

Gay, Jewish, or Both?

Sexual Orientation and Jewish Engagement

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If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them.

Leviticus 20:13

[K]iddushah (holiness) may be present in committed, same gender relationships between two Jews . . . [W]e believe that the relationship of a Jewish, same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual.

Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality Report to the Central Conference of American Rabbis [Reform] Convention, June, 1998

[G]ay and lesbian Jews are to be welcomed into our synagogues and other institutions as full members with no restrictions. Furthermore, gay or lesbian Jews who demonstrate the depth of Jewish commitment, knowledge, faith and desire to serve as rabbis, cantors and educators shall be welcomed to apply to our professional schools and associations.

“Homosexuality, Human Dignity & Halakhah: A Combined Responsum for the Committee On Jewish Law And Standards,” by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, Daniel S. Nevins, & Avram I. Reisner, 2006

Attitudes and policies in American Jewish life toward gay and lesbian Jews have changed dramatically in recent years. Through the mid-20th century, official pronouncements by rabbis and congregational bodies largely reflected biblical prohibitions on homosexuality. Gay men and lesbians were officially excluded from positions of honor, leadership, and recognition.

Then, starting in the late 1960s, partially in response to gay and lesbian collective mobilization and a general move toward greater tolerance of minority

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groups in the society at large, recognized Jewish leaders outside of Orthodoxy began to liberalize their official positions. The year 1965, in fact, marked the first official resolution of the Women of Reform Judaism, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods on the issue of homosexuality and police harassment. In this, Jewish communal actions paralleled similar developments in Protestant denominations in the United States.

The Reconstructionist movement was the first denomination to admit and openly ordain gay and lesbian rabbis in 1984, followed by the Reform movement in 1990. As recently as 2006, the Conservative movement's leading rabbinical body adopted two dramatically opposing positions on homosexuality, culminating several years of intensive deliberations. The more liberal position paved the way for the movement's rabbinical seminaries in New York and Los Angeles in 2007 to accept openly gay students. This move occasioned a degree of conflict and controversy in Conservative Judaism, demonstrated in part by the refusal of its associated Israeli seminary to accede to the decision, and threats of rupture by Canadian and other congregations that disagreed with this position. With this latest policy change, all non-Orthodox seminaries in the United States came to accept openly gay and lesbian students for rabbinical and cantorial studies. At the same time, most Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis officiate at commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples, even as their Conservative colleagues generally refrain from doing so. In short, the liberalization of attitudes and policies toward the inclusion of gay men and lesbians in Jewish life is of recent vintage, not at all complete, and still contested.

The changes in Jewish religious leaders' positions on gays and lesbians dovetailed with rising concerns over the continuity of American Jewry and fears for the continued engagement of Jews, particularly younger Jews, with Jews, Judaism, and organized Jewry. Some Jewish communal institutions (such as the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis) historically have been quick to support and endorse gay civil rights initiatives in the larger society. But overall, despite concerns about Jewish continuity and generational engagement, Jewish leaders and organizations have been relatively slow to reach out explicitly to lesbian and gay Jews. As early as the 1970s, lesbian and gay Jews founded synagogues "of their own" due in part to perceived exclusion and lack of welcome in mainstream synagogue life. As of this writing, there are 15 such congregations now functioning in the United States (Aviv, Shneer, & Drinkwater, 2006).

Indeed, a variety of advocacy groups, many of which were founded in the past 10 years, have promoted more vigorous efforts to, in their view, transform Jewish institutions to become more inclusive and welcoming of lesbian and gay Jews. At least 27 American-based congregations, social groups, and other agencies are affiliated with the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews. Two national organizations work on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) inclusion in Jewish life, and several local Jewish federations have started initiatives to reach out to the LGBT Jewish population in their programming, annual campaigns, and donor-advised funding allocations.

The changes and controversies surrounding the participation of lesbian and gay Jews in Jewish life raise questions about the extent to which such Jews

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actively engage in Judaism both privately and in communal settings. In this context, questions of identity must take into account the sociological and demographic particularities of gay men and lesbians in the United States.

One important difference to consider here is that the lesbian and gay Jews have multiple identity commitments and allegiances—they are not “just” or “only” Jewish Americans; they are also lesbian/gay and might feel a sense of belonging in more than one particular community. They may choose to privilege one identity over the other or not. This sense of split identities is not unique to gay and lesbian Jews, but their strong identification with these two American minority groups fosters patterns of engagement that are distinct to this population.

Some gay and lesbian Jews highlight the salience of their Jewish identity in both Jewish and gay contexts. In other words, these gay Jews choose to participate in the gay community *as Jews* (Shneer & Aviv, 2002). For example, they might participate in gay and lesbian synagogue life or represent a “Jewish voice” in a mainstream gay organization. Other gay and lesbian Jews might not feel or identify as very Jewish at all and choose to participate in the gay community, but not from any particular Jewish vantage point or perspective.

Additionally, in contrast to heterosexual Jews, some gay and lesbian Jews report painful memories of being Jewish that include homophobia, heterosexism, rejection, invisibility, and stigma from the Jewish community. Many heterosexual Jews remember painful experiences of exclusion or rejection in Jewish communities as well, but exclusion because of heterosexuality is unusual.

Gay and lesbian Jews and their families also have specific needs, issues, or challenges that might differ from heterosexual Jews in terms of life-cycle ceremonies, social services (particularly around identity, mental health, and relationship issues), reproduction and family formation, aging, and legal rights. Today, hardly any Jewish organizations incorporate the recognition of how sexual orientation shapes social experiences of being Jewish into what they do.

For many gay and lesbian Jews, the perceived lack of recognition or overt hostility, coupled with a lack of resources in the Jewish community to support one’s coming out process and other life-cycle/developmental needs, can be a push factor away from the desire to participate in the organized Jewish community. These are only a few ways in which gay and lesbian Jews might experience a sense of being marginalized and how decisions whether to stay engaged or opt out of participating in the Jewish community might be influenced. Given their multiple identities and potentially competing priorities, gay and lesbian Jews face complex choices about where and how they want to spend their time, money, and energy and in which community (i.e., the gay community, the Jewish community, or both).

FOUR QUESTIONS

The rapidity of recent changes in the stance of official Judaism toward gays and lesbians raise a number of questions. Among the most fundamental are these questions:

1. Just how many Jews are, indeed, willing to identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual? How large is this minority group in the American Jewish population?

Today, hardly any Jewish organizations incorporate the recognition of how sexual orientation shapes social experiences of being Jewish into what they do.

2. What are their characteristics? How do they distribute by gender, age, region, education, marital and partnership status, and family configurations? Where are they politically?
3. To what extent do lesbian and gay Jews participate in Jewish life? How many gay and lesbian Jews are active in synagogues, JCCs, federations, and other Jewish organizations? To what extent do they practice Jewish rituals and participate in Jewish cultural activities? Are they socially connected to other Jews by way of marriage (where legally permissible), partnerships, and friendships? Do they feel attached to Israel, Jewish institutions, and, more broadly, to being Jewish? In all these areas, how do they compare with or differ from heterosexual or “straight” Jews, and why?
4. Finally, if Jewish gay men and lesbians engage in Jewish life differently from their heterosexual counterparts, to what can we attribute those differences? Are social or institutional barriers at work? Are perceptions of exclusion or neglect a causal factor? Are Jewish gay men and lesbians simply less likely to be engaged in the act of raising Jewish children, a prime impetus for the involvement of Jews generally in conventional Jewish communal endeavors? Or, are there other factors at work that require future analysis?

To date, no social scientific quantitative research has examined these issues, if, for no other reason than the absence of a question on sexual orientation on surveys of the Jewish population. To our knowledge, this report constitutes the first quantitative study of the Jewish identities of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews and of their relationships to organized Jewish communal life in the United States, if not the world.

THE SAMPLE AND METHOD

To address the issues outlined above, we have analyzed data from the 2007 *National Survey of American Jews* (NSAJ), a mail-back and Web-administered survey of self-identified Jews conducted by Synovate, Inc. This sampling frame somewhat overstates levels of Jewish involvement largely because it does not include Jews with no religion and because of its reliance on a previously administered question on religious preference to identify a national sample of Jewish respondents.

From other sources (e.g., the National Jewish Population Study of 2000), we estimate that this segment, Jews with no religion (i.e. secular Jews), constitutes about 20% of the Jewish population. Insofar as gay and lesbian Jews are more represented among Jews who attest to having no religion, the sample we used may underestimate the frequency of gays and lesbians in the Jewish population.

Using its Global Opinion Sample, Synovate conducted the NSAJ between December 20, 2006, and January 28, 2007, eliciting 1,828 Jewish respondents. Of these, 703 came from the Internet sample (with a 48% response rate) and 1,125 came from the mail sample (with a 59% response rate).

The questionnaire (see the Appendix for additional information on the sampling and methods) covers a wide range of Jewish identity-related issues. The large number of questions provides numerous and diverse ways of measuring how strongly respondents relate to being Jewish.

THE FINDINGS**At least 7% of American Jews are Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual**

We estimate that at least 7% of American Jews are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). For several reasons, we regard 7% as a conservative estimate.

The survey question on sexual orientation is shown in Table 1. If we exclude the “no answers” and recalculate only for those providing an unambiguous answer, we arrive at the 7% figure. However, this recalculation presumes that “no answers” are distributed in the same fashion as those who provided qualifying answers. Since “gay or lesbian” and “bisexual” are considered more stigmatized identities, we can assume that their true representation among the “no answers” is, in fact, greater than their frequency among those providing valid answers. In addition, as noted earlier, this sample underrepresents somewhat more secular or marginally engaged Jews (i.e., those whose religion is “none” or a religion other than Judaism) among whom we have reason to believe that the proportion of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is somewhat higher than among those Jews who identify their religion as “Jewish.” For these reasons, the 7% estimate should be regarded as conservative and downwardly biased.

In any event, the figure exceeds those obtained in most surveys of the American population, which report lesbian, gay, and bisexual proportions ranging from 3–5% (Lauman et al., 2000). Additionally, demographic surveys rely on self-reporting, but do not capture the complex dimensions of sexual orientation regarding feelings or behavior. The larger LGB proportions reported by Jews can be attributed to several considerations. Jews tend to live in those cities, states, and regions where LGB proportions are higher and more visible; Jews maintain more culturally liberal attitudes on a wide range of issues including, specifically, homosexuality (Liebman & Cohen 1990); and Judaism, especially its less traditional variations, has been more tolerant of gays and homosexuality than most other religious systems in the United States.

Throughout the analysis, we combined the small number of bisexuals with the gays and lesbians and compared them with the large number of heterosexual respondents, excluding the “no answers” from the analysis. The small number of cases (72 LGB respondents and 1,654 straight respondents) precluded further divisions of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual sample segment, such as by gender, age, or other social categories.

The Demographic Profile of LGB Jews

Jewish gays, lesbians, and bisexuals differ from heterosexual Jews in several ways that have a bearing on their engagement in Jewish life.

More Men than Women Men are about twice as likely as women to report that they are gay or bisexual (9.3% versus 4.5%). This supports other data in the

Table 1.
(OPTIONAL QUESTION): Do you regard your sexual orientation as ...

| | Original Frequencies | Recalculated Frequencies |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Straight* (heterosexual) | 82% | 93% |
| Gay or lesbian | 5% | 6% |
| Bisexual | 1% | 1% |
| No answer | 11% | <u>EXCLUDED</u> |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

literature on sexuality that suggest that men come out earlier than women in general (Ryan 2003). Coming “out” and publicly identifying as gay or lesbian are parts of a multistage process that involves risk. Many LGBT individuals do not appear in U.S. Census data, because sexual orientation and same-sex couples in households were not included as variables until the 2000 Census (Romero et al., 2008). This means that the most significant omission in recent Census data is of single gay men and lesbians because only about a quarter of gay men and two-fifths of lesbians are in couples at any given time (Gates & Ost 2004). Similarly, our data do not reveal how many respondents in our sample identify as heterosexual and/or married but engage in behaviors and relationships that might be considered gay or lesbian.

Whatever the reasons for the gender imbalance among gay Jews, the preponderance of men points to lower levels of Jewish engagement for the gay Jewish population overall. In general, Jewish women score higher than Jewish men on measures of Jewish involvement. All other things being equal (which, of course, they never are), the underrepresentation of women among gay Jews figures to slightly lower their aggregate Jewish involvement scores.

Baby Boomers and Younger Hardly any respondents over the age of 60 (those born before 1947) responded that they saw themselves as LGB. Only 2% did so, as opposed to more than 8% of others (and 9% of those under 35). The contemporary gay and lesbian civil rights movement, whose origins are traced by many to the Stonewall rebellion in New York’s Greenwich Village in 1969, made it possible for more Baby Boomers (and subsequent generations) to embrace the possibility of identifying as lesbian or gay as viable and not as an isolating source of stigma (Duberman, 1994; Shneer & Aviv, 2006). We believe that this sharp break in LGB proportions among those born before or after 1947 represents the effect of birth cohort (when the respondents were born) rather than the effect of maturation or aging (reflecting their age or stage of life). In other words, we find it hard to believe that older people change their sexual orientation to heterosexual as they enter late middle age, thus explaining the smaller number of LGB Jews in their elderly years as contrasted with those who are now middle-aged. Rather, this finding can be understood as rooted in year of birth. In all likelihood, more tolerant attitudes toward sexual orientation have come to characterize those born after World War II. Older people from earlier generations were more likely to deny or repress attractions to members of the same gender.

Western and Urban LGB Jews are more likely to live in major metropolitan areas. Around the country, they are more concentrated in cities with populations of 2 million or more than in suburbs, smaller cities, and rural areas (13% of Jews in the urban centers are LGB versus about 4% elsewhere). The 2000 U.S. Census reported gay and lesbian couples in every county across the United States, and other estimates suggest that the national count for same-sex couples might actually be double the officially reported figures (Romero et al., 2008). The greatest percentage of same-sex couples (16%) live in California, followed by Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont, testifying to the understandable tendency of LGB people to cluster geographically in states with more progressive political or cultural environments. So do their Jewish counterparts: it is probably no accident that the majority of lesbian and gay outreach synagogues and social support/advocacy organizations

are located in California, New York, Massachusetts, and Florida, reflecting the demographic trends of significant LGB Jewish communities.

Better Educated LGB Jews are less likely than heterosexual Jews to report relatively lower levels of educational achievement (i.e., less than a college degree). These patterns arise, in part because less educated Jews tend to be older, more Orthodox, and more culturally conservative, factors inversely related to the prevalence of declared LGB identity.

Nonmarried LGB and heterosexual Jews differ dramatically in their patterns of marital and partnership status. Currently, the only state that legally recognizes same-sex marriage is Massachusetts (2006). Lesbian and gay couples in Connecticut, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Vermont can enter into state-level civil unions. There are broad domestic partnership laws in California and Oregon, but the status of same-sex civil marriage in California is currently in a legal quagmire after the passage of Proposition 8 in the November 2008 election. In New York, after a 2008 court ruling, valid out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples must be legally recognized. While a small number of heterosexual Jews are widowed, no LGB respondents reported they were widowed, owing in part to their age distribution. Those currently divorced are about equal in number for LGB and heterosexual respondents, but in making such comparisons we must recall that LGB Jews (and others) have lacked the state-sanctioned tools to contract marriages or dissolve them, thereby lowering the number of LGB respondents who would call themselves “divorced.”

The truly consequential difference in marital patterns between straight and gay Jews lies in the relatively smaller extent to which LGB Jews are married or with a partner. Among heterosexual Jews, 48% are married and another 9% are living with a partner, amounting to 57% who are coupled. For their LGB counterparts, as might be expected, very few (9%) are married (due in part to lack of legal rights) and far more are in partnerships (22%). But, overall, compared with heterosexual Jews, far fewer LGB Jews are coupled (31%).

Less Likely to Have a Jewish Partner The presence of a spouse (or partner) is a critical incentive for involvement in Jewish life, and even more so is the presence of a Jewish spouse/partner. If anything, remaining single, whether LGB or heterosexual, might be considered a stigma or potential barrier to involvement in the Jewish community, as so many institutions and programs are geared toward couples and family. Among the coupled (married or partnered) heterosexual Jews, Jewish partners outnumber non-Jews by more than a three-to-one ratio. In contrast, for the LGB Jews in couple relationships, non-Jewish partners outnumber Jewish partners by a three-to-two ratio. Among heterosexual Jews, as many as 44% of them live with a Jewish spouse or partner; the same may be said of only 11% of the LGB Jews. In other words, LGB Jews are more likely to find long-term partners who are not Jewish, which poses serious consequences for their lower levels of engagement in Jewish life.

LGB Jews are less likely than straight Jews to be coupled and less likely to create marriages and partnerships with other Jews, LGB or otherwise. In a smaller dating market in the LGB community, LGB Jews are more likely to find non-Jewish partners, increasing the possible tensions for LGB Jews regarding their multiple

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commitments of time, resources, and energy toward the Jewish community. For this reason alone, we might well expect LGB Jews to be less involved and engaged in traditional or conventional forms of Jewish life than heterosexual Jews. Additionally, LGB Jews in interfaith relationships might experience a “double stigma” in some Jewish communities where being openly gay is not welcome, in addition to having a gay/lesbian non-Jewish spouse or partner.

Very Few Children Hardly any LGB Jews report that they have children living with them. The gap between heterosexual and LGB Jews in this respect is truly astounding: 57% versus 9%. Heterosexual Jews are 11 times as likely to report two or more children at home as are LGB Jews—44% versus 4%. Since the presence of children provokes numerous forms of involvement of Jewish life, the absence of children from the homes of LGB Jews provides one more reason to anticipate relatively low levels of Jewish engagement on their part.

Liberal and Democratic As might be expected, LGB Jews report higher levels of self-identification as liberals and as Democrats, in line with other studies on the political leanings of gays and lesbians in the United States. Among LGB Jews, liberals outnumber conservatives by a six-to-one ratio as compared with a five-to-two ratio among heterosexual Jews. While Democrats outnumber Republicans by a ten-to-one ratio among LGB Jews, the comparable ratio is a little more than four-to-one among heterosexual Jews. The pattern here is even more distinctive because Jews as a whole are exceedingly liberal and Democratic in their inclinations. Thus, while Jews in general are more liberal and more Democratic than the country at large, gay and lesbian Jews are far more liberal and Democratic than other Jews.

Few Openly Gay Jews Are Orthodox In recent years, gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews have organized a number of support and advocacy groups, including Orthodykes, Frumgays, and online support groups and Listservs. Their experiences have been the subject of two documentary films (Sandi Dubowski’s *Trembling Before G-d* and Ilil Alexander’s *Keep Not Silent*) and the subject of a recent, award-winning book by Rabbi Steve Greenberg, the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi.

Notwithstanding these efforts, Orthodox respondents who were willing to attest to an LGB orientation in this survey were rare indeed. In fact, of the 115 Orthodox respondents in our sample, only 1 answered “gay or lesbian,” but an unusually large proportion (9 individuals) checked “no answer” to the question on sexual orientation, proportionally about three times as many as among non-Orthodox Jews. Moreover, of the five respondents who identified as gay and were raised Orthodox in their childhood years, only one remained identified with Orthodoxy as an adult. These findings, albeit tentative owing to the small case size, point to an underlying pattern. The inference we can draw (with caution) is that gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews either leave the Orthodox community when/if they come out as gay or lesbian or they remain “in the closet” far more than others, owing in large part to the widespread disapproval of and stigma toward homosexuality in Orthodoxy, both among rabbis and the rank-and-file.

Jewish Identities Among LGB Jews: Less Engaged, Overlooked, or Not Invited?

As compared with heterosexual Jews, those who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual score substantially lower on all measures of Jewish engagement, and especially

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with respect to several areas of conventional Jewish communal affiliation. LGB Jews are less likely to be members of congregations (39% for straight Jews versus 16% for LGB Jews); attend JCC programs during the previous year (30% versus 18%); contribute to a UJA/federation campaign (37% versus 16%); or volunteer for a Jewish organization (27% versus 10%). Unlike heterosexual Jews, gay and lesbian Jews might face stigma, discrimination, or hostility for being openly gay/lesbian at these Jewish institutions, and few JCCs, federations, synagogues, and general Jewish organizations do any explicit or targeted outreach to invite this segment of the Jewish community to participate in their activities and programs (Aviv & Drinkwater 2006). They also might find participation and engagement in secular gay/lesbian civil rights organizations a more appealing and welcoming option, compared with Jewish organizations.

The gaps remain, although are less pronounced, for ritual practice. Heterosexual Jews more often than LGB Jews attend Passover seders (73% versus 58%), fast on Yom Kippur (59% versus 53%), attend High Holiday services (53% versus 40%), light Shabbat candles (26% versus 11%), and attend Shabbat services at least monthly (25% versus 11%). It is worth noting that the gaps are more pronounced, relatively, with respect to regular celebration of Shabbat than with respect to the annual holidays.

One might think that these differences apply only to the outward and more structured expression of communal or ritual interest and commitment. Yet, in terms of personal spirituality, straight Jews report spiritual experiences about twice as often as LGB Jews, whether those experiences are in a Jewish context (28% versus 14%) or non-Jewish context (13% versus 6%). When asked whether they would describe themselves as religious, heterosexual Jews surpassed their LGB counterparts, 38% to 24%.

In terms of cultural experiences, the pattern of gaps is rather striking if not revealing. The difference between heterosexual and LGB Jews is largest with respect to attending Jewish-oriented classes (13% versus 2%) or Jewish or Israeli concerts (22% versus 12%), smaller with respect to listening to Jewish or Israeli music (53% versus 45%), and nonexistent with respect to attending movies with a Jewish or Israeli theme (39% versus 41%). It appears that those acts that demand a clearly defined and explicit Jewish interest (there is probably more agreement about what is a Jewish class than what is a Jewish film) and that entail participating in a public setting defined as Jewish (a classroom in a JCC rather than a movie theater) serve to more clearly differentiate heterosexual from gay Jews.

The gaps in social networks are also quite pronounced, reflecting the multiple identity commitments of LGB Jews and where they might choose to spend their time and energy. Earlier we reported significant differences in the extent to which the two groups have Jewish (or non-Jewish) spouses and partners. Not surprisingly, the gaps extend to friendships as well. Heterosexual Jews report that far more of their close friends are Jewish than do LGB Jews. More than a third (35%) of the former, and only 6% of the LGB Jews, report that most of their friends are Jewish. Using a less demanding standard (half or more friends are Jewish), heterosexual Jews still substantially outscore LGB Jews: 53% versus 19%. This finding may emerge because LGB Jews find more in common socially with their gay non-Jewish peers than their Jewish heterosexual counterparts. In

addition, they may find it difficult to locate other LGB Jews with whom they might be friends in cities where welcoming and inclusive LGB Jewish outreach is not embedded in the Jewish communal landscape.

LGB Jews also differ significantly in all major attitudinal dimensions of Jewish identity. Among them are pride in being Jewish, attachment to Israel, and commitment to Jewish in-marriage. In fact, in no significant area of Jewish engagement, be it about affiliation, association, practice, activity, or attitudes, do we find gay Jews outscoring heterosexual Jews; the gaps between the two groups range from small to moderate, but always in the same direction. However one measures such things, heterosexual Jews are more Jewishly engaged than gay, lesbian, or bisexual Jews.

Explaining the Jewish Engagement Gaps

How can we explain the lower levels of Jewish involvement on the part of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews? One explanation is that Jewish leaders and synagogues are unwelcoming or simply not cognizant of LGB Jews as a socially distinctive constituency of the Jewish population. Few Jewish leaders, organizations, and non-LGB outreach synagogues take any proactive stances toward openly welcoming and inviting lesbian and gay Jews to participate in their organizations. Another possibility is that, as we have seen, LGB Jews have different sorts of social relationships and networks. They are less likely to be married, less likely to have a Jewish partner, and less likely to have children. All of these circumstances militate against Jewish involvement, just as marriage, in-marriage, and the rearing of Jewish children work to promote involvement in the larger population.

We can examine these two explanations through a statistical test by controlling just for two indicative variables: the number of Jewish friends and the presence of children in the home. We can examine a variety of dimensions of Jewish involvement (belonging to a synagogue, ritual practice, Israel attachment, etc.) and see the extent to which the initial gaps between heterosexual and LGB Jews narrow as a result of taking into account the two groups' social networks. If taking Jewish friends and children into account largely closes the gaps, then we can attribute the lower levels of Jewish involvement by LGB Jews to their social networks (which tend to include greater numbers of non-Jews) and their multiple identity commitments. If not, then other explanations for the gaps are possible including, for example, the lack of welcoming (or bias) on the part of Jewish leaders and institutions

We may take **synagogue membership** as an illustrative example. We find a 23% point gap between heterosexual and gay Jews in their levels of affiliation. However, after taking into account the fact that gay Jews have fewer Jewish friends and fewer children living at home, we see that the gap drops from 23 to a single percentage point. In other words, were it not for the fact that gay Jews have so few Jewish friends and so few children at home, they would be just as likely to join synagogues as their heterosexual counterparts.

The same sort of statistical analysis leads to similar results for a composite measure of **organizational activity** embracing several forms of Jewish institutional involvement (e.g., giving to a federation or serving on the board of a Jewish organization). On a scale of Jewish organizational activity ranging from 0–100 (with 100 equaling the highest level on the composite measure of engagement),

an initial heterosexual/LGB gap drops from 15 points to under 2 points once we take into account Jewish friends and children at home. To be clear, lack of LGB involvement in specifically Jewish organizations cannot be attributed to any particular aversion by LGB Jews to involvement in organizations in general. When asked about whether they volunteer regularly for any social justice organization, LGB Jews sharply *outscored* heterosexual Jews by a margin of 25% to 11%.

With respect to other dimensions of Jewish involvement, we find similar gaps in the levels of involvement among LGB and other Jews:

- **Ritual practice** (a scale combining Passover seder attendance, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, attending services on the High Holidays and monthly)
- The **importance** of being Jewish (pride in being Jewish, identifies primarily as a Jew, strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, etc.)
- **Religiosity** (seeing oneself as religious, as observant; belief in God; finds synagogue services appealing; etc.)

In one key area, Israel attachment, the gap between heterosexual and LGB Jews persists even after controlling for the presence of Jewish friends and children at home. This scale's components consist of such items as seeing oneself as pro-Israel, a supporter of Israel, and a Zionist; caring about Israel; feeling proud and excited about Israel; and feeling emotionally attached to Israel. On a 0–100 scale of attachment to Israel, LGB Jews score 14 points lower than the rest of the population; after the introduction of the control variables, the gap does close somewhat, but holds at 8 points, far more than for the other measures. This persisting gap between heterosexual and LGB Jews suggests that, in contrast with other dimensions of Jewish engagement, weakened attachment to Israel among LGB Jews cannot be explained by social networks. LGB Jews, then, have special reasons why they may feel less attached to (or more alienated from) Israel. We can only speculate on the reasons. We do know that LGB Jews visit Israel somewhat less frequently; in this sample, 42% of heterosexual Jews have been to Israel as compared with 37% of LGB Jews.

But the matter of Israel aside, the general pattern suggests that the distance from Jewish life reported by LGB Jews involves a combination of several socio-demographic factors, primarily their higher probability of remaining single, their intimate relationships with non-Jewish partners, and the reported lower levels of children in the home. For understandable reasons, they are less likely to marry, to marry other Jews, and to have children. They are more likely to become friends with non-Jews and to develop social circles that are more ethnically and culturally diverse, compared with many of their Jewish heterosexual counterparts. In this, they are very much like uncoupled Jews (Cohen & Kelman, 2008).

Clearly, we are seeing the power of social networks and multiple identity commitments: sexual orientation and intimate relations heavily influence social identities, group affiliations, and choices on whether and how to engage in Jewish life. So it is for those who are single and married, and so it is for Jews who are heterosexual, or gay, lesbian, or bisexual. If the personal is the political, the personal is also the cultural. And in the case of many gay and lesbian Jews, we surmise that the relationships between cultural, social, and personal networks for

LGB Jews meet at the intersection of the larger gay and lesbian community, and less visibly in the Jewish community.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The identities and behaviors of LGB Jews indicate another iteration of the chicken-and-egg dilemma. LGB Jews score lower than their heterosexual counterparts on every measure of Jewish engagement. At the same time, Jewish communal institutions have been slow to actively welcome or invite LGB Jews into their programs. Are LGB Jews choosing to participate outside the Jewish community because they are less interested in being Jewish? Or, are they excluded by the frontline organizations that populate the American Jewish landscape?

In truth, both of these dynamics are at play in contemporary American Jewish life. We found that LGB Jews have a higher percentage of non-Jewish friends and life partners. At the same time, most American Jewish institutions have done little to explicitly recognize the identity-related concerns of LGB Jews (Shneer & Aviv, 2002). Increased engagement of LGB Jews in Jewish life will come about when LGB Jews acquire more Jewish friends and partners and when they perceive conventional Jewish institution as more “gay friendly.” And, very likely, changes in one sphere will engender changes in the other.

APPENDIX

Synovate, Inc. maintains a “Global Opinion Sample,” a consumer access panel of approximately 1.3 million households that have agreed to participate in surveys by telephone, mail, or online. Households are recruited by invitation through special mailings or intercepts on Web sites. Key demographic variables about the household are captured when respondents complete their member forms. The information includes household composition, income, age, employment, employment type, and the like and is updated periodically. A Jewish respondent is determined by a question in the screening questionnaire that reads, “Please mark whether you are (or your spouse is): Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Other/None.”

For this study, respondents were weighted by the number of adult Jews in the household, age, sex, region, and education to approximate the distributions found in the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Study (Kotler-Berkowitz et al., 2003). We compared the Synovate sample after the application of sample weights with the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Study results with respect to socio-demographic and Jewish engagement characteristics (see Cohen & Kelman 2007). With some exceptions, the gaps between the two surveys are small, suggesting that, with caution, we can rely on the results from the Synovate sample.

That said, the Synovate sample underrepresents unengaged Jews, specifically those who state their religion is “None” but who otherwise identify as Jews. This group constitutes about 20% in many surveys and consists disproportionately of those who are the children of intermarriage, those who themselves have intermarried, as well as young adults who have not (yet?) joined a congregation, an act that prompts some who have expressed no religious preference previously to think of themselves as Jewish by religion. The Synovate qualifying questionnaire asks only about current religious preference, making it impossible to identify Jews in other ways.

Increased engagement of LGB Jews in Jewish life will come about when LGB Jews acquire more Jewish friends and partners and when they perceive conventional Jewish institution as more “gay friendly.”

Members of the Global Opinion Panel are recruited to answer surveys concerned largely with goods and services. As a result, the procedure selects for people with an interest in consumer issues, those who may be more culturally conventional, or have middle-brow cultural tastes. In fact, in part owing to its purposes, the unweighted sample also underrepresents the unmarried.

Every sample is biased in some way. Researchers need to identify and assess the biases, understand their likely effects, and structure the analysis to minimize the likelihood of misinterpretation owing to sample biases. The most relevant and important effect of the biases in this study is probably to underestimate the number of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the Jewish population. Those who are married (especially at a young age), who are more culturally conventional, and who are Jewish by religion (rather than saying they have no religion), are likely to identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual and to hold more positive attitudes toward being Jewish than those who are single, culturally offbeat, and see their religion as "None."

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