# From Sin to Sick: Digital Judaism and Pornography

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores how a Jewish religious website dedicated to solving pornography addiction negotiates religion/tradition and science/technological modernity. Further, the article discusses how medicalization of sexuality is used to resolve inherent tensions in the practice of digital usage. Medicalization language transforms the GuardYourEyes.com website from a forbidden medium for ultra-Orthodox members into a clinical space, a tool for healing. Furthermore, medicalization language allows religious digital prosumers to speak freely about sexuality. By framing sexuality as a "problem of truth" (Foucault, 1998), the ultra-Orthodox authors of GuardYourEyes.com can speak about sex, without being guilty of breaking the admonition that forbids speaking about sex. However, this open discussion serves as a tool to discipline and regulate sexual behavior, thus maintaining the accepted community norms, albeit in a way that is revolutionary for this community. Furthermore, by supporting religious language with medical language, religion and science blur in a way that could potentially undermine both.

As sexual liberty has become widespread in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, religious, traditionalist, and even feminist institutions and communities need to negotiate and clarify their stance regarding gender, sexuality, and varying sexual practices (Cowan, 1992). Specifically, overwhelming access to sexual images and pornography via digital media raises concerns for religious communities which view their consumption as problematic (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Carroll, 2010; Rhea & Issler, 2015). For Orthodox Jews, these concerns have led many to reject or limit internet usage (Theobald, 2012). Beginning with biblical law, Orthodox Jewish law has been trying to direct people towards certain sexual behaviors (e.g., with laws against homosexuality, incest, intercourse during menstruation, etc.). Contemporary strict *Halachic* law, which most ultra-Orthodox Jews follow, forbids touching the other sex (if you are not married to that person), listening to a woman sing, or looking at other women. As a result, modern media such as film, television, and digital media are objects of suspicion or outright prohibition in most ultra-Orthodox communities. Some Jewish religious innovators, however, have utilized modern media and digital tools for religious purposes (Cohen, 2012; Fader, 2013; Katz, 2012), and even, as will be described in this article, used online communication to combat pornography and sexual liberty. One such example is the ultra-Orthodox organization Guard Your Eyes (hereafter, GYE). In order to use the Internet for these purposes, GYE's staff had to rhetorically and discursively make two shifts: first, they had to sanctify (at least parts of) the Internet, and second, they had to frame pornography consumption and masturbation as medical, rather than religious, problems. Thus, the sin of consuming pornography becomes, on GYE's website, a medical problem, an addiction:

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Am I Really an Addict? By Eye.Nonymous

An addict, in the purest sense of the word, means: You cannot STOP. Faced with the temptation, you're going to give in. […] IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL YOU FALL AGAIN… You don't have to be living in the gutter to be an addict, and you don't have to be caught up with adultery and pr*stitutes [sic]. *All you need is a little p*rn [sic], and/or a little m*sturbation [sic], every so often (you can even be an addict if all you look at is swimsuit magazines and circulars for women's apparel) AND YOU CAN'T STOP IT!*

That's an addict.

Luckily, once we admit we have an addiction, there are many tools that can help us. See the GYE handbook for guidance. *But the first step is to come to terms with the truth about ourselves.* (GYE daily email, my emphasis, April 30, 2014)

The above extract is from a daily email sent from GuardYourEyes.com to thousands of "Jews trying to break away" from addiction to pornography (GuardYourEyes, 2014b). Although self-blame can be characterized by some as a "Jewish attribute," there is little more in the above text to frame it as a religious Jewish text: no mention of God, sin, repentance, *Halacha* (Jewish law), or Torah. Instead, what is evident in this text is the strong emphasis on addiction. This entire text is framed to convince oneself that one is addicted, sick, in need of help, and that the only way to get help is through GYE's services. This article explores how GYE negotiates science and religion, tradition and modernity.

GYE is an organization dedicated to providing tools and techniques for Jews suffering from pornography addiction. It is specifically tailored for ultra-Orthodox communities. According to the website, within the Jewish world, GYE is recognized as "the number one resource for dealing with the growing problem of the struggle with addiction to inappropriate materials on the Internet and related behaviors in our communities" (GuardYourEyes, 2014b). This website exemplifies some of the inherent tension in religious discourse about sexuality—the religious attempt to speak about sexuality without speaking about *Eros*, to accept and regulate certain sexual behaviors, and to be able to reject deviant sexualities. In ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, two tensions concerning online discourse about sexuality should be noted. First, Jewish ultra-Orthodox society considers sex a taboo issue which should not be directly discussed; thus, the open discussion of sexuality online stands in contradiction to the community's norms. Secondly, Jewish ultra-Orthodox, at least at the surface level, reject new media, and so the mere use of an online site is controversial. I suggest that both these tensions are resolved by using the language of medicalization and therapy.

The study of medicalization of social behavior (Cloud, 1998; Conrad, 1992; Foucault, 1998; Zola, 1972) has shown how in the last century communities disciplined their members by using medical and therapeutic language. Therapeutic language has become especially dominant in the USA (Heinze, 2004). As will be shown throughout this article, using the therapeutic approach, religious and medical language combine to control sexual behavior. Conrad (1992) argued that "deviant behaviors that were once defined as immoral, sinful or criminal have been given medical meaning" (p. 1) and therefore transformed from "badness" to "sickness." Deviance, according to Conrad, has three major aspects: it is universal, it is a social phenomenon, and it is created and enforced by social group members (1992). This article shows how behaviors that are considered sinful or immoral in ultra-Orthodox communities are now cast as a medical issue, a sickness that the community must heal. In that way, the religious and the "scientific" seem to work side by side, rather than as contradicting binaries. However, as will be shown in the conclusion section of the article, once the religious and the secular languages merge (as they always did, to a certain degree) with the help of an open medium such as the Internet, things become more complicated.

## Setting the Boundaries: "Be Fruitful and Multiply"—Sexuality in Judaism

Pornography addiction and masturbation within the ultra-Orthodox community are, simply put, controversial topics. In general, sexuality is a complex issue in Judaism, as it is subject to both negative and positive attitudes. Sexual intercourse is not only permitted, but encouraged. A healthy

sexual relationship is both a virtue and a duty for married couples (Rockman, 1995). In other words, Jewish law and thought do not understand intercourse as a sinful activity, but rather as the core of a healthy Jewish lifestyle.

This positive attitude toward sex, however, is applicable only to highly regulated sexual behavior (Schwartz, 2012). Sex outside of marriage is strictly forbidden—this includes both adultery and sexual relationships between two single people (Boteach, 2000). Furthermore, sexual relations should occur in the missionary position, in the dark, and with a modest attitude—little talk, little looking (Boteach, 2000). Although earlier rabbinical texts permitted greater flexibility during coitus,[1] Boteach represents the general contemporary rabbinical movement toward a more restrictive view of sexuality (Stadler, 2009; Theobald, 2012). Stadler (2009) and Theobald (2012) agree that a growing panic about sexual "purity" is a response to the sexual "promiscuity" of the modern, liberal culture. Stadler describes how in Israel, the ultra-Orthodox discourse about sexual modesty has become militant in its presentation of sexual purity as a battle against the evil inclination (2009).

An important sexual restriction concerns masturbation—i.e., male masturbation is completely prohibited and female masturbation is either ignored as nonexistent or strongly discouraged. Therefore, pornography consumption is highly problematic for this community. Rockman (1995), a therapist to American ultra-Orthodox Jews, provides in her article guidelines for ultra-Orthodox marriage therapists. She argues that two things must be "kept in mind when counseling the couple about their sexual problems, [which] are forbidden thoughts and destruction of the seed" (p. 194). The term "forbidden thoughts" refers to any thoughts that might cause sexual arousal, and "the destruction of seed" indicates masturbation. For example, Rabbi Boteach in his book, *The Broken American Male* (2008), explains that masturbation is dangerous because it brings males to a state of "numbness and emotionless non-feeling" (p. 36). In other rabbinical texts, and especially in mystical texts, masturbation is not just a sin, but it is the worst sin of all, for which there is no repentance (see the *Sholchan Aruch; Evan HaEzer:25*). Furthermore, according to the Hasidic mindset, this sexual behavior interrupts the restoration of the Jewish community, disrupts the "healing of the world" (a Jewish concept known as *Tikkun Olam*), and prevents the coming of the Messiah (Theobald, 2012, p. 291). Problematic sexual behavior, such as homosexuality or even a rumor about a person masturbating, has real-world consequences alongside the eschatological ones. At the social level, within these closed communities, such behaviors on the part of an individual can affect his or her entire family. The family can lose honor, be shunned, or in extreme cases, even be excommunicated (Theobald, 2012). The act of masturbation, therefore, is seen as harmful for one's body, soul, emotional well-being, marriage potential, the honor of one's family, the solidarity and continuity of one's community and can lead, literally, to the destruction of the world.

Even the act of talking about sexual behaviors or concerns is regulated. Open discussion of sexuality is severely frowned upon. Marriage preparation manuals clearly state that it is immodest for a woman to discuss sexual issues with her husband or even her female friends (personal collection). The concept of *Lashon Hakodes* states that the holy tongue (Hebrew) cannot be used to speak of impure things; this law is then generalized to mean that it is shameful to speak of sexual matters (Theobald, 2012). Therefore, most people who struggle with issues of sexuality will feel highly uncomfortable speaking to their spouses, family, friends, or even rabbi. The Internet, as will be shown, might provide a safe haven for religious Jews to discuss these taboo issues.

It is within this context of highly regulated sexuality that GYE exists. How do they approach this seemingly forbidden topic while staying within the community? Part of the answer, I argue, involves the very medium in which this discussion takes place. That is, the openness of the Internet as a medium allows ultra-Orthodox members to bypass rabbinical authority. In order to stay within community boundaries, however, the creators of this website have to argue that they are not breaching the boundaries or sidestepping rabbinical authority, rather they are using the Internet to retrieve those who feel abandoned, and, eventually, to maintain community boundaries.

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[1]For example, Maimonides allows for oral and anal sex (see Rambam, *Mishne Torah, Issurei-Biah*, 21:9).

## Using Forbidden Tools for a Righteous Cause: New Media and Ultra-Orthodox

As mentioned in the introduction, GYE is using a tool—the Internet—which their society deems forbidden, problematic, or dangerous. Unlike older forms of media, such as sectorial newspapers and cassette tapes which have been accepted by the greater ultra-Orthodox community (Cohen, 2012; Fader, 2013), the Internet and its various new media forms (smart phones, tablets, etc.) are perceived as highly dangerous media in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox community (see Figure 1, depicting what happens to a child using the Internet, taken in Jerusalem, 2011). This is due to the open and participatory nature of the Internet enabling any content to be shared without regulation. Unlike newspapers and cassette tapes, which are produced by and for ultra-Orthodox society, online, anyone can upload anything. Furthermore, the lack of regulation of new media allows for a private, individualized life, which poses a threat for a socially regulating religious community such as the ultra-Orthodox, in which the control of communal life is pivotal (Campbell, 2010).

The ultra-Orthodox resistance to new media has been the subject of ongoing interest in Digital Religion scholarship (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005; Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Golan 2011; Sherlick, 2003). In 1999, the leaders of Belz Hasidic denomination (an ultra-Orthodox group) sanctioned internet use and encouraged all religious Jews globally to accept the ban (Sherlick, 2003). However, as Campbell (2010) and other researchers have shown, not all Jewish religious communities obeyed. Rather, many Jewish religious communities consciously negotiated new media in various ways, by shaping tools that allow access to the Internet whilst maintaining community boundaries and the authority of the religious leaders (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005). Such tools include kosher phones, internet filters, and other socially constructed means of regulating the use of new media. Under the pressure from their fellow community leaders, the Belz leaders recanted their position and allowed community members to use the Internet strictly for occupational purposes. That being said, in 2012 a general rally organized by ultra-Orthodox leadership and attended by approximately 60,000 people discussed the risks of internet use and called for further restrictions (Grynbaum, 2012).

Members of ultra-Orthodox communities continue to maintain an online presence, and as a result, various localized cyberspaces have been developed by and for internet-savvy ultra-Orthodox. These "digital enclaves" (Campbell & Golan, 2011) are internet locales where religious communities create a "safe haven" online for their religious denominations. The digital sanctuaries receive their aegis from several practices, including: a) their maintenance of content specific to the ultra-Orthodox community, b) their guarantee of morally clean information (e.g. no images of women,
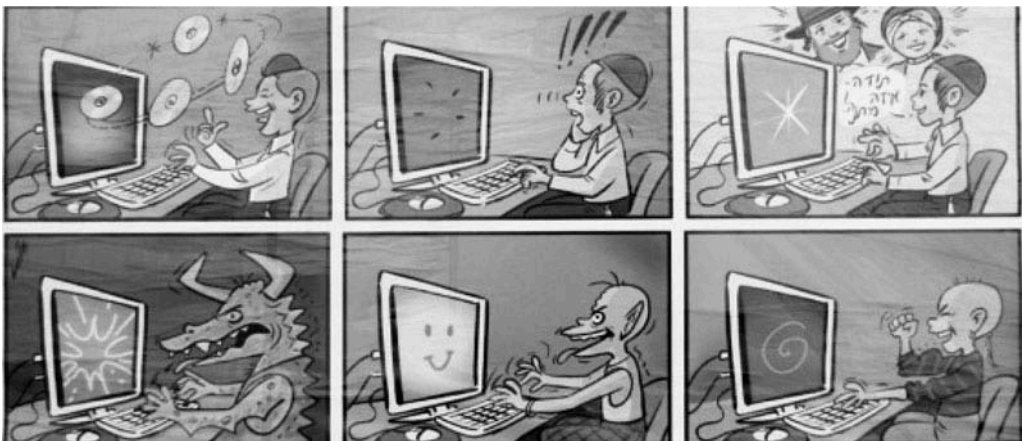


**Figure 1.** Ultra-Orthodox comic depicting computer influence (read right to left). First panel reads: Thank you! What a gift!

which is considered offensive to ultra-Orthodox Jews), and c) in some cases, a literal certification from rabbinical authority.

The GYE website is an example of such digital enclave. According to the ultra-Orthodox magazine *Mispacha* (Britkoff, 2014), GYE is a cooperative effort between an Israeli Jew named Yechezkel Stelzer and an anonymous American Jew known only as "Yaakov N." Yaakov N. is the founder and website's administrator, while Stelzer is the executive director and "addiction therapist" (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). Very few details are available about Yaakov, both online and in the news article. Stelzer, in contrast, is open about his identity and his ambitions for the website. While working with troubled youth, Stelzer began to see internet addiction as a serious problem and searched for official religious or professional sources dealing with this problem. At that point he discovered the GYE website. He describes it:

> The website was built by Rabbi Yaakov, a computer engineer who himself had to find ways to deal with the temptations of the web. Yaakov decided to dedicate his life to treating people that were in his situation. R. Yaakov, who prefers to stay anonymous, developed an initial version of the GYE website, which supplied "first aid" to the people caught in the web. […] [He] generally did good work, but on a very small scale. I understood that a war this big cannot be managed from a small warehouse […] I called Yaakov, offered him partnership, and ever since then we work together. (Britkoff, 2014, my translation)

This story presents the construction of the website/organization as a two-step process. First, a relatively small and unrecognized website was created by an ex-addict. Then Stelzer joined the website staff and added his expertise as a therapist, as well as creating motivation to fundraise. He made the website a topic of public discourse and sought formal endorsements from famous rabbis. For example, GYE had a promotional stand at the above-mentioned 2012 rally and held a rabbinical press conference (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). Thus, the website creators position themselves with those rabbis and leaders fighting against the Internet, even though they do so online. One way the GYE website aids the war against the Internet is by offering internet filters as a tactic to avoid "improper" materials online (*Venishmartem*, 2014). GYE also offers a list of kosher web portals, such as kosher videos (yideotube.com), kosher news, Jewish sites, etc. GYE staff are aware of the problematic reputation created by using the Internet for people within the ultra-Orthodox community. They frame their use of the Internet in terms of "the aim sanctifies the means." In their self-proclaimed "five factors of success," they write, "We harness the very power of instant accessibility of the Internet which has fueled this epidemic, to reach and help thousands of Jews throughout the world" (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). Even with this framing in mind, many in the ultra-Orthodox world, will always consider such religious websites "on the fringe," as they use a *Muktza* (forbidden) tool.

Given the context of these restrictions on sexual discourse and the mere use of new media technology, how can websites such as guardyoureyes.com exist? In what follows I show how GYE and other Jewish religious websites are in fact signifiers of a possible transition taking place in these communities. At least at the level of the online discourse, we see these communities opening up to a more explicit discussion of sexuality. This open discussion, however, takes place under cover of medicalization.

## Analysis: Bending the Fence to Keep the Boundary

The analysis section is focused on the language presented on the GYE website, as well as an example from the Q&A website Chabad.com. On these and similar religious websites, Jewish men (and sometimes women) write about their pornography addiction and seek religious help. Using new media's cloak of anonymity, the users share their stories, concerns, and feelings in the hopes of getting support, or Jewish legal advice (*Halacha*). For example, an anonymous user asked the Chabad.com rabbi, "Why is pornography bad?" The website rabbi answers:

> Good question. Too often we just assume something is bad because everyone says it's bad, without thinking into the reasons. […] But when someone is looking at pornography, he is actively undermining that inner

strength of his, allowing himself to slip into being an animal. The eyes see, the hormones are triggered and the mind is washed away in a sea of biological tyranny. A grown human being becomes a slave of one tiny organ of his body. In his relationship with women, as well, he becomes enslaved in his passion for them—and a cinch for them to manipulate. If you want to rise in life and become a whole and healthy human being, you need to maintain control of your mind. It's your mind, after all. And the first step in controlling your mind is to control your eyes. Keep them from staring at that which doesn't belong to you. (Chabad.com, 2014)

A few themes can be noted in this answer. First, the repeated use of eyes as the source of this sin: "The eyes see," "control your eyes," and "keep them [i.e., your eyes] from staring at that which doesn't belong to you." This rhetorical use of the symbol of the eye is found also on the GYE site, as their name suggests: Guard Your Eyes. This symbol is not made *ex nihilo*. In Judaism, consuming pornography is a twofold sin. Jewish males are commanded to "keep the Brit" (not masturbate) and "keep their eyes" (not to look at women). Therefore, the idea of keeping your eyes "clean" or "guarded" is a traditional religious concept in Judaism, used by GYE to highlight their religious message. A second theme is that of health and wellbeing. The rabbi's answer seems to emphasize wellbeing: "If you want to rise in life and become a whole and healthy human being…." I ague the medicalization of sexuality by using terms related to health and wellbeing is a paramount feature of this discourse. Lastly, and this will be seen also in the GYE discourse, community norms translate into personal responsibility in this text, á la Foucault's panopticon (Foucault, 1979). We can note how in the rabbi's answer the relation to pornography is not framed as a communal decision that is punishable, but as a personal choice of the individual: "If you want to rise…" and "It's your mind, after all." In this way, the user is responsible for his own misbehavior and becomes his own jailor.

The GYE website "speaks" both a religious and a medical language. The religious language is less visible, but can be found throughout the site. For example, under the tab "Articles," the website offers Torah lessons and inspirations. The daily mail cited at the beginning of this article, usually contains some rabbinical or biblical texts of encouragements. This religious language is specifically (European/Israeli) Jewish, as can be noted in the constant use of Yiddish and Hebrew terms, such as "shmutz," "chizuk," "taphsic," and so on. The website also makes reference to rabbinical authorities and their endorsement. Although no rabbis are mentioned on the home page, when one opens the "About Us" tab, the first image is of rabbinical figures (Figure 2). This image on the page which describes what the organization is clearly states that this is a religious, ultra-Orthodox, rabbinical-approved organization. This is important because, as noted before, many religious Jews view the Internet as a form of external media, produced outside the community, and as such, suspicious (Campbell, 2011). However, by publishing rabbinical endorsements, GYE is in fact stating that this website is "kosher" and can be used by religious people.
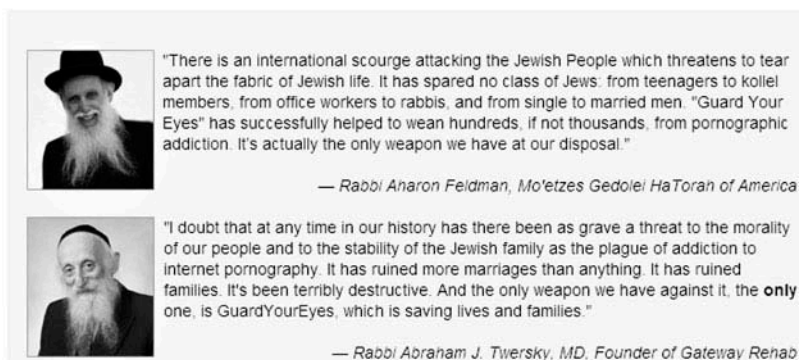


Figure 2. Rabbinical approval for GYE.

The medical language of GYE is more explicit. Most strikingly, the purpose of the website is made clear from the first glance: to provide help to those dealing with pornography addiction. On the website's homepage the main text states, "GuardYourEyes is the leading resource in the Jewish world for those struggling with inappropriate material" (GuardYourEyes, 2014b). Furthermore, the imagery used on the website is not specifically religious—it includes life vests and stop signs (see Figure 3). When introducing the organization and its goals, the website states:

> GuardYourEyes (GYE) is a vibrant network and fellowship of Jews of all affiliations, struggling to purify themselves and break free of lust related behaviors. For the first time, there is somewhere to turn to for help in these areas. In the last couple of years, the GYE network has helped roughly 1,000 Jews get back on a path of sanity, self-control and healing and has touched the lives of thousands more. GYE has become known throughout the Jewish world as the number one address for dealing with these challenges which have reached epidemic proportions. The tools of our recovery program were developed with guidance from the best experts in the field, such as Rabbi Dr. Avraham J. Twerski, and through the personal experience of hundreds of Jews who successfully broke free. [..] Our network is comprised of a website, a pulsating forum, phone conferences, daily *Chizuk* [encouraging] e-mails, support hotlines, therapists, live 12-Step groups and a program of recovery for all levels of this struggle/addiction. (GuardYourEyes, 2014c)

In this introductory text, a few medical terms can be noted: "healing," "turn for help," "epidemic," "recovery program," "experts in the field," "therapists," and "addiction." Hence, this introductory text highlights how the authors understand their purpose. They are not rabbis or religious leaders trying to offer salvation, rather they are experts trying to help Jews "break free." Deviant behavior is thus framed as "sickness," not as "sinfulness."

This medical language is also evident in the supporting materials the authors use. For instance, the tabs and links the website offers have a medical tone: "Tools," "12 Step Program," and "Therapy." The tools offered explicitly claim scientific or medical knowledge: "Scientific studies have shown that it takes 90 days to change the neuron pathways created by addictive behaviors in the brain. Join the 90 Day Challenge" (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). Expertise in the field of addiction treatment is another source of support. For example, one testimony openly compares the materials on the website to the Alcoholic Anonymous texts: "The GYE Handbook is to religious lust addicts what the Big Book is to alcoholics" (GuardYourEyes Handbook, 2012). Additionally, the 12-step program (GuardYourEyes, 2014e) is built on principles similar to those employed by other addiction texts, such as confessing—"We admitted we were powerless over lust"—as well as uniquely religious concepts, such as asking God's help—"We humbly asked Him [God] to remove our shortcomings" (GuardYourEyes, 2014e). This combination of secular addiction prevention[2] with religious texts and concepts creates a system of supporting materials that is both professional and tailor-made for religious Jews.



Figure 3. Life-jacket as a visual cue on the GYE website.

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[2] The AA 12 step program is also a mixture of spiritual and secular language, see Nealon-Woods, Ferrari, & Jason, 1995.

The website's supporting materials and visual aspects suggest a professional organization offering therapy and other psychological tools for "breaking free" from pornography addiction. The colors of the website—light grey, white, and blue—are welcoming and nonthreatening, yet professional. The material suggested evokes a sense of knowledge, positioning the website authors as the experts. For example, in discerning the factors which led to their "success," the first factor listed is "experience:" "The tools of our recovery program were developed with guidance from the best experts in the field" (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). By legitimizing their "methods and principles" the GYE website authors position themselves as the official experts.

Lastly, it is interesting to observe the use of the first-person plural pronoun in the text. The use of "we" is fairly common in describing the authors and managers of the website, as can already be noticed for the above mentioned citations. One interesting use is worth mentioning. In the section dedicated to first-time users, the authors proclaim, "All our work is free of charge and we zealously protect the complete anonymity of all our members" (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). This promise of protection brings to mind the persona of the community guard keeping the Jewish community safe from the dangers of pornography. It can also be linked to the incitement of individuality and personal choice discussed above. Deviant sexuality is framed not as a punishable sin or crime against the community, but as an individual decision driven by sickness, thus encouraging readers to regulate themselves.

In summary, two key findings become clear. First, the website frames pornography consumption as an addiction, and those who consume pornography as in need of therapy. The user is encouraged (or even constructed, as suggested in Charland, 1987) to understand himself as sick. A textual analysis of the GYE website shows that for the religious authors of this website pornography consumption is an addiction, not a sin. As a result, a second key finding is how the authors then become guardians of the community, claiming that they are not breaking the rules by using the Internet, but rather keeping the community's boundaries safe.

## Addicted, Not a Sinner: Medicalization of Sexuality

The topics of sex and sexuality are, as a general rule, taboo in the ultra-Orthodox society. The sexes are separated from a young age, no sexual education is permitted, and topics related to the body and sexuality are generally suppressed (Goshen-Gottstein, 1984). In this social context, how can the managers and users of GYE's website speak so freely about their sexual habits? Anonymity is surely a helpful construct here, but even with the cover of anonymity a few obstacles must be considered. First of all, even when a user is freed from recognition, he is not always freed from social and religious mental and ethical constructions. In other words, if one is taught not to speak of sex, how can one speak of sex? Furthermore, some rabbis have publicly endorsed the website, not staying anonymous at all. Anonymity itself, then, is not sufficient to explain how this discourse about sexuality happens so openly on a website serving a society that thinks of the discourse itself as taboo.

Medicalization of such a discourse might be just the solution to the dissonance. If the managers and users of the website accept sexual and pornography addiction as a medical diagnosis, they can shift from talking about sex to talking about mental (and physical!) health. By speaking about "addiction," "therapy," "recovery programs," and "scientific studies," the readers and authors enter the realm of medical discourse. Better yet, such a discourse allows users to position themselves as "sick" rather than "sexually active," or worse, "sexually deviant." This language limits individual personal agency, and so minimalizes fault and guilt, permitting an open discussion about sexuality in order to "seek help."

The discourse of medicalization also opens up the possibility of using the Internet, a medium which is disputable within ultra-Orthodox communities. By framing "pornography addiction" as a medical epidemic that needs to be solved, the GYE authors also present themselves as experts and the website as a clinical space. For example, on the "About Us" page, they highlight two services the website offers: treatment and prevention (GuardYourEyes, 2014c). The use of these terms frames the website not merely as a support group, but as a medical website aimed at helping patients. As a clinical space, the website becomes a more loosely "kosher" space as it moves from the realm of

entertainment to the realm of work, which is permitted by the leaders of the communities (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005).

Medicalization of sexuality is found useful, in this analysis, for a religious website designed to "fight" pornography. It allows a taboo issue to be openly addressed and a controversial tool to be used. However, this open dialogue is better understood as a tool for social control and the encouragement of self-regulation rather than as a means to facilitate an open discourse about sexuality. Using the language of the medical, some practices are couched as "healthy" while others are characterized as "sick" and in need of correction.

The concept of medicalization is understood as a process in which medical jurisdiction expands into new areas of human experience. The term was coined by sociologists such as Szasz (1960), Zola (1972), and Conrad (1975). According to Zola, "medicine is becoming a major institution of social control, nudging aside, if not incorporating the more traditional institutions of religion and law." (p. 487). Zola and other scholars frame this phenomenon as part of a social development of the early 1970s. However, we might also consider this part of the genealogy of sexuality, as it continues to move from *ars erotica* to *scientia sexualis* as argued by Foucault (1998). *Ars erotica* recognizes human sexuality, while *scientia sexualis* represents for Foucault the "inability or refusal to speak of sex" (Foucault, 1998, p. 53), which is framed instead in scientific language. This, as has been shown, is similar to the ultra-Orthodox inability to speak of sexuality, an obstacle that the GYE authors overcome by using *scientia sexualis* medical language. The GYE authors frame pornography consumption as an addiction, and their services as therapy. Cloud (1998) shows in her research on the medical concept of "therapy" how therapy can be seen as a tool for ideology:

> In the context of social problems [...] therapeutic discourses give the medical metaphor a conservative twist. [...] In psychotherapy, to attend is to watch, to guard, to survey, and to control. [...] Thus, the meaning of therapy, in a sociopolitical context, is inherently conservative... (p. 6-7)

These scholars show how medical language is used in social and political discourse to normalize conservative thinking and to control behavior. According to these scholars, some medical concepts—for example, addiction and therapy—do not describe concrete physical realities, but rather social constructions created to discipline community members. Nevertheless, many people who advocate for treatment of "pornography addiction" assert the medical reality of such a term (Abell et al., 2006; Carnes, 2001; Levert, 2007; Levine, 2002; Paula Hall, 2013). In fact, in 2004 a congressional hearing took place concerning "The Science of Pornography Addiction" (Clarkson & Kopaczewski, 2013). Clarkson and Kopaczewski highlight the problematic nature of the "scientific" testimonies presented in the hearing and claim the testimonies given, as well as the general "science" of "pornography addiction," are highly controversial and are ultimately grounded in moralistic and religious discourse (2013).

Moralistic and religious conservative opinions can be framed as natural and normative using scientific speech. Thus, the medicalization of sexuality is used to frame pornography consumption as a medical problem. The GYE website utilizes this social discourse and embraces a narrative of sexual deviance as a disease, a sickness. This is in line with a general social attitude concerning sexual addiction, but it also serves as a strategy indigenous to ultra-Orthodox communities in that it helps them resolve inherent inner-community tensions in the discussion of pornography.

This medicalization discourse might have some interesting byproducts. First, using medical language might incite people to understand themselves as sick instead of as sinful beings (consider the lesbian, gay, bisexual,and transgender case in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). Long-term effects of this type of self-recognition in this society are hard to predict, but are worth considering in future research. Second, it seems that in this case, religious discourse is losing power to medical and secular discourse. For example, out of the 20 tools offered for strugglers, only three have some religious affiliation.[3] Additionally, one of the principles under "Attitudes and Perspectives" clearly states that "Religion alone is not always enough" (GuardYourEyes, 2014f). By

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[3]Attitudes and perspectives (which offers some Jewish perspectives); Daily *Chizuk* (a daily email with Torah lesson); and Making Fences (A Jewish idiom drawn from the religious text *Pirqei Avot*) (GuardYourEyes, 2014d).

overstressing science and medicalizing morality, the power of secular language becomes stronger, "truer" than religious language. Going to the rabbi is not enough; now the rabbi needs to be a therapist. Thus, one can argue that religious authority (of texts, organizations, or leaders) is being negotiated and perhaps even partially undermined, an outcome, according to Zola (1972), of the power of medical discourse over other social institutions. This threatens and problematizes the supposed binary between secular and religious language. Problematizes, because on such websites, a mixture of meanings exists without obvious contradiction and seems to make sense to the religious user. Therefore, perhaps it is more useful to think of this as an appropriation of "secular" language into the religious worldview, a negotiation by religious users of both "modern tools," such as the Internet, and "modern concepts," such as medical science. Thus, GYE and similar websites might be thought of as hybrids between the religious and the secular. This hybrid can be understood, by religious and secular people alike, as a possible threat, too. For religious people, it can be seen as a threat to religious authority. For secular people, the threat is in the way religious theology might "sneak" into scientific and legalistic paradigms, as in the case of the medical discussion of pornography addiction.

## Conclusion: Sin, Sick, and the Problem of Truth

In this article I have shown how medicalization of sexuality is used in Jewish religious online discourse to solve inherent tensions in the practice of openly discussing sexuality. Medicalization language allows the creators of GYE, as well as the users of this website, to speak freely about masturbation and pornography. Medicalization also transforms the GYE website into a clinical space, a tool for healing, instead of a forbidden medium for ultra-Orthodox members. To use Foucauldian terms, GYE is trying to move sexuality from the sphere of *ars erotica* to the one of *scientia sexualis* (Foucault, 1998). By framing sexuality as a "problem of truth" (Foucault, 1998, p. 56), the ultra-Orthodox authors of GYE can speak about sex without being guilty of speaking about sex. However, this open discussion serves as a tool to discipline and regulate sexual behavior, thus maintaining the accepted community norms, albeit in a way that is revolutionary for this community. In this relatively closed society which has strong communal structures of discipline, this website can be considered a "soft" disciplinary power aimed at helping those who have already broken some societal norms, aimed at returning the deviant to the fold. This "return" however, is not framed only as religious redemption (*Hazara BeTsuva*), but also as healing the sick, as a medical and therapeutic recovery.

The use of such language comes with a price. The GYE website claims they are "Maintaining Moral Purity in Today's World" (website motto, GuardYourEyes, 2014b). One wonders if by using medical language, moral and religious objections are put aside and a scientific, secular discourse becomes central. The blurring of science and religion, of medical and moralistic language, can have problematic consequences for society at large, beyond the scope of GYE or the Jewish community. When we mix religion into science, what is "right" and what is "true" (as in, factual) become interrelated and difficult to separate. Although all scientific research is always already informed by societal norms—it would be naïve to think otherwise, and impossible to conduct research outside one's own bias—it is our job as critical thinkers to try our best to detach the two and single out the tools communities used to discipline their members.

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