REDOING GENDER, REDOING RELIGION

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This article advances a critical gender lens on the sociology of religion by arguing that "doing gender" and "doing religion" function as intertwined systems of accountability. To demonstrate the inextricability of these two systems, this study analyzes open-ended survey data from 576 Jewish women who wear kippot (skullcaps that are traditionally worn by Jewish men). These women's responses reveal that this religious practice is fraught with social sanctions on the basis of the women's simultaneous gender deviance and religious deviance. These women are not read as simply "doing Jewish" when they wear kippot; rather, they are read as doing something that is implicitly gendered, such as "doing religious feminism." It appears that when Jewish women "un/re/do religion," they simultaneously "un/re/do gender" and vice versa: gender scripts and religious scripts are inextricably intertwined.

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*G*ender & Society *in 2015 released a special issue on gender and reli-gion that encouraged sociologists to "develop more compelling theo-retical frameworks that analyze religion from a gendered perspective" (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015, 5). As Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo (2015) explain in the introduction to that issue, the sociology of gender oftentimes fails to analyze religion; reciprocally, the sociology of religion oftentimes omits any meaningful analysis of gender. To resolve this impasse, they call for more nuanced analyses of how gender and religion function as mutually constitutive categories. This investigation advances such a critical gender lens on religion by exploring the following

three questions: how do religious women negotiate conflicts between traditional gender and religious scripts; what do their experiences reveal about the social mechanisms that prohibit and/or enable egalitarian social change; how do gender and religion function as mutually constitutive categories.

To answer these questions, this article analyzes original open-ended survey data about Jewish women who wear *yarmulkes*, colloquially known as *kippot* (small skullcaps that are traditionally worn by Jewish men). This study expands upon the extant literature on women's religious observance that has mainly focused on whether gender-normative practices are oppressive or empowering (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Predelli 2004; Read and Bartkowski 2000; Scott 2009; Shirazi 2001; Taragin-Zeller 2014; Williams and Vashi 2007). Simultaneously, this study advances research about the gender–religion nexus, which has hitherto focused on gender-normative case studies (Avishai 2008; Irby 2014; Rao 2015). These bodies of literature are important, insofar as they challenge the myth that conservative religious practice is necessarily oppressive to women; however, their disproportionate focus on gender-normative religious practices only reveals so much about the influence that gender ideologies and religious ideologies can have upon one another. By shifting the analytical focus to a gender-transgressive religious practice, this study illuminates how people *redo* gendered religion and thereby contribute toward egalitarian social change.

This article is part of a larger project that analyzes the meanings of Jewish women's *kippot*. I have published elsewhere on the range of religious motivations that drive women's *kippot* use (Darwin 2016). The present study analyzes the explicitly gendered meanings and extrareligious (i.e., political) motivations that women associate with their *kippah* practice, as well as the social sanctions they incur from coreligionists. As open-ended survey responses from 576 women of Conservative, Reform, and Renewal Jewish affiliation who wear *kippot* indicate, this transgressive practice poses a challenge to the gender binary that bifurcates traditional Jewish religious practice. Women's *kippah* practice receives some support within egalitarian Jewish fields, but practitioners ultimately remain accountable to the heteropatriarchal[1] gender and religious norms of Orthodox Judaism. Non-egalitarian coreligionists socially sanction the women in this study through gender-policing and a parallel process that I call "Jewish-policing," effectively questioning the practitioners' legitimacy as both women and Jews. The women in this study employ a range of stigma management techniques in response to these instances of status

degradation, from accommodation to "strategic outness" (Orne 2011) as feminist/egalitarian Jews.

These results lend new insight into how gender and religion function as mutually constitutive categories: while men can simply "do Jewish" by wearing the *kippah*, women are not afforded such a gender-blind privilege. Rather, coreligionists perceive women who wear *kippot* as automatically doing something other than Judaism, something that is inherently gendered and political—such as "doing religious feminism." It appears that these two systems of accountability—gender ideology and religious ideology—remain inextricably linked to one another, despite evidence of an egalitarian shift within certain Jewish fields.

COVERING FOR EQUALITY

Judaism is a practice-based tradition, yet women historically have been exempt from the majority of these practices as a result of an anachronistic and heteronormative assumption that they are too busy with children and housework (Barmash 2014). Moreover, women's exemption from Jewish practice remained firmly entrenched until the transnational Jewish feminist movement of the late 1960s/early 1970s (Adelman 1986; Falk 1996; Heschel 1983; Plaskow 1990). Since its emergence, this Jewish feminist movement has gained women access to a number of practices from which they had previously been "exempt" (i.e., excluded). However, one ritual/custom remains conspicuously male-dominated: wearing the *kippah*.

The ongoing masculinization of the *kippah* is problematic because it is arguably the most recognizable symbol of Jewish identity in the public sphere (Endelstein and Ryan 2013). Yet, even when women are encouraged to assume this practice, some resist on gendered grounds. For example, in recent online discussions about this matter, some protest women's *kippot* by invoking the Biblical prohibition against cross-dressing.[2] Others take umbrage with the implication that masculinized head covering practices are somehow superior to the feminized head covering garments (such as wigs, hats, and headscarves) that Orthodox Jewish women traditionally wear after marriage (Auster 2012; Cohen 2012; Namerow 2007). Given the gendered matters that are at stake, participants within this "*kippah* debate" generally maintain that a woman's *kippah* use should remain a "free choice."

However, it is important to acknowledge that a woman's decision to wear a *kippah* is not a "free choice." Rather, this decision to deviate from

traditional Jewish gender norms is quite costly. Women who publicly transgress the Jewish gender binary render themselves vulnerable to verbal and even physical assault by coreligionists, as research on Women of the Wall (WoW) makes abundantly clear (Chesler and Haut 2003; Sered 1997). Moreover, although no studies to date have focused explicitly on the social repercussions of women's *kippot* use, there is some evidence that this practice has become particularly encoded with gender-subversive meanings. For example, Amy Milligan's (2014) interview series with lesbians who wear *kippot* revealed that some women intentionally deploy the *kippah* as a symbol of gender subversion. I (Darwin 2016) later clarified that many women who wear the *kippah* are not motivated by such extrareligious causes; nevertheless, they are aware that their *kippah* use automatically assumes political meanings due to the garment's historical masculinization. This limited literature indicates that religious scripts and gender scripts are inextricably intertwined within Jewish ritual observance such as head-covering; one cannot simply "do Jewish" without also "doing gender."

DOING GENDER, DOING RELIGION

The "doing gender" theoretical model has proven to be enormously influential among scholars as a useful framework for understanding the social construction of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). Sociologists of gender generally agree with West and Zimmerman's (1987) central claim that gender is not something we *have*, but rather something we *do* within our daily interactions. However, some sociologists have become conflicted about the authors' subsequent claim that it is impossible to ever avoid "doing gender" because people are held accountable to society's gender ideals through the judgments and social sanctions of others, institutions, and even themselves (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The problem with this latter claim is that it precludes the possibility of egalitarian social change (Messerschmidt 2009; Risman 2009; Vidal-Ortiz 2009; West and Zimmerman 2009). To resolve this theoretical limitation of the original "doing gender" model, some suggest a shift in analytical focus away from gender's "doing" toward its "undoing." Presumably, this shift would enable theorists to better understand the social mechanisms that enable women to "do gender" in ways that were previously reserved for men (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009). In response, West and Zimmerman (2009) concede that a theoretical shift is necessary to account for such instances of social change; however, they

disagree that this expansion of acceptable gendered practices constitutes gender's "undoing." Instead, they suggest that gender theorists conceptualize this shift as gender's "redoing"; after all, gendered accountability structures still exist, albeit in a less restrictive form.

"Doing gender" has inspired numerous other theoretical models since its debut 30 years ago, including Orit Avishai's (2008) "doing religion." Avishai's model provides a useful framework for exploring how women reconcile themselves with traditional religious observance. Just as gender is something that is done rather than something innately possessed, Avishai proposes that religion (particularly Judaism) is something that people do. Religious conduct—or the "doing" of religion—is a particularly worthy subject of analysis, according to Avishai, because it simultaneously provides practitioners with "a mode of being, a performance of identity, and a route toward achieving strategic ends" (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015). While these "strategic ends" are sometimes extrareligious (i.e., political), Avishai emphasizes that people also "do religion" for the sake of observance itself.

Since Avishai (2008), others have advanced the "doing religion" corpus further by demonstrating some ways in which "doing religion" and "doing gender" relate to one another as systems of accountability. However, these scholars, like Avishai (2008) before them, based their observations on gender-normative case studies. This limited focus only illuminates a certain angle of the gender–religion nexus. Irby's (2014) research on Evangelical men and women's dating practices revealed a distinctly intersectional "gendered Evangelical worldview," leading her to conclude that "gender and religion are intimately and emotionally connected in the lives of young evangelicals" (Irby 2014, 281). This case study effectively highlights efforts among Conservative religious practitioners to reconcile their secular and religious gender norms, but it does not account for how practitioners actively challenge religious gender norms to change. Similarly, Rao (2015) demonstrated that people "do" religion in gendered ways by analyzing how Muslim converts contend with religious gender norms concerning clothing and polygyny. This research compellingly highlights how religious observances result in different demands of men and women, but again, it does not account for how practitioners might challenge such religious gender norms to change. As a result of this continued focus on gender-normative practices among Conservative religious practitioners, the "doing religion" corpus remains vulnerable to the same criticisms as the "doing gender" model: It provides a useful framework for analyzing the status quo ("doing gendered religion"), but it does not account for egalitarian social change ("redoing gendered religion").

This study advances the "doing religion" model by shifting the analytical focus to a gender-transgressive religious practice and thereby illuminating a new angle of the gender–religion nexus. The "doing gender" corpus has already benefited from a similar shift toward analyzing the experiences of transgender social actors, especially those who are gender nonconforming. This research reveals important details about the sex–gender nexus and about the "redoing" of gender that cannot be gleaned from cisgender case studies (Connell 2010; Darwin 2017; Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Comparably, the experiences of gender-transgressive religious practitioners reveal new and important details about the gender–religion nexus that remain obscured within the otherwise gender-normative literature.

This article argues that unlike practitioners in previous gender-normative case studies, women who wear *kippot* cannot be understood as simply "doing gender," "doing religion," or even "doing gendered religion," as theorized by Irby (2014) and Rao (2015). This is because Jewish women who wear *kippot* simultaneously reject their accountability to tradition within both institutions of interest (i.e., gender and religion). I propose that this gender-transgressive religious practice only becomes intelligible through a revised framework that theorizes the expansion, or the "redoing," of religious gender norms. Such a "redoing gendered religion" framework centers the experiences of practitioners who advance egalitarian social change, instead of those who preserve the status quo. This theoretical shift can account for a number of interrelated phenomena that remain unexplained through the conservative "doing gendered religion" model, including how female subjects challenge patriarchal religions to become more inclusive of women by appropriating historically masculinized practices, and how such practitioners modify the meanings of these practices to better reflect their gender.

METHODS

The present study joins a growing body of social scientific research that uses open-ended Internet surveys or questionnaires to analyze the experiences of a marginalized and geographically disparate demographic (Chasteen 2001; LeBeau and Jellison 2009; Lu and Wong 2013; Myers, Forest, and Miller 2004; Scherrer 2008). This open-ended survey format enables respondents to share as much detail as they wished, producing qualitative data that oftentimes resembles interview data (Charmaz 2006; Lu and Wong 2013). Furthermore, Internet-administered survey research

can guarantee anonymity, which proved crucial to the participation of several women who hold leadership positions within Jewish communities.

Traditionally, researchers theorize "doing gender" through ethnographic methods that allow the researcher to witness the interactions of interest. However, the "doing gender" framework is centrally concerned with understanding how people negotiate their accountability to norms (Hollander 2013), a subject that can also be effectively analyzed through people's reports *about* their social interactions (Connell 2010; Irby 2014). Indeed, the open-ended survey in this study collected valuable information about accountability, by inviting women to share about their social interactions with coreligionists and with religious institutions, while wearing their *kippot*. In addition, the survey invited women to reflect on their inward struggles while transgressing this religious gender norm. As a result, this study reveals important information about how these women negotiate their accountability to gender norms at all three levels of interest to the original "doing gender" model: institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Hollander 2013).[3]

I advertised my survey through prominent Jewish Listservs associated with the Conservative, Reform, and Renewal Jewish movements and through the largest Jewish Facebook groups. For sampling purposes, I used the Internet to collect data from Jewish women who wear *kippot* across denominations, geographical regions, occupations, and age groups. I used the following prompt: "Are you a woman who wears a *kippah/yarmulke*? Email me with the subject line '*kippah*' to participate in the first ever large-scale survey into the meanings associated with this symbol, as reported by the women who wear it. And please help spread the word!" I did not advertise through Orthodox Jewish Listservs because extant literature on Jewish women's head covering practices indicated that very few Orthodox Jewish women would qualify (Milligan 2012). Indeed, none of the six Orthodox respondents who completed the survey wore *yarmulke*s as their head-coverings, unlike the rest of the respondents; therefore, I ultimately discarded their data.

Throughout the Spring of 2015, I collected responses from a total of 576 Jewish women who wear *kippot*, 133 of whom wear it on a daily basis. Interested parties received a link to an anonymous 38-item survey that included open text boxes for each of the questions, enabling participants to clarify their responses in as much detail as they wished (Lu and Wong 2013). The survey collected demographic information about the women before asking about their *kippah* practice, the meanings they associate with it, their experiences with coreligionists, and their relationship with femininity and with feminism (sample questions are included in an

online appendix). This research design yielded a sizeable body of qualitative data (63,353 total words; see the online appendix) in addition to quantitative survey data. The quantitative data revealed large-scale patterns among the participants, while the qualitative data provided detailed descriptions of their experiences.

Survey questions focused on the women's personal practices as well as their experiences with social sanctioning when wearing the *kippah*. I chose this line of questioning in order to identify the systems of accountability that enable or inhibit egalitarian social change. More specifically, I was interested in understanding how gender-policing and what I call "Jewish-policing" relate to one another as intertwined systems of accountability. Theoretically, when one deviates from religious norms, the consequence is a negative social sanction that diminishes the individual's status or "religious capital" within that particular culture (Park et al. 2014; Stark and Finke 2000). Since Jewish practice is implicitly gendered, such violations also theoretically render women vulnerable to "gender-policing" and contingently diminished "gender capital" (Bridges 2009). However, it is important to remember that the same act that transgresses the norms of one culture might conform to the norms of another. Therefore, accounts of gender-policing and Jewish-policing illuminate field-contingencies of egalitarian social change; additionally, they highlight the ideological boundaries (gendered and/or religious) that women's *kippot* threaten.

I approached my data analysis in three stages. First, I obtained summary statistics of the quantitative results through survey analysis software. Next, I compiled scripts of the write-in responses to each question of interest to this study (see the online appendix). I enlisted the help of two research assistants to reliably code the two questions that yielded the most qualitative data: "Please share what your practice means to you in your own words," and "Do you identify as a feminist? (Yes/No) Why or why not?" Informed by the basic tenets of grounded theory, our team read through a convenience sample of the first 100 responses to each of these questions and discussed the main meanings and motives we saw emerging from the data (Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1994). Based on these initial rounds of open reading, we devised coding schemas that we tested on convenience samples of 20 questions, adjusting as needed until we secured intercoder reliability of at least 90% (Marshall and Rossman 2011). The other questions of interest to this study yielded significantly fewer write-in responses, so I analyzed these independently. I conducted several rounds of open reading of these responses, while taking notes on emergent themes and key words. I then conducted

open coding and axial coding, devising categorical schemas that encapsulated the main discourses and themes that I detected (Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1994).

Survey respondents ranged in age from 18 to 80 (mean=50.4; median=53; mode=58). Nearly half (n=253) of the respondents only wear their *kippah* in synagogue, 133 wear it on a daily basis, and the rest indicated "occasionally" or "other." Despite this variability, there are certain demographic categories that the majority of these respondents share. For example, the majority of respondents identified as white and/or of Ashkenazic/European Jewish ethnicity. Additionally, this sample is primarily composed of people from the United States, although nearly half (n=235) have lived in Israel and most (n=451) have at least visited Israel. The vast majority identified as Democrats (n=447) and also as feminists (n=503), and most (n=464) have attended a protest at least once in their lives. Therefore, the results that follow mainly reflect the experiences of white, liberal, feminist, and politically progressive Jewish women from the United States.

Nearly half of this sample is composed of "professional Jews" who work as rabbis, cantors, or Jewish educators. The other half work a variety of jobs. Many are engaged in the educational system as students, teachers, school counselors, professors, or librarians. Some work in the visual and performing arts, including writers, singers, actors, musicians, and painters. Several are CEOs, economists, scientists, web page developers, data analysts, or lawyers. Others are social workers, speech therapists, special education professionals, psychotherapists, masseuses, veterinarians, or nurses. Finally, some work for nonprofits, volunteer, or are stay-at-home moms. This wide range of occupations situates women who wear *kippot* within the public sphere as well as the private sphere in their daily lives.

Approximately two-thirds (n=303) of the respondents are affiliated with the Conservative Jewish movement, followed by Reform (n=101), Reconstructionist (n=53), and Renewal (n=37). The predominance of Conservative affiliation within this sample makes sense, since some Conservative rabbis encourage women to commit to the same level of observance as men (Barmash 2014). Those who chose to elaborate upon their denominational affiliation in the accompanying open text box (n=132) claimed a range of hybrid labels, including "transdenominational" and "nondenominational."[4] In addition, more than half (n=314) of the respondents reported that they have changed denominations throughout their life; therefore, their current affiliation is not the same as their childhood denomination. Of these respondents, 58 clarified that they were

raised in religions other than Judaism. The rest (n=256) either grew up unaffiliated/secular and became religious later in life, or they were raised in a different denomination of Judaism (with results split between Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox).

I begin the results section that follows by providing basic information about the women's *kippah* practice, including peer/role model influences, the strategies through which they feminize their practices, and their experiences with gender-normative head-covering practices. In the following subsection, I present their accounts of gender-policing and Jewish-policing, and their strategies for negotiating this dual discrimination. In the third and final subsection, I analyze the women's ambivalence toward the feminist label, and their religious—as well as their extrareligious—motivations behind wearing the *kippah*. All quotes are included verbatim, as the respondents typed them. I conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for theorizing egalitarian social change, and for efforts to advance a critical gender lens on religion.

REDOING GENDERED RELIGION

Women's *Kippot*

The majority of the participants (n=373) did not begin their current *kippah* practice until adulthood (older than 22), and for most of these women (n=304) it was their first time wearing a *kippah*. Slightly more than half (n=277) of the women in this sample grew up with fathers who wore *kippot*; fewer cite female role models who wore *kippot* such as mothers (n=51) or female leaders (n=72). As a result, the message that the vast majority of these respondents received growing up was that Jewish men "do Jewish" by wearing *kippot*, but Jewish women do not.

The respondents are actively engaged in encouraging other women to wear the *kippah*, in order to end this gender division. When asked whether they have ever personally gifted a *kippah* to a woman/girl, approximately two-thirds of the respondents answered in the affirmative (n=328). Furthermore, some (n=40) explicitly clarified that they wear the *kippah* because they want to be good "role models" for the next generation. The following quote reveals the logic behind this practice, as shared by a 25-year old "Traditional Egalitarian" who wears the *kippah* on a daily basis:

> Last year I began working at Hillel [Jewish campus organization] and decided that I was personally ready to take this practice on, and I wanted to

> be a role model for students. I never had *kippah*-wearing Jewish women role models, and thus it didn't fit my image of a "Jewish woman" for many years. I'm hoping to help be a part of the change to normalize this practice.

This quote suggests that role modeling can directly inform children's internalized scripts about how to "do gender," "do religion," or in this particular case, "do gendered Judaism." To change the traditional script, this woman—and others like her—felt obligated to visibly deviate from it. It is clear that these women are not just wearing the *kippah* for themselves, rather, they are wearing the *kippah* in order to make Judaism more inclusive of future women. Such women hold themselves more accountable to this egalitarian shift—and to other Jewish women—than they do to the patriarchal Jewish tradition.

It is important to emphasize that the respondents do not necessarily wish to radically change (i.e., *undo*) gender or Judaism, but rather to *redo* "gendered Judaism" by expanding the ritual options that are available to women while preserving traditional values. This resonates with Irby's (2014) finding that her interviewees did not wish to dismantle, but rather to improve, gender regimes by aligning them with their Christian values. Indeed, the majority of these respondents remain accountable to feminine ideals even while wearing the *kippah*: most identify as feminine (n=333), or even very feminine (n=118), and more than half wear jewelry, dresses, and/or makeup. Moreover, when asked "How does your *kippah* affect your sense of femininity," 91 percent of those who answered (n=499) marked "the same."

One way that these women maintain their sense of femininity while engaging in this seemingly gender-transgressive religious practice is by feminizing the *kippah*, and thereby transforming it, in some ways, into a gender-normative garment. When asked to specify their favorite type of *kippah*, many (n=148) women clarified that they prefer *kippot* that differ from the standard masculinized *kippah*, such as those that are beaded or made of wire (n=126); some explicitly added that such *kippot* are made "for women." According to these write-in responses, *kippot* are "for women" if they are adorned with rhinestones, feathers, beads, embroidery, and crystals. Beyond those that are made of wire and beads, some women's *kippot* are made of conventional fabrics such as suede, leather, or satin, with bright colors or patterns that notionally distinguish them from "men's *kippot*." As one respondent explained, "I wear 'girlie' *kippot* (i.e. more likely to have designs that would be considered feminine such as flowers) and they always match my outfit." Furthermore, most (n=342)

respondents wrote that they match their *kippot* to their outfits, and most (n=405) own more than five *kippot* of different colors and styles.

Through these various aesthetic stylings, women attempt to feminize an otherwise masculinized garment, notionally neutralizing the threat that this religious practice might otherwise pose to their "gender capital" (Bridges 2009) as feminine women. They also endeavor to transform an otherwise stigmatized garment into one that is fashionable, similar to the movement among young Turkish women to make veiling fun and stylish (Sandikci and Ger 2009). This feminization process enables women to conceptualize their practice as one that is distinctly feminine, separate but equal from "men's *kippot.*" As one respondent noted, "I feel like lady *kippot* are different from manly *kippot* . . . like they're in a different category." In effect, feminized *kippot* provide the women with a way to maintain their sense of femininity while challenging the patriarchal Jewish tradition.

Kippah-feminization serves a number of functions for these women: Not only does it enable them to deflect accusations of cross-dressing, but it also makes the practice more appealing to potential recruits. As one rabbi explained:

> I have *kippot* of different colors that match my outfits. Some of them are more feminine in style (colors patterns etc.). Some are not. I do this to show women that there are ways of appropriating the *kippah* that doesn't have to engender masculinity. I have a congregant who had to put on a *kippah* once and said jokingly, "Look at me, I am a boy." I wear the *kippot* as I do so that women like her can get used to what having a woman wear it looks like, and that having a *kippah* on does not make me a man.

This rabbi understands that so long as women think that wearing a *kippah* will diminish their gender capital, they are unlikely to assume the practice. To encourage more women to wear the *kippah*—and thereby challenge the narrative that "*kippot* are only for men"—such role models strategically emphasize their femininity. These feminizing tactics allow women to internally reconcile their religious and gendered scripts, enabling them to do Judaism differently without redoing their gender.

Not all women who wear *kippot* have completely abandoned traditional women's head covering practices. I received a range of responses when I asked, "Did you ever practice one of these alternative forms of head covering? If so, why did you switch to the *kippah*?" Twenty-six percent of my sample (n=151) reported that they used to wear hats, and 15 percent

(n=88) used to wear headscarves. Additionally, 16 percent (n=92) of the women clarified in the open text box that they currently alternate between a number of different types of head-covering garments depending on their mood, or whether they anticipate hostility from coreligionists or anti-Semites (for analogous findings regarding the *hijab*, see Read and Bartowski 2000). For these women, *kippah* use is strategic and field-contingent.

In contrast to these women, a much larger contingent (n=339) has definitively chosen the *kippah* over traditional feminine head-covering garments. One reason that such respondents opt for this switch is their desire to represent Judaism in diaspora: "With my *kippah* on, I am instantly recognizable as Jewish and therefore represent the Jews." This desire to represent one's minority peoplehood resonates with research on Orthodox Jewish men's motivations for wearing the *kippah*, as well as Muslim women's reasons for wearing the *hijab* (Tavory 2010; Endelstein and Ryan 2013). In addition, one small contingent (n=24) explained that they switched to the *kippah* because they were uncomfortable with fellow Jews' assumptions (when they wore a hat or a head scarf) that they were following Jewish modesty laws, or were otherwise affiliated with Orthodox Judaism. These women wear the *kippah* to make it clear that they do Jewish womanhood differently than their more Orthodox coreligionists.

Indeed, when I asked respondents whether they wear the *kippah* to signify modesty—a virtue that traditional women ascribe to their head-covering practices (Taragin-Zeller 2014)—270 respondents answered in the negative. Within the open text box, 19 respondents discursively distanced themselves from this "modest woman" trope, effectively rejecting the traditional way of doing Jewish womanhood. As one woman explained, "I don't wear it to be modest as a woman, but to be modest as a human, humble, recognizing my limits." This distinction can be especially important to those who are married; the *kippah* provides an alternative way for them to cover their heads upon marriage without implying marital subjugation: "I changed to a *kippah* because scarves & hats represent the 'married woman covering her hair' (which I do not support or believe in); and the wearing of *kippah* is totally different." This distinction can also be important to queer respondents, who justify their *kippah* use as the only head-covering option that does not imply heterosexual identity or an intention to marry: "I didn't use to cover my head (being queer, the practice of covering my head after marriage wasn't meaningful)." Thus, the *kippah* functions as an important symbol for disidentification from the traditional gendered—and sexual—Jewish script.

In summary, the women in this sample utilized a range of strategies to internally reconcile the tensions between the traditional script of gendered Judaism and their egalitarian values: some feminized the *kippah* so as to affirm their gender-normativity while doing Judaism differently; others utilized the *kippah*'s masculine-encoding to do Jewish womanhood differently. However, regardless of the women's efforts to internally legitimize their practice, they remain externally accountable to their traditional coreligionists. As the following section will demonstrate, women render themselves vulnerable to delegitimizing social sanctions from coreligionists when they challenge tradition by wearing the *kippah*.

Gender-Policing and Jewish-Policing

Respondents' experiences with social sanctioning varied greatly, depending upon the norms that prevail within their primary Jewish communities; as a result, some women experienced their *kippah* practice as more conspicuous than others. Yet, most women are not alone in their practice: 511 of my respondents said that they have female friends who also wear *kippot*, and relatively few (n=62) said that they expect to be the only woman wearing a *kippah* in their synagogue. Moreover, a sizeable minority (n=179) indicated that no one has ever told them to remove their *kippah*. Simultaneously, some respondents acknowledged the field-contingencies of egalitarianism: when I asked if anyone has ever told them to remove their *kippah*, one woman replied, "No. I don't go places where this would happen," and another said, "Never. But I don't go looking for trouble."

These 179 respondents who have never been told to remove their *kippah* are in the minority. When asked, "If someone has suggested that you should not wear a *kippah*, what was the reason?" 366 provided illuminating accounts of being socially sanctioned for wearing *kippot* by parents, friends, partners, mothers-in-law, and rabbis. One respondent recounted, "My rabbi told me to 'take off the damn *kippa*' at my bat mitzvah, as he blessed me!" Another shared, "My parents didn't want to be embarassed [*sic*] at a family gathering." Many respondents (n=195) have encountered this request based on invocations of tradition/custom; fewer selected "textual references" (n=30) or "women's modesty" (n=36) as reasons for this resistance. Ninety-five respondents selected "other" and specified that people have told them that they look "too mannish" or "too Jewish" when they wear their *kippah*, or that they were breaking the norms of Orthodox Judaism and/or Israel. In sum, these interactions convey the message that women are not supposed to wear

kippot, simply because women have not historically done so. Of course, this type of circular logic can delegitimize any efforts to challenge patriarchal tradition.

Interestingly, respondents are just as likely to remove their *kippah* around Orthodox coreligionists (n=31) as they are around anti-Semites (n=36). This reflects Tavory's (2010) finding that the *kippah* renders Jewish men hypervisible to fellow Jews; similarly, women who wear *kippot* become hypervisible to coreligionists, but apparently it is without the positive community-building effects that Tavory ascribes to men's practice. As one rabbi recounts, "In public places where I am a rabbi, members of the ultra-Orthodox community have told me to take off my *kippah*—in the mall once and in a shopping center parking lot once." Some respondents (n=22) cited heated arguments with Orthodox coreligionists about whether their practice constitutes cross-dressing and therefore contravenes Jewish law. A few others (n=3) reported that they had to choose between their *kippah* and occupational opportunities in Orthodox Jewish fields. As one respondent shared, "When I applied to teach at an Orthodox day school I was asked if I would remove it or wear a hat instead. I said I would not . . . I did not get the job or regret the loss." These passages reveal how some Orthodox coreligionists sanction egalitarian transgression, effectively functioning as gatekeepers for the patriarchal tradition. Due to anticipated hostility from Orthodox coreligionists, a sizeable contingent (n=164) removed their *kippot* when entering Orthodox settings, especially in Israel.

Women who wear *kippot* experience Israel as a particularly hostile cultural field: "It was a non–*kippah* wearing Israeli taxi driver in Jerusalem, who actually stalked me for several blocks, shouting epithets at me. I finally took it off." According to another respondent, "In Jerusalem it was ripped off my head." The risk of such gender-policing through Jewish-policing increases within spaces that are gender-segregated, such as the Western Wall: indeed, one respondent was approached by a man near the Western Wall who demanded to know why she was dressed "like a man." Another respondent had a similar encounter with a woman at the Western Wall (*Kotel*):

> The one place and time I can think of being specifically addressed with the intent to get me to remove my *kippah* was at the *Kotel*: as I approached, I removed the hat that I had been wearing (sun protection + not standing out) in order to approach this site to pray in the way that I generally pray: with a visible *kippah* as my religious head covering. Some

woman nearby—herself having her hair covered with a scarf or snood-like hat (covering most or all of hair, I believe)—announced that this wasn't what women do at the Wall.

This passage illustrates gender-policing through Jewish-policing in action: the more traditional practitioner claims the power to sanction the egalitarian woman by calling into question both her legitimacy as a Jew and as a woman. According to this traditional woman, the *kippah*-wearing woman is simultaneously doing gender wrong and doing Judaism wrong and needs to be corrected. Such experiences reflect the verbal and physical abuse that members of Women of the Wall regularly endure from Orthodox coreligionists (Chesler and Haut 2003; Sered 1997). These stories reveal that unless a woman is among a like-minded group of egalitarian Jews, she must be prepared to have her gender and religious legitimacy questioned when she wears a *kippah*.

Feminism

When these women "do Judaism" in a manner from which they have been historically exempt, they are automatically read as "doing egalitarianism" or "doing religious feminism" instead of simply "doing Jewish." As one woman explained:

Sometimes I wish that it could just be about God and my Jewish identity, but I know that it is inextricably linked with my feminism as well. I am proud to be a feminist but it bothers me that when I'm approached about wearing a *kippah*, I have to defend my feminism as well as my religious expression.

Some women proudly embrace these projections of egalitarian or feminist values, but not everyone is so enthused. Although the vast majority (n= 503) of my respondents answered "yes" when asked if they identify as feminists, their qualifying remarks (n=358) revealed that religious women's relationship with the feminist label is oftentimes too complicated for a yes or no answer (Ecklund 2003; Gervais 2012; Manning 1999; Yadgar 2006).

Most (n=484) of those who answered "yes" to the feminist identity question embrace it unequivocally and relate it to their Jewish practice: "I will not—absolutely will not—be second to a man. I believe that women and men are equals and should have the same religious rights and

obligations." Moreover, some of these women not only accept the feminist stigma that is associated with their *kippah* use, but they also seize the opportunity to practice feminist "strategic outness" (Orne 2011). In other words, they utilize their hypervisibility to begin conversations with coreligionists about women's equality within Judaism. As one respondent shared, "I like having a platform to talk about feminism as it applies to Jewish law, to expose people to the idea that if men should wear one, women should, too." It is for this reason that most (n=97) of the women who wear their *kippah* on a daily basis keep it on even amongst hostile coreligionists; in order to redo Judaism, they understand that they must "do egalitarianism" beyond the confines of their progressive Jewish cultural fields.

It is important to note that when I asked respondents whether they wore the *kippah* because men do, only 37 percent (n=202) answered in the affirmative, and slightly fewer (n=119) indicated that they wear the *kippah* "to protest gender inequality within Judaism" (see Table 1). Furthermore, 41 respondents discursively distanced the *kippah* from feminism in the open text box, when asked if they identified as feminist. As one woman proclaimed, "I wear my *kippah* because of how it makes me feel. I have no political feminist agenda when I wear it." Another explained:

> I wear my *kippah* not so much "because men wear *kippot*" AS MEN, but because religious Jews who were not thinking of their gender as marked—who were men—established this form of practice in the modern context as a meaningful way of marking Jewish observance.

Through feminist logic, this respondent reasons away the political connotations of her religious observance; in so doing, she preserves her identity as someone who is simply "doing Jewish" and not "doing religious feminism." Such women reconcile the tension between their patriarchal tradition and feminist values by reinterpreting the tradition to be more aligned with feminism (Ecklund 2003).

Despite this evidence of feminist ambivalence, the vast majority of this sample identified with the feminist label. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine which came first: women's feminist politics or their gender-transgressive religious practice. Milligan (2014) found that many LGBTQ women who wear *kippot* are motivated by a desire to subvert the patriarchal religious tradition. However, it appears that some women in the present sample resent the politicization of their

TABLE 1:   Messages Respondents Indicate Their *Kippot* Send

Message my Kippah Sends[a]	n	%
My *kippah* allows me to display my Jewish cultural identity.	352	64%
My *kippah* allows me to display that I am religious.	339	62%
My *kippah* asserts my right to represent the Jewish people.	291	53%
I wear my *kippah* because men wear *kippot.*	202	37%
I wear my *kippah* to protest gender inequality within Judaism.	119	22%
Other	181	33%
Total in sample	576	

a. Respondents could indicate more than one message.

practice, because they wear the *kippah* for the sake of religious observance itself (Avishai 2008; Darwin 2016). Of course, given women's historical exclusion from traditional Jewish practice, it is not entirely possible to disentangle these two motives. Indeed, the women in this study seemed aware of this tension, which they tried to reconcile by utilizing the same type of discursive distancing strategies as Women of the Wall organizers: they insisted that they do not desire revolution, so much as reform (Sered 1997). In other words, they do not wish to *undo* Judaism or gender, so much as to *redo* Judaism to be more inclusive of women's full participation. As one respondent explained, "I believe in gender-egalitarianism within Judaism—I think that by de-gendering certain practices we create more welcoming and inclusive spaces for everyone."

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that women remain accountable to the traditional script of "doing gendered Judaism" even when they deviate from it; therefore, they are not *undoing* gendered Judaism through their head-covering practice, so much as they are *redoing* gendered Judaism. Indeed, within Orthodox Jewish fields such as Israel, their own congregations, and even sometimes within themselves, Jewish women remain accountable to traditional Jewish/gender norms. Nevertheless, the women in this study simultaneously hold themselves accountable to the egalitarian cause, future generations of Jewish women, and their commitment to performing Jewish ritual observance (see also Milligan 2014; Darwin 2016).

The woman's *kippah* symbolizes the efforts of some Jewish people to transform the hitherto patriarchal tradition into one that is more egalitarian. Predictably, such women's hypervisible efforts to redo Judaism are fraught with "Jewish police," who contest such transgressions through circular logic that serves to preserve the tradition. These "Jewish police" are the most concentrated in fields that are dominated by heteropatriarchal ideology, such as Orthodox Jewish communities and Israel. The consequences for transgressing gendered religious norms within these traditional cultural fields can be life-threatening at the most extreme (Chesler and Haut 2003; Sered 1997); therefore, so long as Orthodox Judaism's values reign as hegemonic within the Jewish world, the egalitarian Jewish movement will likely remain field-contingent.

It is important to note that "Jewish policing" is often a thinly veiled manifestation of antifeminist gender-policing. In response to this dual discrimination, egalitarian women have two options: They can either discursively distance themselves from radical feminism and revolutionary desire, and thereby diminish the threat that they pose to the patriarchal status quo, or otherwise, they can accept these courtesy stigmas and use them strategically as educational platforms for religious reformation. Regardless of the particular woman's relationship with the word "feminism," her *kippah* symbolizes the feminist injunction that as gender norms progress, so too must religious norms.

Of course, this study is not without its limitations. Future studies that sample more purposively might explore the different meanings that the *kippah* accrues in different denominational contexts. Moreover, it is possible that my method of snowball sampling through Listservs resulted in the disproportionate representation of those who are professionally engaged with the Jewish world. Additionally, future studies might utilize other methods such as in-depth interviews to explore fewer women's stories in more detail. Alternatively, scholars might utilize ethnographic methods to obtain interactional data that demonstrates the redoing of gendered religion in action. Finally, to more fully appreciate the symbolic interactionism that is at play, it would be helpful to know why other Jewish women do not wear *kippot* and what Jewish men think of Jewish women who do wear *kippot*.

Despite these methodological limitations, the theoretical significance of this study is considerable. By shifting the analytical focus away from gender-normative religious practices, this study has highlighted a new angle of the gender–religion nexus and confirmed the inextricability of gender and religious ideals/practices/scripts. One cannot simply "do religion" if that

religion holds one gender accountable to a different set of practices than the other gender. To "do gender" in a more progressive way, the women in this study also had to redo their religion to be more egalitarian.

NOTES

1. The term "heteropatriarchal" acknowledges the heteronormativity that undergirds patriarchal social arrangements.

2. "A man's item shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not wear a woman's garment; whoever does such a thing is an abhorrence unto Adonai" (Deuteronomy 22:5).

3. Future research might expand upon this study through traditional methods, such as ethnography, that would allow the researcher to witness the social interactions in person. This study design focuses on people's experiences of their social interactions instead.

4. Write-in labels include multiple denominations, trans-denominational, non-denominational, post-denominational, traditional-egalitarian (somewhere between Conservative and Orthodox), pluralistic, universalist, post-denominational, neochasidic, liberal Judaism (British equivalent to Reform), "underconstructionist," Conservative egalitarian, halakhic egalitarian, and genderblind Orthodoxy.

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