra-Orthodox stem from Lithuanian *yeshivas*[17] while Chassidish Ultra-Orthodox stem from a 18th century emphasis on Jewish Mysticism (founded by the Baal Shem Tov) and thus each have different spiritual approaches to the observance of *mitzvos*. Yeshivish Ultra-Orthodox strongly identify with a particular Yeshiva (institution of Torah learning) while Chassidish Chariedi strongly identify with a particular community joined under the leadership of a Rebbe (Chassidish Rabbi). Yiddish is spoken in these communities and some Chassidish Chariedi may not speak fluent English.

All male OJC wear *yarmulkas/kippas* (head coverings) and Ultra-Orthodox OJC males often wear black hats on top of them as well. OJC women cover their hair with wigs, scarves, or hats; Modern OJC women are more likely to wear a hat that only covers the majority of her hair. Overall, Modern OJC are most likely to wear modern clothing and Ultra-Orthodox women are often more strict regarding covering all skin above the elbows and knees.

Summary. The universal commitment to following the will of *Hashem*, as transmitted by an unbroken chain from generation to generation acts as the glue that binds diverse OJC into one overarching community. On a daily basis, this chain is perpetuated most intimately by parents, schools, and other community members. The

[17] A *yeshiva* is a school that teaches Talmud and halacha. Today, the term largely refers to a male high school that teaches Talmud and halacha and secular studies.

successful transmission of *mitzvos* is founded on the acceptance of parental and rabbinical authority and therefore is dependent on an intimate, trusting relationship between a child and authority figure. At-risk youth are characterized by distrust of, and rebellion against, authority figures, marking a national existential threat to the transmission of *mitzvos* to the next generation.

Jewish Mental Illness and Service Utilization

Introduction. Given the definition of at-risk youth used in the present study emphasizes a psychological perspective to at-risk behavior, the following subsection reviews research on the topic of Jewish mental illness and service utilization. To my knowledge, there is no epidemiological research exploring mental health specifically among the OJC. Thus, the following review considers research on American Jewry as a whole as the best available approximation. While clear religious and cultural differences exist between the OJC and American Jewry, given that this split occurred within the last two hundred years, it is reasonable to assume that cultural similarities continue to be shared.

Epidemiological research. With respect to rates of psychological disorders, only one large scale community survey (National Institute of Mental Health Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) study; N = 18,000) utilizing a structured clinic interview has been conducted with Jewish participants. This survey was conducted in five cities across three time points (initial interview, 6 months and 1 year follow-ups). Only two sites (New Haven and Los Angeles) assessed for religious preference (Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or none) and this assessment occurred at different time points (New Haven assessed for religious preference at the one year follow-up and Los Angeles assessed for religious

preference at the initial interview). Two published studies have analyzed these data (Levav, Kohn, Golding, & Weissman, 1997; Yeung & Greenwald, 1992) and are reviewed below.

Young and Greenwald (1992) analyzed data collected from the New Haven site (N = 3,640). According to Yeung & Greenwald (1992), the highest lifetime rates of psychological disorders among American Jews included major depression (15%), simple phobia (9.3%), dysthymia (8.7%), agoraphobia (4.6%), obsessive-compulsive disorder (2.6%), and schizophrenia (1.9%). Comparisons between religious groups controlled for several demographic variables including gender, age, marital status, education, socioeconomic status, and race. No significant differences were found when considering lifetime rates of having a psychiatric disorder when comparing Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and No-religion groups. However, when considering disorders individually, Jews had significantly higher lifetime rates of major depression and dysthymia compared to Catholics and Protestants. Conversely, alcohol abuse rates were far lower among Jews (1.7%) compared to Catholics (8.7%), Protestants (9.8%), and the No-religion group (12.7%).

Levav and colleagues (1997) followed up on Yeung and Greenwald (1992) by including ECA participants from both New Haven and Los Angeles (N = 4,583). In this study, Jews were compared to Catholics, Protestants, Other-religion, No-religion, and Combined-non-Jewish group (i.e., combination of Catholic, Protestant, Other-religion, and No-religion groups). Analyses only reported depression and alcohol findings and controlled for demographic variables listed above in Yeung & Greenwald (1992). Replicating Yeung and Greenwald (1992), both period and lifetime rate of alcohol abuse

were significantly lower among Jews compared to the Combined-non-Jewish group. Also consistent with Yeung and Greenwald (1992), Jews had higher period prevalence of major depression (12.4%) compared to Catholics (9%), Protestants (7.4%), and the Combined-non-Jewish group (8.6%), while comparisons to Other-religion (9.8%) and No-religion (9.3%) groups yielded no differences. With respect to lifetime major depression, Jews (18.7%) were significantly higher than Catholics (15%) but no significant differences were reported compared to the other groups (it should be noted that statistical significance was just missed for the Protestant (15.1%) and Combined-non-Jewish groups (16%).

Interestingly, a religion (Jews vs. Non-Jews) by gender interaction was reported for both period prevalence and lifetime diagnosis of major depression whereby the Jewish group was found to have a higher risk for major depression *specifically among males*. That is, while there was a 2:1 female-to-male ratio among non-Jews, there was a 1:1 ratio among the Jewish group. This gender pattern – whereby males are at equal risk for depression as women – has been replicated over two decades later in an adolescent Jewish sample (Wang, Lederman, Andrade, & Gorenstein, 2008; but see Loewenthal et al., 1995). Kohn and colleague (1999) conducted a meta-analysis on 43 studies ranging from 1879 to 1997 that studied Jews and affective disorders. They reported that Jews had a higher risk for affective disorders compared to non-Jews but reported a weak effect size (Cohen d = 0.19; weighted d = 0.01). No significant differences between men (d = 0.21; weighted d = .004) and women (d = 0.14; weighted d = -0.002) were reported (see Kohn, Levav, Zolondek, & Richter (1999) for detailed review of the role of methodology in these results).

Benjamins, Rhodes, Carp, and Whitman (2006) provide a more recent example of increased risk for depression among Chicago Jews compared to the general population. A three stage sampling design was used to select 201 adults and 58 children in the Northeast side of Chicago. These participants completed a comprehensive interview assessing a wide array of health topics, including mental health. Three questions were asked regarding depression. Twenty-one percent reported that, during their lifetime, a physician had told them they had depression, 32% reported feeling depressed during the past month, and 17% were screened "depressed" (defined as endorsing 4/10 depressed symptoms on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression-Short Form scale – a measure of depression symptom severity). Benjamins and colleagues (2006) note that these lifetime rates and self-reported rates are higher than national estimates (Kessler et al., 2003). It should be noted, however, that Kessler and colleagues utilized a well-established structured clinical interview designed to diagnosis psychopathology based on accepted DSM-IV criteria while Benjamins et al. (2006) relied on a self-report measure of depression severity[18] and self-report of physician diagnosis made via unknown means.

Critique of research findings. Importantly, none of the studies reviewed here considered sub-group affiliation differences among Jews in their analyses, though most considered this as a significant study limitation. Although Benjamins et al., (2006) did not differentiate by sub-group affiliation, the sample included several Orthodox

[18] The interpretation of the CESD-short form data used in this study appears problematic. They state that "Individuals with four or more positive responses to these statements were considered likely to be depressed" (p. 485). Given that this measure uses a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day), 1 = Some or little of the time (1-2 days), 2 = Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days), and 3 = Most or all of the time (5-7 days)), it is unclear which score met criteria as a "positive response." For example, if "Some or little of the time" would meet criteria, then a participant could potentially be defined depressed with a score as low as four, which would not meet the cut-off for "mild" depression using the CESD-short form (Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick, 1994).

individuals. Among the 81% of adults who reported belonging to a synagogue, 82% self-identified as Orthodox. As such, approximately two-thirds of the Benjamins et al. (2006) sample self-reported as Orthodox and likely were representative of the findings cited therein.

Reasons for Jewish risk for affective disorders remain unclear. Several authors have suggested that depression and its expression may be more culturally normative among Jews (Kohn et al., 1999; Loewenthal, Macleod, Lee, Cook, & Goldblatt, 2002) and may explain the often cited willingness among Jews to seek treatment for psychiatric disorders (Bowling & Farquhar, 1993; Guttmacher & Elinson 1971; Loewenthal et al., 2002; Yoeung & Greenwald, 1992; see Kohn et al., 1999 for review). Yet, the opposite has been cited among the OJC, who reportedly exhibit low levels of mental health treatment seeking due to its stigmatization in the community (for reviews see Feinberg, 2005; Greenberg & Witzum, 2001; Schnall, 2006; Margolese, 1998; Paradis, Friedman, Hatch, & Ackerman, 1996; Popovsky, 2010). However, there has been a trend of increased treatment seeking in recent years (see *Chapter 2 OJC Perspectives on Mental Illness and Treatment* below for review).

Summary. Decades of research indicate an increased risk of affective disorders among Jews in general, but a dearth of research exists with respect to psychiatric rates among the OJC in particular. Research on Jewish mental health suggests that American Jews have positive attitudes toward treatment seeking, however the opposite has been reported among the OJC. In fact, several clinical reviews OJC mental health treatment suggests a relative underutilization of mental health services among the OJC. Additional

research is required to explore OJC mental health needs treatment seeking patterns in general and among adolescents and young adults in particular.

OJC Perspectives on Mental Illness and Treatment

Introduction. The following section is an introduction to the OJC attitudes toward mental illness and its treatment. I first provide a historical overview of the perceived antagonism of mental health practitioners toward the OJC, followed by two current barriers to treatment: distrust of secular society and OJC stigmatization of mental illness. The stigmatization of mental illness and other cultural attitudes provides a cultural backdrop to understand the challenges the OJC professional faces when working with an at-risk youth.

Historical overview. For much of the twentieth century, the OJC viewed psychology and psychotherapy as being overtly heretical and antagonistic to Orthodox Judaism. Personal histories of discrimination were recalled in a recent roundtable with prominent OJC mental health professionals and advocates:

> *Psychology was suspect because until then it was based on Freud, and everything about it was anti-Torah. I'm older than the rest of you all, but back in those days, if you brought a kid to a therapist, the first thing he did was say the kid should cut back on the learning. He'd relieve the kid of his "heavy burden" of Yiddishkeit* [Orthodox Judaism]*. So that was the battle (Bensoussan & Kobre, 2012; Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald).*

> *When I was in graduate school, Freudian psychology, which is inherently heretical, was dominant. A lot of the senior people in psychoanalysis had been*

> *raised Orthodox themselves and then rebelled against it, so they had an ax to grind. I was tormented in graduate school, constantly lectured about how religion causes mental illness. They'd say things that were blatantly false (Bensoussan & Kobre, 2012;* Dr. Norman Blumenthal*).*

Consequently, many Rabbis spoke against involvement with mental health practitioners. For example, Rabbi Avigdor Miller (a prominent OJC leader) voiced a fiery attack against the mental health field:

> *The schools produce every year new armies of psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and criminologists… It seems puzzling that these armies of trouble-shooters are unable to mitigate the misbehavior and misery of society. But the truth is just the opposite: the more psychologists and sociologists, the greater is the rate of crime and disturbance. These theorists are not "trouble-shooters"; they are actually the fomenters of trouble…At a conference of the Workers' Educational Association, a psychology tutor of the Sydney (Australia) University declared: "If a person retains one sex partner for life, he becomes emotionally immature and develops a shallow character." He stated that marriages would be less likely to break up "if people had a better record of extramarital sex"… Two psychologists were dismissed from Harvard for advocating "experimentation" with hallucination drugs. One, Dr… was subsequently charged with importing narcotics together with his children (N.Y. papers, 12/26/'65). These men speak at gatherings of youth, urging them to "experiment." Little wonder that "the most popular courses in the colleges are females, narcotics, and alcohol." This is the*

> *"profound character" which the psychologist and other "educators" are developing in the young generation. (Miller, 1973; pp. 74-75)*

Over the last several decades, the OJC has perceived a shift away from previously experienced opposition to religion. Several factors have likely contributed. First, the mental health field has increased an emphasis on multi-cultural competence and sensitivity (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2003). This was acknowledged in the previously mentioned roundtable with prominent OJC mental health professionals and advocates:

> *That has changed; now there's all this research that shows overwhelmingly that religion is associated with better mental health across the board. What's more, these days the Jewish, non-frum* [non-Orthodox Jewish] *psychologists are so far removed from Torah that they're not bitter. I don't know if that's better, but at least today they don't have the passionate opposition to Orthodoxy (Bensoussan & Kobre, 2012; Dr. Norman Blumenthal).*

Second, the increased acceptance of mental health services coincided with increased popularity of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which emphasizes skills training and offers far less philosophical stances on the human condition. For example, scholarly articles and books have been written by OJC members on CBT, highlighting the primary importance of both behavioral change (Siev, 2009) and cognitive change (Pies, 2010) in OJC rabbinical writings spanning millennia.

Distrust of secular value systems. The advancement of ethical guidelines for working with minority ethnic and religious populations no doubt changed the reputation of psychology for many in the OJC (e.g., American Psychological Association; 2003).

Nevertheless, many in the OJC continue to view secular society with suspicion. A root fear among the OJC stems from the understanding that the individual, not the culture, is the client. That is, the therapist is ethically mandated to respect the client's relationship with and perception of his or her culture. This fine line distinction is particularly worrisome for OJC parents considering a therapist for an adolescent who is seen as impressionable.

Speaking to this point, I recently discussed with a licensed, secular therapist an example of an at-risk Orthodox Jewish adolescent who had recently stopped religious practice. From the psychologist's perspective, a culturally sensitive therapist would respect the client's values and religious needs yet remain open to the possibility that being an Orthodox Jew might not be what the *individual* really wants (i.e., needs). While this may be consistent with ethical guidelines, it is also what the OJC, especially parents, fear. Practically speaking it is understood among many OJC members that individuals may need to reduce ritual obligations due to mental health reasons. From an OJC point of view, however, an Orthodox Jewish therapist in close contact with a Rabbi would be best prepared to tackle this challenge given the cultural nuance and sensitivities involved.[19]

Consequently, there has been a movement toward training more OJC mental health practitioners. As articulated by Rabbi Michel Twerski, a prominent OJC rabbinical leader and mental health counselor:

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[19] Of course, ethical challenges emerge for the OJC mental health professional as well. For example, is it ethical to accept parent's treatment expectations to "fix" their boy who is no longer religious when it turns out that they have unfair (and unhealthy) religious expectations? Said another way, to the extent that parental expectations *may* be part of the problem, how can the therapist ethically conform to the parent's wishes?

> *We also need to have an alternative. If we are going to condemn the one way* [secular psychologists] *it behooves the Torah community to come up with an alternative and the Torah community has not quite come up yet… I think if we are going to be engaged in these sweeping condemnations we have to have sweeping solutions. So I am very concerned. I'm concerned not about that fact that the knowledge is dangerous. I don't think the knowledge is dangerous. It certainly isn't dangerous to someone who has a very strong faith system. But the values and the context are very, very damaging; very, very injurious…It confronts tens of thousands of young men and women today in our society and we desperately need Orthodox professionals. As you know my brother is a psychiatrist and all the people who otherwise condemn the avenues of secular education require his services for the people whom they would otherwise not entrust to secular therapists because they are afraid that some secular therapist is going to play with their values and play with their belief system so you have to go to someone who you can in fact trust. This is not an easy contradiction to resolve and I think it needs to be done with great care. (Twerski, 1999)*

Consistent with this sentiment, in the last few decades, there has been an influx of OJC counselors trained as mental health service providers. OJC mental health community activists have recently estimated that they have a database with over 1000 OJC therapists and approximately 3,000 OJC mental health care providers (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers) overall *(Bensoussan & Kobre, 2012)*, leading one community leader to conclude "*it's a totally different environment for a frum person looking for treatment then it was even 15 years ago*" (Bensoussan & Kobre, 2012; Rabbi Binyamin Badad). In

addition, several review articles have articulated OJC cultural factors impacting on diagnosis, treatment, and multi-cultural training (Feinberg, 2005; Heilman & Witztum, 1997; Huppert, Ziev, & Kushner, 2007; Margolses, 1998; Popovsky, 2010; Schnall, 2006).

OJC stigmatization of mental illness. A high degree of stigma toward mental illness exists within the Orthodox Jewish community (Feinberg, 2005; Heilman and Witztum, 1997; Huppert, Ziev, & Kushner, 2007; Margolses, 1998; Popovsky, 2010; Schnall, 2006). One of the most commonly cited manifestations of OJC stigma is called "*Shidduch*" anxiety. Prior to marriage, each marriage prospect is subjected to a round of investigations into family background, religious upbringing and observance levels, education and career plans, and medical and mental health history. In fact, though *loshon hora* (gossip, speaking ill against another) is forbidden by the Torah and thereby deemed socially inappropriate, when asked about a *shidduch* (possible marriage match) one is expected and required to answer honestly. As such, individuals may even attempt to hide mental illness from their own trusted Rabbi due to fears that the Rabbi will be approached as a reference. This fear appears to be intensified by the fact that even knowledge of mental illness in one family member may affect marriage prospects for siblings or children.

Thus, it is not surprising that a recent study found that, among Orthodox Jews, the medical model of mental illness (i.e., perceptions that psychological distress is caused by genetic predisposition) is related to increased levels of marriage/family stigma (Pirutinsky, Rosen, Safran, & Rosmarin, 2010). Likewise, a recent comparison between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews indicated increased levels of stigma toward depression

(Baruch, Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Murphy, & Kanter, 2011). Specifically, Orthodox Jews expressed elevated levels of secrecy about depression, stigma against treatment-seeking, stigma concerns about family/marriage regarding mental illness, and stigmatizing experiences compared to non-Orthodox Jews. This reflects a stigmatization of mental illness culturally-specific to Orthodox Jews (versus a general Jewish phenomenon).

Summary. The historical distrust of the mental health field has waned in recent years, yet barriers persist. First, OJC members distrust secular therapists fearing they may negatively influence the OJC client, in particular an adolescent or young adult. While more OJC professionals have emerged to provide a perceived safer alternative, significant stigma toward mental illness and treatment seeking can lead to the avoidance of treatment during which time symptoms likely worsen. Thus, the OJC professionals are first line contacts for many at-risk youth who may present with significant symptoms.

At-risk Youth

Mainstream conceptualizations. With respect to mainstream American at-risk youth, researchers have not agreed upon a uniform definition of an "at-risk" youth. Yet, several conceptualizations have been offered, each representing a different emphasis of problematic behaviors and adverse outcomes (Dryfoos, 1991; Gross & Capuzzi; 2008; Swahn & Bossarte, 2009). Three primary perspectives include:

a) Educational perspective: Emphasis on risk behaviors related to school achievement outcomes (e.g., disruptive class behaviors, truancy, drop-out)

b) Mental health perspective: Emphasis on risk behaviors related to diagnosable clinical presentations (e.g., affective disorders, drug-use, eating disorders) or those that disrupt healthy well-being (e.g., low self-esteem, lack of resiliency).

c) Family dynamics perspective: Emphasis on home life disruptions (e.g., disobeying house rules, endless arguments).

These perspectives not only describe different behaviors but conceptually suggest distinct risk or causal factors. Regardless of emphasis, at-risk youth struggles also interact with adjustments to developmental body changes and societal pressures (e.g., advertisements influence body image and/or unchecked consumptive/materialistic pursuits).

Given the complexity inherent in conceptualizing at-risk youth, Capuzzi and Cross (2008) suggested that "the term *at risk* encompasses a set of causal/effect (behavioral) dynamics that have the potential to place the individual in danger of a negative future event (p. 7)." They continue to state that youth remain at risk as long as his or her transition into adulthood occurs "without goals and objectives, without direction for what comes next, without an understanding of potentials and possibilities, without appreciation for self, or without a knowledge of one's place in the larger society (p. 7)."

An additional perspective on the conceptualization of at-risk youth is the spiritual life of at-risk youth. When reflecting on over three decades of working with at risk youth, Dr. David Elkind noted that societal changes in the last half century have led to societal risk factors that not only undermine spiritual and religious expression but also leave youth isolated from sources of authoritative guidance (Elkind, 1995). That is, the loss of trust and respect in unilateral authority (e.g. authority figures) in the last half century undermined the ability of adults to help youth navigate a) the normalization of sexual liberties (e.g., premarital sex), b) increased sense of loss (e.g., violence, divorce), and c) increased sense of failure due to heightened competition for success. Elkind (1995)

concludes, "adolescents need adults to exercise unilateral authority when it comes to values, manners, and morals, and adolescents themselves need to exercise mutual authority in matters of style and taste" (p. 72).

Taken together, mainstream researchers and professionals have considered several different functional life domains when conceptualizing at-risk youth, including spirituality and religiosity. The cultural context of the youth is likely to dictate the relative functional import of each (i.e., value on education, value on religious practice, etc.). Given the ubiquity of religiosity across OJC culture and lifestyle, a culturally-adapted definition of at-risk youth will likely address the religious/spiritual life domain.

OJC professional conceptualizations. The following section provides an overview of how professionals (largely mental health professionals) conceptualize OJC at-risk youth. NEFESH International (the International Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals) convened experts in the field to address the OJC at-risk youth phenomenon in a report for the community (Blumenthal & Russel, 1999; Russel & Blumental, 2010). They offered five typical "early warning sign" presentation styles for at-risk adolescents in high school. The following list comes directly from this 2010 report (Russel & Blumental, 2010; pp. 66-67):

a. The Silent Polite Rebellion: the student seems disengaged, not "there" with the teacher detached, subtly hostile but not making trouble. These children are often disinterested in *davening* [praying], spending that time daydreaming or quietly and surreptitiously talking to friends. Subtle *tznius* [modesty] violations may be evident or there may be a faddish dressing that is beyond what the school condones. They often wear jackets or coats indoors, closing themselves off, and may be wearing

headphones in school. They are excessively on the internet and/or in chat rooms; are readily critical, of or absent from, school activities or sit out *mesibos* [parties] including the dancing and singing. They are becoming more isolated from adults, remaining largely uncommunicative.

b. The Angry Rebellion: This is characterized by vociferous expressions of anger and hostility to adults and/or peers; zealous championing of "justice," negativity, cynicism, or blatant disregard for dress codes or *tznius*. They typically express, with rancor, *hashkafic* [worldview] conflicts between school and home, hatred for parents, defiance, toward authority figures, and seem to take pleasure in provoking and instigating.

c. Drifting: There are students looking for a different experience: they seek after-school jobs, hang out with a peer group of concern, use slangy speech, or deviate from communal norms and standards in dress. There are often inappropriate photos on their locker doors, graffiti on their notebooks, or publicized interest in risqué music and the drug culture. They may prefer associating with older peers, and seek out precarious or harmful activities in the pursuit of fun. Irregular *tefillin* [phylacteries] use, weekday dress on Shabbos or blatant religious inconsistency may alternate with excessive religiosity.

d. Eating disorders. In these instances there may be marked weight loss or gain, excessive exercise or random physical activity, ritualistic eating habits, perfectionism and overachieving. They may demonstrate a propensity to wear baggy coats or long sleeves and a general body language of covering themselves up. They often have a distorted body image and experience conflict with

caretakers that is exacerbated by their lack of regard for their health and well-being. While predominately evident among girls, eating disorders are not unheard of among boys. In boys it may manifest in excessive bodybuilding and muscle sculpting.

e. Depressive or Anxious. This is characterized by students who are tired, withdrawn, unkempt, disengaged, distractible or frantic about achievement and social acceptance. They easily perceive themselves as failures, often appear unhappy and sleep too much or too little. Their attendance and punctuality can be poor and they may feel beset by physical ailments with little or no medical basis. The recently increased incidents of "cutting" or self-mutilation, particularly among girls, may be evident from a child with numerous cuts, Band-Aids or reluctance to change for gym.

Nefesh further offered the following guideline to assess at-risk behavior across a continuum. This comprised three levels of risk (i.e., soft, medium, and hard "signs"), reflecting differing levels of divergence from social and cultural norms (i.e., soft signs) and extent of social impairment (i.e., hard signs). The following list comes from the 2010 Nefesh report (Russel & Blumental, 2010, pp 95-96):

SOFT SIGNS: Generally in a 12 to 14 Year Old. This teen will begin to show problems with changes from typical behavior within the community group (e.g., chasidish, yeshivish).

- Change in type of music listened to.
- Not learning well; showing great impatience with academics.
- Language is changing with greater usage of slang.

- Beginning to have family conflict
- Beginning to think about those cool things the older boys and girls are doing
- Wearing "cool" clothing is important
- The clothing and hairstyles are changing
- May not have used marijuana, but knows of it and names of other drugs
- Begins smoking cigarettes.

MEDIUM SIGNS: Generally in a 14 to 16 Year Old

- In the second *yeshiva* by their sophomore year.
- May still be in *yeshiva* but has no interest
- Regularly smoking cigarettes.
- Beginning to have serious family conflict, although still living at home
- Symptoms of sexuality are out of the norm for his/her community (e.g., Chasidish, Yeshivish).
- Consistently downing a few shots of whisky or beer at *Kiddush* [ceremonial blessing Sabbath morning].

HARD SIGNS: Generally in a 16 to 19 Year Old

- Is a chronic truant or a dropout.
- No longer following any rules of the house; conflict with parents is routine; conflict spills over into relationships with siblings, and parents will worry about the effect on their other children.

- Attending parties, going to clubs or partying at friend's houses when their parents are on vacation and the house is empty for a few days.
- Spending an excessive amount of time out of the home; may be sleeping by friends.
- Extensive drug use
- Stealing may be commonplace. Money is needed to have a good time or to maintain a habit; those who are addicted will have a habit of $50-$150 a day
- Determine if history of abuse exists, especially sexual abuse
- *Shmiras* [observance of] *Shabbos, kashrus,* and *tefillin* are no longer commonplace
- The teen looks for acceptance from a peer group. Only they are perceived as having the ability to understand what s/he is going through

Rabbi Shmuel Gluck, director of *Areivim* (an organization which provides several resources to help at-risk youth), contends the function of the behavior, not necessarily the behavior itself, is the most important determinant of whether intervention is required. He highlights the distinction between OJC youth whom are at-risk youth versus at-crisis. From his perspective, an at-risk youth is doing well "on average," but due to life circumstances (e.g., family divorce, low self-esteem) is vulnerable (i.e., at risk) to emotional health struggles. In contrast, a youth at-crisis is one who currently feels no accountability to *any* system as reflected by behavior outside the normal behavior for age, gender, and culture. That is, even if the problem behavior seems minimal, if it is a

reflection of a lack of accountability to any rule system then intervention is required immediately to prevent more damaging manifestations (personal communication).

Rabbi Benzion Sorotzkin (PsyD) argues that at-risk youth behavior results from problematic family dynamics caused by physical or sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or invalidation (Sorotzkin, 2012). For example, invalidation can manifest by the punishment of developmentally normal drives and urges or the perception that parental love and approval is contingent on compliance to religious norms (Margolose, 2005). From these perspectives the parent-child relationship represents a primary antecedent to anti-authority behavior.

Orthodox Jewish Community conceptualization. There is a perception among the OJC that the number of at-risk youth is on the rise; however, no epidemiological attempt has been made to quantify the phenomenon. One exception is a decade old study commissioned by the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, which conducted a large-scale survey on OJC at-risk youth in Brooklyn, New York (Danziger, 1999). In order to estimate the extent of OJC at risk youth, forty-five interviews were conducted across 25 institutions that service OJC youth (e.g., schools, mental health practitioners, hot lines, etc). Perceptions of at-risk youth ranged from 300 to approximately 3,000 in a school district of 22,570 youths. Danziger (1999) noted that while these estimates were far lower than rates documented in non-Jewish Brooklyn schools, every participant interviewed believed that the OJC at-risk problem was increasing, with 61% describing the increase as “significant,” 21% as “exponential” and 18% as “moderate.”

The stigma of mental illness significantly affects how the OJC conceptualizes, or at the very least, discusses at-risk youth. For example, consider that Danziger (1999) defined *at-risk* youth as those *currently* diagnosed with either oppositional defiant disorder or a conduct disorder. Such a definition seems more accurately entitled *at crisis* not *at risk.*[20] The OJC stigma against mental illness (reviewed above) may help explain the confusion of terms. That is, given the stigmatization of mental illness and the reluctance to seek treatment, the term "at-risk" is preferred over "in-crisis" as it acknowledges an issue to be addressed yet denies active mental illness. That is, acknowledging that one's child is "at risk" may be more culturally acceptable explanation of a child's behavior and justification for seeking help[21].

Similarly, attributing at-risk youth to being an *off the derech* problem (i.e., rejecting Orthodox Judaism) represents another avenue to conceal mental illness. This attributes at-risk behavior to individual choice (to reject Jewish Orthodoxy) instead of mental illness (i.e., mental illness is perceived to have genetic-basis and thereby affects marital prospects of the whole family, not just the individual). In summary, stigma concerns can lead to denial or covering up of mental illness and the *off the derech* label

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[20] The term "at-risk" will be utilized in the present study as it is the term most widely used among the OJC to describe this population. This trend may be changing, however, as the 2010 Nefesh report (Russel & Blumental, 2010), suggested a reexamination of the term:

> *…the third issue we clarified from previous conferences was the term "at risk." "At risk" means the teen is "displaying" characteristics that could ultimately lead to greater problems. In contrast, many kids with whom we are now concerned are those out of school, using drugs, alcohol, stealing, mechululey Shabbos* [breaking Shabbos laws]*, and acting promiscuously. These kids are no longer "at risk," they are "in risk."*

[21] On a sociological level, the use of the term "at-risk" is reinforced by the OJC mission to pass on *mesorah* (ancient oral tradition). That is, the at-risk youth phenomenon represents a sort of existential threat, as rebellious behavior often includes the rejection of OJC practice and tradition (e.g., breaking the laws of shabbos, eating non-kosher food, dismissing the importance of learning *Torah*, etc). In this way, *mesorah* can be considered *at risk* to be interrupted.

can provide a more culturally palpable explanation. As a result, depending on stigma beliefs, parents may proactively seek treatment for youth who are *at-risk* while others may be compelled to seek help for youth *in-crisis*. Regardless, the term at-risk (with an *off the derech* connotation) is most frequently used to describe OJC at-risk youth.

Current study conceptualization. Several of the at-risk youth conceptualizations reviewed above were incorporated into a culturally-adapted definition used in the present study. An OJC at-risk youth was broadly defined as meeting the two general criteria:

(1) The Orthodox Jewish at-risk youth is experiencing life disruptions (in family, school, community, and/or religious contexts) related to psychological issues reflected in externalizing (e.g., "delinquent") or internalizing (e.g., depression) behaviors.

(2) This definition excludes a youth experiencing life disruptions due to non-compliance with parental and societal expectations (i.e., religious obligations) when devoid of a significant psychological component (e.g., depression).

The Unique Challenge of the OJC Professional

The present section describes OJC youth cultural experiences which can help understand OJC at-risk youth distrust of the OJC professional. Several comprehensive reviews are available which discuss cultural experiences leading to individuals leaving the OJC (i.e., *off the derech*). [22] Several OJC experiences discussed in relation to the off

[22] Interested readers are directed to Attia, (2008), Russel and Blumental (2010), Koslowitz (2009), Levy (2004), and Margolese (2005).

the *derech* phenomenon are relevant to understanding why OJC at-risk youths' distrust OJC members, including the OJC professional.

First, regardless of culture, physical or sexual abuse of youth by adult caretakers results in significant distrust of adults. Based on the experience of 18 runaway OJC youth, Attia (2008) concluded that many of the risk factors of these runaway youth matched those found in mainstream America. That is, many participants described histories of abuse, molestation, and chaotic home life. Given that abusive caretakers were Orthodox Jewish, they generalized their distrust and hatred to Orthodox Judaism and those who observe it.

> *They would tie me up, lock me in a closest, hit me with belts and hangers. It went on for most of my life. Then I started hitting them back. At that point I left. So, not too hard to understand why I hate the religious f***ers is it? (Attia, 2008: OJC runaway).*

> *I basically have flashbacks about being molested because I was molested by a religious guy. That is why religion is hard for me and I hate being around religious people. I have been in situations where I was working in a religious school and they fired me so I hate religion more and more. Whenever I see them it makes me think about what happened to me and it gives me flashbacks. God didn't help me either (Attia, 2008: OJC runaway).*

Second, while the OJC includes several religious and societal expectations, an authoritarian parenting style can lead to power struggles over compliance. While this may work for some children, other children can perceive that parental love and approval are

contingent on adherence to *halacha* [Jewish law]. To the extent that normal developmental drives and need to individuate are punished, youth are vulnerable to shame, guilt, and sense of alienation from themselves and their community (Margolese, 2005). Many youth may find such a life intolerable and rebel against such a system.

> *This relationship is totally based on blood and they should love me but it is not, they won't love me because I'm not religious. It is dependent on how you perform your religious beliefs (Attia, 2008; OJC runaway).*

> *Zero tolerance for anything like how could you not come to shul on Shabbos – instead of focusing on the bad things I was doing – I was going crazy on drugs. He didn't notice or care. Just lots of yelling about religious crap – when he was home, which wasn't very often. They really should focus on shalom bias* [peaceful home interactions] *rather than stupid s**t like the religion forces down your throat (Attia, 2008; OJC runaway).*

Third, religious school experiences can be perceived as invalidating for some OJC youth. Levy (2004) described OJC at-risk youth in Canada struggling with incredible pressure to excel academically and socially.

> *The academic, the emphasis on achievement, the emphasis on excellence, is extremely powerful in the Ultra-Orthodox… The learning, who are the good learners, how much did they learn, how much did they achieve, how many hours are they sitting and learning, is given a tremendous amount of emphasis. Sometimes to the exclusion of other pursuits (Levy, 2004: non-OJC mental health professional working with OJC youth)*

Youth who are not academically talented or learning disabled can feel invalidated and disenfranchised.

> *Who is a good kid? The one who knows how to learn (Levy, 2004; OJC parent).*

> *I think many kids at risk are learning disabled, and if Gemarah* [volumes of commentary and debates on Ancient Jewish Law written in Aramaic] *is king, and you are learning disabled, you are in trouble (Levy, 2004; OJC parent).*

> *I find that most of the kids that are not in yeshiva it's because they have a learning problem that was not dealt with. The yesivha chadarim [classrooms], the Hasidish yeshivas do not have the ability to help the kids who are learning disabled. They don't have the rebbes who have the training. And they don't have the money to support the programs… (Levy, 2004: OJC parent).*

Research supports the contention that school difficulties are related to the at-risk phenomenon. For example, Danziger (1999) reported that all stakeholders interviewed agreed that that difficulty in school was the primary variable predicting future at-risk status. Likewise, Goldberg (2004) found OJC adolescents who scored lower on English and Hebrew decoding and comprehension tasks– skills used to translate and understand Hebrew text – exhibited more externalizing behaviors. In a related finding, Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) has been linked to "at-risk" OJC youth. Last, Feldman (2004) compared OJC adolescent males who had dropped out of yeshiva and were engaging in at-risk behaviors and OJC adolescents who did not. ADHD behavior was endorsed more among the at-risk group.

Fourth, youth perceive disapproval of the OJC when they reject OJC observances and adopt secular mainstream practice and lifestyle (e.g., eating non-kosher, dressing in "fashionable" yet immodest clothing, etc.). Yet, for many OJC youth, secular exposure is pursued simply because OJC observances are perceived as meaningless and OJC concern about acculturation is understood only as judgmental.

In light of the above, when OJC professionals meet with the OJC at-risk youth they must contend with the same resistance any professional must face when perceived as aligned with authority figures in youths' life. In addition, they must contend with an added layer of distrust and other emotional barriers as they are perceived as aligned with an OJC which judges and disenfranchises them. Nonetheless, due the cultural distrust of secular professionals, the OJC professionals represent the first line contact for intervention and must overcome resistance due to their profession position and religious affiliation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Rationale for Design

Given no known research has been conducted on the experiences of Rabbis and professionals working with OJC at-risk youth, a qualitative approach provides a logical beginning point to develop a knowledge base on this topic. In addition, qualitative research can help develop theory, identify additional research questions, and provide direction for prevention and treatment programming. Given the primary aim of the present study, the qualitative approach is well-suited to describe an experience and explore how a person attaches meaning to phenomena.

A qualitative approach, by means of probing, open-ended questions, is particularly helpful when developing a knowledge base on a culturally-unique phenomenon. That is, by inviting the participant to share their experience, they become the expert, thereby giving voice to marginalized, misunderstood, or understudied populations. As such, a logical first level of analysis, with respect to OJC professionals working with at-risk youth, begins with describing the experience itself in the fullest way possible with an emphasis on how the phenomenon was experienced; that is, a description of the experience and the meaning attached to it.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological analytic approach based on recommendations from Giorgi (1997) was utilized to develop textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

The goal of phenomenology, initially developed by Edmund Husserl, explore both the "*what"* (i.e., description) and the "*why*" (i.e., meaning) of a phenomenon. Giorgi and colleagues at Duquesne University formalized methodological procedures for conducting a phenomenological investigation (see Wertz, 2005 for review). Giorgi (1997) posits that empirical phenomenology must include 1) description, 2) a phenomenological reduction, and 3) a search for psychological essence (i.e., structures of meaning underlying human experience). An overview of each is provided below.

Description. A comprehensive description of a respondent's lived experience of a phenomenon is obtained via open-ended questioning. The richer the description, the more variance is provided to guide a more universal structural essence – the ultimate goal of the phenomenological analysis (step 3). A "bracketing" process is utilized to account (vs.

control) for researcher subjectivity. That is, the interviewer attempts to bracket or suspend preconceived notions, judgments, and knowledge from one's own experience, anything that may affect an understanding of the phenomenon. While no research can be inherently value-free, the bracketing process is designed to identify and limit the influence of bias. Said another way, bracketing asks the interviewer to be aware of his or her own ongoing lived experience during the interview in such a way that allows them to remain focused on the participant's lived experience.

Phenomenological reduction. A phenomenological assumption is that to the extent that one can suspend concern with objective reality, s/he can learn about a particular lived experience (i.e., meaning or essence of a lived phenomenon). As such, a phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to *reduce* the objective to its subjective reality.[23] Methodologically speaking, the researcher translates the participant's description of the experience into an interpretation that reflects the psychological meaning associated with the experience. In this way, the phenomenological reduction creates a textural description of the participant's lived experience.

Search for essence. Repeated themes emerge from a reading of all the participant individual textural narratives. However, overarching themes represent a more abstracted description of the "what" of participants lived experience. The final analytic step is designed to explore the meaning and essence of the phenomenon (i.e., the "why" of the lived experience). The search for essence involves a reflective process which draws upon the subjective life experience of the researcher to offer a deeper understanding of the

[23] For example, if a researcher knows that the wavelength presented to a participant is "blue" yet the subject reports seeing "red," the researcher nevertheless writes down "red." He does this because, though he knows that the objective reality is blue, he is concerned with how the subject experiences the wavelength.

experienced phenomenon. The outcome of this process is the creation of a structural narrative. That is, *" the aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?"* (Moustakas, 1994; p. 98).

Participants

OJC professionals (Rabbis, mental health professionals, and mentors) in the United States working with OJC at-risk youth were recruited using non-probability, purposive sampling procedures. Purposive sampling allows for the intentional recruitment of participants who a) have experienced the phenomenon and b) to ensure the recruitment of diverse experience to sufficiently provide in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for qualitative research (i.e., goal of increased understanding) as the sample is not designed to be statistically representative of a population. In addition, purposive sampling allows for flexible sampling as selection criteria may evolve based on on-going analysis (Richie & Lewis, 2003).

Thirteen participants were included in the study with the following inclusion criteria: a) professional experience was relevant to the present study, b) fluent English speaker, and b) self-identify as Orthodox Jewish. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was determined by the researcher and the Data Analytic team (see *Chapter 3: Data Verification* below) to ensure that data collection was sufficient to support study conclusions. Recruitment was localized to cities with large Orthodox Jewish communities. A snowball sampling technique was utilized whereby several

Rabbis and professionals well-known for working with at-risk youth populations were invited to participate and to refer relevant colleagues. This strategy, together with informal referrals from OJC members, generated a lengthy list of potential participants across the country.

Given that the OJC is relatively small and considerably interconnected, demographic information on participants was constrained as a means to protect confidentiality. Consequently, demographic information (see Table 3) was limited to gender, approximate age (e.g., thirties or forties), professional specialization, and approximate years working with at-risk youth. For example, no demographic information was collected regarding the participants' OJC sub-set affiliation. Likewise, the information about the at-risk youth sample they work with was also not assessed. Finally, to ensure confidentiality, all participants were contacted and invited to read the narratives to ensure confidentiality. Several participants voiced concerns and we worked together to make necessary changes to protect the confidentiality of the youth and the professionals.

Participant profession varied, including two PsyD psychotherapists, four clinical social workers (two conducted counseling and two conducted assessment/referrals), three *yeshiva* Rabbis (one teacher, one principal, one dean), and four mentors[24] (two worked at a drop in center, one worked in conjunction with an American yeshiva in Israel, and one worked in a drop-in center, yeshiva, and other responsibilities under the umbrella of a

[24] The job description of the mentors is diffuse. While they may have specific institutional responsibilities (e.g., running a drop-in center), mentors generally remain informally available even outside of institutional buildings and after hours to simply talk or provide guidance. Their general goal is to befriend at-risk youth, establish a long-term relationship, and be available for guidance when needs arise.

single organization. Given three distinct professions were included, textural narratives (Chapter 4) are grouped by profession to help orient readers. As such, textural narratives are not organized in the order in which they were interviewed. A final point, only one participant was female (Participant 5) and only two narratives described experiences working with female at-risk youth (Participant 1 and 5).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to interviews, participants were asked to provide informed consent to participate in the study. The University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this study for both Rabbis (IRB #13.005; approval date of 7/13/2012) and OJC professionals (IRB #12.319 and the approval date of 4/2/2012). The following information was provided to facilitate informed consent:

1. Explanation that participation is voluntary and participants may terminate participation at any point in the study without fears of altering future relationship with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
2. Description of the study's goals, general procedures, interview questions, and time commitment required for participation.
3. Description of risks such as sharing personal experiences and opinions and issues of confidentiality.
4. Description of measures to protect confidentiality (e.g., de-identification, storage safety measures), mention of research personal able to access data (e.g., Research assistants), and plans to destroy data after 5 years.
5. Explicit mention that no benefits will be conferred in return for participation.

6. Contact information for additional information about the study and the UWM IRB in case the participant has additional questions about their rights or wishes to lodge complaint about study participation.

Semi-structured Interview

Following the collection of informed consent, semi-structured, open-ended and audio-recorded interviews were conducted (ranging from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on availability). All interviews were electronically audio-recorded and sent to a transcriptionist.

The definition of at-risk youth designed for the study was reviewed with participants prior to the interview. The following questions were used to initiate dialogue:

1) Would you please describe an initial contact with an at-risk youth in which you believed you formed a successful connection?
2) Would you please describe an initial contact with an at-risk youth where you failed to connect?
3) Do you or how do you address Orthodox Judaism in your work with at-risk youth?

In-person interviews were utilized to expand observations to behaviors (e.g., non-verbal), "presence" and interpersonal style of participant, surrounding environs (e.g., workplace or home), and personal reactions to the participant. In addition to these field notes, analytic journals were recorded immediately post-interview to document: a) personal reactions to, and perspectives on, both the participant and the content of the interview, b) preliminary analyses and interpretations, and c) inform future interview inquiries and sampling strategies.

Data Analytic Procedures

Data analysis was informed by guidelines provided by Giorgi (1985; 2012), Wertz (1985; 2005) and Moustakas (1994). The analytic steps used in the study are first listed and then followed by more in-depth descriptions. The analytic steps included: 1) the transcript was read to obtain an overall sense of the phenomenon, 2) the transcript was separated into *meaning units*, 3) a phenomenological reduction was conducted, leading to a textural narrative, and 4) a reflective process was conducted, leading to a structural narrative. Each step is described below in more procedural detail.

Examining the transcript to achieve an overall sense of the phenomenon. Transcripts were read in their entirety while listening to the audio-recording to verify the transcript accuracy and to obtain an overall sense of participant experience.

The transcript was separated into meaning units. First, researcher responses were removed, leaving only participant statements. Second, participant responses were separated into one or several sentences that described a single idea or theme. For example, consider the following response from Participant 6:

> *He went to a sober living house and he was in my program, like going back a few years and he said, "You should know, that peer evaluation thing changed my life." And I thought that was the worst peer evaluation I've ever done! Like, it did nothing, it was terrible, what a waste of two hours. But, that's where he was at. You never know, you never know.*

This response would be demarcated as representing three meaning units. The first one describes the at-risk youth's perceived experience (*He went to a sober living house and he was in my program, like going back a few years and he said, "you should*

know, that peer evaluation thing changed my life."), the second meaning unit describes the participant's perceived experience (*And I thought that was the worst peer evaluation I've ever done! Like, it did nothing, it was terrible, what a waste of two hours.),* and the third meaning unit describes an overarching lesson learned (*But, that's where he was at. You never know, you never know.)*

A phenomenological reduction was conducted, leading to a textural narrative. First, the researcher interpreted the psychological meaning inherent in the meaning unit. For example, the third meaning unit presented above (*But, that's where he was at. You never know, you never know)* was interpreted as "The participant humbly reflects that it is difficult to predict how youth will respond." Wertz (1985) articulated several questions that guide a phenomenological reduction such as:

a) How does each meaning unit help me understand the phenomenon?
b) What does each meaning unit reveal implicitly or explicitly regarding the significance of the experience?
c) How do the meaning units relate to each other? How does it relate to the whole?
d) Do some meaning units presuppose or assume the other?
e) What is learned when considered each meaning unit about the participant, others people referenced in the story, at-risk youth, the OJC, etc.

Second, meaning units judged irrelevant to the phenomenon of interest or repetitive were discarded. Third, remaining meaning units were reorganized into a linear story, and restated into narrative format to describe the participant lived experience (i.e., textural narrative).

A reflective process was conducted, leading to a structural narrative. This stage in the phenomenological analysis is least grounded in the data yet it is the ultimate goal of the study. The purpose of the reflective process is to explore the meaning and essence underlying the phenomenon of OJC professionals trying to connect with OJC at-risk youth. The reflective process draws upon the textural narratives, field notes, analytic journals, informal discussions before or after the interviews with participants, life experiences, etc. As such, the structural narrative calls upon the subjective life experience of the researcher to offer a deeper understanding of the experienced phenomenon (see Chapter 5: Introduction, for lengthier discussion).

Validation Procedures

Confirmation of the credibility of analyses emerged from triangulation based on agreement between an *Analytic Advisory Team* designed to provide diverse experience and expertise to help reduce researcher bias which may impact analysis. The team consisting of Dr. Jonathan Kanter (providing expertise from a clinical psychology), Dr. Patricia Stevens (providing expertise as a qualitative researcher) and Mrs. Dana Margolis, M.A., (a senior lecturer in the UWM Hebrew studies department, providing expertise in OJC culture). Team members were provided research data (i.e., transcripts) together with textural narratives and asked to determine whether interpretations maintained the integrity of participant descriptions of lived experience. Questions posed to team members were:

1) Are phenomenological reductions grounded in the data? That is, are there indications that biases or pre-conceptualizations go beyond what is explicitly or implicitly stated in the data?

2) Are phenomenological reductions occurring at the level of the lived experience of the participant? That is, can the interpretations be supported by the participant's own words?
3) Do members disagree with any aspect of the phenomenological reduction?

Disagreements in interpretation were discussed and collaboratively resolved. In addition, participants were provided the opportunity to read textural narratives to determine their accuracy and to ensure confidentiality of at-risk youth discussed. One participant made a correction to a quote and three participants requested slight changes in story details to ensure youth confidentiality.

In addition, member checking procedures were utilized. Participants were invited to read their narrative to assess for accuracy (and to ensure confidentiality; see Chapter 3: *Participants* sub section). All participants were contacted and over half provided feedback. Of those who responded all agreed to the accuracy of the narrative portrayal of their experience.

Chapter 4: Textural Narratives

Introduction

Chapter four provides the textural narratives, derived from a phenomenological reduction process, denoting the lived experience of participants trying to connect with at-risk youth. The textural narrative combines the description of experience in the participant's own words (italicized and indented) and my interpretation of the experience (normal type). Thus, the textural narratives were gathered through several sources, including: a) transcriptions of audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, b) field notes, and c) reflections and subjective interpretations drawn from the my life experiences (e.g.,

training in clinical psychology, knowledge of and experience being a member of the OJC, and personal reactions to each individual participant).

Each textural narrative is introduced with my personal experience of each participant in line with the phenomenological utilization of subjectivity as important sources of data. In this way, I share my own lived experience of each participant (i.e., my perspective and personal experience of each participant). Importantly, this form of data must be presented to readers in order to evaluate subsequent analyses. To this end, each textural narrative begins with a *Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant* to provide insight into my emotional reactions, perspectives, and overall experience of each participant.

Next, each participant's *Connection experience* and *Disconnection experience* is presented. To review, participants were asked to describe two experiences: one in which they connected with an at-risk youth and one in which they perceived they did not. Due to time constraints, some participants were only able to provide one of the two narratives. In addition, due to the nature of open-ended, semi-structured interviewing, participants were given authority to guide the interview toward the areas they deemed most important to their experience. As such, connection and disconnection experiences were not discussed in equal depth across participants.

Likewise, participants answered the questions in different order and referred to earlier experiences when sharing subsequent narratives. As such, the orders in which the connection and disconnection experiences are presented differ across participants, matching the order in which they were delivered. Unexpectedly, with regard to *Connection Experiences,* every participant voluntarily shared additional information well

beyond their experience connecting with the youth (i.e., continuing the story to present day knowledge). These experiences were added to the data and expanded the scope and depth of the findings. Last, each textural narrative concludes with a section titled The *Role of Religion,* which describes how participants perceived the role religion plays in their work with OJC at-risk youth (as per the secondary goal of the study).

To add transparency to the process, each interpretation (presented in normal text font) is followed by the participant quote (indented, italicized font) from which the interpretation emerged. In this way, the reader can also have the opportunity to assess the credibility[25] of the phenomenological reductions. In a similar fashion, an analytic team evaluated the credibility of textural narrative data provided below (comprised of a licensed clinical psychologist researcher, expert on qualitative research, and an OJC academic faculty member; see *Chapter 3: Data Verification* for details). Interpretive differences were discussed until an interpretation was agreed upon.

Mental Health Professionals

Participant 1.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 1 (P1) is a psychotherapist in his late forties with decades of experience working with OJC at-risk youth. P1 projects warmth, sincerity, and a refreshing lack of pretense. I vividly recall feeling safe and secure because his entire being suggested only one agenda – to help me.

[25] Given that qualitative research includes a subjective component it raises the question of how to evaluate validity of results. Giacomini and Cook (2000) addressed this important issue, writing "*Clinical readers traditionally think of research validity as the truthful correspondence of results with an objective reality. Qualitative research offers empirically based insights about social or personal experiences, which necessarily have a strong subjective – but no less real – nature than biomedical phenomena. To avoid confusion, qualitative researchers typically avoid the term valid in favor of alternatives such as credible. Even so insights must emerge from systematic observations and competent interpretation (p. 358).*

He talked with ease and had little difficulty recalling details and client-therapist exchanges but I never sensed that he was talking to hear himself talk– he was talking because that was how I asked to be helped. Despite my role as the interviewer, I found myself feeling like I could share anything with him, his demeanor – giving, accepting, warm, open, positive, honest, and humorous – created an atmosphere whereby I felt that, if the situation presented itself ever, I could share information freely, take emotional risks with him, be open to his feedback. I felt like I could ask him for anything because if he could assist, he would, and if he could not, he would do everything in his power to help another way. Toward the end of the meeting he paused for 10-15 seconds to consider whether there was anything else he could add … the feeling I felt during that interim can only be described as feeling loved.

Disconnection experience. P1 described an experience working with a girl in her late teens "*who was very hard to connect* [with] *because the emotion… was rage*." She entered his office and immediately slammed the door, and commenced to scream, swear repeatedly, and violate his personal space. She left mid-session only to return, accusing that he was "*a big fake like all the rest of them*." This escalated to the point that she violently broke one of his figurines. The session concluded with a final round of swearing and a violent door slam. Overall, he perceived her behavior as "*out-of-control*" and "*offensive*."

P1 recalled feeling overwhelmed by "*the amount of rage in her and the amount of distrust*." On the one hand, he appreciated that her behavior was not directed at him:

> *The hatred was apparent. I didn't take it personally cause, again, like I said, she didn't know me well enough to, to hate me that much, so I understood that it was projection."*

Rather, he surmised that it was a test to see how he would react.

> *How is he going to act? Is he going to get mad at me? Is he going to get me in trouble? Is he going to call the Rabbi? Is he going to call my school? … Is he going to call my mother? What is he going to do? Whereas he could just say I never wanna see you again.*

Her rage was so intense he doubted he would be able to help her as "*either I would fail the test or she wasn't going to be healthy enough to be able to accept therapy."*

Moreover, he admitted to feeling personally unsafe because she violated his personal space, had sufficient physical stature to hurt him, and had acted violently. Professionally speaking, he was shaken because, despite his training and experience, he *was* taking her behavior personally:

> *I was afraid of, I was afraid that I wasn't going to be able to bring up genuine empathy because I didn't like her. So it was* [not] *only being scared of her, I didn't like her. Mostly, I don't like people who scare me* [laughing] *… She was actually funny, cuz within her sarcasm and her rage, she was hilarious! She was very funny, very, very, very bright, that was another part, I actually thought she actually might be brighter than me too! You know she, she was like overwhelming me in lots of ways. I didn't feel safe, and, and I felt like she was probably too smart for me and would be able to see through my, you know, therapy-ish kind of things.*

Despite his insecurities, P1 nevertheless felt "*emotionally secure enough to handle her rage*" and employed conflict resolution strategies in an attempt to deescalate her anger. Personally, however, he continued to experience self-doubt the remainder of the session.

> *I didn't think it was working, in fact it looked like the opposite, the nicer I was, I just said "I could see you are in tremendous pain" and you know, "why don't you tell me what it was about," but that was too soon for me to do it. I think it was a mistake on my part although, I dunno, I dunno, I don't think I could have done anything.*

When she broke his figurine, he sensed that she meant to slam it but not break it. Nevertheless, the thought of calling 9-1-1 did occur to him:

> *I just shut down, I just got very quiet, I kind of just looked at her, but I wasn't conscious of anger at her. I was more conscious of am I safe and is she safe? You know, are we safe in this interaction? … My voice got lower, in a calmer voice, but not in a condescending voice, its more that like I spoke to her with respect, and I didn't say anything about the figurine. I just kinda looked at her and she was looking at me, and I knew something was happening there but she, both just kind of ignored it."*

At the conclusion of the session, as she "stormed" out, he extended an invitation, saying "*you know my number if you want to call*."

After the session, P1 described feeling "*terrible*" and concluding that "*I blew it*." He criticized himself for being unable to see past the rage sufficiently to help.

> *She made me feel insecure, and she made me feel unsafe, and she made me feel like, you know, worried about her … Also like relieved maybe she'll never come back. I don't wanna see her again, she was so unpleasant … Doesn't mean I haven't met with people with rage, but I was able to see through the rage faster. She was, the rage was so all consuming that I couldn't see through it. I knew there was a hurt little girl in there, but I couldn't see it at all.*

He considered the possibility that she was reacting to him being a man and began to consider female therapist referrals for the Rabbi that referred her to him. He doubted he would be the one to help her.

> *I knew she was in trouble and the* [referral] *Rabbi said she's in big trouble, but he didn't, he just said she, she has a lot of anger, but that's all he said. He didn't know anything more and, and that first session I got a glimpse of it. I said I doubt it that she's going to call me back. I think her last words to me that day was "F you."*

P1 was shocked when she called him back. "*She left me a message like two days later, "Can I come", like mumbling, "can I come?*" He was filled with a renewed sense of hope and astonished by what she did in the second session.

> *"It was really amazing - she came into the next session with a new figurine in hand* [laughing] *… blown away, blown away, just blown away by it, just blown away, just like something like, "okay, something good happened last week" you know … I said, okay, she is capable of repair!*

To his surprise also, months later she shared that his reactions to her rage during the first session – which he experienced as being counter-productive – calmed her, though she

made sure not to show it. It appeared to P1 that his most impactful "intervention" was simply refraining from rebuking her when she broke his property and then inviting her to come back after such an "*unpleasant*" meeting. He recalled her sharing her experience of the first session with him:

> *"I was trying to push you away, and it was, you know, it was one big test, including the, the figurine … I was out of control, but there was a part of me that was watching the whole proceeding to see how is he going to act … Why would I let you in and then you're gonna reject me later?"*

From this point on P1 described being able to see past her anger and respond to the motivation underlying her anger. He fondly recalls the interaction when he accepted the replacement figurine:

> *I said, "Number one, I want to keep that* [the broken figurine] *here," and she said, "why do you wanna keep it? You wanna make me feel bad?" I said "No, I want to remember how much pain you're in."*

At the end of this second session she tested him again but this time in a more subtle, vulnerable form. "*As she was walking out the door she said, "Once a week is too long… it's too long to wait*." This helped P1 empathize further with her rage, interpreting that it was a guard against feeling so "*needy*" in her relationships, which had made her vulnerable to abuse in the past. Concerned about balancing safe boundaries while respecting her request for help, they negotiated meeting twice a week.

P1 withstood her continued angry and unpleasant behavior for several weeks, believing that by not reprimanding or judging he earned trust or at the very least proved

he was not untrustworthy. Once he felt that their relationship was more secure he used their relationship to challenger her anger:

> *She was in a bad place and she was angry at something I said … and she was being very abusive, and I said to her, "I may not abandon you, but you may push me away… I just want to let you know it's not okay," cause she used to leave every session slamming the door cause she hated leaving, and I said to her, "I don't want you to slam the door. I don't like it, I don't want you swearing at me, and I don't want you slamming the door."*

While she continued with similar angry outbursts they occurred with less frequency and were followed by apology messages on the phone. P1 freely gave leeway for such boundary crossings, being more concerned with helping her identify her own reasons for controlling her anger.

> *I said to her, you know "Just tell me when you wanna slam the door that's gonna be good enough, you don't need to actually." She said, "That doesn't feel as good." I said, "I know, but you'll feel better about yourself afterwards." So she thought about that, she said, "You're right, it's shame, I get ashamed when I slam the door, cause I know it's not right."*

P1 appreciated that her life was improved by gaining control over her anger but true healing came when she learned that she could be vulnerable without being hurt by people she trusted. P1 believed the path was paved by his own sharing his emotions openly in session when he broke her confidence.

> *There were mistakes I made with her… I had a signed release from her that I could talk to this Rabbi… but … she understood that just talk to the Rabbi initially*

> *… So the Rabbi says something to her about something that I told him and she was furious… I said, "I didn't understand, I thought we had an ongoing thing, I thought you trusted him and I blew it, I should have clarified that with you, I'm really sorry."*

The apology "*totally blew her away"* because "*adults don't apologize to kids, totally blew her away, she said "could you say that again?"*

> *It was really funny it was, it made me cry actually. I, I'm, it's bringing tears to my eyes now cause it's like she was so hurt by adults in her life that, that's not how it goes the, the, it goes the adults hurt me and they you know and they move on.*

P1 recalls that she was scared by his emotional expression, perceiving it to be a sign of weakness.

> *She didn't say anything about it then but she told me later on, she told me it actually scared her at first … I said "Are you afraid that I would be too weak for you?" And she said "Yeah" and I said "And..." She said, "I realized that it's not a sign of weakness with you"… And the next week she cried* [with me].

Connection Experience. P1 was meeting with a teenage boy struggling with anger problems: "*I knew he had a rage problem, but I only knew from the parents."* The boy had been expelled from school for bullying, using drugs, and "*mouthing off at his teachers*." In short, "*he was trying to get himself kicked out, he didn't like the school, he didn't like his family, and he didn't like… just… he was an angry kid*." At their first encounter, he was wearing jeans and "*didn't dress like a frum* [Orthodox Jewish] *kid, was not wearing a yarmluka* [skullcap] *but was wearing a baseball cap*."

From the start, despite the boy's angry and confrontational demeanor, P1 sensed that it was "*an act*" to gauge his reaction.

> *He said really nasty things about G-d right away to see, cause he knew I was Orthodox* [Jewish]. *He knew I was some kind of Rabbi figure also, which is confusing. So right away he used swear words in connection to G-d, and I knew that I had him because I'm okay with that!*

He described feeling energized, confident, and secure because *"I could tell that it was gonna be good right away."* Unlike the previous case where it was all he could do to prove *not* being untrustworthy, he sensed the opportunity here to build trust early:

> "*I knew that he's so used to Rabbis, and teachers, and other people being scared at his anger at G-d. I knew Hashem sent me an easy one as far as earning his trust cause I didn't have to fake it. I'm really okay with it, and I think that Hashem is okay with people, we're human beings. You gave us normal human emotions, if I walk over to you and give you a punch in the face it's a normal reaction for you to be angry at me. So when Hashem gives me a punch in the face I'm gonna be angry, even if I know the philosophy, I'm gonna be angry, you know? Yeah, one day, I'll, I'll maybe figure it out, but in the meantime I'm angry! I kind of like enjoyed it because I knew that I'm not gonna have to lie, I really believe it, and he's going to be able to tell that I believe it and that it was going to help him relax in here because he was just so angry.*

In response to the boy's anger, P1 attempted to both validate the boy's anger and also empathize with the motivating pain. He described the following interaction:

> *"It's so cool how honest you can be with your feelings about Hashem, that's really quite courageous because most people who do feel this way are too scared to say anything about it and they just sit on it and it eats them up." So he kind of looked at me and he said, "Do you really mean that?" I said "Absolutely, people spend so much time and wasting time in here when I know that they're really angry at Hashem… I don't even know what you're gonna tell me but my guess is that you've had a lot of pain in your life and you're angry at G-d about it."*

P1 noticed that the boy physically relaxed, his tone softened, and "*all the signs were there he looked at me in a different light."* In P1's estimation, he not only passed the test but he disarmed the need for future ones:

> *Just like that he just like gave me a big smile and the testing was over, and he said, "Yeah, let me tell you about it." And just, just boom, he just like became a chassid* [devout follower], *like right away.*

Subsequently, the boy "*started talking right away after that,"* sharing personal details that teenage clients rarely disclose to him so early in a therapeutic relationship (e.g., girls and marijuana). In particular, however, he focused considerable rage toward his parents:

> *He said, "You wanna know why I'm angry at G-d is because he gave me F—ed up parents, you know, what am I supposed to do… "I don't want it, I'm just a kid … what do you want from me I am more mature than my parents, that's F—ed up.*

P1 added that he later met the parents "*and he was right*!" yet even without knowing that at the time he was moved by the boy's internal struggle.

> *To me it was clear that this is an angry kid, but he, he was savvy enough and smart enough to be able to be angry about things that one should be angry*

> *about… He was exactly right… if we stand back and look at the philosophies, G-d handpicked… the struggle that he was going to need to go through life, but it doesn't make me, it doesn't endear G-d to me* [Laughing]. *I don't want it. "I'm just a kid," he said.*

Overall, P1 described that "*I liked him as soon as I saw him*." From the outset, the boy's anger was never taken personally. He never felt physically unsafe and, from a more secure place, it was easier to "*see the test*" and thereby listen to the pain and struggle underlying the anger. In P1's estimation the key to the boy's trust was his genuine acceptance of the boy's anger, even if directed at something he held personally sacred.

> *Like he mentally rolled up his sleeves and said "Okay, I could work with this guy…. you know he's not gonna judge me. I kinda like threw out my most shocking thing and he was cool." So then I got a lot of clients from that boy cause he told all his friends that were off the derech "Go to* [P1 name] *he's not an idiot like some of the others and he's not gonna judge you. You could tell him anything… I said "F you" to G-d with him and he didn't flinch."*

At the end of the session, P1 "*felt really good and I looked forward to seeing him again and I felt like I can really do work with him, I can really help him*."

The role of religion. P1 spoke with great pride about the outcome with the boy described above. Interestingly, this client remains technically *off the derech*,

> *"But he's healthy. He's not doing weed, he, he's productive, he works with kids, he's a social worker, he's just a just an all-around good kid, and he is a proud Jew."*

He admitted that early in his career he thought his job was to return *off the derech* youth to Jewish Orthodoxy.

> *I remember being at a NEFESH conference, we were talking about kids at risk, and I remember asking the guy next to me "Why are therapists talking about this, isn't this a religious question or are we saying that if a person, chooses to not be frum* [Orthodox Jewish] *that's pathology?"*

Nevertheless, he contends that by no means can one simply believe that *off the derech* behavior is always healthy free will:

> *It depends on the kid. Sometimes it's just free will, but for a child to choose to be different than a family in such a way that is so hurtful to his family, usually suggests an underlying rage or an underlying something… It's not pathological for a person to use the free will that He [Hashem] gave them to decide not to be frum* [Orthodox Jewish]*, but it might be pathological to do something so hurtful to their parents, and seem to enjoy the fact that they're doing that, it seems to say something about family dynamics.*

Instead, P1 perceives his task to help at-risk youth by guiding them to find their own answer for the question "*Why am I rebelling*?"

Participant 2.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 2 (P2) is a male clinical social worker in his late twenties with over five years of experience counseling at-risk youth. He was late for our meeting and I found him to be sincerely apologetic, attempting to find a time later in the day that simply did not exist (as such, time permitted P2 to provide a *Connective Experience* but not a *Disconnection Experience*). He had a

charm and a mischievous spark about him that likely helped me forgive him so easily. Though he did not wear a black hat and coat, his appearance and style of speak was unmistakably *yeshivish*. I got the sense that if I was an at-risk youth I would instantly distrust him and reconsider the moment he spoke and change my mind by the time he pulled a laugh out of me, which would be within minutes. He presented professionally and with self-confidence yet he remained playful, giving off the message that he would rather have fun than take himself too seriously. He seemed genuinely curious and non-judgmental and open to *schmoozing* all day if he could only get away with it.

Connection experience. P2 recalled spending over 45 minutes "*listening to the parents*" about a 16 year old male client before meeting him. He believed that, on the one hand, "*you have to kind of acknowledge the parent's concern, at the same time, it's their perspective and there's always two sides to every coin*." The parents were concerned about rebellious behavior at school (truancy, poor grades) and home (breaking house rules), "hanging out with the wrong crowd, and the use of marijuana. They wanted P2 to personally help convince their son to enter therapy but, apart from providing guidance over the phone, he declined:

> *My response to the parents was, "You get him through the door and, let's see what happens." As long as he, I can't, I can't make the phone call to him, I can't reach out to him, it's never appropriate… if they come through the door, right there there's a motivation, somewhere deep inside they're motivated to, to, to talk to you as expressed through the fact that they walked into the door.*

The teenage boy entered his office "*obviously very apprehensive, his parents probably forced him to come, threatening him with some type of, I dunno exactly what*

they held over his head." His body language expressed disinterest and he looked skeptical and uncomfortable. To P2, he looked like he would rather be anywhere else at that moment. He could empathize that "*him sitting on that couch is not ever what he anticipated in his life*." At the same time, he experienced a brief moment of insecurity over the unpredictability of the client's behavior:

> *It's awkward, they're scared, you know. I'm, I'm a little bit unsure how he's gonna react or how I'm gonna react, frankly, because you gotta kind of go with the flow how he presents.*

In addition to this apprehension, P2 appreciated that the distrust and animosity was directed more at the world then at him personally. He got the impression that the adolescent had "*so many layers of mistrust in his world*" stemming from a sensitivity to "*injustice"* that he perceives in his life (e.g., home, school, religion). He was primed to remain positive no matter what the boy said because "*my experience is that they always want the connection*." For this reason, he used humor to immediately address the distrust openly:

> *I began with a joke, that's kind of like the way I do things, you know, I kind of said something like, "I'm sure you don't wanna be here, no one likes talking to me"... which is true* [smiles].

P2 got enjoyment seeing that the boy "*tried to hold back* [laughter] *but, you know, I guess he couldn't help it*."

Upon reflection, in addition to breaking the ice, P2 wanted to somehow differentiate himself from typical authority figures by not using the "*you're in trouble, let's process it*" approach:

> *Which is the format that he has been used to that I picked up from the parents giving me the background is like he doesn't dress the way we want him to dress he's breaking the curfew, he's not educationally up to par, all those things, you know. I'm sure he's heard that. I hear it through them, I'm sure he's heard it from them!*

Capitalizing on the new feel in the room, P2 attempted to validate the boy by praising a "strength" that is normally framed as a problem behavior.

> *I broke the ice and then I said, "Wow it's amazing, you know, why'd you, why'd you come here today?" "Well my parents made me." "Okay, but you're good at manipulating, right? So why'd you come here, cause you coulda got out of this one." And he kind of really quickly identified with that like, "Ah, how does this guy know that I'm, I'm good at manipulating?" "Because he is!"* [Laughing].

P2 clarified that his goal was not merely to be iconoclastic or to flatter the boy with empty praise.

> *I think he warmed up to that extent* [because] *hey this guy is validating a strength that I have…of something that I'm sure he's perfected, I'm sure he's worked to perfect. I might not respect that strength -my value system - but that's irrelevant. His value system, he's happy about that, he feels successful about his ability to manipulate, so I went with that strength.*

Having established that there must be some motivation other than compliance for coming to therapy, P2 again invited discussion to uncover the client's personal motivations for change, "*So, why are you here?*" and this time the boy shared "*well, I got in trouble in school*." He got caught "*passing around a joint with some friends*" and

commenced to decry the fact that the others two escaped punishment because he believed "*one parent is connected to the school*."

Ignoring the accusation and playing off the expectation that he would comment on the evils of drug use, P2 instead said:

> *I'm sure that's not cool* [laughing] … *it stinks to get caught, you know, no one wants to get caught!*

P2 noticed client's body language became more relaxed and open. He sensed a connection being formed founded on the shared experience and appreciation that "*it stinks*" to be in trouble.

> *You* [the therapist] *could feel that, you could identify with that annoyance, pain, frustration of getting in trouble.*

He recalled feeling confident about the session because "*if you can't acknowledge where they are, then you're not gonna have a conversation, they'll, they'll clock in and clock out.*"

As a sign of good faith, P2 next shared that he had talked to his parents at length, saying "*I spoke to your parents and this is what they told me. I don't think they're 100% true, I don't think they are 100% accurate.*" He likes to "*put all the cards on the table*" because it provides a platform to either process issues with him or for the client to voice his objections and correct the facts as he sees it. P2 shared that his goal is not to minimize the parents but given that parental consequences rarely address the at-risk youth's underlying motivations (e.g., escape from pain), it would suggest they are not "*100% true*."

Feeling more secure and confident that trust was developing, P2 asked again "*okay so like this is your last straw, like why, still like why are you here*?" P2 shared that he repeated the question multiple times in different forms to plant seeds for an insight – whether in this session or a future one:

> *He is motivated because his life sucks… there's no happiness. He's escaping something. So the quicker he can kind of identify with that and recognize that then we can kind of cut through the behaviors, because I don't care about the behaviors … if I look at the behaviors then, then okay, so he's smoking, so, so he's drinking, he's having sex, okay. If I focus on that then we're not gonna get to what's the motivation behind the behaviors.*

P2 was not surprised that such an insight was not forthcoming in the first session:

> *Not in the first session, no, no we didn't end up getting the fact that he was really motivated to be here. We didn't get there, it was still more like, well, I wouldn't have come if I didn't have to.*

That being said, P2 felt "*a lot of confidence in continuing*" because he felt a solid connection developed across the session and the boy *"responded to it, you know, the non-verbal communication is so key, especially in the beginning because you're not doing therapy, you're creating the environment.*

The role of religion. P2 tries to avoid using Orthodox Judaism as a means to address clinical issues because he considers that approach an unnecessary obstacle.

> *They know I'm religious, they, they pick that up that I have value systems that they might agree or disagree or understand or not understand. I don't think*

> *they're looking for a religious figure in this office….we don't learn* [Torah] *together, we're doing therapy.*

That being said, religion is an inescapable reality when working with OJC at-risk youth.

> *They're looking to test you, are you gonna be that other religious figure? Are you gonna judge* [me]*? I'll come back after a weekend and* [the client will] *say "well, I just had sex," you know, what's your reaction? Or "I'm depressed – I haven't put on tefillin in three weeks," what are your thoughts on that? They're looking to see your reaction.*

While he does not address religious observance, he does process religious experience with clients. For example, in the above case "*he had a bar mitzvah recently, you know, what was that like for him?"* If there are mental health issues involved "*I don't think it needs to be brought up as a religious* [issue]*, I think it needs to be brought up in the clinical realm."*

In general, "*They're exploring their own challenges with the religion, their own value system. They're just asking for your help to help them explore the challenge*."

Participant 3.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant three (P3) is a clinical social worker in his thirties with a decade of experience working with Orthodox Jewish at-risk youth. I liked him immediately; he was one of those "bigger than life" personalities who generate instant comradeship. He was warm and generous and, above all, a straight-shooter; you knew exactly where you stood with him. He had a charming sense of humor – one which could poke fun at anything – likely even including you- and you would never dream of taking it personally. He spoke passionately and lived life

passionately. He seemed to "get" the bigger picture, enjoy a good debate, and feel comfortable telling people what to do within minutes of meeting them. As a teen, I imagined I would trust him because I could not imagine him doing anything other than understanding me, lightening the mood, and taking me seriously. Above all else, I had no doubt I would leave any interaction feeling lighter.

Connection experience. P3 recalled meeting a father and his teenage boy,

> *"Going late every day to Yeshiva, he's not getting along with his siblings… He smacks his sister … He's chutzpadik* [rude] *with his mother. He has a few siblings with ADHD, parents, they're overwhelmed. The father works a few different jobs. The mother is just completely overwhelmed and, this kid spends almost all of his time at his grandparents' house because he just can't stand being in the house.*

The boy was reserved and seemed disinterested while the father dominated the conversation.

> *He didn't say much. His father spoke for most of the time. He didn't really say much. He was very reserved… I got the impression he didn't want to be in therapy.*

P3 was surprised and hopeful by the boy's upfront request for help.

> *I'll usually ask "Who brought you here? … Do you want to be here? Or does your father want you here?" He said "No, I, I want someone to talk to." … He wanted, HE wanted therapy* [said in an amazed tone], *the son, which is not usually the case. So that was actually a good sign.*

He noticed a conflicted family dynamic from the start.

> *The father's saying "He doesn't go to school on time. He smacks his sister," and the son is just like kinda sitting there. And the son says one or two things here and there, to kind of "egg on" the father a little bit. His father basically said, "Well, I went to Yeshiva on time, and it's very important to me, and he doesn't seem to care!"*

While the boy was openly rude to his father, P3 felt instant rapport with the boy due to his refreshing honesty.

> *Then the son said something like, "Well, I don't care, you're right!"* [P3 laughing]. *He was just so open and honest. Like most kids it takes you six months of like playing chess and watching YouTube videos to get him to finally talk like, this kid was just like, "Yeah. Yeah, you're right, I don't respect you! (i.e., client's father)* [P3 laughing] *... It wasn't like he was being chutzpadik, it was just like he was stating a fact, like, sorry, you know? ... Actually, I liked the kid a lot from the beginning.*

He suspected that parental issues would likely be a central theme in therapy.

> *I kind of got the feeling from the beginning that maybe, the father was, there was something going on there with the parenting, you know, I mean most kids don't say "yeah, I don't respect you" ... It's one of these typical situations where they will be like, "Oh, here's my kid, fix him" you know? They'll bring him to you and then most of the time it's the parents that need to be fixed.*

P3 recalls that "*the kid was little bit of a mystery to me until I had him by himself."* Nevertheless, he allowed the father to dominate the conversation because he sensed that the boy felt more secure in the silent, watchful role.

The child is often very nervous so even if the father is saying stuff that he doesn't like at least the child doesn't feel like he has to talk, you know what I'm saying? They want to figure out if I'm normal or if I'm crazy. I mean, like maybe I'm not the first therapist they had, you know, or maybe they had a bad therapist you know, so they want to figure out if they can trust me or not.

Despite little interaction, P3 recalled feeling connected to the boy over a perceived mutual reaction to the father's self-righteousness.

After the first session…I was thinking about the father and about how strict he was during the session. You know, "I went on time to Yeshiva when I was a kid" [said in mocking voice]. *Who wants to hear that? You know, like I don't want to hear it either. That's just, so what? Like what does that have to do with your child? The child is not you, you know?*

During the next session, P3 met with the boy alone and invited the boy to take ownership of therapy.

We met last week and I heard what your father said and a little bit about what you said, but, listen I want to hear what you … I think I asked him again, like, do you want to be here? He said, "Yeah." I said "Okay, good, cool, you know… so, what do you want to work on? You know, forget your father for a second. What do you want to work on?"

P3 was delighted by the boy's insight and willingness to communicate.

So, he started telling me the main issues. I'm telling you it was great, kids don't usually do this so quickly [laughing]. *So, what are the main issues? His sister with the ADHD, drives him insane … she takes medication that wears off at like 4:00…*

> *He thinks that his parents don't set boundaries properly, his parents not parenting the other kids.*

P3 was curious about the boy's late school attendance.

> *Then we talked about, "Do you want to go to Yeshiva on time?" Because like just if the parents want it, the child's my client, not the father. So, if he doesn't want to go to school we have to try to figure out what that's about, you know, so he said, "No, I don't want to go late, just you know." Then we started talking, I started realizing what's going on here? He gets up at six o'clock in the morning. Yeshiva starts at 7:30, 8:00, what's going on? Why is this kid late?*

P3 sensed that the explanation may be an unconscious yearning for his father's attention, any way possible.

> *Based on the first session with the father, by the second session I got, I started to get this feeling maybe this kid really wants his father to pay attention to him and he rather get yelled at then ignored.*

From his perspective, additional questionings suggested an unloving, unemotional father-son relationship.

> *I found out very quickly that his parents don't praise him or hug him ever, EVER … I brought up do your parents praise you? He's like "No, but, I don't want it, I don't care." Or, like, I'd be like, "When was the last time your parents hugged you?" "Oh, my bar mitzvah." And, I'm like, "Does that bother you?" He's like "No"* [said in a macho voice].

P3 felt deep empathy for the boy, interpreting that he minimized a relationship with his parents because he felt none was being offered.

I kind of like got the feeling that it probably did [bother him], *everybody wants to be hugged and kissed by their parents. I mean, I want to be hugged, I'm 34 and I still get hugged and kissed by my parents.*

P3 felt confident that the boy would respond to adult encouragement.

Even by the second session I felt like we were having a good rapport, you know, back and forth, and that we clearly had a similar kind of sense of humor, and we got along, and so I was just telling him, like if you want, if you want to go on time and you're just having trouble with your schedule, why don't you try once.

P3 was excited to find out that his theory was correct; the boy simply wanted adult positive attention.

So what happened was I started praising him. I figured someone's got to do it. So I started praising him, telling him like, "Oh, you went to Yeshiva on time? Good job!" And then he started going everyday on time cuz someone was praising him. Unfortunately, it was me and not his father … I, think it wasn't so much me, it was just that an adult that is old enough that he can look up to praising him is something that he's been wanting, he's just not getting it at home.

P3 experienced the father's apathy first hand.

It's interesting because a few sessions after that I had the parents in by themselves. That's just funny, because usually if a kid is coming to therapy and the kid is doing a lot better, the parent will say something, like, "We're glad he's doing better. Thank you" … It just shows you how the father is. He just didn't say anything. I'm like, "Well, he's going to Yeshiva every day isn't he." He's like, "Yeah" [unimpressed tone].

P3 was amazed at the opportunity for parent training when the father brought up the topic of praise.

> *The father said something like, "Maybe I should praise him more?" And, I'm like yeah, maybe you should … I really, I pushed the father a little more and I said, "When was the last time you hugged him?" So, he said, "It's been a long time." So, I said "Listen I don't know how you feel about this, what your comfort zone is, but like, maybe you should try hugging him like once a week," you know, very nice, not sarcastic, "like maybe you should try hugging him like once a week. Just try it out."*

P3 empathized with the father who "*hasn't done it."*

> *You know, if you think about it, it would be kind of hard, if you didn't hug him for two or three years, all of a sudden to start hugging him. Actually, that requires some real psychological change that he's probably not ready for.*

Nevertheless, the boy "*did bring up that his father praised him*" albeit in a backhanded way.

> *His father … said to his grandparents … when this child was in the other room. Oh, he started going to Yeshiva every day on time … You know, he didn't say it to him, he wasn't even in the room, but this was like the praise that he's gotten in the past whatever.*

Given the likelihood that the father would change slowly, if much at all, P3 has focused therapy on helping the boy accept his frustrations with his parents.

> *Most of the therapy is just to work around, for him to understand how to work with his parents. It's just funny, like, you know, the parents probably aren't going*

> *to change … it just turns into one of these things where it's like, you know, how it's really helping the child to accept the parents for what they are is really the bulk of the therapy and not, really, "let's fix your behavior" because the behavior is just because they're trying to get attention, or whatever.*

Likewise, his next goal is to help the boy gain patience and understanding to build tolerance of his sister's behavior.

> *I'm trying to get him to understand that a kid with ADHD doesn't have really great control over themselves. It's like, it's not like she's trying to be mean to you. So, maybe he would give her a little more space and they wouldn't be getting into fights all the time. But, that's like the whole, the next whole big thing.*

Ultimately, P3 believes that the boy is healthy and simply needs help learning how to cope and gain a healthy sense of control over his environment.

> *I really don't think there's anything wrong with this kid. Maybe, like dysthymic disorder because he gets a little depressed …it's not what I expected actually. I expected that I was going to fix kids. I didn't realize… whenever the parents come in and they say "Fix my son." Sorry. Usually, it's the parents. A lot of times it's the parents.*

Disconnection experience. P3 recalls losing a client after having developed a long term "*good*" relationship with "*a good alliance*."

> *He was thirteen. I saw him for about a year, a year and a half, and we had a major falling out and he refused to come back.*

He had originally worked with the boy because "*he would get into fights at school, he would punch people*." In addition, the boy had a complicated relationship with his father who "*was very domineering*."

> *He* [the boy] *was a Chassidishe kid … His father was very modern. His father had a trim beard and his father had a baseball cap, jeans, something like that, which is really weird for Boro Park* [Brooklyn city with large Chassidic population]. *Like, really weird. REALLY weird. You might as well have a zebra with a shtreimel* [Chassideshe head covering]. *I mean you know you just don't see that in Boro Park.*

P3 again perceived that parenting would be a central variable in the boy's violent behavior.

> *He's afraid of his father, I think. His father is just very angry and loud. The father intimidated me too and he's not my father. The parents didn't really know how to parent. The parents didn't really want to learn how to parent, they just wanted to like be yotze zein* [fulfill their obligation] *by, you know, having the kid go to therapy.*

After a year the boy's behavior had improved somewhat but violent behavior persisted intermittently.

> *Then there were just a couple of weeks in a row where he was talking about this most ridiculous behavior … I think the straw was just him talking about getting into a fist fight at school.*

P3 recalled gaining an insight into the boy's lack of progress in therapy – an insight that he took personally.

> *The problem was that I started realizing the alliance was only good because I wasn't pushing him just like no one else was pushing him. So when I started, when I had this one moment where it was just like "enough"* [exasperated voice].

P3 described feeling incredibly insecure professionally in the moment.

> *I felt very powerless and I hate feeling powerless. I felt like I was totally not doing anything. I honestly felt bad about billing the insurance for it.*

P3 admitted to losing his patience and professionalism.

> *I was like "listen, enough!" Like, "Do you want to change? Do you want to be here? Do you like, do you want to take part in this? Do you want to get better? Like this is a total waste of time for both of us. Like if you really want to get into fights in school, if that's what you want to do I can't stop you from doing that if that's what you want to do." You know, like, therapy doesn't work if somebody's like "I want to shoot people"* [said in a funny voice]. *It doesn't work!*

Upon reflection, he understands that unchecked frustration had been building for months. In the moment, all he wanted was to be freed of the professional frustration.

> *What led up to that was probably weeks of like counter-transferential aggravation that I probably should have worked out with a supervisor … it kind of crept up on me and I got really annoyed. I mean, I know this isn't probably the best example of great therapist's behavior, but, it was like, it was just like, how many weeks can we talk about the same thing over and over again? … I just couldn't take it.*

Much to his chagrin and frustration, despite significant efforts to reconcile with the boy "*he just never came back."*

I felt bad… I called the father [who said] *he really doesn't want to come back … I'm like, "Do you want referrals or anything?" I had been working with him for a year and a half, you know, I said, "Can we work it out? Can we have a conference?" "No," he says, "he refuses to come." Come on. He's thirteen. Pick him up and bring him. He refuses to come* [said in an astonished voice].

In addition to professional regret, P3 personally felt sad at the loss of the relationship and disheartened that the boy refused to give him another chance.

That was very disappointing because we had a good alliance and it just like, I don't know… It was upsetting to me how it ended.

The role of religion. P3 perceives a growing problem of poor parenting being forgiven in the name of religiosity.

I think a big, big problem in the frum community, this is really big problem, is that parents are "so frum" quote end quote that they ignore the kids. Fathers, specifically, fathers, I see it a lot. Like, they got all their chavrusas [learning partners]. *They go to the Kollel. They wouldn't skip out on that an iota and kids they have no relationship. It's a nightmare.*

He was warned about the pernicious impact of emotional neglect by his own Rabbi.

My Rav, who is not even a therapist, said the most amazing thing that, in his opinion, not hugging and kissing your children is more abusive than hitting them. Because at least hitting them there is a connection, you know, but not hugging and kissing them…

He blames the problem partly on naive parenting beliefs.

It's a big problem and fathers need to close their sefer [book] *and mechanech* [parent] *their kids. You can't – I mean my kids go to bed at 7:30. I have the whole night to learn. You know, I don't have to be ignoring them learning Chumash* [Bible consisting of "Five books of Moses"]. *You know, that doesn't help anything.*

P3 has little sympathy for parents who short-cut parenting responsibilities.

And then they're like, "oh my G-d, why are my kids "frye" [non-Orthodox Jewish]? *Like, what happened? All I do is learn* [Torah]*." And I'm like, "YEAH* [said tone denoting something exceedingly obvious], *THERE YOU GO!" I'm not saying don't learn. I mean, G-d, there's twenty four hours in a day. There's time to learn … It's such a problem.*

P3 can barely mask his exasperation with the insufficient preparation given to young men for parental responsibilities.

They don't teach you in Yeshiva about parenting … They teach you in Yeshiva – learn. You take Chosson classes [marriage preparation course] *for like three days … Or about Shalom Bayis* [domestic harmony]*. They teach you Hilchos Niddah* [laws of separation during menstruation]*, they teach you how to do the "calendar"* [calculating times of separation] *and they say* [said in a mocking "saintly" voice] *"Be nice to your wife. You should be nice to your wife, she's an "aishes chayil"* [women of valor]*. Okay* [said abruptly] *hatzlacha* [much success]*!" Meanwhile, you spend a year learning Gemara Pesachim* [Tractate of Talmud], *Rashi, Tosafos,* [Talmud commentators] *everything but when it comes to the family and children, it's like, okay, be nice to your wife!*

P3 expresses deep frustration with parents he perceives as self-righteous; when he encounters them he assumes parental neglect will be a target in therapy.

> *It's a big problem in the frum community and it's important for therapists to try to like find that "the super frum father" that's so frum. Yea, it's terrible.*

Participant 4.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 4 (P4) is a male therapist in his fifties with several decades experience working with Orthodox Jewish at-risk youth. P4 carries an authoritative, rabbinical demeanor. His brilliance and intellectual power was evident from the start. His clinical analyses and interpretations poured out crisply, linearly, and in an overwhelmingly logical presentation. Yet, his razor sharp wit was softened by a playful sense of humor. His non-judgmental style was expressed intellectually and under no uncertain terms – in the sense that a plumber doesn't blame a pipe for plugging up (e.g., "you innocently reacted to XYZ … it doesn't reflect anything about you!"). He struck me as a therapist who had seen it all and several times over; little at this point could shock him. I sensed he could tell me painful truths without making me defensive – it would be the truth as he sees it and you would find it silly to argue, on principle, because he also provided a path toward healing. I sensed that people were either awed by him or were dismissive of him and that neither reaction motivated him or worried him much. For my part, I experienced awe.

Disconnection experience.[26] P4 was first called by a concerned relative asking if he would meet with the parents of a teenage boy. During his meeting with the parents he

[26] Only a disconnect experience was provided.

quickly surmised that the parents were most concerned about the boy's sudden disinterest in religious observance.

> *They were quite distraught… because he was like the perfect child … The father was a Hebrew teacher and the boy was the father's big hope, he was gonna become a big Rabbi and, you know, everything was gonna be wonderful and suddenly he decided he doesn't wanna be religious.*

He detected family conflict from the start.

> *The father came across as the most caring, like he said "No, if anything I did* [was] *wrong tell me… we have a very loving, warm family." I got vibes from the mother that she didn't think that's what it was. She tried to say something once or twice - he gave her a look and she was quiet.*

From the moment he met the boy, P4 sensed the core problem was relational.

> *I met the young man and he came in very reluctantly, mainly because he didn't like to displease his parents… Clinically, I mean the problem, besides for the fact that he does or doesn't wanna be religious, he clearly, he's quite depressed and anxious because he feels terrible about displeasing his parents.*

P4 shared his observation – that the boy seemed reluctant to meet him – with the youth, who confessed that he distrusted P4.

> *The thing that bothered him is that he thought for sure my agenda would be that he should become frum … he'd like to come see me as a therapist but not if I have that agenda.*

P4 was unsurprised by the accusation.

> *What often happens when they come in, like they are reluctant especially he, this is very common especially with a kid who is at risk or breaking away from the family's way of life … they usually come in because their parents are the one who is pressuring them to come so I'm identified with them and they think I'm here for that reason.*

He did his best to reassure the boy that he was most concerned about the boy's mental health. With respect to religion, he shared his concern about the boy's extreme *change* in religious observance, regardless of actual level of observance.

> *I said "Would you believe me if I told you that that's really not my agenda. I just want you to be a happy person and doing things you wanna do?" … So he says "Well what's the problem? The whole problem seems to be that I'm not, that I don't wanna be religious." … I said "To me, it seems to me that usually when people have a situation where they change, whatever it is, you know, becoming less religious, more religious, it's usually because of a conflict with the parents so I think, to me, that's a big issue, conflict and how it affected you."*

While the boy acknowledged feeling guilty about displeasing his parents, he denied deeper conflict. Given his observations with the boy's parents and experience with similar cases in the past, P4 chose to pursue the issue further.

> *Sometimes you get the feeling that he has all the symptoms of somebody who had terrible conflict with the parents and they swore to you they were the perfect child, but then it turns out there was an older brother, older sister who had terrible warfare with the parents and it's like conflict by-proxy.*

The boy acknowledged sibling conflict with his parents, giving P4 confidence that parental conflict remained a strong possibility.

> *I asked him and it turned out yes that there was a lot of conflict. There was an older sister who also was at risk … the lesson he learns, of course he's getting along well with the parents because he's doing everything exactly the way they want!*

Regardless of this confirmation, P4 understood that he had failed to earn the boy's trust.

> *He was kind of very turned off with the idea … as if I'm saying that wanting to be not frum means you have a psychological problem.*

P4 attempted again to earn trust by underscoring a sociological, not religious, perspective on religious behavior.

> *I told him no that's not the issue it works the other way too, if somebody's parents are not frum and they become frum, good chances, it's lav davka* [not for sure], *obviously there could be exceptions. But very often if there was a warm nice family, people tend to go along the same route as the family. It's the usual thing. Usually what causes somebody to move to a different direction is because the connection isn't so smooth.*

Ultimately, he persisted with this approach because he has learned that many adolescents tend to blame themselves for external problems, especially parental ones.

> *I find very often that when you help them understand things, like how things work, like why you have this issue, how it's connected … it opens your eyes and you really get interested because they're usually very self-critical – just assume they're bad and lazy and all kinds of other things.*

Yet, P4 surmised the impact of the approach was undermined by culturally-mandated denial.

> *Very often they are reluctant to tell you. They don't like talking about their parents they feel guilty - especially religious kids, kibud av v'eim* [honor your father and mother] … *If he would have been more open about the fact that his father is abusive it would have been more clear, you know? I could associate the religion with the father or whatever his way of life is, it's like if your father was a big sports fan and he drove you and he abused you, you would probably hate sports too! Religion just happens to be the currency that's most prevalent at home.*

P4 perceived the boy remained distrustful, yet polite. He sensed that the boy likely reacted the same way to his parents, and concluded that transference was taking place.

> *He was kind of skeptical. I guess he didn't believe me so much … He was very civil and polite … which I guess is because he's a good boy, that's his modus operandi, and he told me, he told me specifically that he, you know, the main problem he has is offending—is hurting the parent's feelings.*

Often, in P4's experience, adolescents present ambivalently to provide for themselves a sense of self-control (given that the meeting is mandated outside of the boy's volition). As such, he gave him an open invitation to come back, if the boy chose to independently.

> *Kids who just in general are disgruntled and unhappy and they come in because the Rebbe sent them or somebody, sometimes they were sort of really blackmailed to come in. I always tell them, "I'll only see [you] like once against your will.*

> *After that if I can't convince you it's worth coming in then I'm not gonna see you again."*

The boy gave permission for P4 to continue a dialogue with his parents. This acquiescence was not interpreted as being necessarily positive; he was unsure whether the boy would return.

> *I suspected I had gotten through to him a little bit … I was hoping I got through to him but … I thought I would never see him again.*

Moreover, a second barrier emerged.

> *It turns out that he's actually seeing a therapist which, the parents hadn't known before … he's actually not so pleased with her. I said, "Ok, if you decide you wanna stop seeing her and wanna see me then you definitely have to talk to her first."*

In the following week, P4 made a surprising discovery and confirmation.

> *A strange turn of events happened, his name … somehow jogged my memory. I looked at my files I see I once saw an older sister of his , for two-three times he didn't tell his parents … turned out he told me the parents were very abusive especially the father.*

The mother came to the next session without the father, confirming P4's suspicions. He next met the father alone, deftly extracting information.

> *I said first of all your son did mention that you yelled a lot at his mother and that was very upsetting at him … he says "Ok, efshar* [possibly true]*." I said, "He* [the boy] *said you also used to call him a shmata* [rag]*" … "ok, I don't really remember" he tells me.*

> *I figured I have to get him off the hook to be honest without putting him on the spot so I said (and I grouped us together), "In our generation people didn't really know that kids are so sensitive and you know you have to be careful how you talk to them, you know, so it could be taka* [actually] *you don't remember because you know why would you remember such a thing? I think today people are, maybe the generations have changed you know whatever. So that he liked! Then he admitted that with his older daughter there were issues. I said it could have had a big effect on him even though with him everything went well. And then he was telling me how great this kid was doing "Oh, he was taka* [actually] *behaved and learning and it was our dream he's gonna become a dayan* [judge]*." … So, that could be very problematic if he's living to please, you know, cause … he couldn't disappoint anybody. So I said that could affect him a lot because he wasn't able to be open. So that he chapped ha'nah* [received pleasure] *because now it could partly be his wife's fault! So he went on roll "yeah, sure, She put pressure on him, yeah taka* [for sure]*!"*

P4's intention was more than assessment, he wanted to gain support from the father in the event that the boy would decide on his own to continue therapy.

> *Even the most abusive parents want their kids to be better - they'd give up their life in a moment for their kids … They are acting out subconsciously and doing things and usually have their own issues.*

In this case, the father seemed to support therapy.

> *The father said "You know he's* [the boy] *not really happy with the other therapist." So I told him "In principle, I don't usually agree to see at the same time but I think here I'm not really sure he wants to continue … so maybe I can make an exception for a few times and meet with him." So he called me now to make an appointment.*

P4 plans on continuing the same approach he used in the first session, emphasizing family dynamics and his openness to the boy's personal choices regarding religion.

> *I try to win them over by things that make sense. I say "Look you know you have had these experiences, it's not surprising that you have this issue, you know? If this, if being off the derech works for you, fine … for most people it's very traumatic for them to completely* [leave]."

That being said, he does not plan to push the boy regarding conflict with his parents.

> *Many of them have strong feelings about being controlled, about being told what to do and pleasing the rest of the world … If you don't let them eventually* [make their own decisions] *they'll demand more and more. In other words they'll need to do bigger things to make the point that they're in control.*

Ultimately, P4's goal is to help the boy establish a healthy relationship with his parents, and if that proves impossible, to help the child cope with the situation in a personally healthy way.

> *If it works sometimes, the kids will say "So why are you talking to me why aren't you talking to my parents," I say it's a very fair question - sometimes I try to send the parents to see, you know, a family therapist to help them, I say, "Because they*

don't want to come. I guess I can talk to you if you want. I'll try to help you how to deal with this situation."

The role of religion. In general, P4 believes that loss of religious observance is a symptom of relational problems with parents.

There has to be a reason, if there's a decent relationship and you give the kid a reasonable amount of freedom and they have a certain sense of self, why would they go off the derech? … So I say to somebody, "You know, you just never had the opportunity to just do your own thing. So you've had to take dramatic drastic steps to do your own thing." I said, "Is this what you wanna do? Fine, fine. I just want to help you understand like what happened … the way I see it that there's some meaning to all of this."

The problem is compounded by cultural factors.

Traditionally children are scared to tell things to their parents because they are afraid they will get punished or yelled at or rejected but very often they are afraid to hurt the parents' feelings … especially in the Jewish Community you know growing up and you have to bring nachas [pride] *to your parents – that's like the main goal in life… It often shuts down their ability to communicate with their parents, ultimately.*

P4 is dismayed that some Rabbis continue to downplay relational problems when considering struggles with religious observance.

I once told this to a Rebbe, he said "How do you know it was a parent maybe it was a yetzer hara [evil inclination]*, tyvas* [desires]*, mysas* [actions]*?" I asked him "Do you give shmuessem* [religious seminars] *to the bochrim* [yeshiva students]

sometime?" "Yeah." I said, "How many times have you given the bochrim [students] *the schmooze … you think it's so much fun? Those kids* [who are off the derech], *those people are all miserable, it's terrible," I said, "You gave them that schmooze?" "Yeah" …* [I said]*"You actually don't believe it, because you're telling me the opposite, meaning you're making that stuff up, you're lying to your students* [because] *you're saying the stuff out there is beautiful and that's why they go off the derech!"*

P4 believes that adolescents blame religion because it is seen as being more important to their parents than the child.

I think usually the problem is with a lot of these kids that people are so focused on their behaviors that nobody really talks about their feelings, the fact that they are miserable and unhappy.

As such, ultimate healing comes when the child feels that he/she is the most important thing, even more important than religious compliance.

So we have to show, I even tell that to parents you have to show your kid that you are more concerned about the fact that he is miserable rather than the fact that he is not behaving – you actually might get somewhere!

Participant 5.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 5 (P5) is a female clinical social worker in her early thirties with approximately 10 years of experience working with at-risk youth. P5 was friendly, engaging, and she interacted with an openness which was refreshing. She spoke assertively and articulately, naturally making the interaction fun and light. She also had a sincere accepting presence, which

portrayed a realistic view on life and people. I felt comfortable, if need be, to disclose personal information because I sensed she perceived the larger picture of things; it seems so unlikely that she would judge critically or harshly. Above all else, she did not seem to take "things so seriously," being more than happy to laugh about life and, as such, little seemed to faze her. As an at-risk youth, I would trust her, feel accepted, and would be willing to talk about difficult topics if it meant we could schmooze along the way.

Connection experience I. P5 works predominantly with female at-risk youth. In her experience, if youth attend an assessment, no matter how resistant they present, they are tacitly acknowledging that they *really want help deep down.*"

> *I find that once they're in here, they've already taken that step, agreed to come, then it's pretty rare that they'll just totally brush you off. I think it's the step before, where can you even get them to come into the office.*

P5 recalled one of her first assessments in which she met with a 16 year-old girl who "*was 'skyping' and doing inappropriate things with boys that she did not know … sexual stuff over the internet with boys."* She sensed the girl was scared and was minimizing the problem.

> *It wasn't a one-time thing and it didn't continue to be a one-time thing … she was really struggling … She was scared, you know, that she was going to be in serious trouble with the police. She was really scared … she felt very bullied by the school and just very picked on and very judged by everybody.*

P5 felt apprehension and pressure to successfully convince the girl to enter therapy.

Probably, a little bit of apprehension, probably a little bit of "I hope I can get through to her." … You know the parents are bringing their kid to you for help, right, and I hope that I'm going to be able to get this kid to want to go to therapy. … The kid has to be open to the referral or it doesn't work.

The girl presented with resistance, which P5 empathized with and has learned to expect.

Very guarded. You know, very, very guarded … Very resistant to therapy … I was thinking, this was typical. It's just what's to be expected when you're working with at-risk youth, right? They're hurting, they're struggling, usually they're feeling ostracized from the community, judged by everybody… just another person that's going to judge me, to tell me I'm messed up, you know? I think that doesn't scare me. That's what's expected. Our job is to break through that.

She appreciates that a part of the resistance was related to the coercion inherent in the meeting.

Their whole body language speaks resistance when they come in … because their parent is bringing them in or, you know, a Rabbi or teacher or something is bringing them into the office. They're not coming, very rarely, do they come in on their own volition.

In addition, she sensed a stigmatization toward mental illness and treatment.

Because they don't want someone to diagnose them and they don't want to be in therapy … They're going to be resistant, a lot of time they're resistant to therapy.

Despite the clear distrust, P5 felt confident that she would connect with the girl.

I mean every kid starts with "I don't trust anybody," that's what they tell me, "I don't trust anybody." And then they go on for the next hour to tell you their entire

> *life. I almost never had someone say, "I don't trust anybody." That's a common denominator to every kid that comes in here. But also a common denominator is that they go on to tell you their whole life story after they tell you they don't trust anybody* [laughing].

P5 systematically lowered the girl's resistance through a series of interactions. She first validated the girl's unhappiness with being forced into the assessment.

> *I start off, address the fact that they don't want to be here ... "I can tell that this is not something, this is not a place where you want to be" and* [that] *immediately already, right away, lowers down their guard.*

She also clarified her role, which she sensed further reduced the girl's resistance.

> *We do assessments and then we do referrals based on our assessments. I also often tell them that I am not going to be their therapist. That also immediately lowers down their resistance.*

Next, she asked the girl to give her a chance to prove that P5 was not a judgmental person.

> *I also tell them that ... I am very non-judgmental, nothing you're going to tell me is going to surprise me or make me say, "Oh, my goodness." ... I know you don't know me and I know you're not going to trust me immediately but, I'm telling you, hopefully, you will see over time that I am someone you can trust ... and that I hope that is something that will come out in this session together.*

In addition to trying to assure the girl that she was trustworthy, she prepared the girl for possible indications to the opposite.

> *I also tell them I'm going to be VERY honest with them … throughout the whole process I'm always going to be open and honest with you and never do anything behind your back and I really stick to that. The kids see that I really do stick to that … If I'm going to talk to your parents, I'm going to tell you I'm going to talk to their parents. I'm not going to do any of this behind their backs. Obviously, if you're in danger, if you're going to hurt yourself or you know, if you're going to hurt someone else I don't have a choice, but to tell them. I stipulate that for them immediately.*

Once P5 sensed that the girl felt more comfortable, she attempted to demonstrate her trustworthiness by sharing her conversation with her parents and being open to the girl's own perspective.

> *Her guard went down. Her guard went down … then I ask them why they're there … "tell me why you're here? Yeah, your parents have called me already and I've talked to them. I have somewhat of an idea." I call it like it is from the beginning, I say, "I want to hear it from your perspective, why are you here?"*

As she expected, the girl readily shared her struggles in detail.

> *It was probably one of my longest assessments. It ended up probably going on for close to two hours … she talked about everything from this specific issue and how she got into this specific issue and how she's so unhappy in school, how she feels different from her family and she ended up going into detail about everything where she is struggling in all areas of her life.*

P5 felt hopeful, especially given that the girl's parents intervened before the girl's risk behavior could escalate.

Even though it sounds like her behaviors were a little bit escalated, they weren't so escalated. This really was her first display of at-risk behavior. And the parents really stepped in pretty fast … I think because they intervened much earlier, rather than later, this girl really was saved from going down a really bad path … Not to say, that it's hopeless if you intervened too late, it's not, but the key is to intervene at the first red flag because there's so much to be done at that stage.

At the end of the assessment, P5 sensed that the girl felt connected to her.

I knew it went well. I think you have a very good, you know, you can tell if a kid connects, doesn't connect, trust, doesn't trust, like I knew the meeting went well … Her guard went down in the assessment and she connected with me in the assessment. I was just hoping that we could get her, I was hoping that we could get her to help, you know?

P5 was surprised by how quickly the girl connected to her to the point that she denied a need for therapy yet wanted to continue to meet with P5.

She was willing to come back and talk to me again but she wasn't willing to go to therapy … It's amazing, it's amazing what like, if you do it right, what those 45 minutes, an hour, hour and a half are able to do, you know … Definitely a lot more than once we have kids who are willing to come back again here, right, but they're not willing to go to the, go to the therapy.

Ironically, her success building trust undermined her goal to convince the girl to accept a referral for therapy as the girl wanted P5 to be her therapist.

They found someone they trust, right, and they just, they want to stick with that. They don't want to start again, you know? They want you to be the therapist. You

have parents begging. [But] *that's not what we do. That's not what we do.* [They retort] *Well, don't you see privately? Yeah, but I don't refer to myself* [laughing]!

While P5 did not act as a therapist she continued meeting with the girl to convince her to go to therapy.

If we see that the kids are resistant, we will work with them more than once … It took a bunch of times with this girl … because it took her a while, you know, because it took her a while to get therapy, I was just playing the role of case manager. So she would come, meet me and talk and really build the relationship through getting her to go to therapy. Eventually, she did agree to go to therapy.

P5 admitted that during the initial assessment, she had difficulties connecting with the girl and these subsequent meetings helped her understand the girl better.

I didn't catch a depth to her … she came across very shallow in the beginning … But, it wasn't a shallowness … because she has difficulty expressing her emotions and her thoughts … We're on a deeper level now … It took us a while to get there.

P5 was more than happy to continue to act as an unofficial case manager even when therapy was terminated.

Even when the therapy was over the family would touch base when something came up. The family would touch base, the daughter, she would call, you know, we developed a relationship through it. She's doing great… She calls me from time to time, but not in an unhealthy way, you know, just like, just for guidance, just as a check-in.

Upon reflection, the experience taught her that youth, despite the resistance, really do yearn to connect.

> *I think because she was one of the first* [assessments], *what stood out for me was the ease, the ease that it took to break down that wall of resistance. Because, I mean, now I don't get scared about it, because I know how easy it is to break down, but I think, because she was one of the first, I was like, wow!*

Above all else, she believes that youth are willing to take risks to trust if they detect sincerity.

> *As soon as you show these kids that you care and I really believe strongly that you can't fake that. If you don't care or if you really are a judgmental person, you can't get through to these kids, you really have to be, you have to be sincere, you have to be true, you have to really, you can't just say I'm not judgmental. That's not going to work … you have to demonstrate it.*

In particular, she thinks youth respond to a sincere concern for their welfare, regardless of style.

> *Especially for the kids who are struggling who never felt cared for … through all my experiences, it doesn't matter, you got to be sincere, you got to really care. They don't care if you're out going, they don't care if you're quiet, they don't care if you're really cool or if you're really nerdy. They don't. They see this person really has their best interest in mind. And they're really just a sincere person that really cares that they should do well.*

P5 learned this lesson when she accepted her current position, leaving another agency and several close relationships with at-risk youth.

> *I had this guilt, like "Oh no, I'm leaving these kids who connected with me." I felt really bad about it and I talked to my supervisor and she said, "Kids are*

narcissistic. They need to know that their needs are going to be met, that's what they need to know"… So, if they see that you are sincere and that you really do care, you're saying I'm going to make sure that you get taken care of, I'm going to make sure your needs are going to be met and that's a very comforting feeling when you feel out of control.

P5 feels proud about her work with the girl and continues to be amazed by the willingness of youth to risk trust.

I remember like, trying to figure out how, you know, how are you going to, these girls are all coming in the first day, how are you going to connect to each of these girls … I think what stood out to me with this particular case is the ease that it took to break down this kid's wall … Today, she still checks in, years later, you know, still checks in.

Connection experience II. P5 recalled conducting an assessment with a 19 year-old teenage girl brought in by her mother "*concerned about her being depressed and being anxious … she had very poor decision making, would put herself in very risky situations*." P5 described the girl as apathetic.

Just totally apathetic, I mean, her body language, it was so pronounced, her arms were crossed, she was like slouched on the couch, barely sitting up, right, you know, hair like dyed but kind of the original color coming out, ripped jeans, so apathetic and like, just looked down in every sort of way.

The girl's apathy seemed to override the resistance P5 expected to encounter.

It was interesting, it wasn't as much that this girl was guarded … she didn't say the lines "I don't trust people," just more like so down and so apathetic, she was

just like "whatever, you want to ask me questions, ask me questions, you know, I don't care … Like do what you want, I don't care to be here, but I'm here." That was, that was the attitude.

P5 felt energized and curious in the face of the challenge to break through the girl's apathy.

It didn't faze me. I enjoy the challenge of getting through to kids, you know? I mean …I was excited, not excited, but I was interested to see what's behind this kid … Like what's going on with this girl?

She decided to take a different route than she takes with "typical" resistant clients by attempting to increase the girl's internal motivation to change.

I think I talked to her a lot about "Are you happy where you are?" "No, definitely not happy where I am." "Well, you know, that's why I'm here, to me you don't look happy, I'm going to be totally honest with you, you look like," – I pointed out to her how she looked to me – "you're slouched … you can't even crack a smile, you don't look like you're in a good place. I'm sure it can't be fun to be there."

She attempted to develop trust and continue to encourage the girl to take ownership of the challenge to overcome her struggles.

My only goal is to, you know, work with you to get to a better place. I'm not, I can't force you, you're nineteen, you're going to make your own decisions.

P5 sensed that she finally connected by breaking the girl's expectations of her being judgmental.

I used humor a lot with her. She told me some stories that she did really, I mean really poor decision making … Walking, like three o'clock in the morning in bad

neighborhoods by herself. She'd walk to the beach at five. Sleep at the beach by herself. You know, this young, pretty girl. You know, going to different houses ... like having no idea who they are, a man threatened her once and she was like laughing at it. Like, she was so not fazed by things … It was kind of bad that I was laughing, you know we joked together, and that, I think that lightened her up a teeny bit. You know?

Laughing about misbehavior gave P5 license to encourage reflection on the girl's decision making without being perceived as judgmental.

She would tell her own stories and we would find the humor in her stories while, at the same time, pointing out the seriousness of what that decision could have led to … She was responding well.

While the girl participated in the assessment, P5 figured out that the answers were misleading, especially regarding substance use.

She was answering questions, but she wasn't being totally truthful, like that came out right away when we went into the substance abuse piece … she wasn't a liar but she didn't want to go into it if she didn't need to go into it … "No, I don't have an issue with it [substance abuse]*." "So, I'm like, okay I'm just going to ask you a little more specific questions. You know. Do you drink? "Yeah." How often? "You know, I don't know." So, every day? "Yea, sometimes." Like, if you were to ask a general question it would seem that she didn't have trouble at all with substance abuse but as you got more specific, you know, so, "Is that all you do?" "Maybe, I smoke pot." Okay, have you ever done "coke?" "Well, yeah."*

Given the great lengths it took to convince the girl to participate in the assessment and to collect accurate information, P5 was exasperated when the parent interrupted the assessment midway through.

> *So, in the middle of getting to the crux of that first assessment, the mother said, "She's got to go to another appointment … I was frustrated with the parent because this is a priority a little bit and your kid's really struggling and we're like, it took a lot, it took a lot of getting, just to get past the apathy, and you know, to get her to start getting involved in a conversation.*

While the mother agreed, several months passed before the next appointment was scheduled. So much time had passed that P5 felt like she had to start over building trust and contending with the apathy as if meeting the girl for the first time.

> *But it was starting all over again with her, from the beginning. She was even in a little worse place because she continued with this behavior and she continued hanging out and continued partying and continued with her depression, and her anxiety, and so it was another initial contact I felt like.*

P5 prepared the girl that she would have to start the assessment from the beginning.

> *I know we already met, and we already talked and, you know I really appreciated how open you were and how honest you were with me, but, like, I don't think we should start where we left off because it's been a few months. Things probably could have changed for the better or for the worse, so let's like start, you know, let's start. I hope it's not too annoying. Let's start from the beginning and things had definitely changed. You know.*

As P5 feared, the girl was deeper in crisis.

The apathy was still there, in the beginning. Probably even more so because the substance abuse had increased … The substances she was using, the frequency she was using, some of her, you know her depression had gotten worse and the anxiety had gotten worse … I just felt that she was in a worse place.

P5 felt deep empathy for the girl's misery and the complete lack of purpose in her life.

I felt bad for her … I really sincerely really felt really bad. She's in such a bad place, I mean she wasn't suicidal, the lacking motivation to do anything with her life … Sometimes she'll think life isn't worth living, but she'd never really think of acting on that … as far as she could remember she wasn't motivated, "I really can't go back and remember a time that I was ever motivated."

She was not surprised that the girl readily agreed that therapy may be helpful.

A lot of times kids are so unhappy ... if you're using substances, if you have a mental illness, if you have anxiety, depression, you know what I'm saying, anything like that, you're not feeling good, you don't want to be there, sometimes it takes all your strength to get out of that, but, it's like, you know, what I try to show them that like they're in, they're in a black hole, they don't have to live in a black hole. You know, life has a lot more to offer than that little black hole and that, you know, it may seem impossible right now to get out of that. I've seen girls that have been there and have gotten out of it. Just they deserve more than that, they deserve more happiness than that, I think they can all relate to that, to not wanting to be there … .so they can see, wow, I really need to get out of this, you know.

While P5 was pleased that the girl was open to therapy, she understood that the challenge would be helping her to follow-up on the referral.

> *I said, "Honey, do you want me to call you with the referral, do you want me to call your Mom with the name? How do you want to do this?" "Just call my Mom. I probably won't follow up on it." She had some self-awareness to know that she wasn't in a place to follow up with it.*

P5 hopes for the best but as of the time of interview the girl has continued to go without therapy.

> *I did follow up with the Mom to see if she followed up with the referral and the Mom told me they were just in the process of changing insurances … but they were definitely planning to follow up with the referral. So, I don't know…*

The role of religion. P5 often needs to educate parents to help them differentiate clinical issues that warrant referral to therapy from developmentally appropriate behavior that conflicts with religiously-mandated inappropriate behavior.

> *If I have a Bais Yaakov girl* [i.e., girl that attends an Ultra-Orthodox school] *that's just talking to boys, okay, and I've had parents bring that in before. If I do an assessment and see that nothing else is going on, that's normal that they want to talk to boys. You know, when I explain to parents that this is a normal part of growing, they're a teenage girl, I understand it's not what we do … but we have to understand this falls within the normal realm of being a teenage girl. So, we have to think of appropriate outlets but, if they're really angry … then something's happened.*

As such, depending on their family background, they assess for the youth's relationship to religion as it may help understand other struggles in his or her life.

> *We do a little bit of an assessment – we ask them what their feelings are toward religion in general, what their feelings are toward religious people? Toward Rabbis? Do they have a connection with G-d or a Higher Power at all? – because it is a little bit of a red flag if you're coming from a family that, you know, you grew up with all these traditions and you hate them. It's just a red flag of "What's going on here," that the person is just moving so far away from what they've grown up with. You know, someone says "I hate Rabbis* [said in passionate, angry voice]*." They've been burnt.*

Although she expects that some degree of resolution of anger toward religion would likely be therapeutic, if a youth is actively in-crisis and clearly *off the derech*, she skips the religious components of the assessment all together.

> *If the kids are very off* [the derech], *I try not to address it at all, honestly. They've got so much else going on, it doesn't need to be addressed now … I think by most people in this field, that's always been the philosophy – first comes your mental health.*

She admits that on a personal level she hopes that youth will eventually return to the OJC but her goal is to help youth achieve psychological health.

> *If the religion comes afterward, then, of course, as a Jew I'll be very happy if that comes. But it's not, that's not our responsibility. Our responsibility at the time is getting the kids help. But, it's not… it is, it's hard not letting it play in… it is, it's very hard not letting it play in. You know, I have a kid who is so uninterested, you*

know, so far gone, of course as a person it hurts [yet] *my goal, I can't, my goal is first that they have to be in a mentally healthy place.*

She goes so far to question whether religion might be used as an anti-therapeutic substitute.

Religion could just be a replacement for your mental health issues. And if you're in a bad place, then it really could serve as a spiritual high and bring you to a better place, but you didn't fix your issues, you're just going to crumble and fall afterward. You know, so our number one thing is getting these kids healthy.

P5 recalled working with the parents of a girl who "*doesn't want to talk to anyone in the Orthodox world. Really, she's someone who left it and she doesn't want anything to do with it right now."*

I had one case, a girl was molested and she didn't want anything to do with the Orthodox community at all. So I worked with her parents … I referred her to a place to get therapy, she clearly needed the therapy, I referred her to a place that did not have an Orthodox worker for her to get therapy because that was our number one goal.

To help find an appropriate referral, she assesses for therapist preference, including therapist religion.

I'll ask them, "Do you see yourself being more comfortable with a male or female? What kind of personality do you feel that you need?" We got a pretty good idea of the people on our referral list, "Do you feel like you're going to need someone who is going to be "with it?" Do you feel that you need someone

who is very motherly or somebody tougher and then do you want to see someone frum or not frum, do you care, does it make a difference to you?

At the end of the day, however, she understands that despite her best efforts, practical realities often have the last word.

But, the truth is, you don't always get somebody the ideal referral because insurance issues and financial restraints and everything like that. Then you have to refer to agencies that offer a sliding scale. Then you don't get to pick necessarily who you're going to see.

Participant 6.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 6 (P6) is a male social worker in his thirties with ten years of experience working with at-risk youth. He was "relaxed," soft-spoken, and considerate. He naturally balanced an honest assertiveness with an empathic tone and projected a quiet wisdom. He had a "relaxed," non-judgmental persona and spoke with confidence without sounding preachy or full of himself. He seemed open to new experiences and outlooks, yet clearly anchored in Orthodox Jewish code of conduct. I was touched by his genuine desire to help me. Despite a busy schedule, he lingered after out meeting to share contacts information for other potential interviews. I imagine at-risk youth would talk with him mainly because that is what friends naturally do.

Connection experience. P6 described meeting a 16-year-old teenage boy when recruiting at-risk youth for an alternative high school that specializes with at-risk youth and included a mental health therapy component.

> *I had to convince kids that this school was going to be different … it's not going to be a school as you imagine, it's going to be different, while also telling them being up front with them that it's going to be therapeutic.*

Prior to meeting with the boy P6 was surprised by the boy's unique history.

> *He was a gang-banger, gang member, part of one of the most prominent gangs out there … He, as an aside, also comes from a leading Jewish family in the community.*

P6 felt good about the meeting from the start because he believed the program was a good match for the boy and the boy participated with his own questions.

> *Very upfront, very honest … I didn't try to sell him on something. I tried to show him the value in what we are trying to do and what he can get out of it …* [We were] *talking about why he's not in school, what's going on, so we had a direct purpose to why we were meeting, and he wanted to ask some questions about what the school was.*

He was instantly able to see the boy's "macho" demeanor as a front.

> *So, he was a "gang banger." So to me, like, he was very um, tough on the outside, trying to make believe that nothing bothered him, and stuff like that.*

Far from feeling threatened, P6 appreciated that the "front" was helpful to the boy and focused his attention away from the overt behavior to the boy hiding underneath the "front."

> *You can't totally rip down a defense. I mean because they're left with nothing. You can't do it. They need that … Even though he was kind of coming across as*

very guarded and very cold. I was also able to sense his warm side, kind of just focused on that, his warm side.

Accordingly, he matched the tone the boy projected by speaking assertively and directly about the school, thereby respecting the front to which the boy identified.

I was able to be very up front with him. I didn't have to walk on eggshells around him …we spoke about the program. We spoke about what it is that we do, you know very up front, very straightforward, very honest with him and at the end he was thinking, he was thinking about it.

Likewise, he asked candidly about the boy's gang membership, acknowledging something the boy personally valued greatly.

He kept referring to his colors because each gang has a color … They all have their unique colors … So he referred to "my colors, my colors, my colors", so, toward the end I asked him: "Hey, you say, you keep referring to your colors … So, he said: "Yeah, I'm a member of this gang and these are my colors."

P6 did not react negatively to the disclosure, nor did he make a requirement that the boy first terminate criminal activities prior to attending the school; rather, he made one request, which the boy found reasonable.

So I said, "Okay, that's what you're doing [chuckling]*, just, you can't wear your colors to the program. That's one thing, maybe other kids can wear a shirt that's that color, and I'm going to ask that you not wear that shirt." And he understood it and he was alright with that.*

Although the boy chose to attend the school, P6 is unclear what his primary motivations were for attending.

> *I think he was very interested in the idea of what we are doing … And, again, we weren't a treatment facility. We weren't a prison system, which are both things he's been tied to in the past. We were going to provide a program that was gonna allow him to take a look at himself … I think he was very interested in it, in the idea of what we are doing.*

When the boy disobeyed his request to not wear "his colors," P6 calmly addressed the communication of the dress choice, rather to its message of noncompliance.

> *I knew whenever he was in a bad place, he would show up in his colors. Then I was able to talk about it and say, "I see you're wearing your colors, what's going on?"* [Laughing].

The underlying motivation was typically a reaction to family dynamics which upset the boy.

> *His parents were divorced and it was like a messy situation, you know, involving parents who hated each other and stuff like that. Sometimes they would pit one against the other … that was really the basis* [of his wearing his colors], *being in the middle of his parents.*

On one occasion in which the boy wore "his colors," to school, the boy was angry and hostile and hinted at violence.

> *He came in with his colors one time and it was in the morning group* [where you discuss], *"what are your goals for the day and what are you going to do" and all that stuff. He kind of had this chip on his shoulder, and he made a comment about having a gun in his bag.*

P6 challenged him and was surprised when the boy acquiesced so quickly.

> *I said, "well, you know I have to search your bag now." And he's like, "Oh, the hell you do." I said "No, I need to search your bag, will you please give me your bag?" And, he ended up giving it to me which I was surprised. I thought I would have to ask him to leave for the day. He gave me his bag, and I looked through his bag … there wasn't a gun in there.*

While it seemed like the boy's claim was false, he remained perplexed because the boy was thereafter visibly shook and upset, countered by an increase of anger and disruption.

> *He couldn't show that he was really bothered by it, so he was this kind of passive-aggressive, like, "Don't worry, I'll remember this type of stuff." He would, you know, disrupt the group. He would make these sarcastic comments. That was typically how he did it.*

Months later he learned what motivated the boy's fear.

> *He had brought a gun … That day, he happened to have hid it in the bush but the fact that I would actually check the bag shook him a little bit … could have gotten caught … He liked what we were doing there and I think he wanted to be part of it.*

P6 sensed that the event was an initial turning point for the boy because he realized that the school was in fact a safe place.

> *It was almost like a little bit of a security, for him, but also for other people, that this was going to be a safe place. We're not letting guys do whatever they want. We're not letting things happen the way they are going to dictate … They are going to make a threat, they are going to say something* [and] *we're going to take it seriously and we're going to follow through with it.*

P6 believed that peer support, via a group therapy exercise, helped the boy instill a healthy sense of self.

> *We had him lay and each member of the group got up and gave a eulogy for him … That was very intense, very intense. And his reaction, you know, his reaction was, I'm surprised that people actually care about me … You can't feel good about yourself if you live under this false pretense that everybody doesn't like you. And that's how he felt. His parents are divorced, nobody likes me and all that stuff.*

He sensed that the school support group provided an alternative choice to his gang allegiance.

> *He's a perfect kid to get "sucked" into a gang, because* [of] *his family dynamics. He's a single child in a messed up divorce, didn't have any sense of brotherhood, you know, so he connected to this gang that accepted him, that brought him in.*

Appreciating that the boy was committed to resisting authority, he avoided confrontations, inviting, rather than instructing or commanding compliance with school policy.

> *He was outside smoking a cigarette, and I said "Fellas, you gotta go", and he said: "I have to go"* ["have" said with a confrontational tone]? *So, I said: "Well, I mean, I guess you don't have to go. I can't make you go, but I would strongly recommend and suggest you go." So he said, "Damn you! I hate when you speak to me like that!"*

P6 believes that people make the fundamental error of trying to control youth.

> *I'm not getting into a battle with him. I'm not going to physically pull him in and take him … It's hard when you're dealing with resistant teenagers. You can't get into these power struggles with them because you're going to lose … be honest with them. Be up front … Don't be confrontational … I spoke to four parents this morning and I said, "You can't control your kids, you can't control them."*

P6 understood that to heal the boy needed to re-define his relationship with his parents and decided to use group therapy to facilitate the process.

> *I knew I wanted to bring in one of his parents into the group to share, you know to do some chair work with them* [form of humanistic therapy / psychodrama tool]*… It was actually one of the most intense, emotionally intense, therapeutic experiences I've ever had was with him, resolving these issues.*

P6 gave the boy the choice to invite either parent and was surprised by his choice.

> *I thought that he would bring me his father. So, I was going to say "look, let's bring in your father," But, for some reason I said, "Who would you like to bring in?" and he said his mother and he brings in his mother.*

P6 surrounded the boy by his peers (i.e., fellow students) and the boy and his mother sat in the middle.

> *So I say to him, "Talk to your mother." And he just started crying. He's a big tough gang member, he's got tattoos, and he started crying. He started crying, and he had nothing to say … And I said, "just talk to her, she's right here." He tried to say, he tried to say, you know, he tried to say that he was sorry, but he couldn't get the words out.*

P6 was shocked by the boy's display of vulnerability and he found it challenging to remain professionally focused and not personally moved.

> *I was little surprised … this is a big, tough, macho, you know, "F-U," "F-off," "Go to hell" and more than that, stuff like that. He was there in front of everybody, crying like a baby. And once that guard went down, I mean, you just can feel very open and vulnerable with everybody. So, I had to make sure that I stayed as the facilitator of this and not be the one coming and giving the hugs, you know all that stuff. Just be the facilitator and take it to the next step, how far can we go and know where to stop.*

P6 facilitated by finishing the boy's sentence and encouraging honest communication.

> *So, I went over and helped him finish that sentence. And he said, "I love you" and all that stuff. So now, what ended up coming out in that conversation is that he always blamed his mother for the parents' divorce. And what he was doing there was apologizing for blaming his mother … He felt he was pinned between his father* [and mother] *and his father has a very strong personality and he* [the boy] *blamed her. He made up a little bit of a lie to everybody about his mother, which wasn't so true.*

P6 gives the boy credit for utilizing the opportunity take a risk and assert himself with his parents.

> *He has a phenomenal relationship with his mother and he has a very good relationship with his father, and he doesn't feel like he's pinned in between them anymore, and he's able to release himself of that, which I thought was very cool.*

P6 has developed a long term friendship with the boy and has remained a source of help over the years.

> *We're connected on facebook, and every once in a while, we call, text message. He called me, let's say, a year ago to try to help him get into some therapy again or something like that, where to go, who to go. So we looked into programs in* [name of state] *and hooked him up with different people there.*

P6 voiced a clear sense of pride over the boy's accomplishments and even continued struggles.

> *He's still struggling a bit with his behaviors and I think that's going to be something that he always – when you get yourself into a certain lifestyle it's hard to shake. But he's trying to earn an honest living and he's working toward connecting to a healthier society,* [a] *healthier culture than he was in the past.*

Disconnection experience. In general, P6 believes that assessments are problematic when the youth is not fully informed about the purpose of the assessment. In particular, the process is undermined when it seems like the parents are uninvolved in the process. He describes an example where there was "*kind of disconnect in the communication as to what was going to happen*." The only information he was provided by the parents was "*that he got kicked out of school*."

He sensed a likely disconnect immediately based on the youth's demeanor, which indicated that the youth was entering the assessment unprepared.

> *His demeanor was, you know, very warm, very friendly, very jolly … The father brought in the kid for an assessment and it was a little unclear as to why they*

were coming in. When I asked the kid "Why are you here?" He's like, "My father told me to come here." I said, "OK, but why?" He's like, "I don't know."

Upon reflection, the entire meeting seemed doomed from the start.

It was just very very disconnected, the communication, the entire process … I wasn't clear, the kid wasn't clear. The father had different expectations, you know, to come in and meet with me, fix it up.

P6 prefers the challenge of connecting to a youth who is resistant to the idea of therapy to youth who were brought to him under false or disguised pretenses.

Some people don't get help, that's fine, don't get help. It doesn't mean we can't check in, can't get together. But, when it's unclear as to why we're meeting, what's going on, who you are, "Why do I want to go with you, I'm part of NCSY [Orthodox Jewish Organization for Teens]. *I don't need you."*

P6 did his best to explain the situation and what they were going to do.

Your father wanted us to get together, and for me, for us to speak and try to see, how I could be helpful … so I went over my assessment just to kind of figure out and he opened up.

During the course of the assessment the boy mentioned involvement into a situation that seemed connected to one of his other clients.

I was asking if he every acted violently, if he's been aggressive or something like that. He, so he said, "Yeah, there was a time I was getting into a fight with this person." He was starting to tell the story and I was familiar with it.

P6 regrets that he momentarily forgot his role and asked a question more out of curiosity and less as a professional pursuit.

> *So this is where I probably shouldn't have asked this question. I said, "If you want to, like who was the person that you got into a fight with?" I was asking probably for my own analysis, what's going on in the streets, I was just trying to see if I would know who he was fighting with. I could try to find some sort of picture of who he is … Truth is, probably wasn't the better question to ask, because it wasn't necessary.*

While he regrets the question, the approach helps him with parents.

> *Sometimes parents will call me up about a kid and as I'm speaking to them … And they're like "No, my child doesn't have any bad friends" … I'll look the kid up on Facebook and see who his mutual friends are. And he's, and we have eighty friends in common.*
>
> He sensed that the question put the boy on the defensive.
>
> *So that probably put him a little bit, you know, maybe put a red flag on me … A little hesitant to like, who am I, what am I doing, why am I asking him that question? … He said, "I don't want to answer that."*

P6 concluded the assessment but felt that the boy, already caught off guard by the assessment, now distrusted him.

> *It didn't affect the assessment. But, certainly in terms of the follow up, in terms of being able to work with him.*

While he blames himself for "*the poor questioning*" he places the single mistake in the context of what he considers a larger problem – poor communication and lack of transparency.

> *Obviously things aren't going well, you just got kicked out of school. So, it was like kind of vague, let's just go and see, see and figure out, not being up front, that probably played more of an impact … As opposed to coming in* [with the understanding] *got kicked out of school, we're going to do an assessment, figure out what help you need next … what to do next to get you healthy.*

The "*poor questioning*" only sealed the deal.

> *I don't know if that one question affected the long term relationship … the poor question probably just helped.*

The role of religion. P6 has found it necessary to explain to other OJC members that his goal is not to increase religious observance.

> *People ask me about off the derech and kiruv and all this other stuff. I tell people all the time, I'm not in the business of making people frum. I don't care if they're keeping Shabbos, keeping Kosher, doing all that stuff.*

He acknowledges a personal concern but he considers it outside the scope of his professional role.

> *As a practicing, Orthodox Jew myself, part of me does care, but, in my professional capacity, that's not what – If someone needs a program, they need a program. And, if they need a treatment facility, they need a treatment facility. It's not about well, will they have kosher food there? Will they be able to put on tefillin there? That's not part, I mean, that's not part of the equation.*

He will, however, advocate, if treatment will be facilitated by addressing cultural considerations.

> *I have helped families, I have advocated to service facilities to allow, you know, kids to bring tefillin. Some programs don't let you bring tefillin because they view it as a risk factor for suicidal stuff. Leather straps to hang yourself with. I have worked with them to have them accommodate certain dietary, you know, abilities, but that was only after the fact. Like okay, we're going to go so now that you're going to go let's try and see if we can help.*

In an educational setting (e.g., alternative high school described above), he has used religious texts to encourage self-exploration, but not as a means to encourage religious observance.

> *There was some "Pirkei Avos"* [Book on Jewish ethics] *type discussions and that was always, it was more group therapy than it was learning … like the Mishna was said, it was spoken, it broke out into discussions of whatever that Mishna was talking about and how they felt how it tied into them, what it brings up in them, and why they hate it, and why is it that it's true, and why is it that it's not true, and stuff like that.*

High School Rabbi Professionals

Participant 7.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant seven (P7) is a high school Rabbi in his thirties who has taught at-risk teenage boys for over five years. He was late for our interview and coughed his way through most of it (as such, time permitted a telling of a *Connective Experience* but not a *Disconnect Experience).* He was clearly battling a head cold, or something worse, yet he managed to drag himself to work because "*I told you I would be here and I know you are here for a little bit of time*." Here

was someone who clearly put others first. He had a jovial smile and warm demeanor. He was naturally empathetic and expressed his concern and desire to be helpful with ease and I felt close with him instantly as if we had been friends for some time. Despite being similar in age, he put across a "favorite uncle" feel – loving, accepting, and willing to help and listen.

Connection experience. P7 described a typical first contact interaction with an apathetic youth. Originally, the boy was going to be a therapy client but when the boy was transferred to his school he became his school Rabbi (i.e., classroom teacher of religious and secular studies) instead. When they met at school for the first time, the boy presented with an aloof, generally uninterested demeanor. P7 described trying to engage the boy through several topics ranging from school to personal interests but the conversation remained one-sided.

> *Blunted affect… looked apathetic to the world, to anybody, to me, not very engaging at all… his responses were one word responses… The message that I took was, I'm really not interested in talking to you, so let's finish this conversation so I can get back to my iPod.*

In general, P7 has gotten used to being rebuffed, "*as that happens, often times with my experience with this population there is that response, or lack of response, where it's just really you know standoffish*."

Expected or not, P7 admitted that he nevertheless felt somewhat rejected and professionally insecure for a few moments.

> *I feel like backing off… it makes me feel uncomfortable, it makes me feel a little bit like unwanted and not knowing where to go, how do I get connected with these kids?*

That being said, P7 has learned that an initial introduction leaving him feeling blasé or rejected merely represents a rough start to what can quickly blossom into a relationship. In this case, the relationship "*is better, it's off and on, but much better.*"

> *It depends on the day, if he's in the mood of engaging or not, I think there are other variables that contribute to that, if he's tired, or it can be millions of things, but that's the experience in general. So some days he's very friendly and engage-able, and some days he's not.*

He remembers that even by the second interaction, "*he warmed up… and I saw a smile, and when I see a smile, that you know, reinforces it and I keep going and then the conversation sort of developed on its own*." He wondered whether the turnaround was related to being open to something he chose not to disclose during their first interaction.

> *That I was the therapist his father went to and he was going to come to therapy…I said to him, "You know I'm not a therapist here, I'm a Rabbi here, that's my role, I'm not going to be your therapist, there's no connection"… then once I asked him again "What are your interests?" and then he responded with whatever video games he liked, and I responded with an interest in his interest, and that perpetuated the conversation.*

Over the years P7 has learned not to take apathy personally. For example, in this case he learned that the boy was struggling with depression.

He doesn't take care of his hygiene, you know terrible sleep patterns, terrible… just very apathetic, you know, most of his life he's playing video games… his parents are divorced, he never talks to his mother, dad just got re-married, he doesn't like his step-mom. He basically just wants to play video games all day and that's it, nothing else, you know, on line, he voices that all the time.

In general, in P7's experience, apathy has become more and more a broad spectrum, life attitude and less targeted at him as a religious or authority figure.

The tide is changing actually. It's not really that same issue where you have a bunch of teachers who are borderline to actually abusive and the message given over to them is that they're terrible and they're going to hell and all these mistaken messages about Judaism…they really don't have that negative view… there's a lot of "yeah, me and G-d we're great… we're cool, we're boyz … I love him, he loves me, I just don't wanna do it [Orthodox Jewish religious practice]*"* [laughing]. *But there are a couple who have had traumatic experiences but it doesn't seem that that's really the case too much anymore.*

Despite intellectually appreciating mitigating factors that may explain apathy, he still feels moments of insecurity.

It's hard, it's very hard, it's frustrating. It tests my belief about my being adequacy vs. inadequate sometimes… I've realized that before and especially when it comes to the class there have been times when everybody is just not interested that also is frustrating, you know. The other question is "where do I go?" It's a little anxiety provoking like what do I do now?

P7 appreciates that working with apathy is a part of the job description and has learned to cope.

> *So some days, if everyone is tired or not in the mood, nothing's working, nothing at all* [laughing] … *I feel lousy, it only last a few minutes and then I try again the next day.*

The role of religion. When first meeting an at-risk youth, P7 avoids the topic of religion altogether.

> *Generally, I'm not the one who brings up, you know, specific observances that they may or may not do… I don't wanna have it about religion in the beginning, I just wanna get to know the person, for the person, who they are, and I think that's more important… once I get to know someone then, I'll feel more comfortable asking them* [about Orthodox Jewish religious observance].

Even at that point, P7 only gently questions, mostly to gauge a student's level of observance but not to encourage one way or another.

> *I'll ask a question here and there … if it comes up, you know, "You keep kosher?" or "sometimes keep kosher?" or "Shabbos? Is there anything you do on Shabbos?" But generally, I don't ask those kinds of questions …*

Instead, P7 views his rabbinical task is to provide a positive environment for at-risk youth to discuss *hashfafa* [Jewish worldview] to facilitate a youth to revisit his negative views about Judaism.

> *Mostly, my goal is to engage them in a discussion about yiddishkeit* [Judaism] *and what their views are to hopefully identify and challenge some distorted view of*

Judaism based on experiences they've had in other schools and to get them to think, to get them to re-think, to look at things in a different way.

While his personal style is to more indirectly encourage religious practice, he does note that the school where he teaches has recently done more to encourage religious observances than in the past.

I guess over the years we do it a little more than we used to, but that's because the times have changed … it used to be that most of the kids have had horrible relationships with their Rabbeim, now, that's not really so much the case anymore.

Regardless, P7 prefers to focus on developing a relationship independent from religion.

When it comes to trying to get them to observe or to do more mitzvos [commandments] *whatever it is, I don't do that … cuz… if I'm asking about religion, "Oh, you're just one of those Rabbis who ask about* [religion]*, that's all you care about"…* [but] *I'm interested in you, I just wanna know about you.*

Participant 8.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 8 (P8) is a Rabbi and co-principal of a high school (and trained as a clinical social worker) and has worked with at-risk teenage boys for approximately a decade. He had a fun, energetic presence and seemed ready to spring into activity any moment. This was not a prototypical authority figure. He seemed ready to do just about anything. He came across as more than simply non-judgmental – I sensed he could – not that he ever would – but that he could participate in at-risk behavior. That is, he had no airs or pretense. The sum result was a sincere integrity, which said clearly, "I wouldn't do it because I choose not

to… but I totally don't judge you because I totally get it." During the end of a break between classes he asked a boy to put away his iPod and return to class. The boy ignored him and P8 repeated his request sternly. Eventually the boy returned to class but he clearly demonstrated his unhappiness. Before *mincha* [afternoon prayers], I saw P8 hanging over the boy's shoulder, sharing one of the ear pieces and watching a video online together. They were both laughing, enthralled. They lingered well into the beginning portion of prayers. I could tell he would be fun "to hang out" with; you would for sure not end up where you planned.

Disconnection experience. In his role as a therapist, P8 met a teenage boy "*thrown out of school for drug use*." From the start, P8 perceived the boy as apathetic about the whole situation.

> *He barely faced me. He kind of, well, he certainly didn't make much eye contact he barely faced me … Basically, his parents were forcing him to come into session … it was totally against his will. So, try as I might to woo him and engage him he was basically giving me the cold shoulder* [saying], *"I'm not going to talk about anything."*

P8 did not take the apathy too seriously and did is best to engage the boy by empathizing with his plight.

> *I tried to go that route about how much it must stink to be brought into a therapist's office like who wants to be in therapy. You know, "I'm sure you got better things to do than be in therapy" … You know, went that whole route.*

P8 felt confident that his approach would increase engagement based on his past experience.

> *That's the type of thing … right off the bat, sometimes, is the make or break for a kid. When you're able to kind of align yourself with them, you know, they're being dragged in by their parents or they're being forced to go in whether it's a court mandate or something else … Like, how much that stinks and who wants to be here?*

The boy, however, relaxed only to a small degree.

> *There might have been a few moments when I actually thought I was engaging him ... He bought it only in so far as I could tell he was, I guess, appreciative of being understood.*

But overall the boy remained aloof and eventually turned combative.

> *He wasn't buying it, that's for sure. He was very, very clear about it. He was cursing at me, he was* [saying] *"I'm not gonna say a word, I'm not talking, I'm not interested" and that was that.*

P8 doubted much progress would be made the first session.

> *Obviously, he clearly came in with his mind made up, you know, I think that was the mitigating factor, I mean it was very clear from the moment he walked through the door, you know, it was in his body language, it was in his verbal language … I think, it was a lost cause, you know, from the moment he walked through the door ... He just made it very clear beginning to end.*

P8 acknowledges feeling a small sense of rejection but it registers as small compared to when he started working with at-risk youth.

> *I think I'm beyond the point of feeling rejected… you can't say entirely, I don't think anyone is. I think certainly earlier on in my profession certainly there was a*

> *great feeling of rejection when you couldn't* [connect], *you know. At this point, like, you have been there enough times you get a feel, you know, about the population enough not to take it personally.*

Nevertheless, he does continue to experience professional doubt when youth refuse to engage him.

> *I guess there is still a certain sense of not necessarily rejection from him maybe questioning your own self, your own practice and your own ability like, wow, I wasn't able to break him (and obviously take it with a grain of salt, I don't MEAN break him but kind of like get through).*

P8 found a rare opportunity at a second chance, meeting the boy in the role of a school co-principal. The boy again presented aloof and antagonistic.

> *The interesting part to the story is, about a month later, he came to interview at our high school … and he kind of had the same attitude.*

P8 felt insecure about the last interaction and allowed his partner to take the lead during the intake interview.

> *This case I let him do much of the talking, but already going into it I knew we had this negative experience and he's not going to be, you know, it was already like one strike against me and in the interview he had very much of the same attitude.*

While P8 may not feel rejected by the boy, on some level, he nevertheless took it personally, believing that the boy may have disliked him personally.

> *I don't know for sure and he didn't end up coming to our school … there was another school in Brooklyn that he chose to go to. I don't know, I don't think*

really that it had to do with necessarily our previous experience. There's a piece of me that still wonders…

Connection experience. In his role as a co-principal, P8 recalls an intake interview with a teenage boy "*circulated around the foster care system for a while, had a drug history, had a, has a legal history, a psychiatric history.*" He initially interpreted the boy's flat affect as apathetic, but not antagonistic.

He didn't come in with an attitude, it was more, not an attitude, it was just stand-offish … it was very dry, very, very, dry.

Based on the background knowledge of the case, he was expecting the boy to present with a guarded posture, "*Understandably,* [given] *his countless rejections*."

Certainly you can get the sense of a certain mistrust, a certain "feeling you out" which, I think that's one of the most common things in first meetings with this population … all of them there's a sense of distrust. *You know, most of them have been thrown out of Yeshivos … You're probably not the first, second or third interview they've been on … They've had multiple rejections, multiple people, you know just, multiple people on their black list.*

P8 recalled a strong sense that the boy was watching P8 closely for any hint of disingenuousness.

They're feeling you out. For sure, there's no question about they're trying to get a sense of you ... You get a sense of a certain distrust feeling you out, how are they going to react … [that] *I have a legal record, a drug history, you know, this kid was charged with stealing, he's on probation, how are you going to react to that?*

Especially since he's on a yeshiva interview, do you respond with "Stealing, really?"

He felt confident about his ability to pass such "a test" because he has faith in youth's ability to discern his empathy as genuine.

Empathy is not just a tool … It's not just an empathy like you can learn in school the right words … These kids certainly can see through it like, you know, they can see through it very easily.

P8 felt strongly that the school was a good match for the boy because he believed it would provide a much needed sense of security to the boy's chaotic life to date. He directed conversations to highlight,

The safety of our program, the warmth of our program, you know because this is a kid coming in with his history … All those things you know he needs to hear and there was a certain confidence level.

P8 never expects to leave interview intakes with a sense of certainty that a strong connection was developed, given the nature of the meeting. Nevertheless, in this case it was particularly difficult to gauge the boy's interest.

It's very hard with him in particular to draw the line between what's life experience and what's psychiatric … you know, whether it's personality, whether it's psychiatric … He does not emote very much. He's not the most expressive kid, in general … It's not something like you walked out of the room thinking we nailed [it], *this is a great!*

To this day, P8 is surprised with the third-party feedback he received that the boy responded positively during the intake and was excited to attend the school.

> *Just the feedback that we're getting, we're dealing with … his psychiatrist, there was just very positive feedback … that it felt like a good place … there was a sense that he did feel like – because that's one of the things he was really looking for was a safe place. A safe environment, I mean to this day, he doesn't emote very much. Whenever I speak to his psychiatrist, he's like "Oh my gosh, like you can't imagine, this is the one place he goes to and he feels, you know he loves it there." Now, you'd see this kid and you'd be like, "Great! Thanks for letting us know because we wouldn't know otherwise!"*

In general, in P8's experience, at-risk youth are looking for safe environments. He recalls another boy who presented particularly antagonistic.

> *What made it so amazing, that he left, he left the interview so angry but it was so great! A day or two later, he came back and we knew he would.*

The teenage boy, with a long history with drug abuse, "*was being incredibly disrespectful*" to his mother during the intake interview.

> *She was telling stories* [about] *what was going on at home and his friends he is hanging out with and he's like "What the F are talking about?" "What are you saying, such stupid things and you're so-" and he was so angry.*

P8 recalled that he and his partner exchanged a knowing look and they commenced to underscore the rules and expectations of the school.

> *We're going to be tough with this kid, we're going to be tough. He needs it … The list of demands for him to go to school, to come to school. We played it hard … All of our students have to make a commitment to being clean but, in his case it also meant seeing a therapist, and being drug testing regularly.*

The boy responded with an escalation of anger toward his mother.

> *He got really angry, he got really angry he didn't really express it so much toward us. I mean to his mother, he was, "I'm not interested, whatever." He ran out of the office.*

P8 recalled feeling confident that the boy might nonetheless be interested and comforted the mother.

> *I told the mother in the room after he ran out, he was upset and whatever, I told her, "Don't worry, you know, let it simmer for a little bit. I'm pretty confident this is not the last we are going to see of him." And I said, "Don't even bother talking to him in the car ride home about it, you know, if he brings it up, he brings it up. Just, let him let off some steam and simmer a little bit."*

P8 recalled feeling confident because he felt a connection develop during the interview which he credits to breaking expectations. That is, youth sense that new possibilities are possible when they are engaged on his level, a feat never before accomplished by Rabbis in his life.

> *We are Rabbis but we certainly carry ourselves a little bit differently than what a lot of these kids are expecting. And I think that also goes into establishing this alliance. Meaning, they're not necessarily used to Rabbis that will be able to speak their lingo … But they can understand me and hear me and be into my interests and you know, I like skateboarding and they'll talk to me about skateboarding … music that they listen to, movies that they watch showing interest in that, you know what kind of music do you listen to? Oh, you like hard rock, that's awesome!*

Two days later, P8 "*got an email from the mother that he's interested in coming in. He's ready to agree to your terms."* In P8's estimation, at-risk youth, despite the complaints to the otherwise, feel more safe and secure in a structured environment.

> *There has to also be very clear boundaries and very clear expectations … if anything I think that adds to the sense of safety to the environment … It adds to the sense of these people care about us. These people are really trying to make us better. It's not just about having the relationship* [that] *is not an end in itself… I think kids are really are craving some degree of, they want to be structured … they realize that their life is a little bit out of control. It does, it provides a sense of safety.*

The role of religion. Given the population, P8's organization includes Jewish studies as a part of their curriculum. The focus, however, is on increasing a sense of meaning to Judaism as a whole, not religious observance per se.

> *Our learning, our Shiurim* [Jewish seminars], *are not text based* [i.e., learning Torah from ancient Hebrew texts]… *It's group discussion … It's a lot of give and take. A lot of interaction…. It's not just like giving over information for these kids. You have a regular kid, he's in Yeshiva – and he wants to learn Gemora* [Talmud]. *So, it's about getting more information, more insight; for them it's more about making it relevant, making it something that should be meaningful to them.*

He underscores that the immediate goal is not to increase religious observance.

> *Our philosophy is it's never about frumkeit* [Orthodox Judaism] – *hardly ever, we're hardly ever seen a kid who has walked through these doors that's just about religion and Judaism … meaning there's always a mental health piece.*

Rather the goal is to provide a "*healthy, safe place to have healthy relationships*."

He shares frustration that some parents have a difficult time appreciating that the goal of the school is not directly focused on religious observance.

> *One parent, in particular, I'm struggling with this year, he's* [a student] *struggling with Shabbos,* [she says] *"Maybe you can talk to him about Shabbos?" And I keep on trying to explain to her. We keep on having the same conversation almost every other week with his mother. It's not about the conversation about Shabbos, it's about having a relationship with his Rebbeim and learning that they have a mutual respect over time and along with that some nice Shiurim about Shabbos. But, it's not the Shiur* [instruction] *that's going to make it click; it's in the context of a relationship and environment in which he feels safe and respected and loved and he learns to… throw away all his negative associations with Judaism … then maybe a nice Shiur on Shabbos will also* [help], *you know, but there's not going to be that moment when there's going to be like – WOW!*

Ultimately, P8 is committed to help replace youth's unhealthy environments with a long-term, stable, and positive experience. He fails to see the point of focusing attention on religion.

> *Judaism is just the victim, just as much as the kid is the victim.*

Participant 9.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 9 (P9) is a Rabbi and dean of a high school for at-risk youth and has decades of experience working with at-risk youth for decades. P9 seemed to have an endless supply of energy, his mind worked fast, and he seemed constantly a few steps ahead of me. His words spilled out

with almost mechanical precision yet had a calming cadence and effect. His ability to empathize was apparent and more intellectual than it was emotional; that is, I got the sense that his fierce intellectual ability made perspective taking easy and he therefore could relate to whatever he heard or saw. While P9 was not a "touchy-feely" man, there was no mistaking his passion. His passion to give to, and care for, others was evident. He was a highly sought after person via emails, texts, phone calls, and people coming into the office. Despite the distractions, I somehow felt like our interview was the only thing in the world that existed to him. I felt secure and safe the entire time I was in his presence, the building, and even the city.

Connection experience. Given his success managing crisis situations, parents seek P9's counsel – even when their youth are unlikely to attend the at-risk organization that P9 created and manages.

> *I have on the street a reputation as siding with the kid. The parents are happy with that because they know that "I side with the kid" means… even though I'm giving in, it's a calculated decision, it's not just a free-fall decision so the parents are ok. The kid's okay because he has more space than he's ever had and, even if the kid in the back of his mind knows that eventually I'm going to extract commitments from him. Right now, he's okay, whatever commitments I eventually may extract* [will be] *on his own volition … everyone happy, that's my goal.*

P9 recalls meeting a 14 year old teenage boy in crisis.

> *The kid was unhappy … I could see why they would talk, I'll use the word clinically depressed … I can't say there were any of the extreme symptoms, right, but he certainly wasn't a happy camper … the school psychologist wanted to put*

him into inpatient for evaluation, which is highlighting that there is something intense going on.

He was unaware of the details but he appreciated that the boy and family were in distress and overwhelmed by the situation.

The father asked him on the way [to the evaluation] *… to stop by me …the father doesn't understand what's going on and he's coming to me., That's what I've got … that's what I knew. So I'm meeting a 14 year old, modern family, being taken to a Rabbi, he just went to the Psychologist. I mean basically in the last week he's going from place to place.*

When meeting a youth in crisis he never rushes while at the same time he limits needless small talk.

I really just want to get to it ... Any small talk I have before I bring it up is, nothing, like it doesn't serve my purpose at all. I do 30 seconds of small talk … max … If a guy's in my room and is in trouble and we don't talk about it, that's wasted minutes. He's stressing, he doesn't know what I'm gonna say [because] *I'm doing nonsense small talk.*

He acknowledged the crisis directly and used humor and empathy throughout the meeting to reduce tension.

"I heard you had a bad day today, putting it on the table [said nonchalantly and with twinkle in his eye]." *I will also talk about serious things, with a smile; it balances it out; by balancing out I'm allowed to have the intense conversation and I'm not making it too tense –it's sort of like while I'm heating up the room I'm sprinkling water. I'm just trying to create balance.*

Given his rabbinical presence, P9 next tried to proactively offset the boy's preconceived notion that he was untrustworthy or un-relatable.

> *When I meet a kid he has a preconceived notion and I am very well aware I have about 15 seconds to shatter his preconceived attitude … that you need to reassess what I'm about … it used to be when I mentored kids I was considered cool, then I became cool for an old man, now I'm just an old man* [smiles understandingly].

As such, he immediately offered the boy a position of strength in the decision-making process.

> *I understand that people are making decisions for you – that has to stink. Right now, your parents think I'm wonderful and they will do anything I say unless I say something really stupid … Ok, which I'm capable* [smiling] *… So tell me what you would like, and if you could figure it out and it makes semi-sense, I'm okay with that, ok, and then I will present it and we will go from there.*

P9 sensed the boy appreciated the newfound power but needed guidance on how to wield it.

> *"You lead, I'll follow, between the both of us we'll figure something out. I will be your advocate, give me a plan." They like that. Then we have to figure out something that makes somewhat sense and then we try to implement it but they have a hard time with that, they are incapable of actually coming up with a plan, they never had to.*

He likened the boy's difficulty to an inexperienced politician challenging an incumbent government official.

They didn't have to know how to run a government, they just knew how not to run it, "this is no good and this is no good" and all of a sudden they get thrust upon them, "Oh my gosh, what am I supposed to do?" Teens have that problem, they just know everything stinks.

He next tried to encourage the boy to take ownership of the decision-making process by reducing pressure to make the "right" decision.

"Now it can't be a totally bad choice," I say, but I tell them as follows, "Your parents think I'm brilliant, ok, the people, they think I'm brilliant. Therefore whatever I agree they'll do, I want a plan, even if it's not "the" plan, I would like "a" plan. If it's a plan it'll work, you can do anything you want."

P9 proved his sincerity by immediately accepting the boy's request and immediately encouraging another request.

He simply hated school. That was it. So, "then don't go to school." He says "I don't have to go to school?" I said, "You don't have to go to school. You need to figure out what works, now tell me the next step."

He accepted the plan without hesitation because his goal was stabilization, not necessarily immediate change for the better.

I'm a very big believer that a bad plan that had sustainability is generally better than a good plan without sustainability … Anytime I have someone who is fragile, self-esteem fragile, emotionally fragile, motivational fragile any form of fragile, social skill fragile, anything, so I'm gonna go with sustainability. I need a place where I know he's gonna last. So you give me a bad plan that I know you'll do for two years that means you're staying in a system, whether it's my system or

another system you'll be okay and then when you mature, or I say, when you grow brain cells at 17, 18, so then at that point you'll make up.

He perceived a stable, healthy life to be much more valuable for the boy than his following a traditional school experience.

A guy blows four years of high school, he can make it up in a GED, if you're motivated – it's not the same, but then you know what? You'll make it up further in your first year of college and by the time you finish your B.A. nobody knows that you didn't do it anymore. But you can't make up 4 years of, scarred emotional health in those three months you can't, you just can't. So for me I would rather go [with] *anything sustainable.*

He believed the crisis was managed in the course of that one meeting.

Now lemme tell you one more thing the whole crisis was over. And I'll be honest I don't remember where we put him afterwards, but I do know it wasn't a real school, it was like a quasi-school type of a set-up, a GED, I don't remember but it was over, that was it.

P9 believed that the success hinged on his willingness to achieve goals outside of mainstream methods.

What I tell parents is that the mistake we make is we think everyone's supposed to go to school – school is not the end goal, school is an approach, right? An end goal is non-negotiable … there's no alternative to an end goal but there are alternatives to approaches. School is generally what one needs to do to grow up healthy, ok, but what about if school is not gonna help me grow up healthy? So now I don't go to school.

In addition, he advised the parents to "create an environment" to facilitate success.

> *So then … you need to do three things: you can keep them busy, you can feel them accomplished, or you could keep them surrounded by good people (the good people are not giving speeches)… that's how we create an environment. So the busy is a stupid job for 40 hours a week possibly, the accomplished is music lessons and uhh, maybe, uhh karate lessons, I don't know, right? Whatever, whatever, the kids wants … and then surround them with good people is all the instructors, as well as the shul has to have people that are friendly with it's all about creating those three things.*

P9 was surprised that the boy thereafter sincerely wanted to remain connected with him specifically.

> *We stayed buddies. The weird part about this, the weird part is that since he was a more modern, chilled guy. I then wanted to hand him over to my [organization's] mentors, 25 year old guys who were very chilled, one drove a motorcycle, you know, just chilled guys. I gave him to chilled guys, right, he wanted me. He wanted a father figure, and he got along with his father, it was a very weird thing. He always stayed my friend instead of staying their friends.*

He perceived the ultimate outcome as successful and with a sense of pride.

> *We just kept in touch all the time … I taught his chosson class* [wedding preparatory class] … *I was his mesader kedushin* [officiated his wedding].

The role of religion. P9 recognizes that as a Rabbi he needs to break preconceived expectations that he is unable to relate to youth, but he advises people to resist earning acceptance by pretending to be something you are not.

> *We don't lower ourselves and use stupid words or tell them about that we smoked pot (which by the way I never did I was a regular Yeshiva guy I learned in [name of a prestigious yeshiva], I'm a regular [name of a prestigious yeshiva] guy.*

Rather, he tries to express his genuine concern for the youth's welfare, not religious status.

> *We have to show we connect… to get them to believe that I understand people and … may understand them … I also want them to believe that I'm level headed and balanced and even though I come with a stereo-type as a Rabbi whatever it may be, I look at the greater picture and I, I really need to make sure he is emotionally healthy.*

P9 admits that he expects eventual re-integration within the Orthodox Jewish community, but he believes this happens naturally without direct intervention on his part.

> [My] *goal is really to turn people into emotionally healthy well-balanced people. Within this* [Orthodox Jewish] *community a very big part of it has to do with religion, but in my sense, religion is simply a symptom when it falls short and we don't focus on it directly because I assume it gets put together when people become emotionally balanced and healthy.*

The challenge for parents is to learn to focus on underlying motivations, not the behavior itself.

> *People need to stop responding to behavior and must respond to the attitude that led to it. So for instance I can go throw a book at you, but I could have thrown the book at you because I'm angry, I could have thrown it because I was offended, I could have thrown it because I'm insecure, many reasons I could have done it.*

Doesn't mean if someone is insecure he has the right to throw books, but one first must assess right what it, what the root is and not to focus on the symptom.

As such, P9 is not concerned about misbehavior or lack of religious behavior because his goal is to inspire internal motivation to live a healthy, functional life.

What we do is we attempt to create epiphanies … there are internal epiphanies we try to cultivate … and if I plant enough seeds, one or two of them will actually visualize, actually see it as it plays out and that instills confidence.

In his opinion, parent's commitment to their own personal hopes and expectations motivates all excessive focus on religiosity.

I meet a kid, he's wearing jeans, he's not wearing a yarmulke, he has attitude etc. that's what I see, I'm in no rush … unlike the parent who shows me the same kid who is wearing jeans – "Do you know when he was five he used to say tehillim [psalms] *every day!" They give me these stories about nine years ago and it doesn't matter. And my job is by the wedding I need to make a mentch* [gentleman]*, that's my job, he's 14, and he's a boy, I got 8 years right. If she's a girl, right, I got 6 years let's say, whatever, I'm fine … that gives me the chance, like I said, to plant these chance epiphanies.*

He advises parents to forgive short-term behavior and focus on long-term goals.

Parenting worked great with some [children] – *disciplinarian and then rewards and you did great my son and all the cliché, right, and with some of them you need to become a mentor … stop parenting and begin mentoring … one of the advantages that mentors have is they don't care … when you're a parent you need to have that same attitude even though obviously you do care … you need to*

have that attitude of I don't care … one of the rules of a mentor versus a parent is that we mentor long term, I don't really care about your behavior, what we do is we plant seeds.

Professional Mentors

Participant 10.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 10 (P10) is a Rabbi in his early thirties with over 5 years of experience mentoring at-risk youth and was an at-risk youth himself, as he casually disclosed to me. He had an honest, refreshing openness that I found contagious. I felt entirely relaxed – there was something about his ease, quick sense of humor, and bright smiles that, not only made him likable, it soothed and relaxed. When we were speaking, I felt an unspoken pull to share his approach to life "let it go - whatever is on your mind so big, just let it go." I sensed that, as a general life principle, he did not take things too seriously – including our interview – but I knew, without doubt, he took me seriously. He was playful yet capable of moments of profound sophistication and worldliness. At one point in the interview he disclosed a deeply personal, intimate story (included below) and I wondered if the at-risk teens he mentors experience what I did; chosen, honored, and above all responsible to meet him where he was emotionally. As an at-risk teen I would have shared whatever feeling I was having in the moment – I felt secure with him to let go and let it be just that – a moment.

Disconnection experience. At the time of this event, P10 was living in Israel mentoring American at-risk youth attending school abroad. As a mentor, his main job was to befriend, stay available to *yeshiva* students to talk and provide guidance, and to learn *Torah* one-on-one, if students were interested. He described mentoring a teenage

boy for over six months but "*I knew there was something bubbling under the surface.*" P10 described their relationship as being,

> "*Pretty close in terms of learning and planning his next steps in life … We were schmoozing but still on a superficial chavrusa* [learning partners] *level*… He was *a good kid, little lost, big family, not learning disabled… I didn't know that he has serious issues until our outing.*

P10 described sensing something not entirely right from the beginning.

> *I have a very, very vivid… vivid means clear, right?* [laughing] *… very vivid memory of the entire event, and the whole time it was happening from beginning to end I was thinking something's not right and I knew it, I knew it before it started even before, before my outing with the friend.*

Over the preceding months, they had made several other plans to go out but each one fell through until this occasion.

> *He's the one that really kept pushing it … we couldn't decide where to go, finally we made it out and like something was off, like how should we get there, "Should we take a taxi?" "I never take a taxi" "We'll take a bus," "My mother doesn't want me taking a bus." I mean like everything that could make it awkward was awkward but like you know he looked up to me so we ended up taking a bus… I love bus rides, just being with Israelis, something always exciting always happens.*

However, this "*bus ride took a long time, I've never been bored on a bus right before but I was bored*." They arrived at an empty bar/pool club and the boy immediately initiated a serious conversation, disclosing personal details never before revealed.

He was comfortable with me, obviously he trusted me. He trusted my fidelity and he trusted my ability to be there for him but still something was off… it was really quite awkward.

P10 was surprised by how difficult it was to remain focused on the conversation, "*you know I was always looking around you know looking for the TV that wasn't on."* Eventually they decided to walk back to the *yeshiva*. Overall, P10 concluded,

"It was nice, it was pleasant, it was helpful, he was opening up, it ended positive… He says "It was nice, you know, we finally did it." Okay, great, you know, blah blah blah, but… obviously something went wrong…it was an obvious missed opportunity."

In P10's estimation anyone can be a sounding board, anyone can "be there" for someone but,

To help somebody else be stable and prosper you yourself have to be healthy and stable and in that mode of positivity and growth… and at that point in my life, that week or so, whatever it was, I was going through something that was [personally] *challenging… I was not myself. I was not comfortable where I was.*

To P10, healing requires a deeply personal relationship – the youth needs to feel cared for and loved.

If I was myself I would not have waited for him to initiate. What am I thinking? …It's like who's taking who out here? If it's him taking me out you know, that doesn't work, so I'm taking him out so then he feels cared for, he feels loved, he feels listened to, I mean that's a gift, a gift means a lot. When that tiny little thing

in the beginning is different, if he's taking me out, he feels like he's paying me to go out with him.

He blamed himself for being too wrapped up in his own agenda to be able to deeply connect with the boy.

If I was "me" I would be thinking less of myself and thinking more about him and instead of looking for all the distractions the whole time for myself. I would have been much more comfortable with myself and I would have been able to really be with him, and that I had to keep re-aligning my focus to be with him is because I was so worried about myself.

P10 recognizes the high bar he sets for himself.

I don't regret this outing … it wasn't a failure … [but] *I consider this outing a failure of a better opportunity … and I know, and I know it was very clear to me why.*

[P10 interrupts his narrative to shares a personal experience from his youth.]

P10 learned first-hand that it can take months or even years before authentically connecting with an at-risk youth.

There was another, it's funny, initial contact story that I have, umm, but it's not the first time meeting ever, but when I'm done with the story you'll realize that it is.

P10 recalled a twelve year old at-risk youth "*having a rough time, totally closed … doesn't talk to anybody about anything serious, social problems, stuff going on*."

> *It was a Rebbi* [school teacher], *and he was a pretty rigid, rigid guy. Nobody thought he was like cool… So one night the Rebbi offers the kid to go out… I think he realized that something serious was going on and something serious needed to be done, so he took him to a bowling alley and in the bowling alley is a pub, bar, with pool tables, nobody was there, it was like you know, "kosher." The Rebbi goes over and buys a beer for them to share… goes over to the juke box, puts in some money, cranks up some tunes and they played pool, okay, whatever. A few games of pool and then they left and went home. So here we have a situation where, for the student, that was really cool, that was just a cool, a cool memory, but that was it, that's cool… but in my mind I'm not sure what to make of it.*

P10 smiled and confessed,

> *The Rebbi was my father and the student was me…that could have been the beginning of an awesome relationship, could have been the beginning of an explosive, close, trusting, open, emotional bond. But it wasn't, it was cool. I will forever remember it for the rest of my life. It's a side of him that knowing that, lets me sometimes open up to him and I know he can be normal and he can relate, but for some odd reason I was 12 at the time, and it took me more than 10 years to open up to him so… It wasn't the first time I met him but it could have been the first time I met him. I still hadn't met him for another 10 years* [laughing], *in terms of a father-son relationship I considered that I never met him.*

P10 believes that open-communication is ultimately more important than "being cool."

> *Besides showing your son that you're cool … there needs to be … honest and open communication somehow. There needs to be something that your children*

> *will feel comfortable telling you everything that's going on, there needs to be something that the parents really open up for their children that they'll talk to them.*

P10 believes that at-risk struggles could be preempted if they had access to a relationship which had open communication.

> *Nip it in the bud before it becomes a problem, to get kids to trust and talk, really trust and really talk, it's so huge, so huge, like if we could get the kids while they are being abused to open up to their parents. If we could get the kids while they're going through social stuff to talk to their parents if we could get them to talk if we could, if they had a real honest open trusting relationship with their parents, how different your whole field* [i.e., psychology] *would be.*

[P10 continues his narrative by describing a Connection experience]

Connection experience. It was a few weeks before *Succos* [Jewish Fall Festival] and P10 received a tip that a 17 year old *yeshiva* boy was available to help build his *sukkah* [temporary booth where people eat and sleep in in during *Succos*].

> *I was a little nervous because I am a pretty handy guy and I would have to re-direct my focus on not building the sukkah but building the sukkah with this guy, which means it might fall apart but I have to be okay with that… like I'll do it tomorrow without him. I'll take it down and put it back up tomorrow* [laughing] … [But the boy was] *from a Yeshiva that's, you know, not of the highest caliber, let's just say* [i.e., for at-risk youth], *so I was very excited about that!*

The boy was not what he expected.

> *He was actually intuitively helpful, he wasn't handy but he liked helping and he was into it and you know he was like, "Okay what should I do?" you know, he was not misbehaving, lazy which I was expecting…*

When the boy managed to stabilize the *sukkah* by drilling a screw straight into the cement, P10 was genuinely impressed.

> *I stopped what I was doing … he was able to do it, it's not such an easy thing, he was able to do it … I let go of the wall I was supposed to be holding up and I came over and I looked and I said, "That's really good," and I even bent on my knees and like shook it* [in a way that showed] *not that I was doubting that it was good. I went like "That's really amazing," and then he stopped for a second and he's like, "Really?" I'm like "Yeah why? Are you surprised?" And he's like "Nobody's ever said that, nobody's ever looked so close" … and he was really just blown away and I was blown away.*

P10 was surprised as his intended compliment far over-reached his expected impact. He recalled feeling sympathy for the boy.

> *What was going through my head was this is another unfortunate situation of a really great kid who has somewhere been destroyed.*

P10 felt an instant bond had been formed. In P10's estimation, the key to the deep connection was not the compliment or even positive attention; it was taking time to notice the "small things."

> "*I noticed something very small that only he would notice and for his whole life only he knew those little things that he was doing well cause nobody would look*

> *at it … He saw every little detail but do the other people see those details about his life and compliment him and trust him? I dunno if he ever had that and I discovered later he really didn't have it.*

P10 described feeling extremely confident and hopeful about helping the youth.

> *My emotional reaction is this is going to be great! Like, it's gonna be a long journey but this is gonna be awesome, like I'm gonna show this kid and he's gonna see himself how great he is by the end of the year! … I love those kids because … it's all in in their head that they're worthless, it's in their head that they're losers, it's in their head that they can't succeed, and, however that happened… But the greatest thing you can do for somebody who is already a good kid is it make them see that, to enable them to be proud of their work, to, to think positively about themselves, to build up their self-esteem.*

After finishing the *sukkah* their relationship developed through a series of "*schmoozing"* about the boy's current life in *yeshiva* and his history of emotional abuse back at home. A conflict six months later with the boy's father precipitated a personal crisis.

> [He was] *succeeding till Pesach* [Jewish Spring festival], *went back* [to home] *to visit for Pesach, smothered again* [making a "smooshing" sound effect] … *the father wasn't even gonna let him come back. I think it's because his son was actually succeeding … He doesn't succeed, he doesn't allow any of his children succeed he doesn't let his family flourish and be happy. I just remember we were in our front lawn and he was doubting himself he was really, he was really, really doubting himself … and he's asking the same questions that his father was challenging him with, "Did you get anything* [done] *this year?" "What are you*

> *gonna do with this, what are you gonna do with that?" like "Then what?" "What are you gonna do next?" "Did that help you get to your next step in life? Is that gonna help you make money, is that gonna help you get a job?" In other words, "You're worthless, you're still a loser…you're still a loser."*

P10 recalled having such confidence in the boy's ability to succeed that he never even attempted to answer the boy's questions.

> *Because I experienced it on some level, you know I experienced needing to be independent, I experienced that world of being on my own, I experienced independently creating myself, for better or for worse, you know what I mean?* [Laughing]. *Maybe I shouldn't have, but I did and the fact that I know that I did it, and I experienced that it's possible of creating a world completely independently gave me the faith that this kid can also.*

He described a transformational experience which provided the boy a new perspective which precluded the need to answer the self-doubting questions.

> *I don't know where it came from but basically we just sat there and we painted a picture together not with pens markers, paper, but we sat there and like we built a mashal* [metaphor] *together … I think it was more important that we built it together, that like we kind of, we kind of, um we painted a picture of his life … and we both, with this fusion of energy, synergy, it was like you know I didn't think of it and he didn't think of it, but, but the synergy thought of it together that life is a puzzle… like we stepped back… we were able to look at life you know from a birds-eye view a little bit, and he was able to look at his puzzle and how far it had come along and look at, maybe it wasn't, maybe the boarder had grey*

skies, and it was a little uglier on the boarder but like he saw new pieces were coming into his puzzle that was just a hue of the blue and the he could make with his new pieces and snap into it the pieces of his accomplishments this year, like snap them in and they fit, and they're there, and that's the right piece – no ifs, ands, or buts … It really goes there it fits perfectly and that's YOUR piece and it's YOUR puzzle and YOU made it and YOU'RE putting it together, and it, it was, it was awesome.

He credits his help to being able to experientially empathize with the boy's pain. He considers it key for the empathy to be so authentic that the boy would feel and know that P10 truly, genuinely cared.

Can I make this a real transitional moment or is it going to pass as another emotional lie? … I imagined myself, not like in a logical way of, ok if this was me what would I do, but in an emotional way like, like, like, I was really there with him and like you're in pain, guess what, I'm in pain too … that generates the really being there, that generates really feeling the frustration and the entrapment and the pain… and the confusion… of what this guy is going through right now… and it generates the emotion for him to realize I'm really there with him, I'm really, this really means something to me… I really genuinely build an emotional bond in those moments. And I think, you know, because it's genuine, they feel it. They feel, wow this person really gets emotional about me. This person really feels my feelings, this person really cares about me, really wants me to succeed, be happy, be good, be successful…at the moment it was a real pain for me … this is a real life going on here, this is a huge moment. This is a huge turning point

that could say "Will this kid for the rest of his life be a loser or not?" And this is real pain… this is a real question. He really doesn't realize what he's done this year. He really doesn't realize that he has pushed himself to do things … He's doing things on his own. He's making his own decisions, which he has never done before. He is thinking of ideas of what he likes for the first time in his life, and he doesn't see it, or, or he sees it but he doesn't know what to do with it.

To accomplish this he must feel emotionally secure enough to imagine the boy's pain without losing himself in it.

I was right there with him, there was nothing else in the world, I mean there was my safety there was you know like the balance of I'm not gonna let his problems rock me … I have a feeling if you are really strong if you are really steadfast and firm you could be completely in somebody else's problems and still be safe because you are just so naturally safe and stable…I guess is if you need to remind yourself that you are stable then you're not [laughing].

P10 noticed an immediate and long-term change in the boy.

We were up until 2 or 3 in the morning … it was just so resonating, and he was so happy afterwards, just so happy, the guy, I never saw a guy float home like that … because … he was verbalizing images of himself that I can be successful … He was very obviously resonating with not being a loser anymore, being, being strong, being himself, being forward, being positive, being whatever the word means successful, being himself … I don't have to be locked up like it's silly, it's just not me anymore…Everything changed from there because like till the end of

the year he was so open, he was so himself… He never did drugs. Never smoked. Didn't even drink that much, just when he was with me. [Laughs].

Seemingly becoming aware of his approach for the first time, P10 reflected that the relationships that he develops accomplish two goals. The first is an external sense of security - one that comes from the youth knowing "*that if I'm ever really in trouble I can call him* [P10]." However, profound, life changing relationships – real mentorship – occurs when the youth internalizes P10's esteem for him.

That I know he's [P10] *thinking about me reminds me that I'm important and I should care about me also… Yosef HaTzadik*[27] *couldn't call Yaakov when he was about to stumble in sin, but he saw the picture of his father and that was enough… it could be that his emotion was somebody cares about me enough I should care about myself, I am important… More important that he can call me is that he KNOWS he can call me, and he knows,* [P10's name] *believes in me,* [P10's name] *thinks I'm awesome,* [P10's name] *thinks I CAN succeed! So yeah if I ever need him I can call him but more important when he thinks about me, he thinks about how important he is.*

P10 beams with pride over the boy's development of self-worth.

And the turning point of the year … was they went on one of these hikes, and you could either climb down the later or jump into the water and he jumped. And was like, "I've never done anything like that in my life! I was never allowed to and I never wanted to because I would see nothing from it. Nothing, I would probably

[27] Oral tradition relates that Yosef (Joseph – one of the twelve sons of Yaakov (Jacob), sold into Egyptian slavery) was able to refuse the seduction of his master's wife solely due to seeing an image of his righteous father.

get yelled at for doing it." That was like a major turning point is his life. He would have never succeeded. Never … He was shut down from success because his emotions were just completely shut down. And the yeshiva, we chipped away at that, chipped away, showed him his success …

For family reasons, P10 had to leave the mentorship field professionally. He nevertheless has maintained contact and is particularly amazed by the boy's resiliency.

[After completing *yeshiva*] *He went right back to* [American city name] *and signed up for certification in [job title]. Finished the course, started working for the state, didn't make money so he started a second job, a totally different job* [and] *right away he just got fired. He just got down again, he just got crushed again… After his second crush, I happened to call him two days after. He's like "you have no idea how lucky I am that you called me today. He's like Rabbi* [P10 name] *you saved my life today." … He didn't get paid for the whole job, he had to move out to* [city name]*. Commute two hours every day, got a speeding ticket got his license suspended for putting yourself on a limb and "You just called me, a perfect day." I said "Come here and take a break." He said "Baruch Hashem* [thank Hashem]*, I already started working." … And he's back up a third time. He's doing something new now. Three times he got slammed down at two jobs already, slammed, like out of the water, blown out of the water…he has a job now, he signed up for college.*

P10 finds maintaining relationships incredibly challenging as he is no longer professionally connected and "*I'm personally not a phone guy and probably a lot of men*

will say that about themselves." Yet he fears that his personal barriers to communicating may send an unintended, yet invalidating message.

> *I think there's one other piece, which is following through. "Oh you keep in touch with them?" I get this huge sink in my heart, like no, I'm an idiot, I don't. No… And, I'm saying this to myself, that I could be doing better and probably a lot Rebeim and it's hard to keep in touch … and that's, that's really part of caring. Like, if you really cared you would follow through. I'm talking to myself right now. I'm really talking to myself. And that means reaching out, callin them, you know.*

While he tries to convince himself that his importance has waned during the intervening months with little communication, his recent phone call to the boy shattered the illusion.

> *And then also it's hard to. Really, I think a lot of it is our nature to see results. Like I don't really know where they're at right now, so, you know, and I find it will be harder to help. But this last phone call was a solid smack in the face. That, that one's not true.*

The role of religion. P10 has little patience for people who have obvious *kiruv* [Jewish Orthodox outreach] agendas when working with at-risk youth.

> *I think the Rebeim* [Rabbis] *with an agenda … are the ones that are like a little too "Like I am here to do kiruv on you and um, so, "Why do you smoke marijuana? You should stop by the way." "Hey!* [Said in a dramatic, mocking voice] *Wanna come to the beis medrish* [*Torah* study hall]*?" Like, get the heck out of here! … Like, put the kiruv aside and care about this person for a second. Put the kiruv aside for a second.*

When it comes to forming relationships P10 sees little purpose in trying to connect with at-risk youth through Judaism.

> [You can ask] "*Hey you wanna come in Beis Medrish and shmooze?" Or you can just go where he is and just schmooze there … If they are in the beis medrish, in the chair, they don't know what's going on. They're looking around the whole time. They're not themselves. They're not comfortable. They're not happy in this moment to be with you.*

Happiness and mental health, not *kiruv*, is P10's top goal.

> *My goal is happiness. That's it… the only thing in my mind is happiness… how can you be happier? How can you enjoy your life better? How can you smile more often? How can you be more comfortable with yourself? How can you be more comfortable with people around you? How can you be more comfortable at home with your family? How can you be a positive person, mostly to yourself?*

That being said, as a Rabbi P10 sees a place for discussing Judaism with at-risk youth, to the extent that it can facilitate mental health. An example was provided with respect to the boy described in the *Connection experience* narrative above. In addition to helping the boy feel comfortable with positivity and success, P10 believed that true resiliency required a holistic approach that included learning how to have a healthy emotional relationship with pain, suffering, and hardship.

> *We were learning Rabbi Abraham J Twerski book on simcha* [entitled] *thoughts on happiness. And like, one paragraph lead to a conversation which led to a conversation, which lead to his mother and then like, "Is it supposed to be that every time you see your mother you want to throw up?" … I put my hand on his*

hand and I breathed and breathed. And I'm like, I get a choked up with these things…He [the boy] *started sobbing.*

In addition to emotionally connecting with the youth (see *Connection Experience* narrative above), P10 asserted the *Torah* view on suffering to provide an alternative way to appraise and relate to life's difficulties. With these two approaches he feels that youth have a chance to live life without fearing failure or hardship. While he avoids encouraging religious practice,

Taking pain and taking suffering and looking at in terms of Torah hashkafa [Jewish worldview] *I'll be super confrontational. … I will be very confrontational about learning how to understand pain in a Torah way and to understand suffering as much as we can understand suffering, in a Torah way, and to explain that we don't understand how this is helping us yet, but we will understand how this is helping us. And, you know … that is action. It might be more action than tefillin, it might be more action than make a seder* [*Torah* learning session].

While P10 believes it important to have an open conversation about any topic he nevertheless feels a responsibility to maintain certain boundaries, which can be difficult with a population that is sensitive to feeling rejected.

You have to keep your dignity. So obviously there are certain lines that I won't cross. Like… personally, like other Rebeim, if the kids will curse in from of them, other Rebeim will say something. Most of the time I will pretend not to hear it. I'll just pretend not to hear it. Uhm. If it's like a number of times and I can't pretend anymore, so, only because I can't stand the Rebeim that say, [said in a hypercritical voice] *"Nu? Nu? You know? Like, I'll say something like* [said in a playful voice]

"What does that mean?" They know I know what it means. Just to make light of it. And that they know, and just to like to keep that barrier… up. I'll say something, not judgmental, not critical. But something enough to keep the barrier up. Because ya still, you know, if they pull you down, then they can't be pulled up by you.

While P10 does not target *kiruv* he does admit a personal belief that helping a youth be mentally healthy will eventually lead to Orthodox Judaism – though that's a personal belief and hope, not a professional goal.

It's very clear to me that these kids just need happiness and then the frumkeit will come.

That being said, with respect to the boy described in the *Connection experience* narrative,

I don't care if the guy goes on to the beis medresh versus going off to work [i.e., learn in a Kollel or pursue a secular profession], *as long as, I mean I care, but this conversation was to free him of this prison.*

Participant 11.

Participant 11 (P11) was a mentor in his fifties and has worked with at-risk youth for over a decade at a drop-in center for male teenagers[28]. He seemed larger than life. His smile was wide, heartwarming, and contagious; he exuded sheer joy – not happiness, not contentment – pure joy to be alive and Jewish. He chain smoked, one after the other. An adult volunteering at the center teased him, accusing P11 for being personally responsible

[28] As reported in Chapter 3, participant 11 refused to be audio-recorded. All data presented was collected through field notes and analytic journaling. All quotes provided are therefore not transcribed but taken from personal notes during the interview.

for encouraging at-risk teenagers to smoke. P11 released a belly laugh and bellowed, "Let's drink to that!"

While he was happy to help me, he nonetheless refused to be audio-recorded because he felt a newspaper reporter twisted his words and hurt the organization in the past. Overall, he dictated the interview, answering his own questions, not mine. Despite this, I felt enveloped in joy when speaking with him, and I understood why youth constantly interrupted our interview to connect with him.

He first shared his definition of an "at-risk" youth, firmly stating his belief that at-risk behavior (e.g., drug abuse) is a reaction to a painful home life.

> *No matter the issue or trauma, if life is good then they are not "at-risk" for losing everything for any kind of pleasure. But if there is no safe or secure foundation in their life to return to they will risk everything for happiness… kids are looking for immediate pleasure to fill in pain.*

That is, in the youth's point of view, there is nothing to risk losing.

> *I was talking to a teenager addicted to drugs. He told me, "I have only one thing on my mind, I want to experience that moment when I know I can say "Thank G-d it is all over." Do you understand?*

P11 focuses his attention on helping youth seek happiness and self-control, not for the sake of religion but for his own well-being.

> *Happiness is within! The point isn't that something is asur (religiously prohibited). It's not good for his life! He needs to learn how to control himself. I tell them what will happen if you are on a date and the waitress is beautiful and you can't stop looking at her? How do you think that date ends?*

P11 believes his job is to develop a close, trusting relationship so that he has the currency to empower youth, his ultimate goal.

> *I target whatever comes first (depression, lust) and help them search for happiness … I want them to love themselves. I want them to see their power to do, that they can make mistakes! They can cope with mistakes! They can have compassion for themselves.*

From P11's perspective, many Rabbis simply do not understand at-risk youth.

> *I tell the Rebbes, you know the yetzer tov (inclination to connect to Hashem) better; I know the yetzer hara (inclination to reject Hashem) better! …It's not even the yetzer hara* [evil inclination] – *he just doesn't care about himself.*

When he was finished he led me to my next interviewee. As I was leaving the drop-in center for the night he surprised me, as if emerging from nowhere. "Are you ok? Did you get everything you needed?" I felt loved and surprised by it because his refusal to be recorded or directly answer my questions was frustrating. Yet his sincere care was apparent to me. I caught a glimpse into the experience of at-risk youth working with P11. Here was an authentic soul who never stopped caring. I left the building wishing every at-risk youth experienced a P11.

Participant 12.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 12 (P12) is a mentor in his mid to late thirties who has worked at a drop-in center for at-risk male teenagers for over a decade. He interacted with me in a direct, straightforward, almost abrupt manner. He seemed naturally generous but on his own terms; he was not going to offer help out of a need for another's approval. There was little about him that was

insincere - he spoke candidly without a hint of agenda. He was assertive and had an aura of non-conformity. I had a hard time imagining him activating a teenager's anti-authority posture because it seemed like he somehow beat them to it… but in a socially appropriate way.

The drop-in center included a large room filled with pool and ping-pong tables, exercise equipment, loud music, a large flat screen TV, and most of all…. cigarette smoke. In the midst of this chaos, P12 was leading a loosely held together *minyan* [10 men required for public prayer] for *maariv* [evening prayer]. A teen was angry with him and shouted something before leaving. P12 laughed, inviting the youth over, who ran out the door. In the middle of praying he ran after him, returned alone, shaking his head, and finished his prayers.

During our interview, P12 was laid back, kind, present, and helpful. I couldn't imagine him being judgmental, primarily because I doubted much registered as surprising or unfathomable (i.e., I could ask him to rob a bank with me and he would consider it as a viable possibility but decline for personal reasons). His personality did not compel me to want to disclose personal information with him, yet I got the sense that it was in my best interest to do so.

Connection experience. P12 recalled a particular teenage boy who presented several barriers to connection. He met the boy when trying, unsuccessfully, to connect to the boy's peer group.

> *It was one group, one small clique and it was very hard to get into cliques … I tried for a while to like really connect with them, all of them, and it wasn't really taking. I would, you know, come over and talk to them and stuff. I actually started*

> *some groups to try to pull them in like, you know, suggestion groups like what can we do with* [institution's name] *and some guys came. But this clique didn't really wanna come … So, basically I would go over and say hello and they would say hello and … that would be the end of the contact.*

Noticing that mainstream approaches were fruitless "*I decided to do something a little radical.*"

> *One time I saw the guys were very creative. There was a lot of druggies and stuff, but they were also artistic. This group and a couple of them, you know, they were musicians, and they were artistic …* [So] *I took the back room… and I told these guys listen I have something really cool I wanna do, you know, stay, stay behind. We're gonna get dirty so like bring dirty clothes like but stay behind we're gonna stay up after, so I'm gonna do something different.*

The boy, together with the group, was hesitant to go along but eventually agreed. He gives credit to the out of the ordinary and mysterious invitation.

> *It was about 10 guys and they were like very cliquey so they had their own thing and they, they like hesitantly, it was cool because they were staying after we closed so they kind of went with it and then I took out you know buckets and buckets of all color paints and we painted the back room together. But we stayed up until like 6:00 in the morning and some guys were painting like amazing designs. I mean we came out of there filthy and like gross and we spent all night doing this till the morning.*

Looking back P12 admired how rash the decision was given "*that was a day before Shavuous* [Jewish festival during Fall], *so I didn't really think it out that well because I had*

to stay up the next night too [it is custom to stay up all night and learn *Torah* on *Shavuous*]. *I think I got an hour nap or something.*

The shared experience "broke the ice" and he began to connect with the group. Unlike the teenage boy, his friends in the group began to trust him and develop close relationships from that point on.

> *So we stayed, we stayed up w,e were filthy we were slipping around falling and it was like amazing, and the bonding was like tremendous, and all those guys I did connect with and we stayed close with for a long period of time … Even though they've been out for 8 years they come back and talk to me and stuff.*

Yet the boy remained standoffish, unwilling to trust P12 despite tremendous time and effort.

> *He got closer, but he was still at a distance. He was very angry, he was very like, you know, very at a distance … He was here every night and I tried to connect and I tried to connect, and I kept on trying and finally we would go out. I would do everything. I would take him out, and I literally thought it wasn't gonna work.*

P12 recalled not taking the resistance personally, understanding that the boy experienced an abusive upbringing. Despite the continued resistance, the boy remained willing to interact, which gave P12 confidence to persist and he eventually earned trust.

> *He went through a lot of physical and emotional abuse as a kid and like he was very afraid to connect… Then after about a year and a half of just being persistent and taking him out for rides and like trying to connect on a deep level … We'd go bowling together or we would or they'd need rides home so I'd take them on rides home and those conversations were very good conversations but*

> *still even, it was always back offish … By a year and a half around our relationship started getting better like he started wanting to talk to me, he realized he could trust* me.

Unlike the group painting experience, he denies doing anything impressive to earn the boy's trust.

> *The magic was the first time we did the* [painting], *that was magic … But that was just that he would not run away from me that, that's all it got … He gave me the time of day because we painted but after that … What was the change? Complete persistence, I just kept comin back, there was no magic.*

Once a trusting relationship had been developed, he persuaded the boy to address his mental illness (e.g., depression, drug use) and relationship difficulties.

> *I wanted to be his mentor, but I realized it was a lot a lot of pain and damage and he needed some serious therapy and after I think it must have been about two and a half years I convinced him to go to therapy and he went to therapy for the last 7 years or something with the same person.*

P12 expressed pride over the boy's success.

> *I have been his mentor and this other guy has been the therapist for all these years and he's been growing and it's like a tremendous success … He's doing college, he's working … no drugs or anything like that. I mean he's doing fantastic.*

The boy stands out in P12's mind because despite all their history together, he nevertheless still frequently must re-earn the boy's trust.

I will tell you, till today I still have to work on my relationship with him because he is still so scared to have a relationship with me that every time I mess up – I don't give him enough attention, I don't give him enough this – it's still a difficult relationship … I don't think I've ever worked this hard to maintain a relationship. Although our relationship has been very, very close for a lot a lot of years, it's still hanging on a wire.

Disconnection experience. P12 recently reached out several times to help a boy new to the drop-in center but on each occasion he was summarily rejected.

There's one guy he came in here… I really don't know the deal with him… I saw there was something bothering him and I really wanted to like help but every time he saw me he like rejected me like "Get outta here" like "You're one of these people who are trying to like control my life" like "Get away" like "I don't need you."

Early in his career he took rejection personally but he has learned to see it as communicating the youth's level of well-being.

Earlier on it used to affect me a lot more like "What did I do wrong?" you know? … I felt bad … I've heard that so many times that my general reaction is "this guy must be really in pain."

He credits this change in perspective to years of experiences resulting in more frequent connections relative to rejections.

Most of the time it's not happening… it's not like I'm giving off this aura of like untrust or I'm coming off as like preachy because it's not usually happening.

He believes that he has a higher threshold for being emotionally affected by rejection.

> *Something that was very traumatic to me 10 years ago doesn't really affect me today. Like 10 years ago I'd feel, you know, rejected, and I'd feel like, you know, this guy hates me and I'm doing everything wrong and … maybe knocking myself and like now I don't.*

Likewise, he notes a change in how he approaches at-risk youth.

> *Over the years I have changed from being very nervous to approach guys, I mean it was intimidating to come into their life and like you know say like, "Hey, I'm here to help you!" … to now, I literally walk over to people and say, "You wanna talk at 9:00?" and they'll be like, "Okay" and they come in and talk, like that's how it's become. I realize that every teenager really just wants to talk and they want to have an adult listen to them so they just come and then they'll talk.*

In this way, he eventually began to have conversations with the boy and he even hoped a connection was forming.

> *We actually got some better conversations going and I thought "Ok, we're really making a connection," and then he would get mad in the middle and … I played it off very cool. I didn't ever like do any serious contradiction or anything I was just building the therapeutic relationship of some sort and I thought it was going really well.*

But without warning the boy became angry at him.

> *He wouldn't talk to me and we had a couple of good conversations. I thought it was going good … like a week or two later … he just walked by and said, "Oh, I'm having a problem with my parents," he was like blowing up. I said, "You want us to help you with that?" like you want us to like contact them and help you*

and then he says, "You've already talked to them," I said, "I don't recall ever talking to your parents, I never-" "Yeah, you're a liar. You talked to my parents."

P12 recalled being particularly frustrated with the accusation because he was contacted by his parents but on principle had not returned the call. He struggled to explain the boy's anger.

His mother called me on the phone. Now my policy is that I don't talk to parents unless the kid allows it. So it was a voice message and I never called her back like I, I didn't, I didn't wanna break that trust until this kid said he's allowed to, anyway… What happened was when we were having the most meaningful conversation he's had down here [and] *it could be that there was another person here who saw it and told his parents that we were having a conversation. I think, I dunno, I have no idea. I felt like there was a leak and he came home and this is what happened: His parents said, "Oh did you talk to somebody at [institution name] tonight?" like "Are you talking to somebody?" like I guess well-meaning like they were trying to like boost that or something and he heard it as wait a minute this guy is talking behind my back.*

P12 tried his best to repair the relationship.

He literally till today [won't speak to me], *and I explained the situation to him that I would never call his parents and he doesn't, he like hates me.*

While P12 no less often feels rejected by initial rejections he felt rejected on this occasion because he lost the chance to help a boy he thought he could help.

I felt bad because I thought I was making a connection at that point, like shoot, I could have helped this kid.

In particular, he feels deeply affected when rejected by a youth who he connected with deeply.

> *It is more powerful when I have a guy who is seeing me for a while and then just like drops out and decides he doesn't wanna see me anymore and then it's like "what did I do wrong?" and all that stuff and that's happened recently.*

P12 described such a case when he developed a close relationship with a youth in his early twenties "*at one point like wildly successful like money-wise and he basically got into all these drugs and he messed up his whole life*."

> *I had a conversation with him, very, very powerful conversation, you know talkin about his life and a couple of more powerful conversations and every time he sat down it was like meaningful and powerful…*

Over time, he convinced the youth to seek treatment for his drug addiction.

> *The goal was to get him to rehab because I needed to get him help, you know, and eventually I did convince him to go to rehab … by being real and caring … never questioning. I completely joined with him. I didn't try to push anything, ideas. If he told me like how he feels I didn't contradict him at all I just was there listening, being there, till he came to the point himself of saying "Ok, I need help." But it took a lot of caring and loving and holding and that type of environment that he felt safe enough to do that.*

The youth agreed to treatment but eventually dropped out and blamed P12.

> *Two-three years he won't talk to me because he feels so betrayed that I set him up for that terrible failure and like he, he blames it all on me. It wasn't the rehab it wasn't this, it was me, I convinced him, no one else in the entire world could have*

> *convinced him. He, he really was true there was nobody, people have tried for years. Nobody has ever gotten anywhere near. I did convince him and he felt completely betrayed by it and he won't talk to me … He's doin crazy drugs and he's totally not doing well, but he won't talk to me.*

P12 felt torn because he knew that the youth trusted him and he had to risk that trust to help.

> *I needed to get him help, you know, and eventually I did convince him to go to rehab and he hated me, he really, really felt … I betrayed him by sending him to rehab because really I knew what rehab was and I sent him there.*

He faces a difficult reality whereby his sincere care for youth can be mistaken as fake.

> *He felt that that environment was betrayed because I ultimately sent him to rehab to get help and he felt like there was an agenda and maybe he was right, I dunno, but I know that he won't talk to me.*

The role of religion. P12 avoids discussions about religion, largely because he believes that religion is a front, masking the youth's real message. He wants to address the unstated pain and accusation.

> *We never talk about yiddishkeit* [Judaism]*, that's like our rule … We find with the kids in terms of religion, they wanna discuss it, but they don't wanna discuss it. A person very close to me used to say "They're not asking questions they're asking answers." Meaning they'll say, "How do you know God exists?" Now, the way they said it explains to you that they really don't want you to say, "Well, we have proof because you know if you find a watch in the desert-" Then, you know, you give a whole yadda yadda yadda on like proof, that there has to be a creator, they*

> *don't care, that's not what they're asking, they're saying, "I'm in so much pain, I'm angry, and you're the person who are gonna defend it, I'm gonna be angry at you too."*

That is, the youth are escaping from perceived hurtful relationships with Orthodox Jewish authority figures.

> *One of the biggest reasons they have been turned off from their community is because the people representing their community, namely their parents, their teachers, their Rabbi and whatever it is, those people have let them down, have hurt them in some way and they don't wanna be connected to what they are connected to.*

His top priority is helping the youth he mentors address their mental health issues and find healthy ways to reconnect with their family.

> *Their mental health and their sobriety is number one. So our goal is to get them to a point where they are clean and sober and they're working on the mental health thing and they're not a total mess psychiatrically and psychologically, and that's number one. Number two we work on connecting them, re-connecting them to their family.*

For that reason, he redirects religious conversations to address mental health and family.

> *So I tell my staff, and all the volunteers, conversations about Judaism, if someone brings up a conversation and they're upset about something, find out what they're upset about because we again have to go back to our original goal. Our original goal is caring, loving, and getting them through their mental health and their*

> *addiction, that's what we're starting with, and then we'll get to the next level* [family].

That being said, he does also "*wanna re-connect them to the community that they're in so that they're in a community."* But he finds no need to directly address religion.

> *Now that is like sort of kiruv* [Orthodox Jewish outreach] … [but] *we believe just by role-modeling and being faithful and caring and loving unconditionally they see the opposite* [to previous experiences with authority figures] *and they use us as alternate role models from their original role models and they'll change around from that… A lot of these guys come back and say, "You made me religious," and I cannot remember one time we talked about religion, at any point.*

He provides an example with the youth described in the above *Connection Experience* section.

> *He is reconnected to his family. He's totally sober, and he is not angry about religion. I would not say that he is religious but the fierce anger is gone. He is cool with anybody who is religious shall we say, and he doesn't have an issue if you bring up religious topics or stuff like that, none of that bothers him. So will he come back in that area? Maybe, if he seeks for it, if he's looking for it – it's not necessarily going to be us pushing him. And again, same way he still has relationship issues with me, and you know I gotta tip-toe around certain things, he's gonna have relationship issues with G-d.*

Participant 13.

Researcher self-reflection regarding the participant. Participant 13 (P13) is male in his thirties and has mentored at-risk youth for a decade. P13 is without a doubt the

most intense and tenacious person I interviewed. When I met him at his home he was having a heated discussion with a teen on the phone. He spoke sternly, somehow maintaining a balance between not reprimanding and yet not sugar-coating his disapproval of the boy's behavior. He was kind with his time and thoughtful in his responses during the interview. He spoke with deep conviction and confidence in his approach to mentoring but without a sense of self-importance. He was not a "touchy-feely" personality; his genuine care and concern shined through his action and his words, his patience for misbehavior and self-exploration, his willingness and availability to "shmooze" about anything, any topic, and above all else, his authentic acceptance of youth and their potential.

Connection experience. P13 meets teens through his existing relationships with their friends. As such, it is generally a causal, informal interaction.

> *The way you meet is more of a casual meet … What gets you into guys is cuz you know the other guys. They kind of kasher you* [give their approval] *… You're sort of accepted by them at the very least their friends are now okay with you.*

He has no immediate agenda other than developing a relationship.

> *It's not necessarily looking for any sort of progress. It's not trying to find any problems, but it's trying to create that relationship and open them up… So that, not that meeting, but the next time or ten times from now … should you be around them when they have a problem it's* [P13 is] *someone who they feel open and safe to talk to.*

With his approach, he only has as much authority as the teen chooses to confer; in this way, he minimizes resistance.

We work from the kid's angle. We're in touch with a lot of teens, and we meet a lot of teens through that … His friend tell[s] *him that you can meet this guy that was an okay person … which often is what opens up and deals with a lot of that initial resistance.*

Yet, he recalled an instance where peer acceptance did not prevent an angry verbal attack from a male teenager.

It was me and [partner name] *were in town* [in Israel], *doing nothing there, hanging out, talking to* [American] *teenagers … A typical place, you know, you have all teenagers out there you have no adults. It's… uhh, sort of a free for all….*

P13 recalls being met with outright hostility.

"What are you guys doing here, you really wanna help? What are you out for? This is just an excuse for you to be out. You just wanna party!" That kind of attitude.

On the one hand, P13 perceived an attack against "*Yeshiva guys – Rabbis – hanging out in town at 4 in the morning.*"

They're antagonistic… Yeshiva is not quite working out for you … You're angry and upset … and here are these guys who want to quote end quote help.

But in a more general sense, he perceived the boy acting from a place of insecurity.

It's an aggressive attitude you get it from anybody at times you come into my space where I'm an adult here, "what it is that you want?"

P13 recalled not taking the anger personally and first trying to de-escalate the situation.

We engaged in a conversation without getting riled up by it and talking and dealing with his points and back and forth.

As the boy's anger continued they addressed his legitimate concerns but also directly challenged the boy's attitude, not character.

> [We] *basically challenged that underlining attitude of the anger and calling him out on it … It's not getting angry and not getting into a fight, dealing with his questions, sincerely but at the same time … downplaying it and being humorous about it, recognizing it for an attack and pointing out to him as an attack … and then bringing things back down to just talking and schmoozing and, you know, having a normal relationship.*

The interaction was deemed successful, not because anyone "won the argument," but because a relationship was developed.

> *The result of it we spent quite a little time with him that time and over that trip he ended up coming back, being in touch. We invited him for Shabbos, he came to us for Shabbos actually became very close to us*.

As the relationship developed the boy shared his struggle living, what he perceived to be, a double life.

> *He was having a lot of trouble in Yeshiva there. He could learn. He was a solid guy, he was doin well. The world saw him as one person but he felt in a way lost. He was involved a little bit with drugs, a little bit with girls, running around, wasn't feeling fulfillment.*

Specifically, P13 discovered that the boy felt isolated because he felt that his Rabbis simply could not relate to his struggles and also invalidated because the Rabbi's advice ran counter to his experience.

> *Whenever he would speak to any of his Rabbeim* [Rabbis] *there he felt that they couldn't relate to him that they don't have any concept of the drug culture or hanging out with girls and the answers felt very canned … He was complaining about his Rabbeim saying just learn and everything will be fine.*

As their relationship developed, P13 encouraged the boy to re-conceptualize the purpose of religion and to focus his attention on healthy living and relationships. He did so through a drug use metaphor, which both validated the boy's struggle while challenging him to change.

> *It's blasphemy to say it in any mainstream source but Torah is like a drug. If a person's sick and you take the drug, at best you'll feel normal … but if you're well and everything is good and then you take this drug, then you feel high and then you're flying. Torah, or religion, is a full package it's not just the learning, so if your life is doing well, whether that means that the chesed* [acts of kindness] *and the integration and how you get along with people and everything is going well and you're connected to G-d then you learn … it'll make you fly and you'll be high and it will be amazing… But if the rest of your life is in shambles and if you're hanging out in town and drinking every night and you're going running around with a different girl every night and you're doing things that that you shouldn't. So at best the Torah can make you feel normal, at best, and even that it just sort of acts sort of like that patch … So it's not enough to simply say that "Just learn and things will get better."*

He sensed that the boy thereafter began to confront difficult personal issues.

The truth is for him that was like a new sort of perspective and these were things that he was suddenly able to talk about.

While P13 noticed a positive change in the boy he had no expectations of immediate growth; he waits patiently for teens to mature, request help, and follows through on it.

In terms of success rates and a kid getting better, it doesn't happen overnight … you often need a good three, four years … and that's part of the, you know, coming into your own and sense of identity … teens feel like they know everything, anything you tell them, you're outdated, parents don't know, they know and they are going to live in this world. They are going to make their own decisions. They are an adult now first time.

Having long-term expectations for growth protects him from burn-out.

Sometimes you don't do anything with it, sometimes you smile, you try to give off the best impression so it will be open at a later day and there's nothing more to do … There might not be anything else you can do … You can't save everybody and … a kid might not be ready.

Disconnection experience. P13 recalls working at a drop-in center/residence with "*very few rules. The idea is to give them an element of structure and allow them to have an environment where they can succeed*." On one particular night he denied a teenage boy shelter for arriving well past the curfew.

So I have a boy, very bright boy … who gets all tough and he can be intimidating … He was very not into the curfew idea. He didn't like that. His feeling is that

curfew is "I am being punished" by coming back late because, you know, I have to sleep outside in the cold all night. I don't have anywhere else to go.

P13 upheld the curfew rule and reframed the rule from being an external punishment to being a consequence of the boy's internal choice.

You need to be back by 12 o'clock. Now the truth is that the curfew is such that even if you're not back by 12 o'clock that's fine, you're not in trouble … You just can't come in, it's, you know, that's your consequence. You need to find another place to sleep … By our other facility which means sometimes you'll sleep on the floor of somebody's room. You need to go hang out with your friends and I understand that, it's fine, so go sleep by them and you'll figure it out. And it just might be that it will be a cold night and you'll find a bus stop and we'll speak in the morning, but you're choosing something.

The next day the boy started to argue the point – this time with an audience of his peers. P13's first thought was to prevent the boy's issue from blossoming into a group upheaval.

When he has the group around he wants to get everyone riled up so then it's you're one taking on six … meaning I have to sort of control it and not have an all-out riot on my hands – it's not a riot but it's just them all yelling.

The boy angrily accused P13 of being hypocritical and patronizing.

He would come in and get very aggressive about curfew and, you know, treating us like kids, "You said you treat us like adults but you're treating us like kids!" and get very angry.

P13 listened to the accusation but repeated his position firmly, which led to a seemingly endless round of counter arguments.

> *Whereas my attitude is no, it's a choice you're making. I'm not forcing you to sleep outside. You have to be back by 12 o'clock if you so choose, [boy retorts] "No, so you are forcing them to come back," going back and forth.*

P13 remained firm and invited the teens to make a personal choice: stay or leave.

> *Here's the deal guys - you don't have to like it, you could think it's the dumbest rule in the world and I'm willing to even listen to you and have a discussion with you but at the end of the day that's the way it is. If it doesn't work for you, that's fine, you're welcome to go and find a difference place to live. You don't have a place to live, so I don't know what to tell you. So that's the choice that you have to make. So this is what I'm offering.*

The boy continued to "*yell and scream*" and P13 decided that since "*we happened to have a good relationship*" he had the opportunity to deescalate the situation by appealing to the boy's social group.

> *It's staying calm. It's dealing with it and untangling it* [the accusation], *certainly that the other guys see it … it kind of takes the wind out of the kids sails and as long as you're not nasty, so to speak, you don't digress to name calling and that sort of thing … what it really came to was untangling his arguments and turning them back around and dealing with them to the extent where it made it a ridiculous argument … Let's talk about that, adults don't have a curfew because adults don't need a curfew, adults generally come home at a normal time and they'll generally get up in the morning, right?*

Despite the ongoing arguing, P13 felt confident and calm because his ultimate goal was to maintain an open dialogue, not silent compliance.

> *With him it was handling each thing and being repetitive, meaning he'll ask the question again … trying to get you caught up … The truth is just having the open dialogue … especially with teenagers who feel that their voice isn't heard, you know, they're discounted … I'm still willing to talk.*

Finally the boy conceded one point.

> *He was able to be maskim* [acknowledge] *that "Okay, we certainly haven't earned being treated like an adult" … He came out and said … it was just a great quote, it was, "What do you want from us, from me? I'm 17 and therefore I should be treated like an adult, however, don't expect me to act like an adult!" And you know he stops for a second, "Yeah, yeah, you don't understand that."*

Sensing that the debate was over, P13 turned his attention to the fact that the boy was equally contentious with authority and peers.

> *You could see when he argues with other guys he'll put them down. He'll talk over them, and the truth is he is bright and his arguments are generally good …*

P13 took the opportunity to give immediate feedback on the boy's confrontational style.

> *This is your defense mechanism – this is what you use and maybe it works … but … if you interrupt me and just talk faster than I do, doesn't make your argument right.*

Having developed a genuinely close relationship with the boy, P13 feels comfortable asserting boundaries; that is, providing natural consequences of the boy's choices.

> *I just spend hours and hours and hours with him and the truth is at some point he'll yell and scream, and I* [say back] *"I don't care. This is what it is and if you want things to go, this is the bottom line, you choose not to do that, that's fine, we'll still be friends we'll still hang out, but you can't expect me to care more than you care … you can't expect me to invest more than you're willing to invest."*

Far from feeling rejected, P13 believes that his "tough love" approach is honest and provides the boy an experience that he has been yearning to find.

> *The biggest thing we hold over any kid that we work with is our relationship cuz the truth is … this age bracket specifically, are yearning for relationships, yearning for real connection to people, They feel like they're outcasts. They feel not connected. They feel abandoned by family by friends, whatever it is, and that sort of gives them the carte blanche to do what they want and the defense mechanism is that you don't care if I'm yearning for that and it hurts me so much then I just don't care about anything.*

To accomplish this, P13 will reframe compliance as respecting relationships.

> *At one point we had it out a little bit, it sort about not mincing words and being real. I said "You can't make it okay just by smiling and making a joke and putting your arm around my shoulder, it doesn't, it doesn't make it okay," so he* [the boy] *laughs. "You can make a joke out of it but that minimizes the way I feel, this is something important to me. You've done something wrong and your response is to put your arm around my shoulder like we're best friends. That doesn't work! Now*

I'm calling you out on the relationship. I'm calling you out on being a decent person."

Likewise, P13 feels a true friend will confront his friend when they do or say something hurtful.

We tell guys the concept "I love you but you're a jerk" and sometimes you say that b'peh malay [openly] *and the truth is it translates through because what does that mean? It means that I love you we have a great relationship but that doesn't mean that I have to look the other way when you did something wrong. It doesn't mean that I can't tell you, "The way you're treating your parents is wrong. Your parents are crazy, whatever it is, right now you're wrong. Right now what you're doing isn't right … I love you, we're good friends … and because I love you I could also tell you that you're a jerk." The real friend could tell you that it doesn't necessarily affect our relationship.*

P13 believes that mentorship requires the same commitment one gives a blood relative; no matter their behavior or willingness to be helped, a familial bond persists.

That they find is a real relationship. We call it family. But they find a real relationship and that's what sells.

The role of religion. P13 appreciates that adults, especially Rabbis, can be expected to be viewed with distrust by at-risk youth.

I meet a new kid, the initial reaction is you're a Rabbi. You're an adult, You're a therapist, whatever it is, and the initial knee jerk reaction is "What are you doing here? What do you want from me?"

He therefore waits for youth to approach him.

> *If I know 20 guys out there and I'm hanging out with those guys … they think you're okay … "Oh, you're having this problem you got in a fight with your girlfriend, you got kicked out of Yeshiva, your parents etc." but their friends say "Ok, here's a guy you can speak to."*

P13 makes it clear to his volunteers that their work with at-risk youth is not about increasing religious observance.

> *We met a group of girls, interviewed them to be volunteers, and we ask them the question, "Are you idealistic? Do you wanna save the world, help people out?" And they were like, "Yeah, yeah," so I said "This isn't for you … this isn't kiruv rechokim* [returning off the derech individuals to Orthodox Judaism]*, it's not, I'm gonna show you a beautiful Shabbos! I'm gonna put my arm around you and smile and everything is gonna be great and you're gonna be so excited! It's not that at all."*

Rather, P13 believes working with at-risk youth requires patience and concern with little immediate progress or appreciation in return.

> *This is an angry world, angry kids … that are gonna take advantage of you, walk all over you, spit in your face, curse you out, but still love you, you know, it's not gonna happen overnight. It's not like one Shabbos and everything is healed. They know more than you, they know better than you, and certainly even if they don't, they certainly think they do. There's nothing that you're gonna tell them that they haven't heard before.*

For that reason, he makes sure to provide a realistic portrayal of mentoring at-risk youth.

I deal with my volunteers, it's always the frustration you work with a kid for a few months and you don't see any real, real change, because it could take three, four, five years till they're really making changes, two, three years just going around and around in and out of trouble … They start buckling down and then it's another you know 6 months a year beyond that where they're making progress so it could be a very frustrating world. So if you are all idealistic and just want change and that good feeling, that good feeling doesn't come often and frequent.

From P13's perspective, idealistic or religious agendas are not what at-risk youth needs.

But that's really what it is … I certainly make those volunteers cry [laughing].

Chapter 5: Structural Narratives

Introduction

Chapter five offers structural narratives which explore the essential constituents that emerge from textural narratives presented in Chapter 4. While textural narratives are designed to ground findings with participant descriptions of a phenomenon, structural narratives abstract essential constituents of the phenomenon. In this way, phenomenological research moves beyond descriptive goals of qualitative research, embracing an abstract process of reflection to capture the meaning and essence of the described phenomenon.

While structural narratives should clearly emerge from, and not conflict with, the textural narratives, their goal is not to reduce the participants' described lived experience to concrete, quantifiable constituents. That is, structural narratives are designed to do more than identify overarching themes of a phenomenon and are consequently not an

amalgam of all the participant experiences. Structural narratives profoundly depend on the author's own subjective observations and understandings derived from: a) textural narratives, b) a consideration of the transcripts in their entirety, c) field notes, d) author self-reflections regarding participants, e) the literature review, and f) the perceptions and insights drawn from life experiences. In other words, they represent an abstract triangulation of several sources of data, resulting in an understanding of the meaning the researcher attaches to the lived experiences of the OJC professionals[29] trying to connect with OJC youth.

Four structural narratives are presented. To review, participants were asked to describe both a *Connection Experience* and *Disconnection Experience* with OJC at-risk youth. Consequently, the first two structural narratives, *Being non-judgmental* and *Not "taking it personally"* drew upon the most rich data source. Voluntarily, participants continued describing connective narratives to present day knowledge, which led to the emergence of a third structural narrative, "*Being real.*"

Chapter 5 concludes by addressing a secondary goal of the study which explored the role of religion in OJC professionals work with OJC at-risk youth.[30] This research question was addressed with a single open-ended question, "what is the role of religion in your work?" This single question did not provide the same depth of data, nor was it designed to explore participant lived experience of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, given

[29] Structural narratives use the title "professionals." This was done consistent with the goal to abstract essential qualities from the grounded participant interviews to understand the essence of the OJC professionals' experience working with OJC at-risk youth.

[30] For ease of reading, OJC at-risk youth will frequently be abbreviated to "at-risk youth" or merely "youth" throughout all structural narratives.

the exploratory nature of the current study, a fourth structural narrative, entitled, "*Focusing on well-being, not religion*" is offered.

Structural Narratives

Being non-judgmental. In meeting OJC at-risk youth, the professionals are prepared to be the target of profound cynicism, distrust, and resistance. The professionals appreciate that youth view them as merely another representative of someone who, armed with the upper hand of the power differential, will command compliance in general, compel religious adherence in particular, and condemn the youth as "bad," "no good," perhaps even shameful. At-risk youth have learned to protect themselves from these expectations via passive (e.g., aloofness) or aggressive (e.g., antagonism) dispositions.

Moreover, the professionals understand that the OJC at-risk youth will test their sincerity and resolve, and they appreciate that resistance communicates a distrust of the professional's intentions: Are they simply more agents of society seeking to engender compliance or do they actually care about me? Do they have an agenda to simply change my behavior or are they genuinely concerned that I feel miserable? Are they going to reject me because I refuse to follow their (my parents, etc.) expectations or are they going to accept me on my terms? Are they going to "stick around" or will they leave at the first sign of trouble?

Experience has taught the professionals that no words or actions will easily dispel the youths' distrust; rather, a dispositional quality of the professionals will set the stage. Neither intervention, nor carrot and stick technique will accomplish the feat; it requires a genuine, non-judging personality. Either the professional has it or not, it cannot be artificial. Each professional, in their own way – empathically, intellectually, or via humor

– expressed an aura, a persona, of being non-judgmental. This alone seems to significantly lower the youths' guard. Yet, it is by definition an impersonal communication; it is the absence of judgment, as such its opposite is seemingly neither understood, nor implied. The professionals neither agree, nor disagree. The professionals neither endorse, nor condone. Why would such a characteristic seem so essential to the persona of one who works with at-risk youth? Or asked another way, why would youth break their resistance for such a seemingly neutral, detached message?

When reflecting on this, I recalled my own lived experience interviewing the professionals. During these interviews, I noticed uninvited "guests" pop into in my mind: self-doubt, over-analyzing, expectations, etc. I understood that such "guests" naturally come uninvited. That understanding alone helps. With that understanding I could naturally "bracket" my personal thinking. Yet, being human, there were times when I forgot that understanding; imagined mistakes, imagined missed opportunities, and imagined negative impressions crept into my perception as reality. In the blink of an eye an innocent, minor mistake during the interview could suddenly take on disproportionate significance whereby my mind transformed the innocent professional into an agent capable and eager to critique, abuse, and possibly humiliate.

Oh, how to describe the relief of being in the presence of the lack of judgment? I sensed that my essence as a person was neither evaluated, nor valued for what I had said or had done, was saying or was doing. Those imaginings evaporated away as fast as they came, transforming instead into possibilities for renewal; an opportunity to start anew, to let go of the baggage that steered me toward old defenses and routinized patterns of

reactivity. In the presence of non-judgment not only does distrust dissipate, expectations are shattered, making room for new possibility.

The professionals, naturally non-judgmental, appear to see past the behavior and focus on the person; they remain empathic despite the behavior, appreciating that the behavior is simply a communication and they are curious to discover its message. When at-risk youth (no different than anyone else) are beset with unique vulnerabilities and uninvited guests, they enter into a social interaction with the professionals, expecting to be misunderstood, degraded, and devalued. To be in the presence of non-judgment can present youth with a tabula rasa of sorts, a relational context that subtly affirms to youth that the professionals represent a safe context to begin the process of redefining self.

Non-judgment signifies even more in the context of the *off the derech* cultural phenomenon. At-risk youth, having been raised in the OJC and understanding its deeply held values and beliefs, expect a religious agenda, no matter how subtle, to "return" them from *off the derech.* Yet, the professionals do not judge youth for rejecting what they personally hold sacred. In this context, non-judgment is a profoundly powerful expression of acceptance in that professionals accept youths' free will to choose for themselves. In so doing, they accept the youths' difference with humility, and the youth respond by lowering their guards and opening up to the possibility of trust.

Trust may not be earned at once, yet overtime, the professionals prove to youth that their encouragement to change, drop the rebellion, and live life on life's terms is not motivated by personal or religious agenda; it is an expression of sincere care, which all translates into eventual trust. Paradoxically, once youth feel accepted, they are free to change. Change becomes a viable choice once freed from their principled commitment to

resist at all costs, to go to greater and greater self-destructive lengths to prove *they* are in control. Once youth feel sincerely accepted by the professionals for who they "are" they can begin to explore the possibilities of who they sincerely want to "be."

Not "taking it personally." Armed with years of professional experience working with at-risk youth, the professionals have learned that resistant attitudes and behaviors do not necessarily communicate an ironclad resolve to resist forever. Experience has taught them to look beyond the resistant front, as other youth have been willing, even quick, to let down their guard, engage them in conversation, and even be open to a relationship. While some have remained unwilling and, perhaps even intensified their resistance when approached, memories of past successful suspensions of hostility, even conciliations, give the professionals permission to "not take it so personally."

The professionals more often than not see past the behavior, appreciating it as a symptom, a reaction to something *other* than the professional. Far from feeling personally offended or a sense of defeat, they roll with the resistance, using their natural personalities to engage conversation. In this way, they are able to break youths' expectations of critique, punishment, or isolation and naturally validate youth by appealing to their situation ("I imagine you must really not want to be here"), feelings ("I'd be angry too"), and sense of victimhood ("It stinks to get caught, right?").

Even when resistance may persist, they readily appreciate, "How could the youth dislike me? S/he doesn't even know me?" Likewise, knowledge of youths' past painful experiences or trauma provides an external scapegoat that insulates from interpreting personal affront. Far from taking the resistance personally, they empathize, understanding

that the resistance is youths' coping method; it helps him or her feel safe, so "why remove their sense of security?"

Likewise, professionals have learned not to take ownership for failure to break resistance. Sometimes the resistance is a developmentally appropriate expression of the adolescent who is convinced he or she is right and the rest of the world is by definition wrong, hopelessly confused, or un-relatable. Similarly, the at-risk youth may have a personal agenda that makes disconnection a foregone conclusion (e.g., commitment to sabotage to prove to parents that the meeting was a horrible idea). In other words, some resistance is out of the professionals' control. The professionals appreciate that their responsibility is to try, remain available, and fall back on the truism that they "can't save everyone." Connection requires collaboration, but disconnection can be chosen unilaterally.

All in all, the professionals personify the ability to "not take it so personally." Colloquially, "taking it personally" is used as a synonym for someone who is overly sensitive; they over react, likely because of underlying insecurities. They become defensive at the slightest inclination of insult, leading to hurt feelings and resentments. Such a person could hardly be successful working with at-risk youth yet "taking it personally," on occasion, was a very common experience voiced among professionals, suggesting a deeper meaning to the term.

The experience of "taking something personally" is in its essence self-referential. Whatever has happened is primarily attended to, and understood, as it relates to the individual alone. The circumstance, the context of a behavior or statement is forgotten, and perspective taking (i.e., empathy) is lost. "Taking it personally" occurs innocently

and generates a common trail of thoughts: How does this affect me? What does this mean about me? What does this reflect about me? How can I meet my own needs in this moment?

Regardless of professional experience and intellectual preparation, the youths' behavior may nevertheless elicit self-referential concerns whether psychological (e.g., fear of personal rejection, fear of failure) or physical (e.g., fear of violence). In such moments, the professional is distracted by personal agenda, confirming the youth's cynical, distrustful stance on humanity. The professional suddenly experiences tunnel vision, losing the ability to look beyond the youth's behavior, failing to appreciate its communication of vulnerability and pain. A cognitive dissonance is experienced (between intellectual expectation and actual experience), which is resolved via a professional conclusion that the youth was resolutely obstinate and unwilling to be helped. By implication then, hope in their ability to help is lost and belief in the youth's willingness to accept help is lost as well. In short, the youth's shield is seen as impregnable.

No matter how confident, successful, or experienced, the professionals are human and have limits, and if crossed, will lead to self-referential concerns. They may hardly flinch at intense anger, yet rage or threat of violence may trigger personal fears. In a similar vein, personal struggles may bleed into professional activities, whereby personal vulnerabilities are more likely to be exposed. In any such a case, the professionals and at-risk youth are trapped in the same phenomenon: they are experiencing tunnel vision in which only one reality exists. When the professional and youth react to their reality,

parallel tracks are triggered: each person follows a self-confirming reality that can result in disconnection.

Yet, disconnection is not an inevitable outcome of "taking it personally." Some tests are passed by omission, not commission. That is, despite "taking it personally" and failing to empathize and validate, they can still prove themselves as *not* untrustworthy. The professionals demonstrate that they can be personally affected without reacting defensively or responding in kind. They sit silently or initiate casual conversation. Simply by "doing nothing" they succeed in breaking preconceived expectations of a counterattack. And, if the professional proves they do no harm even when provoked, how much more so if not?

Overall, the professionals understand that the youth is projecting an illusion of an impregnable shield and remain focused to the vulnerable, albeit obscured, plea for help. Not only do they expect the resistance, they have learned to enjoy the challenge to break through it. When handling resistance with grace, the professionals are grounded in a focus on the youth and nothing external to him or her, whether that is the youth's behavior, language, dress, religious disregard, or the professional's own self-referential thinking.

"Being real." I encountered several different personality types and demeanors during participant interviews– laid back, iconoclastic, professional, rabbinic, intellectual, passionate, etc. – different in form, yet all authentic expressions of each person. Nevertheless, regardless of the professionals' authentic personalities, their profession exposes an underlying agenda to affect change in the youth, which normally inspires resistance. What is it about authenticity that inspires at-risk youth?

Disingenuousness is a very common, and by definition then, a normal human enterprise, an abstraction of the self-survival instinct. As such, a sign of maturity is to distrust others to some degree. After countless experiences of pretense, deception, and misrepresentation we learn to question others without compunction, without a second thought. Ultimately, perhaps the most pernicious impact is that it reinforces our doing the very same thing; we wear our own masks to protect from some external "other" and, over time, the masks begin to define our lives.

For this reason, it is so refreshing to be in the presence of a genuine, authentic person. Their transparency, willingness to laugh at themselves, acknowledge mistakes and imperfections, and self-confidence to take risks and survive failure, does more than lower our guards; it gives us hope, even permission to momentarily drop the mask, to "be real" with others and, most importantly, ourselves. Their freedom is apparent; having let go of pretense they no longer need to "try" so hard; they are simply being themselves, and it seems so easy and light, and the feeling is contagious.

Freed from pretense, professionals can be honest with themselves, take themselves seriously, and more important, take youth seriously. True, the professionals are not free from agenda, yet their agenda is to help at-risk youth find happiness and peace within themselves and healthy relationships with others and the world. It is what youth deep down yearns to obtain, yet distrust, cynicism, and hopelessness has prevented seeking or accepting help. In the presence of the professionals they can experience that refreshing authentic soul and remember to dream again. They may persist to disagree and argue and test, but not out of fear of the professionals but rather from fear of confronting the possibility of change. The at-risk youth is no different than anyone of us; the genuine,

authentic man and woman seem so rare that, when befriended, we hold on to them tight and do our best to keep them close.

Thus, the professionals can be trusted to "keep it real." The professionals have proven (and continue to prove) that they non-judgmentally accept youth regardless of behavior and, now emboldened by the relationship, they proceed to assert the difference between acceptance and tolerance; acceptance is non-conditional but toleration has limits. No one can be expected to tolerate verbal abuse, broken promises, disrespect, veiled threats of violence, etc. They do not use interpersonal behavior modification techniques; they simply assert their valid rights as a person and friend. By simply being themselves and voicing their honest reactions and needs as a person, the professionals again shatter expectations of another power struggle as their assertion is done with respect (e.g., no name calling or threats), honesty ("I don't like when you do that") and includes reasonable requests ("Stop it, you can't expect me to be ok being treated like that").

Yet, the professionals' use of assertion is more than modeling effective interpersonal skills. It represents an experiential demonstration of "being real" that further urges the youth to risk letting go of the mask, to take their dreams as seriously as their needs to guard against imagined negative outcomes. By encouraging the youth to "be real", the professionals plants a seed for an insight, which eventually bubbles up into consciousness to declare: "I *can* choose to drop my guard." Over time, youth gain insight into their own reasons for change and, in so doing, gain internal motivations to address previously avoided psychological wounds and explore and assert their needs in healthy ways. In short, they begin to embrace and express their authentic selves.

In the presence of the professionals' authenticity, healthy choices become evident, and more important, safe and secure. Over time, youth learn to express their own authentic self, and when they inevitably forget, lapsing back to old routines, they remain secure in the knowledge that the professionals can be trusted to be there, maintaining boundaries and "keeping it real" until the youth can "keep it real" for themselves.

Focusing on well-being, not religion. OJC professionals understand that OJC at-risk youth watch them closely for the slightest signs of religious condemnation or agenda. They understand that youths' expectation are a shield against an attitude held by many OJC members that the ultimate problem of at-risk youth is their *off the derech* behavior (i.e., rejection of Orthodox Jewish religious practice). Yet, OJC professionals appreciate that the question of religion fundamentally misses the point of the professionals' challenge. They work with at-risk youth struggling with chaotic life circumstances, self-destructive behavior, emotional instability, and for many, a life spiraling out of control. Professionals confront realities that people of all ages die by drug overdose, suicide, and homicide. They understand the potential risks involved and their goal is to bring stability into youths' lives, to help them generate self-worth, become self-sufficient adults, enjoy healthy interpersonal relationships, and, ultimately, experience joy and happiness.

The OJC professionals aspire to bring into awareness youths' own reasons to initiate change, not as a capitulation to authority figures, but as a means to pursue and actualize their own potential. They encourage youth to address psychological barriers and instill hope that feeling good and feeling comfortable with oneself is possible. They help OJC at-risk youth self-advocate in healthy ways, promoting acceptance of realities, not as

a capitulation to injustice, but as a pragmatic requirement to drop rebellion to be freed to pursue personal dreams.

To be fair, there can be little doubt that, as Orthodox Jews, the professionals hope at-risk youth will resolve their religious conflicts. Moreover, these professionals often expect that youth will eventually re-integrate into the OJC (on some level) once well-being has been re-established. However, these hopes and expectations are neither pursued in action nor word. Their hands off approach to religion reflect their honest belief that they genuinely care about youths' well-being, not religious compliance.

Such an attitude gives professionals license to address religion when deemed culturally or clinically appropriate. For example, mental health professionals addressed religious experiences when clinically relevant (e.g., "what was your *Bar mitzvah* experience like for you?"). High school Rabbis led discussions on Jewish ideals of moral and ethical character as a means of encouraging self-exploration and identifying personal life values. Likewise, mentors would readily use Jewish analogies or offer Jewish perspectives to help youth (e.g., understand pain and suffering).

When professionals focus on well-being they not only counteract youths' expectations, they demonstrate sincere care about the youth and his or her future. In so doing at-risk youth perceive being taken seriously and begin to take themselves seriously. In parallel fashion, as the professionals focus on well-being and away from religion, OJC at-risk youth follow suit, focusing on future possibilities instead of their reasons for principled rebellion.

Chapter 6: Personal Reflections and Recommendations

Introduction

In this final chapter I offer reflections on study findings and recommendations for OJC members hoping to connect with at-risk youth. In the first section, *Discussion of Findings,* I present a concluding discussion of the study findings. In the second section, *Translating Research into Practice,* I offer recommendations to translate this research into practice with a guideline for how to connect with at-risk youth and a vision for communal structural change. In the third and final section, *Final Reflections,* I consider the meaning of the research findings relative to the overall OJC at-risk youth phenomenon.

Discussion of Findings

The primary goal of the study was to understand the lived experience of OJC professionals connecting with at-risk youth as a way to address a pragmatic difficulty facing the OJC working with its at-risk youth. Namely, how do you help someone who distrusts your intentions, rejects your attempts to intercede, and generally resists attempts to communicate? The preceding chapters offer a phenomenological approach to better understand this phenomenon. This was accomplished in three stages. First, I introduced the OJC culture to understand the unique challenge of the OJC professional (*Chapter 2*). Second, I presented textural narratives of the professionals' lived experience trying to connect with at-risk youth (*Chapter 4*). Third, a structural analysis was presented to offer insights into the essence of the experience to glean deeper meanings inherent in the phenomenon (*Chapter 5*).

The textural narratives described the following phenomenon from the perspective of the professionals: OJC at-risk youth distrust the OJC professionals and an assumed

"compliance" agenda. The OJC professionals counteracted youth expectations, lowering youths' resistance, and ultimately opening up lines of communication.

The structural analyses sought a deeper understanding of the above phenomena by asking "why?" Why do the youth drop their resistance? To state the difficulty another way: the greatest plan in the world can fail if the at-risk youth is committed to its failure. How do the OJC professionals inspire youth to *want* to connect with them? By means of the structural analysis, I contend that these professionals connected by projecting a *feeling* to youth which *promoted* connection. That is, they created an atmosphere, a relational context, where the youth would decide on their own to drop the resistance and open dialogue.

To review, youth connected to the feeling of acceptance (*Being non-judgmental*), feeling safe and secure that *their* needs were the primary concern, not the professionals' personal agenda (*Not "taking it personally"*), feeling encouraged to be themselves (*"Being Real"*), and feeling a genuine concern for *their* well-being (*Focusing on well-being, not religion*). In other words, the youth *wanted* to connect to these feelings and also served as motivation for at-risk youth to drop their pretense of resistance and welcome dialogue. Some examples of OJC professionals' lived experience of this phenomenon are reviewed below:

1. **Being non-judgmental**. At-risk youth expect the OJC professionals to judge their behaviors and life choices (e.g., lack of religiosity, adoption of a secular lifestyle, and breaking of social norms). Years of judgment, critique, and punishment by parents, family members, teachers and Rabbis combine to communicate the message "you are no good." The youth connect to the feeling of not being judged

and its message of acceptance. In effect, the professional is saying, "I'm not judging you by your actions or your past – your essence is good and untarnished and I see that." The youth want to connect to this feeling and subsequently welcomes dialogue.

2. **Not "taking it personally."** At-risk youth expect the OJC professional to rebuke, punish, or retaliate in some way to their oppositional behavior (e.g., verbal insults, disrespectful behavior, religious non-compliance, non-compliance of professionals' rules). When OJC professionals counteract these expectations by not reacting to their own personal reactions to youths' behavior, it offers an experiential demonstration that communicates to the youth that the professionals' primary agenda is youth-centered and not self-centered. This creates a feeling of safety and security, which the youth connects, opening up lines of communication.
3. **"Being real."** At-risk youth expect OJC professionals to project adult pretense and self-righteousness (i.e., being "frum[31]"). The OJC professionals break expectations by lacking pretense, dropping their own "masks," and encouraging the youth to also be themselves. They project and encourage self-confidence and self-respect and take the youth and their relationship with the youth seriously, encouraging the youth to do the same. The OJC professionals project an authenticity which not only dispels distrust; youth *want* to connect and learn to live life authentically as well.

[31] Said in a disapproving tone, "being frum," has a connotation of someone being self-righteous and misguidedly more concerned with external practice than authentic religious expression.

4. **Focus on well-being, not religion.** At-risk youth expect OJC professionals to push a religious agenda (e.g., increase compliance with religious practice and traditions). The OJC professionals project a genuine concern that the youth, regardless of their religious choices, experience happiness, joy, and actualize their dreams. That is, they project a sincere concern for their mental health and well-being, not just their behavioral compliance. Youth trust this feeling, drop resistance, and welcome dialogue.

The current study did not identify specific interventions or techniques to create connection. In other words, no standardized protocol was being followed to overcome resistance and facilitate open communication. Yet, the professionals *did* utilize clinical skills and techniques, displaying a natural ability to develop a therapeutic alliance, "roll" with resistance, and assert interpersonal boundaries. However, the structural analytic approach primes one to go beyond description and focus on the essential components of the experience. That is, the above mentioned clinical skills and techniques represented the variant "forms" of the essential nature of "connecting," but not the essence itself.

To explain, the use of a "rolling with resistance" technique can successfully avoid argumentation (e.g., Motivational Interviewing; Miller & Rollnick, 1991) yet fail to overcome an OJC youth's distrust and perception of the professional as judgmental. Similarly, connection was not simply the result of a positive therapeutic alliance (e.g., trusting relationship between client and therapist), which moderately correlates with symptom reduction in adolescent psychotherapy research (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Kazdin, Marciano, & Whitley). Therapeutic alliance is an index of a therapeutic *relationship* while the present study is specifically exploring the lived experience of

connecting. In fact, the current study's findings were derived from professional specializations which had *no* formal therapeutic relationship (e.g., high school Rabbis and mentors). Finally, with respect to interpersonal skill training (e.g., assertiveness skills), even an inauthentic and untrustworthy professional can model and teach effective assertion skills; it is unlikely that this alone could develop connection.

Arguably, the professionals in this study did something rather unprofessional; that is, something that requires no specialization: they acted as surrogate parents to at-risk youth. They accomplished this by not exaggerating the meaning of misbehavior, which can lead to over reactions. Instead, they patiently understood and empathized with youth and their struggles and, in return, they were rewarded with open-communication. Over time, they earned the opportunity to give the gift of safety, security, stability, and confidence. In short, they earned the right to provide the youth a foundation to grow.

The ability to connect creates the opportunity for intervention, but the current findings do not suggest that connection alone is an effective intervention. That is, these findings do *not* suggest that *anyone* with the dispositional qualities identified (e.g., being non-judgmental) will successfully intervene with an at-risk youth; they will, however, likely *connect* with at-risk youth and thereby have an opportunity to intervene.

The second goal of the study was to explore OJC professionals' perspectives on the role of religion in work with at-risk youth. This component of the phenomenon was assessed with only one open-ended question and therefore provided data with the least amount of depth. Interestingly, however, this single item question led to a structural narrative, *Focusing on well-being, not religion,* which comprised the first three structural narratives. For example, not focusing on religion required a non-judgmental attitude

about religious observance (i.e., *Being non-judgmental*), professionals failed to react even when youth were attacking what they held most sacred, nor did they react to their own personal desires for the youth to reconnect with Orthodox Judaism (i.e., *Not "taking it personally"*). Likewise, professionals' encouraged youth to identify with self-actualization, not rebellion (i.e., "*Being Real*"). This all combined to project a sincere and genuine care for the at-risk youth, not just behavioral compliance (i.e., *Focusing on well-being, not religion)*. The professionals approach seems to contrast with the stigma of mental illness found in the OJC (as reviewed in *Chapter two: Overview of cultural context*). Arguably then, professionals broke expectations by not only not focusing on religion, but by also normalizing mental health struggles, which thereby encouraged youth to address mental illness and focus on health and well-being.

Several potentially limiting factors regarding the purposive sampling procedures warrant further consideration. First, purposive sampling procedures successfully recruited a range of professional specializations yet the same sampling procedure resulting in a primarily male sample (i.e., twelve of the thirteen professionals were male and all but three at risk youth cases were male). Female at-risk youth most assuredly have different experiences than males in the OJC and the female professional may therefore experience a phenomenon that differs than the one captured in this study. Consequently, future research is required to explore the experiences of female professionals specifically.

Second, an inclusion criterion was that professionals speak English. While demographic data on the affiliation of the professionals and the at-risk youth was not collected to ensure their confidentiality, this criterion likely excluded Chassidic communities where individuals primarily speak Yiddish. Given other important cultural

differences in less acculturated Chassidic communities, future research is needed to consider potential group differences. Third, sampling was regionally restricted, raising the possibility that regional cultural factors may exist. Again, additional research is needed to explore these possibilities.

The data verification procedures used in this study also warrants further consideration. The strength of the data verification team was its wide range of specializations (nurse/qualitative researcher, clinical psychologist, OJC academic/parent). This data verification team read the analyses and deemed them to be credible representations of the professional's transcribed narratives. The unique lived experience of this team would have been capitalized more deeply, however, with weekly or monthly meetings to gain insight about their perspectives on the narratives (i.e., instead of just verifying that narratives were adequately grounded in the data). Learning from their experiences may have provided me a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which could have been utilized when conducting structural analyses. Lastly, member checking helped assess the accuracy of the narratives; however, brief follow-up phone interviews would have provided additional opportunities to assess, not only accuracy, but additional insights and reflections of participants.

Translating Research into Practice

The third and final goal of the present study was to offer communal recommendations and enhance resources to help the OJC address the OJC at-risk youth phenomenon. The current study isolated one aspect of the at-risk youth phenomenon by addressing the pragmatic question: How do professionals connect with at-risk youth? First, in the *Promoting connection* subsection, I offer recommendations for both the

professionals and other OJC members for connecting with at-risk youth (e.g., parents, Rabbis, etc). In the next sub-section, *Communal recommendations,* I offer community recommendations for addressing the overall OJC at-risk youth phenomenon.

Promoting connection. Below, I present a general guideline toward creating a relational context or atmosphere that will *promote* connection. The following guidelines are not "rules" to follow; rather they are directions toward a *feeling* to *promote* trust and open-communication. Culturally-specific examples are provided following each guideline below.

Being non-judgmental

1. We must be prepared that youth are watching closely to see if we will judge their behavior.

   How will you react if a teen discloses that they had sex with a neighbor, has not put on tefillin [phylacteries] *for the last month, went to the movies on Shabbos, sporting a tattoo, etc.?*

2. We can acknowledge a youth's unique quality or talent that he or she takes prides in, but others would judge negatively.

   You are good at talking your way out of things you don't want to do. I take that to mean you actually want to be here – I'm honored.

3. We can validate that we find the youth's emotional experience (e.g., angry feeling) normal and understandable.

   It makes sense to me that you are angry at your parents. I mean, they took away your cell phone for talking to girls and that's annoying.

4. We can express that we understand the youth's point of view, even if they counter what we hold sacred. They will not mistakenly conclude that we endorse their beliefs, but they may decide to trust us.

   You break Shabbos because your find it meaningless. I don't do things I find meaningless either.

5. We can voice that we understand their choice to break social norms.

   You hated yeshiva and dropped out– that's what most kids feel like doing at some point or another.

Not "Taking it Personally"

1. If we feel defensive, angry, or similar intense feelings *do not react.*

   The youth has openly broken Shabbos or said inappropriate things in front of her younger siblings – something to "get a rise out of us." You naturally feel compelled to react but you wait until you can respond to the situation, not your personal reactions.

2. When we react to our own feelings (i.e., feeling frustrated, attacked, scared about the future), youth dismiss our response as self-serving (i.e., they distrust our agenda).

   The youth has publically broken Shabbos. Find a way to break his or her expectations that you are merely concerned about your reputation.

3. We must avoid power struggles. When in a conflict, we must ask ourselves, "How can I respond in a way that will increase the chance of a future relationship with open-communication?"

Your child is about to be kicked out of his second yeshiva [high school]. *Ask yourself, "How do I respond in a way that our "one-sided" conversations are switched from me rebuking him to him sharing his struggles so I can understand and help."*

4. We can empathize and validate something we personally find inappropriate as a pragmatic choice to promote connection.

   Instead of reacting to a youth's form of the emotional expression (e.g., "cursing out" a Rabbi), validate that his or her emotional experience (e.g., angry feeling) is normal and understandable.

5. If our current interactions are leading to resistance and rebellion we *do not* need to "give in" but, pragmatically speaking, we need to do something new. Guidance can be helpful, especially if we struggle with not reacting.

"Being Real"

1. Do not try to "win over" youth with something you think *they* perceive as "cool." Being genuine carries more weight than "being cool." Not being yourself may be interpreted as disingenuous and increase distrust.

   You will not "win over" youth by cursing or pretending to be involved in the drug culture. They will see through you.

2. Drop pretense. Encourage the youth to do the same by taking them seriously.

   I don't know what your heart is telling you to do. I doubt it's telling you to listen to your parents all the time just like I doubt it is telling you to fight them all the time.

3. Encourage youth to identify their personal reasons (i.e., values) to actively pursue life instead of passively/aggressively reacting to external rules for life.

   I don't always feel like going to shul [synagogue] – *I go anyway because it's important to me. What kind of things do you do even though you don't want to? Those are the things you really value.*

4. Invite youth to respect your rules AND also respect the youth's right to choose to break your rules *and* live with the consequences.

   The rule is you get a school pass if you put on tefillin [phylacteries] *during the week and you didn't. That's fine – I respect your choice to sleep in – but don't turn this into fight about fairness.*

5. Share your past struggles with *emunah* [faith], discuss the meaning underlying *mitzvos* [commandments], and share a *middah* [personality attribute] that you have challenged yourself to improve.

   Demonstrate that your religion is "real" and not about appearances. This gives credence to your attempts to voice your values to benefit the youth not yourself.

Focusing on Well-being, not Religion

1. If youth bring up religion, take time to assess the purpose of the question before answering.

   Are they setting you up to defend something they hate and reject? Validate the anger and move on or, if they really want to discuss it, explore what the religious topic means to them without trying to defend or promote it.

2. Avoid trying to inspire religious observance.

Ask yourself, "Am I doing kiruv [Orthodox Jewish outreach] now?"

3. Voice that youth deserve to feel comfortable with themselves and feel happy. No one needs to feel miserable and depressed.

   You just seem so miserable and you don't deserve that. I know it seems like there is no hope but I have seen so many people go from miserable to happy and I want that for you.

4. Clarify that your top goal is their health and happiness, not religious observance.

   You're right, learning more Torah isn't always going to help. Sometimes it can be like a drug that covers up pain. You gotta deal with the pain first.

5. Help youth learn to self-advocate (e.g., assertiveness) in healthy ways.

   We can't change your parents. I'm not telling you to "give in" but accept that they may not change and let's put our energies into getting your needs met.

Communal recommendations. The current research findings isolated one aspect of the OJC at-risk youth phenomenon by offering ways to promote connection with at-risk youth. I believe these findings suggest recommendations for the at-risk youth phenomenon in general as well. I therefore offer two specific recommendations and present an overarching framework to address the at-risk youth phenomenon in general. I hope these recommendations will spark communal dialogue and implementation efforts.

First, in many ways, OJC professionals acted as surrogate parents for at-risk youth (see *Discussion of Findings* above). As such, the present findings emphasize the imperative need for the OJC to promote, and make readily available, parenting training resources. I believe the most accessible venue to provide these resources are day schools

given a) their central importance to OJC families and that b) parents and teachers represent the primary daily authority figures in youths' lives (i.e., ensuring everyone is working together). Parenting resources might include: monthly Q&A open forums with a respected *mechanich* [parenting expert], *chinnuch chaburahs* [learning group on parenting topics], and *shuirim* [classes]. Importantly, parent-teacher meetings could be expanded beyond academic issues to include bilateral exchange of feedback and concerns between parents and teachers/ school social workers. Similarly, the same way that all engaged couples attend pre-marriage classes, parents should have access to parenting classes specific for different child developmental ages.

Second, all professionals interviewed (not just mental health practitioners) addressed mental illness or lack of mental health in at-risk youth (either directly or by facilitating referrals). There is a growing trend for OJC members to pursue psychological intervention from OJC mental health practitioners. However, my sense is that this trend occurs primarily on the level of crisis management. Not only does it behoove parents and school administers to consider psychological treatment as an early response intervention, prevention efforts are also essential methods for setting up our children for success. Several Jewish institutions offer programs to maximize health and resiliency (e.g., *The Yashar Foundation, Tikkun, Twerski Wellness Institute*).

Finally, implementation of these recommendations requires a more far-reaching response than can be provided by another "self-help" book, workshop, weekend conference, or task force. OJC structural changes are required to effectively address the OJC at-risk youth phenomenon. I believe it requires a *Chinnuch* [parenting] institution committed to generating communal resources informed by research, professional

expertise, and rabbinical guidance. This institution would need to address three levels of intervention:

Prevention. What are the individual, familial, and communal risk factors contributing to the at-risk youth phenomenon? This level of intervention asks, "How can we set up our children for success?"

Early response. What are the early signs of risk behavior and what adjustments are necessary to intervene? This level of intervention asks, "How do we respond before isolated problematic events escalate into significant life disruptions?"

Crisis management. What immediate action is required to manage a crisis situation? This level of intervention asks, "How can we stabilize our children before we lose all influence or before the self-destruction leads to death?"

In consideration of this conceptualization of the challenge I conclude by offering preliminary research goals and communal implementation efforts.

Preliminary research goals. The present study generates several research ideas including research to:

(a) Explore and develop an operational definition of OJC at-risk youth that outlines both descriptive features and key risk factors on the individual, familial, and communal levels. Professionals in this study articulated potential risk factors based on their experiences, including:

I. Emotional abuse

II. Chaotic home environment

III. Perceived injustice in life

IV. Feeling overly controlled

V. Feeling afraid to disappoint/hurt parents' feelings

VI. Lack of attention at home

VII. Parent-child conflict

VIII. Hurtful experiences with teachers, Rabbis, other OJC authority figures

IX. Lack of open communication with parents

X. Perception that behavior compliance is valued more than their unhappiness

XI. Perception of rejection from family and school contexts

(b) Explore the role of parent-child relationship in the development and/or maintenance of at-risk behavior.

(c) Epidemiological research to quantify the actual rates of OJC at-risk youth.

(d) Explore and develop specific guidelines, workshops, or intervention protocols custom tailored for parents, professionals, schools, synagogue Rabbis, etc.

(e) Explore the role of mental health stigma in the at-risk youth phenomenon

(f) Explore the experiences and perspectives of at-risk youth to better understand their experiences and challenges.

(g) Explore the experiences and perspectives of parents of at-risk youth to better understand their experiences and challenges.

(h) Conduct efficacy and effectiveness trials to determine whether a workshop which trained professionals or other OJC community members in the guidelines presented above (i.e., guidelines to connect with at-risk youth) lead to increased connection.

Communal implementation.

(a) Creation of a *Chinnuch* [parenting] institution with full time staff dedicated to research and dissemination of parenting resources.

(b) This principal organization would consist of two divisions. One division would be charged with targeted, timely research and the second division would be charged with ongoing dissemination of parenting resources

(c) The primary goal of the organization would be to develop and disseminate parenting resources such as guidelines, workshops, and intervention protocols for parents, schools, and synagogues.

(d) These resources must be free to the public (e.g., online) and resources (e.g., workshop materials) proactively sent to schools and synagogues.

(e) Rabbinical leadership must take decisive action, dictating their support or disapproval of particular aspects of parenting resources for their communities.

(f) Rabbinical leadership must address in person or by letter community partners (e.g., school administrators/principals) demanding action. Most importantly, follow-up meetings must be schedule with expectations for implementation.

Final Reflections

My heart breaks at our current plight. OJC parents of at-risk youth find themselves in one of the most painful places imaginable – they watch their child suffer, flounder, and self-destruct and, not only are they at a loss for how to help, their child refuses their help. I wish I would have identified a "magic cure" to end our internal anguish… yet I believe this study offers something just as important. It offers hope. The experiences of the professionals interviewed revealed that OJC at-risk youth profoundly yearn to reconnect – if only they were given an opportunity.

For my part, I no longer see youth rebellion as "the challenge" disrupting the transmission of OJC *mesorah* [OJC Jewish Law, traditions, and customs] to the next generation. Rather, it seems that the at-risk youth phenomenon is a commentary on an already disrupted *mesorah.* The current findings do not directly give insight into the sources of this disruption, but the problems are multi-layered, diverse, and are manifested on the communal and familial level. In short, no one is immune. These findings offer hope and a path to help *reconnect* with our at-risk youth – an essential first step.

What is the line separating valiant persistence to withstand the tides of assimilation by holding true to our religious standards versus being unduly judgmental and driving youth toward at-risk behavior? My sense is that this question must be asked by every parent and the answer will be different with respect to every child. Speaking to one extreme, I recall being asked a variant of this question by a Catholic (non-practicing) psychology graduate student. In a moment of brutal honesty, he told me that he believed that Jews brought suffering upon themselves:

> *Think about it – Jews have asked for discrimination by calling themselves "the chosen people" and resisting intermarriage and acculturation. It sends the message that you are better than everyone and people resent that.*

I take umbrage at the sentiment, but I suggest taking the statement seriously because it reveals something important about human psychology: People resent feeling rejected and judged – whether for good reason or not – and it can lead to catastrophic consequences. In a similar vein, our youth are feeling rejected – whether this is in response to an "actual" experience or a perceived experience – the end result can be tragic.

After conducting this research, it occurred to me that if *Torah* learning and observance of *mitzvos* is not leading to mental health and intact families then, as a community, we are not doing something right. Likewise, if the suffering of our own children cannot compel us to self-reflect and make significant cultural changes I cannot imagine what will. In the meantime I find solace in *Tehillim* [psalms], which declares:

חקרני אל ודע לבבי בחנני ודע שרעפי.

Examine me, O G-d, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

וראה אם דרך עצב בי ונחני בדרך עולם.

And see if a way of rebellion is within me and lead me in the way of eternity.

(Psalms 139)

Perhaps one interpretation of these *posukim* [verses] is that before we judge the rebellion of others we must first honestly evaluate our own, and we are promised divine help to do so.

As we continue to search for effective interventions for our at-risk youth we must reflect on the cultural experience we provide our youth; the school experience we provide our youth; the family experience we provide our youth; and the religious experience we provide our youth. Are they all experiences that reflect our sincere desire to develop an authentic relationship with *Hashem?* A relationship which represents an authentic yearning to give *Hashem nachas* [pride] by virtue of our interactions with Him and others?

I believe that the experience of the professionals interviewed here provides hope that we *can* connect to at-risk youth and, for their part, at-risk youth, deep down, welcome the possibility. We can promote reconnection as outlined in this study, but it

will require us to drop the judgmental attitude, drop the religious agenda, drop personal concerns, and drop pretense. I feel these are small prices to pay for the chances to reconnect, embrace our children lovingly, promote health and independence, and offer our children the blessing to relate to *Hashem* in the ways we have held sacred for millennia. I sincerely believe we are up to the challenge.

Table 1.

American Jewry Demographic Characteristics by Denomination

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	"Just Jewish"
Adults	10%	27%	35%	26%
Children	23%	24%	30%	21%
Married	74%	63%	60%	50%
1+ child	34%	15%	14%	13%
High school education or below	35%	19%	15%	21%
Income less than 50,000	55%	39%	34%	45%

Table 2.

American Jewry Acculturation by Denominations

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	"Just Jewish"
Half or more of closest friends Jewish	90%	68%	56%	46%
Strongly agree "I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People	91%	74%	56%	39%
Married Jewish (Total among those married)	96%	87%	74%	61%
Married Jewish (by year of marriage)				
Before 1970	99%	94%	95%	88%
1970-79	96%	90%	75%	51%
1980-90	92%	74%	66%	45%
1991-2001	97%	80%	55%	44%

Table 3.

Participant Demographics

Participant #	Gender	Approximate Age	Primary Specialization	Years of Experience
1	Male	50	Psychotherapist	20+
2	Male	30	Clinical Social Worker	5+
3	Male	30	Clinical Social Worker	10
4	Male	50	Psychotherapist	20+
5	Female	30	Clinical Social Worker	10
6	Male	30	Clinical Social Worker	10
7	Male	30	High School Rabbi	5+
8	Male	30	High School Rabbi	10
9	Male	50	High School Rabbi	20+
10	Male	30	Mentor	5+
11	Male	50	Mentor	10+
12	Male	30	Mentor	10
13	Male	30	Mentor	10+

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Appendix: Hebrew Word Glossary

Baruch Hashem: Thank G-d (Lit: Bless G-d)

Chassidic: Ultra-Orthodox Jewish subgroup which emphasizes kabbalistic thought and teachings from the Baal Shem Tov.

Chasideshe: Relating to Chassidic

Chareidi: Another name for Ultra-Orthodox

Frum/Frumkeit: Orthodox Judaism

Halacha: Jewish Law

Hashem: Title used to refer to G-d in informal situations (lit: the name)

Kashrus (Dietary Kosher laws): Observation of particular food observances related to slaughter, maintaining separation of kosher food from non-kosher food, meat from milk, meat dishes and utensils from milk dishes and utensils, rabbinical supervision of food preparation at farms and factories, etc.

Kiruv: Orthodox Jewish outreach

Kollel: institution where Rabbis earn a living learning Torah for the sake of learning (versus a synagogue Rabbi, chaplain, school teacher, etc)

Mitzvos: Commandments believed to be the will of *Hashem*.

Mesorah: Ancient Jewish tradition including laws, traditions, customs, etc.

NEFESH International: the International Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals

Off the derech: Refers to an individual who rejects Orthodox Jewish practice and belief (Lit: off the path).

Rabbi/Rebbe/Rav/Rebi/: Different names for a Jewish spiritual leader who has expertise of Jewish law.

Shabbos: Every seventh day is held sacred in which several activities are prohibited (e.g., earning a living, driving a car, writing, etc) to protect the day for religious activities (e.g., praying, learning Torah) and family/community interaction.

Tefillin: Phylacteries are two leather boxes with Torah text regarding mitzvos that male OJC put on during morning prayers every weekday.

Torah: The Torah is details *mitzvos,*the Will of *Hashem* for the Jewish people, and moral stories.

Ultra-Orthodox: OJC sub-groups which are perceived to be more insular and less acculturated than "Modern" Orthodox.

Yarmulka: Jewish head covering for males

Yeshiva: A *yeshiva* is a school that teaches ancient Jewish texts, halacha, and secular studies.

Yeshivish: Ultra-Orthodox subgroup which closely follows traditions and customs from Lithuanian *yeshivas.*

Curriculum Vita

DAVID E. BARUCH

EDUCATION

B.A. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2004
Major: Psychology

M.A. Cardinal Stritch University, August, 2009
Major: Clinical Psychology

Dissertation Title: Lived Experiences of Orthodox Jewish Rabbis and Professionals working with at-risk youth in the Orthodox Jewish Community

HONORS AND AWARDS

2012-2013	TAG Research Award for Emerging Scholars
2012-2013	UWM Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship
2010-2011	UWM Graduate School Fellowship
2009-2011	UWM Chancellor's Graduate Student Award
2009	UWM Graduate School Travel Grant
2009	John and Lynn Schiek Research Award in Behavior Analysis,
2003-present	Phi Beta Kappa, Eta Chapter
2003-2004	UWM Honors Program Scholarship
2002-2003	Psi Chi Summer Research Grant
2002-present	Psi Chi, National Honor Society in Psychology

PUBLICATIONS (Peer Reviewed)

Agishtein, P., Pirutinsky, S., Kor, A., Baruch, D., Kanter, J., & Rosmarin, D.H. (in press). Integrating spirituality into a behavioral model of depression. *Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies.*

Reynolds. E. K., MacPherson, L., Tull, M. T., Baruch, D. E., & Lejuez, C. W. (2011). Integration of the Brief Behavioral Activation Treatment for Depression (BATD) into a college orientation program: Depression and alcohol outcomes. *The Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58, 555-564.*

Baruch, D. E., Kanter, J. W., Bowe, W. M., & Pfennig, S. L. (2011). Improving homework compliance in career counseling with a behavioral activation functional assessment procedure. *Cognitive Behavioral Practice, 18,* 256-266.

Kanter, J. W., Manos, R. C., Bowe, W. M., Baruch, D. E., Busch, A. M., & Rusch, L. R. (2010). What is behavioral activation: A review of the empirical literature. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30,* 608-620.

Busch, A. M., Callaghan, G. M., Kanter, J. W., Baruch, D. E., & Weeks, C. E. (2010). The Functional Analytic Psychotherapy Rating Scale: A replication and extension. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 40,* 11-19.

Busch, A. M., Kanter, J. W., Callaghan, G. M., Baruch, D. E., Weeks, C. E., & Berlin, K. S. (2009). A micro-process analysis of Functional Analytic Psychotherapy's mechanism of change. *Behavior Therapy, 40,* 280-290.

Baruch, D. E., Kanter, J. W., Busch, A. M., & Juskiewicz, K. L. (2009). Enhancing the therapy relationship in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for psychotic symptoms. *Clinical Case Studies, 8,* 241-257.

Gratz, K. L., Tull, M. T., Baruch, D. E., Bornovalova, M. A., & Lejuez, C. W. (2008). Factors associated with co-occurring borderline personality disorder among inner-city substance users: The roles of childhood maltreatment, negative affect intensity/reactivity, and emotion dysregulation. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 49,* 603-615.

Baruch, D. E., Busch, A. M., Richardson, J. V., Kanter, J. W., & Barnes-Holmes, D. (2007). The differential effect of instructions on dysphoric and non-dysphoric individuals. *Psychological Record, 57,* 543-554.

Piancetti, J., Himle, M. B., Chang, S., Baruch, D. E., Buzzella, B. A., Pearlman, A., & Woods, D. W. (2006). Reactivity of tic observation procedures to situation and setting. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 34,* 649-658.

Kanter, J. W., Landes, S. J., Busch, A. M., Rusch, L. C., Brown, K. R., Baruch, D. E., & Holman, G. (2006). Effect of contingent reinforcement on target variables in outpatient psychotherapy for depression: A successful and unsuccessful case using Functional Analytic Psychotherapy. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 39,* 463-467.

Kanter, J. W., Baruch, D. E., & Gaynor, S. T. (2006). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Behavioral Activation for the treatment of depression: Description and comparison. *The Behavior Analyst, 9,* 161-185.

Parsons, R. G., Gafford, G. M., Baruch, D. E., Riedner, B. A., & Helmstetter, F. J. (2006). Long-term stability of fear memory depends on the synthesis of protein but not mRNA in the Amygdala. *European Journal of Neuroscience, 23,* 1853-1859.

Kanter, J. W., Cautilli, J. D., Busch, A. M., & Baruch, D. E. (2005). Toward a comprehensive functional analysis of depressive behavior: Five environmental factors and a possible sixth and seventh. *Behavior Analyst Today, 6,* 65-81.

Baruch, D. E., Swain, R. A., & Helmstetter, F. J. (2004). Effects of exercise on Pavlovian fear conditioning. *Behavioral Neuroscience, 118,* 1123-1127.

PUBLICATIONS (Book Chapters)

Kanter, J. W., Landes, S. J., Busch, A. M., Rusch, L., Baruch, D. E., & Manos, R. C. (2007). A contemporary behavioral model of depression. In D. Woods & J. W. Kanter (Eds.), *Understanding behavior disorders: A contemporary behavioral perspective* (pp. 181-216). Reno, NV: Context Press.

Tull, M. T., Baruch, D. E., Duplinsky, M., & Lejuez, C.W. (2008). Illicit drug use across the anxiety disorders: Prevalence, underlying mechanisms, and treatment. In M. J. Zvolensky & J. A. J. Smits (Eds.), *Health behaviors and physical illness in anxiety and its disorders: Contemporary theory and research* (pp. 55-79). New York, NY: Springer.

Baruch, D. E., Kanter, J. W., Busch, A. M., Plummer, M. D., Tsai, M., Rusch, L. C., Landes, S. J., Holman, G. I. (2009). Lines of evidence in support of FAP. In M. Tsai, R. J. Kohlenberg, J. W. Kanter, B. Kohlenberg, W. C. Follette, & G. M. Callaghan (Eds.), *A guide to functional analytic psychotherapy: Awareness, courage, love, and behaviorism in the therapeutic relationship* (pp. 21-36). New York: Springer.

Kanter, J. W., Bowe, W. M., Baruch, D. E., & Busch, A. M. (2011). Behavioral activation. In D. W. Springer, C. Beevers, & A. Rubin (Eds.), *Treatment of Depression in Youth and Adults*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

WORKSHOPS PRESENTED

Baruch, D. E., Pfennig, L., & Kanter, J. W. (2010, October). *Practical ways to supercharge*
therapeutic assignments. Two hour workshop presented at the Career Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, WI.

Kanter, J. W., Busch, A. M., Weeks, C. E., Bowe, W. M., & Baruch D. E. (2008, Febuary). *Behavioral activation for depression.* Full day workshop presented at Aurora Behavioral Health, Milwaukee, WI

Lejuez, C. W., & Baruch, D. E. (2007, March). *Contemporary behavioral activation treatments for depression: Principles, procedures, and extensions.* Full day workshop presented at the Depression Treatment Specialty Clinic at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Baruch, D. E., Kanter, J. W., Rosmarin, D. H., Pirutinsky, S., & Murphy, J. D. (April, 2012). *Depression stigma and treatment preferences among Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews*. Invited presentation at the Jewish Mental Health Conference at the Center for Anxiety, Manhattan, NY.

PRESENTATIONS AT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Baruch, D. E., Rosmarin, D. H., Pirutinsky, S., Murphy, J. D., & Kanter, J. W. (November, 2011). Depression stigma and treatment preferences among Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews. Poster to be presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Toronto, Canada.

Baruch, D. E., Rosmarin, D. H., Pirutinsky, S., Kanter, J. W., Holt, C. L., Feldman, H. & Caplan, L. S. (November, 2010). Relevance of culturally-valued activities to

levels of depression among orthodox Jews. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, San Francisco, CA.

Reynolds, E. K., Richards, J. M., MacPherson, L., Strumpf, G., Wang, F. L., Sargeant, M., Baruch, D. E., Tull, M., & Lejuez, C. W. (November, 2009). Integrating Behavioral Activation into a college orientation program. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, New York, NY.

Rusch, L. C., Kemp, J. J., Weeks, C. E., Bowe, W. M., Angelone, A. F., Baruch, D. E., Manos, R. C., & Kanter, J. W. (November, 2009). *The impact of models of depression on stigma and treatment seeking in a depressed African American community sample.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, New York, NY.

Baruch, D. E., Busch, A. M., Weeks, C. E., Bowe, W. M., Rusch, L. C., Manos, R. C., & Kanter, J. W. (2009, November). *The effect of a Behavioral Activation workshop on the practice of community therapists.* Poster presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, New York, NY.

Cornette, M. M., Driscoll, M. W., Baruch, D. E., Deboard, R. L., Walker, R. L., Brown, R., Jutzronka, S., & Joiner, T. E. (2009, April). *Acculturative stress, suicidal ideation and interpersonal-psychological disposition among returning military veterans*. Poster presented at the American Association of Suicidology Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Cornette, M. M., Baruch, D. E., Driscoll, M. W., Brown, R., Jutrzonka, S., & Clark, D. C. (2009, April). *Competing priorities among healthcare professionals: Suicide prevention in an environment of limited resources.* Poster presented at the American Association of Suicidology Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Weeks, C. E., Baruch, D. E., Rusch, L. C., & Kanter, J. W. (2009, May). A process analysis of Functional Analytic Psychotherapy's mechanism of change. *A behavior analytic methodology for studying psychotherapy: New data on Functional Analytic Psychotherapy.* Symposium to be presented at the Association for Behavioral Analysis, Tucson, AZ.

Maitland, D. W., Kanter, J. W., Weeks, C. E., Baruch, D. E., & Busch, A. M. (2009, May). Detailed empirical investigation of a single successful FAP session. In J. W. Kanter (Chair), *A behavior analytic methodology for studying psychotherapy: New data on Functional Analytic Psychotherapy.* Symposium to be presented at the Association for Behavioral Analysis, Tucson, AZ.

Baruch, D. E. (Chair). (2008, November). *Functional Analytic Psychotherapy: Theory and Recent Experimental Findings.* Symposium presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Orlando, FL.

Aklin, W. M., Tull, M. T., Baruch, D. E., Loeb, I., & Lejuez, C. W. (2007, November). Examining the Changeability of Affect and Risk Taking among Inner-City Substance Abusers in Residential Treatment. Poster presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Philadelphia, PA.

Baruch, D. E., Gratz., K. L., & Tull, M. T. (2007, November). The role of the Behavioral Inhibition System in predicting panic attack history. Poster presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Philadelphia, PA.

Tull, M. T., Baruch, D. E., & Lejuez, C. W. (2007, November). Examination of the effectiveness of an acceptance-based behavioral treatment for heroin users with heightened anxiety sensitivity. In E. C. Marshall & M. J. Zvolensky (Chairs), *How Can Basic Research Inform Clinical Perspectives o Substance Use and Anxiety Comorbidity?* Symposium presented at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Philadelphia, PA.

Baruch, D. E., Tull, M. T., Malouf, E. T., Trotman, A., Hopko, D. R., & Lejuez, C. W. (2007, November). Examination of the relationship between depressive symptoms and sensitivity to aversive events using a behavioral task. Poster presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Annual Convention, Philadelphia, PA.

Baruch, D. E., Pleskac, T. J., Wallsten, T. S., Aklin, W. M., & Lejuez, C. W. (2007, June). Changes in response mode for the Balloon Analogue Risk Task. Poster presented at the College for Problems with Drug Dependence, Inc., Quebec City, Canada.

Baruch, D. E., Czarnecki, A. A., Richardson, J. V., Busch, A. M., & Kanter, J. W. (2006, November). The differential effects of instructions on dysphoric and non-dysphoric individuals. Poster presented at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Chicago, IL.

Busch, A. M., Rusch, L. C., Baruch, D. E., Landes, S. J., Czarnecki, A., Turner, L., & Kanter, J. W. (2006, May). Measuring process and outcome in Functional Analytic Psychotherpay. In J. Kanter (Chair), *Functional Analytic Psychotherapy: Overview, Methodology for measuring psychotherapy process and outcome, and empirical examples.* Symposium presented at the Association for Behavior Analysis, Atlanta, GA.

Baruch, D. E., Busch, A. M., Turner, L., & Kanter, J. W. (2006, May). A methodology for measuring psychotherapeutic process and outcome in Functional Analytic Psychotherapy. In J. Kanter (Chair), *Functional Analytic Psychotherapy: Overview, Methodology for measuring psychotherapy process and outcome, and empirical examples.* Symposium presented at the Association for Behavior Analysis, Atlanta, GA.

Callaghan, G. M., Baruch, D. E., & Kanter, J. W. (2005, November). A methodology for measuring psychotherapeutic process and outcome in Functional Analytic Psychotherapy. In L. Dee (Chair), Functional Analytic Psychotherapy: Overview, methodology for measuring psychotherapeutic process and outcome, and an empirical example. Symposium presented at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Washington, D.C.

Busch, A. M., Callaghan, G. M., Baruch, D. E., & Kanter, J. W. (2005, November). Measuring process and outcome in functional analytic psychotherapy: An example with a non-self-injuring client meeting criteria for BPD. In L. Dee (Chair), *A methodology for measuring psychotherapeutic process and outcome in functional analytic psychotherapy*. Symposium presented at the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Washington, D.C.

Kanter, J. W., Baruch, D. E., Dee, L. C., Busch, A. M., & Landes, S. J. (2005, May). Modern behavioral activation, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and

depression. In L. Dee (Chair), *Behavioral activation and depression*. Symposium presented at the Association for Behavior Analysis Convention, Chicago, IL.

Brown, K., Baruch, D. E., Kanter, J. W., & Roche, B. (2005, May). Talk therapy or exposure for avoidance? An experimental comparison of derived versus direct extinction of avoidance. In J. Forsyth (Chair), *Anxiety, fear, and avoidance, Oh my! Toward a behavior analytic experimental psychopathology of anxious suffering*. Symposium presented at the Association for Behavior Analysis, Chicago, IL.

Helmstetter, F. J., Riedner, B. A., Baruch, D. E., & Parsons R. G. (2004, November). *Trace fear conditioning requires hippocampal protein synthesis.* Poster presented at the Society for Neuroscience Conference, San Diego, CA.

Baruch, D. E., Parsons, R. G., Gafford, G. M., & Helmstetter, F. J. (2003, November). *The role of hippocampal protein synthesis in the acquisition and consolidation of contextual fear memory*. Poster presented at the Society for Neuroscience Conference, New Orleans, LA

Baruch, D. E., Parsons, R. G., Gafford, G. M., & Helmstetter, F. J. (2003, October). *Protein synthesis requirements in the hippocampus during the formation and consolidation of contextual fear memory*. Poster presented at the Pavlovian Society Conference, Bloomington, IN.

Baruch, D. E., Swain, R. A., & Helmstetter, F. J. (2003, May). *The effects of exercise on acquisition and retention of Pavlovian fear conditioning*. Poster presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association Conference, Chicago, IL.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

2012-2013 Mental Health Outpatient Clinic
Milwaukee VA Medical Center (Community Placement)

Supervisors: Matthew Vendlinski, PhD
Catherine Coppolillo, PhD

2011-2013 Psychosocial Rehabilitation
Milwaukee VA Medical Center (Community Placement)

Supervisors: Michael Haight, PsyD,
Samual Shepard, PhD

2011-2012 Milwaukee Psychology Clinic
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Assessment TA Supervisor)
Central City Cyber School, Milwaukee, WI

Supervisors: Bonnie Klein-Tasman, PhD,
Hon Joo Lee, PhD

2010-2011 Milwaukee Psychology Clinic

Depression Treatment Specialty Clinic
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Therapy Practicum)

Supervisors: Jonathan Kanter, PhD,
Robyn Ridley, PhD

2009-2010 Milwaukee Psychology Clinic
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
(Empirically Supported Interventions Practicum)

Supervisors: Jonathan Kanter, PhD,
Douglas Woods, PhD,
Shawn Cahill, PhD

2009-2010 Milwaukee Psychology Clinic
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Central City Cyber School, Milwaukee, WI
(Psychological Assessment Practicum)

Supervisors: Bonnie Klein-Tasman, PhD,
David Osmon, PhD, ABPP-CN

2008-2009 OCD Center and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Services
Rogers Memorial Hospital, Oconomowoc, WI

Supervisor: Bradley Riemann, Ph.D.

2004-2006 Autism Behavioral Network
Milwaukee, WI

Supervisors: David Trejo, MS,
J. Jeffrey Crisco, PhD