

Vassar College

**Hookup Culture at Jewish Sleepaway Camp:
A Subconscious Strategy for Jewish Continuity**

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

by

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Preface:

Dear Reader,

As you enter into this thesis, you enter into a world. A world that may be familiar to you, a world that may be far from your own social understanding. Before we delve into the intellectual, let's take a moment and settle into the experience of camp.

Close your eyes, let's build a world together.

It is the opening day of summer camp, sounds of laughter and song abound. We begin on a windy road down into camp. A big sign welcomes you. "*Shalom Chaverim*/Hello Campers." Off the bus you leap onto the firm ground of what feels like a Jewish oasis. Not a *goy* in sight, we rejoice. Hebrew can be said freely without *goyishe* glares. We dance.

The smells of the summer pines soak our bodies. You take a breath— you begin to slow down. *Ruach* is in the air as you hug all of your camp friends who you haven't seen in a year. The combination of utter anxiety and pure joy is addictive. Lots of jumping, hugging, screaming. The energy of love.

Staff wearing specific tsevet shirts walk to your *tsrif*/bunk. Old bunks, often built in the 50s/60s/70s sing as you step on their creaky floor beams. "Welcome" they say through each creaky step.

You leave your bunk to explore the vast space around you. You close your eyes. What do you smell? Fresh air surrounds you as you take a moment to be present with the earth. A body of water, large open grass fields, trees and the energy of the forest. We are isolated, in our own world away from modern technology. A swimming pool, a basketball court, campfire pits, the *rikkud* pavilion, the *chadar ochel*. Words used to describe places on camp create their own language. Not quite English, not quite Hebrew. It's the camp language, you know it because you're in it.

You have waited all year for this moment. Camp is a promise of social energy that you cannot get during the normal year. Camp is different, camp is magic. What will your summer hold? You don't quite know and it doesn't quite matter.

Take this energy and let it guide your reading of the following pages. This piece is for anyone who is willing to fall so deeply into the magic of Jewish summer camp that we have no choice but to be critical of some of the patterns we observe.

Todah rabah,
Adina

Introduction

“For those select few of you who went all summer, all eight weeks without finding that special someone, today is your day, 'cause you don't wanna go back home... and lie to your friends about a summer romance that didn't even happen. And you don't want to be the one person... who doesn't have anyone to kiss tonight after the talent show.” - Wet Hot American Summer, 2001

Hookup culture at Jewish summer camp is a subconscious strategy for Jewish continuity. As a people who are systematically marginalized and historically persecuted, Jews are scared of not having a future. The Holocaust and Russian Pogroms alone are recent history and with current upticks in anti-Semitism, we, as Jewish people, have a rightful fear to be scared. Part of what comforts Jewish people, is ensuring that there will be a Jewish future through the passing on of oral, cultural, and religious traditions. Summer camp, for over the past 100 years, has become that space for young Jewish people to learn about the importance of carrying on their religion. Jewish summer camp teaches young people how to be proudly Jewish, and with that love of Jewish practice comes an understanding that we are the future of Judaism today. Thus, this systemic pressure and fear invade the camping sphere. Young people have a responsibility, perhaps an obligation, to continue the Jewish lineage. The obvious answer for how young Jewish youth ensure Jewish continuity is through sexual reproduction. However, for camp-aged populations, this is not yet a possibility. Therefore, a thriving hookup culture emerges as a subconscious tool: young people know there is pressure to “be fruitful and multiply” and thus, they hookup. I argue there is a systemic connection between Jewish summer camp hookups and the institutional fear for a Jewish future.

Every summer across the country young Jewish adolescents go to Jewish summer camp. Parents bid farewell to their kids for any number of weeks and kids are shipped off to sleepaway camp to engage in something uniquely Jewish. A place separate from everyday social life, young people leave behind their phones and learn about Judaism. While this is a simplified definition of the happenings of Jewish sleepaway camp, at its core it remains true. Jewish summer camp is a private space, almost a utopia, for young people to be Jewish. These sleepaway camps provide a Jewish world for their campers—while they vary in their levels of Judaism—all of these summer camps promise a social space where being Jewish is *fun*.

With that fun, parent-free Judaism comes a vibrant romantic and sexual culture. Not everyone is actively engaging in this culture, but everyone seems to know romance is in the air. Perhaps the most popular portrayal of this type of culture is showcased in the 2001 cult classic *Wet Hot American Summer*. This story of horny youth (who are ostensibly Jewish)¹ is fictional but it is based upon writer and director David Waine's experiences at Camp Modin, a Jewish summer camp in New England. *Wet Hot American Summer* is certainly not the only cultural depiction of Jewish summer camp hookup culture. We can point to Netflix's *Big Mouth*, Jewish comedian Joe Mande's standup, and various Spotify EP's (more on this later) as a few examples of this phenomenon. In a short YouTube Clip for educational website My Jewish Learning, comedian Amir Blumenfeld (2010) describes Jewish summer camp as a "sexual thrill ride" (*My Jewish Learning*).

If you are unfamiliar with this world of Jewish summer camp, I will use this time to welcome you. As a former Jewish sleepaway camper and counselor, I can firsthand vouch for the

¹ Examples of their names include Sol Zimmerman, David Bengurion, and Rachel Clipperhoffer-- canonically Jewish names. Additionally, the writer and director David Waine based his film on his time at Jewish summer camp. Thus, we can safely assume this film is Jewish in nature.

presence of this hookup culture: the pressure to hookup, the sneaking out of a bunk, the constant physical touch with the opposite sex, the performance of it all. These were all happenings to which I was keenly aware. My camp experience stuck with me years after attendance and now, as a sociologist, I look back upon this hookup culture. Using a sociological framework, I question why camp had these hookups.² I argue, that the presence of this hookup culture goes beyond the mere “adolescents will engage in sexual exploration” justification. I will not use these pages to prove to you any further that some young Jewish adolescents at summer camp are “hooking up.” That fact, for all intensive purposes, is a basic truth we will accept in the course of my work. Why must we read more into that?

Urban Dictionary, a colloquial dictionary for certain slang terms, answers this question in their first “definition” of Jewish summer camp. Put bluntly they write, “everyone knows that there is only one reason anyone sends kids to Jew Camp: to procreate the species. Jew Camp is about Jewish teens getting together, yes, but the learning is just a time killer until it's dark enough to go find a nice cabin... to satisfy their most basic hormonal urges” (Urban Dictionary 2007).³ This description gets at the idea of adolescent exploration but also introduces another idea: one of continuity. Here, camp becomes a space for Jewish relationship building. It does not necessarily have to be have romantic or sexual, but sometimes, it really is.

Camp is where the next generation of Jewish people are raised. As adults, former campers are 25% more likely to report that most or all of their close friends are Jewish (Foundation for Jewish Camp:16). Camp keeps us building Jewish relationships and making life-long friends. We, as Jewish people, push for camp because we believe camp is a place for Jewish connections. This claim, undoubtedly, is true. But what lies underneath the pro-camp

² I quickly learned it was a practice happening at camps around the country—not just my own.

³ In a study like this, Urban Dictionary is actually a really valuable resource as it illuminates a colloquial, cultural understand of a phenomenon like summer camp.

argument? Jews make up 2.4 percent of the adult population (Pew Research Center Jewish Population Study 2020). That's it. Moreover, Jewish people are highly attuned to population trends after historical events like the Holocaust. The fact bears repeating that roughly two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population were murdered not even one hundred years ago. The Holocaust is recent history, it sits in our mind as Jewish people on a day to day basis (Brandeis University Jewish Population Project 2021) A small Jewish population in combination with fear that population dwindling any further creates a push for Jewish continuity: a fear that our small population could easily die out.

Camp “works.” Jewish educators and institutional leaders have long been attached to this idea of camp “working.” But what metric are they using to determine this success? Studies of Jewish summer camp, often conducted by Jewish organizations such as the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), have concluded that “the childhood camp experience has a significant impact—in some respects a highly substantial impact—on adult Jewish practices and commitments” (Foundation for Jewish Camp:7).⁴ Jewish overnight camp is one the most effective ways to keep young Jewish people Jewish. Camp becomes the space in which Jews are indoctrinated into the world of Judaism. We, as campers, make associations in our brain. “If I love camp and camp is Jewish... then I love being Jewish.”

Thus, our carefree summer camps have much deeper underlying goals. Perhaps camp directors do not even understand the ways in which goals of continuity invade their respective camps. I argue that conscious or subconscious, a desire for Jewish continuity impacts the lives of campers at summer camp. An intense hookup culture emerges because of this pseudo-social pressure to stay Jewish. There is a responsibility that young people are given at summer camp to

⁴ Information for this study was collected and cross tabulated across 26 different Jewish population surveys.

actively continue on a strong Jewish lineage. Hookup culture at summer camp gets messy. In the following pages you will read about experiences within and around this culture. I ask that you hold space for some of these stories that get intense in various ways. I must reiterate that I am not arguing that camp leaders are diabolical in nature, aware of and hoping for certain hookups. I can assure you that they are not. Larger institutional Jewish pressure impacts all of us. Here is where we apply a sociological framework. The phenomena of hookup culture at hand is not the fault of one person. It is a subconscious social solution that attempts to solve a religious fear.

The following chapters are organized by theme, each building upon the next to explain various aspects of Jewish summer camp and hookup culture. Chapter One describes a detailed history of Jewish summer camping, starting briefly with the origins of American summer camping at large. The chapter walks through Jewish camps throughout the 20th and 21st century and touches on how major historical events influenced the camping sphere. As Jewish populations climbed the socioeconomic ladder, the practice of summer camping became integral to life as a young American Jew.

Chapter Two begins to address the phenomenon of relationship building at Jewish summer camp. With Jewish populations assimilated to American society, Jewish institutional leaders and individual families feared that young people would not remain Jewish. Often, the word used to describe these fears was (and is) intermarriage. Simultaneously, a camper “subculture” flourished and young people in the post-sexual revolution era were getting involved romantically and sexually at summer camp. This chapter also describes what a camp hookup culture looks like in the modern world.

Chapter Three utilizes the vast scholarship on adolescent sexuality to understand the experiences shared by my interviewees. I contrast the experiences of male campers with the

experiences of their female counterparts. I write about how an individual's relationship status appears to define their social desirability at summer camp. In addition, this chapter address some more intense sexual conversations including coercion and harassment. Please be aware of this content warning as you proceed with Chapter Three.

Chapter Four addresses the population of queer Jewish summer campers. I share experiences of my informants, five of whom identify as queer. One of these individuals identified as LGBTQIA+ at camp which drastically changed his relationship to summer camp at large. I note in this chapter the difference between being out at camp and being closeted (to oneself or to a larger community).

I conclude with a reflection on this work and the challenges I have faced as I have written this piece. I share my discoveries and the complexity surrounding my own love/hate relationship with Jewish summer camping.

Methods

My study had three major stages of research: studying of the current scholarship, learning about cultural portrayals of Jewish summer camp, and conducting nine interviews with former summer camp participants. Sources for the first component of research were mostly found through access to academic journals and books provided by Vassar College. Archival sources were found, for the most part, by scholar Sandra Fox who wrote about them and/or shared the pieces with me. The second component of the study utilized a variety of media to understand how a culture perceives the institution of Jewish summer camp. My sources all focused on the American Jewish summer camp experience, at times connecting things that were not overtly Jewish to the Jewish experience.

To conduct my interviews, I connected with nine people who I knew previously utilizing the principles of convenience sampling. There is an inherent bias in picking a sample of people who are all, in some way, associated with me. Within my convenience sample, I attempted to interview a diverse group. The nine informants attended nine different Jewish sleepaway camps across the United States, three in the Northeast (two camps in New York State and one in Pennsylvania), two in the South (one in North Carolina and one in Georgia), two in the Midwest (one in Missouri and one in Wisconsin), one in Texas, and lastly one on the West Coast in California. Geographically, these summer camps do not span the entire U.S., but they do accurately reflect the areas in which summer camps are concentrated. Many camps reside in rural areas near New York and Boston, and to a lesser extent in the Midwest and South. Summer camps are also found around the West Coast and near newer (relatively speaking) hubs for American Jewry in the sunbelt cities of Miami, Los Angeles, Arizona, Houston, and Dallas (Foundation for Jewish Camp 2022).

Informants' summer camps also represent a variety of different levels of religious affiliation. Out of the nine summer camps, three of them are associated with a larger religious movement: one with the Reform movement (URJ), one with the Reconstructionist, and one with the Conservative movement (Ramah summer camps). Five of the summer camps are connected to other Jewish organizations/movements: two camps are affiliated with the Jewish Community Center (JCC) and three are religiously Pluralistic, Israel-focused summer camps. Lastly, one summer camp is an independently run camp, not affiliated with any other Jewish movement. To the best of my abilities, I captured the spectrum of Jewish summer camps in the U.S.

My informants vary in terms of gender identity, sexual orientation, and individual affiliation with the camp. This type of affiliation refers to whether informants are former campers or former staff (both counselors and higher up staff) or both. All of these individuals attended summer camp between the years of 2006-2017 (approximately) and worked at summer camps between the years of 2015-2021. These years are a limitation to my study as I only talked to two generations of people, older generation Z and younger millennials. Thus, the experiences I discuss are not representative of the entire population of people who have attended Jewish summer camp; my data is not generalizable. This thesis does not address every kind of Jewish camp, nor every element of the camp experience with uniform intention. Further, my claims surrounding summer camping cannot be generalized to discuss all Jewish individuals.

To ensure my informants were not harmed in any way, their identities are not disclosed in this thesis. Due to the sensitive nature of my research topic, it was important that I conducted my research in a respectful manner such that no participants' personal responses can be identified as their own. I also obtained informed consent from all of my participants before and at the start of each interview. My research was also counted as exempt by the Vassar College Institutional

Review Board. My interviewees were presented with adequate and accurate information about my study before the interview began and there was an option to opt out at any point if they became uncomfortable. Also, all of my interviewees are over the age of 18 so no parental consent was necessary.

In conducting this research, it was essential that I acknowledge my positionality on these issues. I attended and worked at Jewish summer camp. I had to acknowledge and accept my positionality as it related to my preconceived understanding and prior knowledge of heteronormative hookup culture. I cannot take away the fact that I was once surrounded by these systems of hookup culture. In a senior thesis like this, I do reference and theorize about my own experiences, however, I also work to ensure that my biases do not skew the information I collected from my research. Especially in the interview stage of my research, I made a point to not discuss my own experiences in the interviews which would have potentially influenced the responses. I must be transparent about how this study came to be and the personal connection I have to it. Those who read my thesis research must know my positionality.

Chapter 1: The Jewish Sleepaway Camp from Historical to Contemporary Perspectives

While we have established the prominence of Jewish summer camps, sleepaway camp itself is not a uniquely Jewish practice. The earliest iterations of summer camp emerged in a civil war-ridden America. Many scholars trace back to a schoolmaster by the name of Fredrick William Gunn who opened his own camp in August 1861 (Zola 2006). Gunn brought young people (mostly boys) together to mimic the lifestyle of union soldiers (Museum of Jewish Heritage 2020). Here, Gunn modeled a style of learning that engaged with nature outside of the traditional schoolhouse. While there is some debate about whether American camping began with Gunn's program, scholars agree that summer camping emerged sometime in the late 19th century (Zola 2006:2). Early American summer camps embraced a logic of individual betterment, marketing their camps as spaces to build character and foster intellect. In later years during the Progressive Era, education philosophers like John Dewey began thinking about the associations between education and play. These experimental educational proposals provided great evidence for the importance of camp in the life of young children (Zola 2006:5). Thus, after immense growth of and support for the traditional secular summer camp, Jewish sleepaway camp emerged.

The Beginnings of Jewish Summer Camping: 1890s-1940s

By the late 1890s, America had a somewhat established Jewish population. Some of these Jewish individuals with wealth and power began to acquire property in rural New England with the intention of going into the camping business. These individuals, none of them particularly notable early on, invested in the promise of an escape from urban life. Private camps (run by these individuals) and public camps (run by Jewish institutions) had two initial goals: to provide "fresh air" to young people living in inner-cities and to Americanize the children of Eastern

European immigrants (Museum of Jewish Heritage 2020). In 1893, Camp Lehman was opened by Manhattan's 92nd Street Y, a space meant to serve working class Jewish boys. Lehman was not explicitly Jewish in its practice but was the first camp opened by a Jewish institution with the goal of Jewishly oriented philanthropy. As Jewish Studies Scholar Gary P. Zola notes, "these first Jewish camps were Jewish primarily because of their constituency, not because of their mission (2006:14). Summer camps geared toward Jewish immigrant populations were quite successful. For the summer, young Jews left their tenement buildings in Jewish enclaves to assimilate to American culture. Camp was a promise; a promise of an American future, an attempt to gain the social tools to enter into American society.

In the early 20th century, Jewish camping shifted its intention with the rise of Jewish education. Jewish scholars began to notice just how effective Jewish assimilation to American life was, almost too effective. Zola (2006) explains that "many Jews began to drift away from Jewish life... interest in the synagogue and in Jewish ritual declined" (14). Assimilation efforts invaded almost all aspects of Jewish life in the United States, leaving assimilated Jewish individuals virtually indistinguishable from their Christian neighbors. These individuals had Americanized notions of how to perform and present one's ethnicity, how to uphold a sense of upper-middle-class propriety. Thus, the concept of Jewish education emerged to sustain interest in and love for Judaism. Samson Benderly abandoned a career in medicine to create the first Bureau of Jewish Education (Zola 2006:15). Ideas of Jewish education entered the camp sphere and camps began to shift their purposes. Sleepaway camps became a place for, not an escape from, Jewish community.

After World War I, a series of Jewish education initiatives were implemented into summer camp. Many camps functioned similarly to public schooling; programming was meant

to teach campers about the joys of the Jewish faith. The Central Jewish Institute of New York City's Camp Cejwin opened in 1918 and was one of the first camps to have an explicit goal of embracing a Jewish culture and curriculum (Fox 2018:54). Nestled in the woods of Port Jervis, New York, Cejwin welcomed campers with a "Shalom" sign written in Hebrew and English. At Cejwin, daily life was infused with a Jewish energy. Cejwin's Assistant director in 1936, Miriam Ephraim, noted that camp life "gives [Jewish boys and girls] an opportunity to socialize their knowledge" (Sarna 2006:32). Ephraim's use of language is interesting as it alludes to a pattern of communal Jewish living, learning, and experiencing. Cejwin remains a staple in Jewish American camping, providing a model of Jewish cultural immersion in the rural United States. Judaism was no longer a quiet aspect of camp life.

While camps like Cejwin were open to broad interpretations of Jewish education, other Jewish organizations/groups had more targeted goals. Educational principles at camp ranged from goals of Hebrew/Yiddish language education to Jewish socialist/community movements. For example, Camp Achvah (Averne, Long Island) opened in 1927 with the intention of being entirely Hebrew speaking and Camp Boiberik hoped to foster Jewish culture through preservation of the Yiddish language at summer camp (Fox 2018:6,8). The International Worker's Order organized Camp Kinderland in 1925 to promote a Jewishly oriented socialism. Other camps adopted a Zionist ideology, hoping to instill a love of Palestine as a place in their campers.⁵ Sandra Fox provides clarity on this mission: "Zionist camps promoted a form of Jewish nationalism which aimed to create a Jewish State in the biblical Land of Israel, but each Zionist camp reflected a particular vision of Zionism, ranging in political interpretations" (Fox 2018:60). Many Zionist camps were affiliated with youth movements such as Young Judaea and

⁵ This term is widely contested, here I ask my reader to understand the Jewish roots of something that is not inherently corrupt. Read with grace, not judgment for these practices that appear outside of our social norms.

Hashomer Hatzair, which remain active today. Building community through a love of place and a sense of home in Palestine and later Israel, camps grew into sites of ideological transmission.

The Rise of Denominational Camps

By 1936, a *Directory of Summer Camps Under the Auspices of Jewish Communal Organizations* “listed eighty-eight camps in the United States and Canada, without taking account of the many privately run summer camps that American Jews had by then established” (Sarna 2006:29). Many of these camps were governed by the various educational initiatives mentioned above. However, in 1947, different Jewish denominations began to see camps as a site for knowledge production and exchange of tradition. American Jewry, living in a post-World War II world, were worried (rightfully so) about the drastic increase in global anti-Semitism (Sarna 2006:36). Jewish education became a form of cultural resistance, a preservation of religious tradition.

Hearing these cries of fear, Camp Ramah in Conover, Wisconsin opened its doors in 1947 to youth within the Conservative sect of Judaism (Mykoff 2021). Conservative Judaism⁶ was the most popular sect of Judaism at the time balancing the orthodoxy of older practice and a desire for American innovation (Fox 2018:37). What did this non-egalitarian space offer that Jewish camps had not before? Ramah gave leaders of the Conservative Jewish movement a hope for the future. Shuly Rubin Schwartz in her work on Ramah’s early years asserts that the leaders “saw camping as one vehicle to further the goals of the Conservative movement as a whole.” (Sarna 2006:40). Jewish camp creates Jewish leaders in synagogues, in movements, and in larger Jewish institutions. Ideologically originating from the Jewish Theological Seminary, Ramah provided a particularly studious Jewish experience. Here, institutional Jewish leaders hoped to spark a love

⁶ Conservative does not refer to politically conservative, it is a particular type of Jewish practice.

for the Conservative Jewish movement in young Jews. Ramah camps, which then popped up in the Poconos (1950), Massachusetts (1953), and California (1956)⁷, emphasized Torah text study and *davening* (praying) in Hebrew. Ramah camps even brought a professor-in residence to camp to instill principles of Conservative Judaism in Jewish youth (Sarna 2006:41).

In the following years, a Reform camping movement was established by Chicago-based rabbis (Museum of Jewish Heritage 2020). The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) built a space that would allow the Reform sect of Judaism to have their own space. In 1952, the Reform movement opened their first camp, the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute, in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin (URJ Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute website). Denominational camps (here we have focused on Conservative and Reform) were a great success. Many of these camps also functioned in tandem with their respective youth movements, United Synagogue Youth (USY, Conservative) and North American Federation for Temple Youth (NFTY, Reform). Synagogues and public Jewish spaces advertised summer camps as a place to breed the next generation of Jewish leaders. Other types of Jewish summer camps remained in business and thrived alongside these newcomers. In the 1960s, ninety new Jewish sleepaway camps opened: this momentum hurled Jewish camping into a full-blown institution (Zeder N.d.).

The '60s, '70s, and '80s: Camps as a Cultural Institution

In 1969, institutional Jewish leaders hosted the first National Conference on Jewish Camping (NCJC).⁸ Here, various camps, or groups of camps, were unified. Organizations shared

⁷ Now, there are over 10 Ramah sleepaway camps.

⁸ It is believed that this exact conference only convened one other time in 1973. Sandra Fox has a photocopy of the NCJC and there is no indication if the conference occurred between 1969-1973. Around that time, a lot of different organizations started to begin professionalizing camping. Organizations today do similar work but it is unclear when they formed and if they are some derivation of NCJC.

ideas and goals, working in tandem to ensure some form of Jewish passion was instilled in younger generations at camp. Fox (N.d.) notes that this conference “did mark something of a turning point, initiating a new, formalized approach to cross-movement collaboration that would increasingly define the Jewish camping sector from the 1970s onward” (36). Camp leaders were clear about their intentions for summer camp using spaces like the NCJC to espouse their wisdom about the Jewish religion at summer camp. Rabbi David Mogilner, the leader of Ramah camps in 1969, asserted that camp has an essential role in “strengthening Jewish life [and] assuring its continuity under optimum conditions” (NCJC Proceedings). With words like these so eloquently spoken, the sphere of Jewish summer camping was able to get record levels of support. Camps became *the* place to go for Jewish youth in the summer.

By the 1960s, a certain image of summer camp (specifically Jewish summer camp) had solidified in popular culture. Allah Sherman’s 1963 hit “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh [A Letter from Camp]” is one of the most well-known parts of the Jewish summer camp cultural canon. In this song, the Jewish comedian reads some version of letters from his son that express deep distaste with the camp. The camp, while not a Jewish camp, was one of those summer camps where just about everyone there was Jewish (Block 2013). In a similar vein, the 1979 movie *Meatballs* was a smash hit when it first premiered. The movie is not explicitly Jewish but almost all the writers, the director, and many of the characters are Jewish or come from Jewish backgrounds (Singer 2017). Lines from *Meatballs* seem to depict the experience of CITS—counselors in training—as they learn how to one day be counselors themselves. Around a bonfire they sing “we’re gonna smoke and drink and fool around” (1979).⁹

⁹ Another film, *Gorp*, is actually set at a Jewish summer camp and emerged out of the same genre of *Meatballs*: absurd, slapstick comedy about identity and sex at summer camp.

Cultural portrayals of camp and Jewish institutional support worked in tandem to make summer camp—summer camp shaped by Jewish artists—something culturally recognizable in the ‘80s and ‘90s. Jewish summer camp in the 80s was the place to be. In her article “Thirteen Signs That You May Have Attended Jewish Summer Camp in the 1980s” Marjorie Ingall (2013) writes “that Jewish summer camp taught us to use Sun-In, bang really loudly on a table during Birkat Hamazon, dance to “A-Ba-Ni-Bi,” and kiss Jewish boys (or, fine, girls)” (Tablet Magazine). Camp was a place for experiences, a place to be Jewish sure, but really a place to *live*.

As manufactured communities and cultural landscapes, summer camps provided unparalleled experiences for many generations of Jewish youth. Even as rapid growth of new camps declined in the ‘70s and ‘80s, opened camps saw great success (Zeder) Summer camps were finding their place within institutional Judaism, settling on their programming structure and overall missions. Some campers resisted language learning of Hebrew and Yiddish camp, feeling as though camp was a space for fun not a space for intense education. Campers would even miss scheduled *peulot* (programs) in order to convey their dislike. Fox (2020) writes “struggles with language and pedagogy show that campers’ conduct did alter camp life in meaningful ways: Jewish camps abandoned full language immersion by the 1970s, and almost all abandoned their formal, classroom-based curricula” (30).

By the 1990s, it was clear that Jewish camp life had a culture of its own, distant from *goyishe* practices. These unique social settings allowed people to explore Jewish identity in isolation from public-facing opinions (i.e. anti-Semitism). Each summer camp had its respective culture, its own *ruach* (spirit). Throughout the late ‘80s and ‘90s, as American Jewry had settled, camp really became a common practice for Jewish youth and a place well known for

shenanigans. Camp administrators were always pushing for community and connection; this impacted campers who were searching for meaningful social relationships (Fox 2020:32). Camp also became generational, some campers today are third generation campers at their respective camp. I, myself, was a second generation camper, a “Young Judaea baby,” as we playfully called the children of folks who met at camp.

This narrative seemed to build that Jewish summer camp was something that all Jews did. As many Jewish people climbed the socioeconomic ladder, this also became more feasible. Organizations were constructed and scholarships were made to ensure all Jewish young people could have the summer camp experience. Writer Alan Siegel (2012) humorously notes that “Jews are different. We love camp. Throughout the ‘90s, I gave up hot showers and Sega Genesis every summer so I could spend eight weeks among New England’s Goldbergs, Schwartzes, and Cohens.” In a video that was sent to campers in 1988 from Young Judaea’s Tel Yehudah, a young camper says at camp, “you start forming the friends that are going to last all through camp and for the rest of your life” (Camp Tel Yehudah Yearbook Video). This sentiment, this hope for lifelong friendships, is expressed constantly at Jewish summer camp and impacts the state of camping today

Continuing Success of the Jewish Summer Camp Today

What has made these scattered Jewish summer camps into a huge aspect of Jewish American culture? Jewish life in America cannot function without community-mindedness and cultural organization (Sales and Sax 2004:5). Camp provides a space to “educate and socialize our children” (Sales and Sax 2004:4). In essence, camp is where young Jews have always, and continue to learn how to be in Jewish community. Camps are socializing agents (Sales and Sax

2004:14). Summer camp is a place of social learning and experience; “every camp regardless of religious orientation, sponsorship, or educational program, places great importance on social relations, friendship formation, and community-building” (Sales and Sax 2004:14). Through celebration of Shabbat, *t’fillot*, in-bunk living and *Kashrut* practices camp became an immersive experience for campers. Camp life has a certain “camp magic.” Camps exist in many ways as a microcosm of our social world, but Jewish sleepaway camp attempts to create its own reality during the summers. Sales and Saxe (2004) posit the four ingredients that create camp magic: an isolated setting, a total environment (everyone is all in, they have to be), community (the intensity of a temporary community), and camp culture (each camp is “a society with its own culture”). We can apply sociologist Erving Goffman’s concept of “total institutions” to the summer camp. Camp is successful because it is a “total institution”, secluded from “normal” society and provides a space where campers live and learn together.

Sales and Saxe study why the Jewish community appears obsessed with summer camp, especially in the 2000s. They assert, “our study validates this increased interest in Jewish summer camping by documenting the ways in which camp can be an effective socializing agent” (Sales and Sax 2004:17). Camp exposes Jewish campers to an experience that has great potential to shape their social world. Campers learn and grow in a community that quite effectively convinces them, whether consciously or not, that being Jewish is an essential part of their lives. Parents know this as well; parents want their campers to meet Jewish people and to build Jewish relationships. A quick perusal of a few Jewish sleepaway camp websites will prove this claim. Summer camps emphasize their role in building “Jewish identity,” in fostering “Jewish experiences,” and in promoting Jewish values (Tel Yehudah, Camp Tawonga, Ramah in the Poconos, Ramah Darom, URJ websites).

Immersive summer camp experiences “work” in the eyes of those who desire formal Jewish continuity. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the current president of the Union for Reform Judaism (overseer of the URJ camps) stated in the summer of 2021 that “summer camp experiences are the most impactful thing we can do to give a Jewish spark and Jewish skills and Jewish learning to the next generation” (Museum of Jewish Heritage 2020). In 2019, Brandeis University’s Mandel Center for Jewish Education sponsored a conference entitled “The Power of Jewish Camp.” Rabbi Jacobs and Brandeis are, obviously, not wrong. Camp is an insane experience, a whirlwind of Jewish celebration. When I was at camp, everything else in my life felt unimportant. All that mattered to me was making friends, or even meeting someone special, who would last the rest of my life. For the past few years, rates of campers at Jewish summer camp have been high. In 2019, roughly 81,000 young Jewish people went to Jewish sleepaway camp (Foundation for Jewish Camp 2020 Report). Despite the pandemic disruption, the 2021 camping season pulled similar numbers. With 80,000 Jewish youth attending summer camp in 2021, it is no wonder administrators and Jewish institutions have a desire to invest in these spaces (Foundation for Jewish Camp 2020 Report). Today, with over 170 Jewish summer camps, the business of summer camping still thrives in the Jewish community.

Chapter Conclusion

The rich and beautiful world of Jewish summer camping has been built over the past 150 years. Camps have developed alongside the American Jewish community. American Jewish youth are socialized through summer camp hookup culture and camp makes Judaism accessible. It allows young Jews to build Jewish community and Jewish relationships (this point is key and we will return to it shortly). Camp has become a place to be Jewish in community with others.

Camp works and camp secures a Jewish future unlike any other Jewish practice. But, this chapter has left out an essential question: how does this attitude impact our campers? How does this institutional pressure and desire for Jewish relationship building affect the lives of our campers? What emerges from this pressure, from this systemic worry which permeates institutional policy which affects daily camp life, is a romantic, sexual, and hookup culture.

Chapter 2: Hopes for a Jewish Future, Hookups in the Jewish Present

Securing a Jewish Future and the Threat of Intermarriage

We have touched upon concepts of Jewish future and the next generation... but what exactly does that mean? Why do we emphasize and hope for the future in Jewish spaces? It is hard as a Jewish person to explain to a non-Jew exactly how frequently we, as Jews, are sitting around and thinking about our future as a people. So many of our holidays (most, in fact), tell us the stories of how we once suffered, almost went extinct as a people, but, we live to tell the tale! Every time I tell my mother about a possible partner, her first question is “are they Jewish?”

“The Jewish emphasis on marriage begins at birth,” explains sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman (Bayme and Rosen 1994:3). Fishman notes how the Jewish family is a key aspect of securing a Jewish future. Put bluntly, Jewish heterosexual couples mean Jewish babies. In 1958, David Kirshenbaum wrote in his book about the Jewish future that “the problem of child training, how to bring up the Jewish child to carry on the heritage of his ancestors—in short, how to raise him to be a Jew—has always been Jewry’s most vital problem” (24). This emphasis on continuity illuminates how Judaism, as an institution, has taken on the task of securing a Jewish future. Kirshenbaum’s words still hold the same meaning, if not more, in 2022. As rates of intermarriage—marriage between a Jew and non-Jew rise—that promise of Jewish babies is threatened. The Pew Research Center discovered that in 2020 among Jewish adults that got married in the last decade, 61% married a non-Jewish identifying partner. This population study also proved that families that are intermarried are less likely to raise Jewish children. At least 19% of intermarried couples claim they are not raising Jewish children at all (Pew Research Center Jewish Population Study 2020).

Thus, as we have seen, camp offers a solution to the possibility of intermarriage. Young Jews are finding lifelong partners in non-Jews because Jewish people are integrated into modern society. We live amongst the *goyim*. Therefore, an all-Jewish oasis might hold the key for future Jewish (especially romantic) relationship building. At the National Conference on Jewish Camping in 1969, Dr. Solomon H. Gress asserted that “the Jewish teenager represents the Jewish community’s future. Our service to Jewish teenagers at the camp is one of the Jewish community’s forms of help to them, to encourage them to join their personal and individual futures with the future of the Jewish community” (NCJC Proceedings). Here, it becomes quite clear that Jews are not quiet about the fact that young people are the future. Parents do not need to be strict with their children about Jewishness for kids to get a sense of their importance in the larger Jewish lineage. In my life, there was always great value in “doing something Jewishly related” or “engaging in some form of Jewish community.” Being Jewish at camp was a way to fulfill these familial desires for the community. The Jewish young person carries this systemic burden.

Continuity is sociological; we are not always hit over the head with *d’vars* (speeches) about needing to *stay* Jewish. The desire for continuity is embedded in our social discourse, various experiences illuminate the fact that these fears of not sustaining a Jewish future live just beneath the spoken surface. Building off of this introductory discussion of a Jewish future, this chapter will delve into how a subtle camper subculture turned into a full blown world of hookups. We will define hookup culture in the camp context and will conduct a sociological analysis of how a fear of intermarriage and desire for continuity invade the summer camping sphere. By the end of the chapter we will have clearly connected continuity with camp.

Camper “Subculture” and Administrative Responses to “Subcultural” Behavior

At camp, in a parent-free environment, there is bound to be some mischief afoot. Any movie about any summer camp can give us an example of this silly energy. Take the 1998 *Parent Trap* for example, pranks abound and no one follows the “rules.” Jewish summer camp is no different. Walter Ackman, the Ramah director in 1966, described that “anyone acquainted with camp life knows that there is a camper subculture which exists independently, sometimes in spite of and sometimes for spite, of the official camp programs and policies” (Fox 2020:27). Scholar Sandra Fox notes that Ackerman likely saw this uptick in camper resistance in the 1960s post-war era. In a time of national protest and civil disobedience, young campers mirrored these efforts at summer camp (Fox 2020:28). Camp was full of pranks, raiding other bunks, and sneaking out of bunks when counselors were not paying attention. These practices, I can assure you, remain intact today.

With this camper subculture, came a culture of romance in the world of Jewish camping. Long before the terminology of “hookup culture,” camps were filled with camp socials and romantic Shabbat dances. Fox finds that newspapers, written during the summer by campers, provide a lens into the romantic aspect of camper subculture. Fox notes that making out and going steady shifted in the summer camp sphere in the 60s and 70s. She discovers that “references to romance and sex at camp became increasingly frequent... mirroring the patterns of the sexual revolution” (Fox 2020:30). Sure, campers were not having penetrative sex, but experiences of heavy petting and make-outs were referenced in these old camp newspapers.¹⁰ One camp has a section of the newspaper where a counselor in training would expose “who dated or ‘necked’ with whom that summer.” (Fox 2020:31). Fox accounts numerous experiences

¹⁰ Unfortunately, I am unable to access these newspapers as they live in Chicago and other library archives. That said, we can appreciate the work Fox has done that allows us to get a glimpse (even a small one) into this culture.

of counselors balancing the necessary scheduled programming and the more “underground” sexual moments that were occurring between campers. At Camp Boiberik, older campers would explicitly say that they would “live only for their late nights” (Fox 2020:31).

This subculture did not go unnoticed by faculty at camp. Typically, upper staff (directors and other leadership team members) were sometimes aware of the romantic and sexual happenings of their campers. In Sandra Fox’s (2020) historical work, she writes, “the intermingling of the sexes deemed not only acceptable but also as an ideal way to ensure a ‘Jewish future’ through endogamy” (24). In the early 1960s at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, head staff members were actively debating the amount of nightly free time that they should give to their campers. They discussed the appropriate age to allow their campers free time...free time at night for a certain type of canoodling. The team eventually decided to provide campers with evening free time called *Otsar* (Hebrew for treasure). *Otsar*, again in the 1960s, became a scheduled, camp-sanctioned time for “campers ages thirteen and up to have time for romantic encounters” (Fox 2020:32). Staff even attempted to provide alternative spaces for their campers who were not involved in the romance, but it was clear the emphasis was on those “hooking up.” The staff turned off the lights in the girls’ bunk area so that ““couples no longer need leave the camp boundaries, since the girls’ area is dark enough for ‘privacy’” (Fox 2020:32).

What is perhaps most shocking in this situation is the active support of the director. The director noted that there was a “major benefit” to this “lessening of tension . . . in what was previously perhaps the most tense area for campers” (Fox 2020:32). The director was heavily scrutinized for his choice to have *Otsar* but amid all the backlash he never changed his policies. The director, in various Ramah reports, asserted that, “I do not believe that the camp is encouraging anything inherently immoral . . . [o]n the contrary, I believe that the camp has

provided legitimate activity for campers of every inclination and has set bounds on boy-girl relationships in a manner much more effective and more acceptable to campers than has ever been the case.” The director of Ramah Wisconsin, in the 1960s, actively promoted and supported the growing romantic culture at Jewish summer camp. From Fox’s research, it becomes quite clear that the intentions of this director (and other camp directors, who we have less direct information about but Ramah Wisconsin’s practices are not unique) were to encourage Jewish romantic relationships.

Fear of intermarriage was by no means hidden and they invaded the camping sphere with great force. Staff, throughout all aspects of camp “aimed to foster an appreciation for marrying within the faith among youth, using campers’ interests in romance as an opportunity for doing so” (Fox 2020:33). Counselors would literally give speeches about the failures of intermarriage in the Jewish community and would actively frame marrying within the Jewish community as something campers owed to the community at large. From its very beginnings at summer camp, this romantic and sexual culture was tied to a desire for Jewish continuity.

Hooking Up: What Does it Look Like?

“Hookup culture” at summer camp encompasses a lot more than just sex. Today, this term of hookup culture is colloquially used to describe any type of sexual interaction. That said, ask any person who is using the term and they will all define it differently. “Hookup culture is defined as casual sexual contact between nondating partners without an (expressed or acknowledged) expectation of forming a committed relationship” (Heldman and Wade). The term “hookup culture” in the camping world is defined slightly differently. Though there isn’t the vast array of scholarship to prove this fact, there are personal experiences and new research we

can look at to justify the use of this term. In 2021, Shira Wolkenfeld studied the toxicity of hookup culture within Jewish youth group spaces. Here, Wolkenfeld pointed to the ways in which institutional Judaism creates and sustains a world of hookups for Jewish high schoolers. She defines ‘hookup culture’ as “both a verb and a noun... an umbrella term used to describe more casual sexual activity, ranging from light kissing to heavy petting, sometimes including penetrative sex” (2021). This term accurately describes the culture we find at summer camp. Young people are exploring themselves, their bodies, and each other. Often, this does not include penetrative sex, but it can. Wolkenfeld’s definition is important because it comes from the young people who reflect on this culture. My choice to use these words “hookup culture” comes from the fact that campers, counselors, and the entire camp environment floats this idea around all the time. A mere kiss is often defined as a hookup in the camp.

This hookup culture is also all encompassing. The key word here is culture; I reflect upon a *culture* and the ways a *culture* grows beyond its sexual meaning. One interviewee, who we will call Arielle, described the culture as looking “like a lot of touching, like physical touch, physical contact, everywhere with everyone. Boundaries kinda like not existing and this very electric, pulsing kind of energy... people are touching everyone all the time.”¹¹ This flirty air and constant physical contact was noted by many interviewees but Arielle’s definition paints a picture of the world we are talking about. The hookup culture at camp also expands beyond sexual exploration and includes a much more, let us say innocent, world of “shabbat walks” and dates to certain dances. Another interviewee, Leah, explains, “from the moment I got there, I was literally 10 years old, I was informed that there was such a thing as a shabbat walk date. I didn’t know what that was at 10, but it was this idea that a guy, for our context, would ask you as a girl out to pick you up at your cabin and walk together to services and to dinner and then to shabbat shira. It was

¹¹ Interview with author, 12/10/21

like Friday night ‘dates’ and at 10 no one knew what it meant but everyone wanted it because it was cool.”¹²

At many camps, hookup culture for younger kids looked like these “dates” or really just long, confusing walks. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly how this culturally impacts young people as all my interviewees are well beyond their younger years. That said, out of my nine interviews, six referenced that the point of camp was to have your first kiss. Dylan notes that “from my first summer I was pressured to kiss girls from 8 years old until I came out of the closet.”¹³ It is moments like these, the building of romantic and pseudo-romantic relationships, that are crucial aspects of a camp “hookup culture.” I will reflect on all of this later as we hear about people’s experiences within the culture. However, for now, it is essential that we understand the ways in which the goals of relationship building at Jewish summer camp (deep down, always due to fear of intermarriage) impact young people, very young people.

Securing the Jewish Future... at Camp

I believe this palpable hookup culture is actively a product of the desire to have Jewish continuity. I am not unique in holding this opinion. Yael describes that “you know that the purpose of the camp is to make Jewish relationships and Jewish babies, like from a young age I feel like we all knew that. The last year of camp, the director told us like, ‘you already know that the purpose of the camp is to make Jewish babies but don’t do that at camp.’”¹⁴ Yes, the director of the camp told the oldest age group, a group of 16 year olds, that camp is for relationship building. Yael went to a Ramah summer camp, one of the many camps affiliated with the conservative movement in Judaism. Ramah, as a movement, often conducts studies on their great

¹² Interview with author, 12/10/21

¹³ Interview with author, 1/9/22

¹⁴ Interview with author, 1/12/22

successes at camp. They pride themselves on building memories, sustaining connections to the Jewish faith, Israel attachment and more. In an alumni survey, Ramah reports that, “Of those married, over a third are married to someone who went to Ramah (not necessarily the same camp), and just over 40% met their spouses through a Ramah connection.’ The spouses of 93% of married Ramah alumni are Jewish.” In essence, Ramah summer camps have an incredibly high success rate for producing Jewish couples. Statistics and research like these have proved that people who go to certain Jewish summer camps have higher rates of marrying Jews/Jews who went to that camp.

At another camp, Dylan described a visual display of all camp relationships. He explains, “the wall of love... if you and somebody ever hooked up at {camp name redacted} , you can pay to put a heart on the wall of love with your names on it. So, now there is a physical monument at the camp telling kids you are here to hookup with people. Ya know? This is the trophy wall of everyone who did it.”¹⁵ The camp website writes that for \$360 dollars you can have a plaque with your name on the *Kir Ha’Ahava*, the wall of love. “It serves as a living testimony to the power of relationships built on Judaean foundations,” explains the website. Yet again we see a conscious effort to broadcast the power of love building relationships at summer camp. What I find so fascinating is the lack of effort that goes into thinking about just how much this will impact the campers. Imagine driving into camp on the first day and what you see, right next to the camp office is the *Kir Ha’Ahava*. This type of imagery can so easily get inside a young person's mind, solidifying the desire, or almost the need, to find your spouse at summer camp.

Meeting and dating at summer camp is also a trope that is prevalent in modern media. In an episode of *Girls*, Shosanna encounters her camp crush on the streets of New York City. In a movie called *Joshy* (2016), two Jewish adults discover they went to summer camp and one

¹⁵ Interview with author, 1/9/22

describes the other as “boy from camp who was like my crush.” There is even an episode of *Will & Grace* where Grace thinks her mom tries to set her up with a boy from her Jewish summer camp (Ralph 2017). This idea or goal of finding a lover or partner at Jewish summer camp circulates around the popular media because it is deeply entrenched in our culture. It’s so deeply embedded that non-Jews find these moments of Jewish connection comedic; the culture is ours but it is so intense that it is perceived by those around us.

In an article that blew up the Jewish internet in 2016, Liz Rose reflected on similar themes. “How many more orgasms will be had for Zionism?” The title must stand on its own. Rose writes about her time at Habonim camp in Michigan in the early 1980s where sex drives were high and the underlying socialist, Zionism, was quietly impacting all. Rose describes a sexual culture where everyone “believed that we were working for something much greater and bigger than ourselves” (2016). This concept, while here Rose specifically talks about a Zionist camp, is present in all aspects of the Jewish camp world. Hookups, experiences, moments, all feel like they belong to something greater than a fleeting moment of youth. As Leah puts it, “your responsibility is to have Judaism not die and the way to do that is to hookup with people.”¹⁶ And just like that, the desire for continuity invades the camping sphere, loudly, very loudly.

Chapter Conclusion

Jewish summer camp works to build a Jewish community that makes young people fall in love with Jewish practice. Jewish summer camp, also, works to foster a new generation of young Jewish leaders and Jewish people. With the threat of intermarriage and fear of a dismal Jewish future plaguing Judaism at large, summer camp steps in as the place to continue the Jewish lineage. Hopes for a Jewish future in turn impact the policies of camp administration and then,

¹⁶ Interview with author, 1/10/22

the behavior of campers. Hookups, hookup culture, even holding hands at Jewish overnight camp is much deeper than just sexual exploration. A camper subculture, while it is partly natural adolescent growth, flourishes due to the external pressures to build Jewish relationships. A hookup culture emerges from this subculture because campers feel and understand that the point of summer camp is to build Jewish relationships. The next chapter will engage with this on an even deeper level, really unpacking how this culture made people feel. We will study the experiences of former campers within this context of continuity and intermarriage.

Chapter 3: “Invite Me to the Wedding:” Experiences of Hookup Culture

“I remember walking from one side of camp to the other with my camp boyfriend when a higher-up staff member stopped us. ‘Aww, invite me to the wedding,’ he said and laughed. We had only been together for two weeks.”

Adolescent hookup culture is not inherently Jewish. The following chapter will apply scholarship on adolescent sexuality to understand the Jewish sleepaway camp as a microcosm of a larger culture. I do not claim that these practices and experiences are unique to young Jewish people. However, I examine all of these experiences through the lens of procreation (that eventually achieves continuity) which is uniquely Jewish.

Adolescent Sexuality: Boys vs. Girls

Before discussing the microcosm of Jewish summer camp, I will contextualize my work within the vast literature on adolescent sexuality. All of the literature I engaged with studies adolescents (ages 10-19) in the United States. However, due to the ethical complications of studying minors, many researchers have chosen to study college students when conducting more explicit research. I have specifically focused on how attitudes towards sex vary between young boys and girls and how adults view the sexual behavior of young people. There is extremely overwhelming evidence of the existence of a sexual double standard for American youth (Young et al. 2016:857). In essence, “standards of sexual permissiveness for men that were different from standards of sexual permissiveness for women” (Young et al. 2016:857). These “standards” are upheld by both young people and by adults. Research indicates that a greater number of sexual partners is valued for young men (14-18) and frowned upon for young women (of the same age) (Kreager and Staff 2009). Young men are twice as likely as young women to engage

in sexual activity and not experience remorse (De Gaston et al. 1996). However, I find it quite interesting and important that in one study of the attitudes of high school students, both men and women were aware of the possibility of pregnancy in any form of sexual relationship.¹⁷ While a double standard exists, there seems to be an overall awareness of some of the consequences of sexual behavior.

Family experiences and attitudes are, and have been for the last decade at least, one the greatest factors that influence adolescent dating (Olmstead 2020:773). Thus, it makes sense that young people at Jewish summer would date and form romantic relationships to satisfy the desires of their family/familial pressure. In recent history, post-the Sexual Revolution, there has been more validity given to dating without a greater goal. The “hookup” or casual sexual relationship has emerged in a social world where sex can be seen as tool for pleasure, something beyond a marital practice. That said, young people are influenced by their parents and their communities. If adolescents are socialized in a community where relationships are a tool for marriage (or, in our case, relationships satisfy an eventual need to populate) then they adopt that ideology (Olmstead 2020).

The factors that shape young people’s sexual behavior are also essential in the social world of summer camp. Research has found that “reputations and social displays of sexual activity or inactivity are important” (Marston and King 2006:1583). Reputation influences the amount of social control gained by young people in some spaces. In other words, sexual activity exists beyond a private space and can easily become a public act. Not something done publicly, but something that contributes to a public understanding of a person. Social expectations, at large, also influence the sexual behavior of young people which we can see at the summer camp.

¹⁷ I acknowledge that this chapter, and the research I studied, are/is deeply heterosexual.

We can consider “Jewish continuity” as a social expectation and thus, a reason why young people engage in relationships with one another.

“It Fed My Ego:” Male Experiences in Hookup Culture

The experience of young Jewish men in camp hookup culture mirrors experiences of a larger population of adolescent men. All of my nine interviewees commented on the male-dominated nature of hookup culture at Jewish summer camp. Talia, a female camper, remembers, “being desired by boys was such a central part of camp. They had the power.” Straight male campers have a greater proximity to social control through hookups. Talia noted that when she became involved with a young man, he “took one for the team to hookup with Talia.” For Eitan, when asked about his understanding of self at camp he responded with these reflections. Eitan notes that hookup culture, “fed my ego... I had little to feel bad about because I did just fine.” Traditionally, gender-specific sexual norms leave the power residing with the male (Kaeager and Staff 2009). This pattern is reflected in Eitan’s understanding of his own behavior. Eitan’s experiences are positively associated with interpersonal confidence because there is a social aspect to engagement within hookup culture. His statement implies a comparison, a built-in reflection of where one person stands in a larger community. Individual activity is correlated with social standing in a community; in a camp world where relationships are highly valued, young boys engaging in these activities gain not only social clout by social power. My informants expressed that hooking up was highly regarded, especially for young boys; with a romantic relationship comes proximity to the goal for eventual procreation.

For male campers, hooking up is a highly social act. Marston and King (2006) conclude that “young men often report sexual experiences to their peers, sometimes in exaggerated terms (1584). This trope of men associating sex with social power and of sharing experiences in

community is incredibly popular in American culture. Think about the movie-musical *Grease* for example “Tell me more, tell me more; Did you get very far?; Tell me more, tell me more; Like does he have a car?” (Summer Nights 1978). This is just one example that showcases the communal nature and display of male sexual activity. At Jewish summer camp, point systems and sexual games are often the norm for many boys’ bunks. Dylan and Eitan both shared about the prominence of point systems which serve to count up how many people one (male) has hooked up with. Here is an example of one point system (also found in Appendix A) and how one could “double” their points for a certain encounter:

The following special circumstances will result in a doubling of point values awarded:

The social encounter occurs on Shabbat

The social encounter is between two members of the same sex

The social encounter involves more than two people

In order for this encounter to count as double the encounter must be longer than 1 minute

The social encounter exceeds thirty minutes

The social encounter occurs in Israel

Dylan, after sharing about the point system at his summer camp (which he never engaged with due to his queer identity), stated that this is not something to which the female campers were ever privy. Male campers utilized this system to boost their own popularity around their bunkmates and other male campers. These point systems are found in other spaces where Jewish youth convene. Wolkenfeld (2021) in her study describes a similar point system (all likely derived from a similar root) in Jewish youth group spaces. She analyzes, “the point system’s pervasive presence is not just a joke; for decades, teens have been actively tracking how many points they and their peers have accrued, and using these statistics to evaluate their peers’ social

capital” (Wolkenfeld 2021). Social capital for male campers especially is built upon hookups, which in turn can be exchanged for power as these campers achieve the pseudo-goal which was set out for them.

The spectacle of sexual activity for young men also transfers into the bunk environment. Dylan describes a game that was played within the male bunks called “Silent Football.” The game, which is only for male campers, takes the performativity of hookups and puts them into a visible space, literally. Dylan explains that in this specific game, players are focused on not losing, and losing results in doing an agreed upon punishment. These punishment are always sexual in nature and are done in a public space. Failure to comply with the “Silent Football” rules reflects the social standing of any given male camper. This game ventures away from the focus on continuity at camp and showcases how that hookup culture can influence other aspects of sexual exploration. Male campers, regardless of the act itself, are rewarded for engagement in sexual activity.

The small social climate of Jewish summer camp commodifies hookups, especially for male campers. Ori recalls that “people would ask ‘oh who are you hooking up with?’ It was like what you had to offer to the social scene and the conversation. People were way more interested in you if you were getting with someone.” Popularity is derived from these moments, these private moments. Ori notes again that “who you are hooking up with determines your hotness which determines your popularity.” Dylan described this same sentiment, “a huge part of it is most of the hookups you heard about were with the ‘most attractive teens,’ most attractive straight teens.” Maya detailed to me the process of mapping out a “hookup tree” at age 14 with friends. The goal was to connect everyone to each other.

Everything at camp is done in public space, I mean, everyone is literally living on top of each other in bunk beds. These close quarters affect the hookup world, especially for adolescent male folks. Eitan stated that “camp is so funny because you never have a private space or private moment—people do things publicly now that I would never do publicly.” Hookups all happened in public space, hidden sure, but in public space: the woods, behind a bunk, anywhere at night, in a bathroom all served as places to take your romantic interest. In moments that could not be private, many described this culture of physical touch. “Everyone was touching all the time” was a sentiment expressed by many. At any activity, an outsider would just see a vast array of partners, fingers brushing on someone's leg, even a back massage. All touch had a certain sexual element and camp staff and administration rarely set rules, according to most of my informants around this culture. Dylan even describes hearing young men get affirmative praise for their “touchy behavior.” Leah describes a similar approval of staff, specifically administration, of male hookup behavior. At her camp, the administrative staff teach about this “make out train,” though they call it a different name, and allow the campers to continue this tradition of showcasing their current and former partnerships to the larger camp community. She recalls:

there is this... make out train. So two people, publicly, in front of everyone, will stand up, wave to each other, and sit down. And then the next two people will stand up, wave to each other, and sit down. Sometimes one man will stand up and 7 girls will stand up, all wave at each other and sit down. What that signifies, what that is known to mean, and it's screwed up, is that at some point during the course of the summer these two people who are waving have hooked up. Or this guy, who is standing with the 7 girls, has hooked up with every single girl.

The purpose of this activity is so everyone can perceive the hookups that have happened during that session. It is all about the spectacle. The more male campers hookup, the more social clout you have and this proximity to continuity invites a sense of community.

“I Wanted to Be Desirable:” Female Experiences in Hookup Culture

It is not surprising that the experiences in hookup culture for female identifying campers are drastically different. Women who are attracted to men often define their self-worth based on male validation (Olmstead 2020). Talia explicitly said that the whole phenomena was about “if boys wanted to hook up with you or be your date.” Talia expressed very little autonomy in her experiences, she often felt as though she was having sexual first experiences in a passive way. Many young women expressed a desire to be part of the hookup culture, checking if they were “on track” developmentally based on the action of their peers. Maya describes, “I wanted my first kiss so badly and everyone in my bunk had made it their goal that everyone who hadn’t had their first kiss yet would have it that summer. So they were really invested.” Maya’s story illuminates how the social component of romantic connections did transfer into the world of female campers. Talia has a similar story as her first kiss was watched by a gaggle of girls in the bushes. First kisses and first experiences were achievements for everyone, not just yourself at summer camp. Leah describes that external investment in an internal moment, noting, “there was a lot of pressure for me, one of the more outgoing ones in that bunk, to put myself out there.” This “pressure” describes the social awareness of romantic encounters because they achieve something greater than the individual; romantic/sexual acts subconsciously reproduce and bind community.

Leah, Maya, and Talia all share similar stories of feeling a need to be involved, not a desire, but a *need*. Leah explains how this pressure impacted her psyche: “There was always this overwhelming sense of you need to be with somebody to some certain extent even from such a young age.” The *need* to be involved in a romantic relationship is a perfect example of how an external culture shapes an intimate relationship (Marston and King 2006). In essence, the desire for continuity is so pervasive that it becomes the baseline reason that people get involved in adolescent hookups. Sexual/romantic relationships help an individual achieve a certain level of social status because they fulfill a *need*. This need allows campers to feel part of something beyond themselves, it connects them to a deeper Jewish community. Some other scholars can (and will) argue that there is not a sociological reasoning for hookups; hookups are a mere act of sexual exploration. I do not disagree that an aspect of these sexual behaviors are part of the developmental stage of young adulthood. However, I think there is also this underlying social and cultural reason for these interpersonal connections (Vannier and O’Sullivan 2012).

The female-identifying people I interviewed also recounted feeling awful if and when they were not involved in the hookups. Arielle explains that “participating in the thing, having someone to hook up with, that was the prize. You are only cool or worth something if you’re hooking up.” At all nine camps my informants attended, this theme emerged for young women. You were celebrated if you participated and exiled from the popular group if you did not. Female-identifying campers expressed that they were sent into spirals of body image and self-hatred. Something about not being part of the dominant hookup culture impacted the confidence of an individual. Arielle explains that she truly felt left behind:

That memory of knowing that when we get out of this activity, couples are going to split off and that begins the sort of after-hours session of the day where the people who have

someone to hook up with are going to do that and they are going to be learning something about bodies and sex and everything. And if you don't have someone to do that with, you will be watching.

Here we circle back to the idea of spectacle, of watching while others experience. Arielle's feelings would certainly resonate with other young female campers who felt like they were not part of the hookup scene. When a social ideology of connection (to achieve continuity) is so pervasive, it has the potential to impact individual self-esteem. We see similar patterns happening on social media, group ideology that impacts individual self-worth (Olmstead 2020).

The "after hours" portion of the day, when the hookups occur, was mentioned by various young camps. Eitan noted that "to hang out at *chofesh* [free time] was the Netflix and chill of Jew camp." Many interviewees described the "shabbat walk:" a walk "when two people go on a walk around camp. Shabbat is a time when you have a lot of free time. That is when people are left more unsupervised. People would plan to go on a walk in the woods or walk around camp and sometimes go and find a secret spot to make out." Shabbat walks and general free time at camp, often known as *chofesh*, serve as the time for exploration. Yael even describes a time called "hill time" where kids 13 and up would have free time in a designated area at night. This practice recalls *Otsar*, which we read about in Chapter 2. For young campers, these "after hours" time periods, time "hidden" from administration were essential. Many of these young women felt like these times were set aside for them, by the camp administration: it was "allowed."

As we approached these discussions of what happens at camp after the programming ends, some of my non-male interviewees expressed that this is when their bodily boundaries were breached. When counselors appear to turn a blind eye, young people can find themselves in really harmful situations. Out of all nine interviewees, only two of them expressed that a

boundary was ever set around these sexual experiences. Eitan and Yael taught me of a rule called “CHAKWACO: consensual hugging and kissing with all clothes on.” Both of them explained that the rule, for the most part among campers, was followed. At other camps, without such rules, the topic of hookups was actively avoided in an official context. This lack of boundary setting lead to a few really intense situations of sexual coercion and harassment. I choose to leave the details of these stories of assault out of my thesis. These young women’s stories do not need to be written out for shock value alone. I think just stating that they happened is strong enough by itself to sound the alarm that something is not okay. The hope for a Jewish future can cause bodily harm; Wolkenfeld (2021) says that “the collateral caused by this culture is harming Jewish teens just as they begin to explore their sexuality, and may even be turning some teens away from participation in the Jewish community altogether.” There are moments where a culture of continuity goes too far, and this is one of them. As a Jewish person, I feel a certain responsibility to continue my Judaism but I am acutely aware of the fact that that hope should never cause harm. We need to call out the ways in which our community culture can lead to and has led to years of hurt.

The sharing of experiences like these have led to the development of Jewish Teens for Empowered Consent (JTEC). This initiative, while specifically focused on youth groups, reflects on the culture created in Jewish spaces that often involved the breaking of sexual boundaries. JTEC works to call out the toxicity that has been created in some Jewish spaces; some of their specific goals include eradicating point systems (like the one seen above) and creating a National Consent Direct position for Jewish youth groups and summer camps. Their work, which is spearheaded by high school students, is specifically in peer education.

Gaining Social Power, Maintaining the Status Quo

I start this section with a quick anecdote: I was scrolling casually on my Instagram in 2019 when I came across a video posted by my former boss at Jewish summer camp. She was at some sort of staff training and the director of the camp was talking and laughing about how to increase camp attendance. Then he said “well, we know why they come here is to have sex” and everyone laughed. I watched this video multiple times and was truly in shock at the fact that my camp leadership team would admit to this at all, nevermind the fact that it was public on social media. I share this because staff and administration have some awareness, at least at my camp and I hypothesize others, of the hookups that take place. I have engaged in conversations with the director my summer camp where I asked for comprehensive sex education to keep the campers safe. His rebuttal was “that’s not my job.”

Counselors and camp leadership teams provide examples to the campers. Leah described to me how it felt like everyone around her, all her role models, had found great love within this hookup culture. She explained that “you see a lot of them [counselors] who are currently with their partners from summer camp. It’s sorta sweet but it reinforces this idea that you are supposed to find a life partner or at least a long-term partner. My rabbi met his wife at camp.” My summer camp director also met his wife at summer camp. These adults, while obviously older in age, still subscribe to the same social ideology that young people do: just because we age does not mean that we neglect the hopes for continuity in which we were raised. Instead, we often reproduce, as adults, certain social structures. At summer camp, it is an action of status maintenance. Allowing for hookup culture not only maintains the status quo, but it keeps in tack the social status formerly achieved by current staff.

Many of my interviewees brought up the role staff had in creating and sustaining a dominant hookup culture. The staff, as Talia noted, “are just older kids.” Bunk counselors, on average, range from age 17-20. Staff are not necessarily coming to camp for a perfect summer of peer education and programming. Talia describes that the counselors, often, grew up in the same hookup culture. People tend to work at the camps they went to as a child, the catharsis of coming back is appealing to people. That said, Talia notes the counselor would then “think it [hook ups] was funny and would talk about it and maybe even encourage it.” In bunk, counselors play this interesting role in allowing their campers to hook up. Dylan expressed when working at camp that “people at staff meetings would share like ‘hey, It was really cute when my camper kissed his girlfriend for the first time’ and everyone would be like.. ‘Yay!’” Counselors discuss and celebrate these burgeoning relationships. This practice is one where the counselors see themselves in the campers, they often want the campers to have these newer experiences. Again, staff are maintaining their own social status by reproducing a culture that perhaps once benefited them.

For some former counselors, a huge aspect of working at camp was the social experience. Arielle was blunt about the fact that she worked at camp to be with her friends, not for the campers. She narrates, “my approach as a counselor was very hands off, I wasn’t there to be a mentor.” Arielle describes that the staff were hooking up just as much as the campers if not more. Yael notes that “after the campers went to bed the counselors definitely participated.” When lights go out for campers, staff hookups really escalate. Counselors come to camp for many of the same reasons campers do, however, this time they are able to get paid to explore new relationships. Many interviewees were acutely aware of relationships that their counselors had. Camp was full of asking the counselors sex questions and trying to figure out which staff

member was dating who. Young people's mentors at camp, their counselors, are often subconsciously promoting this culture. Staff are still part of this same culture, they perpetuate it and they are embedded in it.

Chapter Conclusion

Many Jewish summer camps, as has been described by my interviewees, have a thriving hookup culture. While these hookups are not uniquely Jewish, there is a powerful Jewish undercurrent to these youthful behaviors. The experiences of male-identifying campers and female-identifying campers differ drastically from each other; this dichotomy proves interesting within the framework of procreation and continuity. Young people express that they feel a *need* to hookup or to engage with this culture, which I believe is deeply rooted in community mentality. Hookups are about connection, they are a method for young people to experience each other and to connect Jewishly in a radically different context than a camp program.

It bears repeating that the adolescent behaviors I have studied happen in spaces outside of the Jewish summer camp. I never intend to claim that only Jewish people have a hookup culture. Instead, I understand that the Jewish summer camp is a microcosm of our greater social world. However, I analyze the experience of young people within a community that holds the added complication of continuity. Continuity is a lens through which to understand the behaviors that take place because there are often external factors that shape young peoples sexual behavior (Marston and King 2006).

Chapter 4: The Queer Experience at Camp: Queerness in Isolation

My work, thus far, has detailed the experiences of straight identifying campers (or campers who have participated in a straight hookup culture) at Jewish summer camp. In order to enrich, and complicate, those discussions of Jewish heterosexuality, this chapter will focus on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ identifying campers.

Queer exposure to heterosexual hookup culture is not specifically a Jewish phenomenon; it is pervasive in the queer experience. However, queer Jewish individuals face the compounded pressure to procreate the Jewish race while also grappling with their queer identity. A Jewish studies scholar Helen Meyers (2011) notes that “the Jewish family promotes heterosexual reproduction as the key to Jewish survival” (75). Queer Jewish people, who often lack the ability to biologically reproduce, are vulnerable to exclusion from a summer camp community that subconsciously enforces continuity. The thing about being queer in a space that is for continuity is that the space is fundamentally not designed for you. This chapter will examine the experiences of campers who were at camp and campers who were not. Either way, I have found that queer Jewish people at summer camp tend to distance themselves from one identity or the other: either we act more Jewish than queer or more queer than Jewish.

The Pressure to Be Straight

Out of my nine interviewees, five now identify as queer; however, only one out of the five, Dylan, identified as queer during his time at camp. The other four (Maya, Talia, Ori, and Leah) did not have any grasp on their own queerness until years after leaving camp. I theorize that there is actually a connection between hookup culture at camp and understanding sexuality. Of course, there are many more factors that contribute to a young queer person’s identity

journey. But, attending a summer camp where straightness is a commodity must impact self-understanding in some way. For example, Maya told me about how her burgeoning identity blossomed through her experiences with men. She explained, “I knew that there was some type of disconnect between me and getting sexual with the guys.” Throughout her interview, Maya talked about camp as a place for romantic and sexual experimentation. For campers like Maya, some of this experimentation helps illuminate aspects of identity that may be hard to discover. Social norms are pervasive and if the social norm is a heterosexual identity at summer camp, that impacts young people’s understanding of self.

Talia expressed that she began to question her sexual identity after camp. Within the confines of summer camp, Talia felt like her straightness was a tool to gain and maintain social clout. It wasn’t until four years after finishing her last year as a camper that Talia felt like she could process her experiences. She told me “it’s just so heteronormative, you know? It’s inside your head until you get distance.” I believe Talia’s reflection cannot be unique to just her. While Talia’s remarks alone are not a generalizable sample, I think it is telling that my informants (and myself) also wrestled with our identity because of our time in the very straight-oriented world of Jewish summer camp. When I was at summer camp, the oldest age group put on a carnival every summer with stations. One of the stations was a “marriage booth,” where two individuals, a boy and a girl, could get “married.” This activity, which seems silly with its juvenile nature, actually took a toll on my identity as a young person reminding me that marriage is between a man and a woman. Traditions, like this one, build and maintain an infrastructure of compulsory heterosexuality at Jewish summer camp.

In a social world where having a straight “partner” is valued, it is socially preferable to fall into a heterosexual relationship. At Ori’s camp, where popularity was defined by your

relationship status, everyone seemed to be paired up. Ori recalled that “it is so integral, it’s like everyone is in a match. A girl and a boy. A girl and a boy. A girl and a boy. You didn’t want to be the odd man out.” Here, we observe straight identity, again, as a commodity through which to gain social clout. There is an underlying pressure to be straight, otherwise one exists outside of the social norm. I can concur, having experienced a culture like this as well. I remember actively telling myself to not question my sexuality because I wanted to be “camp cool.” I am an example of somebody who chose Judaism over my burgeoning queerness.

A pressure to be straight is exacerbated by a dismissal of moments that are “queer.” The normalization of homoerotic behavior is not unique to Jewish summer camp. If LGBTQIA+ identity is overlooked, then engaging romantically with people of the same gender identity as you becomes “practice.” One piece of existing literature, *Queer As Camp* (2019), discusses queer identity formation at summer camp but not Jewish summer camp. This book, which is mostly irrelevant for my study, does help frame my subsequent discussion. Kenneth B. Kidd and Derritt Mason (2019) explain that “same-sex behavior at camp is often downplayed as mere boyishness... girls’ same-sex “crushes” have been similarly dismissed as childlike and immature” (10). Both Talia and Ori shared moments with me of “practice” with their bunkmates to make sure they were ready to “kiss boys.” The dismissal of a possible queer identity or situation, to favor a straight identity which can eventually lead to continuity, is something I heard about a lot during my interviews. Dylan also shared that the “Silent Football” game (referred to in Chapter 3) creates a culture where “homoerotic behavior is not seen as some form of sexual activity, it’s a punishment that you have to engage with another male identifying person sexually.” To reiterate, I am not claiming the homoerotic interactions are Jewish in nature; I am

instead pointing to the contentious relationship with suppressed queer identity and a straight culture that leads to popularity and an eventual Jewish future.

Being Out and Being Ostracized

The infrastructure of many Jewish summer camps, so steeped in heterosexuality, felt isolating to an out queer camper. For Dylan, camp looked very different as “the only out gay man in all of camp.” Dylan provides us with a case study for what was like to be out at a Jewish summer camp. He came out at a young age and was bullied at the first Jewish summer camp he attended. His peers, who were wildly uncomfortable with his queerness, made him and his family uncomfortable enough to switch summer camps after five years of making friends at one place. Dylan had to choose between the gay identity and the Jewish community. At Dylan’s new camp, a teen camp, he felt like the space “was not for him.” Dylan described feeling like he worked twice as hard to gain the social popularity of someone who was involved in a hookup. He also shared that his camp was “socially very liberal” which makes the homophobia he experienced and the slurs he heard extremely sociologically interesting. Queerness, at large, was otherized at his camp because he could not build the type of Jewish relationship that could end with eventual biological reproduction. Of course, as a young gay man Dylan was exposed to homophobia in a variety of places but he shares that he felt “internally conflicted” at Jewish summer camp. Campers like Dylan, feel abnormal, which at first glance is a normal feeling for an adolescent. However, in a space where campers are supposed to feel so proud of themselves and their Judaism, Dylan felt like his queerness influenced the way he was perceived. Dylan reflected, “I did not hookup ever at camp, I left camp to have my sexual awakening.” Being queer was something that he had to leave a Jewish space to explore.

Straightness is, and has been, a tool for Jewish assimilation. Perhaps queer identity threatens not only the Jewish future, but the current (and somewhat stable) acceptance of Jewish people in American society. Jewish continuity, at its root, is an idea that fears the dying out of the Jewish people. Avoiding anti-Semitism might mean not being queer. For example, in Sholem Asch's *God of Vengeance*, a young Jewish lesbian couple is ostracized from their community because they threaten the stability of an assimilated Jewish family (1923). However, one might argue that in the modern world, there are a multitude of spaces in which individuals can exist as queer and Jewish. Countless nonprofits, college Hillels, and synagogues create an atmosphere that is welcoming to all people. New York City's Congregation Beit Simchat Torah was founded as a "gay synaogae" in 1973 and has since flourished into a religious space where all are welcome (CBST website). Jewish queer individuals are able to find and sustain a sense of community as queerness is becoming accepted as part of the Jewish cultural lexicon. This inclusive work, done by adults, sometimes does not translate into the actions and attitudes of young people. While these spaces exist, there is still work to be done because there are spaces—summer camp is an example—where queer Jewish people feel ostracized.

Another interviewee shared that before coming out, she viewed "all of the gay kids as weird in my mind." This reflection proves my argument that summer camp isolates and provides far less social capital to individuals that cannot promise Jewish reproduction. An LGBTQIA+ organization for Jewish youth collected quotes from queer identifying Jewish summer campers. Campers shared that they felt "disappointing" and asked for everyone to "not assume everyone is straight." Another camper said camp was "alienating... but no different than elsewhere" (JQY 2017). Jewish summer, again as a microcosm of our social world, produces homophobia and alienates queer youth. That said, Jewish summer camp left queer youth feeling like a

disappointment to the larger Jewish community. This feeling of failure is ultimately at the root of my claim. The desire of continuity is so pervasive that it makes young Jewish people feel unwanted perhaps by the Jewish religion at large. Identities of Jewishness and queerness leave young campers in a really hard place of having to wrestle internally with which one gets to shine.

Chapter Conclusion: A Inclusive Future

Had I conducted interviews with campers who are attending Jewish summer camp today, I think some of my responses would have changed. Most of these queer informants went to camp between 2007-2016. Today, some summer camps are encouraging homosexual/homosocial interactions because it still forges Jewish relationships. I saw this firsthand when I went back to visit my summer camp and was shocked to see that the most recent cabin raid was to leave the bunk and hang a pride flag at the flagpole. The camp administrators decided to keep the flag up because it added to their welcoming environment. This isn't to say that there aren't issues, and young queer Jews are not a monolith. However, there has been a bit more understanding in progressively Jewish spaces about the ability for queer families to raise Jewish children in other ways (i.e. adoption or artificial insemination). These methods still achieve goals of continuity.

Keshet, an LGBTQIA+ Jewish organization, even has on their website an extensive tool for creating an inclusive LGBTQIA+ community at Jewish summer camp. This resource asks camps to ponder their "camp culture" and consider making it more inclusive through a variety of means (Keshet 2019). We are moving to a world of inclusive Jewish summer camping. However, there is still great importance in studying the experiences of queer campers who were hurt and harmed in any way at summer camp. These instances of exclusion or bullying illuminate the pervasiveness of an attitude of continuity.

Conclusion

“Camp hookup culture is sort of this template of what young Jewish love should look like.”

Ten years after my first summer at Jewish sleepaway camp, I finish my senior thesis on the practice of hookup culture in that same space. Little Adina in 2012, who was hypercritical of her camp environment, probably could not have imagined that a sociological concept lay underneath the games of spin the bottle she saw 11 and 12 year olds playing. She observed banquet dates and marriage booths, first kisses and Jewish weddings just for “practice.”

This thesis argues that the desire for Jewish continuity is subconsciously sustained at Jewish summer camp. Using the summer camp as a model, I have demonstrated how a pervasive religious fear invades the camping sphere. My work uses a comprehensive history of the Jewish summer camp to contextualize the modern experiences of some Jewish youth. I pulled information from interviews I conducted to showcase what these romantic/sexual/social experiences look like and how they affect campers. Further, I recounted the experiences of LGBTQIA+ campers and shared how their stories complicate the hope for a Jewish future. Ultimately, I have theorized that the widespread phenomena of hookup culture for Jewish teens and a romantic culture for younger Jews is rooted in a fear of the Jewish religion dying out.

Continuity is sociological; Jewish texts tell Jewish people that we need to stay Jewish. Texts tell us about ideas that are now unspoken, they are embedded in our social discourse. We experience them, we don't always explicitly hear them. Hookup culture at summer camp emerges from this understanding of the need for a Jewish future that is embedded in our social discourse. Summer camps serve as a site where young Jewish people are socialized and thus are exposed to these ideologies. Hookup culture becomes this practice that is a subconscious (not officially sanctioned) strategy for Jewish continuity.

Ani ve'ata neshaneh et ha'olam, you and I will change the world. We would sing these words at camp and promise each other that we, as Jews, would change the world together. Thus, I find myself writing this thesis, analyzing a phenomenon, and asking Jewish people to think critically about how a hookup culture has been created. Am I changing the world? No, not drastically. But as a young Jewish person whose Judaism is so deeply important to her, I think it is essential that I wrestle with these ideas. Jewish summer camp is amazing because it is this immersive, phone-less experience unlike anything else. Camp is where Judaism becomes cool; Judaism becomes the norm; Judaism feels like the future. However, as I have noted throughout this thesis, this palpable sense of Jewish love sustains a hookup culture. I don't think I, or anyone else for that matter, has the ability to claim whether or not this hookup culture should or should not exist. I understand, and by now I hope you do as well, that hookup culture happens for a reason. Romantic and sexual connections allow for young people to be in relationship other Jewish people. Jewish people are such a small percentage of the global population, it is important to me (and to many other Jews) that we carry on our lineage.

How can this continuation of the Jewish people be emphasized in a way that doesn't pressure young people to "hookup"? Or, that doesn't make young people who do not want to engage feel less "cool"? I wish I had the answers to these questions, but instead, I will leave them unanswered. Perhaps I will return to this work years down the line and I will work with Jewish educators to tackle these complicated questions. *At va'ani, vehamitah harechava latet ahava*, you and me, the bed is wide, there's lots of room for love. The words we sing and dance do impact and socialize young people.

Writing this piece has not been easy, I share things in this piece that often go unshared in any formal capacity. There is not a vast scholarship, or any scholarship for that matter,

specifically on the topic of hookup culture at Jewish summer camp. I have become a social theorist. My research was not perfect and I acknowledge that if I were to continue this work, my sampling methods would need to be stronger to reach a desired amount of variability. I love summer camp, I really do. I would not have written this thesis if I didn't want to spend hours upon hours engaging with a world that is so near and dear to my heart. I want Jewish people to read my work to be critical of a culture that impacts young people at camp. I especially want camp directors and parents to understand the perspectives I have shared. Practices at camp need to change, but only after we understand, sociologically, why the camp world is the way it is. Sociology is the necessary tool to unpack, deconstruct, and rebuild.

Ani ve'ata neshaneh et ha'olam, you and I will change the world.

Appendix A: A Summer Camp Point System

Whereas: The YJ Point System is accepted in all social circles of Young Judaea and
 Whereas: Intermarriage is becoming a serious issue in the Jewish Community and
 Whereas: Social relationships started at a young age can strengthen one's desire to marry within the Jewish Community and
 Whereas: Social relationships will strengthen the unity among the chanichim of Young Judaea

We propose the following:

For every social encounter among chanichim in Young Judaea, the chanichim involved will be given a certain value of points depending on the position of the other chanichim involved in the encounter in the movement. In certain cases, the situation behind the encounter will also result in more points being awarded. The following point values will be assigned to each chanich according to their position, or lack thereof, on mazkirut:

National Mazkir/a: 10 Points

Merakez/et Artzit: 9 Points

National AVP: 9 Points

National BP, OTP, and SAP: 8 Points

National Pirsum: 7 Points

Regional Mazkir/a: 5 Points

Regional AVP: 4 Points

Regional BP, OTP, and SAP: 3 Points

Regional Pirsum: 2 Points

Regional Club Coordinator/VPC: 2 Points

All other members of Young Judaea will be worth one point. This is because we believe that no social encounter in Young Judaea should be fruitless.

All Atid members will be worth 10 Points, Caravan members are worth 15, Caravan members in uniform are worth 20, and Israeli members of YJ are worth 15. Members of the IDF are worth 25 points if they are in uniform.

The following special circumstances will result in a doubling of point values awarded:

The social encounter occurs on Shabbat

The social encounter is between two members of the same sex

The social encounter involves more than two people

In order for this encounter to count as double the encounter must be longer than 1 minute

The social encounter exceeds thirty minutes

The social encounter occurs in Israel

Please note that merchav maz members are worth the same amount of points as the corresponding regional maz member of the same tafkid. Also that you can only get points from a person once, meaning for one encounter only however you take the encounter that is worth the most points with the person.

Appendix B: Photographs of Jewish Summer Camp



Adina Ornstein-Luks at Camp Tel Yehudah (2016)



David Luks (left) and friend (circa 1987)



Miriam Ornstein (right) and friend (1985)



Campers at Tel Yehudah (1973)



From Jeffrey Lasday (circa 1980)



Source: Elisa Weindling on Facebook



Source: Mindy Radler Glickman on Facebook
(circa 1974)



Source: Young Judaea Facebook Group (circa 1980)



Source: Young Judeaea Facebook Group (circa 1980)



Miriam Ornstein (left) and friend, Camp Tel Yehudah 1985

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Name of the Study: HookUp Culture at Jewish Summer Camps

Primary Investigator: Professor Leonard Nevarez

Student Researcher: Adina Ornstein-Luks

Data about informant identity is used for my personal reference and will not be used in the thesis. Possible informants will be aware this is a study of community and social connections at Jewish summer camp. They will also be informed possible experiences around hookup culture might come up. Prior to the interview, informants will be provided with this definition: 'hookup culture' is "both a verb and a noun... an umbrella term used to describe more casual sexual activity, ranging from light kissing to heavy petting, sometimes including penetrative sex" (Wolkenfeld, 2021).

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. Your responses in this interview will illuminate my study of Jewish Sleepaway Camp. We will discuss your personal experience with hookup culture at/working at Jewish summer camp. Your name, as well as other personal information disclosed, will remain confidential. Do you agree to participate in this interview?

1. Describe your experience at Jewish Summer Camp.
 - a. How many years did you attend camp? At what age did you start camp?
 - b. What was important to you at camp?
2. Discuss what role Judaism and being Jewish had in your camp experience.
 - a. Did you have *tefillot* (prayer) in the morning?
 - b. Was Hebrew terminology utilized to describe camp activities/facilities? (i.e. *tsrif* (bunk/camp), *nikayon* (cleaning))?
 - c. How did your camp experience impact your Jewish identity?
3. Did camp provide you with a Jewish community?
 - a. How is summer camp a unique Jewish community?
4. In Shira Wolkenfeld's study, she defines 'hookup culture' as "both a verb and a noun... an umbrella term used to describe more casual sexual activity, ranging from light kissing to heavy petting, sometimes including penetrative sex" (Wolkenfeld 2021). Based on this definition, was there hookup culture at your Jewish summer camp? (if NO, skip to END OF INTERVIEW)
 - a. Are there any particular memories that you have that illuminate the culture around hooking up at camp?
 - b. What does hookup culture at camp look like to you?
5. What was your experience with hookup culture at Jewish summer camp?

- a. Did you engage in hookup culture? (if YES, ask i-ii. If NO, skip to b.)
 - i. Did the culture of hooking up ever feel competitive?
 - 1. Did you experience any general peer pressure at summer camp?
 - 2. Did you feel any pressure to engage in hookup culture?
 - a. If so, where do you think this pressure comes from?
- b. What did hookup culture look like for your peers at camp? (skip iv if answered YES above)
 - i. Were there any games, i.e. spin the bottle, that you encountered at camp?
 - ii. What role did staff play in this culture?
 - 1. Were counselors engaging in this culture? If you worked at camp, were you engaging with this culture? Were campers “allowed” to hook up?
 - iii. How did hookup culture beyond your own behavior impact your understanding of self?
 - iv. Did you want to participate in hookup culture?
 - 1. Did the hookup culture at camp impact your understanding of individual sex/sexuality?
- c. Do you think hookup culture at summer camp is uniquely Jewish?

Thank you so much for all your detailed answers. Have a great rest of your day!

[For the reference of the interviewer:]

[Section 1: Asking about general experiences at Jewish summer camp. Important information to contextualize later information.

Section 2: Jewish experiences/. Drawing connections to Judaism in a camp environment, illuminating questions of Jewish continuity/on the camps goals for campers.

Section 3: Jewish community, Is there a connection between the Jewish community and hookup culture?

Section 4: Witnessing hookup culture from afar, gaining general commentary on cultural practices.

Section 5: Individual experiences, this is where I know I need to be sensitive. I am thinking through these topics with care. Individual experiences from an external perspective.]

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