FINDING ONE'S PLACE: ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AMONG GAY JEWISH MEN

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Abstract

While sociological studies of 'Jewish identity' have proliferated over the last several decades, these works often ignore the internal diversity found within Jewish populations. Because of the particularities of the gay Jewish case, there is a need to devote more scholarly attention to the 'Jewish identities' of this sub-population. This study contributes to this under-studied area.

Using qualitative methods (in-depth interviews and participant observation), this study explores the processes of Jewish identity construction among gay Jewish men. Despite the fact that Jews have historically held more liberal attitudes on social issues than non-Jews, the study found that Jewish families and communities often demonstrate a resistance to homosexuality and Jewish same-sex relationships. While most North American Jews, whether heterosexual or gay, partake in some form of negotiation between their Jewish identity and the non-Jewish world around them, because of the perceived stigmatization felt by gay Jewish men within the Jewish community, this group has added obstacles to overcome in constructing a personally meaningful Jewish identity.

Due to the emphasis on 'traditional' gender roles, the 'nuclear family,' procreation and conservative religious values, the gay Jewish experience bears many similarities to the experiences of gay men in Black, Latin American, Asian, Greek and Italian communities. There are some distinctive features to the Jewish case, however. These include a particular aversion to same-sex relations due to the Jewish preoccupation with ethnic survival and continuity, especially in light of the Holocaust, and increased difficulty for the gay Jewish man to maintain privacy about his sexual orientation due to high levels of friendship and social networks within the Jewish community.

Building upon theoretical models that attempt to acknowledge the complexities of multiple layers of stigmatized identities, the study develops a more nuanced analytical framework in which to understand the various strategies ethnic minority gay men implement as a means of negotiating their ethno-religious and gay identities. The study illustrates, for example, that the variable of 'level of religiosity' serves as a key factor in this process. The study concludes with reflections on the implications of the findings for Jewish communities and recommends similar studies of other ethno-religious communities.

Résumé

Tandis que les études sociologiques de « l'identité juive » ont proliféré pendant plusieurs des dernières décennies, ces travaux ignorent souvent la diversité interne qui se trouve à l'intérieur des populations juives. À cause des particularités du cas juif homosexuel, il y a un besoin de dévouer une attention plus érudite envers les « identités juives » de cette sous-classe de population. Cette étude contribue à ce sujet peu étudié.

En utilisant des méthodes qualitatives (entrevues détaillées et observations de participants), cette étude explore les procès de construction d'identité juive parmi les hommes homosexuels juifs. Malgré le fait que les juifs ont historiquement possédé des attitudes plus libérales sur les problèmes sociaux par rapport aux non juifs, l'étude a trouvé que les familles et communautés juives démontrent souvent une résistance à l'homosexualité et relations juives du même sexe. Tandis que les juifs d'Amérique du Nord, qu'ils soient hétérosexuels ou homosexuels, prennent une certaine forme de négociation entre leur identité juive et le monde non juif qui les entourent, à cause de la stigmatisation perçue ressentie par les hommes juifs homosexuels à l'intérieur de leur communauté juive, ce groupe a ajouté des obstacles à surpasser en construisant une identité juive personnellement sérieuse.

À cause de l'emphase sur les rôles de sexes « traditionnels », la « famille nucléaire », la procréation et les valeurs religieuses conservatrices, l'expérience d'être un juif homosexuel possède plusieurs similarités aux expériences des hommes homosexuels dans les communautés noires, latino-américaines, asiatiques, grecques et italiennes. Cependant, il existe des caractéristiques distinctives pour le cas juif. Celles-ci comprennent une aversion particulière aux relations du même sexe à cause de la préoccupation juive avec la continuité et la survie ethnique, en particulier en vue de ce qui est arrivé pendant le Holocauste et il existe une liste plus nombreuse de difficultés pour l'homme juif homosexuel de maintenir une vie privée concernant son orientation sexuelle à cause des hauts niveaux d'amitiés et de réseaux sociaux à l'intérieur de la communauté juive.

Avec une construction basée sur les modèles théoriques qui essayent de reconnaître les complexités des couches multiples d'identités stigmatisées, l'étude développe une structure de travail analytique plus nuancée qui vise à comprendre les nombreuses stratégies utilisées par les hommes homosexuels à minorité ethnique de pouvoir négocier avec leurs identités homosexuelles et ethniques religieuses. L'étude illustre, par exemple, que la variable de « niveau de religiosité » sert en tant qu'élément clé dans ce procès. L'étude conclut avec des réflexions sur les implications des trouvailles pour les communautés juives et recommande une étude similaire pour d'autres communautés aux bases ethniques et religieuses.

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I met my dear friend Avi Goldberg on the "first day of school" in September of 1995. Who would have imagined the depth of friendship that we would sustain over these eight years of working and muddling through this degree together? I wonder how we would have made it if we didn't have each other to lean on. Avi is a great person and a cherished friend. Congratulations to both of us for reaching the finish line!

My amazing wife, Marsha, was, as usual, a tremendous source of support and encouragement for me. Whether I was enthusiastically sharing with her my most recent sociological discovery, testing a new argument or suffering from the customary episodes of stress or burn-out, she has been there for me at every step of the way. Her proofreading and computer skills towards the end of the study were invaluable. I thank her for her love, her patience and her belief in me.

My dear father, Jack Schnoor, passed away in January of 2001 while I was in the midst of the interviewing process for this study. I think of him often, but especially at this time. I know how proud he would have been of my accomplishment and it pains me that we cannot be together to share this. His memory is a blessing to me.

Those who know me well know how much this research has touched me personally. In addition to conducting an academic study of the gay Jewish experience, I have been motivated to act to effect social change. I have devoted much time and energy to the task of raising awareness in the Jewish community about the particular concerns of gay and lesbian Jews. Many positive changes have come in general society and the Jewish community over the last three decades. I believe many more are needed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The objective of this introductory chapter is to theoretically situate the project in the scholarly literature, to outline the key research questions and themes to be explored, to demonstrate the scholarly contribution of the work, to describe the organizational structure of the thesis, to describe the methodology of the project and provide some reflections on this methodology and to provide some background material on the attitudes towards homosexuality among different religious traditions and ethnicities as well as the gay Jewish organizational history in Toronto.

Studies of Jewish Identity

In the transition from pre-modern, traditional societies to post-Enlightenment, modern societies, Jewish cultural identities have gone through a significant transformation from an identity based on collectivism to an identity based on personalism and voluntarism (Cohen, 1999: 3-4; Elazar, 1999: 35). While in the past Jewish identities were structured and regulated by the constraints of 'normative community standards' – what Berger (1967) would call the Sacred Canopy – in the modern period, cultural identities have come to be perceived as freely chosen and individually constructed (Bellah et al., 1985; Berger and Luckman, 1967). Ethnic identity, in general, is no longer considered a

fixed, essentialist status, but rather a social construction that is continually negotiated and re-negotiated by the individual (Nagel, 1994; Spector and Kitsuse, 1987). Ethnic identifiers can now slip in and out of ethnic roles depending on the social context (Waters, 1990). As such, many Jews in the North American context and elsewhere now feel free to appropriate only those aspects of Jewishness that they find personally meaningful (Cohen, 1991: 27; Cohen and Eisen, 2000: 7-9; Horowitz, 1998: 74-75).

Scholars of the sociology of religion have described a similar societal shift. Wuthnow (1998: 9-10) described religious identity as shifting from a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking." An individual is no longer constrained by ascribed characteristics, according to Wuthnow, but rather, as "Sovereign Self," constructs his/her own personal religious identity by pulling together elements from various repertoires. Roof (1999: 166) refers to this concept as the new "religious individualism." For Roof, "Individuals configure new spaces for making meaning and engage in a process of ... authenticating their own affirmations."

This new condition of voluntary and individualist ethno-religious identity has brought about a new central question that guides studies of ethnicity in North America: How successful is ethno-religious group "X" in negotiating the delicate balance between participation in North American society and preservation of its ethno-religious heritage? Observers of ethnic identity in North America have divided into two camps on this question of the ethnic survival of immigrant groups. Prior to the 1970s, and as far back as the 1920s Chicago School (Park

and Burgess, 1921), theories of ethnicity in North America were dominated by an *assimilationist* or *melting-pot* perspective that saw each generation gradually retaining less and less "authentic" ethnic identity and behaviour (Gordon, 1964). More recent *transformationist* or *cultural pluralist* perspectives (Breton et al., 1990, Glazer and Moynahan, 1970) have emphasized that ethno-religious groups are able to retain certain components of their cultural identity, so that some form of cultural distinctiveness will persist into future generations.

Contemporary social scientific studies of Jews in the diaspora directly reflect the above paradigms. Starting with Sklare and Greenblum's (1967) landmark study, sociologists of the Jews have begun to examine the question of the prospects of the very survival of Jewish distinctiveness in an open and meritocratic North American society. Scholars of the Jewish experience are divided as to how to interpret the current Jewish situation. This divide is also seen in a debate between the *assimilationist* school (Hertzberg, 1979; Liebman, 1988, 2001) and the *transformationist* school (Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Goldscheider 1986, Weinfeld, 2001)

This new preoccupation with the study of "Jewish continuity" and Jewish identity has often ignored the internal diversity found within Jewish populations (Prell, 1999: 17-18). Historically, many types of hyphenated-Jews have struggled with competing desires in their attempt to fashion meaningful Jewish identities. The more upwardly mobile and reform-minded German Jews in America, for example, had different frameworks for Jewish identity than did the later-arriving more working-class, more traditionally minded Russian Jews. Ashkenazi Jews

have different ethnic backgrounds and concerns than Sephardic Jews. Socialist and Communist Jews had particular world views that greatly influenced their constructions of Jewish identity.

The 1990s saw the beginnings of a literature on Jewish identity from a specific feminist perspective (Fishman, 1993, 2000; Davidman and Tenenbaum, 1994). Because of the unique challenge of "stigma" gay Jews often face in the Jewish community – what Goffman (1963: 3) would refer to as an attribute that is "deeply discrediting" in relation to others – this sub-group of Jews has added reason to implement individualist and personalist approaches to constructing and negotiating meaningful Jewish identities. Besides possible personal conflicts with Jewish theology, gay Jews often face the challenges of resistance from the Jewish family and community to full participation in synagogues and other public Jewish arenas, as well as resistance to forming long-term same-sex life partnerships and having children (Fishman, 2000:106-109). Because of these particularities of the gay Jewish case, there is a need to devote more scholarly attention to the Jewish identities of this sub-population. Just as we have begun the process of "gendering" the sociological study of the Jews, we must now begin the process of "queering" the sociological study of the Jews. This project is one of the first scholarly works to address this new avenue of sociological inquiry.

By situating this work within the classic paradigms and debates of Jewish identity, I wish to bring queer Jews back into the frame of mainstream attention of sociologists of the Jews. Just as all Jews in the modern period struggle to synthesize sometimes disparate commitments to fashion a meaningful Jewish

identity, so must gay Jews. And as Cohen and Eisen (2000: 9) reported, this attempt at secure identity construction "does not leave Jews untroubled." Many experience enduring ambivalence towards Jewish community, Jewish family, Jewish institutions and organizations, Jewish theology, commitments and norms, etc. This work aims to tell the stories of gay Jews' attempts to negotiate a meaningful personal Jewish identity; stories of successes and failures, self-fulfillments and ambivalences.

Research Objectives

In more specific terms, the dissertation will be guided by the following four central research questions:

1) What effect does homosexuality and the reactions this engenders have on the Jewish identity of the gay Jew?

By analyzing the experiences of gay Jewish men in different facets of their lives, each chapter of the thesis illustrates different challenges and areas of negotiation that gay Jews confront in constructing a meaningful Jewish identity.

2) How (if at all) is the gay Jewish experience different from the experiences of heterosexual Jews?

Where relevant, the thesis will focus on the particularities of the gay Jewish experience as compared to the experiences of heterosexual Jews.

3) How (if at all) is the gay Jewish experience different from the non-Jewish gay experience?

Keeping within a comparative ethnic framework, the thesis will compare and contrast, where possible, the gay Jewish experience with the experiences of gay white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The work will draw parallels between the experiences of gay Jewish men and the experiences of other ethnic minority gay men (e.g. blacks, Latinos, Asians). The thesis will also present distinct Jewish particularities.

4) How might we begin to theorize the strategies gay Jews use to negotiate their queerness and Jewishness?

In reviewing the prominent theoretical models in the literature of gay identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden 1989) and ethnic identity development (Atkinson, Morton and Sue 1989), it became clear that none of the models are sufficiently complex for a proper examination of the ethnic minority gay experience. Borrowing from and adding to more elaborate theoretical models (Morales 1990; Reynolds and Pope, 1991) that attempt to acknowledge the complexities of multiple layers of stigmatized identities, the thesis develops an analytical framework to better examine the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity, and to gauge the various strategies the ethnic minority gay man implements as a means of negotiating this dual-minority status. Demonstrating significant differences between more secular gay Jews and more traditional gay Jews, the thesis explores these various strategies in detail.

Research on Gay Jews

In terms of the literature that currently exists on the topic of gay Jews, there is a collection of fiction (Raphael, 1996; Schimel, 2000; Tulchinsky, 2000), a significant amount of material that offers personal narratives or life-histories (Alpert, 2001; Balka and Rose, 1989; Dworkin, 1997; Fink and Press, 1999; Moore, 1995; Shneer and Aviv, 2002; Torton Beck, 1989), and a recent body of material that challenges Orthodox theological interpretations (Alpert, 1989; Alpert, 1997; Levado, 1993; Rose, 1999). There is precious little, however, in terms of scholarly social-scientific literature devoted to the issue of gay Jews. Shokeid (1995) gives an anthropological account of the gay synagogue in New York City, Cooper (1989) offers a social history of the rise of the gay Jewish movement in terms of its organizational structure, and Walzer (2000) gives a journalistic account of the social and political landscape of the situation for gay Jews in Israel. However, with the exception of Mushkat (1999) – a small-scale study based on interview data from a sample of nine Jewish lesbians – and the recent work of wolfman (2002), which focuses on Jewish family issues, there is no empirically based sociological literature that examines micro-issues, such as ethnic identity construction or negotiation of dual minority status. There are a number of social-scientific studies that examine these exact questions for blacks (Icard, 1985; Greene, 1998), Latinos (Espin, 1987; Garcia, 1998) and Asians (Chan, 1989; Nakajima et al., 1996), as will be presented later in this chapter and in relevant chapters of the thesis. My research fills an important void by adding to

the sociological literature on ethnic identity construction of gay Jews within the larger context of the ethnic minority gay experience.

Interestingly, within the Jewish literature there is considerably more work that concentrates exclusively on the Jewish lesbian experience (Alpert, 1997; Alpert et al, 2001; Moore, 1995; Mushkat, 1999; Torton Beck, 1989). There is a distinct gap in the literature regarding the specifics of the gay Jewish male experience, particularly in North America. This work will address this gap by exclusively exploring the issues of men. There is some evidence pointing to the fact that there are distinctions between the experiences of gay men and the experiences of lesbians in terms of their ability to successfully negotiate their queer and ethno-religious identities. A quantitative study of gay Christians (Rodriguez and Ouellette, 2000: 341), for example, reported that gay men are more likely to experience conflict between their homosexuality and religious beliefs.

Organization of the Thesis

The substantive chapters of the thesis can be summarized in the following manner. Chapters 2 and 3 work in tandem to outline the predominant reactions gay Jewish men report receiving from the segments of the Jewish community with which they come in contact as well as their families. They examine these reactions in light of the claim that Jews tend to hold more liberal attitudes on social issues and embrace more liberal causes than non-Jews. These chapters will reflect on the effect these community and family reactions may have on the

individual Jewish identities of gay Jewish men. It will also attempt to compare and contrast these experiences with other ethnic minority gay men in an attempt to uncover what may be distinctive about the Jewish case.

Chapter 4 describes the reactions gay Jewish men report receiving from the gay community regarding their Jewishness. It will examine these reactions in light of the claim that gay communities are particularly sensitive and tolerant to diversity. By reflecting on these experiences the chapter will address the question of what effect these reactions may have on the constructions of Jewish identity.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine how the circumstances of gay Jewish men described in the previous chapters may directly apply to specific key life situations. Chapter 5 discusses the partnering practices of gay Jewish men in terms of the ethnicity of their partners, while Chapter 6 examines issues around fatherhood. Where relevant, I draw parallels from the Jewish case to other ethnic minority gay experiences. I also compare the gay Jewish case to the heterosexual Jewish experience.

Chapter 7 examines the various strategies or perspectives gay Jews employ, consciously or subconsciously, to negotiate a gay and Jewish identity. It does so by engaging relevant theoretical models on gay and ethnic identity development. Building upon these models, the chapter develops a more nuanced analytical framework to examine intersection of ethnicity and sexuality.

Chapter 8 will bring to focus the central sociological findings of this work as well as reflect on some of the Jewish community implications of these findings.

Research Methodology

The data collection for this project involved several components:

a) In-depth interviews with thirty gay Jewish men in Toronto;

b) Interviews with a smaller sample (six) of parents of gay Jewish men as well as two social service workers who facilitate support groups for gay Jews;

c) Thirteen field visits in Toronto to gay Jewish events; and

d) Newspaper, archival materials and Web sites related to gay Jews.

Interviews for this study were conducted between September 2000 and August 2001. Interview respondents were acquired through snowball sampling, through meeting them at gay Jewish events in Toronto and through referrals from friends, family and acquaintances. I am aware that my respondents do not form a random sample and thus certain biases may exist. For example, those who agreed to be interviewed are more likely to be fully "out of the closet" (and thus more comfortable with their gay identity) than those who would not agree to be interviewed. In addition, to learn first hand about the history and developments of the gay Jewish community of Toronto, I purposely sought out individuals who have been actively involved, both past and present, in this community. More so than the average gay Jew, these individuals have a particular interest in finding ways to integrate their gay and Jewish identities.

That being said, I endeavoured to find a reasonably representative sample to the best of my abilities. I did succeed in locating a roughly even age

distribution among respondents: Two are under twenty years old, six are in their twenties, eight are in their thirties, seven are in their forties, seven are in their fifties, and one is in his eighties. I was not successful in finding respondents in their sixties or seventies. In terms of religious backgrounds, I also succeeded in finding a fairly well-distributed sample that provides a reasonably good reflection of the Jewish population of Toronto. One third of the respondents (ten) could be described as more traditional Jews, while two thirds (twenty) could be described as more secular Jews. By traditional Jews I include both Jews who are strictly religiously observant Orthodox Jews (of which there were three in my sample) as well as those Jews who might not observe all Jewish laws but still maintain a conservative religious orientation and place more importance on synagogue attendance, celebrating the Jewish holidays and preserving and perpetuating Jewish tradition. The vast majority of the respondents were middle class, also an accurate reflection of the Jews of Toronto.

Interviews were semi-structured in format. The same groups of central themes were explored with all respondents, but I allowed flexibility in letting the respondent speak about issues that were of particular importance to him (see Appendix A for interview questionnaire). As mentioned, some interviews involved respondents who were leaders in the gay Jewish community. In these interviews I attempted to benefit from their experiences and expertise by asking these respondents to give their opinions on macro-issues, such as the relationship between gay Jews and gay Jewish organizations with the 'mainstream' Jewish community of Toronto.

Parents were found through referrals from gay Jewish respondents or others (see Appendix B for interview questionnaire). In total, six parents of gay Jewish men were interviewed. This included two couples (the mother and the father) and two other mothers. The age ranged from fifty to sixty-nine, with three parents in their fifties and three parents in their sixties. Three of the four gay sons of these parents were in their thirties, while one was sixteen years old. Three of the six parents could be described as more secular Jews, while the other three could be described as more traditional Jews. All parents were middle-class.

The two social service workers were interviewed because of their experience and expertise in working with gay Jews. One of the social service workers facilitated a social group for gay Jewish university students and young adults, while the other facilitated one support group for gay Jewish youth and another support group for parents of gay Jews.

Interviews were conducted in the respondents' home or office or in my apartment in downtown Toronto, wherever the respondent preferred. The shortest interview was thirty minutes in length, while the longest was two hours and thirty-five minutes. The average length was one hour and twenty minutes. With the exception of four interviews where I took notes, interviews were recorded on audiotape and later transcribed verbatim. The data were then coded into different themes, which formed the material for the various chapters.

The research was approved by the McGill Research Ethics Board (see Appendix C) and respondents signed an Informed Consent form before the start of the interview. Respondents were assured that the information gathered would be

kept confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in the study rather than real names.

After some initial hesitation most gay Jewish men were quite pleased to be interviewed. When I approached individuals to interview, most asked what my sexual orientation is and why I was interested in doing such a study. Many were surprised to find out I am heterosexual, and a number were delighted that a heterosexual person would consider conducting such a research project. Upon first meeting my respondents, my sense was that they were testing me to get a sense of my motives for the study. Once the respondents determined that I am respectful and friendly, most were pleased to be interviewed. Very few refused. Many found the interviews personally satisfying and mentioned that they had rarely put so much sustained thought into these personal issues. Many respondents thanked me at the end of the interview for devoting energy to such a research project.

Finding parents of gay Jewish men to interview was more challenging. The majority of gay Jewish men who had living parents did not feel comfortable with the idea of my interviewing their parents. This fact alone is an interesting piece of data and might suggest respondents' discomfort with their parents in relation to their gay identity. I had a number of refusals from parents whom I approached for interviews. Savin-Williams (2001: 3) reported that while gay youth are coming out at earlier ages nowadays, society is not yet at the stage where the majority of parents are ready to speak openly about the subject. In the end, only one set of parents I interviewed had a son who was also interviewed for the study.

The fieldwork for this research included thirteen field visits from June 2000 to June 2001. These visits included lectures, panel discussions, synagogue services, films and social events that related to gay Jews. The fieldwork served a number of purposes. It helped to situate respondents in lived realities, it aided in corroborating and interpreting interview data through informal conversations and, as mentioned, it allowed me to locate future respondents.

The archival material for this research included newspaper articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Canadian Jewish News*, and newsletters of the gay Jewish organizations of *Keshet Shalom* and *The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jews*. A large variety of gay Jewish Web sites were consulted as well.

Researcher's Presentation of Self: Insider or Outsider?

It is important to be reflexive about one's role as a researcher and one's relationship with the individuals one is researching, particularly when one is studying a population subject to social stigma. In this vein, it is helpful to reflect on the ongoing discussion among ethnographers and other social scientists concerning the concepts of the researcher as an "outsider" or "insider." Conventional wisdom may dictate one of two things. If one was conducting a study of a gay community, for example, it may be assumed that only an insider (i.e. a gay researcher) would be truly able to appreciate, interpret and understand the social life, behaviour and attitudes of such a population. On the other hand, it may be assumed that only an outsider (i.e. a heterosexual researcher) would be

able to maintain the necessary objectivity to properly assess the population in question.

Starting with Merton's (1972:14-15) seminal article on the subject, several scholars have criticized the above positions of extreme "insiderism" or "outsiderism." Merton argued that because we all possess a collection of statuses (one is heterosexual and Jewish and male and middle-class, etc.), we are all simultaneously confronting one another as both insiders and outsiders. Naples (1996: 84-85) reiterated this point when she reported that the bi-polar construction of insider/outsider are false separations. She reminded us of the interactive and fluid process of statuses, which are ever-shifting and permeable depending on social context and location.

The complexity of this issue is illustrated well in the 1970s research of Joseph Styles on gay bath houses. Even though he had never been to a gay bath house, Styles (1979: 148) assumed that because he was gay he would have the advantage of insider knowledge of the behaviour cues and interactions that take place in such an environment. When he started his fieldwork he realized that he was seriously mistaken. He was quite puzzled by the behaviour of the men and felt very much like an awkward outsider. After altering his research methods to address this concern, he concluded that "there are no privileged positions of knowledge when it comes to scrutinizing human life." Illustrating a similar point about the complexity of insider and outsider definitions, Weinfeld (2000: 289-291), in a discussion of culturally sensitive social service, reminded us that a secular Jewish psychologist treating a Hasidic Jew does not provide an

appropriate "ethnic match." Though both are Jewish, the secular Jew is certainly not an "insider" to the world of Hasidic Jews. Because of great internal diversity of identities, we must be cautious about assuming the "illusion of sameness" just because two people identify by the same label (i.e. gay or Jewish) (Pitman, 2002: 285-286).

Reflecting upon my own research on gay Jewish men, what relationship did I have to those I was researching? On the most basic level, as a heterosexual Jew, I might be characterized as a "partial insider" (Sherif, 2001: 438). I could be described as possessing one ascribed characteristic in common (Jewish) with my respondents, and one that is different (heterosexual) from my respondents. Would a Jewish lesbian, for example, be in a better position to conduct fruitful research of such a population? Looked at in another way, I seem to have as close a connection to gay Jewish men as does a Jewish lesbian. We both could be described as holding two ascribed characteristics in common with the population: I am Jewish and male, and she is Jewish and gay. I might be able to better relate on a personal level about what it means to be a man, and she might be able to better relate to what it means to be gay. Of course, as I have tried to demonstrate above, these ascribed statuses are not as clearly defined as they might appear. Because of the internal diversity within identities and the fluidity and shifting nature of these statuses, I would argue that no single combination of identities serves as the ideal formula for effective research.

Another matter needs to be considered. As a member of a socially privileged group (heterosexuals) who is researching members of a disenfranchised

group (gay men), I need to reflect on issues of power differential. If an informant has confided in me that he is gay, but is 'in the closet' to most others, this knowledge gives me a power advantage. How do I negotiate this position of privilege? Is my research exploitative? Am I harming my subjects? What should I reveal about myself? Should I tell them I am heterosexual?

Firstly, to try to break down issues of power differential between me and my respondents, I implemented what Patricia Hill Collins (1990: 215-217) referred to as the feminist "ethic of caring" and the "capacity for sympathy." Collins reminded us that a researcher's emotions can form an important basis for understanding one's informant and analyzing the data. By interacting with each respondent as an individual with whom I cared about and whose life experiences mattered to me, I demonstrated the genuine respect I held for each informant. Shaffir (1998: 48) speaks of a similar principle, which he refers to as the "neglected role of sociability." He argues that "the extent to which we are seen as likeable, friendly, dependable and honest" bears directly on the researcher's ability to collect rich data. I believe in this principle and try to enact it as much as possible when I conduct research. In my experience, Shaffir is correct that people tend to cooperate in research, not because of their evaluation of the scientific merits or credentials of the researcher, not because they are fascinated by the subject and not, I would add, because of the ascribed statuses of the researcher. It is rather because of their assessment of the researcher as a friendly, honest and caring human being. In this research I succeeded in gaining an excellent rapport with my informants. As a testament to this, I have formed friendships with a

number of them, which have continued long past the interview. In my estimation, I have succeeded in enacting a genuine "caring" and "sociable" relationship with my informants.

Secondly, the issue of what to reveal about myself as a researcher is an important question. Shokeid (1995: 4-5), an anthropologist who conducted an ethnographic study of a gay synagogue in New York, reported that when he spent time in the field setting he did not initially reveal to his informants that he was doing research or that he was heterosexual. He felt that this would "destroy any chance for normal interaction." Shokeid reported that when some respondents later found out this information they were initially upset, but later forgave him. When I conducted my fieldwork at gay Jewish events in Toronto I felt it was important to reveal early on that I was conducting research, so as to try to avoid any misunderstandings. I found it awkward, however, to volunteer the fact that I am heterosexual in the first minutes of the conversations. I found that it allowed for a more natural conversation if this information came out more gradually during the normal course of dialogue. There was one incident when an informant at a field event, upon hearing I was doing research on the subject, may have assumed I was gay. At the end of our conversation when it became clear to him that I was heterosexual, he may have felt some embarrassment. While this incident was unfortunate, I endeavoured throughout the research to approach each personal interaction as respectfully as I could so as to avoid any ill feelings. By the same principle, I paid special attention to keep the names of my respondents confidential, so as not to reveal their sexual orientation.

Revealing my personal background to those I formally interviewed was not problematic. As I mentioned, I developed an excellent rapport with my interview informants. Most interviews involved a preliminary "getting to know each other" segment before officially beginning, and where, in the course of natural conversation, it was usually revealed that I am heterosexual. Of course, many respondents knew this before we met, through our initial phone conversation or through the middle-person who helped to arrange the contact. It was important to me to be honest to my respondents about my background throughout the research, so that I could foster an environment where they felt comfortable to be honest with me about their personal life.

Judaism and Homosexuality

The following background information on Judaism will be helpful in setting the context for the study. With increased societal permissiveness towards homosexuality, the literature addressing the question of the Jewish perspective on homosexuality began to proliferate in the 1970s and has gained momentum ever since. While the casual observer might assume that Judaism and homosexuality are completely at odds with each other, upon careful examination of the various positions of North America's four major Jewish denominations one will find great variation in opinion. The central biblical passages within Jewish tradition that are commonly cited in relation to homosexuality are found in Leviticus 18:22: "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination" and in Leviticus 20:13: "And if a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, they

have both committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood-guilt is upon them." As is evident, both these passages refer to the sex act between two males. In traditional Judaism, the sex act between two females, referred to indirectly in Leviticus 18:3, is given less emphasis and is considered less serious a transgression, albeit still forbidden.

Much Jewish lay literature on the topic has been produced that bases its arguments on these textual passages. Much of this has been written by rabbis and Halachic (Jewish legal) scholars primarily for internal Jewish consumption. As mentioned, each Jewish denomination, Orthodox (Lamm, 1974; Angel et al., 1992/3), Conservative (Artson, 1990; Roth 1992), Reform (Freehof, 1973; Kahn, 1989) and Reconstructionist (Meyers, 1995) has developed a distinctive position on the topic. In some circumstances there is not unanimity of opinion within a single Jewish denomination.

Though many modern Jews no longer feel bound to the theological precepts of a particular Jewish denomination, the following is offered as a general guideline to the diversity of Jewish opinion on the question of homosexuality. Orthodoxy considers homosexual sex acts to be a *toevah* (often translated as "abomination"), and thus absolutely against traditional Jewish law (Halachah). This does not mean that Orthodoxy endorses a "witch-hunt" to try to find and implicate these individuals. It is the act of homosexual sex which is sinful, not the essence of the person who commits the sin. The individual should be treated with respect and compassion and encouraged to seek professional help to try to lead a

heterosexual life in keeping with 'Torah values' (Lamm, 1974: 196; Freundel and Bulka, 1992: 1).

In 1992, Conservative Judaism's *Committee on Jewish Law and Standards* came to a position on the issue of homosexuality. The Conservative movement will not ordain lesbians or gay men as rabbis or cantors, because these positions are considered by the movement to be the most important Halachic role models. The movement also does not allow gay/lesbian marriages or commitment ceremonies. At the discretion of the local Conservative rabbi, gay and lesbian Jews may lead prayers, read from the Torah and serve as youth counsellors or Hebrew school teachers, but formal public acknowledgment of one's homosexuality would generally not be granted. The Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism affirms a prescription for heterosexuality, but supports full civil equality for gays and lesbians and calls upon its synagogues to increase awareness and understanding for gay Jews in its midst (United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1992: 19). In January 2003, there was some evidence that Conservative Judaism may be starting the process of re-examining its stance on homosexuality (Associated Press, 2003).

The Reform movement rejects the traditional Halachic view (as described in the Orthodox position) of homosexuality. As of 1990, the movement has permitted gay and lesbian rabbis and cantors. After considerable debate, in 2000 the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) adopted a resolution that asserted that the relationship of a Jewish same-sex couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual. The same resolution also stated that the Reform

movement recognizes the diversity of opinions within its ranks on this issue. The movement does not, therefore, require its rabbis to perform same-sex ceremonies. Rather, it has opted to support the decision of those who choose to officiate at rituals of union for same-sex couples, and also to support the decision of those who do not (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2000: 3).

Similar to Reform, the Reconstructionist movement rejects the traditional halachic view of homosexuality. According to the *Report on the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality* (Meyers, 1995), the movement asserts that, "The Jewish values that affirm the inherent dignity, integrity, and equality of human beings [have] primacy over historically conditioned attitudes based on ... texts that condemn homosexuality as an abomination" (36). As such, "Lesbian, gay and heterosexual people are equally deserving of sexual intimacy that promotes well being of the body, mind and spirit for both partners in the relationship" (37). In 1984, the Reconstructuctionist Rabbinical College determined that "sexual orientation will not be a determining factor for admission" (39). Regarding the issue of same-sex commitment ceremonies, in 1993 the movement adopted the following statement: "We support those of our members who choose to officiate at same-gender commitment ceremonies. We acknowledge that rabbis ... may choose not to officiate at same-[sex] commitment ceremonies. We affirm their right to make individual judgements in this complex area" (40-1).

Because Judaism is often considered both a religion and an ethnicity, for comparative purposes it is useful to briefly examine the positions of other

religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) and other ethnic groups (blacks, Latinos, Asians) on the issue of homosexuality.

Homosexuality and Religion

While there is documentation to show that homosexual relations were present in the Church throughout much of its history, by the twelfth century the Church was publicly opposed to homosexual relations. Just as is the case with Judaism, as discussed above, there are biblical passages that are seen by many Christians as the authoritative statement of condemnation of homosexuality (see, for example, Romans 1:26-27). (Boswell, 1980: 3-40, 91-118; Carmody and Carmody, 1993: 135-143; Ellison, 1993: 157).

Roman Catholicism has been particularly hostile to homosexuality. St. Thomas Aquinas declared homosexual sex acts as "a crime against nature" and the most recent document published by the Vatican on the subject decrees that homosexual acts are "not a morally acceptable option" (Clark et al. 1989 : 277).

Protestant churches exhibit a great variety of opinion on the matter. While virtually all churches officially support full civil rights for gays and lesbians, some churches are specifically gay-positive (e.g. Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, Episcopalian) while others are generally unsympathetic to gay concerns (Southern Baptists, Evangelical). In the past thirty years many gay-friendly caucuses have developed within particular churches (Lutherans Concerned, National Gay Pentecostal Alliance, Seventh-Day Adventists Kinship International). Within Roman Catholicism, gay-friendly groups have developed as

well (Dignity, New Ways Ministry). These liberal streams notwithstanding, with the long history of opposition to homosexuality in the Church, it has been difficult for many Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, to reconcile their Christian and gay identities (Clark et al. 1989: 281; Ellison, 1993: 164-166; Johnson, 1992: 150-155).

The Islamic tradition strongly condemns homosexual activity. The Koran denounces the "people of Lot" (Lotists) who ignored warnings and partook in same-sex relations. Whereas the Jewish and Christian traditions have developed more liberal branches or denominations that have reinterpreted theology to find a place for gay men and lesbians within the faith community, Islam does not appear to have room for this type of theological flexibility. There are very few openly gay men or lesbians in Muslim communities (most of which are not in Western societies). Similarly, Muslim states see very little in the way of gay rights activist organizations. Gay pride is seen as a (corrupt) Western phenomenon in many Muslim countries (Duran, 1992: 181, 189-193).

Interestingly, in most Muslim societies people with same-sex orientation do marry, thus presenting a public image of heterosexual 'normalcy.' Conducting same-sex relations in private is often tolerated as long as it is done discreetly. This way the "proper" social order is preserved. Also, similar to much of Latin American society, in the case of male anal-sex, only the passive receiver of this sex is stigmatized as a homosexual (humiliated to be playing the "feminine role"). The active giver of this sex is not considered "homosexual" and does not suffer from societal stigma (Duran, 1992: 183-184; Weeks, 1993: ix-xi).

Eastern religious traditions are generally not as doctrinally strict as Western traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), often adapting to the social values of the culture within which they finds themselves. As such, from an Eastern religious point of view, the issue of homosexuality has not proven to be as controversial. The Hindu tradition, for example, has no definitive religious position on homosexual acts. The attitude would best be described as ambivalent or indifferent. The Confucian and Taoist traditions also hold a neutral stance on the issue. Homosexual acts are denounced in certain contexts in the Buddhist tradition, but only as a form of sexuality in general (a violation of celibacy), not because of the same-sex component. Homosexuality (a Western concept) as a distinct 'orientation' or identity politic is foreign to an Eastern religious world view (Cabezon, 1993: 81-82; Sharma, 1993: 67-68).

The concept of a homosexual orientation is also foreign to most Aboriginal religious traditions. 'Conventional' Western (English) categories of gay/straight often do not make sense to First Nation peoples, who have a more fluid (less binary) understanding of gender and sexuality. While there is great variations among different First Nations on the issue of sexuality, among many native cultures there exists a third-gendered person. Sometimes referred to as *Berdache*,[1] these people are biologically "one gender," but take on traditional characteristics in behaviour and dress of the "other gender." These people, often called Two-Spirited (because they are fortunate to have the spirit of both man and

[1] Berdache (Persian origin, meaning male sex-slave) is an unfortunate term coined by Europeans and popularized by Western anthropologists. Individual tribes have their own terms for these people, for example the Navajo use Nadle and the Lakota use Winkte (Baum, 1993: 8-11).

woman), are often revered and serve as spiritual healers to their communities (Baum, 1993: 12-15; Tafoya, 1992: 254-258).

Beginning in the 1990s, empirical sociological research has been published on the gay and lesbian Christian experience (Mahaffy, 1996, Wilcox, 2002). This body of literature, which also includes specialized studies on the gay-positive Metropolitan Community Church (Rodriguez and Ouellette, 2000), gay Evangelicals (Thumma, 1991) and gay Catholics (Wagner et al., 1994), generally explores this central question of balancing or negotiating two seemingly contradictory identities: queerness and Christianity. I am not aware of any empirical sociological studies on the gay experience of those members of a religious tradition outside of Christianity and Judaism.

Homosexuality and Ethnicity

Until the early 1980s the vast majority of the empirical sociological literature on issues surrounding lesbians and gay men in North America described only the "'mainstream white" experience. Since the late 1980s this gap in the literature has begun to narrow, with an array of studies on the ethnic minority lesbian and gay experience.

Many ethnic minority communities (e.g. blacks, Latinos, Asians) tend to place a strong emphasis on "traditional" gender roles, the "nuclear family," procreation and conservative religious values (Garcia, 1998: 26-27; Greene, 1997a: 219-226; Morales, 1990: 232-234). This can have a direct bearing on attitudes towards gay men and lesbians within the ethnic community. An

appreciation of the ethno-cultural context is therefore essential to understanding the formation and construction of gay identity among lesbians and gay men. One of the tasks of this work will be to try to situate the Jewish experience within this framework.

The literature illustrates that combining a gay identity with an ethnic minority identity, such as African-American, Asian-American, Latin American, among others, can be particularly challenging as it often creates a situation of multiple levels of oppression and discrimination (Reynolds and Pope, 1991). Faced with being a minority within a minority, these individuals bear the task of trying to integrate two major aspects of their identity when both may be devalued in general society. The literature describes the difficulties involved for ethnic minority gay men and lesbians in 'coming out' within the ethnic community and attempting to affirm both a positive queer and ethnic identity (Hunter et al., 1998: 46-48). In addition to this difficulty within the ethnic community, the ethnic minority gay man or lesbian also cannot presume full acceptance from the broader gay and lesbian community, as movements that focus on sustaining a collective identity for an oppressed group sometimes overlook the concerns of sub-groups found within the larger movement. (Eder et al., 1995: 489 ; Goffman, 1963: 138). Some ethnic minority lesbians and gay men report that they feel marginalized in both the ethnic and the gay community. These individuals find they are required to conceal important aspects of their identity in each community to gain acceptance (Morales, 1990: 219-220). In the relevant chapters, I will elaborate

further on the experiences of ethnic minority gay men and lesbians within the ethnic community and within the larger "gay community."

Gay Jewish Organizational History

While the central focus of this work is the micro-context of how individual Jews construct their Jewish identities, it is important to situate this examination in the broader macro-context. With the use of gay Jewish archival materials, interview data, data from field visits and newspaper articles from *The Canadian Jewish News*, this section outlines the gay Jewish organizational history in Toronto and elsewhere in North America. The Toronto organizational history can be summarized by the formation of the following groups:

a) 1975 to 1978 – *Ha'Mishpachah* (Hebrew for "The Family");

b) 1978 to 1979 – *B'nai Kehillah* (Hebrew for "Children of the Community");

c) 1982 to 1992 – *Chutzpah* (Yiddish for "Nerve / Gall"); and

d) 1992 to 2001 – *Congregation Keshet Shalom* (Hebrew for "Rainbow of Peace").

Other related initiatives and groups currently operating are also discussed.

1970s: *Ha'Mishpachah* and *B'nai Kehillah*

The first organized gay Jewish entity in Toronto was formed in the mid-1970s and was given the name *Ha'Mishpachah* ("The Family") to signify a

potential replacement family for those gay Jews who were not receiving sufficient support from their biological families. The group, which consisted primarily of men in their twenties, thirties and forties, met in one another's homes to hold discussion groups and Jewish cultural holiday celebrations (mainly Passover and Hanukkah). There were no formal membership requirements. The events would attract approximately twenty to thirty people on average, with the largest event (a Passover seder) attracting approximately fifty people. The events were advertised in *The Body Politic*, Toronto's gay newspaper of the day.[2]

Certain members of this group had a desire to expand their events to include Friday night Sabbath services. This was the impetus for the formation of the successor group called *B'nai Kehillah* (Children of the Community), a name that more closely resembles those names customarily used for synagogues. For approximately two years in the late 1970s, gay Jews, again primarily men, held Friday night religious services in the social room of Holy Trinity Church, adjacent to Toronto's downtown Eaton Centre. The group also held Jewish High Holiday services one year with the loan of a portable arc containing two Torah scrolls. Some of the members of this group were quite religiously observant and also secretive about their sexuality within their family and home community. The group printed newsletters in 1978 and 1979 and, in conjunction with *The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations*,[3] hosted a *Shabbaton* (social

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[2] The newspaper existed from 1971 to 1987.

[3] The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations was officially founded in 1980 and still exists today. It facilitated some gay Jewish programming in an unofficial manner in the late 1970s. Its objectives are to serve as the worldwide voice for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) Jews and to support, inspire and strengthen local groups. It holds international

event held over the Sabbath) in Toronto with visiting members of gay Jewish groups coming from American cities.

1980s: Chutzpah

From approximately 1979 to 1982 the remnants of the two previous groups met sporadically with minimal levels of organizational structure. Around 1982 the formation of a new group called *Chutzpah* (Nerve / Gall) began to develop. Groups of mostly men in their thirties and forties met in one another's homes on an informal basis for Jewish holiday celebrations. The turning point in gay Jewish organizational structure in Toronto came in the mid 1980s when new, ambitious leaders took control of *Chutzpah* and formalized it to include a constitution, an executive structure and a paying membership. In 1988 the group became an official member of *The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations*.

The group desired to make better inroads into the mainstream Jewish community. Encountering reluctance from the downtown Toronto Jewish Community Centre to allow the group to use its space and reluctance from *The Canadian Jewish News* newspaper to publicize its events, the leaders of Chutzpah applied legal pressure until these bodies relented. Instead of meeting in private homes or the party room of a downtown condominium building, the group began to meet in the more public and visible space of the Jewish Community Centre.

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conferences for LGBT Jews every other year. In February 2001 it changed its name to the more inclusive Keshet Geavah (Rainbow of Pride): World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews.

Promotion of the group in *The Canadian Jewish News* brought a new surge of paying members. While Conservative and Orthodox synagogues ignored the group, many public lectures, film nights and other events (with admission charges) were held at this time in Reform temples throughout Toronto, particularly at the Holy Blossom Temple. A panel on "coming out to your parents" in 1986, for example, unexpectedly drew a crowd of two hundred people and served as the catalyst to develop a support group for Jewish parents of gays and lesbians, which still exists in Toronto today.

In the late 1980s *Chutzpah* hosted a *Shabbaton* with visiting members in attendance from gay Jewish groups from Montreal and Rochester, New York. Funding for *Chutzpah* came through donations from wealthy gay Jews in the city, membership fees and fundraising activities of the group (bake sales, garage sales). With the exception of a small grant from the Jewish Family and Child Services to print prayer books, no funding for the group came from the mainstream Jewish community.

At its peak in the early 1990s the group consisted of approximately 150 paying members. This enabled the group to undertake the ambitious project of hosting the Midwest regional conference of *The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations.* Held in June 1990 at Toronto's downtown Primrose Hotel, this conference and the media coverage garnered in *The Canadian Jewish News* provided higher levels of exposure to *Chutzpah* and gay Jews in general in the city.

At the same time, the group was developing somewhat of an identity crisis. A significant portion desired that the group develop only social programs with no religious content, while another significant portion wanted the group to adopt a more religious focus in the model of a synagogue or congregation. The latter group proved victorious in the power struggle and the group transformed itself in 1992 into *Congregation Keshet Shalom.*

1990s: *Congregation Keshet Shalom*

Similar to what happened in the late 1970s, the gay Jewish entity of the early 1990s wanted to rename and re-orient itself to a more synagogue-like framework. In 1992, with a new president and executive structure in place, the newly established *Congregation Keshet Shalom* (Rainbow of Peace) formalized a monthly Friday night religious service held at the downtown Jewish Community Centre as well as an annual High Holiday service in a larger space at a public community centre. In addition to its formal prayer services, through the mid-1990s the group also conducted social events, lectures, Passover Seders and Hanukkah parties. A *Keshet Shalom* newsletter circulated from 1992 until the group disbanded in 2001. The new group fortified its affiliation with the mainstream Jewish community by establishing itself as part of the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and the newly formed Toronto Downtown Jewish Community Council. Despite these affiliations on paper, there was no mainstream community funding given to assist the operation of the group.

Although the group did have a female president for one year and did honour International Women's Day on an annual basis, like the groups which preceded it, *Keshet Shalom* faced the problem of Jewish lesbians viewing it as primarily a men's group.[4] It was also not able to attract a following of young people in their twenties. Its leadership core was made up of middle-aged men.

Through the process of transformation to the more religiously focused *Keshet Shalom* from the more social-oriented *Chutzpah*, the group lost approximately half its members. These numbers were never recovered. In its inception in 1992 the group had approximately seventy members. From the late 1990s onwards the group experienced a sharp decline, with board members resigning without finding replacements, programs being cancelled and personality conflicts damaging the morale of the group. By 1999, the membership fell to forty members. By the time the group disbanded in 2001, only twelve paying members remained.

I had the opportunity to attend the final formal event that *Keshet Shalom* held, which was a Hanukkah party held in December 2000 in a social room at the downtown Jewish Community Centre. In keeping with the gender composition of the group, of the forty people in attendance only about five were women. As opposed to the Hanukkah parties of the past, there was no live music. A table of Hanukkah foods (*latkes,* etc.) was laid out and those in attendance sat at round

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[4] Though I do not have firsthand knowledge of the group, I have heard of the development of an informal group for Jewish lesbians called 'Nice Jewish Women,' which has organized discussion groups, social gatherings and Sabbath dinners. The group is a Toronto initiative originating from an international Jewish lesbian and bisexual feminist email discussion group called 'Nice Jewish Girls.' The title 'Nice Jewish Girls' is based on a 1989 publication by Evelyn Torton Beck of the same name.

tables and chatted. At one point the group was called to assemble around a table for the lighting ceremony of the *hanukkiahs* (Hanukkah candelabras). Perhaps reflecting the religious apathy of the group, only approximately ten people gathered around the table and offered an unenthusiastic rendition of the relevant prayers.

The Demise of *Keshet Shalom*

Why did *Keshet Shalom* cease operations in 2001? The totality of the data collected points to several possible reasons. Firstly, the history of the gay Jewish organizations in Toronto can be seen as the history of starts and stops, of groups that sputter along meekly until a new leadership emerges that re-energizes it, only to have it dissipate again when these volunteer leaders depart. When energetic leaders emerge, groups can succeed. When these overburdened volunteer leaders inevitably become burned out, the groups die. In this sense group survival is a matter of circumstance of whether there is anyone present in a certain time period who is willing to put in the substantial effort. *Keshet Shalom* no longer could provide these individuals.

Secondly, and related to the first reason, because there was minimal funding and formal support from the mainstream Jewish community, *Keshet Shalom* had very limited financial resources and a weak physical infrastructure. Leaders of the organization had no salary to motivate them. While *Keshet Shalom* had a dynamic Web site, it had no physical office space. It was in a sense a "virtual institution." Phone messages to its "Rainbow Hotline" sat on a personal

answering machine on top of someone's refrigerator until that individual had time to retrieve the messages. Similarly, mail would get picked up at the organization's post office box when someone had time to do so.

Thirdly, the diversity of opinions as to what types of programs and activities the organization should provide caused substantial amounts of tension and conflict. Being gay and Jewish does not, of course, entail everyone having the same needs and desires. In addition to the ongoing conflict between the more traditional members and the more secular members, tensions were also common between men and women and between politically left-wing and politically right-wing members. The congregation could not be all things to all members. This phenomena caused a high turnover of members. While a large Jewish centre like New York has sufficient numbers of gay Jews to support a high turnover, Toronto does not. It is also possible that the more conservative nature of Toronto's Jewish community, as compared to New York's more liberal Jewish community,[5] means that more Toronto gay and lesbian Jews are likely still closeted and not comfortable participating in a public organization that would identify themselves as gay or lesbian.

Finally, the suggestion was offered by some respondents that there is an attitude shift now in North America among gay and lesbian Jews toward a preference for a strategy of integration to separation. While the boom of gay Jewish congregations may have occurred in the late 1970s and 1980s, some suggested that because in the last ten years gay Jews have gradually seen more

[5] The more traditional nature of Canadian Jewry as opposed to American Jewry will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

acceptance in mainstream liberal synagogues, they would rather participate in these broader-based institutions than segregate themselves in their own congregations. Respondents reported that just as is the case in Toronto in the mid- to late-1990s, other cities such as Montreal[6], Detroit, Rochester, N.Y., and Pittsburgh are seeing their gay Jewish organizations sputter or collapse.

Other Gay Jewish Initiatives in Toronto

Two other entities deserve mention when outlining the history of gay Jewish organizations in Toronto. Firstly, from the mid-1980s until the end of the 1990s, four synagogues[7] in Toronto combined to form an AIDS committee. The committee provided a formal support group for HIV-positive people, provided a "buddy program," where a volunteer would be trained to offer support on a regular basis to someone living with AIDS, developed AIDS awareness and education programs at their synagogues and developed an annual Passover seder for people with AIDS. With the advancement in medical treatments, people with AIDS are increasingly living longer lives. The committee felt its work was no longer essential and ceased operations.

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[6] The history of Montreal's gay Jewish organizational structure bears similarity to the Toronto case. The first gay Jewish organization by the name of *Naches* ("Joy") began in 1972 (Weinfeld, 2001: 147-8). The group arranged informal social gatherings in private homes. Because of the lack of acceptance in the Jewish community, many members remained closeted. The group evolved into a more formally structured organization in 1989 by the name of *Yachdav* ("Together"). The new organization reached its peak in 1994 when it hosted the North-East Regional Conference of *The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations*. By the late 1990s the organization began its decline. In 2002 a new gay Jewish organization by the name of *Faygeleh* (Yiddish slang for "gay") developed.

[7] The four synagogues that participated were Holy Blossom (Reform), Beth Tzedec (Conservative), Beth David (Conservative) and Adath Israel (Conservative).

Secondly, the works of a gay Jewish man by the name of Johnny Abush deserve mention here. In order to address what he considered to be the invisibility of the gay Jew, Abush (1952-2000) created the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Jewish Archives, a collection of over 10,000 artifacts (books, posters, buttons, photographs, crafts, etc.) of LGBT Jewish interest. After his death of AIDS-related causes, Abush's collection was transferred to the ONE Institute in Los Angles, a LGBT archival institution. Abush also co-organized the Jewish Queer Culture Committee from 1993 to 1996, which offered gay Jewish arts and cultural events in Toronto. Moreover, he established the *Twice Blessed* Web site which served as one of the primary Internet links to gay Jewish subject matter, and he managed the *Keshet Shalom* Web site. For a short time in the late 1990s, Abush even established a gay Jewish dating service called *Nu Yenta!*, which, at its peak, had over four hundred members worldwide. In January 2001, I had the opportunity to attend the memorial service that was held in honour of Johnny Abush. Clearly he was well-respected. Ten speakers from the LGBT Jewish community, both men and women, paid tribute to his life's work, and approximately seventy people were in attendance at the event, held in a Toronto Jewish community centre.

Gay Jewish Groups Currently Operating in Toronto

In March of 2000, the Jewish Campus Services (now called Hillel) of Toronto began a group called Jewish Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender

Students and Young Professionals of Toronto (JLGBT)[8] at t[redacted] Toronto downtown campus. This group is recognized as the first gay Jewish organization in Toronto that is primarily funded through mainstream Jewish Federation sources. The group holds Friday night dinners and other casual social events or cultural programs approximately every two months during the school year. The group is an affiliate of the larger body called the National Union of Jewish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students (NUJLS).[9]

I had the opportunity to attend three of the events held by this group. In March 2001 I attended a free Friday night dinner where I shared some of my preliminary research findings. The group of fifteen people, with a roughly equal mix of men and women, was made up primarily of young adults in their early twenties. The group was enthusiastic and friendly and seemed to enjoy interacting with gay and lesbian peers of their same age and social position. In April 2001 I attended another event, which consisted of a film with gay content and a presentation by an author about his book on gay life in Israel. The organizers were disappointed that only twenty-five people attended this unique session. This was probably due to a lack of sufficient advertising and the fact that there was an admission charge. The strength of the group was illustrated at a third event I attended, in June 2001. Approximately forty young people in their twenties or early thirties casually socialized over a barbecue at a suburban Toronto park on a

[8] In the fall of 2003 this grouped changed its name to *Kulanu* (Hebrew for "all of us")

[9] The National Union of Jewish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students, founded in 1998, is a well-funded organization (both from Jewish community funding and gay organizational funding) with affiliate groups in many universities across North America. The group holds an annual conference in a different North American city every winter or early spring.

pleasant spring evening. Approximately two-thirds of the guests were male. This group appears to be successful when it brings young gay and lesbian Jews together for casual social interaction. The group continues to operate at the time of writing this document (2003). For gay and lesbian Jews who are in their late-thirties or older, this group would not be appropriate. With the demise of *Keshet Shalom*, no similar group presently exists for this older age group.

Support Group for Jewish Parents and Families of Gays and Lesbians

As mentioned earlier, a support group for Jewish parents of gay men and lesbians was established in Toronto in the mid-1980s. In its first decade it was coordinated through the Reform Holy Blossom Temple. In 1997 the Jewish Family and Child Service (JFCS), a body funded through mainstream Jewish Federation resources, took over the group and began to hold monthly meetings in its own offices. The group remains active as the demand for its services in the Jewish community continues.

Support Group for Gay and Lesbian Jewish Young Adults

From 1994 to 1996, The Coalition of Jewish Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students existed at Toronto's York University. The short-lived group offered social events as well as discussion groups. Seeing the need for more formal support groups for these young gay and lesbian Jews, the leader of this group approached Toronto's Jewish Family and Child Service. In 1996 the JFCS

developed monthly meetings at its offices to offer group discussion and support for gay and lesbian Jewish youth. The group remains active.

Jewish Gay And Lesbian Fund

In 2002, a Jewish Gay and Lesbian Fund was developed in the Toronto Jewish community to sponsor gay Jewish cultural and educational programs in the city. To date this fund has sponsored a gay Jewish float at Toronto's annual Gay Pride parade in June of 2002, as well as a Hanukkah party that featured presentations of gay Jewish content, in December 2002.

Shir Libeynu

In terms of a synagogue service that may offer a comfortable setting for Toronto's Jewish gay and lesbian community, the relatively new *Shir Libeynu* (Song of our Hearts) Congregation may be the wave of the future. Established in 1995 by two Jewish lesbians, the congregation holds annual High Holiday services in a downtown public community centre (which used to be a synagogue) as well as two or three Sabbath services throughout the year. *Shir Libeynu* describes itself as a progressive egalitarian synagogue for Toronto's pluralistic Jewish community which emphasizes social and political activism. I had the opportunity to attend High Holiday services at this congregation in September 2000. The very liberal and participatory service was attended by approximately two hundred people with a mix of gay and lesbians, heterosexuals, adults,

children, couples and singles. The successful congregation serves as a model for the possibility of openly integrating gay and lesbian Jews and heterosexual Jews into the same Jewish ritual space.

Chapter 2

Jewish Community Reactions to Gay Jewish Men

> ***I can't believe they're making a fuss over people loving each other. Spend more time making a fuss about people hating each other, let's do that.***
>
> *Traditional gay Jew in his forties*

This chapter will work in tandem with the next to explore three distinct themes. Firstly, in light of the claim that Jews historically hold more liberal attitudes than non-Jews, the two chapters will examine in some detail the reported experiences of gay Jews within the Jewish community context (Chapter 2) and within their Jewish families (Chapter 3). Explanations will be provided to link these findings to the literature on Jewish liberalism. Secondly, the chapters will offer some speculations as to whether there may be some distinctive features to gay Jewish experiences as compared to experiences of gay non-Jews. Finally, the chapters will begin to answer one the key question of this work, namely, "What effect does homosexuality and the reactions this engenders have on the Jewish identity of the gay Jew?"

Experiences in the Jewish Community

There are a number of references in the literature to the challenges that gay Jews face in the larger Jewish community. Examples of exclusion and ostracism

can be found in the articles that make up a seminal work on the subject entitled *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian or Gay and Jewish* (Balka and Rose, 1989) as well as a number of subsequent works (Fishman, 2000: 106-109; Levado, 1993; Mushkat, 1999; Raphael, 1996; Rose, 1999; Shneer and Aviv, 2002). These references are a good starting point for understanding the obstacles gay Jews face in integrating their gay and Jewish identities within their own ethno-religious community. By conducting systematic in-depth interviews of gay Jewish men I was able to bring the prominent issues into clearer focus. This section will examine examples of face-to-face interactions between gay Jews and the larger Jewish community as well as examples of policies implemented by Jewish institutions that respondents considered homophobic.

Ignorance and Prejudice

My interview data suggest the Jewish community of Toronto is somewhat ignorant of the existence of gay Jews in its midst and uninformed of the issues and challenges that are involved in being gay and Jewish. This ignorance is accompanied by prejudiced attitudes. One respondent, a man now in his forties who had been active in Toronto's gay Jewish scene, remarked that when he placed a telephone call to the downtown Toronto Jewish community centre in the early 1980s to inquire whether the centre offered any programs targeted to gay Jews, the receptionist's response was "there are no gay Jews!" While a similar response may not be likely two decades later, it is a good indication of the

challenges gay Jewish men have faced in gaining acceptance in their Jewish community.

Other examples of ignorance and prejudice include a respondent in his thirties, Emile, who worked for a Jewish human-rights organization. He described an incident where a Jewish person called in to report an anti-Semitic incident. During the course of the conversation the caller made disparaging remarks about gays and lesbians, then went on to say, "but there are no gay Jews." When my respondent replied that "You are talking to one," the response of the caller was, "But you are such a nice person!" The same respondent received a complaint from a relatively observant caller who worked for a Jewish institution. The caller reported that he was refused time off for Jewish holidays because "if you are gay, you are not observant, so you wouldn't need the holiday time off." The particular challenges faced by the religiously observant gay Jew will be explored in more detail throughout this work.

Feelings of Ostracism

Respondents often reported fears of ostracism from the Jewish community. According to a Jewish community social worker who facilitates support groups for gay Jewish youth, many Jewish young people are scared to come out because of this fear of potential ostracism.

Because of this phenomenon, some gay Jewish respondents reported that they will purposely try to distance themselves from the Jewish community to avoid stigmatization. One respondent, who claimed he "does not hide his

sexuality," reported that while exercising at the Jewish community centre he noticed that others around him appeared uncomfortable:

> There were certain responses I got that have been negative, so part of it makes me not want to be with them, and so I isolate myself further.

One traditional respondent I interviewed is openly gay in most of his social interactions, but is in the closet when he attends his Orthodox synagogue. He described how he keeps his distance from other congregants in his synagogue:

> I don't actually know what people's positions are on this topic because I haven't engaged people in conversation. I guess I could speculate about what people's positions would be. Have I built up a wall based on what I think their positions might be and may that be part of the reason why I haven't gotten close to people? Could be. I'm not a psychologist.

Two respondents spoke of the bitter memories they have of their childhood in private Jewish schools. Kyle, a traditional Jew, explained that he felt rejected as a gay man much more in Jewish school than he did in public school. He asserted:

> That is where some of my resentments towards my Jewish upbringing came from. I was always happy in the house, but not at that day school. I found it really oppressive.

Marvin, a secular Jew, explained how his experiences as a child in Jewish school may have affected his feelings about Jewish environments as an adult:

> I had a lot of trouble in Hebrew school as a kid. I was made fun of a lot by some of the kids. I had a lot of trouble. I don't know if that's why I don't particularly like synagogue. I have a lot of bad memories from ages eight through sixteen at Hebrew school, being made fun of and being put down a lot by some of the kids so it was hard. That element of the Jewish community is very difficult for me.

As will be discussed in the conclusion of this work, this phenomenon of Jews feeling they want to distance themselves from their own community has important implications for issues surrounding "Jewish continuity."

Heteronormativity

Gay Jewish men described the Jewish community around them as heteronormative, with little room for diversity of expression. This heteronormativity promotes strong feelings of discomfort and alienation. With a strong emphasis on (heterosexual) marriage and procreation, many gay Jewish men often feel on the margins, somehow not living up to the Jewish ideal. Kevin, a respondent in his twenties, explained:

> It's hard. I can't just pretend that I'm "twice blessed." I'm not ... I went to a friend's wedding, all my friends are getting married. You go to a religious wedding ... it's uncomfortable. My friend telling me, "I hope you find a woman. You'll love her as much as I do!"

A secular respondent in his fifties described the discomfort he experienced when he started to go to a synagogue regularly to say *kaddish* (prayer for the deceased) for his father and the only thing the rabbi would ever ask him is, "So, are you married yet? When are you getting married?" A respondent in his thirties, who describes himself as having a "strong cultural Jewish identity," stressed the heteronormative family environment in which he grew up:

> I think it sort of goes back to the whole sort of family issue. For many years, I think it's so ingrained, that you're brought up with a certain direction in life, that you go to high school, you go to university, you come out, you get a job, you go back to school or what-have-you, you know; you meet somebody, usually get married, settle down, have children, and on goes your life. And I think that you're never provided with any alternatives, you know, when you're young.

The type of heteronormativity in the Jewish community can cause mental anguish for the gay Jew. A traditional Jew in his forties, confided that:

> It hurts because I feel kind of shunted to the side of things ... all these other Jews seem to be just going along and having the weddings and the children and the bar mitzvahs and this and that, and I'm always on the outside of it. Which is really painful. It's very, very painful.

Parents of gay Jewish men also face the challenges of having a son who does not follow the 'typical' Jewish pattern. Flora, the mother of a gay Jewish teenage son, lamented:

> All people talk about is [whether their son] has a girlfriend, they're getting married ... that's the next sort of life cycle event. Right after bar mitzvah, then they graduate from university, then they get married, then they have children. So this is not normative for the Jewish community. So I assume that there will be people out there who will feel sorry for us, that we don't have a normative child.

Surface Acceptance vs. Public Recognition

A number of respondents described the Jewish community response as "thinly veiled tolerance." This manifests itself as an attempt to be liberal ("I don't have a problem with it") combined with a desire to subdue the issue ("Just don't talk about it"). The attitude can be summed up as "be gay, but quietly" or "don't ask don't tell." Elliot, a secular Jew, described the attitude in this way:

> "I don't mind if you're gay, but don't make it an issue ... don't talk about anything gay." It amazes me that people seem to be able to think that you can separate gay from identity. Like when they talk about their wife and their kids, that's not heterosexual, but ... if I ever were to talk about a boyfriend, or seeing a movie that's gay, or a book that's gay ... well, that's shoving it down their throats.

A key part of this appearance of acceptance is silence or denial. Respondents reported that Jews try to avoid the issue whenever possible. While this may not be an active rejection of one's gay identity, respondents describe it as "passive rejection." One respondent recounted his frustration:

> Nobody says anything, but it doesn't mean that they're comfortable. They could talk about their husbands, and wives, and children. I couldn't talk about my partners or my pets ... somebody in that kind of relationship, caring relationship. And I was really annoyed, some of the people I knew, they knew my partner had AIDS, and they never asked questions, they never came to visit, nobody came to the funeral and I felt a certain betrayal.

Another strategy for surface acceptance is exaggerated kindness. Kyle described the interaction he experiences with Jews as insincere politeness or kindness that disguises real attitudes. He characterized Jews as exhibiting the same type of false kindness as do 'liberals' in general:

> I don't always feel that it is a warm understanding. It's that they're simultaneously accepting and condescending about it, too; that you are somewhat lesser, but we want to be okay with it. It's like you are driving your car at one hundred miles an hour, right? And with neo-Conservatives or with Christians, for instance, you hit a brick wall and you stop and your dead! But with Jews you hit a giant air pillow and you just keep driving and s-l-o-w-l-y it stops and grinds to a halt. You know? That's the liberal reaction. Liberalism smothers you with kindness.

Similarly, another respondent spoke of the difference between tolerance and genuine acceptance or support. When asked about how he is treated by the Jews with whom he comes into contact, he replied with some bitterness:

> I get tolerated. I don't get honoured. I don't get respected. I get tolerated. In a progressive, "Oh, some of my best friends are Jews," kind of way.

This relates to a key distinction revealed in my data regarding reactions of the Jewish community towards gay Jews in its midst. This is the distinction between casual or informal acceptance on the one hand, and official public recognition on the other. In casual encounters, as described above, gay Jews may be met with indifference, denial or exaggerated politeness regarding their sexual

orientation. When the question of public acknowledgment and recognition of gay Jews in a Jewish organizational or institutional context arises, however, Jews often exhibit resistance. This point is illustrated by a respondent who complained:

> It's fine on a personal level. But I don't want to be a second-class citizen. I want to have a public wedding. And I want to have an office in the Lipa Green Building [the Headquarters of Toronto's Jewish communal services administration]. And I don't want to be ... "shh, shh, quiet!" The day that I start bringing a boyfriend home, that's going to be an interesting thing. The day that I start demanding a marriage certificate from my Jewish leadership and the ability to adopt ... and to have what I call a normal life, a fulfilled life ... that's when people start, "Oh, you're asking a bit too much. We'll allow [you] to do whatever you want behind closed doors, but to see two men under a *chupah* [marriage canopy] at a major synagogue ... I don't think we could."

Just as racism or anti-Semitism is often exhibited in subtle, less overt ways in Canadian society today, anti-gay attitudes also manifest themselves in more subtle ways. Issues of public recognition, such as openly supported and advertised Jewish communal organizations for gay Jews or celebrations of life-cycle events at synagogues, remain very controversial issues in Toronto, among other places.

Feelings of Marginalization

One respondent recounted a personal story that illustrates well the extent to which gay Jews can feel marginalized from the greater Jewish community. As an adult, this respondent, who was always comfortable with his gay identity, began to feel more comfortable with his Jewish identity and desired to seek ways to integrate the two identities. He went to gay bookstores and gay archives and was unsuccessful in finding any publications that concerned Jews. He then turned

to the Jewish Public Library of Toronto. After finding a number of references to gay issues in the periodical indexes, he sought the materials on the shelves:

> But I would go through, and it was uncanny, they would have ... a whole run, and maybe there were two that I'm looking for [and they] would be missing. Without exception, everything I was looking [for], it didn't have, but they had everything else. It was like someone had gone through and thrown out anything that had gay references in it. It was very weird.

When the respondent inquired at the staff desk of the library he was told, "Oh no, no, no ... we do not have anything. The rabbi won't allow it." Another librarian added:

> There's a backroom office downstairs, and one of the staff members has a file folders with articles that they keep that have ... gay stuff in it, but it's ... secret, nobody's allowed to know about it.

He was granted permission to look at these "secret" files, but was quite disappointed at the small quantity of information that they contained. He had these poignant comments to describe his situation:

> I was just overwhelmed. I felt so alienated and so unwanted and so invisible that I was just not included. It was very difficult because I hadn't looked to the Jewish community for anything at all in my whole life, and so, finally I thought, Okay now I need to, and I wasn't wanted. I was totally shut out. I just felt ... really ... depressed, like I've been run over or something.

Along with these feelings of marginalization are feelings of hurt. One traditional Jew described an event where a Holocaust survivor had come to speak to a Jewish group. The conversation that followed her talk turned somehow to the issue of two gay Jewish Montrealers who had recently had a Jewish wedding. Isaac recounted the event:

> And this woman who was talking to [the audience] about tolerance and about respect came out with the most disgusting things to say

> about these [gay] guys. At one point she turned around and said people like that should be killed. And I couldn't confront her. She has all that clout as a survivor and it wasn't my place. But I was so hurt. I was so, so hurt. I quit the movement after that.

Institutional Homophobia

My data provide a number of specific examples of actions by Jewish institutions that respondents perceived as stemming from homophobia. These are strong examples of incidents that have caused respondents to feel further alienated and marginalized from the greater Jewish community.

A respondent claimed he was rejected admission to the Jewish Theological Seminary (the rabbinical training institution of the Conservative Jewish Movement) because he was publicly known as gay. He also described a situation where a photograph of him marching in Toronto's Gay Pride parade was essentially cause for his dismissal as a Jewish educator:

> I hate the fact that I had to go through what I had to go through with the community that I served and worked with and loved for many years, and to have been kicked out for one picture in a newspaper. Calls were made back and forth between the local office in Toronto and the New York office, the central office. I'm uninvited to be a guest at conventions and programs of that movement. From being completely in the middle of all of it, I had nothing left to do with that particular movement. It's very sad, I miss it. It was a very important part of my life as a Jewish educator. I felt kind of exiled by that experience.

A respondent described another situation where certain individuals were refused conversion to Judaism at the last moment after going through the year-long process of study:

> I've since been involved with some friends of mine who are in the process of converting into the Conservative movement and have been

> thrown out of the conversion process at various stages with no real *Halachic* [Jewish legal] basis. It's a nightmare. Rabbis were not only not saying anything, but supporting their colleagues; running away from even being seen with these people because their colleagues might see them. It's horrific. And I totally despair.

Another respondent recounted an incident in the early 1980s when the gay Jewish organization he belonged to, *Chutzpah*, first approached the downtown Toronto Jewish Community Centre for space for its events. He explained that the community centre:

> ... was very reluctant to deal with us. They didn't want us to be there, or have anything to do with us. We wanted to use one of their facilities, one of their rooms. Why not? That's what they're there for. And they gave us a hard time. First [they] said it wasn't possible, we'd have to pay them a lot of money ... it was quite clear they gave us a frosty reception. They didn't want us there. But we persisted. And we more or less said if they [weren't] forthcoming, we would take further action. So they relented and they allowed us to rent one of their facilities, one of their rooms.

Examples of perceived homophobia even included incidents involving the Reform movement, a liberal Jewish denomination. A respondent reported that he attempted to arrange for a prominent gay Jewish speaker to come to a Reform temple in Toronto. Despite the fact that the gay Jewish speaker was himself an ordained Reform rabbi, my respondent, Andy, reported that the Reform rabbi of Toronto "was very, very frosty; very cold. Just really didn't want us to be there; he didn't want to deal with us." Another respondent reported that a Reform rabbi in Toronto conveyed a clear message to his assistant rabbi (a lesbian) that she will lose her job if she makes her sexual orientation public knowledge.

While the following example is not a direct action taken by a Jewish institution, several respondents spoke with great bitterness about what they

perceived to be homophobic sermons given by Conservative congregational rabbis from the pulpit on the occasion of the Jewish High Holidays. One respondent said that he was stunned to hear such public derogatory remarks about gay men and lesbians from his rabbi:

> He categorized all of the horrible things that were happening in the world. And he went into child abuse and pornography and drug addiction and lo and behold homosexuality got lumped into that.

The respondent went on to explain that of the 2000 people in the congregation at that time, "there must be at least one hundred gay people." He asserted that "[the rabbi] insulted a lot of people with that sermon," and that he "was very disappointed that the board of that synagogue would consider it acceptable that this kind of sermon be given." Another respondent recounted similar feelings about his Conservative rabbi's Yom Kippur sermon:

> In a nutshell, the rabbi made the *kol nidrei* night sermon, one of the most important nights of the Jewish year. In his sermon he focused on sexual ethics. And ... he made serious derogatory words towards gays in this speech. When it came to gays, the only image that he could come up with was, "Why do they have to march down Yonge street?" And the face he had was ... such a disgust on his face. He should know better. Here's a man who's persecuted by the Nazis and probably was persecuted along with homosexuals in the Holocaust. And it just didn't faze him. I've never been back to that synagogue since. My father has never had me sitting next to him for *kol nidrei* since. And I'm sure that hurts him.

Internalized Homophobia

The relevant literature on the experiences of gay and lesbian Jews makes several references to the phenomenon of internalized homophobia (guilt or shame about being gay) (Duberman, 1991: 14-15; Raphael, 1996: 84; Schuman, 1989:

16). The phenomenon has been considered important enough by social scientists to monitor that Wagner et al. (1994) developed an internalized homophobia measurement scale.

Some shame about being gay did surface in the reflections of my respondents. Whether the cause of this shame stems from matters of personal psychology, of general societal opposition to homosexuality, of Jewish community opposition to homosexuality, of a combination of these factors or of other factors, is certainly beyond the scope of what my data can provide. The full range of data gathered does lead, however, to the intuitive suggestion that at least part of the cause does lie in the opposition to homosexuality, and gay causes in general, on the part of the Jewish community.

A possible example of this feeling of shame or guilt came from one respondent, who demonstrated more concern about the well-being of his family members than of himself. He felt he needed to protect them at the expense of his own self-expression and peace of mind:

> It was very difficult for me to be closeted, and it caused compounding problems for me, but I thought, especially in the younger years, the teenage years ... I didn't want my brother to be known as the brother of a fag, and have to put up with the social stigma that goes along with that. That I didn't think was fair to him either. [My mother is] the first of ten kids and she has three of her own. Life was very difficult for her ... and I thought that the added burden of, "Hey, this one's gay!" and not knowing how to deal with it, would have probably put her over the edge ... I felt that would break her heart ... [and] I felt it would impact on her ability to work.

In a later chapter on inter-ethnic partnering a respondent reiterates that he feels some guilt about being gay. As will be shown in that chapter, this type of feeling can have an important influence on one's choice of ethnic partner.

Homophobia as Cause for Mental Health Problems

Some respondents reported that the negative reactions they have received in the Jewish community have been a detriment to their mental health. Depression, loneliness, anger and the need to seek psychiatric therapy were mentioned as challenges respondents faced in trying to come to terms with their homosexuality and in trying to find a comfortable place in the Jewish community. The literature corroborates this idea that perceived homophobia can have adverse effects on mental health. Kulkin et al. (2000: 2) reported that suicide and suicidal thoughts are more common among gay and lesbian youth than among heterosexual youth. One respondent claimed he was not surprised that *Keshet Shalom*, the now defunct gay Jewish congregation of Toronto, was unable to be successful. He claimed it was "full of wounded souls who were depressed, angry and irritable." Another respondent, who spoke bitterly about the unsympathetic attitudes towards homosexuality of a certain Orthodox rabbi, poignantly asserted:

> The problem with Orthodox Judaism ... is that their eyes are so focused towards heaven that they don't see what's on the ground. [The Rabbi's] eyes are so focused on his ideas about what God thinks that he doesn't understand that he's hurting people. Has he seen the stats on teenage suicide among queer youth? If he did, would he be able to bring a connection to homophobia and understand that homophobia by religious [people] is contributing to stress among gay youth, to the point that it leads some to suicide? Would he be able to make that connection? I do not believe that he would. And ... I have a real problem with that.

This type of psychological damage, which respondents feel are being inflicted upon them by the Jewish community, is an important phenomenon that

will be addressed in later sections dealing with community implications of the research.

Some Degree of Acceptance

In addition to the numerous examples of negative reactions gay Jews reported receiving from the Jewish community, respondents also reported – albeit to a lesser extent – receiving positive reactions from the community. A number of respondents reported little or no problem in terms of homophobia from the Jewish community. What type of reaction one gets from Jews, of course, is also a function of what types of Jews one tends to come into contact with. It is instructive to observe that in the majority of cases it is the more secular Jews and Jews less directly involved with Jewish organizations and institutions (especially religious) who report that they have received positive responses from the community. My data suggest that younger Jews and Jews who live in the downtown core tend to be significantly more liberal in their attitudes.

Despite one respondent's decision to stay in the closet in his Orthodox synagogue, he reported that in general, "I have had nothing but positive experiences." In contrast to a previous respondent's painful experiences as a Jewish educator, this respondent went on to describe his positive experiences in the Jewish day camp system:

> ... it didn't hinder me at the camp career-wise. At [one Jewish camp] I ended up being unit head. And at [another Jewish camp] I ended up being assistant director, which is one of the senior positions.

A traditionally minded Jew in his forties insisted:

> I live right in the Jewish community, I don't know ... I don't have a problem with it. I'm surrounded by a whole building full of Jewish people here in this office, and I don't think that I have ever been treated poorly when it comes to gay issues.

Of course one must consider that it is possible that this respondent is receiving only a surface acceptance from the Jewish community.

Younger respondents (teens, twenties and early thirties), in particular, often reported that their peers were very supportive when they came out of the closet. Isaac described his pleasurable experience with friends his own age:

> I immediately called all my best friends and had them come over and we had a party [laughs]. It was a coming out party and they were fabulously wonderful. Many of them had said to me that "We were going to tell you if you hadn't told us."

Norman, a respondent in his thirties, reiterated that the younger Jews have no problem with his sexual orientation. He commented that "The older generation is still uncomfortable with it, but ultimately they come around. I think it is a very accepting community."

Isolated examples of sympathetic Orthodox voices were provided from respondents as well. One respondent who was struggling with his Orthodox inclinations and his gay identity approached a Lubavitch rabbi for guidance. The respondent reported that rather than shun him for his gay identity he responded with sympathy, saying that:

> There had to be some way to resolve this conflict within the Halachah [Jewish Law] without having to step outside the bounds of Judaism. We can work on it. We'll work together. There's got to be a way to do this.

A secular Jew in his early fifties recounted a story where an Orthodox colleague remarked to him that a second male colleague is romantically interested in my respondent:

> It was a meeting at the planning department ... and the planner was being cooperative; a very attractive young man. And we get out of the meeting, and the [Orthodox] guy says, "He likes you, he likes you." And I said, "Yeah, well, we're colleagues." And he says, "No, no, no, that's not what I mean, he likes you!" [laughs]. This is an Orthodox Jew [laughs]. And I said, "Oh, well, he's married and has kids." He says, "Oh ... " as if to say, "that's too bad." It was very funny. That was his way of saying, "I know and it's okay." And it was very nice to know.

It must be noted that what makes the above incidents noteworthy is that, because of the standard Orthodox view of homosexuality, as discussed in the introductory chapter, these reactions appear to be the exceptions to the rule.

Jewish Organizational Reaction: A Mixed Response

As was outlined in the previous chapter, since the 1970s gay and lesbian Jews have developed their own religious and social organizations to try to counter their lack of acceptance in the Jewish community. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the mainstream Jewish community has offered limited financial or emotional support to these groups. As mentioned, this is likely one of the contributing factors to the decline and ultimate demise of some of these groups.

In the 1990s, the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto began to facilitate two support groups, one for parents of gay and lesbian Jews and the other for gay and lesbian Jewish youth. In the year 2000, for the first time, the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto formally began to sponsor a social group for gay

and lesbian Jewish students and young adults based at the University of Toronto. These somewhat recent developments demonstrate a new degree of organizational support for gay and lesbian Jews.

Despite these, many gay Jews still feel alienated from the Jewish community. Why is this the case? My data suggest that many gay and lesbian Jews who could potentially be interested do not know about these groups. The community social worker who facilitates the two support groups reported, for example, that some Jewish schools do not allow any publicity of these groups due to their sensitive nature. The one social group that does currently exist is not well publicized outside the university community and is geared towards "young adults" aged eighteen to thirty-five. Numerous respondents who are older than thirty-five complained about the absence of any gay Jewish programming geared to their age group in the city. While Toronto can boast more services for gay Jews than any city in Canada, there is room for a more wide-ranging gay Jewish infrastructure in the city.

Jewish Liberalism

Jews in America have historically held more liberal attitudes on social issues and embraced more liberal causes than non-Jews (Liebman, 1979: 3-8). Recent research (Cohen and Liebman, 1997; Weinfeld, 2001: 254-256) illustrated that, in comparison to non-Jews, Jews in America are more likely to self-identify as "Liberals" or "Democrats," offer more support for civil liberties, place more importance on the separation of Church and State and offer more support for

government spending for social issues. With these types of characteristics, one would reasonably expect liberal attitudes among the Jewish community towards homosexuality. How is it that for the most part my findings illustrate quite conservative views and behaviours on the issue?

Firstly, the vast amount of research that has been done on Jewish liberalism has concerned the Jews of the United States. Little research has been conducted on the Canadian situation[10]. Research has shown that Canadian Jews are more "Jewish" than American Jews. Shaffir and Weinfeld (1981: 13) report that Canadian Jews:

> ... speak more Yiddish, provide their children with more intensive Jewish education, make higher per capita contributions and relatively more visits to Israel, are more likely to be Orthodox and less likely to be Reform, and have lower rates of intermarriage.

Brodbar-Nemzer et al. (1993: 43) corroborated this claim that Canadian Jews are more traditional. They reported that based on 1990 survey data 19 per cent of Canadian Jews identify as Orthodox, while only 9 per cent of American Jews do so; 43 per cent of American Jews identify as Reform, while only 11 per cent of Canadian Jews do so. They also reported that on a variety of Jewish ritual behavioural items (i.e. lighting Sabbath candles, attending Passover seders) Canadian Jews consistently observe at a higher rate. While I am not aware of any data that compares Canadian Jewish attitudes to American Jewish attitudes on social issues (such as homosexuality), based on the above patterns it is reasonable

[10] One work on Canadian Jewish Liberalism was conducted by Jean Laponce (1993). This work concerned only Jewish electorate data, however.

to speculate that the relative conservatism among Canadian Jews does extend to their attitudes and reactions to gay Jews within their midst.[11]

Secondly, a significant difference exists between expressing theoretical support for civil liberties for gays and lesbians in general society through a survey instrument on the one hand, and embracing gay and lesbian Jews in real-life situations within the Jewish ethno-religious community on the other. Supporting civil rights in the public square does not necessarily translate to cultural or religious acceptance within a specific community. Orthodox rabbi Michael Broyde (1993: 74), for example, while strongly condemning homosexuality from the standpoint of Jewish morality, argues that "in the best interests of Judaism" it is recommended that Jews support basic civil rights for gays and lesbians in America. If an Orthodox rabbi supports civil rights for gays and lesbians, it is not surprising that more liberal Jews do as well. In fact, of the several reasons often cited to try to explain the phenomenon of Jewish liberalism (Cohen and Liebman, 1997: 409; Weinfeld, 2001: 256), one of the more favoured explanations of scholars is the argument that Jews behave in such a way that will protect Jewish minority group interests. Fostering an environment where civil liberties are granted to minority groups is beneficial to Jews. By the same token, it could be argued that disapproving of homosexuality within the Jewish community is also beneficial to the Jewish community as a way of trying to promote higher rates of Jewish procreation and thus "Jewish continuity."

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[11] Within Canada there is some variation between major cities. We know for example that in general the Jewish populations of Montreal and Toronto are more traditional than the Jewish population of Vancouver (Davids, 1998: 212-214).

It must be kept in mind that the sample size in this study is small and non-random. Future research would be useful to further explore this potential discrepancy between the finding that Jews hold liberal attitudes compared to non-Jews and my finding that to a large extent Jews hold conservative views of homosexuality.

Jewish Community in Comparative Context

An interesting collection of comments were gathered when respondents were asked to compare reactions they receive from Jews to reactions they receive from non-Jews. Roughly the same amount of respondents held the opinion that Jews are more accepting of homosexuality as those who held the opinion that Jews are less accepting of homosexuality. The majority of respondents, however, reported that they have experienced no tangible differences in the reactions from these two groups. As Jon, a secular respondent in his fifties, put it:

> I don't think there's a huge difference, to be honest with you. I think the prejudice and discrimination is dispersed pretty equally ... I have had no personal experiences that would single out any one particular sort of ethnic or religious group that is more homophobic ... than any other. I just think it's generally speaking not very good.

Another respondent also drew parallels between Jews and non-Jews:

> I would not hold the view that the Jewish community is any more homophobic than the population at large. I think if you start segmenting it into religious groups, I'd say that probably the Orthodox community is more homophobic. I don't know if that's so much different than any other organization which is much more strongly religious or strongly observant, like the right-wing Christian, for example.

There were a number of respondents who expressed the view that, compared to non-Jews, they find the Jewish community more accepting of gay men. Despite some uncomfortable incidents in the Jewish community, one respondent referred to the above idea of Jews having a tradition of liberalism:

> The Jews are more open, they understand visible minorities, it's another minority. They're a religion, but also an ethnic group. There's a religion side which condemns homosexuality, but they're also a social group, which tends to be more liberal.

Kyle explained his perception of more tolerance among Jews by referring to the fact that Jews tend to have higher educational levels than other ethno-religious groups in Canada. Interestingly, he saw a parallel between Jews and Chinese in this regard:

> At least most Jews are educated. That makes already a huge difference, because at least they have some information to take to the table, whereas when you are dealing with other families that are more working-class or don't have the benefit of intellectual discourse that often happens in Jewish homes ... That environment [of intellectual discourse] doesn't happen in a lot of other homes. I think it happens in Chinese homes too a lot. It seems that all my Chinese friends have very similar family experiences. I think there is a link there.

An orthodox respondent made the interesting comment that, while there is disapproval in the Jewish Orthodox community to homosexuality, he finds a more moderate tone among Jews:

> An extremely religious non-Jew will have a really bad reaction, an extremely religious Jew might have a mild reaction. If you start doing comparisons and try to draw down the lines ... where's the line between absolute hatred or mild disapproval? Where do you draw the line? I would say that more of the Jewish community is on the line of understanding minority issues. You're not as likely to hit hate in the Jewish community as you are in other communities.

On the other hand there were respondents who felt that Jews were less accepting of gay men than non-Jews. Citing the same reason as a respondent above – high levels of education – Joshua explained that in his experience people who are highly educated and intelligent tend to be more stubborn to change their views:

> I'm not sure if it's a perfect theory ... but people who are intellectual, when they come upon a point of view and they've established that as their point of view, breaking it is very hard. People decide ... there's something wrong with being gay. I think that when they find out about their kids, that that's a really hard thing to ... move on, because I think that intelligent people hold their prejudices much deeper than non-intelligent people.

Another reason cited by this respondent for added Jewish resistance to homosexuality is the perceived importance that Jewish people place on the traditional family and family cohesion. Chapter 3 will elaborate on this idea of the possible distinctiveness of Jewish families.

Parallels with other Ethnic Minority Communities

As can be seen, my respondents had a range of opinions on the question of comparing the reactions of Jews and non-Jews to gay men. I turn now from the insights of my respondents on this question to references to other ethnic minority group experiences found in the literature. As discussed briefly in the introductory chapter, feelings of alienation and marginalization from one's ethnic group are certainly not exclusive to gay Jews. Gays and lesbians of other ethnic groups (Blacks, Latinos, Asians, etc.) also report significant challenges in integrating

their gay and ethnic identity. Thus, many parallels can be observed between gay Jewish experiences and other ethnic minority gay experiences.

Garcia (1998: 32-33) and Morales (1990: 232-234) described some of the difficulties faced by the Latino gay man due to the great emphasis placed on the nuclear family and religion (Catholicism) in Latin American culture. Interestingly, there are few words in Spanish for "lesbian" and "gay" that are not derogatory. Due to strong resistance to homosexuality in the community, there is much pressure on the Latino gay man to remain closeted. Declaring one's homosexuality is sometimes seen as an act of treason against one's culture and one's family. Espin (1987: 44-48) illustrated that lesbians in Cuba perceive significant disapproval from the general Cuban society.

With few public gay black role models, strong pressure to remain closeted exists in the African-American community as well. Icard (1986) was one of the first of several scholars to discuss the difficulties of being gay in black culture. Hostility and antagonism towards gays and lesbians is a common feature of this community, which sometimes views homosexuality as a corrupt white influence (Adams Jr. and Kimmel, 1997: 133). Same-sex relationships are often seen as a threat to the propagation of the race (Green, 1997a: 225). Loiacano (1989: 24) and Greene (1998: 44) reported that because of strong family and community bonds, many African-Americans are reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to fellow African-Americans for fear of jeopardizing these connections and support, which often function as important buffers against the racism of the dominant culture.

The literature described the Asian-American community as similarly homophobic (Chan, 1989: 18-19). Asian culture typically expects obedience and conformity to the wishes of the parents. The maintenance of outward appearance of "proper" gender roles is paramount. In a collective society, the concept of "face" dominates over individual desires. A declaration of homosexuality is a rejection of these roles and can be seen as selfish and disrespectful. Sexuality is often a taboo subject (Han, 2000: 209). The existence of gay Asian-American men is often denied and, similar to the black community, homosexuality is often seen as a white, Western phenomenon (Nakajima et al, 1996). As one respondent explained in Chan's (1989: 19) study, "I am sure my parents would reject me. There is no frame of reference to understand homosexuality in Asian-American culture."

Interestingly, the gay man or lesbian need not be a member of a visible ethnic minority group to experience the challenges described above. Research on "whites"' often mistakenly treats this group as if it comprises one monolithic ethno-religious culture. This ignores the variability of the gay white man or white lesbian who may be Greek Orthodox, Italian (Catholic) or Portuguese (Catholic), Russian or Serbian Orthodox, Armenian, etc.

Fygetakis (1997: 165) described, for example, the difficulty of being a Greek lesbian in America. Greek Orthodoxy maintains a very negative view of homosexuality. It is considered a "grave sin" that "breeds promiscuity" and "undermines the traditional nuclear family." Traditional Greek culture also maintains rigid family and gender roles.

Cerbonne (1997: 121) described the similar challenges that Italian-American gay men face. Italian men often live under the stereotype that their role is to be "Latin lovers, dark and suave romancers of women." There is no room for same-sex loving in this paradigm. The Roman Catholic environment that surrounds most Italian men exhibits significant resistance to homosexuality..

Jewish Particularities

As the above data illustrate, the experiences of gay Jews within their own ethnic community are similar in many regards to the experiences of other ethnic minority gay men in their communities. These communities seem to share conservative views that favour a "traditional family model" and strict gender roles, leaving little room for public homosexual expression.

While these strong parallels exist, my research did suggest that there are certain factors that may be distinctive to the Jewish experience. One factor that stands out in the Jewish context is the strong emphasis put on ethnic continuity. This issue was raised by a large number of respondents, especially among parents of gay Jewish men. In the face of perceived widespread assimilation and intermarriage, more so than other ethnic communities – and certainly more so than white Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities – strategies to promote "continuity" have become one of the central priorities of the Jewish ethnic polity. My data suggest that the mainstream Jewish perception that gay Jewish men do not contribute to Jewish continuity – meaning they do not have children – is one of the key sources of anti-gay attitudes in the Jewish community. The fact that this

perception that gay men will not have children is not entirely accurate, as will be seen in a later chapter, does not alter the result. While it is true that there are references in the literature to a similar concern with "continuity" operating in the black community (Greene 1997a: 225), in the face of the recent events of the Holocaust and the fact that Jews, as a non-visible minority, are more susceptible to assimilation into mainstream society, I suggest that this obsession with ethnic survival is stronger in the Jewish community. Respondents reported that they perceive the negative reactions towards them as stemming from the fear that gay Jewish men are betraying this deeply cherished value of Judaism to actively contribute to "Jewish continuity." This phenomenon can be exacerbated by the fact that many Jews have family members who perished in the Holocaust. Jack explained that he feels "ousted from the community" because his behaviour is a "threat to community values." He expressed the view that:

> The underlying issue is that Judaism is a very community and group-oriented religion. Homosexuality brings in the element of self-gratification; my own joy before my community's joy. And I think ... that's one of the reasons why it makes some conservative Jews and even some liberal Jews [shudder] ... because it breaks the whole rule of, "you do what you are doing for the community."

One respondent complained about what he considered narrow attitudes of the Jews with whom he comes into contact regarding his responsibility towards the community:

> If it doesn't advance the Jewish cause, per se, in a real way, then there's no real interest to invest or investigate. And that's a very tough thing to take.

Respondents made other general comments regarding the distinctiveness of being gay in the Jewish context. Lawrence remarked that "There's much more of

a gossip [network] working within the Jewish community, because people are so connected." For this reason it is more difficult to maintain anonymity and to keep secret one's sexual orientation in the Jewish community. This observation has validity. We know that Jews maintain very high levels of interaction and friendship patterns with fellow Jews, as compared to friendship patterns between other ethnic groups (Weinfeld, 2001: 169).

Another reason why it may be difficult to maintain anonymity in the Jewish context was cited by Jon. Both Jews and gays are highly concentrated in Canada's urban centres. Gay men who live in rural areas often come to Toronto as a means to distance themselves, physically and emotionally, from their families so that they can construct a new identity. Jews are more likely to be in the larger cities to start with. This, combined with the high levels of Jewish social networks mentioned above (even between large cities like Montreal and Toronto), makes it more difficult for Jews to gain anonymity and to get a fresh start to construct a new identity. Jews are more geographically concentrated than any other ethnic group in Canada: Approximately 75 percent of Jews in Canada live in Montreal or Toronto. Canadian Jews are also more geographically concentrated than American Jews (Shaffir and Weinfeld, 1981: 12-13; Weinfeld, 2001: 166).

In another vein, one respondent offered the opinion that while he does not feel that there is any more homophobia in the Jewish community than in general society, he resents it more coming from the Jews. He explained that a community that has had a long history of persecution should know better not to discriminate. A secular Jewish respondent in his twenties, Charles, reiterated this idea when he

said that given the Jewish experience as a minority community "I don't think [Jews are] as tolerant of other minorities as they should be." Of course, this argument is valid if comparison is made between Jews and white Anglo-Saxon Protestants; it does not demonstrate any distinctiveness of the Jewish situation in comparison to other ethnic minority groups. As will be suggested in the chapter on reactions towards Jews in the gay community, it is not necessarily the case that groups who themselves are victims of prejudice and discrimination abstain from holding prejudiced attitudes towards other groups. The theme of the oppressed willing to oppress others is prominent in the literature (Dworkin, 1997: 83-84; Klepfisz, 1989: 52-53; Rofes, 1989: 201-202).

Effects on Jewish Identity

My data reveal that some gay Jews in Toronto feel quite comfortable within Jewish settings. Gay Jews are more likely to describe positive reactions from fellow Jews if those Jews with whom they interact live in the downtown core of Toronto, are younger and are more secular. This being said, the predominant trend reported by respondents is the experience of alienation and marginalization from the community to some degree. Even those who are more secular (the majority) and interact with like-minded secular Jews often experience some form of negative attitude from their fellow Jews. While the Toronto Jewish community has some resources and programs for gay Jews, my data suggest they are not sufficient. Through specific examples of ignorance, prejudice, homophobia, heteronormativity, superficial surface acceptance and social and

religious exclusion of gay Jews on the part of the mainstream Jewish community, I have illustrated that gay Jews often feel unwelcome as full participants in Jewish institutions and Jewish community life. It would be reasonable to assert that in this type of resistant environment, where gay Jews feel excluded or exiled from their own community, it would be difficult for gay Jews to embrace a positive Jewish identity. For those gay Jews who desire to be actively involved in organized Jewish life, there can be much bitterness and resentment towards the community for placing obstacles in their way. For those gay Jews who have never had a strong interest to be involved in Jewish life, the reactions of the Jewish community can be enough to push them outside of the Jewish community altogether.

Conclusion

Given that Jews in North America have historically held more liberal attitudes on social issues and embraced more liberal causes than non-Jews, it would be reasonable to expect Jews to "fight for the underdog" and warmly embrace the gay Jews in their midst. This chapter has illustrated that many gay Jews are not experiencing this warm embrace within their community. While Jews should perhaps "know better" as long-time victims of discrimination themselves, my data suggest that gay Jewish men experience significant amounts of anti-gay attitudes and behaviour from fellow Jews. Possible reasons for this discrepancy between the claim that Jews are particularly liberal and the findings of this chapter have been put forward. The Canadian Jewish community is more

conservative than the American Jewish community, and offering theoretical support for civil rights of gays and lesbians does not necessarily translate into acceptance within a specific ethno-religious context. Further research is recommended to explore these themes.

Whether gay Jews experience quantitatively more or less homophobia than gay men of other ethnic minority communities is a question that is beyond the scope of this project to answer. What can be said is that there are strong parallels between gay Jewish experiences and the experiences of other ethnic minority gay men in North America such as blacks, Latinos, Asians, Greeks, Italians, etc. In a general sense, all these communities share conservative religious values that emphasize traditional gender roles, the primacy of the nuclear family structure and procreation. For these reasons it might be argued that gay Jews (in addition to other ethnic minority gay men) encounter more resistance in their ethnic community than do gay white Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

One might argue that because most Jews in North America are secular or only moderately observant, the characterization of conservative religious values is misplaced. I would argue that because Jewish culture is both a religious and ethnic system, even for those Jews who are more secular – the majority – the residue of religious tradition remains for many. The Jewish religious system thus influences Jewish ethnic sensibilities. I would argue that secular Protestants do not generally have this sense of religiously informed ethnic identity. In the case of other ethnic minority groups, such as Greeks, Italians and Latin Americans, for

example, the influence of Catholicism likely plays a similar role to that of Jewish religious tradition.

While I have drawn important parallels between the gay Jewish experience and other ethnic minority gay experiences, I have also suggested some unique Jewish particularities that place greater strains on gay Jews than other ethnic minority gay men. These include a) a strong emphasis on "Jewish continuity" reinforced by memories of the Holocaust and the fear of cultural assimilation and b) highly developed social and friendship networks coupled with high urban concentration and residential segregation in the Jewish community, all of which make anonymity and privacy more difficult.

By outlining the myriad of examples of anti-gay attitudes and behaviours found in the Jewish community of Toronto, this chapter has begun to illustrate why gay Jews have difficulty maintaining a meaningful Jewish identity and why they may separate themselves from organized Jewish life. Because the Jewish community often makes it difficult for the gay Jew to feel that he is able to fully integrate his gay and Jewish identities, there is a strong incentive – if not a requirement – for the gay Jew to go to some effort to try to construct a personal identity that will embrace these two parts of who he is. A subsequent chapter will explore more fully how gay Jews go about this construction by examining different strategies of identity negotiation.

Let us now turn to a discussion of the experiences of gay Jewish men within their own families.

Chapter 3

Jewish Family Reactions to Gay Jewish Men

This chapter works in tandem with the previous chapter to explore three distinct themes. Firstly, in light of the claim that Jews historically hold more liberal attitudes than non-Jews, this chapter will examine in some detail the reported experiences of gay Jews within their Jewish families (parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family). As was done in the previous chapter on Jewish community reactions, links will be made between these findings and the concept of Jewish liberalism. Secondly, the chapter will offer some speculations as to whether there may be some distinctive features of the reactions of Jewish families as compared to reactions of non-Jewish families. Finally, with the evidence from various reactions of Jewish families, the chapter will continue to address one of the key questions of this work, namely "What effect does homosexuality and the reactions this engenders have on the Jewish identity of the gay Jew?"

Experiences in Jewish Families

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are a number of non-academic works that offer a preliminary picture of the experiences of gay Jews within their community. These works also touch upon the challenges gay Jews face within their families. This chapter will bring these issues into focus. In considerable

detail, it will illustrate the many difficulties gay Jews face in gaining acceptance in their families. It will also illustrate that in a minority of cases Jewish families do offer full support from the outset, and with time, a number of other Jewish families temper their negative attitudes to offer some form of acceptance.

Stress in Coming Out to Family

Although they did not understand the full implications at the time, my respondents often reported an awareness in childhood or early adolescence that they felt different from other boys. With the coming of mid-adolescence, many respondents started to understand and acknowledge – to varying degrees – that they are gay. One of the most stressful and difficult issues involved in the realization that one is gay is the process of 'coming out' to others, particularly family. Because of their fears of rejection, many respondents described particular emotional strain in deciding if, when and how to come out of the closet to parents. Savin-Williams (2001: 32-33) reported that those who do come out to their parents usually come out first to a peer or sibling who is thought to be safer. One of my respondents, a secular Jew in his teens, exhibited much reluctance in coming out to his parents. When I asked him about whether he was planning to, he replied:

> No, not now. I don't know when or if. Why do they have to know? My mother would flip! She might be mad with me.

While it is difficult to come out to parents, respondents also reported it can be very emotionally draining living a closeted life with the elaborate webs of

deceit that this often involves. An Orthodox respondent described the high levels of stress growing up in an Orthodox family with clear expectations that he would marry a woman and raise a family. He admitted, "I was beside myself! I had to say something. They kept trying to set me up!"

Some respondents told dramatic stories of the day their parents found out they were gay. The drama indicates the difficulty of the phenomenon. A secular Jew in his thirties recounted a story where a former vindictive boyfriend telephoned the respondent's family to out him to his family against his will:

> I came home at 2:30 in the morning from my friend's place, and all the lights were on in the house. And I remember seeing my brother's car, and my brother-in-law's; everybody was there. I remember coming in thinking, somebody had died, and I thought, geez, had it only been that good! My parents were up in their bedroom, and my brother and brother-in-law were in the basement. And my sister came into my room with me and lit up a cigarette. The first words that she said were "Daddy got a phone call tonight." And I immediately knew what happened; I mean I didn't know who it was, or the depth, or the content of what was said, but I knew, generally, what happened. And [it] was very much along the lines of my thought pattern of the time ... to immediately lie. It was one of my better ones that I'd come up with in terms of being on the spot. But I think it held its ground for one night.

A traditional Jew in his forties described the turmoil of coming out to parents in this way:

> [A] very, very, very horrifying thing for a kid to have to go through with his parents is to do this. I mean, the Jewish community should make this part easier, thank you very much.

A secular Jew in his thirties reported that coming out to each person "gouges you emotionally." He claims he was "weeping inside." He described how difficult it was to tell his family:

> I was not happy ... it was not a happy moment. It felt ... you know when you lose circulation in your leg and it feels all tingly? I felt like that all over, the whole time I was with [my mother]. I felt like throwing up. I was not happy. And I thought I'd feel better a couple of days later, and I didn't feel better a couple of days later. It was not easy.

Rejection

Respondents reported many instances of negative reactions from their parents when disclosing their sexual orientation. Different degrees of rejection were described. The majority of these were caused by ignorance or discomfort with homosexuality or disguised by the defense mechanism of denial. The experience of one respondent in his forties was especially poignant because the rejection he experienced was so severe that his parents cut him off emotionally and financially. He came out to his parents at age nineteen "with very, very disastrous results." The respondent reported that:

> ... the biggest mistake I ever made in my life was to tell my parents. My mother became absolutely hysterical. There were months and months and months of screaming. Hysterical behavior, suicide attempts which weren't really suicide attempts but they were very melodramatic. I was already living in [city] at the time as a student in university. And they had given me a series of post-dated cheques to pay for my residence. My September residence cheque came back NSF [not sufficient funds] and the dean of the residence called me into his office. That's how I found out they had really cut me off. I knew they were upset but I didn't think my mother meant it when she said you're not our son anymore, we're sitting *shiva* [Jewish mourning ritual when someone dies] for you. It's over. We never want to see you again.

In an ironic twist, the respondent described how this strong rejection from his parents was beneficial to him in some ways:

> I must tell you that there's no gift your parents can give you better than rejection. It turned me into a real over achiever. I've come to realize that all of the decisions that I made, from the moment they cut me off to very recently, were designed to prove myself to them. So I became very, very focused. I was a really top student. I [became very successful in my career].
>
> I'm never going to get married. I'm never going to give them children. I'm never going to be straight. And they're never going to get over it. So I've stopped trying to please them and now I please me. So there's a relationship there but it's very, very strained. It's superficial. It's infrequent. In a sense I sat *shiva* for them. I had to mourn whatever benefits you get from having parents. My mom is not a mother at all. No mother could really love a child and behave the way she has. In my view I'm an orphan, I don't have parents.

While most stories were not so extreme in the levels of rejection Jewish parents exhibit towards their gay sons, as will be seen, negative responses were quite common features of the data collected.

Ignorance

When parents know very little about what it means to be gay, basing their views on inaccurate stereotypes, for example, it will often make it more difficult for them to adjust to the news about their gay son (Savin-Williams, 2001: 50). One father in his early fifties who is conservative about his views on homosexuality spoke candidly about his difficulties:

> I found it difficult to deal with ... How am I going to tell friends? It was totally foreign to me. I'd known some gay people, but never anybody close to my family. [My interests] were always sort of the macho thing, being involved in sports, athletics ... and I really knew very little about the gay world.

One respondent had strong complaints about the ignorance of his mother when he came out to her:

> One thing she said to me when I told her was ... "I don't understand it. I'm so straight, and your father, he's so straight. How could you be gay?" Which I thought was an asinine question, because she's an educated woman.

A secular Jewish respondent in his twenties recounted how difficult it was for him to finally acknowledge that he was gay and join a gay-support group. When he came out to his parents, he was surprised at their strong reaction, which was full of negative stereotypes:

> They said a lot of crazy stuff. They got really concerned. They tried to convince [me] that I was making the wrong choice. And they thought that [the support group] was a cult that had been converting me into being gay. They kept trying to convince me. It all happened one night I crashed at their place, and it was fairly heated I guess. And lots of tears and very loud. I think they now understand it better but they really thought I was just making a choice. And that I wouldn't have a life long partner. They thought I wouldn't have a good job. What would everyone else think? I think they believed a lot of the stereotypes that are out there that you would lead this just groundless kind of life.

Denial

One of the ways people try to cope with information that they do not want to hear is to deny that it is true. My respondents reported several examples of this on the part of their parents. One respondent reported that his Orthodox parents would not accept the fact that he was gay when he told them. They told him that he must have talked himself into it. They instructed him that he is under-estimating himself and that he could get married if he tried harder. The most hurtful statement of denial his parents delivered was that he was simply "not spiritual enough" to overcome this condition.

Another Orthodox respondent described the negative reaction of his mother in this way:

> That was a difficult reaction. She had a very negative reaction. Her hope was that there was something that I was mistaken about, that this wasn't the only option open to me. Perhaps it was a phase or perhaps it was a mistake, or a desire for attention or something like that. And that maybe with counselling or the like, I would be comfortable in relationships with women.

One respondent who came out to his parents in his mid-twenties described the way his mother insisted that he could not know for sure that he was gay:

> I took the remote control, and I pressed the off button, and I said, "I have something to say." And I just said it. My father takes a deep breath and says, "Just a minute, let me go get a drink." And he goes to get his Schnapps, which is my father's way of dealing with reality. And it's very interesting ... my mother's first reaction was, quote unquote, "Are you sure? How do you know?" "But you've never dated girls, how do you know? We know you've never been with girls, what about this girl, what about that girl, she was your best friend ... "

The same respondent described in an animated fashion how, two years after he came out to his mother she was still in denial that he had actually acted on his homosexual inclinations:

> ... this was more of a nightmare than anything. I found myself in a car with my mother driving back from Montreal to Toronto, alone with her. So we're in this enclosed environment, I have nowhere to run. And she's very manipulative, my mother. And I've never talked about sexual activity with my mother in my entire life. I'm in this situation, and my mother says, "Can I ask you a question?" So I know when I hear the 'can I ask you a question?' Run! No time to answer. But it was getting better by that time, I said to her "you can ask me a question if you're ready for the answer." And she lied, and said, "Sure, sure!" "Have you ever slept with a man before?" So I said, "Yeah, sure." "Oh my God!" Two years later, when she finds out I've actually had a sexual encounter with another man, this was like she's about to kill herself. Like it's all theoretical, but when it becomes reality ... [gasping sound] Oh my, she starts bawling, and

> I'm stuck in the car with her on the 401 at one hundred kilometres per hour, going by Kingston or something ...

According to the social worker who facilitates support groups for parents of gay Jews, a good litmus test for how parent are coping with the news of a gay son is to examine how they respond to questions about their son or to homophobic jokes. A father in his fifties admitted that he was not comfortable confronting homophobia:

> Sometimes I felt when people would talk about gay things, [people] that didn't know that [my son] was gay ... I wouldn't speak up, I would just sort of let it pass. They'd say something negative about gays, and I thought ... "should I say anything?" Better just not to be confrontational, to just sit back ... or sometimes I hear gay jokes that are off-colour, I might make a gay joke ...

This father's denial is again apparent when he is asked specifically about his gay son:

> I don't respond ... I'll say, "I've got three kids." And they say, "Oh, when's he going to get married." "Well, when the time comes." I just pass over it ... I'm not going to get into a whole issue about talking about it. I'll [let it] pass.

My data suggest that it is easier for parents to deny that the son is gay if the son is not involved in a relationship. As illustrated above, for some parents without any display of or reference to "gay behaviour" the issue is still quite theoretical. A traditionally minded Jew in his forties in a happy same-sex relationship, explained:

> I don't know if it's considered a different standard but I think because I didn't have a partner until a couple of years ago it was sort of like out of sight out of mind and now that I have a partner they can't deal with it.

Another reported a similar sentiment:

> I haven't really been in a serious, long-term relationship where we'd have to confront these issues, so it's something that can just kind of sit and simmer on the sidelines, in that sense ... that issue hasn't been forced.

For some parents, however, even when their sons are dating other men they can remain in denial about their sons' sexual orientation. One father had this to say about a man his son was dating:

> I didn't consider it as a girlfriend. I just didn't deal with it. Certain things I just don't deal with. I don't want to think of him as going out on a date, and what he's going to do on the date ... I just leave that part and I don't deal with it.

This denial is likely due to the discomfort this father has with male same-sex relations. He admitted, "I'd be uncomfortable with him in a close personal relationship. I don't know how I'd handle it." Another father, while not necessarily in denial, shared this type of discomfort. He explained:

> Being a male, I don't know what it's like to be in the body of a homosexual. So to me it feels a little strange to see another male having a relationship with my son. It still feels a little strange. I must admit [that] thinking about a [marriage ceremony] I feel a little awkward [as well].

Parents Go into the Closet

The social worker described the common pattern that once the gay son comes out of the closet to his parents, the parents often go into the closet because of embarrassment or shame. This pattern was evident in my interview data. As is evident in some of the quotations already provided in this section, parents often worry about "what their friends will think" or "how they will tell their extended

family." This need to keep the information hidden from others is another example of the lack of acceptance and support on the part of parents.

One respondent described how this need to keep his parents in the closet has been a "horrible" situation for him:

> I'm not out to a lot of the extended family because of my parents. Because my parents have not articulated it, but in a hundred different ways said, we are embarrassed about you in front of the family. So I'm protecting them. I know that there are people in the family that I could talk to with maturity and intelligence, and we'd become very close. You can't know about who I am unless you know about my gayness and about my gay struggles. And so it's made me distant from a lot of family that I feel very, very close with.

Another respondent also sacrificed his own relationship with his extended family to appease his mother's wishes:

> So [my family] didn't have any difficulty with it when I finally came out to them. Which I only did two years ago. Prior to that I kept my distance from the [extended] family ... out of respect for my mom. She didn't want them to know. She was very embarrassed, very ashamed.

Parents Causing Children to Feel Hurt and Angry

These various modes of rejection on the part of parents often have strong negative impacts on the emotional well-being of the children. On the subject of parents feeling a need to keep the information hidden from the rest of the family, one respondent described how strongly this has hurt him:

> The most hurtful thing my mother said to me, which was a real eye-opener, was, "Well, now that you've told your parents, don't tell anybody else." The Big Secret. And the reason why it's a really big eye-opener is that it's taken me twenty years to realize how selfish my parents are about their image in their community and their friends, as opposed to the happiness of their children.

During my interview with one respondent in his forties it was clear he desperately wanted his mother's support, but was not getting it:

> She hurts me. Instead of turning around and saying, "Son, I'm happy that you are in a relationship, I can go to my grave now knowing that you have a significant other and I'm contented and I know that he loves you and I know that you love him and I know that you relate well to each other and that you share things well together." She doesn't say that, and it bothers me, it pisses me off.

One respondent described his father's reaction to the news in this way:

> He said a few really hurtful things ... not about me per say but about people who are gay. And he found it really disgusting and words such as that. And I guess [he's] dealing with his own homophobia or whatever.

Another respondent recounted the anger he felt at his mother's reaction:

> One of the things my mother said when I came out to her was, she said, "I can't believe you've been dishonest with me." That pissed me off to no degree. That actually made me very angry. And I said to her, "Don't you ever say that. When did you ever ask me in an atmosphere where I felt safe enough to say something? When did you cultivate an environment where I would feel safe, that I could say something of that ilk, even?"

Reluctance to Tell Grandparents

Given the generational differences and the fact that grandparents are more likely to be immigrants to Canada, one might speculate that grandparents are more conservative in their values than are parents. My data lend only indirect support to this claim. Very few respondents "came out" to grandparents for fear of upsetting them. For this reason I have only limited data on the actual reactions of grandparents.

When I asked a respondent in his teens about coming out to his grandparents, he seemed disturbed by this notion: "Ew, yuck!" " I don't think they would like it!" Aaron explained why he decided not to tell his grandmother that he is gay:

> The other thing kind of sitting in the background is – and it's a difficult dynamic – is my grandmother. I have one grandparent left who's alive, my *bubbie* [grandmother], she's [very elderly]. And in fairly good health, thank God. But she's from, like, another world, literally; born and raised in Poland, and came over in a boat. And this is something that will make the rest of her life miserable. [She and I] have a very close relationship.

When I asked Aaron how he knows it will make his grandmother's life miserable, he responded:

> She talks about me getting married to a nice Jewish girl. She wouldn't be able to understand it, and it would be fairly devastating. So I've made the decision that it's not something I want to talk to her about. So that creates also some strains and tensions in terms of the ability to bring a date to a family function where she's going to be there, for example.

Kyle, a traditional Jew in his twenties, expressed similar sentiments about his grandparents:

> I just don't want to disappoint them, you know. It's one thing with my folks. They had to know. But I just really never got around to it [with my grandparents]. And my *bubbie* still doesn't know. And this is ten years later. We just never discussed it.

This reluctance to tell grandparents was shown on the part of the parents, as well. One respondent reported that he was offered to speak on a radio show about gay issues. He declined the offer because of his mother's discomfort with his grandparents hearing him. A mother in her fifties who is quite supportive of her teenage gay son told me that her parents do not know. She explained, "They

would be disappointed, heartbroken, I don't know what they would do. They're pretty traditional." When I challenged her by asking whether she is in the closet with her own parents, she replied:

> Oh, definitely, definitely. But it doesn't matter to me, at least. I don't care that my parents don't know. My parents are elderly. They've got their own problems. They only want *nachas* [pride and joy], right? So why am I going to tell them that Anthony is gay when I know it's not going to be *nachas* for them?

Clearly, this reluctance is interesting data in itself. It likely indicates that family members speculate that the grandparents will have negative views about their gay grandson. The one case where the data do provide actual evidence of a negative reaction from grandparents is in the case a respondent who did come out to his grandparents:

> And we kind of got into a discussion [about gay issues] and [my grandfather] said I think it's due to a hormonal imbalance. And we were talking, talking, talking and slowly I leaked it in that I had gay friends. And my grandmother was like, "Well you don't want to go down [to the gay area] too often because you don't want to be absorbed into their culture too fully." And I was like, "Well, actually," and I told them. And my grandparents were like, "Well you're not old enough. You might not be sure ... you never know." I mean that was that. That's how I came out to them.

When I asked this respondent how he felt about this reaction, he replied:

> I was upset. I was upset that they thought that I was lying to them or ... I have no idea what they thought. But I think that they had thought that I hadn't thought this through. And it hurt a lot.

Exclusion from Extended Family

A number of examples of negative reactions from extended family members can also be found in the interview data. A secular Jew reported that his extended family will not acknowledge his sexual orientation:

> I don't have a lot of relationship with my extended family, partly because I was gay and they wouldn't acknowledge it. Whereas other people were invited to family weddings or occasions with their date, I was always invited single, because they knew I was gay. They didn't want me to come with another man, so I would just never go to anything. I would never have any feelings with my extended family.

Another example of rejection of same-sex partners came from a respondent in his forties. He described a situation where he and his long time partner flew out of town to take care of the respondent's grandmother just before her death. When it came time to write the eulogy in the newspaper all the grandchildren were listed with their spouses, but the respondent was listed alone. He was angered by this lack of public recognition of his partner. He also recounted what happened just before the funeral:

> When [my uncle] went to see the rabbi and the rabbi started asking about the family members who should be mentioned at the funeral and how people fit in my uncle said they sort of looked at each other and they knew that they should say something about [my partner] and they chose not to. I guess they found it embarrassing. [My partner] no longer goes to events of that family.

A number of respondents spoke about the awkwardness and tension that exists with their extended family about the "unspoken topic." Many respondents have strong suspicions that their extended family knows they are gay, yet the family has taken the position of "let's not talk about it." One mother in her sixties remarked that in the case of her heterosexual daughter, the extended family shows

interest in whether she is dating anyone, but because of discomfort about the subject they never ask anything about her gay son. A respondent in his fifties complained about his experiences at get-togethers with his extended family:

> You've got to be an idiot not to really think I must be gay. They're not willing to bring that up, they're not going to say, "Are you?" to me. If in fact they said that, I'd say yes. I would certainly not lie. I think it would be very nice if it was really out in the open ... "He's gay. Bring your friend. Bring someone along, someone you really like." That would be great to happen. It would be beautiful.

Aaron spoke about the discomfort he feels with the heteronormative assumptions of his extended family, namely that he is looking for a woman to marry:

> The tough part is when the family members talk about, "Oh, and you'll be married, and you'll find a nice girl," or suggesting setting up a blind date. I think that's a difficult thing to have to brush off and say, "I'm too busy, maybe another time" or something like that. That's an awkward situation.

Probably more hurtful than heteronormativity are family members who make active homophobic comments. One mother in her sixties described how her heterosexual son has a lot of difficulty accepting her gay son. She reported that her heterosexual son has made some comments that made her very angry, such as referring to her gay son as "Auntie Justin" instead of "Uncle Justin" in front of the grandchildren.

Supportive Reactions from Families

While it is true that negative attitudes towards gay men in Jewish families were quite prevalent, in a minority of cases respondents did report situations of

full support and acceptance from their parents or other family members from the outset. This included, for example, statements of unconditional love on the part of parents, support for their gay sons' relationships and the embracing of their sons' partners. Some parents were aware or had strong suspicions of their son's homosexuality for several years and were simply waiting for their son to come to terms with it or even helped to 'out' their children in a supportive manner.[12] Other parents or families originally rejected their son's sexual orientation, but over time moved to a new place of acceptance. Perhaps because they are of the same generation and usually close in age, siblings tend to be the ones most likely to offer full acceptance and support. Evidence of this was found in the reports of several respondents.

Overall, my data indicate that positive and supportive reactions towards gay men are more likely to come from Jewish families, rather than from the larger Jewish community. Possible reasons for this will be offered shortly. The following sections highlight some of these supportive reactions from families.

Awareness

As Savin-Williams (2001: 140) reported, there are cases where the parent knows that the child is gay much before the child fully realizes it or is ready to talk about it. A man in his thirties reported that, "My mother was totally aware.

[12] Although there are examples of positive reactions directly from the interviews with parents, it must be noted again that a number of parents refused to be interviewed. Clearly the sample that was interviewed is biased towards parents who are more comfortable and supportive of their gay sons.

Her nightmare was to see me get married to a woman and be totally unhappy." I had the opportunity to interview this respondent's mother, a woman in her fifties, who confirmed that she knew at an early age that her son was gay and tried to help him accept himself:

> Every time I saw an article about gay men, or whatever, I would cut it out and sort of leave it, because I figured maybe he didn't realize what he was, that he was different. [One day] I sat down and said, "[Son], are you gay?" He said, "No, why do you think that? Why would you say that?" I said, "I just was wondering, and I just want to let you know, if you are, it's okay. I love you just the same, and it wouldn't make any difference." I was trying to make him feel comfortable.

Another mother in her fifties also confirmed that she was well aware of her son's sexual orientation at an early stage:

> I suspected that he was gay for a long time, and I figured it was his story to tell. He certainly knew he was in an open household. He could tell me, his father, his siblings ... but it was his story to tell. I don't even remember, but it just sort of came up, and he said, "You know, I'm gay." And I said, "Yeah, I figured that out."

Support

Showing support for the child's same-sex partner is one strong way of demonstrating full acceptance of the child's sexual orientation. One respondent boasted about the way his father spoke of his boyfriend:

> My father always said it beautifully. He says where he has read it, everything about my relationship with Peter is holy. The way he sees it. He sees real genuine love there and the desire to do good things and help each other to do good things. And that's what matters to him.

Another respondent spoke of his mother's support for his partner:

> When my last partner was sick and died of AIDS, she was very supportive of him, and didn't do any of the kind of AIDS panic that was common at the time.

Savin-Williams (2001: 173-175) reported that because of the fear of rejection, gay sons often come out to their fathers last, after revealing the news to a number of others. Sometimes the father's supportive reaction surprises the son. A respondent who is Orthodox but whose father is less observant reported:

> I came out to him in the past two to three years, also relatively late, one of the last people. I was nervous about his reaction and was pleasantly surprised to find a very positive, affirming reaction, in that, "You're my son. No matter what happens I'll always love you, and nothing you could do would ever change that, and that's it."

Matthew, a secular Jew in his thirties, was also pleasantly surprised by his parents' reaction:

> I had no idea what my parents would say, I had no idea where I was going to live the next day or sleep the next night. I didn't know if I'd have my sister to turn to if my parents said, "Go away." I had no backup plan at all. Zero. And I was very fortunate ... I had my parents arms around me to care for me and support me. My parents have always included the person I was dating. In that way I was very fortunate.

Some parents interviewed also described supportive reactions to their sons. A secular Jewish father in his sixties spoke about his gay son, who is in his thirties:

> Well, all along, [my wife] and I decided that it was okay, that just because he's gay, he's no different from any other human being. We agreed that it was a natural state. I feel that he is just as worthy or just as human as anybody else.

His wife, also in her sixties, concurred by saying, "It's a natural state and something to be celebrated. He's a good guy and we're very proud of him."

Another mother, in her fifties, insisted that there is no homophobia in her house:

> Don't forget all the work I've done in the gay community. I took my kids to the AIDS walk, and we went to the AIDS vigil, and I have gay friends. So they knew that [my husband] and I were the last two people on earth that would be homophobic. All my kids know that, because they've grown up in that kind of environment, in this house for sure.

While different families (and individuals within families) had different comfort levels with a gay member in their family, a social worker who leads a support group for Jewish parents of gay children reported that Jewish parents rarely sever their ties with their children.[13] She reported that in her experience of working with parents of gay Jews she has witnessed distinct patterns or stages of behaviour among parents. In the early stages of finding out their sons are gay she typically observed parents becoming angry or upset and taking out their emotions on their children, often by applying guilt to the child. As mentioned earlier, the social worker explained that, "When the children come out of the closet, parents go into the closet." Parents then go through a "coming out process." The more comfortable they begin to feel about this new information the more friends and family members they will share it with. "It is a long and difficult road for parents," she explained, but through time many parents do come around to accept their children.

Much of my data do support this idea of Jewish parents expressing negative reactions at first and then gradually moderating their view, to move to some form of acceptance, whether it be full or partial. A "cultural Jew" in his thirties described the process this way:

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[13] Of course, it should be mentioned that the parents that consult a social worker for assistance are probably more likely to have moderate views than those parents who do not seek out a social worker.

> I think that parents themselves go through a coming-out process. And part of it was me sort of pushing them ... saying if you don't accept it, then that's fine, but don't expect this from me. And since then, to their credit, they've done a lot on their own. I think it was a different generation, and a different way of thinking, and it's not that easy to change that.

An Orthodox Jew whose parents are not Orthodox had a very interesting theory on the four steps to acceptance his mother undertook through over a four-year period:

> I kind of make a joke about it now. The four stages of a Jewish mother accepting her son's homosexuality: [First], try to set the son up with Jewish girls. [Second], try to set up the son with any girls. Any girls. Spend a couple of years saying, "I wish he weren't so lonely, he needs somebody to love." And then [third] try to set your son up with Jewish boys. Yes, that did happen. My mom has tried to set me up with Jewish boys. [Finally, try to set up your son with any boys.]

Another respondent's mother also turned around in her attitude towards her son's homosexuality. This respondent's mother had a negative reaction and hoped that perhaps it was only a phase her son was going through. Here is more of what the respondent reported about his mother:

> She had concerns about what it would mean to be gay in terms of what my life would be like in the future. And I think it took her a number of years until she became comfortable ... I'm not highly certain how she did it. I think she became comfortable with the fact that there wasn't any decision involved here, there wasn't choice. And now I think that she's quite comfortable, and a supporter, and very supportive of the things that I do.

Supportive Grandparents

The data provided a small amount of evidence of positive reactions from grandparents. Steven reported this about one set of grandparents:

> They were fine. They asked me why I thought I had to tell them because they told me that love was unconditional.

Finally, in animated fashion, another respondent reported with great pleasure the surprising incident he had with his grandmother:

> We were at a bar mitzvah of one of my cousins. And [my partner] wasn't there – he was out of town or something – and anyway we were sitting at a table, it was myself and my grandmother and my aunt and her kid. And her kid knew. But my aunt didn't know yet and neither did my grandmother. We were all sitting there and my aunt starts in about, you know, are you dating any girls? ... What's happening? ... and I am just kind of dodging it a little, and my grandmother pipes up, "[my grandson] has a friend named [Peter] who he brings home all the time, and he is a lovely boy and Peter is [my grandson's] family!" This is like an eighty-three year old woman! [*respondent laughing hard.*] We had never discussed it. I mean, obviously she is not so stupid. But she said it in such a beautiful way! I never wanted to talk about the gay thing with them when it was just about who I had sex with, but when it is about my family, that's how she nailed it. You know, she said "Peter is [my grandson's] family." And then she turned to me and said, "You and [Peter] just find us some grand-kids!" [*respondent laughing with great pleasure.*]

This passage is interesting in its illustration of a grandmother's acceptance of her grandson's same-sex partner. What is also revealing is the message half-jokingly conveyed by the grandmother that to gain her full acceptance her grandson will have to produce (great) grand children. This anecdote lends support to the idea of the importance of offspring and continuity, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The emphasis that the grandson and his grandmother place on "family" will also be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Support from Extended Family

While extended families in general tended to have less than positive reactions, examples of extended family offering full support did arise. Leonard, a secular Jew in his fifties, reported that his niece and nephew "completely accepted it; it has never been an issue." Another respondent's story illustrates that Orthodox Judaism does not always correlate to negative attitudes on homosexuality. This traditional Jew spoke with great pride and joy about a thank-you note he received from his Orthodox nephew, who had written, "Thank you, Mark [respondent's partner], for making my uncle so happy.":

> And I took this note ... this is a boy who went to [religious Jewish schools in Toronto] ... he walks with his black hat on and his white shirt and the black blazer on in the middle of the summer with black pants. I got that note that he had written, and I called his mother and said, "[Sarah], I hate to be rude but did you read this note that [Yaakov] sent me? Did you do this note or did he?" And she said, "No, he wrote anything he wanted." I was floored, I was amazed that we have such an impact on this young man whose life is so different than the average Jewish kid. So they must see through the gayness and love us for who and what we are as human beings and kind people and loving people which is all I really want. So I'm very, very lucky.

Jewish Liberalism

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jews in America have historically held more liberal attitudes on social issues and embraced more liberal causes than non-Jews. Given this, one would reasonably expect liberal attitudes among Jewish families towards homosexuality. How is it that a significant segment of my

findings on the reactions of Jewish family members demonstrates quite conservative views and behaviours on the issue?

The reasons cited in the previous chapter may apply here as well. Due to higher levels of Jewish religiosity in Canada, it is possible that Canadian Jewish families may hold more traditional values than American Jewish families. In addition, expressing theoretical support for civil liberties for gays and lesbians in general society through a social survey does not necessarily translate into a warm embrace of real-life gay sons and grandsons within one's Jewish family.

As I reported in the previous chapter, in trying to explain the phenomenon of Jewish liberalism, one of the more favoured explanations of scholars is the argument that Jews behave in such a way that will protect Jewish minority group interests. Fostering an environment where civil liberties are granted to minority groups is beneficial to Jews. By the same token, it could be argued that disapproving of homosexuality within Jewish families is also beneficial to the larger Jewish community as a way of trying to promote higher rates of Jewish procreation and thus "Jewish continuity."

My data did provide significant evidence to suggest that this perceived lack of procreation was one of the key difficulties that parents had with news that their sons are gay. The desire for their sons to marry a woman and have children was a very common theme among parents. The realization that this will not happen – and that they will not become grandparents from their son – was quite difficult to bear for many parents. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this failure to perpetuate the Jewish people is seen by some as betrayal of a cherished

Jewish value. Parents often felt stigmatized because their sons were not promoting this Jewish value for their families. One respondent, whose mother was particularly rejecting of her son's homosexuality, reported this anecdote:

> My mother on many occasions said to me that if I had to be gay, if that's really how I had to be, then I should do like everybody else. Get married, live a double life, have children. That would be perfectly fine with her. She was prepared to see her son be unhappy, make a wife potentially unhappy, deceive people. All so that she could say that her son turned out the way she wanted. She was quite prepared to see that happen.

While not as extreme as this respondent's mother, many respondents reported that their parents were distraught to realize that they may never have grandchildren through their sons. One respondent suggested the following about his parents:

> I think they went through a period of mourning; the life that could have been, you know the kids and wedding and all that stuff.

Another respondent was quite resentful of his parents reaction. While perhaps projecting his own experiences onto others, he provided the following speculation:

> I would venture to say [in] the majority of cases the mothers get angry and resentful "that you're not going to produce children for me; you're an embarrassment to me."

Another respondent reported that one of his mother's first statements when she found out he is gay was "I guess this means I'm not going to have grandchildren by you. Well, this is a tough road to hoe."

Two parents interviewed admitted that it was difficult for them to accept that their sons would not give them grandchildren. One mother in her sixties who was generally quite supportive of her gay son described her reaction to his coming out:

> Looking down the road, I was thinking, he won't get married, I won't have grandchildren. I'm not part of the "norm":.

A father in his fifties also spoke about how he feels outside of the "norm:"

> I was disappointed. I wanted sort of a norm, what I thought was a norm ... that at some point he'd get married and have children and lead a normal life.

As mentioned, the assumption on the part of parents that their sons will not have children because he is gay is not necessarily accurate. This will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

While the preceding data and arguments have illustrated some of the reasons why Jewish families do not exhibit liberal tendencies towards their gay relatives, it is also important to reiterate that the overall data on reactions of Jewish families do demonstrate more liberal attitudes and behaviours than the data on the Jewish community in general. To review, a number of family members showed strong support for their gay relative and others tempered their views over time.

How is it that these parents and other family members are showing acceptance and support of their sons' homosexuality? Is it because Jews have a particular disposition to liberalism? I do not have sufficient evidence to prove this. What is more likely is that because Jews put strong emphasis on tight family bonds (Weinfeld, 2001: 127), these families are not prepared to abandon their gay family member altogether. In a sense, families are forced to confront the situation. Whereas a Jew may hold the theoretical opinion that homosexuality is detrimental for the general good of the Jewish community, when one's own son is gay it is much more difficult to simply dismiss this as wrong and divorce oneself from the

issue. Because of the importance of maintaining family cohesion, Jewish families go to great efforts to try to avoid total rejection of the child. It is often better to find some way of integrating the child into the family than to allow the child to separate completely from the family sphere (Tremble et al, 1989: 257). As Norman explained:

> I've never heard horror stories ... about Jewish kids being thrown out of the house, parents never talking to them again. Parents may not be happy, not thrilled, but never the horror stories, it's like 'families are first, no matter what, we'll get through this.'

Alan explained the idea quite succinctly:

> I think that there's more of a strong sense of family within the Jews that I know ... that's what forces families to be more tolerant. I think if there wasn't that kind of sort of instilment around family and the importance of it, there might be more inclination for it to become more of a divisive issue amongst families.

Another reason why Jewish families may be more supportive than the Jewish community in general is that when one has a gay member in one's family, one has more time to experience, to learn and to adjust to the situation. When one hears of gays and lesbians in other Jewish families or in the Jewish community in general, one does not have the benefit of experiencing the situation directly, and thus is more likely to assume a knee-jerk reaction to the situation.

Jewish Families in Comparative Context

An interesting collection of comments was gathered when respondents were asked to speculate on how Jewish families react to gay members of the family as compared to how non-Jewish families react to such a situation.

Respondents provided a number of examples of how they felt Jewish families in general may differ from white Anglo-Saxon families. One respondent explained what he saw as the difference:

> Growing up gay and Jewish, it's very interesting. There's a real sense of family amongst the Jews. My former mate is non-Jewish; he doesn't get to see his family much. There's no kind of camaraderie. My family, we're all inseparable. We are just always together and many of my Jewish friends are like that with their families. So there's something for me in Jewish, like being Italian too, in the sense of family.

Alan echoed the same sentiments:

> I think in terms of family relationships, the Jewish friends that I have tend to have a much [closer relationships] ... both in terms of the intensity and the frequency of their relationship with their family. They tend to have more of a close relationship than a lot of my non-Jewish friends do, particularly the ones that I know that are gay . . .

One respondent, speaking about his non-Jewish partner, reported that:

> [Glen] is not that big on family. He doesn't love family type of things. He prefers a family of friends compared to family of family. His background with family is not so brilliant. So he was not thrilled to be invited [to my family events] because you had to go. He didn't always want to go.

When I asked this respondent about the ethnic background of his partner, he responded "WASP English." When I asked the respondent whether he has observed general differences between Jews and WASPs on the issue of family relations, he offered that for WASPs:

> Family stuff isn't as important. I'm not saying it doesn't have any importance because that would be foolish, [but] it doesn't have that same fingers around your neck.

He also made the insightful statement that:

> The people I've seen that have the most trouble coming out are people who come from cultural societies which family is way up there in importance.

When I asked the respondent whether he thought this was a Jewish trait, he made important links to other ethnic minority groups:

> [It is a] Jewish trait. Chinese. Korean. A lot of people ... who [are] Asian [have] huge family trouble. I think it's a family thing. The same type of thing [exists] with European families; people [with] Hungarian backgrounds or Italian backgrounds.

The literature (Walzer, 2000: 178-179; Weinfeld, 2001: 141-142) does suggest that Jewish culture is somewhat distinctive from white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture in its strong emphasis on family relations. This translates to a strong identification and attachment both to the nuclear family and extended family so that family loyalty and obligation play a very significant role in social relations. Walzer, (2000: 178-179) in his book on the gay-Jewish experience in Israel, for example, found this concept of family bonds to be so prevalent that he coined the term *mishpachti'ut* ("familialism") to describe it.

As alluded to earlier, and as confirmed by the current literature on family relations that involve a gay child (Fields, 2001: 17-172; Hunter et al 1998: 77-78; O'Brien and Goldberg, 2000: 122-123), due to the social stigma associated with being gay, parents in general often react negatively upon first disclosure of their child's same-sex orientations. Because of the strong emphasis on family cohesion often found in Jewish settings, the situation can be even more difficult for gay Jews and their families than it might be in the white Anglo-Saxon context. In a situation where family bonds are not as intense to start with, the tension or conflict between a parent and child over the child's disclosure may not be as

painful. The parent and child may decide to simply distance themselves further and not directly address the issues that divide them. For many Jewish families this type of distancing may be less likely and less feasible. Rejection from parents in the Jewish context, therefore, may be more difficult for the child to bear.

Parallels with other Ethnic Minority Communities

As reported in the previous chapter, gays and lesbians of many other ethnic minority groups also experience significant difficulties in gaining acceptance in their ethnic community. Much of this resistance comes from families. The strong kinship found among the Jewish community can also be found among other ethnic minority groups in North America, such as Asians, blacks, Latinos, Italians, etc. Often accompanying these strong family bonds are conservative religious values that presume heterosexual orientation, conformity to traditional gender roles and the expectation that the child will marry and have children (Garcia, 1998: 32-33; Hunter et al, 1998: 74-76; Morales, 1990: 232-234). Clearly, the experiences of gay Jews within their own ethnic community must bear close resemblance to the experiences of other ethnic minority gay men.

Jewish Particularities

While these strong parallels exist, I have argued that one factor that stands out in the Jewish context is the strong emphasis put on ethnic continuity. In the face of perceived widespread assimilation and intermarriage, more so than other

ethnic communities – and certainly more so than white Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities – strategies to promote "continuity" or cultural survival have become one of the central priorities of the Jewish ethnic polity. My data in chapter two suggest that the mainstream Jewish perception that gay Jewish men do not contribute to Jewish continuity – meaning they do not have children – is one of the key sources of anti-gay attitudes in the larger Jewish community. My data on Jewish families lend more support to this argument. This perceived lack of procreation was one of the key difficulties that parents had with the news that their sons are gay. This failure to perpetuate the Jewish people was seen by some as betrayal of a cherished Jewish value. As mentioned, parents often felt that they themselves were now stigmatized and positioned outside of "Jewish norms" because their sons were not promoting this important Jewish value for their families.

The issue of the Jewish Holocaust can exacerbate this strong desire on the part of parents to see their children have children of their own to ensure Jewish continuity. One respondent reported that his parents had a very hard time dealing with his homosexuality. He added, "My parents are survivors, it's a whole different breed, a whole different situation." Another respondent spoke about the way his Jewish partner understands the anguish his mother is going through:

> He understood my mother's reaction better than my non-Jewish friends for sure. He [understood] the importance of having grandchildren. My mother survived the Holocaust. Lots of her family went to the camps. And surviving all that and then having only one child and wanting a grandchild and finding out your son is gay and the hysteria that went along with it. I think he was really quite much more understanding about it than I was.

Effects on Jewish Identity

The predominant trend reported by respondents regarding their immediate reactions from their Jewish families is a lack of acceptance of their homosexuality. This lack of acceptance can be caused by ignorance and manifested in denial and heteronormative or homophobic behaviour. These negative reactions can cause hurt and anger on the part of gay Jews. Stronger cases of rejection can bring about the painful experience in which, because of shame on the part of their parents, gay men are asked not to reveal their sexuality to extended family members. This can further distance the gay man from his family members. Because in Jewish culture, as is the case with many other ethnic minority cultures, the family serves as one of the focal points for expressing and sustaining ethnic identity, lack of acceptance from the family not only strains these family relations, but may also by extension strain the gay man's association and connection with the ethno-religious community. Gay Jewish men may purposely exclude themselves from cultural activities to avoid shaming the family in front of other members of the community. This further alienates the gay individual from the ethnic system. These circumstances would likely impede the attempt of the gay Jew to construct a positive and meaningful Jewish identity.

Siblings, the family members who are closest in age, are the ones most likely to offer full support to their gay family member. The data also reveal, that for reasons of family cohesion, Jewish families in general are more likely to be supportive of their gay family members (particularly after taking some time to adjust to the situation) than is the larger Jewish community. This finding suggests

that it is more likely through Jewish family life, rather than general Jewish community relations, that an individual can embrace a more positive Jewish identity.

Conclusion

In tandem with the previous chapter, and in light of the fact that research shows that Jews in America have historically held more liberal attitudes and embraced more liberal causes than non-Jews, this chapter examined the reactions of Jewish families to gay family members. By highlighting the primarily negative reactions of Jewish families I illustrate that, despite this inclination to liberalism, many Jewish families are uncomfortable, at least in the initial stages, with a gay family member. It is possible that Canadian Jewish families are less liberal than American ones, and it is also possible that theoretical support for gay civil rights may not directly translate to a warm embrace of a gay member of one's own family.

It is the emphasis within Jewish culture of strong family or kinship bonds, which includes the expectation of having children to promote ethnic continuity, that motivates some of the negative attitudes towards gay Jewish family members. It is possible that this phenomenon may make the Jewish reaction more intense than a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant reaction. Paradoxically, these same strong family bonds also reduce the chances that the family will abandon the gay member altogether, as families often feel forced to find ways to accommodate the gay member to preserve some sense of family cohesion. Thus, overall, Jewish

families tend to be more supportive than the general Jewish community. Due to similar emphasis on kinship bonds, the predominant family patterns found in the Jewish context would likely also be found in other cultural communities, such as blacks, Asians and Latin Americans. The tragedy of the Jewish Holocaust and the perceived threat of intermarriage and assimilation of a non-visible minority group, however, may place added urgency on Jewish families to oppose homosexuality and to promote procreation to ensure Jewish continuity.

Because the family serves as one of the focal points for expressing and sustaining ethnic identity, this lack of acceptance from the family not only strains family relations, but may also by extension strain the gay Jewish man's association and connection with the ethnic community. Although Jewish families tend to show more support overall to gay Jews than the Jewish community in general, by outlining a significant number of examples of attitudes and behaviours of non-acceptance found in Jewish families, this chapter offers more support to the idea that gay Jews may have difficulty constructing and maintaining positive and meaningful Jewish identities. Because Jewish family life often makes it difficult for the gay Jewish man to feel that he is able to fully integrate his gay and Jewish identities, there is further incentive for him to go to some effort to try to construct a personal identity that will embrace these two parts of himself. In a subsequent chapter different strategies of identity negotiation will explore more fully how gay Jews go about this construction.

Chapter 4

Gay Community Reactions to Gay Jewish Men

This chapter will explore two related themes. Firstly, because gay and lesbian communities have suffered from significant discrimination throughout history, one might argue that these communities would be particularly tolerant and accepting of gays and lesbians of diverse ethno-religious groups. In light of this claim, this chapter will first examine in some detail the reported experiences of gay Jews within the larger gay community. Secondly, by reflecting on these experiences, the chapter will continue to address the key question of what effect societal reactions might have on the Jewish identity construction of the gay Jew.

Experiences in the Gay Community

The theme of the experiences of gay Jews in the larger gay community is a much less developed area of research than the experiences of gay Jews within the Jewish community. The literature does provide some brief references that hint at some exclusion of Jews within the broader gay community. Rofes (1989: 200) reported that in the California gay community he was sometimes referred to as a "typical pushy New York Jew." Gay Jewish fiction writer Lev Raphael (1996: 166), offered his opinion that the gay and lesbian communities "often have deep ignorance of the Holocaust." Levado (1993: 59) opined that the "gay community is largely unsympathetic and often hostile to Judaism." Empirical evidence to

support these claims is not provided by the authors. This chapter will contribute to this understudied area of the experiences of gay Jewish men in the wider gay community.

Interestingly, more of the specific claims of exclusionary behaviour in the mainstream gay community come from Jewish lesbians. Dworkin (1997: 67-68), Klepfisz (1989: 52-53), Plaskow (1989: 298-302), Torton Beck (1989: 176-177) and others have described the lesbian-feminist movement as ignoring and trivializing the lesbian-Jewish experience. Jewish lesbians have been questioned about why they would want to endorse a religious tradition that invented patriarchy and is thus antithetical to the feminist cause. Within the greater lesbian-feminist movement, Jewish lesbians have been described as JAPs (Jewish American Princesses) and have been accused of being too loud, pushy, exploitative and domineering.

Let us now turn to the data collected on the reported experiences of gay Jewish men.

Inclusion of Jews in the Gay Community

Approximately half of all respondents (14) reported that they have never experienced any type of negative experience as a Jew within the gay community. Of those respondents, a few went on to emphasize how the gay community is particularly tolerant of all cultural groups. A secular respondent, Joshua, spoke about the pluralism of the gay community:

> The gay community is so cross-cultural. It's so remarkable, there [are] just no cultural bounds. They're everything: they're black, white, green, red, yellow. And I've never experienced any anti-Semitism. It's way too mixed a group to be anti-Semitic.

A secular Jew named Stanley reiterated this sentiment:

> We're such a small community within a rainbow of communities. Oh God, that sounds so tired. But it's true. Everybody comes from a different ethnic group when you walk down that street. The thing that binds everybody together is the sexuality. So other things become less important, I think.

The issue of the gay experience in an urban setting was raised by a respondent, Norman. He argued that because gay men "date so many people" and in an urban center like Toronto "one in twenty people are Jews," non-Jewish gay men have had ample exposure to Jewish people. Norman felt that this inter-mingling between gay Jews and gay non-Jews fosters a environment of more cultural understanding and respect.

Some respondents reported that not only is the gay community accepting of Jews, but Jews also have taken on a disproportionate leadership role. One respondent reported that there are a disproportionate amount of Jews who participate in and lead programs for *Out and Out*, a popular gay social organization in Toronto. He attributed this to the fact that Jews are often "taught organization and leadership skills from an early age." He claimed that more than any gay Jewish organization, the large Jewish membership in *Out and Out* has proven successful in "unifying gay and lesbian Jews."

Another interesting aspect of the argument that the gay community is very accepting of Jews is the fact reported by two respondents, that a significant number of Jews attend church services at the Metropolitan Community Church

(MCC), Toronto's gay-friendly church. A traditional Jew who has strong reservations about going to the MCC commented:

> It's a strange world. MCC has captured something in the imagination of a gay community. MCC has religiously managed to do what I don't think the Jewish community has been able to do. [It is providing] a spiritual place to be gay and comfortable. It has a religious feel to it and a spiritual feel to it, but [gay Jews] are completely accepted and are a majority there.

While it is quite significant to note the level of acceptance towards gay Jews in one of Toronto's key gay religious institutions, it is also interesting to observe the tone of the respondent's remarks. He laments that some gay Jews seem to be substituting synagogue attendance for church attendance. The related discussion of how well the Jewish community of Toronto has provided a gay-friendly infrastructure will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

Exclusion of Jews in the Gay Community

Approximately one third (9) of my respondents did report feeling some form of exclusion as Jews in the gay community. In describing his experiences as a Jew in the gay world that he is a part of, one respondent mentioned that he saw swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti written on the wall of a gay bathhouse that he attends. He also reported that he is aware of the existence of gay Nazi groups on the Internet. One of the more striking examples of behaviour that caused a respondent to feel marginalized came from a secular Jew who is quite active in the gay community. He spoke about someone he was dating:

> I had an experience where there was a guy I would see regularly. He liked being humiliated in sexual activities and I didn't take it terribly

> seriously, and he was a nice-looking guy, so I would do things with him or to him, and then what became for obvious reasons the last incident, he finally let me know that the reason he wanted me as a sexual partner was because I was Jewish and he could think of nothing more humiliating than to have sex with a Jew.

Another respondent reported a similar experience. His gay male friend confided in him that he would not pursue a relationship with a gay Jewish man he had just met because "I would never have sex with a Jew." Other incidents that might cause a gay Jew to feel marginalized include a type of attitude that objectifies or exoticises gay Jews as particularly sexually desirable. One respondent reported that:

> I often get people telling me that they liked having sex with Jews because Jews have bigger penises, Jews are more sexually active and exciting. These are stereotypes and [examples of] fetishizing Jews; so it was never a relationship between two men, it was between a man and a Jew.

Ironically, this respondent reported that he has also heard non-Jewish gay men stereotype gay Jews as particularly weak, passive and effeminate. Other stereotypes cited by respondents were references to gay Jews as "pushy, loud and money-conscious." A respondent described a new development concerning circumcision that could cause a gay Jewish man to feel alienated from the larger gay male community:

> A lot of men I've talked to lately who are my age group ... don't talk about being circumcised or cut anymore, they talk about being damaged. So I think there's a new discourse around circumcision that again isolates Muslims and Jews from the rest of the gay community. A Jew or Muslim wouldn't necessarily see their circumcision as being a damaging or tampering of their body that's painful and psychologically traumatic. It [is] an assumption that real men are uncircumcised and they're Christian. So that new kind of discourse [connects] issues of masculinity, religion and identity.

Among more traditional or observant gay Jews, anti-Jewish sentiment can be more common. The claim was made by a particularly observant respondent who wears a *kippah* (Jewish head covering) in public that:

> There's about a twenty-five per cent chance when I come down to Church and Wellesley [a prominent gay area of Toronto] that at least one person will say something nasty to me for being Jewish.

When I asked him to provide an example, he responded:

> Well, "fucking Jew" is one of the things that I've heard on more than one occasion. Two native guys walked past me and said, very loudly, "it's a pity that Hitler lost the war, wasn't it?"

The respondent also mentioned that there is often resistance to traditional religion among the gay community. He explained:

> One of the sure things you'll face is that people will assume if you're Jewish or if you're Muslim, this means that you're homophobic, much more homophobic than the Christian community. I've had the experience where people will just not speak to me or come up to me because they see the *kippah*, and think 'Oh, this person's a nut.' I was told this by a gay secular Jew. It was only after he'd seen me around for five months and seen me in groups that he had the nerve to come up and talk to me, because his experiences of being a queer Jew in Israel was that anyone who would wear a *kippah* was somebody who would beat him up.

The observations of Jack, a secular Jew, reiterated this tension between religion and the gay community. He reported that "because of what religion has done to people" many gay men reject it wholeheartedly. He opined:

> It's okay to be a Jewish gay man in the gay community if you are not overly or overtly Jewish. It is very, very hard to be a practicing Jew in the gay community.

Overall, my data suggest that most Jews do not have any negative experiences in the larger gay community. It is possible that because of the experience of discrimination that gay men and lesbians have faced in their

lifetimes, most gay men and lesbians are particularly respectful of cultural diversity. However, a minority of my sample, particularly more outwardly observant Jews, have had some experiences that caused them to feel excluded in some way. The argument that a community that is already oppressed would be particularly sensitive not to oppress or stigmatize others does not hold true in all situations. It appears that a small number of gay Jews face the experience of being doubly stigmatized - stigmatized as gay in the Jewish community and stigmatized as Jewish in the gay community. In some cases other variables such as class or education level may supersede sexual orientation to influence attitudes. A traditional Jew who is university educated, for example, made an interesting point about the intervening variable of class. He explained that while he has experienced only interest and admiration among the gay university-educated professional with whom he routinely interacts, he suggested that the "gay world is also divided by class and level of education, so I think you might find the same old prejudices in gay circles."

The following section provides some comparative context to this question of the inclusion of ethnic minority gay men and lesbians within the larger gay community.

Lack of Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in the Gay Community

With the momentum of the Stonewall Rebellion[14] of June 1969, the 1970s was a watershed decade for gay men and lesbians in the Western world. Gay liberation movements gained strength and numbers. The literature reports, however, that gay liberation movements sometimes face the problem of not being able to adequately represent all types of homosexual identities. It has been criticized as exhibiting a white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class (male) (urban) bias. While there is also literature that illustrates that some lesbian networks have had considerable success in combating racism in their communities (see, for example, the research on the National Women's Music Festival by Eder et al, 1995), negative stereotyping and prejudice of ethnic minority gay men and lesbians does exist in the "mainstream gay community" (Hunter et al., 1998: 48; Seidman, 1997: 120-123; Morales, 1990: 220).

In their research on gay African-Americans in the United States, Adams Jr. and Kimmel (1997: 149) described the gay and lesbian community as "white establishment that offers little genuine acceptance to people of colour and ignores their specific concerns." They reported discriminatory behaviour towards blacks and characterized the gay and lesbian civil rights movement as one that applies primarily to "white boys in jeans." Loiacano (1989: 22-23) and Foulke and Hill (1997: 246) also argued that racism against blacks exists in the gay community.

[14] Stonewall was the name of a gay bar in Greenwich village which was the site of several nights of rioting between gay activists and New York police.

Both cited examples of gay blacks treated rudely, given poor service or being refused service altogether at primarily white gay bars.

Asian-American lesbians and gay men also feel excluded at times from the broader gay and lesbian community. Pamela H. (1989: 285-286) argued that it was the invisibility and racial discrimination experienced by Asian gay men and lesbians in the predominantly white gay community that served as a catalyst for Asians to form their own gay and lesbian organizations and social groups. Chan (1989: 18) found similar findings of occasional racism in her study of the Asian gay community. One respondent explained, "The gay community is so white and sometimes racist. I feel more comfortable with Asians and people of colour." Ridge et al. (1999: 50-52) and Aryes (1999: 89) provided evidence suggesting racist attitudes towards gay Asians in the Anglo-Australian gay male community. During their fieldwork in a gay bar they heard the derogatory comments " This place is swarming with Asians" or "It's like a boat-load of Vietnamese just walked in." They reported that some gay Asian men felt marginalized by an Australian gay scene that sometimes stereotypes Asians as being sexually passive and having smaller penises, thus subordinating them to a less desirable group.

Christian-normativity

While there may be some parallels between the experiences of gay Jewish men and the experiences described above, because North American Jews are usually not a visible minority, it is likely that they face less exclusion than do gay blacks and Asians. Two respondents specifically mentioned that they have

observed more intolerance towards these minority groups than to Jews. What is probably more common in the gay community than blatant anti-Jewish sentiment is a milder form of exclusion that I refer to as Christian-normativity. My data provided evidence to suggest that gay Jews sometimes feel excluded from the more general gay society because of a permeating Christian-centrism or Christian-normativity that assumes that all people in society operate within a Christian framework. Because of the resistance often found to traditional religion in the gay community, it should be pointed out that this Christian-normativity refers to a secular Christianity. Thus, gay religious Christians can also feel excluded from the general gay community because of their commitment to faith.

A number of my respondents spoke about the challenges they face around Christmas. Because a number of gay Christians do not feel comfortable celebrating Christmas with their biological families due to lack of acceptance, the gay community has developed many community Christmas celebrations to replace the family celebrations. For gay Jews who are not interested in celebrating Christmas this can be an isolating experience. As one secular respondent described:

> Christmas time further isolates Jews because you don't celebrate Christmas with your family so you're not with them, and you can't even be with a lot of people in the gay community because they're all doing Christmas things, and you have all these gay choirs. They are very popular. They all do Christmas concerts. They all spend a lot of their times practising for events like that, so to even do things that are important celebrations in the gay community they tend to have this Christian affiliation which is isolating.

A traditional Jew also spoke about his feeling of exclusion from the gay choir:

> I quit because they did a pretty intense Christmas concert. A large number of people who were there were Jewish, in fact the director of the choir is Jewish. I immediately said, "Why aren't you putting a Hanukkah section? There are at least as many Jews here as non-Jews and that's also a holiday." And I just couldn't be there. I wasn't going to sing Christmas carols, and I wasn't going to celebrate somebody else's holiday. And I was promised last year that this was the last year that it was going to happen. And I went to join the choir again this year and surprise, surprise, they're having their holiday concert in December and they're spending all of their time practising. So I won't be that involved and it hurts, it really hurts.

A number of respondents spoke about the problem of gay community events being scheduled on Jewish holidays. A traditional Jew reported that he has experienced a lack of sensitivity to ethnically diverse gays and lesbians in this regard. When he has confronted the schedule-makers:

> Ignorance is plead. Or sometimes you get people who just aren't aware ... get defensive or dismiss the importance. They don't think that holidays could be meaningful for another culture. 'Oh, scheduling is just so difficult!' That's an excuse for lack of sensitivity.

Another traditional Jew was quite frustrated about the scheduling for a major annual fundraising event for AIDS:

> It was around 1987, 1988 ... the first two [AIDS fundraisers]. The first one was on Yom Kippur. And a lesbian in the community was studying to be a rabbi. I believe she is a rabbi now. She had sent them something saying, "Please, the Jews within the community would actually like to participate, but you're having this fundraiser on Yom Kippur." And then the next year they put it on Yom Kippur again, because they never bothered checking any of the dates. And this is one of the things I find generally within the queer community, is that there's no acknowledgement of the Jewish calendar.

It should be pointed out that a very large proportion of Jews, whether traditional or secular, observe the holiday of Yom Kippur. When I asked the above

respondent to describe the reaction he received when he complained about this scheduling, he replied:

> People will get defensive when you bring up something like 'Well, we can't keep changing the date for everybody out there. Do you want us to consult with the Sikhs, and the Wiccans?!' One, that would be fair. And two, we are the biggest of the religious minorities here. You're not talking about two or three people, you're talking about a fairly sizeable proportion who don't feel welcome in the community because things like this keep coming up.

As an observant Jew who won't travel or spend money on the Jewish Sabbath, this respondent is in a particularly difficult position in terms of his ability to participate in gay community events. He went on to describe other examples that he felt demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to traditional religion:

> Generally speaking, far too many events are held on Shabbat. Friday night or Saturday. And you can't even bring this up, because people will have a negative reaction when you bring up: "Well, since you choose not to participate." "No. You're choosing something that prevents me from participating." Or if I bring up something like saying, "Why can't we move this event to one of the Christian holidays?" "We can't do that, this is ridiculous to even suggest it." "But can't you see the analogy?" "No, there's no analogy."

Comparing the Gay Community to General Society

An important question to ask at this point to those who have reported experiencing exclusion as a Jew in the gay community is, "How do these experiences of exclusion in the gay community compare to their experiences in general society?" It is likely that these experiences of exclusion are not any more nor any less prevalent in the gay community than they are in general society. What is different, however, according to my respondents, is that it is more hurtful when experienced in the gay community because of the higher expectations of

cultural sensitivity from a community that itself suffers from discrimination. One respondent put it this way:

> It's more irksome because you'll be told, "Oh, no ... we include everybody, we're a rainbow, a rainbow is beautiful because it consists of many colours. Yes, Jews are welcome in our community," and then they do something [with scheduling] that's really basically saying, "You're not part of this community."

Certainly Jewish heterosexuals can also feel out of place at Christmas time in North America, but one respondent made the point that for gay Jews who may also feel excluded from their own Jewish community or family, as described in previous chapters, this type of exclusion from the gay community can feel "doubly stigmatic." When I asked a respondent whether he has experienced more exclusion in the gay community than in the general society, he responded:

> No, not more so, but I just find it more ironic, I guess, in the gay community, because I think these are people who themselves have experienced this discrimination and oppression for so many years. I guess logically I would think that people tend to be more open and less prejudicial, when I guess that maybe that's really not the case ...

Effects on Jewish Identity

In previous chapters I have suggested that exclusionary attitudes and behaviours from the Jewish community, and to a lesser extent from Jewish families, have made it difficult for gay Jews to construct a positive Jewish identity. What effect does the reaction of the gay community have on this process? The majority of my respondents had no particular problems in their daily interactions with the larger gay community. This might suggest that this part of their lives provides no impediments to their development of a Jewish identity.

One might also surmise, however, that if gay Jews feel excluded from the Jewish community and feel welcome within the larger gay community, then it is within general gay settings that these individuals would likely spend more of their time. This phenomenon may further isolate the individual from a Jewish milieu and concomitantly may further reduce his attachments to Jewish identity.

Some respondents offered isolated incidents of what they considered anti-Jewish sentiment from gay individuals. Others drew attention to the Christian-normativity that exists throughout all of Canadian society and remarked that this phenomenon made them feel excluded from the gay community, which they expected to be particularly sensitive to issues of inclusion. It is possible, therefore, that for some gay Jews, both the Jewish community and the gay community are alienating them from their Jewishness and thus contributing to weakened Jewish identities.

Conclusion

Given that gay men and lesbians have faced discrimination throughout history, one might expect that this community would be particularly sensitive to inclusion. For the most part, this argument held true for my respondents. My data revealed that while a small number of respondents did report feeling excluded to some extent as a Jew in the gay community, this is not as serious a challenge for most gay Jews as compared to the challenge of gaining full acceptance they in the Jewish community. Approximately half of my respondents indicated they have never experienced any exclusion as a Jew in the gay community. Some went on to

emphasize the particular care that gay men and lesbians take to be respectful of cultural diversity.

Respondents provided a number of arguments to illustrate the acceptance of Jews in the gay community in Toronto. The argument was raised that in a large metropolitan centre like Toronto where Jews are highly concentrated, non-Jewish gay men are more likely to meet and date gay Jewish men, thus promoting respect and acceptance of Jews. While not easily proven, this theory seems plausible. It is not unreasonable to assume that in a large city where Jews tend to concentrate there would be more familiarity with Jews and less likelihood of ignorance that can promote prejudice and stereotypes. In a smaller city or rural area, of course, this phenomenon may not occur. It was also argued that gay Jews have relatively high rates of leadership in gay organizations. The literature suggests there is some historical truth to this claim. We know, for example, that one of the early leaders of the first gay rights organization in the United States, the Mattachine Society, was a Jew named Frank Kameny (Rogow, 1989: 79). The high proportion of gay Jews who date and form relationships with non-Jews, as will be illustrated in the next chapter, provides more evidence to this argument that Jews are accepted within the larger gay community. For these reasons, it is not likely that the gay Jews' interactions within the larger gay community have a direct bearing on the construction of their Jewish identities.

As my data on gay blacks and Asians suggest, exclusionary behaviour does exist to some extent in the gay community. The gay community does not always live up to the ideal of sensitivity and tolerance (Cerbonne, 1997: 131;

Tremble et al., 1989: 263). My respondents provided some isolated examples of what they considered anti-Jewish sentiment, such as objectifying gay Jewish men as pushy and loud on the one hand, and weak, passive and effeminate, thus sexually undesirable, on the other hand. Some gay Jews felt excluded by what they described as a Christian-centric environment, where Jewish concerns are sometimes overlooked in designing programming or setting dates for gay events. This was especially hurtful to some respondents who expected the gay community to be more sensitive to these matters than would normally be found in general society. In these minority of cases, it is possible that this perceived lack of affirmation of the individual's Jewishness within the larger gay community can weaken the individual's connection to Jewish identity.

Upon closer examination of these few incidents of feeling excluded from the larger gay community, the variable that appears to offer some explanatory power is level of Jewishness. Among those respondents that reported some feeling of exclusion in the gay community, there is a high proportion of respondents who are traditional. One must be cautious in offering conclusions based on a small non-probability sample. However, it is likely that for traditional Jews – because of their visible-minority status of wearing a *kippah* and their religious requirements of not travelling on the Sabbath and holidays and keeping Jewish dietary laws – it is more difficult to blend into "mainstream" gay social patterns, thus causing more conflict or antagonism. As we see in general society, it is those minorities who are "visible" who often face more discrimination. The social worker interviewed reported that, in her experience of working with gay Jewish clients, she has come

to believe there is an attitude in some segments of the gay community that "gay culture" can take on the meaning of a "new religion," which allows no room for competing religious allegiances. This phenomenon could be present for a number of my respondents whose traditional Jewish orientation means that ethnicity and religion represent a significant part of their identity.

To expand on this theme of the interaction of gay Jewish men with the larger gay community, let us now turn to a discussion of inter-ethnic partnering practices of gay Jewish men.

Chapter 5

Inter-Ethnic Partnering

The previous three chapters highlighted the general challenges that gay Jewish men may encounter in their interactions with the Jewish community, their Jewish families and the 'mainstream' gay community. This chapter, in tandem with the next, examines how these circumstances might actually apply to specific, key life situations. This chapter examines the partnering practices of gay Jewish men in terms of the ethnicity of their partners, while Chapter 6 examines issues of fatherhood.

In the social scientific literature that deals with the gay experience, little discussion presently exists on the subject of ethno-religious composition of gay partnerships. This chapter addresses this gap in the literature. The chapter asks two questions: what preferences do gay Jewish men express in terms of the ethnicity of a potential partner, and what are their actual behavioural patterns in terms of these partners? Where relevant, I draw parallels between the Jewish case and other ethnic minority gay experiences. I also compare the gay Jewish case to the heterosexual Jewish experience.[15]

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[15] This discussion on partnering should not be interpreted as advocating long-term monogamous relationships as the "ideal" or "proper" form of personal relationship. I am aware that other forms of relationship models, such as more casual non-monogamous physical relationships with a number of partners, are common to gay male culture in the Western hemisphere. Another style of relationship becoming more common is the "open-partnership," where two men form a long-term partnership with each other with the understanding that each is free to pursue sexual relationships outside of the partnership. This being the case, it is interesting to note that the vast majority of respondents of this study did express a desire to enter into a long-term monogamous relationship if

The chapter suggests that, while the majority of gay Jews interviewed expressed a desire for a Jewish partner, there are a very small proportion of gay Jews who actually had Jewish partners. The chapter explores several reasons why this phenomenon may occur. These reasons contribute to our knowledge of the challenges gay Jews face in constructing their Jewish identities.

Research on Out-Marriage in the Jewish Community

While the the issue of the extent to which gay Jewish men form inter-ethnic partnerships has never been systematically examined, a myriad of attention has been devoted to the question of out-marriage rates among Jewish heterosexuals (out-marriage is defined as a Jew who marries a non-Jew). Researchers in the United States have demonstrated that the rates of Jewish out-marriage have climbed continuously from marriages in the 1940s (of which approximately 7 per cent were out-marriage), to marriages in the 1960s (approximately 17 per cent), to marriages in the 1970s (approximately 30 per cent) (Cohen, 1988: 28-30; Sharot, 1998: 95-96). The statistic that most startled the American Jewish community was the finding of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS). The survey reported that, from the period between 1985 and 1990, some 40 to 50 per cent (depending on one's interpretation of the statistics) of American Jews were married to non-Jews (Fishman, 2000: 141). The

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the opportunity presented itself. One might speculate that Jewish values, which emphasize the importance of family, may be playing a role here. This issue, however, is beyond the scope of this work.

most recent figures for Canada tell us that in the mid-1990s Canadian Jews were out-marrying at a rate of approximately 30 per cent (Weinfeld, 2001: 154).

Some scholars argue that Jewish out-marriage may not be a serious problem for the Jewish community. Since out-marriage creates, in total, more "Jewish households" (households with at least one Jew)(Cohen, 1991: 49), it brings with it converts to Judaism, thus potentially increasing the number of Jews (Weinfeld, 2001: 154), and it signals a diminishing of ethnic animosity or mistrust between Jews and non-Jews (Fishman, 2002: 9-11).[16] The predominant opinion among North American Jewish community leaders, however, is that out-marriage is one of the most serious problems facing the Jewish community of North America today because it threatens the primary goal of "Jewish continuity." Jewish out-marriage is reported to be particularly dangerous to the Jewish community because it brings with it a loss of Jewish identity, a weakening of social and religious cohesiveness of the community and an actual demographic loss over time of the Jewish population (Goldstein, 1992: 124).

A central reason offered why Jews are out-marrying is that Jews, particularly in the United States, place less emphasis on parochial community concerns and more emphasis on the autonomy of the individual to make his or her own romantic choice based on love (Fishman, 2000: 141; Weinfeld, 2001: 160).

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[16] It could also be pointed out that Jewish out-marriage rates in Canada are lower than most other religious groups. Catholic out-marry at a rate of 42 per cent; East Orthodox at 50 per cent (Weinfeld, 2001: 372).

Research on Inter-ethnic Partnerships Among Ethnic Minority Gay Men and Lesbians

As mentioned, there is little documentation and discussion in the literature about the ethnic composition of gay partnerships. The few studies I was able to locate offered some interesting findings that do indicate high inter-ethnic patterns among ethnic minority gay men and lesbians. Bell and Weinberg (1978: 85) reported that the majority of their gay black sample claimed that more than half of their romantic partners had been white. Two decades later, Peplau et al. (1997: 21) found that "committed interracial relationships occur at a higher rate among African-American lesbians and gay men than among black heterosexuals." They also reported that gay men, more than lesbians, are likely to have partners of a different ethnicity. Greene (1995: 103-104) reported that lesbians of colour have a greater tendency to partner with women who are not members of their ethnic group than do white lesbians. In addition, Jackson and Sullivan (1999: 4-5), along with Nakajima et al. (1996: 573), report the tendency in Australia for gay Asian men to partner at high rates with Anglo-Australian gay men.

Some possible reasons given by the above researchers for these higher rates of inter-ethnic partnerships among ethnic minority lesbians and gay men include limited pools of partners to choose from (particularly when some gay men or lesbians are "in the closet") and lack of social infrastructure for these gay men and lesbians to meet others within their ethnic group, particularly outside of large urban areas (Greene, 1995: 103-104; Peplau et al., 1997: 20-21). In the case of gay Asian men in Australia, the reasons concern issues of social stratification

based on ethnicity, which will be explained in more detail later in this chapter. These suggested reasons serve as a useful comparative context as we now turn to an examination of the partnering practices of gay Jewish men.

Desire for Jewish Partner

Turning to my data, of the thirty gay Jewish men interviewed, two-thirds of twenty respondents reported that if they were to be involved in a long-term relationship, they would prefer their partner to be Jewish. Weinfeld (2001: 144) provides some evidence, based on personal ads in Canadian dailies, that most heterosexual Jews in Canada also prefer to partner with fellow Jews.[17] It is not surprising to see that of the ten traditional gay Jews I interviewed, nine of them are among this group of men who express a desire for a Jewish partner. A traditional Jew in his thirties admitted that:

> If I find someone who is gay and Jewish, the interest goes up a notch for sure. If they were a seven they become an eight ... It's a factor that would draw them to me closer. If you are gay and Jewish, you can get at least two dates!

The most common reasons offered by respondents for their desire for Jewish partners have to do with issues of cultural or ethnic affinity. A large proportion of these respondents spoke about their desire to find a partner who shares their "Jewish values," which emphasize the importance of the family, ethnic heritage, ethnic symbols such as Jewish food, celebration of Jewish

[17] Weinfeld found that Jews, more than other ethnic groups, were likely to identify themselves in personal ads by their ethnicity and were also more likely to specify that they are seeking partners with the same ethnicity (Jewish).

holidays and the like. There is no reason to believe that these factors are any different than the factors considered important by heterosexual Jews. A secular Jew in his thirties described his discomfort with a non-Jewish partner who did not share his "Jewish sensibilities":

> One of the issues that I had with my last partner was, because he never really had a lot of exposure to the Jewish community, he didn't understand the importance of the holidays ... and didn't understand that, let's say, for Passover and the High Holidays that it was important for him to come back with me [to my parents' house]. He didn't understand what that impact was, whereas I knew how important it was for me to be up at his parents' on Christmas Eve. And there were a lot of fights that went over that. And I think being Jewish really provides a common ground more than anything else. [Jews] share a very similar traditional and cultural upbringing. And I think many of them have similar values that are instilled, and I think that that's very helpful in terms of a relationship.

Another secular Jew reiterated this feeling of cultural affinity:

> Having had a partner for four years who wasn't Jewish and then having been ten years now with [Sammy], I can't even begin to tell you the difference it's made, to have somebody who comes from the same background as you. And now I realize how much added benefit there is to us both by being in the same religion. It's huge.

Traditional Jews, who may be religiously observant, reported added difficulties or complications with non-Jewish partners, who may not be comfortable observing Jewish Law, such as the prohibition of turning on lights or spending money on the Sabbath. In addition, some traditional Jews simply claimed that they would not even consider dating a non-Jewish man. A traditional Jew in his twenties put it this way:

> The only reason why I would only go for somebody Jewish is because of the way I was brought up. It has nothing to do with me being gay or straight; it was always understood that I was going to private school, this is the way you do Jewish things ... like I said, I'm

> traditional, in the sense that I would find someone who's Jewish, so we have certain things that are in common.

Another traditional Jew admitted he has only dated non-Jewish men as "more of a sexual thing, rather than a long-term partnership search thing." He expressed his opinion on the matter quite clearly:

> I would have never married a non-Jewish woman had I been heterosexual. Why should I change those values as a gay Jew? I fell in love with a non-Jewish guy several years ago. And I was totally madly in love with him. And I broke it off because of that.

This issue of becoming involved with non-Jews only for sexual relationships will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Another reason identified as to why gay Jewish men desire Jewish partners is the fear of anti-Semitism. This phenomenon occurred in isolated cases where the respondent was the child of Holocaust survivors, causing added sensitivity to prejudice against Jews. One respondent explained:

> I suppose because I'm a child of a Holocaust survivor, I never want to be called a dirty Jew. You know in a fit of anger, what comes out sometimes could be so hurtful that being called a dirty Jew is probably the worst thing I could ever hear. So I would never want to put myself in that position, and [my partner] being Jewish I don't have to worry.

Another child of survivors felt the same way:

> If it was an option, then definitely I would want to be in a relationship with someone who is Jewish, [rather] than [someone] who's not. There's no question about it! I just wouldn't feel the same comfort level with someone who isn't Jewish. At some point, they're going to turn around and say something...

The majority of respondents who offered an opinion about their parents' views on the matter indicated that their parents would prefer to see their son with a Jewish partner. A traditional Jew, reported:

> How would my parents' react if I brought home a non-Jewish guy? They would have a really hard time and I don't know how I'm going to deal with it if it comes to that. I really don't.

Alan, who comes from a very secular Jewish family, also reported that "they'd love for me to meet someone Jewish." Of the sample of Jewish parents interviewed, more than half expressed a desire for their son to find a Jewish partner. A mother of several children, including a gay teenage son, reported that she treats all her children the same way:

> I'm hoping that he will settle down, quote-unquote, and it would be with a Jewish partner. I would like that. When our eldest [heterosexual daughter] was dating, I would say, "Is he Jewish?" I don't see that I should change my attitudes just because they're gay. I need to let them know that it matters to me. I ask [her], and I will ask [him] when the time comes. I don't want to approach them differently. I would like to see him meet Jewish guys.

Inter-ethnic Realities

While I have illustrated that gay Jews report a relatively strong desire to partner with other Jews, and that parents often support this, the realities of the situation do not reflect this desire. One respondent's account stands out as an important indicator on this point. A secular Jew reported that he placed a personal ad in a Montreal newspaper stating, "Gay Jewish male seeks the same." He reported that of the numerous responses he received, not one was Jewish. As an experiment he then placed an ad in the same newspaper reading, "Gay male wrestler seeks the same." Of the numerous responses he received, a disproportionate amount were Jewish! While we must treat this as no more than a single anecdote, I would argue that this surprising story points to the strong

tendency of inter-ethnic dating practices among gay Jews: non-Jews were the only ones who responded to a gay Jewish man, and Jews disproportionately responded to a "wrestler," which would stereotypically be perceived as non-Jewish.

The same inter-ethnic pattern is suggested by another respondent. This respondent, who was active in *Keshet Shalom*, claimed that in his experience working for the now-defunct gay Jewish congregation in Toronto he got the impression that non-Jewish gay men considered a "Jewish husband to be the ultimate prize." He reported that:

> I have no idea why, but we would get people phoning up saying, "Hi, I want to join your group. I'm not Jewish, I don't know anything about it. But I would like to meet Jewish men. Can I join your group?"

In fact, the great majority of respondents reported that they have observed that it is much more common for Jewish men to become involved with non-Jewish men, than with Jewish men.

Behavioural evidence can also be provided. Of the ten respondents in my sample that had partners, eight of them had non-Jewish partners.[18] While one must be cautious to generalize based on a small non-probability sample, this finding combined with the above evidence provides a strong suggestion that gay Jewish men partner with non-Jews at a higher rate than do heterosexual Jews. This fact is, of course, consistent with the findings noted above, that ethnic minority gay men

[18] My interviews primarily gathered data on respondents who were involved in a serious relationship (i.e. with a single partner or boyfriend). In retrospect, it would have been useful to collect more data about the ethnicity of the men who respondents were casually dating.

and lesbians tend to partner with those outside their ethnic group more so than do heterosexual ethnic minority individuals.

It is interesting to note that only one-third of my sample had partners at all. This can be compared to the marriage rates of heterosexual Jewish men. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) in the United States, 46 per cent of Jewish men aged twenty-five to thirty-four were married (compared to 22 per cent of gay men in my sample in the same age group who had a serious partners), 73 per cent of Jewish men aged thirty-five to forty-four were married (compared to 50 per cent in my sample), and 77 per cent of Jewish men aged forty-five to fifty-four were married (compared to 33 per cent in my sample)(Fishman, 1993: 256).[19] The overall partner rate for gay and lesbian adults in the United States is estimated to be approximately 50 per cent.[20] It appears, therefore, that the overall gay Jewish partner rate of 33 per cent found in my sample is closer to the gay partnering rate than the Jewish partnering rate. Ambert (2003: 6) argued that gay partnerships are more likely than heterosexual partnerships to dissolve due to the fact that society gives less value and offers less support for gay relationships. As will be discussed later in this chapter, it is possible that lack of support from the Jewish community contributes to gay partnership rates involving a Jew being even lower than overall gay partnership

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[19] Of course it is possible that a small proportion of the married Jewish men included in the NJPS are gay.

[20] This figure is taken from a 1998 website entitled Partners Task Force for Gay and Lesbian Couples: Are Gay Couples Overlooked? (Partners' Gay/Lesbian Media Survey) [http://www.buddybuddy.com/toc.html]

rates. More research is needed in order to draw more definitive conclusions about these differing rates.

Analysis of Inter-ethnic Partnering Practices

The remainder of this chapter explores the under studied question of why gay Jewish men demonstrate a strong inter-ethnic partnering tendency. This is a particularly important question given the fact that two-thirds of my sample directly reported that they would prefer a relationship with a Jewish man. Where relevant, I will draw parallels between the Jewish case, other ethnic minority experiences and the heterosexual Jewish experience.

Analysis of the data allowed me to identify five possible reasons for this phenomenon:

a) Small number of openly gay Jews;

b) Non-acceptance by the Jewish community;

c) Lack of gay Jewish infrastructure;

d) Internalized distaste or discomfort with Jewishness; and

e) Internalized homophobia.

a) Small Number of Openly Gay Jews

To speculate why gay Jews tend to partner with non-Jews at a high rate, the obvious factor seems to be the sheer lack of eligible gay Jewish men. Finding a Jewish partner can be especially difficult if one lives away from the major urban

centres, where most Jews reside (Dworkin, 1997: 81). Simply stated, gay men are already restricted to a small part of the male population. To then desire a Jewish partner limits one's choices quite a bit more. As several respondents reported, gay Jews suffer from being a "minority within a minority." One respondent captures this difficult predicament:

> Every time I'm in-between relationships I say, "Next time I'm going to date someone who's Jewish." And then I never actually do. There are the guys who are interested in me, and then there's the circle of guys that I'm interested in, and then there's the circle of guys that are available. That leaves such a tiny proportion of the population ... that to add another criteria, like are they Jewish? ... there just isn't an out gay Jewish community big enough for there to be a pool to select from.

Another respondent reported that, because of the sheer lack of numbers, even observant gay Jews are reluctantly settling for non-Jewish partners:

> I know some of my most observant friends are settling down with non-Jews because at some point, I guess, you just give in and you just say, "Look, I don't want to be alone anymore, and I found a person whom I like very much, and they're not that Catholic or they're not that Christian ... and they tolerate my *schtick* for Judaism, and that's it."

In his quote, the above respondent raises an important point about closeted-ness. Not only is there a relatively small pool of gay Jews to meet in any one geographical region, a number of respondents commented that it is even harder to find partners because gay Jews are frequently closeted about their homosexuality. While it may be possible to find closeted gay Jews through the Internet, for some gay Jews they are very unattractive partners. As a respondent emphatically stated:

> I don't ever want to date somebody who's ashamed of me. I refuse to be closeted. It's not that I'm flamboyant, but I refuse to be closeted. I don't want to live a lie. And that means that if you're not openly gay, you're not going to want to be in a relationship with me.

As has been argued in earlier chapters, the negative reactions gay Jews receive from their families and other community members can encourage these men to keep their sexual orientation a private matter. We know from the literature that due to community pressure and homophobia many black men (Peplau et al., 1997: 20) and Asian men (Chan, 1989: 18-19) keep their homosexuality hidden, thus making it difficult for other co-ethnics to find them. This leads to the important discussion of the issue of non-acceptance by the Jewish community.

b) Non-Acceptance by the Jewish Community

While a small number of gay Jews may seem like the obvious reason why gay Jewish men do not partner with other Jews at high rates, my interviews revealed that lack of acceptance by Jewish families and the larger Jewish community of their gay members can have a very strong effect on whether gay Jewish men seek out other Jews. In an earlier chapter I presented the case of one respondent whose parents were so upset about his homosexuality that they cut off all financial support. What should be added to this story now is the effect this reaction had on this respondent's desire for a Jewish partner:

> It was pumped into me just like most of us, marry somebody Jewish. You marry somebody Jewish; you date somebody Jewish; you should always meet somebody Jewish. When I had the kind of reaction that I had from my parents when I came out, it was clear to me that my parents were ashamed. My mother was very worried that it would reflect [badly] on her.
>
> When I first got involved with [a gay Jewish organization] we were really invading the mainstream to let the Jewish community know that we were there. We had interviews with the *Canadian Jewish*

> *News* and my mother was absolutely mortified that the Jews, all those *Yentas,* would find out that [Max Greenblatt's] son was [gay]. "And for God sake don't give them your name. And if you don't care about yourself, you should at least care about us." So that whole experience really turned me off Jews, it really did. And I went off to the bars and I was involved in other organizations but nothing Jewish. I was really rebelling.

Another respondent, whose difficult story is reported in an earlier chapter, described the challenges faced in constructing a positive gay Jewish identity and how this can decrease one's desire to find a Jewish partner:

> To start with, even if you're not gay, having a Jewish identity is a challenge in the Diaspora to begin with, because it's an optional thing. So you have that thing already. Then you have the added thing that you're gay, and that supposedly the tradition says you're a piece of shit and rejects you, like [Rabbi Stern's sermon] on Yom Kippur, or your mother is ashamed of you, or whatever. So you have all this negative energy coming from the Jewish world that if it's not important to you, you just dump it. So, Jewish partner, *schmewish* partner, it doesn't matter, that's why.

A secular Jew expressed his anger about the subject:

> I'm very offended by the idea that I should limit my partners to only Jews, because it's hard enough as a gay man to find a partner in the first place. And even if I do, I don't necessarily get the encouragement and the support from the Jewish community!

A traditional Jew reported that as a Jewish educator he is very familiar with the phenomenon of intermarriage in the Jewish community. He observed that many of these Jews were marrying non-Jews partly due to negative Jewish experiences and associations. He commented:

> Somebody once said the Jews are just like everybody else, just more so. It's a great line. I think gay Jews are like all the other Jews, just more so!

This respondent makes the important point that if it is true that some heterosexual Jews are marrying out of the faith due to bad Jewish experiences, then considering

the evidence provided of the levels of disapproval from the Jewish community towards gay Jews, it should not come as surprise that gay Jews are partnering at an even higher rate with non-Jews.

A secular respondent suggested that once a Jewish man has already "violated" ethno-religious standards by coming out as gay, it is no longer difficult to break other community norms:

> Given that I got past all the stigma and that I am attracted to the same sex, is it going to be a such a big deal? If I went that far ... I mean that's a big, big, big taboo for many years. So if I got past that and I meet someone with a real chemistry and he's not Jewish, who cares.

As mentioned, more respondents reported that their parents prefer them to partner with Jews than with non-Jews. There were some cases, however, where respondents reported a double standard on the part of their parents. Because some parents assumed that their gay sons would not have children, they did not express a preference that they have a Jewish partner. For their heterosexual children, however, these same parents expressed a preference for a Jewish spouse. This double standard among parents has also been identified by Mushkat (1999: 242-243) in her research on Jewish lesbians. This attitude likely further accentuates the trend of inter-ethnic partnering.

The above evidence suggests that gay Jews may be dealing with conflicting desires. On the one hand there may be a desire to find Jewish partners for reasons of cultural and ethnic connection. On the other hand, due to non-acceptance by the Jewish community, there may be competing forces pushing gay Jews away from Jewish life and other Jews. The following sections can be seen as

other ways that community non-acceptance can directly or indirectly foster a situation of inter-ethnic partnering.

c) Lack of Gay Jewish Infrastructure

Another reason why gay Jewish men who wish to find Jewish partners are not successful in doing so is the lack of a gay Jewish organizational infrastructure in Toronto to facilitate social interaction between gay Jews. Several respondents complained that there are few opportunities for gay Jewish men to meet one another. One respondent admitted:

> I've always thought the next partner was going to be Jewish, and it's just never turned out that way. I guess if I can be involved more in the gay Jewish community, I would meet more gay Jews and the opportunity [would increase], but if the community isn't there, then it's always hit and miss whether [he] turns out to be [Jewish].

Another respondent also lamented that in a large Jewish centre like Toronto there are few safe Jewish settings for gay Jews to socialize:

> I'm not going to sit around and wait for Mr. Jewish man to come along. It would be nice. It would be good. Part of me has said, "Well maybe I just need to put myself into a community where that can happen." The same way that if I lived in Fargo and I wanted to marry a Jewish woman, I would say Fargo is not the place for me to meet a Jewish woman. It's hard for me to believe that Toronto is not a place for me to meet a Jewish man but it may not be. The next answer as far as I'm concerned in terms of doing that is to actually start hanging out in the non-Jewish world and to see if I can find a Jewish partner in a non-Jewish context, because there ain't no way that I found to be meeting Jewish men in a Jewish context!
>
> There aren't Jewish gay socials. *Kollel* [a liberal Jewish educational institution in Toronto] runs this fabulous singles dating thingy. And a couple of years ago they made it abundantly clear that it was for straight people. And a couple of us challenged them on that one and said, "Why?" And their answer was that they need to make it really

> clear that people are coming into a safe environment and part of that safety is knowing that it is purely a heterosexual environment!

Because Toronto is by far the largest Jewish centre in Canada, one may assume that it would have many opportunities for gay Jews to meet one another. This is not the case. The largest gay Jewish organization in the city, *Keshet Shalom*, officially folded in the fall of 2001. My data suggest that a lack of community support, both financial and emotional, played a significant role in its demise. There were simply not enough openly gay Jews in town who were willing to continue to work on a purely volunteer basis to sustain the organization. There is one social group called JLGBT (Jewish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and young professionals of Toronto), headquartered at the University of Toronto, that meets a few times a year. However, it is not well-publicized outside of the university community and is designed for "young adults." Numerous respondents who are older than thirty-five complained about the absence of any gay Jewish programming geared to their age group in the city.

As opposed to the high priority put in the Jewish community to develop and fund dating services and matchmaking services for heterosexual Jews, no community endorsed service exists for matching gay Jews. One can reasonably speculate that this is directly related to the community's non-acceptance of homosexuality and gay partnerships. This phenomenon is not unique to the Jewish community. Peplau et al. (1997: 20-21) and Greene and Boyd-Franklin (1996: 260) report the same situation in black communities, as does Chan (1989: 18-19)

for Asian communities. Ethnic minority communities are reluctant to develop the necessary social infrastructure for their gay men and lesbians to meet one another.

d) Internalized Distaste or Discomfort with Jewishness

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jackson and Sullivan (1999: 4-6) report the tendency in Australia for Anglo-Australian gay men to partner at high rates with Asian gay men. This pattern is caused in part by the fact that, similar to what has been described above, gay Asians feel alienated from their own culture due to the rejection of their homosexuality from their host community. In the Australian case, this type of inter-ethnic partnership can also involve issues of exploitation and racism. Older gay Anglo men are stigmatized in the Australian gay scene due to their age. Therefore, they do not have the required social capital to partner with younger Anglo men. However, by virtue of their Anglo ethnicity, these older men still hold higher social and cultural capital than Asian gay men who are stigmatized due to their non-Anglo ethnicity. Therefore, the predominant pattern sees <u>older</u> gay Anglo partnering with <u>younger</u> gay Asian men.

I provide this example to illustrate how racial oppression can affect choice of partner. Older gay Anglo men settle for gay Asians because they are the best that they can get. To add to the devaluing of Asian culture in this context, younger gay Anglo men speak pejoratively of these older Anglo men as "rice queens" because of their tendency to partner with Asians. Interestingly, gay Asians who partner with other gay Asians are also given a pejorative term: "sticky rice." The results of these patterns can be very damaging to the psyche of the gay Asian

man. When Asians are both rejected by their own culture for being gay and also suffer from racism from Anglo-culture for being Asian, internalized racism can arise (Han, 2000: 219-221; Nakajima et al., 1996: 573-574). Similar patterns of internalized racism among gay blacks in the United States are reported by Greene (1998: 49-51). This devaluing of one's own ethnicity can accentuate inter-ethnic dating patterns.

Similar to the case of Asians, gay Jews can also feel doubly stigmatized. On the one hand, they can feel marginalized due to a perceived Christian-normative climate in the general society. On the other hand, they can feel marginalized due to the rejection of their gay identity from their own Jewish community. My interview data cannot determine whether inter-ethnic dating patterns among gay Jews contain elements of exploitation as described above. However, what came to light was some resentment towards Judaism or a devaluing of one's ethnicity on the part of some respondents. Sometimes this resentment manifests itself as a subconscious distaste or discomfort for things Jewish.

A number of respondents acknowledged the reality of this internalized distaste for Jewishness. One respondent raised the issue in the context of partnering practices:

> I think that a lot of gay men will tell you, "I've dated lots of Jewish men and a lot of them are fucked up." You heard me say it! [laughter]. I can't parse out how much of that is my own anti-Jewish stuff, my own issues around Jews and Judaism and my own fears around that. This has almost been the universal experience in gay men in Jewish community: it's been so negative that they carry around all this baggage around being Jewish.

Another respondent's perspective is also quite instructive in this regard. While he states a preference for a Jewish partner, he then goes on to express why he does not want a Jewish partner. He reported:

> I find that I always thought it would be great to have a Jewish partner because I wouldn't have to explain so many things. But every time I have tried to meet or date Jewish guys, they always remind me of my family and so it's a horrible situation. It's not what I want, so they're better off as friends; but the idea still appeals to me.

Other comments from respondents regarding their reservations about a Jewish partner included "If I found out someone was a gay Jewish man, it would be unpleasant for me because, people might think that I was Jewish," or "Sometimes their angst reminds me a little bit of my angst," or "I get very bored of the Jewish mother, overprotective Jewish son *schtick,*" or "I think that men having neuroses too close to your own aren't very hot. Non-Jewish men's neuroses aren't as apparent or as oppressive." All hint at a certain discomfort with their own Jewishness. In all, one third of my respondents expressed some form of this discomfort or distaste with Judaism. There are a number of references to this phenomenon in the popular gay Jewish literature (Klepfisz, 1989: 46-48; Mass 1994: Ch. 2; Schuman, 1989: 16). Rofes (1989: 202-203), a gay Jewish man, goes so far as to say that his anti-Jewishness intensifies when he dates Jews.

Other examples in my data that may have some connection to a discomfort with Jewishness concern issues of sexual and erotic attraction. A secular Jew confided that he finds having sex with a Jewish man to be very unappealing. He admitted it is not rational. He referred to it as a "gut feeling." Another respondent in his fifties admitted:

> Every time that I have dated Jewish men, it becomes a matter of friendship. The sexual thing for me, it just disappears. It's more than a coincidence. It's got to be more. There is almost a collegiality about meeting another Jewish gay man. There is a framework that is similar ... which you think would propel you into a relationship with a Jewish man. But for me, [it doesn't].

One respondent had interesting comments about why gay Jewish men may not find other gay Jewish men sexually arousing:

> A lot of gay cultures have been based on the sort of California surfer boy *twink* thing, and it has not been a typical physical characteristic of gay Jews to be like these blond, blue-eyed, hairless children. So if that's the kind of culture you're brought up in and looking for as desirable, then you're not going to look for Jews, because they don't fit that characteristic.

Because the media has glorified a certain physical type at the expense of other physical types, gay Jewish men may sub-consciously internalize these preferences and develop the idea that Jews are not sexually desirable. Another respondent had a similar perspective:

> Are we attracted to other Jewish men? Most would say no because physically they're not [our] type. Every gay Jewish man I've met is usually dark. Dark hair, dark eyes. [We] all want blonds. [We] want Brad Pitt! [We're] not that interested in Adam Sandler! It's just unfortunate.
>
> Even that [gay] rabbi from Los Angeles we brought up here for the weekend ... the knife through my heart was that his lover is a blond, blue-eyed Catholic guy. The *Rebbetzin* [rabbi's "wife"] wasn't even Jewish! I couldn't believe it!

One respondent provided another interesting observation regarding sexual expression:

> Another [issue] could be sexual practices. Having read the messages for a gay Jewish group, there seems to be a lot of attitudes that gay Jews should be very Christian missionary in their sexual behaviour. So good Jewish boys aren't into S and M, aren't into anything kinky, they're just a good fuck, and that's it. So if they're into anything

> outside of that, they feel like they're the only gay Jew who's into something alternative and therefore they cannot look within the gay Jewish community for it; they have to look outside.

Again, we see that gay Jews may internalize certain stereotypes about Jews that may restrain them from their desired form of expression, thus potentially preventing Jews from becoming sexually involved with one another.

It is important here to briefly reflect on gender differences in partnering practices. Two respondents reported a difference between gay Jewish men and Jewish lesbians, suggesting that Jewish lesbians are more likely to partner with other Jews due to different priorities in relationships. Emile reported that he was amazed to see so many Jewish lesbian couples. Another respondent, Abe, offered a reason why there would be a difference between genders:

> I think the nature of how women want to connect and how men want to connect are very different. I'm making very gross generalizations, but I think women see relationships in the long-term and attraction goes into a pool of other things, whereas men are just more likely to act on impulse and attraction. I think that the appeal for men tends to be very genital-brain, whereas for women there's a different kind of culture.

Abe's speculation is corroborated to some extent by Hunter et al. (1998: 94), who reported that gay men, more than lesbians, are inclined to have sex on the first date. Abe's perspective also lends some support to the idea brought forward in this section that gay Jewish men seem to be interested in forming relationships with other Jewish men for cultural reasons, but sometimes fall short of doing so because of lack of sexual attraction. It is likely true that Jewish lesbians share this desire for cultural connection with other Jews. If it is true that lesbians put less emphasis on immediate sexual attraction in their relationships,

then this may be one factor which accounts for a higher inter-ethnic partnering rate among gay Jewish men over Jewish lesbians. More exploration on this topic is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn.

Whether it be a distaste for Jews as sexual partners, a distaste for overprotected Jewish sons, or a distaste for Jewish angst or neurosis, my data reveal some respondents who demonstrate a subconscious or "gut" discomfort for things Jewish, which may be preventing them from establishing long-term romantic partnerships with other Jews.

Of course, these patterns are not limited to gay Jews. Hyman (1995: 169) and Prell (1999: 18-20) have argued that in their struggle to find a secure place in American society, American (heterosexual) Jews have historically projected those qualities for which Jews have been criticized (e.g. being overly demanding, pushy, money-hungry) onto other Jews as a way to try to separate themselves from this damaging stigma. This has translated into the prominent gender stereotype of the Jewish woman as a Jewish American Princess (JAP), for example. This negative stereotype, which enjoyed its greatest popularity in the late 1970s and 1980s but still permeates today, depicts Jewish women as materialistic, whiny, aggressive, nagging – and withholding of sex (Fishman, 2000: 8-9; Prell, 1999: Ch. 6). Jewish men thus sometimes wish to avoid these sexually passive women and seek out their dream *shiksa* (non-Jewish woman), who will be more sexually exciting and materialistically less demanding (Weinfeld, 2001: 129). In addition, Jewish women may internalize these negative stereotypes about themselves and seek out non-Jewish partners as a way of

separating themselves from the environment that they associate with the oppression. This attitude, exhibiting a distaste for Jewish women, is not dissimilar to the examples above of gay Jewish men having a distaste for other Jewish men. Both can promote some form of internalized distaste of Jewishness and thus might contribute to inter-ethnic partnerships and marriages.

e) Internalized Homophobia

As discussed in an earlier chapter, there is some discussion in the gay Jewish literature of a form of internalized oppression often termed internalized homophobia (Duberman, 1991: 14-15; Raphael, 1996: 84; Schuman, 1989: 16). When a gay individual is living in a community that is quite hostile to homosexuality, as the Jewish community can be, this person may start to internalize these negative messages and develop shame and guilt about his/her homosexuality. I would argue that this phenomenon can also perpetuate patterns of inter-ethnic partnering among gay Jewish men. While ten respondents demonstrated attitudes that may be connected to internalized distaste or discomfort with Jewishness, only two interview respondents demonstrated some form of internalized homophobia. It should therefore be considered a less common phenomenon.

The most prominent example of this phenomenon came from a respondent who described his feelings of guilt for being gay. His guilt developed because he believed that by being gay he was shirking his responsibility to fulfill

the requirement in the Jewish community to procreate to ensure ethnic continuity. Interestingly, these emotions had a strong bearing on his choice of partner:

> I felt guilty being Jewish and gay myself. It was a big source of discomfort for me. I would not have entertained a Jewish gay guy, because it was enough that I'm Jewish and gay, so therefore that's one less male in the [Jewish] stable, so to speak, likely to procreate. But the idea that I'd be – even though I obviously wasn't going to make the other guy gay – the idea that I'd be taking another gay guy, that I'd be with another gay guy, was just too much for me to deal with. I just couldn't accept that.

This respondent felt shame for being gay within a Jewish context and seems to have felt more shame about the idea of "contaminating" another gay Jew by partaking in a relationship with him. This internalized homophobia prevented him from seeking Jewish partners.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to make a contribution to the understudied topic of ethnic composition of ethnic minority gay male relationships. It illustrates that while the majority of gay Jewish men may desire a Jewish partner, there are a number of reasons why these partnerships are not actually occurring. Level of Jewishness did not prove to be an explanatory variable in this case. Equal proportions of traditional and secular Jews fit into this pattern of inter-ethic partnering. The fact that so many gay Jews are partnering with non-Jews does offer important evidence that anti-Jewish sentiment in the gay community could not be widespread.

The chapter pieces together different aspects of the ethnic minority gay experience and illustrates their links to the phenomenon of inter-ethnic partnering practices. Besides the more obvious factors at work, such as small numbers of gay Jews, the chapter uncovers more subtle underlying dynamics that are sometimes at play. I argue that the theme of non-acceptance of homosexuality by the Jewish community sometimes creates a situation where gay Jews are turned away from Judaism and Jewish life and find it more comforting to seek a partner outside of this oppressing milieu. The fact that gay Jews often feel pressured to stay closeted, and the ethnic community chooses not to develop a social infrastructure to allow its gay members to meet one another, only accentuates the situation. The chapter suggests that oppression towards ethnic minorities from general society and the "mainstream" gay community, combined with rejection of gay identity in the ethno-religious community, can bring about internalized oppression on the part of the ethnic minority gay individual. Expressions of internalized distaste or discomfort with Jewishness or internalized homophobia can contribute to inter-ethnic partnering. Other ethnic minority communities, such as blacks and Asians, demonstrate similar patterns.

Some of these patterns can be observed in the heterosexual Jewish context, as well. Through gender and sexual stereotypes, some heterosexual Jewish men, for example, have also developed a distaste for Jewish women, whom they consider to be more demanding and less sexually desirable. While this similarity between gay and heterosexual Jews exists, the other factors – such as a lack of a large pool of accessible partners, the challenge of being stigmatized within the

Jewish community and the resulting lack of resources and motivation to develop a community-sponsored gay Jewish social infrastructure – indicate that gay Jews face distinctive obstacles in finding mates within their own ethnic community. With out-marriage rates of 30 per cent among heterosexual Jews in Canada (Weinfeld, 2001: 154), these findings suggest that if such a rate were systematically studied for gay Jews it would likely be higher.

It is important to note that this chapter dealt with the question of whether the partners of my respondents were Jewish or non-Jewish at the time the relationships began. Sociologists of the Jews (e.g. Fishman, 2002; Phillips, 1997) are beginning to pay closer attention to how Jewish and non-Jewish partners negotiate their mixed ethnicities during the course of their relationships. Interestingly, among my eight respondents who had non-Jewish partners, one reported his partner is about to begin the process of converting to Judaism, another reported that his partner is considering converting to Judaism, and two others reported that their partners are "interested" or "knowledgeable" about Judaism. Perhaps what we are seeing here are gay Jewish men who because they cannot find other gay Jewish men (due to small numbers or lack of social infrastructure), are therefore partnering with the next best thing: non-Jewish gay men who have a favourable predisposition to Judaism. Another explanation is that these Jewish men are in fact influencing their partners during the course of their relationships to acquire an interest in Judaism. If the latter explanation is true, then gay Jewish men, as is sometimes the case among heterosexual Jews, may actually be helping to bring more Jews into the fold. Future research would be

necessary to determine the rate at which non-Jewish partners of gay Jewish men are converting to Judaism. Based on the 1990 NJPS, we know this rate is approximately 10 to 20 per cent in the United States for the non-Jewish partners of heterosexual Jews (Cohen 1991: 49).

Overall, the chapter provides yet another example of the way that some gay Jews may suffer from what could be termed "identity ambivalence." The ambivalence is caused by conflicting or competing desires: on the one hand they want Jewish partners for cultural reasons, but on the other hand there are forces at work that do not allow this to happen. Respondents often experience a clash between their Jewish and gay desires and are forced to struggle to find ways to negotiate this difficult divide. These circumstances make it difficult for gay Jews to develop a secure Jewish identity and to integrate their ethnic and gay identities. It appears that having a relationship with a non-Jewish partner who is fond of Jews and Judaism may serve as one strategy that helps to bridge this divide. A later chapter will discuss strategies for identity negotiation in more detail. The final chapter of this work will discuss the community implications of this inter-ethnic partnering pattern.

Chapter 6

Gay Jewish Fatherhood

I had fantasies and dreams for years about the kids and the bar mitzvahs and the weddings and the whole business. It wasn't until many years later that I realized the fantasies never included a wife.

Secular gay Jew in his late-forties

In tandem with the previous chapter, this chapter examines how the challenges gay Jews face might apply to specific key life situations. This chapter examines my respondents' reflections on becoming a father. It will highlight some of the links that exist in the minds of the respondents between their Jewish identities and their thoughts on gay parenthood. In the social scientific literature that deals with the gay experience, very little discussion exists on the subject of the intersection of ethnicity and gay fatherhood. This chapter attempts to make a contribution to this understudied area. Where relevant, it offers some comparative context to non-Jewish gay parenthood as well as to heterosexual Jewish parenthood.

While a majority of gay Jews interviewed in this study expressed a desire to become a father, none of the respondents had children at the time of the interview. This chapter will provide a context to explain why this is occurring. The chapter illustrates that the issue of fatherhood is another area where gay Jewish men are

struggling to negotiate a path through competing forces of Jewish and gay identities.

Gay and Lesbian Parenting

Much more scholarly attention has been paid to the experience of lesbian parents than gay male parents (Dunne, 1999: 1; Hunter et al, 1998: 121). As previously stated, more research needs to be conducted on the experiences of gay men.

While the subject of gay and lesbian parenting is not new, what is new are the varied social contexts in which gays and lesbians are having children (Weston, 1991: Ch. 7). There has been a significant transformation in this regard over the last thirty years, as attitudes in "mainstream" society towards homosexuality and "non-traditional families" have liberalized dramatically (Weeks et al., 2001: 1-3). Thirty years ago, the majority of gay men who were having children were doing so in the context of heterosexual relationships. Many of these gay men remained married to their wives, others divorced and many kept their sexual orientations hidden to the general public. By contrast, the majority of gay fathers (56 per cent) in the recent *National Study of Gay and Lesbian Parents*[21] began parenting their children with a male partner (these partnerships are often referred to as *primary* gay relationships)(Johnson and O'Connor, 2002: 86). Weston's (1991) study of gay and lesbian parents in the San Francisco area included a sample of eighty

[21] This American study, conducted by Suzanne Johnson and Elizabeth O'Connor in 1999-2000, included a sample of 415 gay and lesbian parents.

respondents, where only eight were ever married to spouses of the "opposite sex." Johnson and O'Connor (2002: 87) illustrate the changing parenting context over time with their finding that the average age of the children of respondents who began their parenting in a heterosexual relationship was approximately twelve years, while the average age of the children of respondents who began their parenting in primary gay relationships was approximately five years.

Early studies on gay fathers (Miller, 1979; Bozett, 1980) focused primarily on two themes: (a) dispelling myths about gay fathers as sexual abusers of children; and (b) examining the issue of how and when the gay father disclosed his sexuality to his children (the assumption being that most men bore children as closeted gay men involved in heterosexual relationships). It is only from the mid-1990s and onward that research has been conducted that is sensitive to the new same-sex parenting contexts referred to above. Dunne (1999: 6-8), for example, outlined the variety of non-heterosexual parenting arrangements that now exist for gay men: (1) men can become sperm donors (involving different levels of participation in the raising of the child, from no involvement, to a more limited "kindly uncle" role, to full co-parenting); (2) men can arrange for a surrogate mother to give birth to their children; (3) men can adopt; (4) men can be foster-parents; or (5) a man may serve as a father if his partner has a child.

Due to these new parenting contexts (new reproductive technologies and the increasing willingness of gays and lesbians to have children in a non-heterosexual families), we know that gays and lesbians are having children at a much higher rate now than thirty years ago (Johnson and O'Connor, 2002: 1).

This trend is often referred to as the "gay-by boom." For the first time statistics are available in Canada to identify this phenomenon. The 2001 Canada Census reports that 15 per cent of common-law lesbian couples in Canada have children and 3 per cent of gay male common-law couples have children.[22] One could reasonably speculate that these numbers are under-reported since some in the gay and lesbian community are likely uncomfortable reporting their sexual orientation on a government census. Future censi will allow us to monitor the changes.

For same-sex couples who wish to raise their biological children exclusively within a same-sex context, it is more complex for gay men than it is for lesbian women. New reproductive technologies allow women to purchase sperm from an anonymous donor or to arrange for a friend to donate it, and need not have any further contact with the man. Men, on the other hand, must arrange for a surrogate mother to carry the child for nine months. The legal, social and financial ramifications of this situation are more onerous. For men who are donating sperm and wish to be involved in raising the child in some form of co-parenting arrangement, the negotiations with the mother often prove to be challenging. Questions of whether to live in the same house, same building or same block as the biological mother, decisions as to how much involvement with the child is appropriate, among other issues, often involve complex and difficult negotiation (Johnson and O'Connor, 2002: 97; Weeks et al., 2001: 169-70). For these reasons, adoption is the most popular method for gay men to have a child.

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[22] See Statistics Canada. (22 October 2002), "2001 Census: marital status, common-law status, families, dwellings and households", in *The Daily* [Online], Available at: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/021022/d021022a.htm> [1 March 2003].

Johnson and O'Connor (2002: 97) report that more than 85 per cent of gay fathers arrange to have children through adoption. Adopting a child, of course, does not give the father a biological connection to the child. This fact can have a strong bearing on the gay father's reflections on ethnic identity.

As stated, there is little discussion in the literature of the issue of ethnicity as it relates to gay and lesbian parenthood. Weston (1991: 166-7) is one of the few who briefly addresses it. She observed two distinct patterns in her research. A number of her respondents viewed the heterosexual biological family as the principal mediator of ethnic identity, where two 'opposite sex' biological parents are needed to hand down the appropriate cultural traditions to their children. In this case, some felt that forming a gay or lesbian family with children could not satisfactorily perpetuate proper cultural values and is thus considered a betrayal of ethnic heritage. Some ethnic minority lesbians and gay men also felt that because they already had "one or two strikes against them" due to race or class oppression, they did not want to place the added stigma on a child of having a gay or lesbian parent.

On the other hand, some African-American respondents with a strong ethnic identity saw no problem with having children through same-sex partnership or other non-nuclear family arrangements. In these cases, their ethnic identities and kinship ties did not require the biological connection of the child to all of his or her caregivers. Raising a child within a same-sex context with specific ethnic and cultural traditions was thus seen by a number of Weston's Native-American,

African-American, Latino and Jewish respondents as a concrete refutation that gay relationships contribute to the process of cultural genocide.

We see here a difference in values about the importance of two biological parents raising the child. These differing perspectives are important to keep in mind as we examine the data I have collected.

Desire for Children

Of all the gay male respondents in my study, slightly more than half expressed a strong desire to have children, just less than one third specifically expressed a desire not to have children and the remaining did not have a strong opinion one way or the other. Those who expressed a desire to have children fall into two general categories: those who claimed that they actively plan to have children (primarily respondents in their twenties, thirties and early forties), and those who felt that they were too old to have children and who had strong regrets about this perceived shortcoming in their lives (primarily respondents in their mid-forties, fifties and older). This finding of older men with regrets about not having children was also found in the research of Weeks et al. (2001:162). The respondents' type of Jewishness (secular or traditional) did not serve as an explanatory variable on this issue.

The strong desire for children is, of course, not unique to gay Jews. The first commandment in the Torah (Genesis 1:28) is to "be fruitful and multiply" (Feldman, 1995: 29). This high value placed on bearing children resonates with the majority of Jews, both observant and secular (Weinfeld, 2001: 137).

Goldscheider (1986: 92) reported that Jewish women are less likely than women of any other religious or ethnic group to state that they wish to remain childless (similar data on Jewish men does not exist). As mentioned, slightly over half of my sample of gay men expressed a desire to have children. This proportion is likely lower than the overall Jewish average. The rates I found in my sample are closer to the rates in the general gay male population. Patterson (2000: 1058) reported on a study by Beers (1996), for example, which claimed that approximately half of gay men desire to be fathers.

At first glance, respondents' reasons for either wanting or not wanting children do not show any direct connection to issues of ethnicity. Those who do not want children commonly gave reasons such as "I don't feel called to be a parent," "I would rather focus on my career," "I don't think I would make a good parent," or "they scream, make noise and cost money!" Though my respondents did not mention it, the literature reports that gay men who are fathers often feel marginalized from the mainstream gay male society, which does not often have room for children's needs (Dunne, 1999: 8).[23] This phenomenon, combined with the perception from some parts of general society that gay men are simply unfit to be fathers (Weeks et al, 2001: 157), can bring about a double stigma to gay fatherhood.

Those who desire children commonly spoke of strong paternal instincts, a long-time dream of having kids, an unwillingness to accept the fact that they won't have kids and the expectation that they are just as worthy potential parents

[23] In response to this negative reaction, gay-father support and social service groups have proliferated in major North American cities in recent years.

as any heterosexual. A traditional respondent in his early thirties explained his strong desire in this way:

> I think that having a child is something very important to me. I would rather be thirty-five and a single parent, than forty and still looking for a relationship and thinking about having a child. I think that's more important to me. I think that there are lot of things that I have to give to a child. I hope that there are good qualities in me, and morals and things that I can pass on.

Two other respondents in their twenties and thirties also specifically mentioned that they would not be prepared to delay having a child until they have a partner. The desire for a child superseded the desire for a partner.

As mentioned, a number of respondents in their mid-forties and fifties expressed strong regrets about not having children when they were younger. A secular Jew in his fifties explained:

> What gay people are doing now didn't exist twenty years [ago]. There are a myriad of ways of fathering children now. This is a whole revolution. Twenty years ago gay couples could not adopt kids, but they are now, quite legally. It's been a huge shift. I probably would have looked into it twenty years ago, because I had a great biological desire to have kids. [But] it wasn't an option. The only option was to get married and have kids. I said, "I'm not going to get married. I don't want to have a wife." I remember thinking the wife was this undesirable intermediary to having children. If you could skip the wife and have kids, that would be great, and I couldn't figure out a way to do that. So it wasn't done.

The majority of respondents believed that if they had a child their parents would be quite supportive. This is in keeping with the findings of Johnson and O'Connor (2002: 108), who report that two-thirds of their general gay male sample did not anticipate any disapproval from their parents. The sample of parents I interviewed were divided as to whether they supported the idea of their sons having children. Those who had reservations spoke of the complexities of a

co-parenting arrangement in which their sons would not have the opportunity to live with their children. They felt this would be emotionally difficult for both their sons and their grandchildren. One mother, who supports her gay son having children, expressed regret over the challenges involved:

> My only regret for a gay man is that he can't have children easily. The women, if they want them, can go out and buy sperm. But for a man who wants to parent a child, it's not so easy. And that's my only regret for my son. I also worry about the larger world and the reactions when he wants to move up the ladder, but I think he's good enough and smart enough; he'll contend with that. But if he wants to be a father, it ain't going to be easy. And that's my only regret.

A number of respondents reported that their parents simply assumed that because they were gay it was already established that they would not have children. Some parents admitted this directly. Clearly, these parents were not familiar with the transformations, described above, that have taken place in the gay and lesbian community over the last two to three decades. Weeks et al (2001: 162) also found that, in keeping with the common wisdom of their generation, many parents mistakenly assumed their gay and lesbian children would not have children.

Most respondents who did not anticipate full support from their parents felt that in time, as their parents became more accustomed to the new child, they would begin to show more support. Johnson and O'Connor (2002: 110) reported that this actually occurred with most parents in their study. This idea of parents' gradual acceptance over time of their sons having children is also in keeping with the findings in an earlier chapter, which explained that parents often went through a slow process of moderating their views. A secular respondent in his thirties

offered an insightful interpretation of how he thought his parents would gradually grow accustomed to his having children:

> I think it's changed over the years in terms of the social attitudes and legal changes that have gone on, and I think at first they [were] thinking, "Well, no, this will never happen, listen to what he's thinking." Certainly over the last ten years, it's becoming more of a realistic possibility now. I think they've [both] been quite supportive about it. I've never had any feelings that they've doubted my capabilities as a parent. And so I think if and when the time came, they'd [both] be very supportive about it. I think it would take some getting used to, particularly if I was with somebody. And again, I think, only because it's never come up in any serious fashion, there would probably be a lot more questions about it when the time were to come.

The majority of respondents who wanted children spoke of adoption as the most likely method they would use. Most parents who supported their sons having children also spoke of adoption as the most feasible method. A number of respondents spoke of the difficulties involved in co-parenting with the biological mother. A traditional respondent in his thirties explained why he prefers adopting to co-parenting:

> I considered the idea of approaching a woman, you know a [lesbian] couple, and sharing parenting with them. But at this point I think I'd like to not have that complication. It's hard enough to raise a child with a gay partner whom you are in love with and committed to .... To start negotiating with people who you don't have that deep connection with is tough.

Another respondent reiterated this point:

> I'm not sure how much I'd want to [parent] with two people already involved, who are in their relationship. Even excluding all the legal difficulties and ramifications of that, from a purely parenting perspective, I think it would be very difficult for me, because I would want to have that active role, and I'm not sure how that would play itself out. You know, I don't want to live with a lesbian couple the rest of my life and raise kids, it's not sort of where I anticipated things going [*laughter*].

Fatherhood Realities

Despite the desire among the majority of my respondents to have children, none actually had children at the time of the interviews. It is true that Jews have lower fertility rates than non-Jews in North America (Goldstein, 1992: 122). For example, Jewish women in the United States in the late 1980s aged twenty-five to twenty-nine averaged only 0.5 children, whereas all white women in this age group averaged one child. By their early forties, Jewish women averaged 1.6 children, while white women in this group averaged 2.1 children (no such information exists for Jewish men) (Goldstein, 1992; 122). Weinfeld (2001: 142) confirmed that similar patterns exist in Canada. With no children at the time of interviews, however, clearly my sample of gay Jewish men have a fertility rate well below the Jewish average.

If we consider the 2001 Canada Census statistic that only 3 per cent of common-law gay male couples have children, my findings may not be considered terribly surprising. As the times continue to change and society becomes more open to gay fatherhood, it would be reasonable to assume that in ten years a number of these respondents will have children. Only one of my respondents had ever been married.

Gay Fatherhood and Jewish Identity

With the legal changes in Canada in the mid- to late-1990s regarding adoption by gay men, more societal acceptance of homosexuality and new advances in reproductive technologies, more and more gay men are seriously considering having children. Upon close examination, for a number of my gay Jewish respondents these reflections were connected to issues of Jewish identity. With strong expectations in Jewish families to procreate, some respondents spoke of the angst or guilt they feel about not directly passing on the Jewish family name through biology. A secular Jew in his early thirties admitted "I was really paranoid about not having children until my brother had two daughters." Jon, a secular Jew in his fifties, regretted that by not having children he is not allowing any possibility for Jewish continuity from his own bloodline. In the case of another respondent, the loss of many family members in the Holocaust exacerbated his regret for not being able to perpetuate the family genes. His remarks were quite poignant:

> The one part about being gay that's been problematic for me in terms of being Jewish is the whole cultural baggage about passing down a family name, and I think it's been exaggerated by the Holocaust in having so much of the family decimated. My one male [relative of my generation] with the same family name died of AIDS. He was also gay. So I'm the only male left with the name, and I failed them. Even though I know it's a social construction. It doesn't seem to be something my father talks about as [being] important, [but] I feel that there would be a need to pass on the name, and that's why using [my] sperm would be more legitimate for me than if I adopted a kid and gave him my name. That's an issue I've always wrestled with since I've been an adult.

Heterosexual Jewish couples who suffer from infertility difficulties sometimes describe a similar angst about not being able to give birth to children and contribute biologically to Jewish continuity. This feeling can again be exacerbated if members of the family were killed in the Holocaust. Because Jewish couples typically marry later and attempt to start a family on average later than non-Jews, it is likely that infertility is more common among Jewish couples. Fishman (1993: 51-54) reported the high figure of 13.6 per cent of all Jewish women aged thirty to thirty-four who have had fertility problems.

Because traditional interpretations of Jewish law dictate that it is the religion of the mother that determines whether the child is Jewish, some heterosexual Jewish men who are married to non-Jewish women also face the potential difficulty of some in the Jewish community not considering their children Jewish. Some of these heterosexual men may thus also feel they have failed to contribute biologically to Jewish continuity.

In response to the angst or regret for not biologically passing on the Jewish family name, some of my respondents also expressed resentment towards the Jewish community for not adequately accommodating gay Jewish men who wish to have children. One complained about the incompatibility of fulfilling the Jewish expectation of getting married and having kids when one is gay. He bemoaned the fact that rabbis and other Jewish leaders are not encouraging alternative arrangements to fulfill the Jewish law to procreate:

> I do feel some periodic pangs of regret that apparently I won't have children. And so if I was looking to complain about that, I would say it's just too bad that the Jewish community wasn't more encouraging of people who are gay and Jewish having children, notwithstanding

> the fact that they're not going to be legally married to an opposite-sex person. The idea of saying to people, you can have your [gay] relational life, but you also have this tradition to pass on ... and so the way to do that is to have children. You would think they ought to encourage that, [but] that was never an option.

Respondents perceived a strong resistance to gay parenthood from Jewish institutional leadership. A traditional Jew in his forties felt strongly about this issue. He expressed a personal desire for Jewish continuity. Again we see a direct connection to the Holocaust:

> So I think that's why this gay thing comes out as: "You! Don't be proud for not having Jewish children! We've died in the Holocaust!" And I've felt it, too. I feel that my anger is, yes, I do want to populate the world with Jews. I am a Jewish nationalist. I don't want my Jewish people to die out. I'm obsessed with that myself, whether it's heterosexual or homosexual. So don't ever accuse me of not being passionate about the future of this people! That's the whole hypocrisy, the whole Catch-22 of this attack on me as a gay Jew. Of all people, I want this people to come forward, but you've made it impossible for me to participate in it.

Quite passionately, this respondent continued to criticize the Jewish community for not accommodating and encouraging those gay Jews who wish to have children:

> Just because I'm attracted to men doesn't mean I can't be a good father. And until the day that every heterosexual Jew sleeps in a separate bed from his wife until they're ready to produce a child ... If the issue in Judaism is against non-procreative sexuality, then let's throw everybody into question. We, our sperm, still produce children. And so many of us are going through gymnastics trying to be fathers and mothers when the Jewish leadership could have saved 10 per cent of the Jewish people, by offering creative family structures for us.

Strategies for Integration

It was those respondents who held the more traditional view that both biological parents need to be actively involved in raising the child to ensure proper ethnic continuity, that had the most difficulty in developing and implementing a plan to become fathers. While fully acknowledging the complexities of gay men co-parenting with women, two respondents were determined to do this as a way to ensure a biological link to their children and to ensure that their children are raised as Jews.

When I asked a secular Jew in his twenties about how he would like to have a child he replied:

> I can't pay a woman to be a surrogate mother, it sounds strange to me. I haven't even mentioned adoption, because I have this need, this masculine need, to spread my seed. What can I do? I think it's pretty natural. I have this natural desire for my genes to go on.

This respondent explained that his only solution would be to use his sperm to inseminate a woman. When I asked him whether the mother would be Jewish, he replied definitively that, yes, the mother would have to be Jewish: "The whole idea here is to continue Judaism," he explained. With some difficulty, the respondent went on to describe his ideal parenting situation:

> My ideal fantasy set up would be to have a friend bear a child. It gets so complicated, I don't know if it could ever happen, but I'm determined somehow ... I'd have to somehow find a woman, but at least be friends for at least three years. Now in the living situation, I would have to live with this woman in the first year. We wouldn't be a married couple. It's an issue with dealing, focusing on the child, and focusing on this partnership. I'm willing to be in any kind of partnership with a woman for that reason. [After the first year] we

> would live close to each other and yet live separately. It gets complicated. We could have joint custody. I would want the mother to be involved. It's important for the identity of the child, I think.

This respondent's explanation of his ideal parenting situation indicates how complicated he feels it would be to implement.

Another respondent, a traditional Jew, desired a biological link to his child as well as the active participation of the Jewish biological mother. He proposed the unique idea of the "four-parent home":

> I talk about a four-parent home, which is what my ideal would be. I have to find three other people to create a home with. First, find the male partner. And then, hopefully find [a lesbian] couple who want to co-parent children and live together with us. All four people would need to be Jewish. A Jewish home.

The respondent explains that to impregnate one of the women, he would be open to mixing the sperm between he and his partner so that both of the Jewish men would be actively involved in impregnating the woman. He spoke of the whole arrangement as holy from a Jewish point of view:

> I think it could be even ritualized, just like so much of Jewish life has taken natural occurrences and ritualized them: birth, death, bar mitzvah, puberty, the cycle of the years, the new year of the trees, and whatever ... I think there could be some ritual between a gay couple and a lesbian couple to transfer the sperm to the fertile woman and create a child in a very honoured way.

While Andy described this arrangement as the most logical solution, he admitted that he has met a lot of resistance among his peers towards the arrangement, mostly by lesbians who do not wish to live or co-parent with gay men. Nonetheless, he urges his fellow gay and lesbian Jews to join him in thinking in "a larger, more Jewish communal creative frame of mind."

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to make a contribution to the understudied topic of the intersection of ethnicity and gay parenthood. Despite assumptions among some that gay men simply do not have nor want children, this chapter reveals that many gay Jewish men strongly desire the experience of fatherhood. Younger respondents had the same expectations as most heterosexual men, that they are worthy of being fathers and plan to make this a reality. Many older respondents had strong regrets that the times did not allow for an opportunity to become fathers. Less than one-third of the sample did not desire to be a father. The level of commitment to Jewishness did not prove to be an explanatory variable on the question of desire for children nor on issues regarding the connection between Jewish identity and fatherhood.

Despite this strong desire for children, not one of my thirty respondents actually had children at the time of the interview. There are a number of reasons for this. For gay men who wish to have a biological child, the personal, social, legal and financial implications of either surrogacy or co-parenting can be onerous. In addition, respondents sense a lack of acceptance and encouragement of gay Jewish parenthood, not from their own parents for the most part, but rather from the larger Jewish community. While some heterosexual Jewish couples also face the challenge of desiring children but not being able to have them, they do not suffer from this additional problem of lack of community support for the right to parent.

Some respondents felt a measure of guilt or angst for not fulfilling what they perceive to be the expectations of their family and/or Jewish community to have children and actively promote Jewish continuity. This issue can take on an added urgency when connected with loss of family members to the Holocaust. Some respondents are trying to develop tentative strategies that involve co-parenting as a means to integrate their more traditional Jewish values on parenthood with their gay relational desires. Doubts remain in their minds whether these plans can ever become reality. It would be reasonable to expect to see a number of gay Jewish men for whom a biological child or the ethnic identity of the child is not of high priority to be adopting children in the near future.

Clearly, some respondents perceive their Jewish community as not going far enough to include the gay minority within the larger ethnic fold. Some men expressed anger and resentment towards the Jewish community for not finding more active ways to accommodate gay Jewish parents. Respondents are thus finding the concept of fatherhood to be another area that can contribute to the identity ambivalence discussed in the previous chapter. As part of the process of trying to integrate their gay and Jewish identities, many gay Jewish men desire children, and some are particularly concerned about promoting "Jewish continuity." However, due to physical, logistical and cultural reasons, some are having significant difficulty fulfilling these desires. This has important community implications which will be discussed in the final chapter. In general, further studies that specifically address the question of the intersection of ethnicity

and gay fatherhood are needed to provide a wider comparative context in this area of scholarship.

Chapter 7

Strategies for Identity Negotiation

> ***I'm tired of fighting. I'm exhausted. I spend most of Shabbat sleeping because I'm just exhausted with the daily fight of my identity. It's hard enough having one minority status to negotiate in a society, but to have two, it's exhausting.***
>
> *Traditional gay Jew in his forties*

The previous chapters have illustrated the many ways in which gay Jews may feel excluded from the Jewish community and from the gay community, and the concomitant ambivalent or conflicted relationship that can develop towards their Jewish identity. In response to this phenomenon, many gay Jews seek ways to reconcile or balance these two identities. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the various strategies and perspectives gay Jews employ, consciously or subconsciously, to try to negotiate a gay and Jewish identity. To begin, I will review the relevant literature on identity negotiation of this type. I will then illustrate how my data can offer a more nuanced understanding of these processes than is provided in the current literature.

Theoretical Literature on Models of Identity Negotiation

Gay Identity Models

Much theoretical literature has been developed addressing the question of negotiating a gay identity and ethnic minority identity. It is useful to briefly touch upon the evolution of these types of theoretical models.

In the 1970s, academic research on homosexuality shifted its concern from the search for the causes of the phenomenon to the question of the process by which an individual develops a gay identity. This process was described by use of developmental stages. The majority of these theoretical models were drawn from the fields of sociology (Plummer, 1975; Troiden 1989) and psychology (Cass, 1979; Coleman 1981, Minton and McDonald, 1983). The models are fairly similar in design in that most involve a progression through different stages of growth and all view gay identity formation as "taking place against the backdrop of stigma" (Troiden, 1989: 48).

The model developed by Vivien Cass (1979), called Sexual Identity Formation (SIF), is the best known and most frequently cited homosexual developmental model. The model is based on the idea that interpersonal conflict occurs at each stage of the model and as this conflict becomes resolved the individual progresses to the next stage. For full identity integration of interpersonal conflict the individual must pass from the first stage of development, called "Identity Confusion," to the sixth and final stage, called "Identity Synthesis."

Cass's model has received some criticism due to its linear structure. Several scholars (Chan 1989: 18; Garcia, 1998: 63; Mushkat, 1999: 239; Yueng and Stombler, 2000: 147-148) question whether this step-by-step linear progression is appropriate for describing human life. It is more realistic, they argue, to expect people to backtrack, to experience these stages in a different order, to abort the process altogether or to change to a heterosexual identity. Constructing one's gay identity is a lifelong process that does not come to a simple end at some point. A linear model cannot demonstrate this. Also, one must account for the fluidity of identity. Identity is dynamic, always shifting and changing depending on context. Incorporating the work of several others, including Cass (1979), Coleman (1982) and Plummer (1975), Troiden (1989: 49-68) developed a similar theoretical model to Cass's, which addresses some of the above problems by incorporating a more fluid process of identity construction.

Ethnic Minority Identity Models

Early stage models concerning ethnic-identity development tended to focus on the African-American experience (Cross, 1971; Jackson 1975; Parham and Helms, 1981). Atkinson, Morton and Sue (1989: 39-44) developed a useful model that can apply to any ethnic minority identity experience. Their *Minority Identity Model* was originally developed to help counsellors understand issues of ethnic minority clients. Although it consists of five distinct stages, like Troiden's model of sexual development it is more accurately conceptualized as a continuous process where boundaries between stages are vague and fluid.

There are significant similarities between the sexual identity and ethnic identity models. Both involve the process of coping with stigmatized identities. Both describe a process where the individual moves from denying his or her identity to embracing and accepting it. This process involves a period of confusion followed by a period of complete rejection of the values of dominant society. The final stages involve the ability to synthesize values of both minority and majority perspectives and to form healthy supportive relationships with members of dominant groups (Espin, 1987: 35-39).

Joint Models

While these models may be helpful in understanding certain aspects of an individual's development, neither the sexual identity model nor the ethnic identity model are sufficient in providing a proper examination of the ethnic minority gay experience. Both models reduce the extent of marginality to one characteristic. The one-dimensional models are too simplistic in that they are unable to acknowledge the complexities of multiple layers of stigmatized identities that some people possess (Reynolds and Pope, 1991). For this study, it is necessary to work within a framework that includes both sexuality and ethnicity since the two variables can significantly affect each other. As discussed, gay and lesbian individuals of certain ethno-religious groups can feel caught in a double-bind: they can feel marginalized both from the homophobia they may experience in the ethno-religious community and from the racism they may experience from the gay community. Thus, Cass's early sexual identity model may see full disclosure of

one's gay identity as an advanced stage of development, but does not take into account the extra challenges a black gay man, for example, may have in disclosing his identity within his ethnic community. It might be more advantageous to stay closeted in the black community so as to ensure continuing support from this group; support that will be needed if incidents of racism arise (Martinez and Sullivan, 1998: 249-250).

One of the few attempts to develop a model that incorporates both minority statuses is the stage-model of Morales (1990: 228-229). Morales described the following five stages:

Stage 1 - Denial of Conflicts: the individual tends to deny or minimize the reality of the discrimination they receive as a) a member of an ethnic minority and b) as a gay person;

Stage 2 - Bisexual vs. Gay/Lesbian: the individual debates whether identifying himself or herself as bisexual rather than gay may be more advantageous within the ethnic community;

Stage 3 - Conflicts in Allegiance: the individual is aware that he or she is a member of two stigmatized groups and feels of anxiety around the need to keep these identities separate or compartmentalized;

Stage 4 – Establishment of Priorities in Allegiance: the individual feels resentment towards the lack of integration among the ethnic and gay communities. The individual forms a primary identification to the ethnic community and develops feelings of anger for racism experienced in the gay community; and

Stage 5 – Integration of the Various Communities: the individual attempts to integrate the dual identities. Some develop successful coping mechanisms such as developing ethnic minority gay organizations.

Leaving aside the weaknesses of stage-models discussed earlier, we can see from Morales's Stage 3 an important awareness of the issue of the clash between an individual's two minority identities. What is particularly significant about Morales's model is that in Stage 4 he suggests that the individual will choose to identify primarily with the ethnic community. While Greene (1998: 48) provides some evidence to support this from her research on the gay black community, evidence of the opposite phenomenon, primary identification with the gay community, is also reported in the literature. We see that Latino gay men (Garcia, 1998: 109) and Asian gays and lesbians (Chan, 1989: 19-20), for example, feel more comfortable identifying with the gay community than with their ethnic community.

Reynolds and Pope's (1991: 178-179) *Multi-Dimensional Identity Model* (MIM) provides another theoretical model that examines strategies for negotiating two stigmatized identities. This model was designed to apply to a variety of combinations of multiple stigma: women of colour, women with disabilities, ethnic minority gays and lesbians, etc. Reynolds and Pope developed a typology outlining four possible strategies for individuals with double-stigmatized identities. These are identified in the following table:

Table 1: Multi-Dimensional Identity Model

(A)	(B)
Identify with one aspect of self (society-assigned; passive acceptance)	Identify with one aspect of self (conscious identification)
(C)	**(D)**
Identify with multiple aspects of self in segmented fashion	Identify with combined aspects of self (identity intersection)

Source: Reynolds, Amy L and Pope, Raechele L. 1991, "The complexities of diversity: exploring multiple oppressions", *Journal of Counselling and Development*, vol. 70, September/October, pp. 178-179.

Options A and B describe the situation in which the individual chooses to identify with a single aspect of one's stigmatized identity while suppressing the other. The model suggests two possible ways this could happen. The individual could a) allow society to determine one's primary group or b) make an autonomous choice of self-identification. Option C involves choosing to embrace both aspects of identity but in separate or compartmentalized ways. Depending on the setting, the individual embraces one aspect of identity while simultaneously hiding the other. In this way the individual tends to present a one-dimensional, incomplete, and segmented self. Option D involves the integration of multiple identities by no longer segmenting or dichotomizing the different aspects of self. As Morales reports, forming new communities that embrace the intersection of these identities is one technique in this regard.

These two latter models serve as a helpful analytical guide for the purposes of this chapter. Placed together, these two models can be summarized as containing four ideal-types of negotiation strategies for the gay Jewish man:

1. Identify primarily with the Jewish community;
2. Identify primarily with the Gay community;
3. Compartmentalize the two identities; and
4. Integrate the two identities by forming ethnic-gay communities.

However, upon examination of my data I have discovered more complex arrangements than these four categories. I am thus able to offer an expanded and more nuanced model. The following are seven strategies or perspectives that arose in my data in relation to the question of negotiating gay and Jewish identities:

1. No negotiation is necessary as there is no conflict;
2. Negotiation is not possible as the two identities cannot be reconciled;
3. Juxtapose two identities and take pride in one's status as outsider;
4. Identify primarily with the Jewish community;
5. Identify primarily with the Gay community;
6. Compartmentalize the two identities; and
7. Integrate the two identities. (Five distinct methods for this arose).

Before elucidating on the various strategies it is important to keep in mind the lesson of past literature, that these categories are not meant to be rigid but rather quite fluid and dynamic. Categories can overlap, meaning individuals can implement more than one strategy at the same time. Though they do not need to follow a strict linear development, as will be shown in the examples of some of my respondents, these strategies are often temporary or situational, sometimes changing over the life of the individual.

As described in the introductory chapter, in terms of Jewish religious observance interview respondents fell into two general categories: more traditional Jews (10 respondents) and more secular Jews (20 respondents).[24] Much more so than age, this issue of the extent to which one embraces traditional Judaism serves as a very significant explanatory variable. This important distinction is not considered in the above models of Morales (1990) or Reynolds and Pope (1991).

Strategies of Negotiation

1. No Negotiation is Necessary

From the outset, it should be mentioned that by developing models or typologies of strategies for ethnic minority gay individuals to negotiate these two

[24] Traditional Jews include both Jews who are strictly religiously observant Orthodox Jews (of which there were three in my sample) as well as those Jews who might not observe all Jewish observances but still maintain 'conservative religious values' in terms of placing importance on synagogue attendance, celebrating the Jewish holidays and preserving and perpetuating Jewish tradition. Though secular Jews have a sense of Jewish identity, they place relatively less importance on these matters.

identities, one has already problematized the issue by assuming that these two identities must be at odds with each other or cause some form of internal conflict for the ethnic minority gay individual. While there are a number of secular respondents who do find it challenging to balance the two identities, in my data there were also four individuals, all particularly secular in their Jewish orientation, who reported that they have no internal conflict whatsoever with embracing these two identities. For example, one secular respondent explained that:

> I never see it as a negotiation. I see it as two parts of me. And they're not diametrically opposed. These are things that exist there within me and are part of me. I never find one fighting with the other. I find people who are hush-hush about being Jewish in the gay community. I find people who are quiet about being gay in the Jewish community understandably. But, no, I don't find myself having to reconcile. They just exist.

When I asked another secular Jew whether having a gay and Jewish identity required some negotiation he responded:

> No I don't think so ... it's just who I am. I'm a gay Jew or I am a gay Jew with AIDS. I think all three things are necessary to be clear about who I am. They're all me and it's okay.

2. Negotiation is not Possible

Whereas the above secular individuals have no sense of conflict to resolve or negotiate, be it theological or otherwise, there are also those particularly religious individuals who cannot see any possible way to negotiate the divide. One respondent who was active in gay Jewish organizations in Toronto came into contact with several young observant Orthodox gay men. He commented on the anxiety these men faced with being Jewish and gay:

> The pressure to fit in gave a lot of these [Orthodox] kids absolute nervous breakdowns. And you still see some of it. You see people who are unable to enter into meaningful relationships. What we've done is written off maybe 10 per cent of our Jewish youth.

I encountered one observant Orthodox respondent who could see no possible way to resolve the dilemma and found himself in deep despair trying to cope with his problem. He described himself as facing much "frustration, confusion and fear." Reluctantly, he shared his pain:

> I just feel like there is no way to deal with this. There's not one day that I don't think about it. I wake up every day and think about it. I am still filled with a lot of shame around this issue and would do anything to not have to deal with this. I do not think of myself as homophobic, maybe I am, but I just do not want this for me and my life ....

Thus, for a minority of those interviewed there are no successful strategies developed to try to negotiate the gay and Jewish identities, either because they see no conflict or because they see no solution. Most gay Jewish respondents I interviewed fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. That is, they do feel there is a tension to address and believe there is some way to try to resolve or reduce this tension.

3. Pride in Status as Outsider

A perhaps unexpected strategy employed by three respondents is the strategy of actually drawing attention to one's status as outside the mainstream and embracing this role with pride. One respondent explained how he likes to challenge stereotypes he has found in the Jewish and gay communities by emphasizing how he is different from the majority:

> There's a real tendency to homogenize all gays primarily as middle class but also as Christian, and so I make sure that everyone knows I'm Jewish. And if they have trouble with that they will have to deal with that. And then in the Jewish community I always identify as gay, I guess I want to make trouble in that [I want to] make people think about where their politics are; just how tolerant they are. Canadians like to say they are really into multiculturalism and equality and in practice it doesn't always happen. I'll make a point of showing that my life is as valid by pointing out the difference.

A traditional Jew explained that being Jewish and being gay constitute two different ways that he feels outside of the mainstream of society. He refers to these identities as the "roots of my outsiderness." Besides the feeling of being outside of mainstream society, the respondent also explained that he feels like an outsider within the respective gay and Jewish communities. This status, he reported, gives him pride:

> The irony of it is I'm an outsider from the Jewish world and the gay world as well. They've so successfully made me an outsider that I feel like [I'm] outside them, too, sometimes [laughing]. But the thing is I wear that as a badge of honour. It's something that is very liberating for me and has made my life way more exciting than it had any right to be. And I feel that I have got the best of both worlds.

Interestingly, an Orthodox respondent also sees value and empowerment in embracing a marginal status:

> To me, a large part of my identity has been the identity of the stranger within the community, and this is something that I also find a lot within Jewish literature that I like about the role of Jew in European society as the intelligent outsider. For example, Elijah roams the world as a poor person, waiting for an act of kindness to bring about the coming of the Messiah. You have to learn respect for other people. You have to respect the experience of the marginalized person. This is a large part of the way that I regard my interaction with the Jewish community. I find value in being outside of the mainstream.

4. Prioritize Jewish Identity / Repress Gay Identity

As a strategy to try to work through the conflict of having a gay and Jewish identity, approximately one-third of my respondents choose to strongly emphasize one of their identities while repressing the other. This type of identity negotiation demonstrates a very close correlation to levels of Jewish religiosity. Of the five gay Jews who prioritize their Jewish identity over their gay identity, four of them are traditional Jews. Of the four who prioritize their gay identity over their Jewish identity, three of them are secular Jews.

More traditionally minded Jews, those who place a high importance on Jewish identity, religious observance and participation in organized Jewish life, are the ones more likely to try to repress their gay inclinations so that they do not interfere with their Jewish life. As mentioned, five respondents have chosen this path of action, at least for a period of time in their lives. A traditional Jew reported:

> If I weren't Jewish, I might be out there fighting for gay rights, but my Jewish identity is far more important to me than my gay identity. And that's something I knew right from [the start]. I did not want to allow my same-gender romantic orientation to affect my passion for Judaism and Jewish life and the Jewish people. I never wanted that to impinge on it, to steal time from it and to even affect it.

Another traditional respondent described the struggle he faces to fit into mainstream Jewish life. This struggle causes him to repress a significant part of his identity:

> There was a pretty bad raging battle within. And I kept it under control for a very, very long time and I continued to date women and I sort of loathed the moment when sexuality would take place. And I would lead a very rich fantasy life constantly involving men. I wasn't

> really identifying as a gay man. I was a straight man who was attracted to men and I didn't tell anybody then. And I kept this secret inside.

While one might guess that being gay would cause a Jew to adopt a more liberal expression of Judaism to accommodate one's homosexuality (a phenomenon that certainly does occur), interestingly enough two of my respondents consciously chose to become very religiously observant Jews in an attempt to purge themselves of their gay inclination. These respondents also illustrate some shame for being gay. As a result of the "battle" he was having between his gay and Jewish identities, at a certain period of his life one respondent chose "extreme spirituality because [he] felt guilty for being gay." When I asked him to describe this extreme spirituality he explained that he:

> [became] obsessed about *kashrut* [dietary laws] and *Shabbat* and keeping the holidays. There were a few years [on Yom Kippur] where I made sure I read every word in the *machzor* [prayer book], because it was like the magic potion. If I missed a word it would be like [*gulping sound*] hell to pay.

Surprisingly, even a secular Jew chose the path of extreme religiosity to try to stop himself from being gay. This respondent claims his "Jewish journey" was all tied in with being gay. He became friendly with some observant Jews at a Jewish summer camp and joined their community. He claims "It stopped me from being gay for ten years." When I asked him about this seemingly unusual pattern for a gay secular Jew to become extremely observant, he provided the following explanation:

> I think it's common for people in adverse situations in their lives to seek out stability. It's the same way old people become religious. Sort of hedging their bets. So I think that religion, maybe twenty

> years ago more than now, served as a secure footing for people, including me. An opportunity to escape.

It is also interesting to note that neither of these two respondents were very religiously observant at the time of the interview. Both had moved on to other type of strategies to negotiate their identity, as will be seen in the next section. These two individuals provide a vivid example of the fluidity of the process of managing one's identity. As the literature suggests, strategies of identity negotiation can be temporary or situational, and individuals can go through different stages through their lifespan.

5. Prioritize Gay Identity / Repress Jewish Identity

As mentioned, another way to prioritize one identity over the other is to place emphasis on the gay identity while repressing the Jewish identity. Internalized distaste for one's Jewishness can play a role in this regard. One respondent offered his impressions of the secular gay Jewish speakers and audience members he encountered at a lecture:

> Most of these guys, when push came to shove, said that they had made a choice in their lives to be gay men over being Jewish men. And they looked at their Jewish identity as kind of an addendum. All of them had non-Jewish partners. All of whom had serious, serious issues around their own internalized anti-Semitism, and were all more or less honest about that. And all of whom used queer language to talk about their affinity for Judaism. They talked about ... how they were "out" to their colleagues about being Jewish.

An active member of the gay Jewish community of Toronto reported similar impressions:

> I have never known so many internalized anti-Semites as gay Jews. ... Because of whatever reason – the homophobia in Jewish tradition, misinterpretations of Torah or whatever – it's far easier to just say "fuck it" to the Jewish world and the Jewish identity, and go blazing out of the closet in the gay world. They're not proud of being Jewish.

This respondent himself is an interesting case in point. Already a traditionally minded Jew, he became extremely observant as a way to cope with his turmoil of being gay and Jewish. In a later period of his life, however, he rebelled against Orthodox Judaism:

> I never thought I'd be the Jew that would say, "Fuck Judaism! It's persecutory." I was always the one who was going to defend the Jewish community at all costs. And here I was actually becoming that person that I thought I'd never be. The person walking out of the synagogue and saying, "That's a synagogue I'll never go to," saying, "I will never go to an Orthodox synagogue by choice any more," questioning a lot about my heritage.

Another respondent, who was secular to start with and then became religious, followed a similar pattern to the respondent cited above and became much more secular again, only observing "some of the remnants of the holidays." He now puts much less emphasis on his Jewishness, while his gay identity has become a much bigger part of his life.

Two other secular Jews interviewed expressed this kind of sentiment where gayness has taken priority to Jewishness. One explained:

> To me I'm gay. But to me that's much more fundamental than being Jewish. I can change my religion but I can't change my sexual orientation.

Another reported that he is not ready to form a family and have children and is well aware of the fact that he is not following the model that the mainstream

Jewish community desires. He prioritized his personal happiness of leading an active single gay life over Jewish community expectations:

> I'm not happy with the Jewish community and its homophobia. But I can't really afford to wait for them to gain more enlightened views for me to be able to reconcile my own Jewish queer identity. Because Judaism is such a group and community-oriented religion and culture, [it] allows for personal happiness as long as it doesn't sacrifice Jewish continuity and Jewish community survival. [For me] it's a question of breaking away from the idea of community needs [to seek] personal happiness.

6. Compartmentalize the Two Identities

Of the four respondents who described some form of separation or compartmentalization of identities as a strategy, it is perhaps not surprising to note that three out of four are traditional Jews. Since traditional Jews place much importance on their Jewish identity and participation in organized Jewish life, they have a lot to lose should reactions to their homosexuality interfere with their ability to enjoy and participate in Jewish life.

A classic example of the use of compartmentalization of one's gay and Jewish identities can be found in the case of a traditional Jew who attended religious services at an Orthodox synagogue on a regular basis but kept his gay identity hidden in this setting. This type of separation of identities requires a keen sense of what Goffman (1959: 238) would call "impression management":

> Like many people, I compartmentalize, and being gay is one thing, it's an integral part of me, and I enjoy it to its fullest extent. Being an observant Jew is something that I also enjoy and get satisfaction from, for a number of reasons. And so the two separately are both things that make me feel good about myself, so I want to participate in them. Bringing the two together gets a bit more problematic. And so that's why you'll see when I'm at the [Orthodox synagogue], I'm

> not really "out" at all. I want to enjoy the feelings that I get out of the observant experience, the prayer and that communal experience, and so I sort of put the other on hold and enjoy that.

Another traditional respondent also attended an Orthodox service on a regular basis. He seemed to be in denial about the fact that his gay identity may one day come into conflict with some of his fellow Orthodox congregants. He thus provides a good illustration of Morales' (1990: 228) Stage 1, "Denial of Conflicts." When I asked him what might happen if one day he would like to bring a same-sex partner to the synagogue, he responded that there would be no problem with this since it is the public (closeted) image one portrays that is important in this setting. This response ignores the more deep-rooted conflict that could ensue in the future if the respondent desired, like any heterosexual couple, public recognition of a romantic partner. His strategy of "don't ask, don't tell" compartmentalization reflects another of Morales's stages, that is Stage 3, "Conflicts in Allegiance." He explained that in this synagogue being gay:

> has no bearing .... It shouldn't make a difference. If I go to [the Orthodox synagogue] they don't care, as long as you're going and you're having a good time, and they make sure that you keep coming back because you have fun and they're making the service interesting... that's what I go for. Sexual orientation or being with a partner has nothing to do with that. The two things are totally separate. The two don't have any meeting ground. They're saying, "Come, come, come, there's certain things we don't talk about here." That's fine. One thing I've known about Jewish communities from experience is that they're very respectful of the sort of image you portray. What goes on behind closed doors they don't care about, really.

A third traditional Jew also described the strategy of keeping the two identities separate at a certain time of his life:

> For a long time, they were completely separate spheres in my life and I find it hard to reflect on how one can do that, but now I know that people do that all the time.

It is interesting to note that while compartmentalizing their two identities, both of these latter respondents also use(d) the strategy of prioritizing their Jewish identity over their gay identity. This is another illustration of the way categories can overlap. It is possible to compartmentalize two identities while still prioritizing one over the other. In the case of one of these respondents, as will be shown, he later in life became active in a leadership role in the gay Jewish community. He thus has employed a third category of "integration of identities." Though not all individuals fit well into stage models, this respondent is a good illustration of Morales's (1990: 228-229) description of the shift from Stage 3, "Conflicts in Allegiance," to Stage 4, "Establishing Priorities in Allegiance," to Stage 5, "Iintegrating the Various Communities."

7. Integrate the Two Identities

The strategy of identity negotiation that most respondents used was to find ways to integrate the two identities. Twenty-four of the thirty respondents indicated they have developed some strategies that have, at certain times in their lives, helped to reconcile the two identities. The reason why such a large proportion of respondents fell into this category may be due to a sampling bias in my respondents. To learn firsthand about the history and developments in the gay Jewish community of Toronto, I purposely sought out individuals who have been actively involved, both past and present, in this community. More so than the

average gay Jew, these individuals have a particular interest in finding ways to integrate their gay and Jewish identities. These gay Jews, however, are not all particularly religiously observant or traditional in their Jewish identity. There are both more traditional ways and secular ways, as will be shown, to express one's Jewish identity and to connect it to one's gay identity. Of the various individuals who might be defined as having some form of leadership role, 60 per cent were secular and 40 per cent were traditional.

While the theoretical models described above simply identify "identity integration" (Morales, 1990: 228-229) or "identity intersection" (Reynolds and Pope, 1991: 179) as a possible position, with the suggestion that this might involve the development of ethnic minority gay organizations, my research was able to uncover a much more elaborate and nuanced understanding of the different ways that this integration can be achieved (in the Jewish context). In total, five different strategies of integration have been employed by my respondents: participation in gay Jewish groups or activist causes; adoption of a liberal Jewish theological perspective on homosexuality; emphasis on linkages between Judaism and homosexuality; use of "Jewish values" to guide through the gay world; and development of integrative gay Jewish rituals. Again, the dichotomy of traditional Jew and secular Jew is an important explanatory variable that can help to distinguish between different types of strategies.

7.a) Participation in Gay Jewish Groups or Activist Causes

My respondents mentioned several different gay Jewish groups or causes in which they were involved. Two respondents stood out in their own ways for their levels of gay Jewish activism. For these respondents, this activism has served not only the purpose of raising awareness to others, but of helping them to integrate their gay and Jewish identities. One of my respondents came out in his Jewish high school. He took pride in doing so and claimed that doing this was a way for him to combine his two identities:

> There's no one who has come out publicly. There have been secrets that everyone knew but I think that I have been the only person to actually openly challenge stuff as the only representative from [this Jewish high school] who's gay, ever. I know I've changed some people's minds. I've accomplished my purpose. And I've made people more aware that there are gay graduates from this school.

Another respondent took on a gay Jewish leadership role. For him, being involved in these activities helped to foster an integrated and secure identity:

> I was very, very involved in the gay Jewish community the first years that I was out. And that's part of my identity. I got involved in Pride Day stuff. ... I loved being in queer space and feeling safe and comfortable. I loved being the Jewish leader. I [hope] to continue to challenge Jewish institutions and families to change. I do this by being out and loud and proud as a Jew and a gay Jew as I possibly can.

Shokeid (1995: 239), in his ethnography of the gay synagogue in New York City, described the way that attendance at such a synagogue "was for many an act of restoring their cracked self-image and identity, combining its divided parts into one meaningful identity." My respondents reported similar sentiments, describing

participation in such gay Jewish initiatives as "blending the two nicely," and providing "comfort and sense of belonging."

Respondents reported their involvement, both as leaders and as participants, in several different Toronto gay Jewish organizations or causes. The organizations include *Ha-Mishpachah, B'nai Kehillah, Chutzpah* and *Keshet Shalom*. Other causes include a support group for gay Jewish youth and young adults now administered through the Jewish Family and Child Services of Toronto; *The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews* (an international umbrella organization linking gay Jewish institutions); the *National Union of Jewish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students* (a North American gay Jewish student organization); the *Jewish Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Students and Young Professionals of Toronto* (a gay Jewish social group run mainly through the University of Toronto); and *Twice Blessed* (the home page for much of the gay Jewish material on the Internet).[25]

The following two examples illustrate that even among secular Jews there is a desire to try to integrate their gay and Jewish identities. One respondent had this description of his experiences at *Keshet Shalom* events:

> It was the first time in my life that I'd ever brought those two facets together. Being gay and being Jewish. And that was a very important experience to draw the two out together, because I guess I'd always seen them as distinct entities in my life, that lived separately. And I think that that was an important part of helping me understand that really, in essence, these were all facets of my life sort of intertwined, that they can't be dissected.

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[25] More details about these organizations and groups can be found in the introductory chapter of this work.

A secular respondent who played a leadership role in *Chutzpah* in the late 1980s had similar sentiments to share about what his involvement meant to him:

> I was coming to terms with my being both gay and Jewish at the same time. You know, you're a minority within a minority. I think that's the element of it; the need for finding people in the same category and dealing with that in a classical support-group setting was important to me. It helped me come to terms with myself, certainly. And I became certainly bolder in expressing just not the fact that I'm gay, but the fact that I'm Jewish.

7.b) Adoption of a Liberal Jewish Theological Perspective on Homosexuality

Another common approach by respondents to reconcile their homosexuality with their Jewishness is to challenge the traditional Jewish position that forbids sexual relations between those of the same sex. Eighteen respondents described some form of personal perspective that involves a more liberal theological approach to this issue. Where one might assume it is the secular Jews who are quick to liberalize Jewish values, it is important to note that seven of the eighteen respondents in this section are traditional Jews, and of these seven, two are strictly observant. What is very interesting to observe is the distinct difference in approaches that traditional Jews take in developing more liberal perspectives as opposed to the secular Jews. As will be illustrated, traditional Jews reinterpret the Torah, while secular Jews dismiss the Torah.

Traditional Jews interviewed tend to take the position that the Torah is a divinely written document that must be respected. However, the way in which the passages from the Torah that concern homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) have been traditionally interpreted by religious authorities is, according to them,

not correct and not in keeping with modern times. They emphasize the dynamic and changing nature of *Halachah* (Jewish Law) and argue that we need to continue to explore the issue to develop new understandings. One traditional Jew offered his opinion about the way anti-gay sentiments have been super-imposed onto the Torah, while other passages in the text that support same-sex love are conveniently ignored or denied:

> Homophobia has been added into biblical stories over and over again, when in fact if you look at the biblical text, there are a lot of homo-erotic elements to it: Joseph and Potiphar story and certainly the David and Jonathan story. Those are examples of real loving relationships between men.

An observant Jew, who is particularly knowledgeable about Jewish law and tradition, spoke with confidence about his position on the potential fluidity of Jewish Law:

> I look back at mainstream *Halachic* [Jewish legal] positions on a lot of things and say, there are reasons these decisions were made, and these decisions can be changed. It's something that's living and it's something that changes and it is something that is changing. And so when I hear that there's a hard-and-fast *Halachic* position, I can remind people that there used to be a hard-and-fast *Halachic* position in favour of slavery. I don't think you're going to find any Orthodox rabbi in the city now who says that slavery's a good and just thing. It changes. Judaism is an interaction between the community and *Hashem* [God]. And there may be decisions that were made 500 or 1000 years ago that may have been good for the time, but may be bad now.

Another observant Jew went a step further. He reported that he can foresee a time when Orthodox Judaism will even change its position on the issue:

> I believe that there's a way to reconcile it ... I have a gut feeling; maybe it's a hope. ... I believe that the Torah is the word of God, I'm not disputing that. I'm not saying that we sort of excise out sentences ... I think that when brilliant rabbinical minds have turned their thoughts to various issues that were important to them, they have

> found ways to come up with analysis that is coherent, consistent and reaches sound conclusions. And I believe that if someone were to spend his attention on the issue of prohibitions against homosexuality in the Torah and the Talmud and what it means to us today as gay people ... I think that it could be bridged.

What is particularly interesting to observe about the adoption of liberal perspectives among traditional Jews is the way in which limitations are imposed on acceptable liberal innovations. Of the seven traditional Jews who have developed more liberal interpretations of the Jewish stance on homosexuality, six of them expressed a general distaste for Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism (two denominations of Judaism in North America that are officially supportive of inclusion of gays and lesbians in many aspects of Jewish life). A traditional respondent admitted:

> I'm still a snob about Reform. Reform [is] the movement that has opened up the most to it, obviously ... but I could just not go to a *shul* [synagogue] and see glass windows and an organ and the service in English. It makes my skin crawl. I feel like I am in church [*laughing*].

Other traditional Jews reported that they have no interest in attending religious services at *Keshet Shalom*, a liberal gay Jewish congregation in Toronto, because of the non-traditional style of prayer services. One respondent explained that this type of English-based service "wasn't juicy enough" and "just doesn't have any *ruach* [spirit] to me." He reported that a more traditional Hebrew service has more resonance for him. Another traditional Jew was more critical of the *Keshet Shalom* service:

> I went to that *Keshet Shalom* once, it was a novelty thing, like going to a D-list comedy theatre. It's pretty cheesy. It's just funny the way they rewrite things.

We see here a distinct style of negotiation for traditionally minded gay Jews. They tend to adopt a liberal Jewish understanding to the prohibition of homosexuality, but want to maintain their more traditional style of Jewish ritual expression that they are used to from their childhood. As Shokeid (1995: 79-81) alludes to, just because one is a gay Jew does not mean one will become a Reform or Reconstructionist Jew. My data illustrate that those gay Jews who come from more traditional backgrounds have developed a more complex or nuanced method of negotiating a traditional Jewish gay identity.

Secular Jews have a different approach to reconciling their homosexuality with their Jewishness. They are not concerned with examining the Jewish texts and traditions to find new ways and interpretations to make them more supportive of homosexuality. Their sense of Jewishness contains a stronger ethnic, rather than religious, component. This means they do not need to have any investment in Jewish text or law to preserve their sense of Jewish identity. Because Jewishness can be defined as both a religious and ethnic system, it does lend itself well to this kind of strictly ethnic identification. One secular respondent, for example, explained that he feels he is "a more spiritual or cultural Jew, not a religious Jew." Another, elaborated well on how this type of secular Jewish identity can play out:

> At a certain point [I decided] that the Leviticus injunction against homosexuality did not mean a thing to me. I've read essays on it, but my acceptance of myself as a gay man is not going to be based on those alternative interpretations. I think some Jewish gay men need them, and so I support them. For me, they're just interesting. That means that, essentially, my view towards the Torah is that it's not the word of God. That's how I've reconciled it. No one can take your Jewish beliefs or your education or your background. It's always with you. And it's fine.

Another respondent never even had the motivation that the above respondent did to explore alternative interpretations to the textual prohibition. In his liberal sense of what Jewishness is, no conflict need arise:

> I'm aware of all the different reasons why people might have problems with being gay because they're Jewish... Say if I were observant or something, I can understand a little of what that must mean to go from accepting the Torah literally as the word of God ... but that requires a belief system. It's not an issue for me. I don't accept one as the gospel so it's just sort of interesting that's all. I don't want to trivialize other people's faiths or belief systems. It's just that I have my background that I come from and it doesn't allow for something that isn't secular.

Several secular respondents offered the argument that they knew in their hearts that there is nothing wrong with them being gay. This self-realization was much more important to them than prohibitions written in a Jewish text. As such, the Torah was overruled. A secular Jew shared this opinion forcefully:

> I don't care. The Torah can say whatever it wants as far as I'm concerned. I don't follow it. I don't care about following it. Because if the Torah is going to tell me that who I am is wrong, then I'm not going to listen to it. Because I know in my heart that I'm right ... because if it wasn't right I wouldn't be feeling it.

7.c) Emphasis on Linkages Between Judaism and Homosexuality

Another strategy for integration reported by four respondents is the strategy of emphasizing parallels or linkages between the gay and Jewish experience. Both traditional and secular respondents raised the issue of the similarities between homosexuality and Jewishness in that both involve being a member of a minority group. A secular respondent reported that:

> I've definitely found that the minority thing has hit. You feel like when you're growing up when your Jewish that you're a minority.

> And being Jewish is also like being gay in that sense. You're cognizant of being a minority, an invisible minority. I think it helps in dealing with that part of it.

This type of parallel of minority status was connected to issues of oppression and the Holocaust. Another respondent raised the issue that both Jews and homosexuals were murdered by the Nazis in the Second World War. We know that the symbol of the pink triangle has been adopted by the gay community as a badge of honour in recent times (Shilts, 1982: 213). Blumenfeld (1996: 147-148) also raises the theme of the parallels between the dual oppressions of anti-Semitism and homophobia.

Respondents also mentioned parallels between homosexuality and Jewishness in popular culture. One explained that:

> There is always a link. There's the "Oy Vay" over-the-top Jewish mother and the over-the-top drag queen. Larger-than-life characters, like "the Nanny" and gay icons, Joan Rivers and people like that. There's lots of overlap. There's a disproportionate number of gay Jewish artists out there. Jews have played a huge part in defining what gay culture is. In the gay culture, there are a lot of big figures, like Tony Kirschener, Harvey Fierstein; big, big names in the gay community. Lots of them are Jewish.

We also know that Jews have played a prominent leadership role in gay activism over the last several decades (Rogow, 1989: 79). Another respondent offered his insight on why this might be the case:

> Strangely enough, I think that you'll find a lot of gay Jews in the forefront of gay liberation. I think it's because Jews have already had two thousand years of being in a minority [so we] already have a lot in our genes and in our history of questioning majority establishment; we already have some mechanisms in place for questioning ultimate truth.

7.d) Use of "Jewish Values" to Guide through the Gay World

Three respondents integrated the two identities by using their sense of Jewish values to help guide them in their everyday gay lives. A respondent coming from a traditional Jewish background and living in Toronto's gay ghetto, put it this way:

> In terms of sexual promiscuity, drug use and things that are very prevalent in the gay world, those are things where I try to draw on my Jewish values that I grew up with to help guide me through those things, protect me from them. The gay world is full of temptations just like any really super-secular world is in any big city. If you live outside your ghetto, it's tough. Judaism is a little candle floating up the street, lighting my way sometimes.

When I asked an observant respondent how he negotiates his gay and Jewish identity, he offered a similar type of perspective of the way Jewish values can inform the gay experience:

> Negotiation sounds like trade-offs from one against the other, and I don't like to think of it that way. I'd like to think that the two can in some ways enrich each other. That Jewish identity and experiences can form the way in which you should act as a gay man. Because I think that a lot of Jewish identity is centred upon a morality and a way of acting within a community, and that those are aspects of Judaism that can inform the way that you should participate in the gay community.

7.e) Development of Integrative Gay Jewish Rituals

Developing religious rituals that integrate gay and Jewish perspectives is an approach adopted primarily by traditional Jews. Of the six respondents who spoke about such rituals, four were traditional. A number of rituals have developed in this regard. One observant Jew spoke about a ritual that he has been

attending every year at a Toronto synagogue called the "Third *Seder*," which is a Passover dinner dedicated to Jews living with AIDS. Another traditional respondent has adopted the custom of putting an orange on the *Seder* plate at Passover, a new tradition that has come to symbolize inclusion of women and gays and lesbians in the Jewish community. A third traditional Jew described a very powerful experience he had as part of the Jewish Renewal movement that celebrated "coming out of the closet" in a Jewish ritual context:

> We wanted to create a coming-out *aliyah* [Jewish ritual of reciting a blessing over the Torah in front of the congregation]. It was actually very exciting, and a wonderful model. We developed a *brachah* [blessing] for the *aliyah*. Which was a really lovely one, because rather than making an *aliyah* that would divide us from the community, it was an *aliyah* that would bring the community together. So the words of the [blessing included 'Blessed be God'] "who has made us sexual beings." And they invited everyone to pin pink triangles on themselves, to identify with those who'd come up for this *aliyah*. Well, people went wild. People were coming up and asking me and other people to give them the honour of pinning the pink triangle on them. It was very, very emotionally received. It was certainly the most powerful Jewish ritual space I've ever been in. We ended up creating something that was far more meaningful than we probably imagined.

Finally, three respondents reported that they would like to get married and have a Jewish wedding ceremony. One respondent reflected on what would be needed to go into a Jewish same-sex wedding to try to properly integrate the Jewish and gay perspectives:

> I would like to have a ceremony; I would like to have a wedding. It's something that I think I'd want to think through carefully. It's interesting, because having a wedding with two men could be in a lot of ways a more meaningful experience than a heterosexual wedding, because heterosexuals don't have to analyze the wedding service and try and understand what the purpose of it is, and whether it's applicable in their situation, which is something you might want to do if you were gay. You might want to really parse through the

ceremony and try to understand it better, and see if it really applies to two men, or how it could be modified to make it applicable.

Conclusion

Though there are some gay Jews who feel no sense of conflict in maintaining a gay and Jewish identity, and there are some for whom no resolution to the conflict seems possible, this chapter illustrates that for most gay Jews there is a need to develop some form of strategy, whether conscious or not, to try to support both identities. Using the relevant literature on identity negotiation as a starting point, the chapter develops a more elaborate model on how this process may operate. Much more so than age, the variable of Jewish religiosity is shown to have significant explanatory value. Secular Jews are more likely to see no conflict at all between the two identities, to repress their Jewish identity and/or to dismiss the importance of following what they consider outdated religious texts. Traditional Jews are more likely to repress their gay identity, to compartmentalize their identities and/or to reinterpret Torah passages. Both traditional and secular Jews participate in relatively large numbers in some form of gay Jewish organization, social group or cause.

The conclusion in some of the literature reviewed that ethnic minority gays and lesbians primarily identify either with the gay community (Chan, 1989: 19-20; Garcia, 1998: 109) or the ethnic minority community (Greene, 1998: 48; Morales, 1990: 228) can now be looked at in a different light. By looking more closely at a larger variety of strategies and the intervening variable of level of religiousity, we can develop a better understanding of the complexities of the

issue. It is likely that a more in-depth analysis of gays and lesbians of other ethno-religious groups would also uncover a more complicated picture. See the concluding chapter of this work for further discussion of the theoretical contributions of this chapter.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

With the transition to modernity, Jewish identity is no longer a fixed status, but rather a social construction that is negotiated by the individual. In their search for a comfortable Jewish identity, many Jews in North America feel free to appropriate those aspects of Jewishness that they find personally meaningful (Cohen and Eisen, 2000: 7-9; Horowitz, 1998: 74-75). Certain sub-groups within the Jewish community, such as Jewish women, who have traditionally felt excluded from the mainstream Jewish community, have added reason to implement such an individualist and voluntarist approach to constructing meaningful Jewish identities. While we have seen in the last decade the burgeoning of a social-scientific literature on Jewish identity from a Jewish feminist perspective, little such work exists on gay Jewish identity. Given the particularities of the gay Jewish case, there is a need to devote more scholarly social-scientific attention to the "Jewish identities" of this Jewish sub-population. Just as we have begun the process of "gendering" the sociological study of the Jews (Fishman, 1993, 2000; Davidman and Tenenbaum, 1994), this work has begun the process of "queering" the sociological study of the Jews. From the perspective of comparative ethnic studies, we can see a number of scholarly works that examine issues of ethnic identity construction and negotiation of dual minority status for gay blacks (Loiacano, 1989; Martinez and Sullivan, 1998),

Latinos (Espin, 1987; Garcia, 1998) and Asians (Chan, 1989; Han, 2000). My research fills an important void by adding to the sociological literature on ethnic identity construction of gay Jews within the larger context of the ethnic minority gay experience.

The task of this concluding chapter is twofold. Firstly, it will bring to focus the central sociological findings of this work based on the four research questions posed in the introductory chapter, and secondly, it will reflect on some of the Jewish community implications of these findings.

Jewish Identity Construction

What effect does homosexuality and the reactions this engenders have on the Jewish identity of the gay Jew?

My research has illustrated the preponderance of non-supportive attitudes that gay Jews receive from their Jewish community and their own Jewish families regarding their homosexuality. Chapter 2 describes the prevalence of prejudice and heteronormativity that exists in the Jewish community. Cases of more direct homophobia are also brought forward, particularly the case of Jewish institutions, such as synagogues. Chapter 3 describes the stress and fear gay Jews often feel when contemplating coming out to their families. The chapter also outlines a considerable amount of rejection towards gay Jews as well as avoidance and denial of the phenomenon on the part of family members.

While it is true that Jews in America have historically held more liberal attitudes on social issues and have embraced more liberal causes than non-Jews

(Cohen and Liebman, 1997; Weinfeld, 2001: 254-256), I have brought forward some reasons that explain these conservative reactions. Firstly, Canadian Jews tend to be less liberal than American Jews (Brodbar-Nemzer et al., 1993: 43; Shaffir and Weinfeld, 1981: 13). Secondly, embracing civil liberties does not necessarily translate into embracing homosexuality and same-sex relationships in the Jewish community context because, as reported by my respondents, some Jews believe that same-sex relations threaten the cherished value of "Jewish continuity."

Certain segments of the Jewish community are more likely to offer support to and acceptance of gay Jews. These are younger Jews and more secular Jews. Within Jewish families, siblings are much more likely to accept a gay family member than are parents. Families of gay Jewish men tend to offer more acceptance than the Jewish community in general. Because of the importance of strong family cohesion, Jewish families are not usually willing to allow the existence of a gay family member to cause a permanent rift in the larger family relationship. For this reason, immediate families, even when initially strongly opposed to their son's or brother's homosexuality, tend to moderate their views over time. The fact that immediate family members gain more exposure and are thus likely better able to sensitize themselves to the reality of a gay man also plays a role here.

Overall, the preponderance of these less than supportive reactions from Jewish community members creates an environment where some gay Jewish men feel unwelcome as full participants in the Jewish community. For some who do

not have strong attachments to their Jewishness, this lack of support is enough to push them away from any involvement with the Jewish community altogether. For others who wish to retain a sense of Jewish identity, they find themselves in a difficult struggle to negotiate two seemingly competing identities. Given that Jewish families serve as one of the focal points for expressing and sustaining Jewish identity, the lack of support and acceptance by Jewish family members can alienate the gay Jewish man from both his family and the Jewish community. On the other hand, because, in time, Jewish families tend to offer more support than the Jewish community in general, Jewish families often allow gay Jewish men added opportunity to construct or reconstruct meaningful Jewish identities that integrate their gay identities.

Chapter 4 suggests that for most gay Jews, their interactions with the larger gay community do not have any direct relation or association to their Jewish identity. For most, their experiences in the gay community neither affirm nor reject their Jewishness. My findings suggest that gay Jews face more exclusion in the Jewish community than they do in the gay community.

A small minority of my sample, however, experienced direct anti-Jewish slurs or incidents while interacting with the broader gay community. This is likely no more nor less than one would find in general society, but these incidents would likely impede their ability to integrate their gay and Jewish identities. A large proportion of my respondents described a situation of Christian-normativity, where public events are sometimes scheduled on Jewish holidays and where Christmas celebrations tend to dominate the calendar in December. While this

experience, again, is no different for heterosexual Jews, some gay Jews expressed disappointment and bitterness towards the gay community for not being particularly sensitive to these matters of cultural diversity. This situation certainly does not lend itself well to developing a meaningful Jewish identity that integrates one's gayness.

Chapter 5 on inter-ethic partnering illustrates how the challenges that gay Jews face can affect their choice of partner. The chapter observes that most Jews in my sample desire a Jewish partner. Due to a variety of competing forces, such as lack of acceptance and support from the Jewish community, however, few actually have Jewish partners. This phenomenon is a practical example of how the circumstances that surround gay Jews can impede the development of a positive Jewish identity. It would seem reasonable that gay Jews who have Jewish partners and feel more comfortable participating in Jewish life would have a better opportunity to foster a positive Jewish identity. Many who feel that Jewish community attitudes are not supportive of openly gay Jewish relationships feel inclined to form relationships with non-Jews and to move away from the Jewish community. These circumstances impede the process of constructing a secure and meaningful Jewish identity.

Fatherhood is another area where some gay Jewish men are struggling to negotiate a path through competing forces of Jewish and gay identities. While most gay men have children through adoption, I encountered some men who have a strong impulse to have biological children through a Jewish woman so that they can pass on the Jewish family name and genes, thus contributing to Jewish

continuity.[26] These men are encountering difficulties in developing an actual plan to have children because of the social, legal and financial complexities involved. They also report experiencing resistance from some segments of the Jewish community in their desire to have children. Some men feel a sense of regret for this inability to have children. Because they are unable to successfully combine their lives as gay men with their desires to have Jewish children, these men are not able to construct the full and rich Jewish identity that they desire.

Gay Jewish Experience as Compared to Heterosexual Jewish Experience

How (if at all) is the gay Jewish experience different from the experiences of heterosexual Jews?

An adage mentioned by one of my respondents says that "Jews are like everyone else, and even more so." What my research reveals is that, as this respondent suggested, "gay Jews are like all other Jews, and even more so."

Gay Jews, like other Jews in North America, are faced with a situation where they are a small minority in a predominantly secular Christian milieu. Thus, many Jews feel excluded in some way by the Christian-centric environment in which they live. Any Jew, for example, may face a situation where a public or private meeting or event is held on Yom Kippur or on other important Jewish holidays. In a world of voluntary and individualist Jewish identity, most Jews develop for themselves some form of balance or negotiation that allows them to

[26] To repeat, none of the men in my sample have kids.

keep some level of Jewish identity and still participate in the larger non-Jewish world.

My research illustrates that when gay Jews begin to negotiate for themselves how they will feel about and act upon their own Jewishness, they often encounter additional obstacles than heterosexual Jews. Gay Jews often face stigma, rejection and heteronormative attitudes from their Jewish families and the Jewish community with which they come into contact. As I have argued, this phenomenon makes it more difficult for gay Jews to construct a positive Jewish identity.

Furthermore, most heterosexual Jews simply expect that general society will have a Christian-normative orientation. It is common, however, for gay Jews who feel excluded from the Jewish community (because of a lack of acceptance of homosexuality) to turn to the gay community with the expectation of finding a place of acceptance and comfort that will, to some extent, replace the Jewish community. Along with this expectation often comes another. Because of the discrimination that gay men and lesbians have faced throughout history, gay Jews often believe that the larger gay community will be particularly sensitive and inclusive to all diversity, including ethnic and religious diversity. When gay Jews discover that the "mainstream" gay community is no less Christian-normative than general society is, they feel doubly excluded; they feel both a degree of exclusion from the Jewish community for being gay and some degree of exclusion from the gay community for being Jewish.

My research suggests this double exclusion is most pronounced around Christmas time. While many heterosexual Jews have Hanukkah parties or other Jewish family gatherings to counter the preponderance of Christmas celebrations in society, for those gay Jews who depend primarily on the gay scene (rather than the Jewish scene) for their sense of community, this time of the year is particularly alienating as Christmas celebrations tend to dominate the social calendar.

One's choice of boyfriend, girlfriend, partner or spouse is another area where most Jews partake in some form of negotiation between their Jewish identity and the non-Jewish world around them. Many Jews, heterosexual or gay, desire a Jewish partner or spouse. There is no reason to believe that heterosexual and gay Jews have different motivations for this, often having to do with issues of cultural, ethnic or religious affinity. This cultural affinity is expressed as a shared sense of some form of "Jewish values," which emphasize the importance of the family, ethnic and religious heritage, ethnic symbols such as Jewish food, celebration of Jewish holidays and the like.

Despite these desires, a significant number of Jews marry or partner with non-Jews. Again, it is likely that similar reasons exist for this. For some, it is a matter of placing less emphasis on parochial community concerns and more emphasis on the autonomy of the individual to make his or her own romantic choice based on love (Fishman, 2000: 141; Weinfeld, 2001: 160). For others, it is a desire, conscious or subconscious, to venture outside of the Jewish milieu because of past negative Jewish experiences or because of a distaste or discomfort

for Jewishness or Jews that can be caused by internalizing negative stereotypes of Jews. Some heterosexual Jewish men, for example, stereotype Jewish women as Jewish American Princesses ("JAPs") who are materialistic, whiny, aggressive, nagging and withholding of sex (Fishman, 2000: 8-9; Prell, 1999: Ch. 6). These men thus wish to avoid these supposed sexually passive women and seek out their dream *shiksa* (non-Jewish woman) who will be more sexually exciting and materialistically less demanding (Weinfeld, 2001: 129). Similarly, some gay Jewish men develop an attraction to a type of gay male body that the media glorifies, such as a blond, blue-eyed "California Surfer Boy." These men sometimes subconsciously internalize these preferences and develop the idea that Jewish men are not sexually desirable.

While this similarity between gay and heterosexual Jews exists, I have argued that there are a number of added obstacles for gay Jewish men in finding a Jewish partner. These include a small pool of accessible partners, the challenge of being stigmatized within the Jewish community and the resulting lack of resources and motivation to develop a community-sponsored gay Jewish social infrastructure. While the out-marriage rate among Canadian heterosexual Jewish men is approximately 30 per cent (Weinfeld, 2001: 154), my research suggests that the inter-ethnic partnering rate for gay Jewish men is considerably higher.

Procreation is an important concern that many Jews, both heterosexual and gay, feel is closely connected to their Jewish identity. Compared to other ethno-religious groups, Jews, both traditional and secular, tend to place a very high value on bearing children (Goldscheider, 1986: 92). My research suggests that a

lower proportion of gay Jewish men desire children than do heterosexual Jews. For some Jews, both heterosexual and gay, not having biological children can cause some guilt or angst. These Jews feel some regret for not biologically contributing to "Jewish continuity." Heterosexual Jews may lack Jewish children, for example, because of infertility problems or because a Jewish man has fathered a child with a non-Jewish woman (the more traditional segments of the Jewish community would not consider this child Jewish). Gay Jewish men who wish to have biological children face added obstacles. These include a perceived resistance to gay parenthood from the Jewish community and Jewish institutional leadership, as well as the personal, social, legal and financial complexities involved in a gay man becoming a father either through surrogacy or co-parenting.

Gay Jewish Experience in Comparative Ethnic Context

How (if at all) is the gay Jewish experience different from the non-Jewish gay experience?

There are many similarities between the experiences of gay Jews and gay men of other ethnic minorities such as blacks, Latin Americans, Asians, Greeks or Italians. All these groups tend to place relatively more emphasis than white Anglo-Saxon groups on "traditional" gender roles, the "nuclear family," tight family bonds, procreation and conservative religious values (Garcia, 1998: 26-27; Greene, 1997a: 219-226, Morales, 1990: 225-226). This often translates into resistance to homosexuality and same-sex relationships within these cultural

communities. Living as a minority within a minority, ethnic minority gay men often face the challenging task of trying to integrate two major aspects of their identity when both are sometimes devalued or ignored in general society (Hunter et al., 1998: 46-48).

While these strong parallels exist, my research suggests that there are certain factors that are distinctive to the Jewish experience. One factor that stands out is the strong emphasis placed on "Jewish continuity." In the face of perceived widespread assimilation and intermarriage, more so than other ethno-religious communities – and certainly more so than white Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities – strategies to promote "continuity" have become one of the central priorities of the Jewish ethnic polity. Many of my respondents that assumes that gay men do not have children, and thus gay Jewish men do not contribute to Jewish continuity. Even though this assumption is not entirely accurate, this is one of the key reasons, according to my respondents, why Jews have difficulty supporting Jewish same-sex relationships. While it is true that there are references in the literature to a similar concern with "continuity" operating in the black community (Greene 1997a: 225), in the face of the multitude of Jewish lives lost to the Holocaust and the fact that Jews, as a non-visible minority, are more susceptible to assimilate into mainstream society, I suggest that this preoccupation with ethnic survival is stronger in the Jewish community.

Chapter 5 discusses the reasons why gay Jewish men are not able to find Jewish partners. The various reasons cited are lack of numbers, lack of support from the ethnic community, lack of a gay social infrastructure within the ethnic

community, distaste or dislike for one's own ethnic community and internalized homophobia. There is no reason to believe that these factors are unique to gay Jews. I cite evidence that suggests that these issues are also present in the lives of gay men belonging to other ethno-religious groups (Han, 2000: 219-221; Nakajima et al., 1996: 573-574; Greene, 1998: 49-51). Because of the Jewish preoccupation with ethnic survival and continuity, however, the concern about out-marriage and inter-ethnic partnering is likely more pressing in the Jewish community than it is in other ethno-religious communities.

The Jewish experience is also somewhat distinctive due to the fact that Jews, compared to other ethnic groups, maintain very high levels of interaction and friendship patterns with others from their own ethnic group (Weinfeld, 2001: 169). It is these highly developed social networks and friendship associations – combined with high urban concentration and residential segregation (Shaffir and Weinfeld, 1981: 12-13; Weinfeld, 2001: 166) – that likely make anonymity and privacy more difficult within the Jewish community than it is for other ethnic minority gay men within their own ethnic community.

In terms of the experiences of ethnic minority gay men and lesbians in the larger gay community, Chapter 4 cites literature that reports some experiences of racist attitudes in the gay community (Hunter et al., 1998: 48; Tremble, 1989: 263; Morales, 1990: 220). While I did uncover evidence of a small amount of anti-Jewish sentiment in the gay community, because Jews are not usually visible minorities it is likely that the incidence of anti-Jewish sentiment is less than anti-black, anti-Asian, or anti-Latin American sentiment.

Strategies for Negotiation

How might we begin to theorize the strategies gay Jews use to negotiate their queerness and Jewishness?

In reviewing the prominent theoretical models in the literature of gay identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden 1989) and ethnic identity development (Atkinson, Morton and Sue 1989), it became clear that none of the models are sufficiently complex for a proper examination of the ethnic minority gay experience. Each model only considers a singular aspect of the minority experience. More elaborate theoretical models (Morales 1990; Reynolds and Pope, 1991) that attempt to acknowledge the complexities of multiple layers of stigmatized identities provide a better starting point to examine the variety of ways in which sexuality and ethnicity intersect.

Using specific examples from the experiences of gay Jewish men, I was able to build upon and improve these latter theoretical models. Firstly, I broadened the discourse by suggesting that there are more strategies than prioritizing one identity over the other, compartmentalizing identities or integrating identities. By suggesting that for some gay Jews there is no conflict between their gay and Jewish identities, I argued that we need to be cautious about problematizing these issues to begin with. I also suggested that for some gay Jews the internal conflict is so strong that they feel that no solution is possible.

Secondly, I was able to bring to light in some detail the concept of the fluidity of strategies to which the models only allude. My data illustrate that strategies of identity negotiation for gay Jews can be situational and can change at various times in an individual's life. For example, two of my respondents have implemented two distinct strategies at different times of their lives. At one time, these respondents prioritized their Jewishness over their gay identities. Later in life, however, both have given priority to their gay identity and have moved away considerably from their Jewish connections. In another example of fluidity, I illustrated that one respondent implemented two strategies simultaneously. He compartmentalizes his gay and Jewish identities, but at the same time he prioritizes his gay identity over his Jewish identity. My research adds important emphasis to the fluid, changing and situational nature of these means of negotiation.

Thirdly, I have added more nuance to the models by demonstrating that the variable of religiousity plays an important role. Secular Jews are less likely to feel conflicted while traditional Jews are more likely so. Secular Jews are more likely to repress their Jewish identity, while traditional Jews are more likely to repress their gay identity. Even within the integration strategy of conceptualizing more liberal Jewish theological perspectives on homosexuality, we can observe a subtle, yet significant difference of approach. Secular Jews tend to do this by dismissing relevant Torah passages as non-authoritative, while traditional Jews tend to spend considerable effort in reinterpreting these passages while still imbuing them with religious value. There is no reason to believe that such a

paradigm would be any different for other ethnic minority gay men and lesbians. Different levels of commitment to one's ethnic or religious heritage, whether it be for Greeks, Brazilians or Chinese, can play a key role in how one attempts to negotiate one's gay and ethno-religious identities. More research in this regard is recommended for other ethno-religious groups.

Finally, we see that Morales (1990: 228) and Greene (1998: 48) suggest that ethnic minority gay men and lesbians tend to show more priority to their ethnic community, and others such as Chan (1989: 19-20) and Garcia (1998: 109) suggest that they tend show more priority to the gay community. In total, my research points to the significant complexities of these issues and argues that there are a great variety of strategies implemented that depend on additional variables and can evolve and change over different phases of an individual's life. In point of fact, there are likely as many strategies of negotiation for gay Jews as there are gay Jewish individuals. This is indeed consistent with my support for the argument that, for most Jews today, Jewish identity is freely chosen and individually constructed (Horowitz, 1998: 74-75). Gay Jews, like other Jews, feel free to appropriate only those aspects of Jewishness that they find personally meaningful (Cohen and Eisen, 2000: 7-9). As such, gay Jews are finding myriads of ways to incorporate their gayness into their Jewish identities. There is no reason to believe that such a phenomenon does not exist for gay men of other ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Community Implications

As Jews in North America have been increasingly accepted into the larger society over the last several decades, the Jewish community has been able to re-direct its energies and resources inward. This has resulted in a higher level of awareness of the diversity within the Jewish community (Shaffir, 1993: 360). Particular interests in Jewish sub-groups – Jewish women, Sephardic Jews, poor Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews, gay Jews and more – have started to come to the attention of the larger Jewish community. Social cleavages and diverging perspectives within a community are a natural and perhaps even essential ingredient of the public affairs of an ethnic polity. It is not the conflicts themselves, but how the individuals within the group manage and negotiate these differing interests that is the true test of the social cohesion of the ethnic community (Breton, 1991: 2-5).

Using the Jewish example as a case study, this work has reflected on questions that test the very limits of pluralism within an ethno-religious community. With biblical texts prohibiting homosexual sex acts permeating Jewish consciousness, how far is the Jewish community willing to go in accommodating, embracing or integrating gay Jews? Are there more pressing reasons to counter these negative attitudes towards homosexuality? What level of "institutional completeness" (Breton, 1967) is the community willing to provide for its gay and lesbian Jews?

By analyzing the experiences of gay Jewish men in different facets of their lives, such as their experiences with their family and the larger Jewish

community, their reflections on finding a (Jewish or non-Jewish) life partner and their feelings regarding potential fatherhood, my research illustrates that many gay Jews face significant obstacles and challenges in maintaining a strong Jewish identity. Because some gay Jews feel marginalized and excluded from the Jewish community, they want to distance themselves from Judaism and Jewish social and ethnic links. It could be argued that this is not a healthy situation for the community. The fact that this community's rejection sometimes causes gay Jews to suffer from mental or emotional stress, manifesting itself as depression or even suicide attempts, is indisputably unhealthy for the Jewish community.

Because most Jewish families are not willing to sacrifice their relationship with their gay family member, family acceptance tends to come a little more easily than community acceptance. Rather than remaining silent and private about their processes of acceptance of their gay family member, more awareness about these issues could be beneficially promoted in the community at large. Through my research I have discovered that the support group for families is poorly promoted throughout the Jewish community, likely due to the stigma involved in bringing the topic of homosexuality into the Jewish public discourse. There are private Jewish schools in Toronto, for example, that will not promote the support group for gay youth. In general, Jewish community sponsored support groups for parents and for youth could be better promoted. Because gay youth are coming out more and more as young as high school age, it could also be beneficial for Jewish high schools to show more initiative and leadership in providing necessary support.

The Jewish community is caught in a difficult position. On the one hand, there are strong political forces in the community that emphasize conservative religious values. These values dictate that gay issues are not to be publicly acknowledged in prominent Jewish institutions. On the other hand, there are gay Jews who are struggling with their Jewish identities who could likely benefit from more active and visible community support.

I have argued that some of the key reasons why gay Jewish men seek out non-Jewish men as partners are because of the negative reactions of the Jewish community. Some of these men feel stigmatized within the Jewish community and therefore wish to separate themselves from the community. Secondly, there is a lack of motivation and therefore resources to develop a community-sponsored gay Jewish social infrastructure. How far is the Jewish community willing to go to try to reduce rates of "out-marriage"? The community could consider providing programs and services to encourage and to assist gay and lesbian Jews who desire monogamous Jewish partnerships to find such mates.[27] This could take a similar form to the multitude of community-sponsored matchmaking services and singles social events that take place for heterosexual Jews.

Chapter 6 illustrates that there are gay Jewish men who wish to have biological children born from Jewish mothers and to raise the children as Jewish. Partly out of community resistance, these men are encountering significant difficulties in putting this plan into action. Is the Jewish community willing to support non-traditional Jewish family structures? The Jewish ethnic polity, which

[27] I reiterate the point that I do not assume that all gay and lesbian Jews desire or should desire monogamous Jewish partnerships.

has a preoccupation with increasing the Jewish population, could address this situation. For those gay and lesbian Jews who desire such a scenario, the community could encourage and facilitate arrangements in which these Jewish men and women could locate each other and develop an agreement that could make the birth of a child possible. For those gay Jews interested in adopting a child and raising this child in a Jewish milieu, the Jewish community could again actively assist in such an enterprise.

Let us turn to the gay Jewish organizational situation in Toronto. In the opening chapter, I outlined the variety of challenges associated with operating and sustaining a gay Jewish organization. If these organizations have so much difficulty sustaining themselves in a city like Toronto, with a large Jewish population (180,000), one may ask whether there is really a demand for such organizations at all. Perhaps the model of integrating gay Jews into "mainstream" Jewish organizations and congregations replaces the need for particular groups for gay Jews.

As I have suggested, integration is an important wave of the future. Toronto's *Shir Libeynu* (Song of our Hearts), a progressive and pluralistic egalitarian congregation, successfully integrates gay and heterosexual Jews into the same Jewish ritual space. The First Narayever Congregation, a traditional egalitarian congregation also located in downtown Toronto, is another "mainstream" synagogue that is attractive to some gay and lesbian Jews. This synagogue has recently undertaken an extended period of study on the issue of inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews and has decided to incorporate public

announcements during the course of the Sabbath prayer services of anniversaries of any couple, gay or heterosexual, who requests it.[28] In January 2004, the congregation will be voting on the question of whether Jewish same-sex marriage will be integrated into the synagogue. Many Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues in the United States are including gay and lesbian concerns into the life of the synagogue. It is likely that more such congregations in Canada will adopt this model of integration.

Despite this attraction of integrative settings, I would argue that there is still some demand for groups designed specifically for gay Jewish concerns. Most Jewish women or Sephardic Jews, for example, want to feel that they are a part of the total Jewish community, but this does not mean that they do not also have a desire to spend time in Jewish sub-groups to celebrate their particularist interest in Jewish feminism or Sephardic heritage and culture. The same is true of gay and lesbian Jews. The currently active gay Jewish group in Toronto for students and young adults, and the larger national body that sponsors it (National Union of Jewish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Students), are well-funded, dynamic and successful new organizations, for example. In these social groups, young adults are able to celebrate their collective identity with pride and, for many, this allows them to comfortably integrate their gay and Jewish identities. The groups also allow for social interaction between gay and lesbian Jews in a safe space, which can facilitate the development of Jewish romantic relationships for those

[28] While for some this may seem like a meager step towards full integration of gay and lesbian Jews into a synagogue setting, set in the larger context it is important to realize that this is one of the only synagogues in Toronto that officially permits this.

who desire them. The younger generation is growing up with much less societal stigma about being gay and, as a result, feel more comfortable with their gayness and have higher expectations than the older generation about the level of Jewish acceptance to which they are entitled.

The fact that as of March 2000 the Jewish Federation of Toronto financially sponsors the Toronto chapter of this organization, employs a Jewish communal staff person to facilitate the group and offers physical space to the group signals an important turning point in Jewish support for gay Jewish initiatives. Responding to a request from the Jewish students themselves, the ethnic polity decided this is the first formal gay Jewish organization they will financially support. Given the Jewish religious tensions involved in the question of homosexuality, how is it the ethnic polity felt that it is appropriate to fund such an organization? As I have illustrated, there is a desire among some middle-aged and older gay and lesbian Jews for such a social group. Does this signal the beginning of more financial support in the future?[29]

From a Jewish communal policy perspective my research has particular relevance. For a community that places strong emphasis on "Jewish continuity," it is important to observe that some gay Jewish men actually feel discouraged from forming Jewish families, having and raising Jewish children and being actively involved in Jewish life. The Jewish ethnic polity will need to continue to reflect on what further measures, if any, it wants to take to represent the pluralism within

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[29] In 2002, a Jewish Gay and Lesbian Fund was developed through Toronto's Jewish Foundation to sponsor gay Jewish cultural and educational programs. The Chicago Jewish Federation established such a fund, as well, in 2001.

its ranks. Sociologists must be cautious about predictions, but as societal attitudes and laws continue to show more support for gay and lesbian concerns and rights, it is likely that Jewish communities will move in the same direction. Future research can monitor these developments. Further research is also recommended on other ethno-religious communities to examine the ways in which they address the gay and lesbians within their midst.

Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire for Gay Jewish Men

1) Demographic Characteristics

- Age
- Occupation
- Birthplace
- How long have you lived in Toronto?
- Where else have you lived?

2) Describing Jewish Background / Identity

Tell me about your Jewish background.

Did you go to any Jewish schools? Day school / afternoon school?
- Other type of Jewish education?

In terms of Jewishness, how would you describe your family life growing up?

How would you describe your level of Jewish observance?
- Has it changed from what it used to be? How so?

Do you attend synagogue? How often? Which one?

How would you describe the extent of your involvement or interaction with Jews, Jewish institutions, Jewish organizations, the Jewish community?

How would you describe your Jewish identity?

3) Describing Gay Identity

How would you identify or describe your sexual orientation?

Was there a certain point when you realized that you are gay?
- How did this process work for you?
- Was there a certain point when you 'came out' to others?

How would you describe the extent of your involvement with other gay people, with 'gay culture,' gay social groups, gay activist groups, gay organizations, etc.?

4) Experiences of Being Gay in the Jewish Community

Have you come out to your parents?
Have you come out to your siblings?
Have you come out to close Jewish family members?
Have you come out to close Jewish friends?

What was their reaction? What was it like for you?

In general, how would you describe the way that Jews with whom you come into contact react to you as a gay man?

Do you see any difference between the Jews and the non-Jews with whom you come into contact regarding their attitudes towards you as a gay man?

What do you perceive to be the general attitudes of the Jewish community of Toronto towards gay Jewish men?

As a gay man, how comfortable do you feel in Jewish environments (synagogues, Jewish organizations, Jewish community centres, etc.)?
- Can you give an example of some experiences you have had in a Jewish setting?

Have you ever brought a partner to meet your parents?
- If so, what was that like?

Have you ever brought a partner to a Jewish family gathering of any kind?
- If so, what was that like?

Do you know any Jewish lesbians?
- How do you think their experiences compare to yours?

Do you think there are some basic differences between the experiences of gay men in the Jewish community compared to the experiences of lesbians in the Jewish community?

If lived in other geographical locations:

How would you compare your Jewish community experience as a gay man in Toronto as compared to how it was in (xxxxxxx)?

Do you have any children?
- What are your thoughts about having children?
- What do you think the attitude of your Jewish family and friends would be to you having children?

5) Experiences of Being Jewish in the Gay Community

What have been your experiences as a Jew in the gay community?

Have you ever felt any discomfort or felt excluded as a Jew in a gay setting?
- Describe.

Have their been any differences between your experiences as a Jew in the gay community and your experiences as a Jew in the "straight world"?

What do you perceive to be the general attitudes of the gay community towards gay Jews?
- Are these attitudes any different than the attitudes of the "straight world" towards Jews?

If lived in other geographical locations:

How would you compare your gay community experience as a Jewish man in Toronto as compared to how it was in (xxxxxxx)?

6) Assessment of Extent of Marginalization / Integration

How do you negotiate the two identities?
- Some people have described their Jewishness and gayness as completely at odds with each other, others have described the two as mutually reinforcing.
How do you feel about the relationship between your Jewishness and gayness?

Do you participate in any gay Jewish events / causes?
- Describe.
- What do (did) you think of it?

How would you compare your comfort level of being gay in the Jewish community to your comfort level of being Jewish in the gay community?

7) Partnering Issues

Do you have a partner at this time?
(*partner = a relationship that you consider serious*)

If has a partner now:

Is he Jewish ?

Do you have any preference as to the Jewishness or non-Jewishness of a (potential) partner?
- Why?

Regarding your attitudes about the Jewishness or non-Jewishness of a potential partner, does the nature of the relationship make a difference (i.e. short-term relationship that may, for example, be focused more on sexual relations vs. a longer-term relationship)?

Have your parents met your partner?
- If so, how have they received him?
- How do they feel about the fact that he is (Jewish / not Jewish)?

Have other Jewish family and friends met your partner?
- How have they received him?
- How do they feel about the fact that he is (Jewish / not Jewish)?

If no partner now:

Have you ever had a partner?
- If so, was he Jewish?
- How important an issue was this for you?

Do you have any preference as to the Jewishness or non-Jewishness of a potential partner?
- Why?

Regarding your attitudes about the Jewishness or non-Jewishness of a potential partner does the nature of the relationship make a difference (i.e. short-term relationship that may, for example, be focused more on sexual relations vs. a longer-term relationship)?

Did your parents meet your partner?
- How did they receive him?

- How did they feel about the fact that he was (Jewish / not Jewish)?

Did other Jewish family and friends meet your partner?
- How did they receive him?
- How did they feel about the fact that he was (Jewish / not Jewish)?

All:

Of all the men with whom you have had a relationship (from short-term sexual relationships to long-term partners) would you be able to you say approximately what proportion was Jewish?
- Why do you think this is?
- How important of an issue has it been for you?

How easy / difficult is it to find a gay Jewish partner if one was interested in finding one?
- Why?
- How might it be done?

If lived in other geographical locations:

How does this compare to how easy or difficult it would be to find a gay Jewish partner in (xxxxxxx)?

Would you be able to offer any reflections on the question of whether there is any difference between the rate that gay Jewish men are partnering with other Jews as compared to the rate that straight Jewish men are partnering with other Jews?

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire for Parents of Gay Jewish Men

1) Demographic Characteristics

Parents:
- Age
- Occupation
- Educational level
- Birthplace
- How long have you lived in Toronto?
- Where else have you lived?
- How many children do you have? What are their ages?

Son:
- Age
- Occupation
- Educational level
- Birthplace

2) Describing Jewish Background / Identity

Tell me about your Jewish background.

Did you go to any Jewish schools? Day school / afternoon school?
- Other type of Jewish education?

In terms of Jewishness, how would you describe your family life growing up?

How would you describe your level of Jewish observance?
- Has it changed from what it used to be? How so?

Do you attend synagogue? How often? Which one?

How would you describe the extent of your involvement or interaction with Jews, Jewish institutions, Jewish organizations, the Jewish community?

How would you describe your Jewish identity?

How does your son's Jewish identity and practice differ from yours?

3) Reaction to Son Being Gay

How would you describe your relationship with your son?

How did you find out your son is gay?

Was there a point when he 'came out' to you?
- How did he do it?

How did you feel about it ?
- What was your reaction? What did you say?

Have your feelings about the issue changed in any way since he told you?

How would you describe your relationship with your son since he told you?
- Has there been any change?

Have other Jewish family members / Jewish friends been told?
- How do you feel about this issue?

What have been the reactions of Jewish family members? Jewish Friends? Jewish community at large?

Do you find that there is any difference between the reaction of Jews and non-Jews when they learn that your son is gay?

How would you assess the Jewish community's response to gay Jews and their families?

Could they be doing more?
- Describe

Have your attitudes or behaviours about the issue changed at all since you found out about your son?

4) Partners

Does your son have a partner now?
- If so, is he Jewish?

Has your son had any partners?
- What proportion have been Jewish?

What is your opinion about whether or not your son's partner is Jewish?

What are your thoughts about whether or not your heterosexual children have a Jewish partners?

What are your feelings about you son bringing his partner to a family dinner / event?
- Has it happened?
- How did it go?
- Reactions of other family members?

5) Children

Does your son have any children?

If not, does he plan to have any?

What are your thoughts about him having children?

How would you like to see him do it?
- Adopt?
- Surrogate mother?
- Other?
- With / without partner?
- Jewish / non-Jewish partner?

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Appendix C

Research Ethics Board Office
c/o Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer
Research Grants Office
James Administration Bldg, rm 429

Tel: 398-6831
Fax: 398-4853
www.mcgill.ca/fgsr/rgo/reshum.html

March 5, 2001

Randal Schnoor
Sociology Dept.
Leacock Bldg

RE: Gay Jewish Men: Twice Blessed or Doubly Disadvantaged

In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Research Involving Humans, the University Research Ethics Board-1 reviewed the above project submission at its meeting of February 26, 2001 and the project was approved.

With regard to research activities that involve your presence during formal (i.e. worship) activities by the congregation, the committee recommends that you seek permission from the rabbi and advisory council of the congregation.

Please note this approval is valid for a period of one year.

Sincerely,

George Wenzel
Professor and Chair, REB-1

cc: Dr. M. Weinfeld

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