

ALIENATED JEWS

What about Outreach to Jewish Lesbians?

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The terms "Jewish continuity" and "outreach" appear extensively in Jewish communal policies and debates over the health of North American Jewry. However, the meanings of these terms and their translation into practice are not clear. In particular, there is debate concerning (1) what constitutes Jewish continuity, (2) are Jewish identities eroding or transforming, (3) what are effective outreach strategies, and (4) which "alienated Jews" should be given priority in terms of resources. This article explores the lives of nine such Toronto-based alienated Jews, documenting the unique challenges lesbians face as Jews.

Unofficially welcomed as paying members in Toronto congregations and as Jewish philanthropists, Jewish gays and lesbians remain marginalized, only gaining institutional acceptance by de-emphasizing their sexual loyalties. Despite clear strides that have been achieved in removing barriers to Jewish involvement, notably in egalitarian liberal synagogues, the position both formal and informal of the Jewish community in regard to homosexuality is still inconsistent (Morris, 1987). Further, the acquisition of full religious rights, such as access to role model positions in Jewish institutions, continues to be a struggle.

In-depth life history interviews and participant observation experiences spanning eight months provide preliminary insight into the complex interrelationship of Jewish and sexual identification processes. This article discusses the implications of these findings for preventing communal disaffection and promoting Jewish identity maintenance, social support, and revitalization.

BACKGROUND

Only since the 1980s have researchers and practitioners begun examining the

sociopsychological consequences of ethnic diversity on the "coming out" process for lesbians and gays. In their silence, lesbian and Jewish identity theorists alike unwittingly helped reproduce the beliefs that (1) being Jewish and lesbian are incompatible affiliations and that (2) the processes of Jewish and lesbian identity formation are mutually exclusive journeys and thereby not significant factors in each other's unfolding.

Rendered invisible as Jews within lesbian feminist orbits and similarly so as lesbians within mainstream Jewish circles, Jewish lesbians have found their concerns and needs ignored by communal leaders and front line workers. Indeed, the alienating effect of invisibility is a dominant theme not only in this study but also in many of the life stories of Jewish lesbians found in autobiographical and Jewish therapy works. Although there has been an increase in Jewish lesbian works (see these pivotal texts: Alpert, 1997; Balka & Rose, 1989; and Beck, 1989), there remains a dearth of research on Jewish lesbians. In spite of the stigmatization of lesbianism evidenced in the dominant Jewish community and of Judaism in the dominant lesbian community, neither has sponsored studies to investigate this double bind.

Stage models continue to dominate attempts to categorize the processes involved in developing a lesbian identity. Such models typically chart a movement that begins with feelings of sexual-emotional attraction to other women, followed by self-definition as a lesbian and participation in a lesbian subculture, often ending with a more integrated identity (e.g., Cass, 1979). However, such unilinear typologies oversimplify the coming out process of lesbians. Smith (1997, p. 284) argues for "considering the multidimensionality and complexity of the coming-out process." Many of the models fail "to account for

the diversity of lesbian definitions and experiences in the development of a lesbian identity" (Brown, 1995, p. 19), ignoring how ethnicity, race, class, age, marital history, and religious affiliation interact with the development of a lesbian identity. For instance, naming oneself a Jewish lesbian or a lesbian Jew can emerge from differing starting points, evolve, and be expressed in a heterogeneous fashion.

The extant literature that does consider the interplay of ethnic and sexual identity construction relies on small non-random but qualitatively rich investigations not unlike this study (see the edited volumes of Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Greene, 1997). Such studies of ethnic-specific lesbians highlight the effects of cultural factors, socially defined stereotypes, and expectations on the negotiation of sexual and cultural identifications. Several variables that affect the formation of a lesbian identity are the following: (1) the importance of family and ethnic community relationships, (2) the perceived threat of stigmatization by one's ethnic reference group, (3) the degree of ethnic tolerance and acceptance in a lesbian and gay community, (4) the need for ethnic community support, and (5) the desire for cultural expression. The research suggests that ethnicity indeed matters.

THE STUDY

The interviews lasted approximately three hours and took place in the women's homes, with the exception of one that was conducted over lunch in a popular Jewish deli. None of the women objected to the use of a tape recorder, and over 100 hours of interview material were collected. The interview schedule consisted of a flexible, largely unstructured list of open-ended questions exploring the participants' lives as Jews who are lesbians and as lesbians who are Jews, including the feelings and experiences they have attached to both identities. In order to ensure anonymity, fictive names have been assigned to the participants.

I discovered a Jewish lesbian social/discussion group, "Nice Jewish Girls," adver-

tised in one of Toronto's gay and lesbian newspapers. Mazal, the co-founder of the group, was very helpful to me, both as a participant herself and as a source for other possible participants. Snowball sampling, a process whereby established interviewees provide referrals to potential new participants, and interview opportunities acquired through participating in Jewish lesbian events, produced the other participants in the project.

Over the eight months of the study I met socially with Jewish lesbians in cafes, on ice skating outings, at movies, comedy nights, and at the Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Community Center. I attended two Hanukkah parties, one hosted by Keshet Shalom, the Jewish gay and lesbian synagogue, and the other held in the home of a "Nice Jewish Girls" member. I also attended two meetings of the Jewish Anti-Fascist League upon invitation by one of the interviewees. While these experiences helped situate participants in their lived realities and aided interpretation of the interview data, the themes presented in this paper are based on the in-depth interviews alone.

Characteristics of the Study Sample

Jewish lesbians are a heterogeneous group. The nine women in this study vary in their Jewish upbringing; Jewish geography; age and period of coming out as lesbian; extent of lesbian and Jewish identity disclosure, pride and acceptance in those two identities; and definition of their Jewish and lesbian identity. In assessing how representative these nine participants are of the Toronto Jewish lesbian community, it is important to note their particular sociodemographic characteristics at the time of the study. Sara and Mazal live alone in apartments within the high-density gay and lesbian section of the city. Dana, Ellen, and Shauna reside in the high-density Jewish area. Dana shares space with a Jewish heterosexual male. Ellen is co-sitting for a cousin, and Shauna owns a quaint two-story home. Cheryl and Leah live together as a family in a multiethnic, principally Greek area of the city. Lara lives with

her girlfriend in a fashionably designed home in the trendy student quarter. Eretz lives student-style with two roommates in a multiethnic low-income area.

Ellen, Eretz, Lara, and Mazal are in their twenties; Dana and Leah are in their thirties; and Shauna, Sarah, and Cheryl are in their mid-to-late forties. Mazal, Lara, and Dana grew up in a close-knit Winnipeg Jewish community; Shauna came from a Minnesota Jewish community to Toronto as a married woman; Eretz lived much of her life in Montreal; and Ellen, Leah, Sarah, and Cheryl were born and raised in Toronto. All nine women went to university, and the four women in their twenties are still actively pursuing their education. The other five women hold positions in advertising, teaching, social services, and government.

FINDINGS: A JEWISH IDENTITY- LESBIAN IDENTITY DIALECTIC

The history of discrimination against Jews, bisexuals, gays, and lesbians influences the lives of the Toronto Jewish, Jewish gay and lesbian, and gay and lesbian communities. In general, the homophobic climate of Toronto Jewry in general has been slower to change than it has been in Jewish communities in major American cities, not only because there is less Jewish gay and lesbian visibility in Canada but also because of Canada's religious conservatism. Feelings of nonacceptance reported by Jewish bisexuals, gays, and lesbians stem in part from "troubling" Torah readings (Alpert, 1997): persistent attempts to use the sacred Jewish texts as an ideological justification to delegitimize homosexuality.

Yet, as Dworkin (1997, p. 66) writes: "In many ways the lesbian experience parallels the Jewish experience." Both have endured exclusion and dehumanizing treatment (see also Balka & Rose, 1989; Beck, 1989), and members of both communities have attempted to escape that treatment by denying their identities. Both Jews and lesbians are familiar with hiding, compulsory conversions, and forced exodus, and consequently both have a survivalist consciousness (Dworkin, 1993).

Alienation

Although other studies confirm the distress and loneliness of feeling estranged from one's "actual self" (e.g., Moses, 1978), many do not consider the different sources of self-depreciation and what aspects of one's self are being stifled by that estrangement. In this study, alienation was expressed in four modalities: (1) feeling disconnected from one's lesbian self in Jewish company, (2) feeling estranged from one's lesbian self in non-Jewish contexts, (3) feeling separated from one's Jewish self in lesbian circles, and (4) feeling divorced from one's Jewish self in Jewish settings. The disjuncture between one's self-identification and a superimposed identity by others threatens one's identity, confining its expression to restricted spheres (Weinrich, 1988). The form of these four sources of vulnerability and invisibility varied according to one's Jewish upbringing and time and life stage of coming out as a lesbian.

Similar to domestic abuse and alcoholism, lesbianism is cast as atypical of Jews (i.e., "these were things we were told did not happen to Jews"). Seven of the nine women experienced a lag in their self-definition as a lesbian and reported accentuated feelings of outsidership. For instance, Shauna, now in her late forties, dismissed a crush she had on a Hebrew school friend and complied with expectations to marry. Only after the dissolution of her 14-year marriage has she accepted, at least to herself and select others, her lesbian orientation. Ellen, a naturopathic student who grew up with a high level of Jewish communal involvement, had a brief love affair with a woman at age 16 on an Israeli kibbutz, but kept her same-sex attraction hidden until age 22 when she felt ready to attach meaning to these emotions. Mazal, a 22-year-old social work student, created imaginary boyfriends to avoid any questioning from her Jewish heterosexual friends. Forty-seven-year-old Sarah described her high-school years as a very lonely time due to an experienced rift between internally and externally recognized definitions of self (i.e., passing as non-lesbian to others but not to herself).

The intensity of or chance of feeling alienated from one's lesbian self is affected by the temporal and spatial context in which one "came out." In other words, coming out in 1957 versus 1997, in a sparse Jewish presence versus a close-knit one, presented a different set of conditions and demands. For example, although Shauna, Cheryl, and Sarah are all in their forties, Sarah's story is different from that of her counterparts. Unlike Cheryl and Shauna who affirmed their lesbian identities after 18 and 14 years of marriage, respectively, Sarah did so at an earlier age during a period when psychiatry and the religious right enforced the criminalization and stigmatization of homosexuality.

Absent from lesbian identity development models is the recognition of internal confusion as a byproduct of estrangement from one's ethnic self. Practitioners who therefore use these development models may mistakenly assume that ethnicity plays no part in lesbian identity formation processes and that expressed feelings of internal distress are strictly associated with lesbian self-disclosure. After seeking the company of other lesbians, many interviewees feel a subsequent disconnection from their Jewish self. Pressure exists in the lesbian community to prioritize lesbian issues and hide ethnic, in this case, Jewish feelings. For example, while Garnets and Kimmel (1993) acknowledge obstacles to achieving a positive lesbian identity when one's co-ethnics devalue lesbian life choices, they ignore the negative attitudes perpetuated within lesbian culture for being, for example, Jewish and/or a person of color.

Not unlike the women in the Jewish lesbian vignettes published in Beck's (1989) and Balka and Rose's (1989) anthologies, my interviewees confirm the reality of Jewish alienation within lesbian communities. For instance, Mazal speaks of expectations to cease fighting for Jewish concerns and to minimize adherence to Jewish beliefs and practices when acquiring lesbian membership. Dana relays the negative perceptions held of Jews she has encountered in lesbian

circles wherein Jews are thought of as frugal, pushy, loud, and overbearing, including the "Jewish American Princess" and "Jewish mother" stereotypes. Lara details the presence of anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism or pro-Palestinian attitudes. Eretz emphasizes Jewish alienation in lesbian contexts derived from the conception of Judaism as a patriarchal religion.

The fourth source of alienation, feeling disconnected from one's Jewish self in Jewish settings, is sustained by culturally enforced assumptions of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980) and spiritual uncertainty. The separation from one's Jewish self noted by some lesbians is complicated by Jewish religious values that seem to posit a male God and empower men, that do not value women's participation or experience aside from procreation and child-rearing roles, that fail to support women's equality, and that deny women's right to be gay (Personal communication, Cohen, 1995).

Going Public

The perception of Jewish communal responses to lesbianism and anticipated parental reactions distinguishes Jewish lesbian identity experiences from those of their non-Jewish lesbian counterparts. For the women in the study who were brought up in a traditional Jewish setting with strong Jewish involvement, fear of the Jewish community finding out exacerbated their fears of losing their Jewish ties and indeed their very sense of self. Such feelings adversely affected their attitudes toward "naming" their lesbian identification.

Strong familial bonds are embedded in Jewish culture, which further complicates a daughter's disclosure of her lesbian identity. For example, Mazal's parents did not value or even acknowledge her female relationships, making her feel that lesbianism and Jewishness must be incompatible. Her parents ceased to insist that she restrict her intimate associations to Jews as they continued to do with her sisters. The fact that she was dating a Jewish woman was simply irrel-

evant. In her words, she "felt like if [she] was going to be a lesbian, that meant [she] could not be a Jew."

Parental expectations, the importance of presenting a positive face to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, and the desire to appear successful to other Jewish community members can lead to family denial, secrets, and discord, possibly resulting in the lesbian daughter's flight. For Lara, exposing her lesbian orientation to her parents evoked guilt, a feeling of "letting her family down," and having shamed them in the Jewish community. Ellen emphasized the "fear" she felt in naming her sexual identity in the context of her Jewish social immersion because she assumed that being a lesbian contravened Jewish sociocultural expectations, specifically to marry and have children, a lifestyle choice she desired.

Periods of disassociation and estrangement from immediate family members is a common experience of many Jewish lesbians. However, relationships, like identities, are not static. Such intervening factors as time, improvements in social support, and positive communal attitudes toward homosexuality may facilitate family healing and acceptance. Ellen's parents have been supportive of her lesbian identity, including her girlfriends, at Jewish family functions. Her mother is active in Jewish Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (JPFLAG), and her father is a legal advocate for same-sex rights. At the same time, the rabbi of her Reform Congregation, in which she has been active for 25 years, recently condemned same-sex marriages in a sermon. Ellen felt offended and decided to leave.

Although not reported in this study, I have heard stories of parents going so far as to sit *Shiva* (a Jewish mourning ritual) for their gay- and lesbian-identified offspring. Leah, a daughter of practicing Orthodox Jews, met the following response from her mother: "I wish I was your father, dead, so that I did not have to hear about this." Shauna, the one woman in my study not to come out as a lesbian, justified not doing so until she is in a

significant relationship with a woman since "there is nothing to tell" and "it is a concept [her widowed mother] can't relate to."

Allegiances

Jewish and lesbian allegiances can be compartmentalized, conflictual, or harmonious. Shauna confines her lesbian identity to "gay places" and does not bring her lesbian loyalties into issues concerning her Jewish spirituality. She attends a traditional egalitarian synagogue, but does not publicize her lesbian identity. Similarly, Sarah's Jewish marginality has led her to view her Jewish and lesbian identities as separate, non-overlapping journeys.

Ostracized by co-ethnics, some interviewees abandon their Jewish ritual adherence, affiliations, and involvement and minimize their Jewish social networks. Some women redirect their energies to focus more on their lesbian commitments. Dana, for example, was highly involved in the Jewish community while she was growing up, but rejected her Jewish associations when she went to college. She replaced these ties with lesbian concerns, which she saw as more self-empowering. Twenty-six-year-old Eretz's case stands out in this study because, unlike the others in the group, she was not raised as a Jew, her father being a convert to the Jehovah Witness faith. In fact, Eretz's Jewish identification came after affirming her lesbian orientation. Having already gone through a process of differentiating herself as a nonconformist, identifying as a lesbian was less challenging. For her, coming out as a Jew proved more difficult because of the belief among some that "if your mother is not Jewish, then it doesn't count" (Eretz). Her choice to reclaim her Jewish heritage became a springboard for many alliances with oppressed groups.

Cheryl and Leah did not report conflict or diminished attachment to their Jewish identity as a result of coming out as a lesbian. Jewish-lesbian identity synthesis was a "natural" process for both of them. Raised in Orthodox Jewish households, they received

extensive Judaic knowledge in their formative years. They met each other at the Toronto Reconstructionist Shul and exhibit a continually evolving allegiance with a Toronto Jewish feminist community. Prior to coming out, both women explored the Jewish spiritual landscape and considered philosophical questions regarding their Orthodox backgrounds. Eventually they found acceptance and meaning in the Jewish Reconstructionist movement. In so doing, both avoided Jewish-lesbian identity discord and actively sought Jewish lesbian contacts and spaces in which they could freely express their Jewishness, practice the Jewish traditions, and continue their women-centered focus.

Developing a Jewish feminist political analysis, challenging the devaluation of women and the invisibility of lesbianism, preceded Lara and Ellen's public celebration of their lesbian allegiance. When Ellen named her sexual affiliation, her Jewish social support system remained intact. However, she was stigmatized one summer by fellow camp counselors at a Jewish summer camp and experienced conflict with her Reform rabbi.

Community Building

Jews are quite familiar with the need to turn inward and establish institutions that insulate them from discrimination. However, until the formation of organizations like "Chutzpah" in the late 1970s, there were no formal places where Jewish lesbians could congregate and express their dual commitments. Community building continues to be an important part, albeit to varying degrees, of all nine women's experiences, including the forging of ties with other Jewish lesbians socially, politically, in Jewish holiday celebrations, and in religious congregations.

In recent years, several groups have emerged in Toronto to combat feelings of alienation and enable the reconciliation of dual identities. These include the Keshet Shalom synagogue; the Coalition for Jewish, Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual University students; a political activist organization that calls itself the Jewish Feminist Anti-Fascist

League; Shere Obeinu, a women-focused organization that is run out of a nonsectarian community center; and the social group, "Nice Jewish Girls," which recently renamed itself "Nice Jewish Women" and acquired a new leadership.

Unmasking one's Jewishness, be it through wearing a Star of David necklace, participating in Jewish feminist activist groups, or voicing Jewish concerns in lesbian majority contexts, may elicit anti-Semitic reactions. Eretz recalled being told, "Judaism is very patriarchal; why would you want to be a Jew anyway and how can you be a feminist and a Jew and a dyke?" Assumptions of Jewish privilege, androcentric devout religiosity, and similarly distorted thinking about lesbians perpetuated by non-lesbian Jews have helped bolster Jewish lesbian group solidarity.

Although fragmented pockets of Jewish lesbian activity exist, Cheryl and Leah sense a collective yearning for more Jewish events and greater group cohesiveness. To meet this need, they hosted a Passover seder in their home. The women present were excited and felt as though they were "part of something important."

The need for safe spaces to express one's Jewishness and lesbian identity is a major theme shared in the interviews. Nevertheless, one such space, Keshet Shalom, continues to struggle with attendance problems. Keshet Shalom is a small, loosely structured organization that convenes mainly for Friday night Shabbat services and to celebrate the Jewish holidays. It lacks its own rabbi and holds its services in a poorly lit room in the downtown Jewish Community Centre. Internal politics, spotty commitment, and differing religious tastes limit the congregation's growth (Rose, Personal communication, 1998). According to Ellen, the only woman in this study who attends Keshet Shalom, the majority of the congregation is male, and the women who do attend are typically mothers aged 40 and up. Ellen believes there are less women attendees because they are finding alternate nontraditional spaces to satisfy their spiritual and communal needs.

Identity Integration

Validating the different parts of oneself—in this case, nurturing and synthesizing one's lesbian and Jewish identities—is a goal expressed in different forms by all the interviewees. Obtaining identity integration is not a fixed end, but rather an ongoing process, in which the content of what is considered self-actualization and integration can vary across time and space. At the time of the study, Mazal is giving priority to the fight for Jewish lesbian legitimacy. In their resistance to Jewish lesbian oppression and their articulation of group pride, Eretz and Lara strive to synthesize their varied notions of self. Ellen expresses her positive integrated self-concept by marching with her mother behind the JPFLAG banner on Pride Day. Ideally, she would like to belong to a Reform desegregated congregation where lesbian and gay life-cycle ceremonies are commonplace.

For the older women in this study, normalizing lesbianism is key. Cheryl and Leah demonstrate identity integration by rearing their children in an atmosphere of *tikkun olam* (social action). For Sarah, a professed "assimilated Jew" who did not socialize with non-Jews until her university years, identity integration objectives primarily concern being "out" at work and finding a meaningful relationship.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Committed Jewish outreach practitioners would do well to consider the implications of this study. In particular, Jewish lesbian feelings of alienation, isolation, and fear and their yearnings for Jewish support and Jewish identity resurgence demand attention. Outreach efforts can address these problems and make a real difference in these people's lives.

Jewish Lesbian Role Models

Many women I interacted with during this study stressed the need for Jewish lesbian role models—active women recognized in the mainstream Jewish community. Knowing

there are other women-identified Jews who are valued, not ostracized members of the Jewish community, would help Jewish lesbians counter their feelings of alienation from their Jewishness. Increased Jewish lesbian visibility in Jewish leadership roles, such as rabbis, cantors, Hebrew school teachers, and youth group leaders, would normalize Jewish lesbian identification, fight ignorance and homosexual hostility, and help create safe environments for Jewish lesbians. An interviewee strongly articulates this need for role models: "I had never met someone who was homosexual, especially a Jewish lesbian. I think that would have made the biggest difference in the world to me if I had a Jewish lesbian role model (Mazal)."

Destigmatization of Lesbianism in Jewish Institutions

Jewish lesbians are raising offspring from former heterosexual marriages, adopting children with their Jewish partners, forming unions with Jewish gay men to achieve Jewish family aspirations, and producing Jewish offspring utilizing new reproductive technologies. Clearly, lesbianism does not represent a serious biological threat to Jewish continuity. Therefore, Jewish lesbian families deserve communal respect and validation.

Destigmatizing lesbianism means rethinking Jewish women's roles and demystifying lesbianism as obscene, unnatural, and atypical of Jews. Further, educational, social, and religious institutions would benefit from eliminating the assumption that all members are heterosexual and reside in Jewish husband-wife familial contexts. One woman had a vision of a "future where Jewish children are raised to have choices, when being lesbian or gay is just as valuable as being heterosexual. I'd like to see gay and lesbian rabbis and to have the Jewish community see lesbian couples as a couple and an alternate family" (Lara).

Awareness and Support

Although a few Toronto synagogues do provide therapeutic group support for fami-

lies of gays and lesbians, the majority of the Jewish community remains less informed than it could be surrounding alternative forms of sexuality. Instead of merely supporting partial re-integration of Jewish lesbians in the form of marginal support groups, invisible to those who do not use their services, synagogues should hold seminars and workshops and create educational materials designed to debunk stereotypes about gays and lesbians and dismantle negative attitudes. Friedman (1994, p. 143) advises that "a great deal of consciousness raising is called for in the Jewish community." Perhaps Alpert's (1997, p. 99) "Gay and Lesbian Awareness Week" would be of some help.

Jewish institutions would succeed in attracting more Jews back to the fold if they adopted an explicitly inclusive welcoming stance. Group belonging, communal sharing, respect of differences, and accessibility ought to be stressed. Some of the women indicated that Jewish communal efforts to support the normalization and validation of members' lesbian life choices have been confined to restricted, often peripheral segments of the Toronto Jewish community. One woman spoke of such exclusionary experiences in Judaic life: "Some time ago a Jewish lesbian died in a car accident and there weren't any synagogues that would give her an appropriate eulogy that this woman's partner wanted, one that recognized their relationship" (Cheryl). Another women corroborated the perception of fragmented and selective Jewish sensitivity that exists for Toronto Jewish lesbians:

If you are talking about a really Reform, secular, intellectual Jewish community, then there will be a degree of acceptance, but that's a very small part of the Jewish community... If you are a gay kid growing up in an Orthodox family, you're in big trouble. That's a kid I would worry about; that's a high suicide category. If you're a Conservative family, you're in big trouble as well. And that's close to my experience (Dana).

Celebrating Ritual Diversity

Celebrating Jewish holidays, particularly Passover, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, with other Jewish lesbians has engendered powerful emotions for many of the women in this study. For women whose coming out as a lesbian disrupted their practice of Jewish rituals, renewed participation in the Jewish holidays is especially rewarding. For example, Mazal describes her joy partaking in a Passover seder with a Jewish bisexual, lesbian, and gay social group she helped start: "We created our own seder and rewrote the Hagaddah and we had a beautiful dinner and it was the first time ever. It was really great. We invited our friends. It was beautiful. We sang Jewish songs. We really became a family, which was really nice."

A new sense of Jewish pride evolves through the creation of Jewish rituals that break down sexist and heterosexist structures. Alpert (1997) highlights the innovative and empowering ways in which Jewish feminists in general, and Jewish lesbian feminists in particular, are re-inventing Jewish traditions, transforming passive or disenfranchised Jewish identification into a revitalized attachment. Jewish continuity depends on making rituals meaningful to all participants.

FUTURE RESEARCH: WHAT ABOUT JEWISH GAY MEN?

Although Jewish gay men have not been the subject of this analysis, they too face issues of alienation and conflict with regard to their Jewish identity. Additional interviews were carried out with three Jewish gay men. Like their lesbian counterparts, these men expressed a need for Jewish gay role models, "safe" spaces, awareness, support, appreciation, and celebration. However, sex-role expectations within the Jewish community and gender inequality in the society at large produce differences that warrant scrutiny. For example, one male interviewee emphasized stereotypes as setting Jewish lesbians apart from Jewish gay men:

Lesbian women are expected to express their lesbianism by getting into deep relationships and starting a family, and this coalesces well with a more blended integration in the Jewish community. That is why you probably see more "out" lesbian couples with kids or without kids than you will see gay men because the stereotype of the gay man is this guy hanging around having a lot of anonymous sex.

According to a mother active in JPFLAG, the predominant fear expressed by parents in the support group relates to the stereotypical image of the sexually promiscuous, solitary, and fickle gay male. In particular, many worry about their sons going downtown to the gay district where other men may take advantage of them. Instituting a Jewish Gay and Lesbian Awareness Week and holding ongoing workshops and seminars would encourage the unlearning of fears, stereotypes, and negative attitudes, as well as promote group pride and social incorporation of bisexual, gay, and lesbian Jews. Outreach programs in which inclusivity, acceptance, and validation of Jewish diversity figure prominently stand a greater chance of re-igniting the passions of alienated Jews about being and doing Jewish.

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