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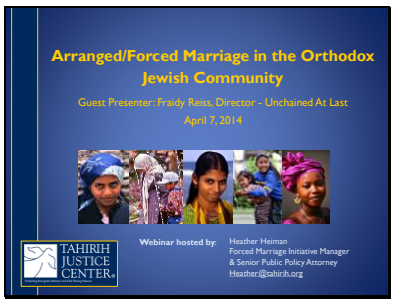

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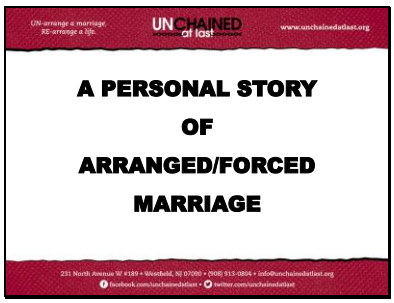

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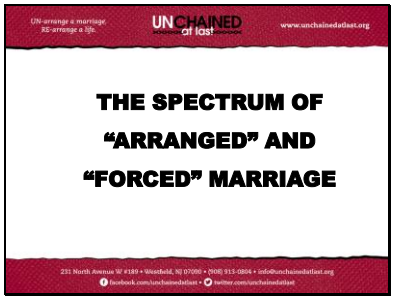

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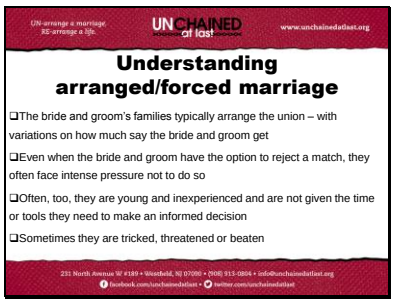

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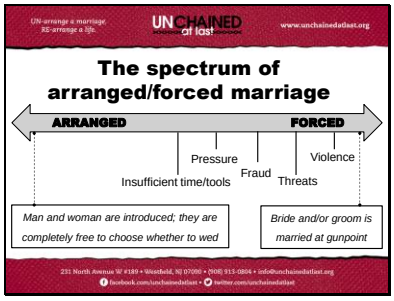

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Marriage at a young age

Average age at which girls are expected to marry in the Orthodox Jewish community:

SEPHARDIC	HASSIDIC	LITVISH
16	17	18

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Reasons for arranged/forced marriage in the community

- Tradition
- Aversion to sex outside marriage
- Fear of intermarriage (intensified after the Holocaust)
- Push to have many children (intensified after the Holocaust)

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Limited choice entering marriage

- Boys and girls are never allowed to meet on their own; they are kept completely separate from each other, with no contact allowed
- Marriages typically are arranged through a matchmaker
- Typically the bride and groom are young and inexperienced, never having dated or even flirted before
- The matchmaker usually approaches the boy's family and then the girl's family; if both families agree, the boy and girl "date"
- "Dating" differs in the Hassidic and Litvish communities

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Hassidic "dating"

- The bride and groom typically meet for about half an hour
- By then, the engagement party has been planned – so they face intense pressure to go along with the marriage
- If they try to resist, some families ignore or dismiss their protests
- The bride and groom are never allowed to be alone together or to have any physical contact before their wedding, not even during their engagement

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Litvish "dating"

- The boy and girl go on a limited number of "dates"
- They are not allowed to be alone together (they must remain in a public place) and they are not allowed to have any physical contact, even after they are engaged
- The average number of "dates" is seven; by then they must decide whether to marry each other, after spending only a number of hours together
- They might face intense pressure not to say no to a matchmaker

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Religious marriage contract

- The bride and groom do not sign the contract; two rabbis sign instead
- The contract is written in Aramaic, which most brides don't understand
- The contract specifies whether the bride is a virgin
- Most couples also get a civil marriage license, but some do not

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Limited choice in marriage

- Jewish law prohibits birth control (except with a rabbi's permission)
- Under Jewish law, a woman's earnings belong to her husband
- Married Orthodox Jewish women must wear a head covering; some Hassidic women must shave their hair under the head covering
- Wives are considered unclean while they menstruate and for a week thereafter, until they immerse in a ritual bath

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Limited choice leaving a marriage

- Under religious law, only a man can grant a divorce – not a woman
- Divorce is considered shameful, so women are pressured to stay
- Discussion and understanding of domestic violence are limited
- Women often have a lot of children (average 6-8 children)
- Women typically have no access to money (no bank accounts or credit cards in their name) and probably have no education
- Hassidic women often don't have a driver's license

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Religious courts create obstacles

- Orthodox Jews generally must go first to a religious court ("bet din") for legal matters including divorces
- Bet din rules discriminate against women
  - A woman typically isn't allowed to be a judge, lawyer or witness
  - Only a man can grant a divorce, and he can demand anything he wants in return; if he refuses to grant a divorce, she becomes a "chained woman" and cannot move on with her life
- Bet din rulings are legally binding and are upheld in civil court

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Problems in civil court too

- ❑Often judges award custody to the parent who will continue to raise the children in the same religion
- ❑If a woman wants to leave the religion, the entire community – even her parents and siblings – will help her husband in the divorce; they will testify against her in court and raise money for his legal fees
- ❑If the community cannot get a court to remove her children, some rabbis resort to kidnaping the children

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Difficulties taking "basic" steps

❑Women in the Orthodox Jewish community often face pressure not to:

- Call the police, even if they are abused or threatened
- Obtain a restraining order against a violent husband
- Seek a domestic violence shelter
- Go for therapy
- Confide in a friend or relative about an unhappy marriage

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What providers should know

- ❑People in insular communities might fear and distrust outsiders
- ❑The rules of handshaking are different in the Orthodox community
- ❑In the Orthodox community, people are expected to give unconditional respect to anyone who is older than they are
- ❑Immodestly dressed women might make Orthodox Jews uncomfortable

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A question of semantics

- Orthodox Jews often do not think of their marriages as "arranged" and might be offended if asked whether their marriage was "forced"
- Instead, if you suspect a marriage was arranged/forced, ask how the spouses met, how long they knew each other before marriage, etc.

I did not realize my marriage was "arranged" until after I was divorced.

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HOW UNCHAINED AT LAST HELPS

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Unchained At Last

- Unchained is the only nonprofit in the US dedicated to helping women leave or avoid arranged/forced marriages and rebuild their lives
- Unchained provides girls and women with free legal representation, social services and emotional support to help them leave or avoid arranged/forced marriages and rebuild their lives
- Unchained also raises awareness about arranged/forced marriage in the US and pushes for relevant legislation

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