



# Navigating the Laws of *Shomer Negiah* in a Secular World

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## Research Questions

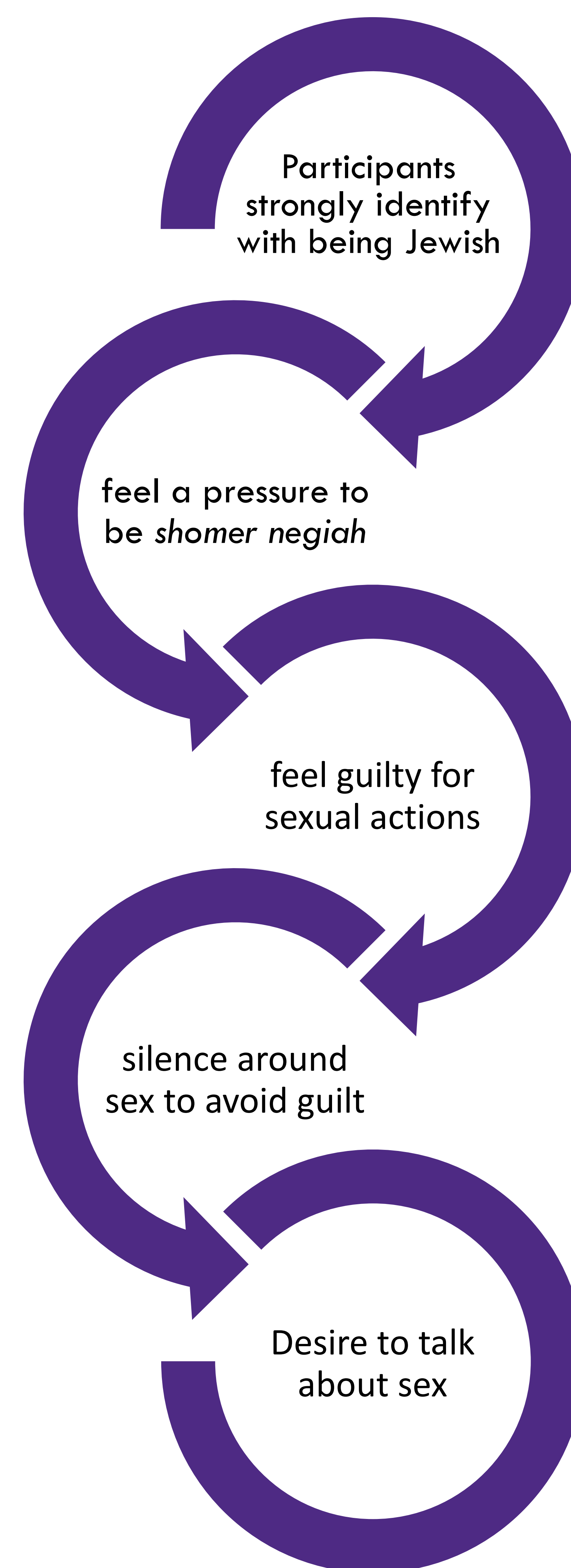
How does growing up in a Modern Orthodox (MO) community shape young women's perceptions of their sexual health? How do these sex education programs, synagogues, schools, and communities affect the sexual health of these young people, particularly once they leave their homes and communities for university or other settings?

*"I have such a damaged perspective of what it means to be a sexual person... If you talk about what's pure, what's clean and holy and talk about in a positive light. I think that would make a world of difference of how girls view their bodies"* (Interview, 11/28/18)

## Background

The Modern Orthodox Jewish community currently functions on the fantasy that MO teens are receiving all their messaging around sex from their Jewish schools and communities. The messaging these students receive tells them to refrain from sex and touching people of the opposite sex (be *shomer negiah*), until marriage. This messaging can be confusing for young people who live in both the secular and religious worlds and don't know which religious laws or cultural norms to conform to<sup>1</sup>.

## Findings



## Methodology

The study was conducted through 17 interviews with unmarried MO young women ages 18-25 about their sexual health and past experiences. Participants were recruited through Facebook groups and participated in an hour-long Skype interviews that focused on their perceptions of their sexual health and experiences. The data were analyzed through a process of open coding which were turned into analytic categories leading to the final analysis of the full dataset.

*"I'd say that the vast majority of students are not shomer. I think that some sort of revolution in the education needs to take place to cater towards the students and not catered towards the ideals of the school"* (Interview, 9/2/18)

## Implications

Based on the research, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Provide culturally appropriate sex education in MO day schools
2. Train health teachers to be able to answer questions about sex as they pertain to health and Jewish law
3. Make *mikvot* (ritual baths) accessible to unmarried MO women

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Lilah Shapiro, Dr. Peter Locke, Dr. David Rapp, Sarah White, and Assistant Dean Susan Olson for their continuous support. This research was funded by an Academic Undergraduate Research Grant.

## References

1. Blau, R. T. (Ed.). (2007). *Gender relationships in marriage and out*. KTAV Publishing House, Inc..

