IN the late 1960s, I knew virtually nothing about hassidic Jews when I began researching their lifestyle and community organization. But I still vividly recall how I was struck then by their distinctive presence along the Park Avenue area in the Mile End district of Montreal. Many of my peers mockingly referred to them as the ‘Park Avenue White Sox’ (after the famous Chicago White Sox baseball team) because some of the men in the community wore breeches tied below the knee, so that their white-stockinged calves were visible below their long black coats and slipper-like shoes. Those hassidim not only appeared out of place but, to my surprise, seemed untouched by the secular influences of the wider society.

At around this time, in November 1969, I noted in my set of field notes:

I spent a good part of the morning walking the streets around Park Avenue to get a feel for where the hassidim live in this part of the city. I was there around mid-morning. Hassidic men are walking briskly as though they are on a mission. No one strolls leisurely. My casual strolls, at various times of the day, allowed me to also observe scores of women pushing baby carriages and young boys, with lengthy earlocks, playing outside their homes. I wonder if this community has experienced any major changes that have impacted on their chosen way of life? I imagine this will become one underlying theme of my research. How can it not be? Based on a few conversations that I’ve had with persons that seem knowledgeable about hassidim — mainly non-hassidic Jews I should point out — they have managed the impossible. Their treasured lifestyle appears to remain intact despite living in a densely urban area surrounded by goyim.

The hassidim are, indeed, a success story, if success is measured by the ability to retain a distinctive way of life which includes not only ‘... a belief in the absolute authority of religious law, in the covenant between Israelites and God, and in the certainty of messianic redemption’, but an abiding commitment to the norms and sanctions that characterize the hassidic sect with which the individual identifies. To be sure,
total uniformity is hardly possible and, as any observer of hassidic life will attest, the variability in lifestyle within the hassidic community is best seen as falling along a continuum. That said, however, identification with, and commitment to, a hassidic way of life in line with the culture and ideology of any particular sect, remains impressive.

Nevertheless, change (in some manner or other) is inherent in human activity and the hassidim are not an exception to that general rule. All communities seeking to insulate themselves must contend with outside influences; in order to do so, they organize a series of boundary-maintaining mechanisms which are intended to influence, shape, and regulate the behaviour of their members. Social scientists who have carried out field research and who have studied the phenomenon among such societies (not only hassidim but also the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish) have described the ways in which social control issues operate.3

However, although the leaders of hassidic communities may initially succeed in regulating the pace of inevitable change, it now seems increasingly unlikely that they will be able to maintain the physical and social boundaries which they have hitherto succeeded in imposing. The boundaries have become more porous and the impact of social change is already apparent to a determined social researcher — but, admittedly, not to total outsiders. Heilman has perspicaciously observed that while hassidic communities are often portrayed as a picturesque reminder of yesteryear caught in a time warp, ‘... today’s Hasidim are very much part of the modern world, struggling in a variety of ways against powerful social forces that threaten either to sweep them away or else transform them into something radically different from what their founders conceived or their leaders perceive’.4

The resurgence of hassidic communities, following their near destruction during the Holocaust, has been analyzed elsewhere.5 In what could not be imagined only a few decades earlier, today’s hassidic communities enjoy burgeoning numbers and a plethora of institutions to meet their needs, and they rank extremely high on any scale of ‘institutional completeness’.6 Among North American Jewry, hassidim enjoy the highest birth rate at a time when demographic analyses show the overall Jewish birthrate to be declining.7 Significantly, this sizeable population increment is not matched by a defection stream warranting serious concern for the time being. Moreover, there is little evidence to indicate that the younger generation’s commitment to the traditional hassidic lifestyle is diminished; in fact, the reverse may actually be the case. As evidenced by an explosive birthrate, the ability to attract financial resources to sustain a widely diverse institutional infrastructure, matched by a heightened awareness of the economic and political clout which their numbers can exert in political circles, the commitment of the younger generation has not faltered.
The present paper, which concentrates on a geographic segment of Montreal hassidim, examines social change at both the macro and micro levels. I divide the analysis into two segments which may seem unrelated but which in fact reflect different dimensions of change impacting on the community. In the first, I draw upon two extensive surveys which were commissioned by the Coalition of Outremont Hassidic Organizations (COHO). COHO was established in 1996 by some hasidic entrepreneurs in order to identify the economic and social needs of the hasidic and ultra-Orthodox populations of Greater Montreal. In another section, I examine social change more closely and focus on a number of specific problems which my informants identified in the course of my intensive fieldwork. They are problems which they considered to have altered the tenor of their everyday life in their particular hasidic community.

It is necessary, first, to make a selective review of the relevant literature and then to specify background information and data sources.

Review

The social scientific study of hasidic life is, in practice, the study of how social change is negotiated, managed, and controlled. There is the mistaken impression on the part of lay people that the lifestyle of hasidim makes them impervious to foreign influences. In fact, a review of selective studies of the subject demonstrates that social change has been an essential focus for the scholars who undertake the task of analyzing hasidic beliefs and social behaviour.

Solomon Poll’s *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg*, published in 1962, is one of the earliest sociological studies of Brooklyn’s hasidim. His central interest was the community’s social, religious, and economic structures and therefore he did not explicitly focus on social change, although that theme inevitably emerges. In the chapter on assimilation, Poll notes that when hasidim came to settle in the United States, their leaders stressed that it was imperative not to follow the irreligious practices of the majority of American Jewish citizens:

The Hasidic leadership recognized that the greatest enemy of Hasidism is change. If members should engage in even the most minute secular behavior... this would be a deviation from the norms of the group and might lead to more extensive deviant behavior endangering group cohesion.

Even at that early stage in the community’s evolution, Poll rightly predicted that active participation in the labour force could have adverse consequences by restricting the community’s ability to retain tight control over its members. Overall, however, Poll offers an idyllic portrait of hasidic life. For example, marriages were for life. Until 1959, there had been ‘only two divorces of which the community
had any knowledge and the individuals involved were not considered true Hasidim by the community’. 11

In 1974 (12 years later) Israel Rubin published Satmar: An Island in the City, in which he noted that the Satmar sect, despite its highly successful insulating mechanisms, ‘... remains exposed to internal and external forces beyond its control’. 12 In particular, Rubin identifies several areas of potential conflict. The first is the secular education of females; even in the early 1970s, the programme in the school for girls was far more advanced and elaborate than that in the school for boys. Rubin comments that the situation had an impact on preserving insularity but also gave women an increased influence in family decision-making. Referring to economic pressures, Rubin identifies several related aspects. First, ‘... a clash between motivation for high spending... and limitations on earning’; 13 which, at the time of his research, was in an incipient stage; second, and related, the trend towards working wives stemming from the necessity to make ends meet; third, and resulting from the second, the changing balance of power within the family. With regard to the place of women in the community, Rubin observes: ‘... power may be gradually slipping into the hands of those who are penetrating the barrier that is designed to keep Satmar culturally insulated’. 14 Finally, he detects the beginning of a change in the secular education of boys, particularly in giving the pupils a better knowledge of English to equip them for finding gainful employment. There were two other major problems, unrelated to the economic situation: the succession problem of the religious leader15 and the substantial population increase. There was no heir apparent to succeed the present Satmar rebbe since he had no surviving children while the system of social control exercised by the community was greatly dependent on close personal ties — which might be weakened by a large population increase.

By 1992, when Jerome Mintz’s Hasidic People was published, there were many more consequences of social change among hassidic Jewry and much of the volume’s content reflects the minor and major conflicts which had rocked hassidic life. 16 Apart from the problem of succession among the Satmar, Mintz examines politics and race in Crown Heights and hassidic litigation before the United States Supreme Court. The chapter on ‘Family Problems’ sheds some light on the consequences of change at the micro level and, as in the case of other studies, focuses mainly on the changing status of women.

Mintz notes that an increasing number of hassidic women had secured employment outside the community as teachers, secretaries, or clerks. More generally, there was a greater number by far of gainfully-employed women, at least until the birth of their first child. He comments that in the process, they established contacts which ‘... allow the women to hear voices that are discordant from those in
their own society’. 17 He adds: ‘In these explorations into the secular world, community mores and standards are stretched and sometimes broken...’18 and concludes: ‘The Hasidim are well aware that women today are more sophisticated than they were a generation ago and that a new balance has to be struck between the couples’.19 Divorces are no longer rare and ‘The major share for the blame for the increase in divorces... most often falls on the assimilation of new ideas from outside the community. Blame is placed at the door of social change’.20

In New World Hasidim, a 1995 collection edited by Janet Belcove-Shalin, the theme of change is considered in the volume’s introduction.21 The hassidim’s story is still one of overall success, but there are critical challenges and serious problems have arisen. Belcove-Shalin states that some hassidic communities have been rocked by scandal and controversy, including acts of child and drug abuse, racism, violence, and kidnapping.22 She comments that reports about these and other problems have been featured by the media, and have cast a pall on the idyllic hassidic lifestyle.

Two other volumes, both published in 2005, reflect on the theme of change, one to a greater extent than the other. Jacques Gutwirth has attempted to account for the unexpected rebirth of Hassidism, from 1945 to the present day, but he does not set out to document the varied changes which hassidic communities have encountered over the last several decades.23 However, the reader of this optimistic volume discovers that, willy-nilly, accommodation to the surrounding environment (be it in the United States, Israel, Antwerp, or France, for example) has necessitated entering into practices and arrangements which were formerly unnecessary and even considered undesirable. I will cite here only two examples. First, Gutwirth notes that because of financial difficulties, greater numbers of women are compelled to find work outside the home, even if only part-time, but that this development is also, in part, the result of the indirect influences of prevailing feminism.24 As already noted above, such new-found employment opportunities, based either on economic necessity or a desire to explore creative talents more fully, or a combination of the two, have an impact on the organization of the household. Second, arrangements entered into with local governments, in return for economic or social assistance, may impose demands which restrict the degree of hassidic insulation from the surrounding culture.

Viewed from a distance, hassidic life may appear largely unaltered and some believe that the modifications required by legal, social, or economic circumstances have largely failed to dent seriously the passion with which adherents live their religious life. But Hella Winston finds serious flaws in this serene portrayal of hassidic life: in Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels (published in 2005), she
recounts the experiences of several hazzidic Jews from Satmar and other sects who, unhappy about the severe restrictions of their group’s lifestyle, struggled to move out of their community. The actual number of such defectors may be small, but their rebellion has attracted much attention and comment. That may be because over the years, the focus has been on the attraction of sects and cults rather than on the disillusion and rebellion of those born and bred in intensely religious communities.

Background and Data Sources

This Journal published in 1997 an article on changes which I documented among the Tasher hazzidim in the Quebec community of Boisbriand. I had first written about that group in 1987 and wanted to discover whether there had been any changes. I focused in particular on several demographic and institutional changes as well as on the Tasher’s use of the media to enhance their agenda. However, the bulk of Montreal’s hazzidic Jewry is situated just west of the city’s Mile End district, north-east of Mont Royal and Park Avenue streets, notably on Esplanade and Jeanne Mance. Another block of hazzidim live in the Eastern part of Outremont, an area abutting the city of Montreal, particularly on and around the streets of Hutchison, Durocher, and Quebes. Owing to their sheer numbers, this is the area where hazzidim attain their maximum visibility. Since my introduction to hazzidic Jewry had been in that very area of Montreal, it now seemed reasonable to return to it. However, it was not nostalgia alone which determined my decision to do so.

An increasing number of unrelated incidents had brought the theme of change in clearer relief. Although each incident, by itself, might be seen as not entirely unusual, taken together they seemed to suggest that the community was in the throes of change even if, to use Gladwell’s phrase, the tipping point had not been met. First, I was beginning to hear about people who had divorced and I had to revise my opinion that these people would not consider divorce, even if they had to deal with marital difficulties of a serious nature. Second, I was surprised at the extent of the activities in which they now engaged — activities which in earlier years would have been quite inadmissible to them but which they now claimed not to be that unusual or reprehensible — most notably, visits to local bars and to sporting events. In 2004, a hassid had asked me to meet him at a fast-food restaurant and in the course of our conversation there, he mentioned in a matter-of-fact, casual manner that he attended sporting events on occasion and had visited the local casino, while conveying the impression that he remained as firmly committed to the Satmar lifestyle as any of his deeply-religious peers.
It had also become increasingly clear that, despite rabbinic prohibition, numbers of hassidim whom I met were spending considerable time surfing the Internet just for purposes of pure enjoyment. Moreover, many of them assured me that they were far from unique, that many of their peers did the same. Meanwhile, there had been a major tax scandal involving some individuals and institutions affiliated with the Boisbriand Tasher and by then Bob Dylan’s ‘The times they are a changin’ came to mind.

My method of choice in the study of hassidic Jews is ethnography with the help of participant observation and informal interviews. It is an appropriate method for two reasons, mainly: first, it enables the researcher to fully understand how hassidim organize and make sense of their everyday lives and second, since hassidim strictly cloister their communities, only ethnographical methods are likely to succeed—certainly not formal interviews or replies to questionnaires.

In the circumstances of hassidic leaders ensuring as far as possible that their communities retain their insularity, it is fortunate that a somewhat unexpected turn of events may help to reveal aspects of lifestyle which have been traditionally hidden from outsiders. That is the case when hassidim have approached government agencies for various kinds of assistance and have been required to comply with demands for relevant information. It is then that we discover that hassidim are not immune from such problems as care for the elderly, poverty, learning and development problems, and bleak employment prospects. In the process, stereotypes about hassidim begin to unravel: not all of them are content with their lifestyle; a proportion of the community has to live well below the poverty line; and both as a group and as individuals, their insulation from the mainstream does not succeed in making them unaware of the social, economic, and political climates obtaining outside their gates.

Occasionally, carefully-crafted strategies for gaining access to secretive communities may not be needed: comparative success may be achieved as a result of fortuitous circumstances. Some of the data presented in this paper is a case in point. Hassidim residing in the Mile End and Outremont areas of Montreal had to provide concrete evidence to support their entitlement to assistance and a hassid was appointed to spearhead a drive to conduct a needs survey of the target population. In the event two surveys were conducted: in 1997 and in 2005. In addition to the survey material, I had a series of unstructured interviews (in reality, conversations) with hassidim residing in that area. Apart from such numerous conversations, I also completed eight informal interviews, three of those with women. The conversations were unplanned and typically occurred as I walked along the streets of the area and wandered into hassidic-owned businesses to survey the goods. An additional source was the publications...
advertising hassidic businesses and services; I relied upon the 2005–06 Montreal Community Directory prepared by the Beth Jacob Teachers Seminary which encompasses both the hassidic and ultra-Orthodox non-hassidic residents of Montreal (including the Tasher in Boisbriand, Quebec) as well as a weekly publication, Quality Shopping, which features (but is not limited to) advertisements of hassidic commercial enterprises.

**Macro Elements of Change**

The 2005 Report on ‘The Hassidim and Ultra-Orthodox of Greater Montreal’ is sub-titled ‘A Needs Assessment and Population Projection of the Hassidic and Ultra-Orthodox Communities of Greater Montreal’. It was funded by a grant to COHO from Canadian Heritage and Charles Shahar, a demographer, served as Research Co-ordinator. The report is presented in two parts: the first includes a comprehensive needs assessment of the hassidic and ultra-Orthodox populations of Greater Montreal; it examines perceived needs as these relate to immigration problems, language training, dealing with elderly parents, housing problems, managing the stress of home and work, and childcare needs. The second part features in-depth population projections of the hassidic and ultra-Orthodox communities in Greater Montreal. While these communities, but especially the hassidic one, have been growing at a sizable rate, the report offers the first statistical projections, based upon the current trends, to arrive at population estimates for the years 2010, 2020, and 2030. This is not insignificant in terms of future needs of Montreal Jewry: while the size of the total Montreal Jewish community has been diminishing over the past three decades, the hassidic and ultra-Orthodox populations have shown definite growth.

A word about the survey’s methodology is in order. The initial pool of potential respondents was derived from the Bays Yaakov Directory, listing the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the hassidic and ultra-Orthodox populations in Greater Montreal. Following the extraction of a random list of households from the directory, telephone interviews were conducted between October 2004 and February 2005. A total of 469 respondents were interviewed, representing approximately 18 per cent of 2,608 hassidic and ultra-Orthodox households located in Greater Montreal. The sample was stratified by geographic area, thereby making it possible to distinguish between various hassidic and ultra-Orthodox communities. Table 1 of the survey report offers a summary of postal code regions, the communities involved, and their relative frequencies in the study.

We see in Table 1 that the largest representation is from the H2V region located in the Outremont and Park Avenue areas.
Satmar, Belz, and Skver hassidic sects predominate in that location.\textsuperscript{39} There are 163 such households represented here, or 34.7 per cent of the entire sample.\textsuperscript{40} The survey offers basic demographic data concerning household size. This is particularly relevant as these numbers impact upon the abilities of families to meet their overall needs and the perceived difficulties in managing daily affairs. Figure 1 is a summary breakdown of mean household size across hassidic and ultra-Orthodox communities, while Figure 2 examines the mean number of children across hassidic and ultra-Orthodox communities.

Table 1.
Frequency distribution by postal code region, geographic area and Hassidic/Ultra-Orthodox community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postal code region</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H2V</td>
<td>Outremont &amp; Park Avenue</td>
<td>Satmar, Belz, Skver</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3S</td>
<td>Eastern Cote des Neiges</td>
<td>Yeshiva</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3W/H3X</td>
<td>Snowdon/Hampstead/Western Cote des Neiges</td>
<td>Lubavitch</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J7E</td>
<td>Boisbriand</td>
<td>Tosh</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.
Mean household size across Ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic communities
As both figures reveal, the mean household size and number of children are considerably lower in the overall Jewish population.

Zeroing in on a profile of concerns and difficulties of Hassidic households, Figure 3 provides a summary of the responses when individuals were asked to identify which of a number of situations are of concern. The three categories with the largest response rates include housing, aging parents, and managing home and work. As we will see, housing becomes problematic owing to the finite number of houses in the area that are affordable but also sufficiently close to the neighbourhood such that it can be reached by foot on the Sabbath and Jewish holy days. Almost one fifth (19.1 per cent) of respondents claimed they experienced ‘some’ or ‘major’ concerns in managing the responsibilities of home and work. What kind of help did respondents require? In order of priority, there was ‘... cleaning/domestic help, followed by financial assistance, childcare help, and advice/counselling’. The percentage of respondents in this category is understandable in light of the large families involved and the challenges of sustaining adequate income to support the latter. In the matter of care-giving to aging parents, the most identifiable needs related to extra help for light and heavy housecleaning tasks, transportation needs, followed by bathing/washing and taking medication. According to the survey: ‘Almost half of the respondents had elderly parents living in Montreal and almost half had “some” or “major”
concerns about their rôle as caregivers’. It is not coincidental that hassidic Jews identify the same kinds of mundane matters which pre-occupy the larger Jewish and non-Jewish populations. Indeed, as government-sponsored or supported programmes have become available to cope with them, hassidim have chosen to identify themselves as worthy.

Part 2 of the survey focuses on population projections. In light of the significant rates of growth of the communities under examination, the analysis seeks to determine growth patterns by 2010, 2020, and 2030.

Table 2 details the number of households derived from the Bays Yaakov Directory for alternate years, between 1996 and 2004, by postal zone areas. The postal zone area of interest in this paper (H2V) comprises Outremont and the nearby Park Avenue neighbourhood. Table 2 also indicates the number of individuals represented by the households in question. We see that in 1996, there were 676 hassidic and ultra-Orthodox households in the H2V area, representing 3,725 individuals. By 2004, that number rose to 4,981, an increase of 33.7 per cent. By using the average percentage growth rates from 1996 to 2004, Shahar calculated projected rates, estimating that the H2V population will increase from 4,981 individuals in 2004 to 6,188 in 2010, an increase of 24.2 per cent. Ten years later (2020), the population is projected to increase to 8,882 individuals, and to 12,750 by 2030. Table 3 provides projections for the hassidim and ultra-Orthodox in Greater Montreal (1996–2030).
The above figures starkly indicate that the Hassidic community in Outremont and the surrounding area in Montreal have experienced change if only by virtue of a dramatic increase between 1996 and 2004. However, the explosive population rate has also been consequential in terms of the community’s ability to provide for its own in times of need. Moreover, the Hassidic population has been compelled to respond to ongoing allegations of municipal improprieties which have been brought to the attention of legal authorities. For the outside observer, the most tangible reflection of change lies in the increased numbers of Hassidic-owned businesses which are sprinkled through the neighbourhood, including supermarkets, bakeries, and stores selling prepared foods, photographic equipment, furniture, and clothing. By contrast, in the past, most commercial ventures were located in peoples’ homes. The organization responsible for this transformation is

### Table 2.
Projections for Hassidim and Ultra-Orthodox population living in Greater Montreal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J7E, Boisbriand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>1,555</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>6,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>1,199</td>
</tr>
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<td>H3W/H3X, Snowdon, conversation H3S, Eastern Côte des Neiges</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>2,776</td>
<td>3,551</td>
<td>3,546</td>
<td>3,933</td>
<td>5,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampstead, Western Côte des Neiges</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>2,997</td>
<td>3,120</td>
<td>3,259</td>
<td>3,315</td>
<td>3,418</td>
<td>3,768</td>
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<td>Households</td>
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<td>607</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>733</td>
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<td>H3S, Eastern Côte des Neiges</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Households</td>
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<td>501</td>
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<td>710</td>
<td>875</td>
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<tr>
<td>H3W, Outremont Park Ave.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
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<td>3,989</td>
<td>4,358</td>
<td>4,634</td>
<td>4,981</td>
<td>6,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>1,123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on average household size: H2V = 5.51; H3S = 5.14; H3W and H3X = 5.54; J7E = 5.78.*

The above figures starkly indicate that the Hassidic community in Outremont and the surrounding area in Montreal have experienced change if only by virtue of a dramatic increase between 1996 and 2004. However, the explosive population rate has also been consequential in terms of the community’s ability to provide for its own in times of need. Moreover, the Hassidic population has been compelled to respond to ongoing allegations of municipal improprieties which have been brought to the attention of legal authorities. For the outside observer, the most tangible reflection of change lies in the increased numbers of Hassidic-owned businesses which are sprinkled through the neighbourhood, including supermarkets, bakeries, and stores selling prepared foods, photographic equipment, furniture, and clothing. By contrast, in the past, most commercial ventures were located in peoples’ homes. The organization responsible for this transformation is

### Table 3.
Projections for Hassidim and Ultra-Orthodox population living in Greater Montreal (1996–2030)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>H2V</th>
<th>H3S</th>
<th>H3W/H3X</th>
<th>J7E</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>3,725</td>
<td>2,997</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>959</td>
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<td>3,999</td>
<td>3,120</td>
<td>2,776</td>
<td>1,295</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4,358</td>
<td>3,259</td>
<td>3,551</td>
<td>1,555</td>
<td>12,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4,634</td>
<td>3,315</td>
<td>3,546</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>13,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4,981</td>
<td>3,418</td>
<td>3,933</td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>14,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2010)</td>
<td>6,188</td>
<td>3,768</td>
<td>5,402</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>18,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2020)</td>
<td>8,882</td>
<td>4,431</td>
<td>9,152</td>
<td>6,930</td>
<td>29,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2030)</td>
<td>12,730</td>
<td>5,202</td>
<td>15,518</td>
<td>15,537</td>
<td>49,007</td>
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</table>
COHO (the Coalition of Outremont Hassidic Organizations) which has professionalized the process by which hassidic-owned business ventures are initiated and co-ordinated.

As noted above, COHO was founded in 1996; it is situated in the heart of an upscale area of Outremont and occupies three rooms on the second floor of an office building. These rooms are decorated with various photographs of COHO officials meeting influential leaders of government up to the ranks of provincial premier and Prime Minister as well as provincial and federal cabinet members — a testimony to the political links which have been successfully cultivated over the years. There are also on the walls various plaques identifying the businesses which COHO has helped to establish and which had been singled out for various municipal and provincial awards. The organization is managed by a Board of Directors but remains spearheaded by an individual, a hassidic entrepreneur and businessperson who saw the need to establish a centre of this nature that would help to meet the economic needs of a growing community.

A COHO brochure reads: ‘Community leaders of the Hassidic and Ultra-Orthodox communities of Outremont and surrounding areas have established a unique initiative to offer employment and business assistance services in partnership with the Federal government’. (There is also a French-language brochure.) Such partnerships extend beyond the federal level of government to include grants from provincial and municipal government agencies. There is a staff of three persons working full-time. Two women focus on matching clients’ employment interests and skills to the needs of employers, while the third (a male) concentrates on the creation of new start-up businesses — offering advice on the availability of loans, assistance in the completion of required documentation, as well as noting practical details on the feasibility of the proposed undertaking and the range of daily problems which might occur. The brochure specifies: ‘The COHO initiative has been designed to assist members of the community to make career choices and find suitable gainful employment; enable entrepreneurs with both new and existing businesses to access services to help them compete and thrive in the global economy; provide information regarding government programs geared to toward expansion and export’.

COHO estimates that since its inception it has helped to establish approximately 150 businesses, enjoying a success rate of between 60 and 70 per cent. The businesses vary in scope and include stores selling photo supplies, shoes, picture framing, groceries, baked goods, jewelry, travel, and wedding supplies. A person closely connected with the organization commented that COHO offers business advice and, in reference to a particular business it helped to establish, added:
First of all, we gave him advice. The guy didn’t know one end of a stick from the other. We got him a grant of $5,000... We got him loans, we taught him how to go to the bank, how to operate a business... You know something? When you get married and soon have 3–4 kids, you don’t have time to fool around. You have to make money. Whenever somebody comes in with an idea, we, COHO, help them develop it. We send them to this organization, this foundation that would give them some money. We direct them because they would never know what to do.

In this regard, COHO’s business development services include accessing government services and support for small businesses, providing information on business start-ups for entrepreneurs, and offering assistance in applying for business loans. On the employment side, the organization helps individuals to complete résumés, and offers career counselling and job placements. ‘About half of the clients are in their early 20s for business start-ups... If they are ready to work hard, and why shouldn’t they be, and with our advice, they can’t go wrong’, commented one of the counsellors.\[47\]

The surveys which COHO has commissioned reflect changes in the hassidic population and identify members’ perceptions of their needs and changing circumstances. Indications of change are also observed by noting the range of business ventures which hassidic Jews have undertaken in recent years, as reflected by stores whose merchandize either caters to hassidic Jews (for instance, those carrying religious articles) or offering services meant to appeal to a hassidic clientele (for example, certain styles of clothing). However, these are outward manifestations of social change that, in and of itself, might lead to the conclusion that the hassidic community is enjoying success attending to the challenges of urban life. From a distance, at least, the self-imposed insulation appears intact. As in the past, then, hassidim cling tenaciously to a way of life whose foundational values and traditions also served the earlier generations of hassidim. However, such a snapshot fails to fully appreciate the dynamic tensions experienced on the day-to-day level in the hassidic community: the social and cultural boundaries in place to combat unwelcome foreign influences are not as strong as they appear to be.

I now turn to a consideration of a select number of such influences and activities which, according to my informants, are not isolated incidents experienced by only a handful of individuals who may be easily dismissed as deviants but reflect, instead, a widening inability by leaders to successfully channel and control individuals’ activities and decision-making. In particular, I draw attention to seemingly disparate features of everyday life which, in their totality, reflect the impact and consequences of on-going change. More specifically, I focus on the intrusion of the Internet, the increase in divorces, and a movement by some disaffected hassidim to sever ties with the community and its stringent way of life.
I have suggested elsewhere that regardless of their ideological stripe, hassidic communities attach supreme importance to preventing assimilation by insulating their members from unfavourable secular influences of the host culture, and have noted that this theme is commonly addressed in ethnographic studies of hassidic sects.48 The notion of boundaries and how they are maintained serves as an appropriate metaphor as hassidim strive to close the circle around their chosen lifestyle by imposing strict measures of social control. Kanter has observed that boundaries do more than define the group by setting it off in its environment but, in giving it a sharp focus, also facilitate commitment to its norms and expectations.49 The persistence of boundaries requires not only criteria and signals for identification but, as importantly if not more so, a structuring of interaction that allows for the perpetuation of differences, be these cultural, social, or political, or more likely combinations thereof.50 It has been noted that insulation from the surrounding culture is the strategy most commonly used by the hassidim in order to cultivate and maintain a distinctive identity.51

I suggest that these efforts at boundary maintenance are meeting with increased resistance. The issue is not whether hassidic communities fail to establish viable institutions to effectively control permissible contacts with outsiders but, rather, the degree to which the playing field has tilted over the past decade or so. For example, hassidic sects continue to maintain separate schools for boys and girls, as in the past, and as before, the secular curricular content remains closely supervised and even censored. The dramatic shift, rather, lies in the relative ease with which younger persons can access, and interact with, the outside world.52 While such contacts were not unknown in the past, they were required to be practised surreptitiously in order to avoid detection. Avoiding detection, today, has been eased dramatically by the presence of a comparatively new and expanding technology: the Internet.

The Internet

‘The Internet is a real danger’, remarked a hassidic woman whom I met. ‘It’s the high tech stuff that’s a real danger to our kids, and it’s so difficult to control’ she added. Such underlying concern about the media, vary generally, and advances in modern technology were reflected in my conversations with hassidic respondents.53 To locate this concern in an appropriate context, hassidic leaders (and haredi ones more generally) have typically issued religious decrees (psak din) against media as a threat to Torah and family values. In a recent
publication, Yoel Cohen recently noted: ‘From the appearance of newspapers in the nineteenth century, through the development of radio and television, and latterly video, computers and internet and cell phones, haredi rabbis have enacted such decrees against media’.

Focusing on the religion-news media nexus in Israel, Cohen observes that to the degree that new technologies could be controlled or viewed as harnessed toward the pursuit of Torah studies, they were permitted. With regard to the Internet, however, he writes:

...haredi rabbis... issued a ban on its use. These rabbis regarded Internet as a far worse moral threat than television: whereas television was supervised, the Internet offered access to pornographic sites.

Cohen adds that the ban on computers and Internet has not been entirely successful, since an estimated 40 per cent of haredi houses in Israel have personal computers and the rapid speed at which technology evolves has compelled haredi entrepreneurs to market computer-filtering programs. Moreover:

In 2002 haredi rabbis forbade talmudical college students from using mobile phones, seeing them as threatening the appropriate atmosphere for the yeshiva study hall. But as the mobile phone’s capabilities widened, notably providing internet access, haredi rabbis see the mobile phone as a moral threat to the entire community and established a rabbinical committee for communication affairs which began negotiating with mobile companies to provide only telephone facilities.

While some media have been amenable to hassidim’s control, Lapidus reviews some recent controversy within the haredi community, concluding that ‘... it seems that the internet is far too threatening and unmanageable to be tamed sufficiently, and hence there are increasing calls for its total ban from haredi communities’. In 2003, the Vishnitzer rebbe instructed his hassidim to avoid the Internet, identifying it as a sakoness nefoshess — a threat to life. In a pashkevil (a poster with religious and social information in the form of a public statement) 11 Montreal hassidic leaders discouraged use of the Internet stating: ‘It’s already well-known to most people how dangerous a computer is, how many have fallen victim to it, may we be spared. And how many kosher people from decent homes have fallen due to the Internet? While it may have begun unwittingly, to their regret, they were corrupted and entire families have been destroyed’.

On 20 January 2006, the following headline appeared in the hassidic weekly, Der Yid: ‘Principals from educational institutions in Monsey agree to a prohibition on computers and internet connections in homes’. Referring to a recent meeting in suburban Monsey, New York, a village largely inhabited by haredi Jews, the article reported on a growing ban of the Internet. Paraphrasing the article, Lapidus writes: ‘... it is reported that if a parent requires internet access for
their livelihood, not only must they acquire permission from a select
group of rabbis, they must install safeguards and locks, such as pass-
words, screensavers that lock, and even locking access to the computer'.
The article maintained that the signatories to the prohibition also
claimed that a pupil from a house with an Internet connection could
easily infect others — the other students, the immediate environment
— with whom he or she comes into contact. So concerned were hassidic
and ultra-Orthodox leaders about the Internet’s danger that, in the year
2,000, haredi leaders in Israel signed a proclamation identifying ‘... the
Internet the greatest menace ever to face Jewish culture’ and a ‘danger
thousands of times more serious than television’. In a conversation I had with a hasid, he said: ‘There are many
things going on in the world today, cell phones, let alone computers’
and added: ‘You know about the kosher cell phones? Kosher means
it’s just a phone. Kosher means they cannot get the Internet. It’s a
phone, and that’s it. Today telephones can do everything.’ Reflecting
on this general theme, a hassidic mother and grandmother considered
the enormous threat posed by recent technological innovation:

We have the same problems right now that all parents, all over the world,
are having, and that’s the high-tech stuff. The Internet’s a threat to kids, the
Internet’s a threat to our kids too. You know the kids don’t have access to
computers. They have phones. Phones today are enabled to access
email.... The biggest problem... and it’s not pornography, gambling is
one and chat lines is the other where people are looking on the Internet
for relationships. That’s the problem. We never had that.... All of a
sudden, there’s a whole big wide world out there and you don’t have
control.... Like once upon a time, when our kids wanted to go to the
movies.... Today you walk into Blockbuster.

Most threatening for this speaker is the personal freedom offered via
accessing the Internet and that this is easily accomplished with cell
phones offering this option. Lapidus has commented: ‘... the challenge
of the internet is a microcosm of the challenge of modernity — the
exposure to uncontrolled options’. The community’s ability to
exercise control is now lessened; indeed, access to the Internet is even
more insidious in that it enables contact with outsiders from the
privacy of one’s home, or from a computer, without requiring the
inquisitive hasid to come into actual physical contact with outsiders.
A hasid stressed the significance of this point: ‘Before, if you wanted
to do something that wasn’t allowed, like a movie, you had to go to
the theatre, or if you wanted to read something that questioned what
the rabbis said, you went to the library. No more. Today, with the
Internet, I know many people that do these things on their computer’. The Internet, then, has magnified the opportunities for deviance, and
deviant-related activities can be pursued anonymously. Of course, it
is not the Internet *per se*, but the unsupervised access to it that offers a range of activities and social worlds which were previously beyond the ken of the majority of hassidim, particularly the younger, unmarried members. A hassid said to me: ‘The biggest thing is opportunity. You know what we say? The mouse is not a thief, the hole in the wall is a thief . . . Which means if there’s no girls around, or nothing to steal, or whatever, you’re not going to do it. If there’s opportunity . . .’. It is not surprising that opponents of the Internet emphasize its anonymity, underscoring the freedom it offered to express views and feelings which would otherwise be kept to oneself.

A woman from Satmar said: ‘Our Sages tell us that it’s impossible that a person should not be influenced by his environment . . . Everybody absorbs their environment and a little bit of the goyish culture. And what’s going on in the street today . . .’. Her voice trails off. It is not difficult for her, and for the others with whom I spoke, to identify problems which confront the hassidic community and whose impact cannot be avoided. In the next two sub-sections I address two such problems — divorce and defection — whose magnitude is not so easily judged. What is relevant in this context, is not that these are novel conditions which were unheard of in the past, but rather that the numbers appear to have much increased and that their visibility has been enhanced. The risk is that they may now be considered suitable options for others.

**Divorce**

In its simplicity, divorce among hassidim has risen owing to their greater numbers today. However, one can argue that hassidic-arranged marriages remain more durable than marriages in the non-religious world; and, more to the point, that divorce remains rare. Mintz observed: ‘While it is easier for couples to separate today than in past times, divorce is still seen as a drastic option’. Nevertheless, while small in absolute numbers, he claims that by hassidic standards there has been a divorce explosion. Nearly two decades before Mintz’s 1992 *Hasidic People*, Rubin acknowledged in 1974 that while divorce was rare, he could identify a change which he believed was worth noting: ‘A divorcée, once a stigmatized person, seems to have lost her stigma and has no apparent difficulty remarrying’. I suggest that divorce is more frequent owing not solely to an increased hassidic population but also to changing expectations concerning quality of life, particularly as this pertains to hassidic females.

Divorce struck a chord with respondents not only because its consequences are generally unpleasant but because it generally had occurred close to home. For the majority, it was not an abstract topic about which one might speculate theoretically, but a situation which had
been experienced in one’s family. A few illustrations from the data follow. On one occasion, I was sitting with a woman from Belz who was outspoken on issues involving the hassidic community, and sensitive about understanding that changing mores in the wider culture had affected the hassidim. When I enquired whether divorce was more prevalent today than 20 years earlier, she replied:

Now you’ve hit home because my son just got divorced. I would say, let’s go back 20 years, divorce was horrible, horrible. You really had to be something to get divorced. Now my friend’s daughter lived with her husband three months. She decided he wasn’t quite as smart as she thought he was, and she just left. And this is happening. Divorces, I would say, I would hear about one a week.

Another female, already divorced, and raising four children, echoed this view: ‘It’s certainly a lot more than before. It’s a real problem in the community because it never happened like this before’ and added: ‘Don’t misunderstand me, the vast majority of marriages last but the option [of divorce] is no longer impossible’. A third woman, a mother of five children, aged seven to 14 years commented:

The big difference is that people your age are getting divorced. I mean you hear about it in New York but it’s also happening here. When it happens to someone you know, a friend, it’s natural to begin comparing. You also see that people survive the experience even though it’s usually very painful. I just hope the problem doesn’t get worse.

One explanation for this developing phenomenon centres on the particular needs of the individuals concerned. From this perspective, the individual considers his or her needs to be supreme even if the ensuing behaviour — marital separation and divorce — violates the mores of the insular community. An example from the data shows how a hassidic woman reflected upon a divorce in her immediate family:

Because of the ‘Me’ generation and the entitlement that has filtered down to our kids. When we got married, I knew I’m getting married, and if I had a problem I had to work it out. Today they get married, if there’s a problem, I’m out of here…. The trouble is that nobody is willing to tolerate anything…. My daughter-in-law was with my son for two years. She didn’t have any kids. She said: ‘You know what? I have a plan of the way I want to live my life, and it’s not working out, so I’m out of there’.

On the other hand, in the opinions of several informants, an explanation that is individual-centred, masks attention to gender considerations whose impact figure importantly in the divorce outcome. The next informant skillfully drew the connections between gender, secular education, and decision-making:

... I would say 90 per cent it’s the girls that are leaving. I blame, I shouldn’t say I blame, but I could write a thesis that’s because of the way the kids are
educated. The girls get much more secular education. They are capable of going out and getting jobs as secretaries or whatever. The boy sits with the Gemorah. So until the night of his wedding he’s told that girls are something you don’t think about, you don’t look at, la la la la la. All of a sudden he’s got this female. She’s been out there for a year or two. She starts working right about 17 or 18, gets married at about 19 or 20. He’s coming straight from the Gemorah, right....? You take these girls, they have social skills.

Several informants indicated that this differential exposure of males and females to the outside world — whether in actual practice owing to employment, or to secular studies within the confines of the school — contributes to perceptions of marital incompatibility which, in more cases than in the past, culminates in the dissolution of the marriage. Of course, divorces did occur in earlier years but (as noted above) they were uncommon. More recent exposures to secular influences have resulted in unexpected repercussions. However, divorce is not the main repercussion of estrangement or discontent. Discontent and disillusion may result in a hassid becoming increasingly unhappy and isolated until the decision is made to leave the hassidic community and its distinctive lifestyle.

Abandoning the Hassidic Lifestyle

To preserve anonymity, I use pseudonyms here.

Ricky was given my address by someone in Montreal who was familiar with my interests in hassidism. She introduced herself in an e-mail, stating that she had left her hassidic husband but was still residing in a hassidic neighbourhood and raising her six children. She gave me her telephone number and when I used it to speak to her, she suggested that we meet when I next came to Montreal. (She knew that I taught at McMaster University in Hamilton, some 400 miles from Montreal.) She said that she thought I would find her experiences ‘very interesting’. Some three weeks later, we met for coffee in a restaurant in her neighbourhood. She was modestly dressed but her hair was not covered. We spoke generally about the hassidic lifestyle and she recounted some of the hardships she had endured before her final decision to obtain a divorce. On a later occasion, I was invited to her house — in the heart of the hassidic area I was studying — and she showed me her wedding album and commented on members of the wedding party. She said that she had been vilified for securing a divorce and that some hassidic women telephoned her or even came to her door and added: ‘One woman yelled that I’ll burn in hell because of what I’ve done’ and that there was great pressure from hassidim in the neighbourhood who know her ‘to raise the children hassidic’.

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She resented particularly male privileges among hassidim and their occasional hypocrisy. She claimed that one of her ex-husband’s friends had propositioned her, while she was still married, and had said to her that no one would need to know. She had completely dissociated herself from her native community, though she remained in contact with her mother and siblings. She commented that she used to cover her hair but clearly no longer did so and added: ‘And I’ll wear short sleeves if I want to’. Her friends and her children’s friends now did not include hassidim. Despite having lost contact with her hassidic peers, she occasionally heard of their activities: ‘Some of them I know are probably very content. They have a hassidic family, there’s a good chemistry between the husband and wife, and all’s well. But I know of others… that were stuck in a relationship and what could they do? Where could they turn? You never hear about these women’, she claimed. As it happens, one does hear about them increasingly.

Mrs K, a hassidic mother and grandmother who is not only involved in the community’s affairs but is also unusually familiar with events in the wider society, acknowledges that the hassidic community has experienced unexpected change which is too painful to ignore: to her dismay, it has recently become the focus of film-makers and academics who, in her estimation, have failed to do it justice. In the midst of our conversation about social changes, she suddenly said: ‘And that’s another thing that infuriates me. The hassidim, we’re considered a very exotic species that’s being put under the microscope more and more these days. [There’s] an explosion of things written about hassidim. And about what’s written, all of it… is sensationalized. Nobody can do a sociological study without having a sexual component in it…’. From her perspective, as soon as someone leaves Satmar, or one of the more well known sects, a book is written about them. She is horrified by blogs appearing on the Internet where hassidim share their concerns and misgivings about hassidic life in such a public forum. She is particularly angry about a book published in 2005, _The Unchosen_, which details the experiential trajectories of individuals who sought to leave the hassidic fold: ‘You get the impression that there are so many that have left, but it isn’t true… I’m not saying it doesn’t happen, but you get the impression there’s an exodus’.

While the actual number of hassidim who have chosen to leave and to sever ties with their religious upbringing has probably risen over the past two decades, the numbers are likely to be more limited than is claimed in print or on film. However, any low count of formerly hassidic Jews masks a more insidious development which appears to be causing considerable concern: those who have become marginalized while pretending to remain connected to the hassidic lifestyle. Two hassidim chose to emphasize that concern. One woman said:
I’m not worried about the ones that are checking out, but those that stay, [that are] like a worm in a rotten apple. There’s a guy on the net who’s a hassid and a heretic. . . . I’m worried about the ones that are staying in the community and leading a double life.

Another, a man, commented:

It’s hard to know who’s being influenced in which way and what they’re thinking inside. When you see someone in shul wearing a shtrimelel, what are you supposed to think? He’s kosher, right? But people who are giving into doubts and experimenting are not so easy to detect and they are the ones that can spread poison.

Those leading ‘double lives’ carry a stigma that, in Goffman’s terms, is discreditable. They must learn to craft a self-presentation that turns on deception — successfully convincing others to believe that they abide by the norms of the community despite strong inner doubts as to their relevance and even legitimacy. Those embarking upon such a line of questioning initially contain their doubts from becoming public through skilful maneuvering. In what is described as an intimate journey among hassidic girls, Stephanie Weller Levine introduces the reader to ‘the infamous 888 Montgomery Street apartment [in Crown Heights, Brooklyn] where young Lubavitch questioners converged’, she says it was like a club, affectionately dubbed ‘888’ which included a ‘cozy living room — strewn with open copies of the Talmud and ashtrays heaped with remnants from pot and cigarettes . . .’. The gatherers ‘. . . were anomalies . . . among their peers whose main concerns were finishing seminary, finding suitable spouses, and getting on with the next stage of their Hasidic lives. For many of the 888 regulars, Hasidic life was about to end; they lacked faith and shared a boundless curiosity about the non-Lubavitch universe’. A chapter in the book is devoted to Rochel, about whom we read. Rochel straddled two worlds. Every night, she made the trek from her parents’ house in a relatively safe, affluent pocket of Crown Heights to join her friends at 888 Montgomery Street, on the outskirts of the Lubavitch neighborhood. She spent her days at the seminary; she is the only young woman from the 888 crowd to complete the two-year seminary program. Rochel handled both universes with seeming ease. Her school friends adored her. If she threw a party, nearly the whole class would come . . . Her teachers marveled at her sharp mind. But just beneath this surface aplomb, she smouldered with confusion and pain.

When Weller Levine comes to 888, she finds Rochel sprawled on the living room’s deep couch. Her appearance was striking: ‘She wore cut-off shorts, a T-shirt, and a bright red bandana tied around her forehead’ but she says: ‘I will not walk out of the house like this. I will put the skirt back on’. However, appearances may serve as a convincing prop to disguise a radical internal transformation as
exemplified by Dovid, another of the 888 regulars; everyone revered him as a genius because he enjoyed the rare ability to memorize the late Lubavitcher rebbe’s extemporaneous Sabbath talks and recorded them verbatim at the holiday’s conclusion. However, ‘His yarmulke and beard were a bit deceiving, for he had completely lost faith in the tenets of Orthodox Judaism’. Such deception, to avoid being outed as a heretic, involves meticulous planning — one aspect of which is frequenting physical settings where one’s hassidic identity is unknown, if not irrelevant. For example, even though she was brought up in Williamsburg, and is married to a hassid,78

When Dini enters the bar, she is dressed modestly: long dark skirt, long-sleeved sweater, ash-blond wig covering her hair. She bids me hello but doesn’t stop to sit down, heading straight to the bathroom instead. When she emerges several minutes later — in tight jeans and a tank top, her real hair jet black, curly, and flying — all eyes are trained in her direction. No one would ever guess she was a hassidic Jew.

Of course, such published revelations do not find favour amongst observant hassidim. When the subject arose about changes in their lifestyle, one of them exclaimed:

‘Did you read The Unchosen? So much garbage . . . Not because she’s lying, but because she’s trying to insinuate this is a cross section, but it ain’t . . . . About those she writes about, she didn’t make up’.

New York City’s hassidim encounter problems similar to those described here for Montreal but since New York has a much greater population and is geographically much larger, those living there find more fertile ground for experimenting with the secular society. To start with, it is easier there than in Montreal to conceal one’s deviant behaviour. And apart from the fact of facilitating such anonymity, New York City can provide institutional support from a Manhattan-based non-profit group, Footsteps, which helps drop-outs from the hassidic world in their transition to secular society. An article in The Jerusalem Post in 200579 about Footsteps noted:

Particularly for a young person, whose departure can be hasty and unplanned, the road out of the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Crown Heights is fraught with confusion and loneliness — and sometimes drug abuse.

Here I must stress that in my experience with Montreal hassidim over the decades since I started my fieldwork research, and more recently, I found such serious problems of defection not to be frequent. To the best of my knowledge, the actual numbers are minuscule: I have heard of only four cases.80 However, there are many tales in Montreal about those who have left the fold and it is clear that there is now a growing concern about the matter. During a conversation I had with
a hassidic woman, she told me:

I just got off the phone with my son in New York. His doorbell rang, he opened the door, and there standing was his close friend who had cut off his payess [earlocks]. My son was in shock.

Another hassidic woman, living in Montreal, commented on the changes which had occurred during the last three decades. She bemoaned the present disappearance of what she called ‘intact families’ and insisted that such families had been common in the past:

I hate to tell you, mister, but there is almost no family out there today that is totally intact. [And there were such families earlier?] Yes, there were. Nowadays you can have a family of ten kids and you’re going to find nine kids, eight kids perfectly following the path and you’re going to find one or two that are totally out . . . . I cannot think of a family, and I’m talking about an extended family now, . . . everybody’s got someone. It didn’t used to be that way.

A hassid made similar comments and then added:

You hear about people, younger people, almost always, that drop out. It’s happening more and more today, and it’s very sad. But it’s not a major problem. If it was on a graph, it wouldn’t show up. But it’s happening more in New York and so we hope it won’t spread here.

Conclusion

A few years ago, in 2002, I took my son (who is a serious basketball fan) to the Tasher hassidic enclave to celebrate the Hannukah candle-lighting in the Bays Medresh. There were some 300 men gathered there, of various ages and when he jokingly asked me, ‘Do they follow basketball?’ I offered to wager 100 dollars that he would be unable to find seven hassidim among those present who would be familiar with arguably the most famous basketball player ever: Michael Jordan. He did not wish to enter into the wager, but I believe I would have won, if he had. Nowadays, however, I doubt whether the odds would remain in my favour.

The boundaries which traditionally separated the hassidim from mainstream culture are more porous now, as is evident from the cases cited in this paper. However, I still find it hard to take lightly the changes which are occurring and when I said so to a hassid whom I had come to know and who casually remarked that some of his hassidic acquaintances frequented local bars to watch sporting events, he retorted: ‘What do you think? We’re not human? You’d be amazed at what some hassidic Jews are ready to try these days’.

The phenomenon of deviance and social control has been studied among haredi adolescent males in Montreal by Jonathan Levy who
divides exposure to outside influences into two categories: influences confronted outside the home which are largely unavoidable such as billboards, store signs, and people walking in the street; and new technologies which enable outside influences to be imported into the home, such as computers and internet access. He notes:

While it is possible to control what enters one's home, it is virtually impossible to limit what children see outside. Park Avenue contains numerous bars, clubs, movie shops, a strip bar, pool halls, libraries with internet access, restaurants, and theatres. St. Laurent Boulevard — with its bars, clubs, and nightlife — is only a short walk away from the majority of Hasidic homes. In addition, it is an extremely popular area with people of different cultures, backgrounds, each with their own ideas of what constitutes appropriate dress and activity.

Levy's haredi adolescents included non-hassidic youth. He states in his dissertation that his informants were in effect almost unanimous that not only were more Jewish young men now engaging in deviant behaviour, but that the seriousness of such behaviour was also increasing. His overall conclusion is significant: he describes the comparative ease with which transgressors of hassidic values and prohibitions can engage in deviant or suspect behaviour secretly, and with impunity, while preserving their status within their community. In the circumstances, the techniques traditionally employed by the hassidim to resist secularization are becoming increasingly less effective.

At times imperceptibly, but more visibly on other occasions, hassidim are responding to social change which is driven both by internal community needs and by external social influences which can no longer be contained effectively. They will no doubt attempt to continue doing what they have done for decades: devise, co-ordinate, and negotiate tactics and strategies to preserve a cherished lifestyle. In order to succeed, they will have to display even more ingenuity and creativity and researchers will need to be even more persistent and ingenious to discover whether hassidic leaders have been resourceful and vigilant in their battle for the hearts and minds of their young members.

NOTES
3 This paper includes references to studies of hassidic communities. Those interested in other, non-Jewish, 'closed' communities might read, for example,


5 Jacques Gutwirth’s recently published *The Rebirth of Hasidism: 1945 to the Present*, London, 2005, examines this renaissance in detail. The reader is well-advised to read Samuel Heilman’s *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry*, New York, 1992, for a fascinating portrayal of haredi — ultra-Orthodox — Jewry which explores their origins but, most importantly, their remarkable resilience after their near destruction during the Second World War. Heilman’s account, more than any other, reveals how the ultra-Orthodox are responsive to modernity despite rejecting much of it.


8 I discuss COHO in the paper. The two surveys are: Survey of the Hassidic & Ultra-Orthodox Communities in Outremont & Surrounding Areas, 1997; The Hassidim and Ultra-Orthodox of Greater Montreal: A Needs Assessment and Populations Projections of The Hassidic and Ultra-Orthodox Communities of Greater Montreal, 2005.


10 Ibid., p. 39.

11 Ibid., p. 55.


13 Ibid., p. 197.

14 Ibid., p. 198.

15 It is interesting to note that the politicking, name-calling, and legal wrangling and divisiveness surrounding this problem were intensified hugely following the death of Moishe Teitlebaum — who was the successor to Yoel Teitlebaum, the Rav during Rubin’s research.

16 Jerome Mintz, op. cit. in Note 2 above.

17 Ibid., p. 126.

18 Ibid., p. 183. Mintz maintains: ‘... these lapses do not appear to call into question religious faith and acceptance of the Hasidic worldview’ (p. 183). My observation, based on data collected some 16 years later, indicates that increased contact with outside influences enables women (and men, for that matter) to begin re-assessing the saliency of observing as punctiliously as before aspects of the hassidic lifestyle — and even eventually calling into question selective components of the faith. At its extreme, the data which reflect on this problem connect to those choosing to distance themselves and even to leave the hassidic community and its chosen way of life.

19 Ibid., p. 185.

20 Ibid., p. 215.

One can add embezzlement to this list.

Jacques Gutwirth, op. cit. in Note 5 above.

Ibid., p. 144.

Hella Winston, *The Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, Boston, 2005. While Winston’s is the first published volume on leavers from the hassidic fold, the reader may be interested in my research on the topic published several years earlier. See, for example, an article published in this journal in 1987 which, while examining the process of disengagement of ultra-Orthodox Jews from hassidic society, focused in particular on three stages: the motivation for leaving; the process of departure; and the difficulties of being transplanted into secular society. In a later article, I compared and contrasted the respective experiences of newcomers to Orthodox Judaism (baalei tshuvah) and hozrim beshe’elah (literally, ‘returning to question’) of formerly observant Jews. See William Shaffir and Robert Rockaway, ‘Leaving the Ultra-Orthodox Fold: Haredi Jews Who Defected’, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 2, December 1987, pp. 97–114; and William Shaffir, ‘Conversion Experiences: Newcomers to and Defectors from Orthodox Judaism (hozrim betshuvah and hozrim beshe’elah), in Z. Sobel and B. Beit Hallahmi, eds, *Tradition, Innovation, Conflict: Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Israel*, Albany, N.Y., 1991, pp. 173–202.

See, for example, a story which appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, on 29 December 2005, titled ‘New York group helps ex-haredim adjust to secular life’.

W. Shaffir, op. cit. in Note 25 above.


William Shaffir, op. cit. in Note 1 above.


Ethnographies of hassidic communities generally address this point. Relatedly, there are occasions, and it would seem increasingly, when government institutions decide to investigate selective aspects of hassidic organization and, in the process, reveal dynamics which were heretofore concealed. An excellent recent example concerns hassidic schools in Montreal where a Quebec government committee was established to study the integration and reasonable accommodation of children from minority groups within the province’s school system, after an article appeared in a French-language daily about how selective hassidic schools circumvent provincial laws concerning education.

Despite being sanctioned by rabbis of the various hassidic sects in the area, the survey’s results should not be taken at face value, cautions one resident of the area whose encounters with the hassidim have received
considerable attention in the media. She and I communicate fairly regularly by e-mail, as unfolding events in the neighbourhood, and even beyond it, warrant observation. In a recent message, commenting on my suggestion that the numbers of hassidim in Mile End and Outremont have increased, and will continue doing so in the near future, she stated: ‘I know that the leaders of the sect [hassidim] have a stake in creating the impression that their numbers are rising rapidly’. Her general point is that the numbers may be intentionally inflated since the hassidim seek government grants to support the needy population.

34 The 1997 report was titled ‘Survey Of The Hassidic & Ultra-Orthodox Communities in Outremont & Surrounding Areas’. It was also co-ordinated by C. Shahar but included input from two sociologists at McGill University: Morton Weinfield and Randal Schnoor. It includes a special acknowledgment to The Honorary Martin Cauchon, Member of Parliament for Outremont and Secretary of State for the Federal Office of Regional Development (Quebec) for his assistance in the initiation of COHO. In contrast to the 2005 survey, it includes excerpts from conversations with key informants that add to, and serve to counterbalance, the tables of statistical data. Thus, for instance, with respect to matters of physical and mental health, a respondent is reported as saying: ‘People are afraid to go to mental health professionals, and we have only a handful within our community. People will not even consider discussing their problems with someone who is not Orthodox’. Or, with respect to childcare: ‘Big problem! Not uncommon to have 10–12 kids (informant has ten). Not uncommon for women of 24 to have 4–5 kids already’, followed by ‘People are begging for post-natal care; somewhere to go after the baby is born, for 5–10 days; because the hospital stay is so short. Mothers and newborn come home to houses with 6–8 children…’, regrettably such qualitative data are not included in the 2005 survey.

35 As will become clear, the survey data do not focus exclusively on the hassidic population in the designated Mile End area and Outremont, but also include hassidic and non-hassidic Jews elsewhere in Greater Montreal. However, the responses of hassidim in the area in which I focus in this paper can be identified separately from the larger survey population.

36 Statistics provided in the 1977 survey, published by COHO, maintain that 50.4% of this population was under the age of 15 in 1997. According to the survey data in that report, the population was doubling every 15 years owing to the high fertility rate.

37 According to the survey, p. 9, that directory ‘is updated yearly to take into account the arrival of new immigrant families, those that leave Montreal, and members lost through natural attrition’, p. 9.

38 This is considered a sufficiently large sample to meet the requirements of statistical significance. Census Canada, we are informed by the author, samples one in five households (20%).

39 Vishnitz and Bobov hassidic families are also present though their numbers are considerably smaller.

40 The next largest group resides in the region comprising Snowdon, Hampstead, and Western Cote des Neiges. This is where Lubavitch is located. There are 128 Lubavitch households in the sample, or 29.3% of the total respondents. The Yeshiva community is located in Eastern Cote des
Neiges, and constitutes 25.4% of the sample (119 households). Finally, the 59 households of Tasher hassidim in Boisbriand, account for 12.6% of the sample pool.

41 Shahar, op. cit. in Note 7 above, p. 26.
42 Ibid., p. 31.
43 These projections are based on the Bays Yaakov Directory, mentioned earlier. Shahar states regarding the methodology, ‘The statistical projections assume that the same conditions (in migration, fertility rates) that applied in the past will extend for the next twenty five years’, p. 35.
44 A 2003 study by Shahar (op. cit. in Note 7 above) indicates a mean household size of 5.55 individuals from the ultra-Orthodox living in the H2V area. It should be noted that the population in this postal code is almost exclusively hassidic.
46 This form of commercial enterprise endures to this day as evidenced by advertisements appearing in weekly shopping circulars distributed in the hassidic community.
47 An interesting study could examine the kinds of business ventures which hassidim establish. The entrepreneurial initiative is bound by limitations imposed by religion — for example, hours of operation so that the Sabbath and holy days may be observed. I think it would be more interesting to pursue a line of thinking suggested by one of COHO’s counsellors: ‘The businesses, many of them, provide a service…. There are no expenses because they are the workers…. It is the responsibility of hassidic Jews to buy from these stores’. How are these obligations perceived by hassidim, and are there particular tactics employed by the owners to attract a hassidic clientele? Of course, since the services may appeal equally to a non-Jewish clientele, one would examine hassidic business practices in this wider scope. And, in the absence of any meaningful secular education in the case of men, or high-school studies in the case of some women, how do hassidim learn to organize and conduct these business ventures?
50 See Frederik Barth, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, Boston, 1969.
53 Levy’s study confirms this concern. He states: ‘The introduction of cell phones with the capability of taking pictures, sending and receiving e-mail, and surfing the internet has broadened the range of deviant behavior capable with these devices’ (p. 131). Referring specifically to the Internet, he claims: ‘… this invention represents the largest worry for the haredi community… as it allows any user uncensored access to virtually anything, without even looking for it’ (p. 134).
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55 Ibid., p. 11.
56 Ibid.
58 Quoted in the poster.
59 Ibid., op. cit. in Note 57 above.
60 Ibid.
61 Such kasher phones limit access to text-messaging, video applications and internet access. A list of cell phone models that are considered kasher (appropriate) circulates within the community.
62 Lapidus, op. cit. in Note 57 above, p. 17.
63 Levy points to yet another possible use of the Internet which is troubling community leaders: ‘... the internet is a simple confidential way to communicate with other deviants and even to express one’s own view on ultra-Orthodox Jewry. One such individual, writing anonymously under the pen name “Hasidic Rebel” posts his own observations, as well as criticisms of the community.... It is the unintended consequences of using the internet that have the community so concerned and struggling to find a response’ (pp. 136, 137).
64 Mintz, op. cit. in Note 2 above, p. 186.
65 Rubin, op. cit. in Note 12 above, p. 132.
66 I caution the reader that my analysis here is somewhat tentative, not because of so-called ‘soft’ data I gathered, based on informal interviews, but because of the comparatively few number of divorced persons I had time to meet. Moreover, this is typically a sensitive topic requiring the respondent to reveal personal details which may compromise not only oneself but also others.
68 As far as I know, any such reliable figures are unavailable. Indirect measures, however, could be reflected in statistics which are collected by an organization such as Hillel in Israel which may record any contacts — such as numbers attending its programmes, or other services it provides. As for New York and Montreal, more specifically, impressions about numbers of defeaters are based largely on hearsay.
72 Ibid., p. 89.
73 Ibid., pp. 89–90.
74 Ibid., p. 95.
75 Ibid., p. 90.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., p. 89.
Leaving can be variously defined. One important distinction, for example, is between those who are Orthodox from birth or hassidic (as in this case) and those who, having become baalei tshuvah, decide to revert to their non-observant lifestyle, or remain observant but outside the context of the hassidic framework.

Some members of a Montreal YMCA and leaders of a neighboring synagogue are involved in a spat over windows and the state of dress, or rather undress, of gym users. The congregation was upset that young boys and teens studying at the synagogue could look across into the windows of the “Y”, and see sweaty bodies, stretching and bouncing about. So members of the Hasidic Jewish community raised money to have the windows frosted. Now some people who use the gym are upset because they’ve lost the view and the daylight and have begun circulating a petition to restore the original transparent windows.