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A WEAVE OF SEXUALITY, ETHNICITY  
AND RELIGION:  
JEWISH WOMEN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA  
EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

by

Haley Hinda Seif

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DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

In Partial Fulfillment the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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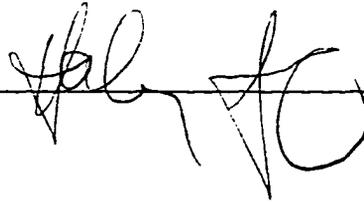
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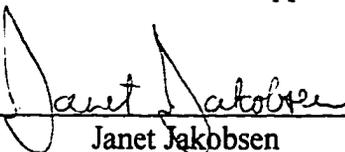
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on 31 interviews and one focus group conducted with Jewish bisexual women and men in the San Francisco Bay Area. While there is much academic discussion and theory about interlocking oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality, I explore the complex ways that these systems weave together with religious and ethnic identification in the lives and speech of study participants.

Interviewees discuss their multiple and shifting identities, difficulties that they encounter in conceptualizing the intersection of their ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, and demonstrate the ways that these identifications intermingle in their speech and stories in spite of these difficulties. They compare the liminal status of both Jewish and bisexual identifications on the boundary of privilege, and their decisions about passing or acting in solidarity with the oppressed. Participants' experience and practice of both Jewishness and bisexuality are changed and influenced by each other.

## I. INTRODUCTION

When I started graduate school in 1994, I wanted to capture on paper some of the complexities of Jewish individuals and communities that were not adequately represented in published accounts of Jewish community. Although different communities were described in print, ranging from classic ethnographies of aging Jewish communities in California and New York to Mizrahi women in a Yemeni village, I rarely saw representations of non-heterosexual Jews in community, or of certain diversities within Jewish communities.<sup>1</sup> In the Jewish neighborhood that raised me, I remember residues of tensions around the marriage of Russian with Galitzianer Jews, disabled community members, Jews who married outside the religion, and the occasional Sephardic or Mizrahi neighbor whose simmering Arabic foods wafted around its corners. Following Kobena Mercer's theoretical explorations of Black, gay communities, I wished to explore Jewish and non-heterosexual community from the places that exist "*within* and *between* each of these various identities," delving into the "conflicts and contradictions" that reside in these spaces.<sup>2</sup>

I also wanted to acknowledge new forms of Jewish community building that were not based on close kinship groups, the Jewish ghettos of the past, or contemporary neighborhoods. There is a phenomenon of recreated Jewish communities comprised of those who have moved away from their geographic communities of origin and are reinventing Jewish community using feminist, lesbian, and anti-racist models. These groups also attempt to shed decades and more of assimilationist messages that grow from

anti-Semitism and its stepchild, internalized anti-Semitism. They are trying to recreate idealized versions of traditional Jewish culture, ethnicity and race and reappropriate negative stereotypes, making Jewishness something to be preserved, valued and celebrated rather than hidden, underplayed, or denied. These communities are utopian reinterpretations of mostly Eastern European, sometimes Ladino and Arab based Jewish cultures that once seemed to be dying out in 20th Century United States and in other parts of the world.

These gatherings of friends and recreations of Jewish family have also been important personal sites of meaning for me. They helped me shape a sense of pride and identity since my college years, find the beauty of my face, hair, and body that have been ethnically inscribed in the US, and engage in shared spiritual practice that is rich and life affirming. They are also places of centering and regeneration that have given me the strength to live creatively, and to participate in struggles for social justice with some hope in a society overwhelmed by cynicism, alienation and consumerism.

As I tried to see my “community,” it flickered before me like late lightening in a hot, Arizona sky after the monsoon season, the cool promise of relief always just out of grasp. At the time that I conceived of the project, I was in a relationship with an ex-Catholic woman and receiving much of my emotional sustenance from a small network of Jewish lesbians and gay men in central California. As I thought of conducting interviews in the larger Bay Area Jewish lesbian communities, I feared being distrusted as a bisexually-identified woman. How many lesbians feel that perhaps the only true

heterosexuals are bisexual women? We cannot be easily dismissed as deluded followers of compulsory heterosexuality, since we have tasted the forbidden fruit. As the project closes I am sexually involved with a man, and still wonder how I would have been received if I had studied Jewish lesbian community.

I had “come out” as bisexual in a group of Jewish women during a year off from college in 1982. My identification transitioned from heterosexual with the support of a group Jewish bisexual women who were older than my 20 years, and formed an affinity group at the Jewish Feminist Conference held in the Bay Area in 1982. Since that wonderful group had dispersed, I was part of heterosexual relationships and communities or lesbian relationships and communities. My bisexual identification was generally something that I lived in isolation and with some degree of shame. In my mind, “bisexuals” were white and Christian born, they were lecherous male swingers, and I rarely identified with “them.” The few times that I had attended formal groups of bisexuals had cemented my alienation from bisexual community.

Yet I noticed another trend in San Francisco Bay Area bisexual organizing in 1994. Jewish people across genders were coming together to form different aspects of bisexual community. These ranged from a formal support group, to spiritual gatherings and informal pot lucks. A close friend who had formerly been a leader in Jewish lesbian community projects now identified as bisexual and introduced me to her queer- and bisexually- identified friends. The time seemed ripe to study these new community formations. I also decided that it was critical to expand the limited information available

on bisexual lives as the numbers of young people coming out as bisexual seemed to be multiplying exponentially.

As I tentatively told people I was joining together “Jewish” and “bisexual” in a project, they usually laughed at my revelation. “How many could there be?” Yet somehow the charge that these groups were too small and that this was an unimportant, self-indulgent project rang false. How many anthropological studies have been conducted on small groups of people in far-off villages with exclamations of how “exotic” that must be? Due to the pioneering works of Jewish lesbian scholars and activists, as well as lesbian ethnographers, the idea of Jewish lesbians and lesbian communities have become more recognized.<sup>3</sup> In my choice of a Jewish bisexual community, I seemed to have hit a particular wall of denial, to have chosen a community that people could or would not fathom. Is it possible that Jewish women and women, women and men and other genders that are rarely named love each other and are forming communities?

#### **“Intersection” of Identifications**

*Don't queers always step outside of our ethnic communities to gather? How dare we insist on being both Jewish **and** queer, loving women **and** men at the same time?*

One way that this project may confound preconceptions of community is the intersectionality of identifications. Many contemporary feminist writings, especially writings by women of color, address the ways that identifications and oppressions are not additive but interact in alchemical transformations that, for instance, make Chicana women different than the simple addition of white women and Chicano men. This

interaction seems particularly difficult to conceive of when we look at the lives of people with minoritized sexual orientations. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer identified people who also share ethnic or racially minoritized identities, it is assumed that we will probably distance from or leave our “home” communities in order to explore or express our non-heterosexual desires and identifications. Rather than choosing between a heterosexual, ethnic community and a community of generic sexual minorities, many of the participants in my study maintained or reformed Jewish ties. Others who had been raised with only tenuous connections to their Jewish heritage and/or religion embraced this identification for the first time in Jewish bisexual community. Participants’ queer identification often moved them closer to their ethnicity and religion rather than farther away. This often occurred after a period of alienation, yet was not a return to traditional forms of Judaism or Jewish community but to recreated, queer versions of Jewish community. This recreation of Jewish culture and religion is typified by participants’ involvement in local queer or queer friendly synagogues and Havurahs.

In order to study the particular interaction of Jewishness and bisexuality in the 1990’s, I interviewed 27 Jewish bisexual women and 4 Jewish bisexual men in the San Francisco Bay Area, and conducted a focus group with six interviewees. While the focus of my study is on women, I do not exclude men or attempt to create a segregated community of women that does not represent the lives of women in my study. Perhaps because my focus is on ethnic as well as gender and sexual identifications and includes a dizzying multiplicity of identifications, I am not able to “place or position maleness

wholly as Other.”<sup>4</sup> This is a qualitative project, not claiming to represent all Jewish bisexuals but exploring these identifications from the point of view of 31 individuals who live in a geographic region known for its political and sexual counterculture. I found a variety of attitudes about the connections that people drew between their Jewish and bisexual identifications, but I will focus upon a tendency to challenge binary oppositions of identity categories. This tendency was apparent in many interviews and should be of theoretical interest to a broader readership.

One of the difficulties of engaging in a study that lies at the crossroads of two identifications is the ways that the researcher must become knowledgeable about both identifications, their histories and theoretical frameworks. A spectrum of issues related to both contemporary Jewish and bisexual cultures surfaced during the course of my research and interviews that could have become foci of this project. These included distinctive language uses among interviewees that were connected with comfort and community building; struggles and disagreements about monogamy and non-monogamy within bisexual communities; issues of class; strong analogies between being bisexual and biracial drawn by participants from mixed heritage backgrounds, as well as the difficulties of integrating dual or multiple cultural heritages; coalitions and tensions between Ashkenazi Jews and people of color as well as lesbians and bisexual women; political activism; sexual liberation; Jewish sex workers; and people’s feelings of inclusion and exclusion within specific Jewish denominations ranging from Orthodox to Jewish Renewal. I decided to focus upon issues that I felt lay at the crux of the Jewish

bisexual combination, and therefore did not delve into many of the above topics that were highly important to individual interviewees. While a number of the above issues have received attention from activists and other writers, such as the monogamy/non-monogamy debate, I hope that others that have been underexplored or never explored in print, such as bisexual language usage, will receive more attention in the future.

I start with a theoretical exposition of some of the problems I face in looking at “identity,” “community,” and these configurations for Jewish bisexuals. I then discuss the methodologies that I utilize in this qualitative, feminist study. I offer a partial organizational history of Bay Area Jewish bisexual organizing since the early 1980’s, including people’s joys and discomforts in these communities. Finally, I will demonstrate the ways that their Jewishness and bisexuality interact on a day-to-day level through some examples of language use and stories. The participants in my study enact the forging of identity and community outside of a heterosexual/homosexual split, the revitalization and redefinition of Jewish community away from paradigms of White, upwardly mobile assimilation, the interaction of two liminal identifications that may offer opportunities of “passing,” and the potential for coalition building as a community that does not strictly police its borders.

## II. THEORIZING IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

### Identity

Since challenges by women of color to predominantly European American feminist theorists started to penetrate the academy in the 1980's, postmodern feminist theory recognizes that "unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity" must be replaced "with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation."<sup>5</sup> Within my sample, there are a proliferation of other identifications including disability, gender identity, and geography that demonstrate the crossroads that lie within small "communities."

I also explore participants' concepts of identity and community with an awareness of the difficult political implications and histories of these concepts. In the words of Diana Fuss, "identification is neither a historically universal concept nor a politically innocent one."<sup>6</sup> She reminds us of the colonial history of identity categories that created a universal "white" against a subjugated, colonial Other. While I and many of the participants in my study am part of movements to proudly reclaim the negatively accented identifications of "Jew," "bisexual," and "queer," I recognize the dangers and challenges of such a process.

### Identity Labels

Many study participants expressed doubts about the accuracy of identification labels. In spite of this discomfort, there are were a proliferation of labels used during the

study. For example, many said that they use the term “bisexual” with unease or asserted that they strive for a society where identification labels are obsolete because they feel that the term perpetuates false paradigms of two genders and sexualities. This contraction is expressed by Leah, a national activist in both Jewish and bisexual communities:

Leah: I don't like the word very much, but it's what we have to work with. I don't like the word because it contains bi, which implies duality, which means two. And that's exactly what I think ... we're fighting against..., the division of genders into two not-so-equal parts, and the system of dividing things, whether its into oppressor and oppressed, or women and men, or any kind of identity category....I find it to be very artificial, not very useful, and creates incredible power dynamics, power differentials. So to say bisexuality means that you're implying that there's two and only two genders. And I don't believe that. Or that you have to have relationships with women and men. You know, all of those things I find problematic....

Hinda: So is there a better term?

Leah: Not really, I just want to abolish the whole system in the first place.

Labels are used with a sense of play, and in order to forge coalitions. In particular, labels referring to sexuality are worn and shorn and change situationally. This sense of fluidity around labeling confounds assumptions that sexual orientation labels are always fixed, as bisexuals assert agency in assuming various identifications. The proliferation of labels also suggests the diversity of communities to which participants belong, since the decision to claim a label often denotes a decision to identify with a community or political affiliation. For example, at least twenty participants call themselves “queer” along with or more often than “bisexual,” suggesting a desire to identify with an urban, politically radical community of sexual outlaws.

*bisexual pansexual dyke bisexual transsexual Bi-dyke Butch bi queer*  
*Bi lesbian lesbian identified bisexual fag identified bisexual woman*  
*bilingual, bicoastal, bisexual activist African-American, Jewish, Bisexual Woman*  
*radical ashkenazi Jewish reconstructionist ambi-sinister bi-dyke bi-national bi-lingual*  
*Red diaper baby Jew sexual Not heterosexual*

Leah was one participant who had changed her sexual orientation label within the last few years. A strong feminist who is non-monogamously identified and usually involved with women, she explains why she decided to rename herself from “lesbian identified bisexual” to “just bisexual,” typifying the ways that labels are used as part of a political strategy by some community members:

Leah: I know that I can call myself bisexual with confidence and not question my own commitment to women. It used to be that I had to say the word lesbian I think to prove to other people and myself how committed I was....

Thus, we see the impulse to take labels, however inadequate, and their associated political movements very seriously at a point in time when participants struggle against societal oppression of minoritized sexualities. Yet we see the eventual hope that sexual orientation labels, and the divisions they represent, will become unnecessary. Some participant activists work toward a some utopian, future moment when sexual oppressions and divisions no longer exist.

“Queer” or “Bisexual”?

The term “queer” was used by more than half of the interviewees to describe their sexual orientation and community. This suggests a desire to build community and solidarity with a group that is much larger and more diverse than a small, bisexually

identified minority. It also might indicate a fluid notion of one's own sexuality, not always "bisexual" but shifting and changing within the breadth of non-heterosexuality, as well as participation in the challenge of a dual gender system perpetuated by the term "bisexual." "Queer" is an oppositional term primarily used by a hip, youthful crowd in highly urbanized population centers. It also implies a politicized, anti-assimilationist stance toward sexual orientation.

While many of the participants use the term "queer" along with bisexual to identity themselves and to denote community and political affiliations, there are numerous problems with the word that lead me to retain a bisexual focus. Queer community is not limited to bisexuals; it encompasses a broad spectrum of non-heterosexual, oppositional sexual practices and identifications. Yet "queer" often is used to represent lesbian and gay, and presents a way to eclipse bisexual possibility. A helpful political analysis of the placement of bisexuals in the queer movement is offered by bisexual organizer Liz Highleyman:

The position of bisexuals within the queer movement is unclear. Various groups and individuals disagree about just who should be included under the queer umbrella. Some maintain that "queer" applies only to gay men and lesbians....In fact there may be a growing tendency for some gay men and lesbians to use the term "queer" to minimize the visibility of those who aren't gay or lesbian- by using "queer," they don't have to mention bisexuals, transgendered people, and others by name. Others insist that queerness has a large ideological component- it is as much about how you think and what you believe as it is about what you do in bed or who you do it with. Some see the queer movement as a sexual and gender liberation movement that includes all sexual and gender minorities and their supporters, rather than as a homosexual-identity based movement. Still others think of queerness as a cultural construct, which includes specific styles of dress, body piercings, genderfuck, and certain types of music.<sup>7</sup>

Tamara Bowers, radical feminist and founder of the New York Bisexual Women's Network, observes that queer identification may be problematic for feminists:

The word "queer" is attractive to bisexual women because it is inclusive, keeping us from bickering over who belongs. This is attractive to bisexual women for obvious reasons, having suffered from rejection in some lesbian communities. But by identifying primarily as "queer," lesbians and bisexual women are placing their solidarity and alliance to queer men over that of other women.<sup>8</sup>

Hannah, a study participant who is a writer, graduate student, and who was active in queer organizing on her East Coast college campus, discusses the ways that her queer identification keeps her invisible as a bisexual woman:

It's funny, because I feel like its hard to talk about bisexuality separate from talking about queer in general, so I keep finding myself sliding into queer, and I think that that's part of bisexual invisibility. What would it mean to even talk about what ... it mean[s] to be bisexual separate from just talking about what it means to be queer?...But the cultural constructs around sexual orientation are so rigid in terms of, you're either heterosexual or you're scum, it's hard to separate into the finer shades of scum. ((LG))

...I used to feel really invisible as queer or as lesbian.... And now I don't at all, but I still feel invisible as bisexual. I think nowadays people look at me and assume I'm a lesbian. So I think when I first started doing queer activism, it was the lesbian invisibility that I was focusing on. Whereas now I feel perfectly visible as a lesbian, but I still feel invisible as bisexual. [I]f I meet people who I don't know and they're not connected to bi community...they'll assume I'm a lesbian, especially if I show up at a queer event.

My appellation of the participants and community as "bisexual" also reflects my own positioning. Since many of my mentors have been lesbian-identified women who are currently in their 40's, and since I have spent the last 5 years living outside of major urban centers, I generally use the term "bisexual" rather than "queer" to identify myself. My decision to retain the word "bisexual" instead of forefront some participants' queer

identification represents my particular focus on individuals who define themselves as bisexual (even though they may use other self-definitions as well, including queer, dyke, and lesbian), and the fact that some participants in the project, especially people over 40, were not comfortable with the term “queer” as a self-appellation or community affiliation. Finally, my study of “bisexual community” reflects my own imaginings of and search for an idealized community.

#### “Jew” and “Bisexual”

There are particular problems with looking at the interaction of bisexual and Jewish identifications. I delve into “Jewishness” with trepidation, since the perception of Jewish essence has been used as a justification for ghettoization and genocide. This historic discourse of Jewish bodies and sexualities in racist and genocidal movements has been explored by Jewish scholars including Sanders Gilman and the contributors to Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’s anthology **People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective.**<sup>9</sup> It has ranged from negative stereotypes of Jewish bodies to images of Jewish hypersexuality and transgression of modern gender roles to the disembodiment of Jews as “people of the book.” According to Eilberg-Schwartz:

In European imagination, Jews often smelled, they had long noses and big feet; Jewish men menstruated; women were sexually alluring, etc. The Jew, along with the woman and black, was regarded as closer to nature, more animal-like, and hence more embodied than the white, Protestant, male European.<sup>10</sup>

Jewish reactions to these negative bodily discourses include the highly gendered and classed practices of dieting, hair-straightening, and the nose job, as well as

assimilation through intermarriage and childbearing with white Christians. Other Jews may unwittingly cultivate an image of a desexualized, intellectualized, or consumerist middle class Jewish body. Archetypes of assimilationist imaginings are Aryan icons of Hollywood promoted and produced by Jewish directors and producers in film and on television, and the Barbie doll, created by the Ruth Handler. In the words of Barbie historian M.J. Lord, “The daughter of a Polish Jewish immigrant, Ruth Handler coded with her fashion dolls the same sort of phantasmic ‘America’ that Louis B. Mayer had coded in his movies.”<sup>11</sup>

Do we want to talk publicly about the ways that Jews are sexual? Is it possible for Jews to do anything in the popular mind but bounce from extreme axes of frigidity to hypersexuality, from contemporary stereotypes of unresponsive JAPs to a flip side of voraciously sexual German Jews unattracted to each other and insatiably defiling the Aryan race?<sup>12</sup> According to Eilberg-Schwartz, “...the Jewish struggle to find and create a place in the modern world is very much entangled in a larger project of thinking about the status and character of Jewish bodies.”<sup>13</sup>

I also use sexual categories with unease because of their stigmatized origins. In his *History of Sexuality* Volume I, Foucault mapped the invention of Western concepts of sexual identification whereby sexual practices become defining truths of one’s being through medical and psychological discourse.<sup>14</sup> According to Foucault, this contrasts with prior times when sexual acts may have been punished, but were not seen as defining the

actors. “Heterosexual” was rendered the healthy universal, and “homosexual” was seen as the diseased, flawed essence:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality.<sup>15</sup>

The interaction of Jewishness and bisexuality is particularly fraught, since contemporary and intensifying stereotypes of bisexuals as indiscriminately sexual and diseased echo past discourses of Jews tainting or destroying European races through our sexuality that were deployed at historic epochs including medieval Spain and Nazi Germany.<sup>16</sup> Old nightmares of Jews imprisoned in concentration camps to stop us from contaminating the Aryan race intermingle with new tropes of bisexual women’s bodies polluting pristine lesbian bodies with traces of semen and/or HIV, and bisexual men’s bodies spreading HIV throughout pure heterosexual communities.<sup>17</sup> Since the 1980’s, there is a desire in the United States for psychic or physical quarantine against bisexual agents of pollution and disease. Thus, Jewish bisexuals grapple with various stereotypes about looks, bodies, and sexualities, and one community leader surmises that many Jewish men who engage in bisexual practices are unwilling to identify as such because of the weight of the interaction of the discourse of bisexual and Jewish men as contaminants.

While some may think that prejudice against Jews is a thing of the past, since the economic and residential placement of most contemporary U.S. Jews does not suggest employment or housing discrimination, I find that Jewish bodies and sexualities are particularly enduring sites of anti-Semitism and Jewish marginality. As we picture Jewish noses, Jewish mothers, Jewish women who overstep imagined boundaries of propriety and are termed “pushy,” and the enduring reluctance of many white Christians to marry Jews and many Jews to build families with non-Jews, we find physical and sexual arenas where Jewish “otherness” persists.<sup>18</sup> While historian Leonard Dinnerstein points to high intermarriage rates since the mid-1960’s as a positive sign of the decline of anti-Semitism in the United States, the persistence of separate family building and partnership between Jews and non-Jews by almost half of Jews who legally marry indicates that there is still significant separation between U.S. Jews and others.<sup>19</sup> This situation is exacerbated as the rhetoric of the Christian Right polarizes Christian and Jewish bodies and storms into public arenas including the educational system.

A conversational exchange that occurred at the beginning of the focus group session typifies the current salience of the image of the dangerous, devouring Jew and bisexual. In Aliza’s introduction towards the beginning of the group, she makes a quip about being a vampire Jew from Transylvania. The listeners catch on quickly to the joke, adding to and embellishing it:

Aliza: My name’s Aliza, and I just spent the afternoon ... seeing two films, one on Transylvania and one on the Holocaust, so that’s sort of up for me right now. My father’s from Transylvania, so I’m a Transylvanian Jew- ((LG))

Group: ((LG))

Aliza: which is why I'm a vampire.

Group: ((LG))

Aliza: Yes, there are vampire Jews.

Cara: Have you been eating any Christian babies lately?

Group: ((LG))

Jesse: (Sticking) them into matzo.

Group: ((LG))

Why is the image of a vampire Jew humorous to this group? The participants acknowledge and poke fun at a superstition about Jews as devourers of Christians that has plagued us through the centuries. Yet I also see a queer subtext in this joke, a joke that might not be as popular in a group of heterosexual Jews. The quip has multiple layers of meaning in a Jewish and queer context, responding to negative stereotypes of Jewish, queer, and bisexual identifications. To this day, gays and lesbians are accused of corrupting, molesting and harming children. Furthermore, the metaphor of a vampire is particularly apt for bisexuals, who are stereotyped as being voraciously sexual. Since some members of this bisexual community are also non-monogamous, the vampire joke has particular relevance to their community and stigmatized sexual choices.<sup>20</sup> In her anthology **RePresenting Bisexualities**, Film and Women's studies theorist Maria

Pramaggiore offers ways that the negative vampire stereotype may be deployed and positively reclaimed in representing bisexual subjects:

The polymorphous vampire, whose sexual and sensual appetites wed desire and identification, may be the quintessential representational figure of bisexuality in the 1980s and 1990s, evidenced not only by *The Hunger* but also in Anne Rice's vampire chronicles. The vampire's peculiar physiognomy permits an exploration of sexuality beyond gender and sex, because desire becomes an all-pervasive rhythm of sex, blood, and satiation rather than courtship, coupling, and conclusion.<sup>21</sup>

These metaphors of vampires, cannibals, and pollutants point to the ways that both Jews and bisexuals have been deemed potential disrupters and destroyers of social order. As Mary Douglas explained in her anthropological work on the cultural concepts of pollution and taboo, "we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion..."<sup>22</sup>

Why have Jews and bisexuals been considered disruptive? Part of the threat may be the ways that these two identifications are difficult to define and boundarize. Hannah refers to this as the "middle" status of both Jewish and bisexual identifications:

I think both ... are these categories that defy categorization...I feel like being bi is simultaneously a sexual orientation and not a sexual orientation, and that it's this middle category. And I feel the same way in some ways about Judaism, the ethnicity that isn't an ethnicity and the religion that is not a religion, because you can be totally anti-religious and still be Jewish. And it is for many people a middle category in terms of their classifications of white and people of color, and Jews are sort of in this never-never land in between.

Hannah's partner Aliza echoes her description of Jewishness and bisexuality as two liminal identifications, but adds a class component to her analysis of the placement of

many Jews. Aliza sees that the middle status of Jews has been a problematic phenomenon, enabling some Jews to pass and claim Anglo, Christian privilege, and non-Jewish elites to use Jews as a visible front of capital.<sup>23</sup> She also sees this status as an opportunity, spurring some Jews to use our relative privilege to struggle for social justice and assume leadership roles in coalition building effort.<sup>24</sup>

I see a lot of commonalities, actually, because I feel like both Jews and bisexuals are in many ways in the middle. Jews in this country in terms of non-Jewish, white and people of color, and also in terms of a lot of the Jewish community comes from the middle class....So there's again that middle place, and it's historically where Jews have been placed because its a way that the wealthy can make us do their dirty work and take some of the brunt of the class oppression directed at the poor....

And I notice a lot in coalition work of different kinds that Jews really dominate, that they play a really pivotal role and they do a lot of linking between different peoples... I think that there's a way we've learned in order to survive to make friends with everybody, to make friends with people above us and below us. In particular to identify with people who are in worse shape than us.

But I think there's many tendencies going on in this country, there's also a very strong assimilationist strand. And with bisexuals, certainly many bisexuals have one foot in the straight world and one foot in the gay world, or feel invisible. The ways both people can be invisible to all the different communities. There's those of us who are both Jewish and bi who aren't invisible, but there are numbers who are, so we have a choice about coming out that's shared. And I don't think it's a coincidence that many of the leaders in the bisexual community are Jews. And for that matter, probably a number of Jewish leaders are bisexual.

Hannah feels that her Jewish and bisexual identifications have played complementary roles in her life, since her experience of growing up in a marginalized, Orthodox community gave her the "tools" to deal with heterosexism and biphobia in her later life. In this way, she feels that her Jewish background enhances her ability to negotiate her difficult placement as a bisexual in U.S. society.

I think they actually complement themselves. Because I grew up in a Jewish school in a town that was one percent Jewish. That used to be weird, and we got a lot of conversation about dealing with anti-Semitism.... [W]e had teachers who would tell us flat out, people will hate you for who you are, and you just have to hold in your heart that they are the ones who are wrong. And so when I came out, it was okay, and whether it was straight people hating me for being queer or lesbians giving me shit for being bi, in a way it was sort of like, whatever. I already had the tools.

### Bisexuality and Gender: Dual Gender Perpetuation or Subversion?

It is difficult to think of “bisexuality” as intersecting with other identities, since it has only recently been used as a category of community and identification outside of medical and psychological discourse, or the male fantasy of landing in bed with two “hot chicks.” Bisexuality has been celebrated by some for its potential to be a sexual ‘anti-identity’ outside of the binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality.<sup>25</sup>

Since the early 1990’s, when a renewed, politicized bisexual movement became more visible around the time of the publication of **Bi Any Other Name**,<sup>26</sup> a number of activists and scholars have attempted to categorize contemporary bisexuality and bisexuals, and provided insights into the particular problems and resistances to such categorizations.<sup>27</sup>

Similar to the experience of an editor of a bisexual anthology, who told me that all 70 writers who offered submissions had a different definition of the term “bisexual,” I heard as many definitions of the word as there were interviewees. These ranged from essentialistic descriptions (“It’s kind of like being Jewish. I may not express it, but that’s who I am. For years I’ve believed that I’m not straight, and I’m not lesbian, I’m bisexual,

and that's who I am"), to celebration of sexual liberation or non-monogamy, to discomfort with the label and interest in dissolving categories of gender and sexual orientation. Some participants offered multiple, contradictory, interpretations of bisexuality which highlight the gulf between the majority gender and sexual systems in contemporary US culture that are offered to us conceptually and linguistically, and their lack of "fit" for various bisexuals who are working toward new paradigms of sexuality and gender. All participants except one used the term "bisexual" to describe their sexual identity, although many used other labels as well. The person who uses the word "queer" and not bisexual is an intersexual activist who objects to the term because her own body defies categorization within a two sex system.<sup>i</sup>

As I conducted this project, I could not afford to remain ignorant of the panoply of gender issues and identifications, even if I had only identified a limited range of them as personally relevant in the past.<sup>28</sup> As I tried to be respectful and inclusive of all the participants in my study, I saw that a rigid concept of two genders failed. There is no adequate, readily understood language available to me to represent the many variations on gender that confronted me during the project. I feel betrayed by pronouns and the multiple ways that the English language forces me into a dual-gendered framework. I try

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<sup>i</sup> "Intersexuality occurs when an individual is born with physical evidence of sexual ambiguity or duality, such as a micropenis, androgen insensitivity (which results in an XY [chromosomally male] child with a vagina who is assigned as a female), enlarged clitoris...and/or ovotestes. Intersexed people often receive surgical intervention to assign- or reassign- their sex while they are still infants; often, this intervention is problematic physically or psychically, for the treated individual." ( Dallas Denny and Jamison Green in **Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority**. ed. Beth A. Firestein, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996, 86)

to avoid the sloppy concepts of “same sex” and “opposite sex” relationship, and use awkward terms such as “cross-gender” and “woman-woman” relationship that fall less readily into strict binaries.<sup>29</sup> These shortcomings of the English language to describe the spectrum of gender, bodily, and sexual identifications is mischievously argued by Toun, an intersexual participant who playful tells me she’s really heterosexual:

No, I don’t consider myself bisexual, I actually consider myself heterosexual, because what is homosexual? It’s having sex with people of the same gender, and heterosexual is having sex with people of the opposite gender and bisexuality is having sex with people of both genders. Well, I’m intersexed, and I’m not either or, and a lot of people I sleep with aren’t exactly either/or either. So in a lot of ways I feel like I’m heterosexual because I haven’t actually had sex with anybody who is intersexed, anybody who is born intersexed. So in many ways I feel like, no, I’ve never had that sort of same sex experience. (giggle) So I kind of identify as being heterosexual in that kind of concept, technically.

While some participants embedded their personal definition of bisexuality in a dual gender system, many questioned this system and saw their commitment to bisexuality or “queer” identity as part of its challenge. Bisexuality was not merely a challenge to a heterosexual/homosexual split, but also represented a way to challenge a gender roles proscribed for men and women, and a sharp dichotomy between biological males and females. I use the term “gender challenge” in a manner similar to leading participants in the study, who are highly influenced by the strong transgendered movement of the Bay Area. In the words of Dallas Denny and Jamison Green, writers and activists on transgendered issues, gender is “a social construct independent of biological sex.” Gender identity is “one’s sense of self as a boy or a girl, woman or man (or, as we are increasingly realizing, as a nongendered, transgendered, intersexed, or otherwise

alternatively gendered person.)” Gender challenge means not only that a woman will step out of normal gender roles, by wearing a tie or playing baseball, yet retain her gender identity as a woman; it means that a biological male may have a gender identity as a woman, that we cannot take for granted that everyone will be either biologically male or female, and that there may be a spectrum of gender identities rather than just man or woman.

Out of 31 participants, two considered themselves outside of a strict divide of biological male and females, although one was an intersexed participant who was embracing her liminal status, and another was a transgendered woman who was working toward the achievement of a comfortable and uncontested female gender identity, trying to walk the thin line between wanting to be unquestionably attributed to the gender “woman” by strangers, yet also hoping to be an uncloseted role model for younger transgendered people in the future. In any event, individuals who lie between the poles of the male and female sex seemed to be accepted and embraced by the community as both friends and lovers. Thus, a number of participants engaged in the questioning of gender oppositions when participants realized that a binary gender system was not adequate to describe their own lives, the lives of their friends, or the people in Jewish and queer communities around them. They occasionally spoke of ways that their expression of gender challenge was rooted in or influenced by their particular Jewish belief systems.

Jane describes her strengthened commitment to questioning the dual gendered system as she fought in coalition with transsexuals and transgendered people for a change in the name of the world renowned San Francisco “Gay and Lesbian” Pride Parade:<sup>30</sup>

I was one of the people who in the last few years was actively involved with the pride parade committee, enough to get the name of the parade changed to include bisexuals.

.....

In the process of changing the name from gay and lesbian parade to bi, we also brought in transgendered and transsexual. And I think that’s really healthy. I do now feel funny when it says on a form please check are you male or female, cause I truly believe there are other gender identities, that that’s not about your body parts.

The facilitator of a Jewish bisexual support group talks about the importance of gender fluidity in the group, and the ways that it is critical to examine gender assumptions if one is to be sensitive to the diversity of people who identify as Jewish and bisexual in the Bay Area:

Just because of the position that I happen to be in facilitating this group for Jewish bisexuals, I meet a lot of transgendered Jews or Jews...[in] whose personal lives a significant component is dealing with the fluidity of gender and the notions of gender boundaries, or lack of them, as the case may be. So I think that it’s enormously important, and again its one of those things that’s really very confounding to gays and lesbians who have essentialist orientations.

Another interviewee, Ari, describes bisexuality as her attraction to “both genders,” yet then explains the ways that she has never fit into either gender category. This is an example of the ways that participants struggled with the words and concepts for gender that we are offered in common discourse. These contradictions and inconsistencies are a positive sign that some resist predominant and oppressive categories

of discourse and are birthing concepts of identity that will be less rigidly embedded in a dual gender/dual sex system:

As far as I can tell I've been bisexual forever. ...I'm really just comfortable at this point with the fact that I'm attracted to both....

There is one way in which it may be a little different for me. For a long time I had a hard time relating to the identity of bisexual because when I saw other people who identified as bisexual they didn't look like me, I didn't necessarily feel that they were people I could relate to.... I kind of feel like a person who is sort of in between genders, I'm definitely not a typical female or woman, but I'm not a man either, and there are definitely aspects of both in me. And that really impacts on the way I go through the world and being bisexual.

The ways that Ari negotiated her sense of gender dissonance were informed by her Jewish heritage: when her lover decided to undergo sex reassignment surgery, Ari decided against this option for herself partly because of traditional Jewish strictures against altering the body. She had been Bat Mitzvahed in an Orthodox synagogue as a teenager, and still retained some of the values from that education. Instead, Ari found a way to make peace with her body, changed her name from a girl's name to a "cute Jewish boy's name," and continues to claim a liminal place regarding her gender identification.<sup>31</sup>

The ways that bisexuality may challenge boundaries of gender and sexuality has specific ramifications for Jewish bisexuals in the Bay Area. Jesse, the support group facilitator, is also a leader in the difficult struggle to achieve inclusion of bisexuals in the area gay and lesbian reform synagogue. He explains the struggles around the meanings of the concept of "inclusivity" in the synagogue: which groups are seen as worthy of exclusion, and which groups, if included, are seen as threatening the purpose of the institution.

[The synagogue] is actually world famous for its inclusiveness of its liturgy. And it's also world famous for its inclusivity altogether, and that's actually code for including women. And it has come to mean a little bit more, being more inclusive of Sephardim and Mizrahi people. But it hasn't come to mean inclusive of bisexuals. ((LG))

And actually I think one of the rabbi's big problems with bisexuality...is that if we include bisexuals, then the heterosexuals aren't going to be far behind, and we're not doing special outreach to heterosexuals, we're just not - gonna do it. So he felt like it was sort of opening the door that couldn't be shut or that couldn't be well defined and all that kind of thing.

While some definitions of who is Jewish may be very rigid, based on female  
bloodline, what Jewishness means is much more open to interpretation, defined by some  
as religion, others as culture, ethnicity, or race, each of these definitional categories  
branching into unlimited meanings. In increasingly mobile times when Jewish people are  
no longer restricted to ghettos and enforced sexual marginalization, the boundaries of  
who is Jewish and who participates in Jewish community are becoming equally  
permeable, filled with Jews with non-Jewish mothers, religious converts, partners and  
friends of Jews, and increased recognition of the ancient cultures of Jews of color.

**Jewish and Bisexual: Tiny Point or Sweep of Possibilities?**

The unity of bisexual and Jewish identifications may bring us to a tiny point  
occupied by a few individuals who currently name themselves as such. It also may  
encompass a broad sweep of the possibilities of those who have experienced sexual  
desires toward people at different points along a gender spectrum. It may include the  
innumerable ways to align with the Jewish community, the outer boundaries of which  
might be represented through participation in religious services or conversion, or through

the discovery of Jewish lineage or “one drop” of Jewish blood.<sup>32</sup> It may mean the acknowledgment that in order to build community or achieve political agency, we must embrace the spectrum of both Jewish and bisexual possibility.

In the particular community that I studied I see a mixture of these strategies, to build exclusive community with people who name themselves Jewish and bisexual, and to construct community and alliances across a spectrum of Jewish and queer possibility. This latter strategy promotes the recognition that there are no clear boundaries for either identification, and a celebration of the intersection of communities and the coalitions they forge with a breathtaking range of cultures and sexualities. Thus, the identifications or placements of “Jews” and “bisexuals,” and the particular interaction of Jewish and bisexual identifications, offer hope for disruption of the system of invented binary oppositions. Community leader Aliza elaborates upon this aspect of being Jewish and bisexual:

There’s the way that when you’re sort of on the edge or in the middle, you have a perspective that’s unique, a way of seeing both/and rather than either/or.... I think that’s really important for our culture as a whole, for the planet as a whole to survive, we have to go to that both/and thinking rather than the either/or. And I think Jews and bisexuals are in a ... position to take a leading role in moving us forward, and embracing both/and and everyone.

While this concept of embodying a challenge to systems of binary oppositions owes much to the oft cited work of Gloria Anzaldua on mestiza consciousness, I do not wish to appropriate these terms or ideas.<sup>33</sup> While some of the participants in my study were women of color of mixed heritage (with one parent of Latino-Christian or African

American-Christian heritage and another of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage) and discussed the implications of living between heritages and sexualities in ways that are more analogous to Anzaldua's work, most of the participants were Ashkenazi Jews who have the opportunity to claim a greater degree of White and/or heterosexual privilege, and regularly grapple with ethical choices about passing and assimilation as both Jews and bisexuals. In spite of the pressures to pass, they often find ways to assert their Jewishness and bisexuality, and politically align themselves with people of color, lesbians and gays.

### **Community**

Before I delve more deeply into discussions of Jewish bisexual community, I wish to explore the term "community" and some paradigms for political and ethnographic study of lesbian community. In their award winning book **Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold**, a detailed ethnohistorical study of the development of lesbian community in their own town of Buffalo, anthropologist Elizabeth Kennedy and community historian Madeline Davis decided to "focus on community rather than the individual ... based upon our assumption that community is key to the development of twentieth-century lesbian identity and consciousness."<sup>34</sup> If community has been critical in the development of lesbian identity, should we look at emerging forms of bisexual community in order to understand bisexual identity? Or can we understand bisexual identity by looking at bisexual positioning within broader communities of those who reject heterosexual hegemony? How are lesbian communities different from more traditional communities studied by anthropologists? And what is "community" anyway?

Kennedy, Davis, and political theorist Shane Phelan explain that unlike other communities that are shaped by geography, consanguinity, or political affiliation, lesbians often gather together from diverse physical locations. This diffuse nature of lesbian communities “...raises problematic issues about boundaries” that are increasingly common for ethnographic study in a mobile, urban and suburban United States.<sup>35</sup> I was similarly compelled to look at community as “sites of constitution of [bisexual] selves,” and similarly confounded by the difficulty of defining bisexual community.<sup>36</sup> The latter task is exceedingly difficult because of its newness and the particularly porous borders of bisexual identification, social interaction and political movement. Trying to understand specifically bisexual identity through exploration of queer or other broader communities of sexual minorities is problematic because it would not specifically address issues of bisexual identity formation and perpetuation. I found the four major processes of lesbian community outlined by political theorist Shane Phelan helpful in determining whether I could consider Bay Area Jewish bisexuals a “community”:

- 1) a lesbian community insulates lesbians from hostility toward their sexuality.
- 2) ..a lesbian community can be a beacon for lesbians or for those who would become lesbians. It does this by breaking or easing lesbian invisibility...
- 3) Communities also model behavior and help members and new entrants interpret their lives- show them “how to be a lesbian” and what it means to be one....
- 4) Finally, communities may provide the base for or result in political mobilization.<sup>37</sup>

At least one of these four indicators of community were apparent in many interviews. I decided to interpret “Jewish, bisexual community” broadly, recognizing that

there is no one, well boundarized community, nor can Jewish bisexual organizing be broken down into discrete micro-communities of pagans, working class members, or people who live in the East Bay. Everyone in the sample was somehow linked to another. Many were connected through Jewish and/or bisexual “institutions,” and almost all had participated at some point in the Jewish Bisexual Caucus of BiPol; about half of the participants were recruited through the mailing list of this caucus.<sup>38</sup> Aside from these affiliations, many had worshipped with, gossiped about, dated, or somehow “shmoozed” with other participants.<sup>39</sup>

Phelan continues to explain that essentializing communities is as dangerous as essentializing identities: it may lead to exclusion and an inflexibility toward members’ processes of personal development or coalition-building with others. Since communities are composed of individuals with multiple identities and allegiances, they may be seen as sites of tension as well as comfort. They are places where coalitions may be formed on personal and political levels as we learn about and become respectful of the identifications that people bring and we do not share. Thus, community is not a “secure home”; it is “unstable, shifting ground.... In the process of community, personalities are created. Persons do not simply ‘join’ communities; they *become* microcosms of their communities, and their communities change with their entrance.”<sup>40</sup> I use this idea to study Jewish bisexual community, seeing it as a “process” rather than something static.

## Re-visioned Community

The group that I study is a community of people who gather according to categories of identification that have been reimagined in the 1990's. The project of creating progressive Jewish and queer or bisexual community, lives, and bodies is embedded in a project of revisioning Jewish and non-heterosexual histories.

In the words of anthropologist Ana Alonso, "Social remembering is a profoundly complex, active and ongoing process in which different interpretations of the past engage each other and struggle for dominance."<sup>41</sup> According to Kobena Mercer, this process of social remembering is key to the creation of modern identities. "...[A]ny social identity is shaped by how it imagines and remembers its relationship to the past."<sup>42</sup> This contest over social history and meaning, this process of "reweaving of our own necessary mythologies of identity, community and belonging..."<sup>43</sup> means that there can be no unitary or stable sense of community or culture:

Such keywords, in Raymond Williams' sense, as 'community' and 'culture' are inherently ambivalent and have no fixed or final meanings precisely because they are constantly subject to struggles in which different groups seek to hegemonize their definitions over the definitions of others."<sup>44</sup>

A sense of history plays an important part in the beliefs and practices of participants in this group, which includes controversial reinterpretations of Talmud and Jewish ritual. It is a contested version of Jewish history and tradition which challenges mainstream Jewish practices and customs and employs history or biblical passages to demonstrate that new interpretations and directions are culturally embedded and valid.

This is often done with a sense of play and irony and without claims to a final answer, but an understanding that history and texts are always deployed to bolster alternate visions and choices. For example, ritual leader Aliza feels that her unconventional revisioning of the religion to emphasize its woman-centered and earth-based aspects is part of the Jewish tradition of midrash, where passages of religious text receive multiple interpretations:

[I]n terms of the religion, I've basically at this point ((LG)) kind of recreated the religion in a way that's more meaningful to me, and I think also more true to the original roots.....and really, everyone, though they won't admit it, takes what they like and leaves the rest.

Some community members also embrace historical stereotypes of powerful Jewish women and demasculinized Jewish men to support the non-traditional gender roles within their community, including butch-identified Jewish women and "fag-identified" Jewish men.<sup>45</sup> These roles are not only present in "same-gender" relationships, but may offer less sexist paradigms for cross-gender relationships or "queer" male-female relationships. The ways that history and ethnic or religious tradition are utilized to support non-mainstream behaviors and projects seem to give them roots, and perhaps will help them endure over time.

In the following passage, Toun uses history to link and find strength in queer and Jewish survival:

Recently I've been able to equate how Judaism as a tribe has been able to hold together in the face of all this adversity, and equate that to the emerging queer identity. I'm looking at our history way back, and realizing how we've also been able to hold it together as a tribe, and how we're slowly beginning to develop our

own rituals and our own culture, if you want to put it that way. And how queers have had the same sort of adversity that Jews have had in a lot of ways, and that people have always hated them, have always wanted to kill them, have carried out pogroms against queers. So I think for me, when I made that connection it totally made me identify even more with my Jewish heritage.

Lighting the Sabbath candle, a ritual that her Orthodox- raised father had practiced but that she had rejected in her youth, now serves her not only as a Jewish rite but a weekly ritual in honor of queer survival for her entire communal household.<sup>46</sup> Using her grandmother's candlesticks gives historic weight to their tribute to both histories and identities.

So I decided I really wanted to start doing Sabbath again. I had never done it in my adult life, and I mentioned this to my dad and he sent me my grandmother's candlesticks, so we started doing Sabbath here. It's been really great, everybody's been really into it. It's that tie in with here's part of my history and here's this (tribe) of people who have survived through incredible odds and incredible adversity and incredible hatred, and tying to my current family structure and how we are here, all of us are together and we have made it through this incredible battle. Adversity and cultural hatred towards us too.

Toun gives us a particularly embattled sense of her own history and her current family as an intersexed person who is usually seen as a butch woman by strangers and identifies more strongly with the transgendered community than the bisexual community. She lives in a communally run and owned household with people of different ages, and ethnic and religious backgrounds. "One of the members in the household is a transgendered activist, very vocal for many years...." She considers her current home a "hotbed" of transgendered, intersexual political activity. As I heard about the violence that she faced as a child and her current political activism in a newly forming community

of people who have been physically mutilated and traumatized in order to fit in to a two sex system, I understood how her use of ritual was an important act of healing and personal empowerment:

High school was incredible. It was like constant warfare. You walked the halls and people would spit on you... people would throw you against the wall and bash your head into the walls. Many many broken noses, many many kicked in ribs, lots of blood and gore for being queer. That was pretty constant. And I think I read pretty queer, everywhere. I often will get shit for it. I would get yelled at or people will come and want to attack me or something like that.

.....

And now it's been really exciting that intersexuals are starting to really come together and begin this whole concept of community, because here, finally, my people, this is where my citizenship is. But on the same level, its also kind of intense, because the first time I went to an Intersex Society meeting, I was, oh this is really exciting, this is going to be really great....And I found out that I was the only one there who hadn't been medically intervened upon, I was the only one there who still had all of my parts, and everyone else had been mutilated.

.....

So in the same way that in the 50's and 60's, homosexuality was the love that couldn't speak its name, intersexuality is the gender that couldn't speak its name.... I think the intersex community is just beginning to come together, it's a community that's been pretty well devastated and people are pretty shell-shocked....[M]ost people are incredibly shocked to find that there are other people like them out there, because we've all been isolated by the medical community.

### Dangers of Revisioning Community

The attempt to reembrace and recreate "Jewish community" also brings its dangers. We cannot romanticize the conditions which forced previous generations to turn within, the shtetls and prejudices which precluded most possibilities of interreligious partnership and marriage, the strict rule of the family that arranged marriages and maintained permeable control over the movement and associations of Jewish women.

Exclusions may also result when an “almost White” ethnic community such as an American, Jewish community reimagines itself and forms in the 1990’s.<sup>47</sup> When Ashkenazi Jews decide to only date other Jews or to primarily build community with Jews, we may perpetuate racist segregations that were common in older Jewish communities of the U.S.

The public reclamation of self-love and erotic attraction from Jew to Jew can edge dangerously close to the physical essentialism and reinforcement of dying tropes of racial demarcation. The rebuilding of Jewish communities may also hinder coalition building in political times when it is sorely needed, and again lead us down a spiral of racial essentialism and racism.

Recreating Jewish community may also perpetuate the hegemony of Ashkenazi Jewish culture and the invisibility or oppression of Jews of color and their specific cultures. Although Jews of the world come from many geographic areas, and a majority of Israel’s Jewish population is currently of Mizrahi heritage, hegemonic Jewish culture tends to subtly ignore, exclude or marginalize Mizrahi Jews and Jews of color who represent a numerical minority in the U.S. Jewish community.<sup>48</sup> The shadowing of a multiplicity of Arab Jewish cultures perpetuates a false dichotomy of Arabs and Jews, which in turn feeds into the continuing oppression of Palestinian “Others” by the Israeli government. In the words of Mizrahi sociologist Ella Shohat:

The commonalities between Jews and Muslims, particularly the “Arabness” of Jews in Spain, North Africa and the Middle East, is a thorny reminder of the Middle Eastern character of the majority of Jews in Israel today. Erasure of the Arab dimension of Sephardim is crucial from a Zionist perspective, since Israel

has ended up in a paradoxical situation in which its “Orientals” had closer cultural and historical links to the presumed enemy- the “Arab”- than to the Ashkenazi Jews with whom they were forcibly merged into nationhood.<sup>49</sup>

The group that I studied reflected more diversity and inclusion than traditional Jewish communities because of its anti-racist ideology and unusually broad interpretation of what it means to be Jewish. I remember a powerful moment when the new African American lover of a group member attended a havurah service, and cried as she told us of her family’s alienation from her Jewish grandfather. The group welcomed and comforted her. Yet the bisexual Jews that I interviewed were predominantly European American. On a personal level, I have found that as I have become more immersed in Jewish community and culture, people of African, Latino and Asian heritage have moved from a central to a more peripheral place in my life. This segregation becomes easier to justify and less likely to be scrutinized by political progressives when it is in the name of ethnic reassertion.

These debates and dilemmas become more pronounced as Jewish bisexual community members make plans to form an “intentional” housing community, since housing has geographic borders and has been a historic and enduring site of racial and ethnic segregation. Hannah, who is central in these discussions of forming a cohousing or cooperative community, and who currently lives in a cooperative household, explains that she would probably be happiest in a multicultural community that is not limited to other bisexual Jews:

I need to feel not alone in being Jewish and I need to feel not alone in being bisexual. But I don’t need to get that all in one place. It doesn’t have to of look

like a Jewish bisexual community, it could look more like a multicultural, sexual orientation-free community. And I'd be just as happy, probably more happy with that.

The dreams of these community members to live collectively in an exurban or rural environment reflect its postmodern status. Derived mostly of individuals who grew up in urban areas and moved to a gay mecca that is increasingly congested and exorbitantly costly, they imagine a new migration from city to country where a valuation of communalism, a commitment to reinventing idealized Jewish tradition, eating organic and other healthful foods, and a challenge to capitalist values of professionalism and financial accumulation may be compatible with a glorified vision of non-urban living. Yet this vision of a country move portends further danger of geographic and political distancing from communities of color and their struggles.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Why the Bay Area?

Why did I pick the San Francisco Bay Area as a site for my study? My permanent home is Northern California, and I am connected with Jewish bisexual individuals and communities there. This geographic region is a national center of both Jewish and bisexual organizing. In the words of one participant, “[t]he Bay Area is kind of a forerunner for many things...it’s frenetic, it’s like the energy of earthquakes. But it’s moving us forward.” It is a center of Jewish Renewal, a movement to “fuse feminism, mysticism, craft and social action with traditional Jewish teaching to create a contemporary Judaism.”<sup>50</sup> In 1994, the authors of the sociological study **Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality** aptly declared San Francisco “a natural laboratory of the sexual”:

More than any other city in the Western world, it is a recognized originator of diverse sexual behaviors, values, ideologies, and organizations. It caters to a wide range of interests, providing an encouraging environment and many opportunities for those who want to experiment sexually. Dozens of organizations...provide social support and meeting places for people with varying sexual desires. Moreover, there is a multitude of groups, newsletters, magazines, and activities in which people explore the meaning of sexuality. Because of the very atypicality of the setting, sexual variation is maximized, and most aspects of a sexual phenomenon can be studied.<sup>51</sup>

San Francisco has one of the first and strongest lesbian and gay synagogues in the world, and one member estimates that ten to twenty percent of its membership is bisexual. Many national and regional organizers and writers on bisexuality and Jewish

culture live in the Bay Area, and a number participated in the study. The Bay Area has a rare, organized support group of Jewish bisexuals, the Jewish Bisexual Caucus of BiPOL. It also has social and religious communities which are predominantly composed of Jewish bisexuals including Queer Minyan Havurah and Pardes Rimonim, an “earth-based,” feminist, mostly bisexual Jewish ritual group. Aliza, one of the founders of Queer Minyan, speaks to the importance of Queer Minyan and the growing centrality of bisexuals in the Jewish, queer community:<sup>52</sup>

Queer Minyan is very very bisexual[ly] dominated. I think its really interesting, because we’re no longer clinging to the sidelines of the queer community going “let us in, let us in,” or “let us be here,” or “is it okay for us,” at least in some of these circles. And that’s pretty neat, and it’s accepted. Because we sort of dominate.

This unusual concentration and network of people within my research group afforded unique opportunities to find subjects to interview, and to observe and discuss the ways that Jewish bisexuals form relationships together and interact in community.

As I previously mentioned, The Bay Area was also the place where I had “come out” as bisexual with the warm support of a group of Jewish women. So my bisexual beginnings were intimately linked with my Jewish heritage and the Bay Area: exploring the burgeoning Jewish bisexual community in that locale was a “coming home” for me.

### **Feminist Methodologies**

This project is interdisciplinary and incorporates a mixture of genres. I interweave interviews, theory, personal narrative, and tools of cultural and linguistic anthropology. A major model for my writing is the book **Women Writing Culture**, a collection by

feminist anthropologists which successfully and compellingly incorporates personal narrative and reflexivity in intellectually rigorous study.<sup>53</sup> In particular, I have been inspired by the ethnographic work of anthropologist Smadar Lavie.<sup>54</sup> Not only is her analysis of border models as they pertain to Israeli women of color and other culturally and politically marginalized Israelis a useful contrast to my own study of Jews who are differently marginalized, but her creative writing style, which blends memoir with poetic, theoretical and ethnographic styles, provides a rich example of effective experimental ethnography.

The powerful voices of Jewish lesbian writers and activists, and their willingness to delve into the complexities of Jewish women's experience, have provided inspiration not only for my research, but for the ways that I and some of my subjects live our lives as bisexual, anti-racist Jewish feminists. These models of non-heterosexual Jewish feminism include the early anthology **Nice Jewish Girls**, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck; **The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance** by Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz; the essays in **Dreams of an Insomniac** by Irena Klepfisz; Elly Bulkin's interactive project in **Yours in Struggle**; and the years of writing in **Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Their Friends**.<sup>55</sup>

### **Post-Modernism**

I draw upon post-modern theory to study post-modern community, community that did not and could not exist a decade ago, where boundaries of race, religion, sexual orientation and gender are blurred, the meaning of various identifications are contested

and changing, and people's multiple identifications interact and influence each other. Some Jewish bisexuals struggle to forge new concepts of family and community, for example in their challenge of monogamy or nuclear family models in spite of the inhospitable political climate. Their attempt to live by alternative paradigms is exhilarating, and can sometimes be exhausting for its leaders and members. This creative tension is described by Aliza, a leader in Jewish queer organizing and Jewish feminist ritual and co-founder of Queer Minyan Havurah:

And this is a lot about being Jewish for me, is the reaching for something better, for something new, for something radical, for something transformative. And sometimes the reaching and the grasping gets tiring for me, you know? And that's when I go and meditate and even want to hang out with other cultural types, because there's this sort of greediness to us that's a gift and also can be very negative too. But it's exciting, and it's exciting to hang out around a bunch of Jewish bisexuals.

### **Reflexivity**

Like some feminist scholars, I explored a topic which was readily accessible to me on a slim budget. The division between myself and the subjects of my research is unclear; as a woman who identifies as Jewish and bisexual, I become a "subject" of my research. In the words of Anneka Marshall, who conducted a study of African American women's sexuality, the people who I interviewed "are not just research subjects but rather they are friends, sisters, mothers, and generators of knowledge in their own right."<sup>56</sup> I also try to retain a writing voice which is "self-reflexive and accessible,"<sup>57</sup> and to construct a project that will not only be of interest to a narrow academic community, but to the

people who contributed to the study and to others outside the academy who wish to see Jewish and bisexual lives described and analyzed.

### **Studying Peers: “Subjects” or “Participants”?**

Many anthropologists and other researchers have written of the promises and challenges of studying a community with which one identifies. In their book **Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold**, a detailed ethnohistorical study of lesbian community conducted in their home town, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis explain the high ethical standards which they assumed on a professional and personal level during their lengthy research.<sup>58</sup> Any perception of impropriety on their parts could have reduced the level of trust that their informants were willing to invest in them and therefore compromise the study. An insensitive treatment of their informants could have jeopardized their personal standing in their own social community.

I face similar ethical challenges on a smaller scale which influence some of the ways I have viewed my project, and hence the methodologies I employed to conduct the research. I feel fortunate that my first opportunity to engage in original research was an experience of studying my “peers” or “studying up.” Since studying peers gives me little opportunity to hide condescension, disrespect, or manipulation, this research forum can provide a guidepost for ethical standards that should be present in my own future research about people who may be less economically and theoretically empowered than myself.

Members of the Bay Area bisexual community were involved in helping me contact and select interviewees, and one suggested the venue of a focus group which was

also organized for this project. In acknowledgment of the active role that many have played in the project, I do not call them “subjects,” but instead name them “participants.” While I was gathering data in the Bay Area, I sometimes frustrated participants with my reluctance to claim ownership of the research; in my desire to respect the wisdom of others, I may have seemed indecisive and unfocused. I still feel uncomfortable calling this “my project” because of the active participation of so many people, and the implications of an individualist mode that does not accurately reflect my political ideas or experience of research.

What are the implications of being one of few “named” persons in this project, leaving anonymous and invisible the many thinkers who shared key ideas? The dilemmas of taking names away from participants are magnified in studies of gay and lesbian activists, since many are very deliberate about being “visible” and “out.”<sup>59</sup> Perhaps they are heightened in a study bisexuals, since bisexuality and bisexual identity is even less visible than gay and lesbian identity in U.S. culture. In order to give participants some agency, I invited them to choose the pseudonyms which are used in the written product.<sup>60</sup>

### **Methods of Recruitment and Data Collection**

I found the participants through three major contacts. The leader of a Jewish bisexual support group in the Bay Area sent my project description to 120 members on the group’s confidential mailing list, expressing his support for the project and asking them to participate. The other two contacts helped me find interviewees through the

snowball technique. The fact that I obtained contacts through different avenues provided a substantial diversity of subjects considering my limited resources.

In the individual interviews, I used a semi-structured, open-ended dialogic format. I have included a copy of the interview question guide as Appendix C of this thesis. As the interviews progressed, they became more focused on certain issues such the ways that being Jewish and bisexual interact in people's lives.

As the finale to my data collection, I organized a focus group of six people who had been interviewed individually. This comes out of a tradition of political activism in the Bay Area where focus groups are used to tackle political issues. People were invited to participate in the group based on their membership in varied communities and their enthusiasm for the project.<sup>ii</sup> Participants came from a variety of class and geographic (including national) backgrounds, ages, and denominational or synagogue affiliations. Two members of the group were Jewish identified women of mixed heritage, in recognition of the significant proportion of mixed heritage Jews and Jewish women of color in my sample. One group member is the child of a Holocaust survivor and another the daughter of a blacklisted Communist, representing two major communal traumas that directly or indirectly affect contemporary Jews and the people in my sample. Three of the group members have been struggling with issues of temporary or permanent disability.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> See Appendix D for profiles of the focus group participants. See Appendix B for demographics of the 31 interviewees, including religious affiliation.

Contrary to the common research practice of selecting focus group members who are unknown to each other prior to the meetings, which is followed by researchers such as Dr. Nora Gold in her exploration of anti-Semitism and sexism in the experience of Canadian women, this focus group included members who were linked to each other in various ways.<sup>62</sup> There was a woman-woman couple, a founder and members of Queer Minyan, the facilitator of a Jewish bisexual support group and people who have attended that group, and people who otherwise are known to each other through networks of Jewish queers, bisexuals, and political progressives in the Bay Area. Everyone in the group knew at least one other group member before the group started, although some members are central to Jewish bisexual organizing, and one does not consider herself part of Jewish bisexual community. I found that this level of familiarity, the presence of leaders of Jewish bisexual organizing and thought, and our history of prior conversations enabled the group to move beyond superficialities and grapple with sensitive and complex issues in the short span of two and a half hours.

### **Linguistic Anthropology**

In the process of discussing their identifications and solidarities, many participants highlighted language and speech as a vehicle through which their identities and communities were forged. In her essay “Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender,” linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal explains that “...anthropologists have long been aware of the ways in which the metaphors, literary genres, and interactional arrangements readily available in a

community actively shape the way speakers define the social world.”<sup>63</sup> I will use Gal’s discussion of research on the links between gender, speech and power in order to demonstrate how language and discourse analysis is a particularly apt methodology for an inquiry into the cultures of people with multiple, marginalized identifications.

Our interactions and self-concepts are shaped by the verbal/conceptual categories that are given to us; in spite of efforts such as one study participant’s use of the word “hse” in her writing in order to subvert the male/female dichotomy, it is difficult to speak and therefore live outside of dominant binary paradigms. Since we are also given categories of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as naturalized and separable categories, and since these categories are often highlighted over others such as geographic origin and religion in feminist discourse, it is equally difficult to express lexically and therefore conceptualize the complex ways that an individual’s many identifications interact together, and the manners in which people prioritize their identifications. The prevalence of such binaries and metanarratives of identity also has negative political implications. They impede the formation of alliances, since existence between or outside of binaries and the complexities of multiple identifications remain difficult to describe or unacknowledged.

Yet Gal explains that dominant discourses are also contested in language use:

Th[e] ability to make others accept and enact one’s representation of the world is another aspect of symbolic domination. But such cultural power rarely goes uncontested. Resistance to a dominant cultural order occurs when devalued linguistic strategies and genres are practiced and celebrated despite widespread denigration; it occurs as well when these devalued practices propose or embody alternative models of the social world.<sup>64</sup>

This process of contestation is not simple and complete: it contains partial subversions, and contradictions as individuals and communities are in the process of molding language to reflect their complex lives, and creating less oppressive discourses and experiences.

Since speech and community are generally not solitary phenomena, I decided to organize the focus group. I found it fruitful to contrast what people said about their identifications in a less interactive setting, an individual interview, with what they created together during the focus group. The participants in the study often enacted or contradicted in the interactive focus group what they expressed in individual interviews. In particular, they contradicted a common perception that their Jewish and bisexual identifications were in “different boxes” in their lives by interweaving Jewish, bisexual, and queer topics and communicative strategies in their discussion.

### **Disappointments**

There are also many ways that my methodology has fallen short of my plans and ideals. A few participants expressed willingness to read drafts and provide commentary, and most are interested in reading portions of the final product. Most of the data analysis and writing occurred during a six month period, while I was completing my Master’s degree and working half -time as a research assistant. Because of the difficulty of integrating numerous critiques during this brief period of time, I did not share this phase of my work with study participants during this phase. I plan to distribute my thesis to two key participants and integrate their feedback before proceeding further with the material.

#### IV. "JEWISH BISEXUAL COMMUNITY"

When I arrived in Oakland, California for the purpose of conducting interviews on the day before the San Francisco Pride Parade, I was surprised to learn how many people who identified as Jewish and bisexual wanted their stories to be known. I was also struck by the heterogeneity of this burgeoning community. The facilitator of the Jewish bisexual support group aptly describes his group as "a most amazing borsht:"

...lots of different people come through the group, an incredible variety of people from amazingly diverse backgrounds, and you just would never think ... you get this incredible cross-section of how diverse Jews are. We have lots of Jews from outside the US, for example, that participate in the group, people from every point on the religious spectrum and every point on the orientation spectrum. And people who are mixed heritage, and people who are Jews by choice who converted to Judaism, transgendered people- male to female, female to male, I mean ((LG)), it's really the most amazing borsht....

Yet there were pulls toward conformity that led to varying degrees of alienation for some who did not fit a white, middle class, able-bodied, urban-raised, cross-gender relationship paradigm. There was a predominance of women from middle class backgrounds. While there were women of color in the community, almost all of the women's Jewish backgrounds were of Ashkenazi origin; Mizrahi Jewish women are not represented in my sample.<sup>65</sup> This disparity is reflected in Jesse's imagery of the community as a "borsht," a soup from the Ashkenazi tradition. While there was a range of ages, from twenty one to sixties, most of the women were in their twenties and early thirties. The few community members who had children often had difficulty integrating their parenting into adult-centered community and activities. While there were more

women than men in the communities, there were internal struggles around how to welcome bisexual men into a feminist community without elevating them. In the words of one interviewee, "... there's a way that men who are really good, really feminist, really cool, really sweet are given more attention than women who are really cool, sweet and feminist. It's something that I'm aware of. And it's tricky." These were communities that struggled with the subtleties of sexism, racism and classism and other oppressions.

### **Bay Area Jewish Bisexual Communit[ies]: Some Organizational History Since the 1980's**

While a thorough exploration of the various forms of informal bisexual community building would necessitate significant historical and ethnographic study, I will briefly outline some of the formalized aspects of community building efforts since the 1980's. This is not a complete account of even visible Jewish bisexual institutions, yet offers a glimpse of some institutions present during this period. It is a story of community creation, disintegration, and realignment as debates around activism vs. emotional support, non-monogamy vs. monogamy, religious affiliation and secular identification create alliances and tensions between Jewish bisexuals. As I present these community groups and events through the words of members, I give them room to share what these organizational moments mean to them on emotional, spiritual, and political levels.

It must be noted that while the activities of the Jewish Bisexual Caucus of BiPOL, a non-religious, non-denominational group described below have been attended at least once by almost all project participants, a minority of my sample usually participated in

any of these formal institutions. This is particularly true of the spiritual and religious groups, since study participants identified across the religious spectrum from Orthodox to secular. Only a few interviewees were involved in the radical reinterpretations of Judaism that typified the bisexually dominated spiritual groups. An institutional history also weighs heavily toward religious and spiritual gatherings which does not represent the breadth of secular-leaning, informal community building. As a person who has never studied Jewish texts, I am not prepared to enter the debate of Jewish religious practices that has been taken on by numerous feminist rabbis and Jewish feminist Biblical scholars and theologians including Judith Plaskow, Savina Teubal, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky.<sup>66</sup> I therefore let the participants in these spiritual groups discuss their own experience, interested in the ethnographic insights that they offer rather than focusing on how “true” their perspectives are to the original texts.

The first formal group of Jewish bisexual women was called Bi Weekly, an affinity group that formed after the 1982 Jewish Feminist Conference that took place in the Bay Area, and in which I participated for one year before I returned to the East Coast. Jane describes the origin of the group:

I went to that conference not knowing what was there, and I saw this bisexual workshop. I wanted to go and I went, and I figured that there'd be probably five people in that room. And there were eighty. It knocked my socks off. Those of us who signed up to continue meeting and who kept meeting became a real family, and a support network and stayed together for many years.

...

We were the first that I knew of who did that [formed a Jewish bisexual group] and really made a go of it. Partly why we stuck together so long was a function of lack of choice. And still, there was a lot to gain, so we were willing to invest a lot.

We were willing to invest vulnerability, time, and good food. (giggle)...We couldn't take it lightly. It was a lifeline to pieces of ourselves.

This group met for a number of years. While half of the members have reidentified as lesbians and some have moved to different states, many of the friendships are enduring.

Leah tells a similar story of the beginning of formalized Jewish bisexual organizing in the 1990's Bay Area. As the first group started when women joined their Jewish and bisexual identifications at a Jewish conference, the second started almost a decade later, after the first national bisexual conference that took place in San Francisco in 1990. A bisexual organizer named David Lourea and others presented a workshop on being Jewish and bisexual which was well attended and provided a catalyst for further organizing.<sup>67</sup> This workshop was spoken of in powerful terms by a handful of participants in my study, since it represented the first time that many people discussed the intermingling of their Jewish and bisexual identities with others in an organized setting. The following is Jesse's moving account of his own experience of attending the workshop:

Well, there were quite a few Jews that were involved in the organizing of the conference. And some of them got together, amongst them Dave Lourea ...who organized a workshop called Jewish Heritage, Bisexual Identity. And ...at the conference, there were about 450 people who were registered....In that workshop, there were 45 people who showed up. And when I walked into it...I came in late...and I felt for me- and this is kind of where the connections for Jews and bisexuals come together for me- I felt like what a lot of people have described they felt like when they first stepped foot in Israel. I'd come home. I was fully present. I was completely grounded. I was a member of the world community. I was on the planet. [E]very cell in my body was functioning exactly correctly. It was just this bizarre- it was this amazing feeling...and most of what went on at

workshop was people just sort of told stories. About being Jewish and bisexual. And a lot of it was about being invisible as a Jew in the bisexual community.

Jesse, who is in his early 50's and older than most study participants, uses the Jewish metaphor of stepping foot in Israel to demonstrate the ways that an archetypal Jewish experience of "coming home" would not work for him; it was only in the creation of a Jewish and bisexual space that Jesse found that sense of home. Leah also explains the impact of the workshop. "And out of that workshop, people were incredibly inspired, I mean the workshop was packed."

After the conference, Jesse invited Leah and a non-Jewish ally to join him in creating a Jewish Bisexual Caucus of BiPol. Jesse describes his motivations for starting the group:

So she and I and Leah started this group....[S]o it came out of a need to create a space where Jewish bisexuals could be visible to each other, could have a safe space to talk about whatever our issues are on an ongoing basis, and also as Jews [to] be visible to the bisexual community.... [W]e do that by having parties around the Jewish festivals like Sukkot and Hanukah.

Leah then recounts that the group, which had started as a site of support, discussion, and activism, became a more formalized support group with periodic social activities. At this point, some people left the group who were seeking social and political community rather than a self-help model, including Leah:

[F]or a while we were a group of ... five or six people meeting, kind of serving a lot of purposes in each other's lives; we were ... a quasi support group, discussion group. We supported each other during the Gulf War when all of us felt like we needed to be around other Jews who had similar political visions, we did activism, we were very involved politically, we did a lot of education, so we were doing work. And eventually that group evolved to become a very structured support group with some social activity. And I stood away from the group because I really

don't need support around being Jewish and bisexual, what I really wanted was community....

While the support group continues to serve as a point of entry for people who are grappling with what it means to be Jewish and bisexual, as well as a site of visibility in the bisexual community through well attended Jewish holiday parties, Leah and others joined a new group called Queer Minyan. Queer Minyan is a social and prayer group that meets monthly on Friday night to celebrate Shabbat; while most of its members are Jewish bisexuals, it welcomes people who identify as Jewish "queers" and their friends. It was founded by Aliza, a lesbian identified bisexual woman, and a "fag-identified" bisexual man. According to Leah:

And I think the second phase of building a Jewish bisexual community was when Queer Minyan came into my life and...there just are so many people in Queer Minyan who happen to be bisexual and of course almost everybody who's in Queer Minyan is already Jewish.

Leah explains that along with providing a sense of community, Queer Minyan offered her a place to explore her Jewish spirituality with others. In the following statement she refers to a process of becoming "spiritually identified" rather than religiously identified, language which suggests the differences between this reimagined form of Judaism related to a Jewish Renewal model, and the conventionally recognized forms of Jewish religion:

I never really went through a period of not wanting to be Jewish, not liking being Jewish, not wanting to be part of Jewish community. But what has changed in my life is that I've become more spiritually identified, and that as a child and young adult I always identified as a cultural Jew.... I think the reason it's changed is that I finally have found a spiritual community that makes sense to me and that moves me inside, and nothing really moved me spiritually before.

She clarifies why Queer Minyan was a special place that enabled her to come closer to Judaism. She found a recreated form of Judaism that broadly reinterpreted Hebrew texts to fit the ideologies of modern, queer identified members:

Queer Minyan ... was an Earth-based, feminist... pagan-oriented philosophy that leaves a lot of room for not only questioning pieces of Judaism that we were brought up to not question, but also leav[es] a lot of room to ask questions about things we don't know about...and to add to the body of midrash that we grew up with. There was room for me to not know a lot of things about Judaism in terms of Jewish religion, and so it made me feel safe and comfortable. And it was a place where I really felt something move within myself, and felt a connection to community that I could for the first time have a place where I wanted to go for shabbat, and where I knew that if I got myself there I would leave feeling so much more centered and grounded. That has been tremendously important to me and...not so ironically perhaps it's also very connected to a Jewish bisexual community.

According to co-founder Aliza, the people in this ritual group became “mishpacha” to each other and helped create space for further Jewish bisexual organizing and community building.<sup>iii</sup> Among the people who attend the monthly Minyan gatherings is a smaller group of close friends who form a day-to-day social community together:

Some of it was through Queer Minyan...that those of us who started it were Jewish and bisexual. So that set a tone. And then, we've really become mishpacha to each other. And we do a lot together...It's primarily a place where people come and connect. And I think it's been very, very powerful. And it's not all Jewish bisexuals. But then outside of that more formal thing, there's a group of us, about ten of us, or a dozen of us, that tend to hang out a lot and feel like family to each other, and we talk about living together pretty seriously....

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<sup>iii</sup> “family” in Yiddish. Aliza’s use of this word reflects the ways that the group not only recreates Jewish religion, but reinforces Yiddish language and culture. According to Aliza, whose father’s Transylvanian Jewish heritage did not include Yiddish, and whose British mother does not speak Yiddish, “... I feel even more Jewish than when I was younger now, because I think I’m around more consciously Jewish Jews. For example, when I was younger I didn’t speak with Yiddish inflection because my parents’ background wasn’t Yiddish speaking...but then I started hanging around Jews with Yiddish-inflected accents, so I find myself using more Yiddishisms and that kind of thing.”

So we're thinking about living together, we pray together, we're sexual together, we do spiritual stuff together, we help each other on practical levels. It's definitely community, I would say. I feel like living in community is really important and I need that and I want that.

A fourth phase in formal Jewish bisexual community building was the creation of Pardes Rimonim, an "earth-based," feminist Jewish ritual group that conducted its first High Holiday services in 1995. Aliza explains that while some people are members of both Queer Minyan and Pardes Rimonim, Pardes is more focused on "striking a new spiritual path" based on the pagan roots of Judaism that truly challenges traditional Judaism.<sup>iv</sup>

Pardes is also dominated by Jewish bisexuals, I started it and I'm a Jewish bisexual, the other people in it-- almost everyone is a Jewish bisexual....A lot of people think it's the same group [as Queer Minyan]. It's not. I mean, there's overlap. But we're not connected with Queer Minyan.

I wanted to find High Holy Day services that I wanted to go to. ((LG)) ..That was really the bottom line, I really wanted to create something that would work for me. ...And...I was sort of gathering people to me who were interested in...the earth-based roots and the pagan roots of Judaism as well as wanting something more radically feminist. You know, not just tinkering with the words here and there. But really...going deeper with transforming Judaism. And we're still in that process...It's gonna be a long, long process. But I feel like we're really biting into it, and not just feminizing Hebrew. And that connects with...the Hebrew goddess, Sarah the priestess, etcetera....So for me it's a different avenue than Queer Minyan, I mean Queer Minyan is more about community than it is about striking a new spiritual path.

Aliza, who is also a ritual leader and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, describes the ways that her Jewish practice is undergirded by a philosophy of inclusivity:

I'm intuitively searching out the practices and customs and rituals that are meaningful to many people, not only Jews. And especially many people who felt outside of religion of any kind...

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<sup>iv</sup> Pardes Rimonim mean Orchard of Pomegranates in Hebrew.

This philosophy is demonstrated by the experience of Raquel, a community historian known in both Latino and Jewish communities for her writing and political organizing. She describes the ways that Pardes Rimonim has offered her a place to link her secular, politically radical Jewish upbringing with her Latina heritage and spirituality. This is captured by her description of Pardes as “a place where...kosher means organic and union label.”

I grew up in a secular Jewish family. And ...at that time I didn't think about it being connected with the spirituality, the religion as much as with the tradition of social justice...feeling collective responsibility for the world.... The stories that I grew up on were about the participation of my family in labor movement struggles...and quite a lineage of particularly strong women in my family.... About 15 or 20 years ago I started getting involved in Jewish feminist stuff around here, and began slowly to start reclaiming some of the spiritual traditions that I had grown up not knowing about. And I now have a very strong sense of how ...radicalism is in fact as much of an expression of Judaism as any of the religious forms of practice, and have been much more interested in reclaiming Jewish ritual and becoming involved in Jewish spiritual community.... [I'm] very active in Pardes Rimonim, sporadically do shabbat with my child, and ...[I'm] more involved.

Raquel spells out her shift over time from a primary focus on her non-Jewish, Latina heritage to reintegrating her Jewish heritage:

It's an interesting time to ask me, cause I'm feeling very Jewish right now. I spent about fifteen years with the focus of my personal and political work on the Latina side, and over the last, oh four, five years, have really been returning to that piece and looking more at the Jewish stuff. I do a lot of workshops on internalized anti-Semitism on college campuses, Jewish radical heritage and the linkages between racism and anti-Semitism.... But I recently decided that I want to have a Bat Mitzvah within Pardes Rimonim, I'm going to be their first...and my new partner is Jewish.... I want my child to grow up there. I want to do a commitment ceremony with my new partner in that community.

She explains why being Jewish was not her priority for many years:

I think that part of why it was less important before had to do with being of mixed heritage, not having been fully claimed by Jewish community, and that where I was directly experiencing stuff the hardest was around being an immigrant Latina. But also...in a society that doesn't look at anti-Semitism that much ...it was a battle to take on first... the piece about racism. When I had really gotten grounded in that...what started happening was I'd be doing workshops, and working with white students on racism issues and talking about how they needed to be grounded in their own identity and I'd go Raquel,, put your money where your mouth is, how come you're not working on the piece about being Jewish. And it was never that I was alienated from it really, but I just didn't feel like it was a priority for a lot of years.

Her status and skills as a national feminist and anti-racist organizer are seen as wisdoms that are relevant to leadership in Pardes Rimonim. Raquel headed part of their 1995 High Holiday Service, bringing her Latina heritage and history into the ceremony:

And I get to lead there. Where else in Jewish spiritual life have I been able to find any place that as a Latina Jew whose mother is Latina ((LG)), so a lot of people don't even think I'm Jewish, who has no religious training whatsoever...who grew up as a Communist, where else can I stand up and lead prayer? So for me its been a real wonderful experience of integration...of being able to validate what I know as part of Jewish tradition.

A captivating storyteller, Raquel invokes her own family history in group spiritual practice in a way that is personally and socially healing. This is accomplished through her re-creation of her "great great great great grandmother's" life and legends. Through the process of myth-making, both a reimagined version of history and the group's current alternative religious and social practices are validated:

My great grandmother's grandmother was the wife of a rabbi in the Ukraine and was a better scholar than her husband and was really pissed off at the sexism of the religion.... [T]he story is that she stood up one day in temple and said to everybody there, "Your God is a man," and walked out. This is in the 1850's in the Ukraine. She was also an arbiter of disputes and...a powerful ...matriarch in her community. Her granddaughter, my great-grandmother, is the one who came [over]....

[G]oing to High Holidays at Pardes Rimoni...[I] really fe[lt] ...for the first time like I had a spiritual community where all of my people were welcome. And not just the Latinos but the anti-religious, Jewish ancestors who were always hanging over my head being critical ((LG)) when I was at other celebrations. And in fact I did a piece on Rosh Hashanah where they had me do one of the alternative Torah portions where it was a piece of my writing that was partly about my ancestors and in which I invoked that great- great- great- great- grandma. And a lot of it has been about my sense of connection with her, and my sense of validation from that community about that being ...central...

It was a profound moment when I stood in the center...we had already had a piece read from Canaanite mythology, and then we had somebody do a Torah thing, and then we had a performance about Sarah and Hagar. And then I got up there...and I could feel that ancestor of mine who walked out of temple 140 years earlier put her hands on my shoulders, it was like welcome back into the temple, I'm bringing you back, it's been enough generations. You know, this sense of (carrying) through something that she had dreamed of - not even necessarily been able to dream of- just sense the absence of. But this was a place where I was seen as not only fully Jewish, but in a way I was getting to be the rabbi that she never got to be. But it was a place where I was asked to read a Torah portion things that were about Latino history, and everyone saw it as relevant to them ...as Jews. That it was a place where my child got to carry...one of the three Torahs ((giggle)) that we had for ourselves there around the room. I just felt like I didn't have to leave anything at the door.

...

Where I could be spiritual in the way that I was spiritual that was fully political, that it was not patriarchal, that it was about being fully in the world...that we got to pick and choose **in community**...for years I had been picking and choosing what I wanted from Judaism, but to be able to do that in community and affirm each other. It felt like it was the first place that I'd found for spiritual practice that I didn't feel like I had to leave anything at the door.

...

And it's so wonderful to be able to tell about my great- great- great- great-grandma to all these people and have her become a figure in people's mythology. To give her retroactive validation that way, make her visible....

[A]nd I think what would she do....walk into this room and look around and see all these guys in skirts and these pierced body parts and ...women kissing each other in the corners, and I'd just take her by the hand and say believe me, this is what you were dreaming of.

Jesse, who also facilitates the Jewish bisexual support group, has been part of organizing efforts to make the area gay and lesbian, reform synagogue more open to bisexual participation and membership. This has involved putting together educational panels, discussion groups, and organizing meetings and negotiations with synagogue leadership.

[I]t's been kind of spotty but basically I've organized or had help organizing several different events....[O]ne ... was a panel presentation of four very very different bisexuals who then sort of allowed themselves to be questioned by a group of people who just showed up. The entire synagogue was invited and quite a few people showed up to get information and ask questions, and a lot of hard questions were asked. And a lot of people really liked that....I've been getting requests to do it again at the synagogue....

When a past officer of the synagogue "came out as bisexual and married a man," this situation brought the debate about bisexuality to the forefront at the synagogue, culminating in a discussion during the fast on Yom Kippur:

[A] very well known member of the synagogue who is a past officer and who was an out lesbian and very involved in the lesbian community ... then came out as bisexual and then married a man and then had a baby....[T]rying to get the community to deal with this created quite a controversial situation. She and I led a discussion on Yom Kippur... in the middle of the day at our synagogue we have between morning and evening services we have discussion groups and so we invited anybody....[S]o basically we were trying to facilitate a discussion about healing the differences between the various orientations. And a lot of people showed up....

According to Jesse, there has always been significant bisexual presence at the synagogue. This participation has generally been invisible, and the synagogue has not included bisexuals in outreach activities or language in the services:

...And then most recently I got a group of people who identify as bisexual and some people who are allies were also invited to a pot luck where we discussed what we would like to have the synagogue do around our issues of visibility. So those are the three big things that I've done, other than also ...doing outreach personally from this Jewish bi group that I cofacilitate, sort of doing outreach to various bisexuals in the synagogue, inviting them to the group or just getting... us visible to each other, at least. And that's been incredibly gratifying for me, and there's hardly a night that I can go to synagogue now or any time that I go to a synagogue event, and there aren't a bunch of us there. And we all know who the other is....[A]t this potluck ...we ...got a little committee actually, wh[ich] is going to do some things around making some demands on the synagogue for some changes in liturgy.

As of July 1996, when I conducted the interviews, the group wanted the word "bisexual" included in a prayer for healing. This prayer is particularly important to the many congregation members who have been touched by illnesses that plague their communities, AIDS and breast cancer. Similar to the struggle to include this term in the Pride Parade in which Jesse also participated, this synagogue group is also pushing for inclusion of transgendered people in liturgy.

So in terms of the liturgy, there's this one prayer called mishuberadh, which is the prayer for healing. It was an innovation of [the gay and lesbian congregation] to actually include it in the siddur, and it specifically says gays and lesbians. And I think it should specifically say gays and lesbians and bisexuals and transgendered people. I think that we're still a ways from that. I've been bringing it up for several years now, and the conversation hasn't really gotten very far.

### **Challenges to the Nuclear Family Model**

Many participants saw non-monogamous beliefs or sexual practices as a way to challenge paradigms of the nuclear family that are a normalized, if only sporadically achieved ideal within dominant United States culture. While questions about non-monogamy were not part of my standard interview and I therefore do not have an

accurate count of how many participants subscribe to non-monogamous values or practice non-monogamy, thirteen respondents stated that they were non-monogamous during the course of interviews.<sup>68</sup> For non-monogamists, these sexual ideals were part of their concept of sexual liberation. One participant linked her non-monogamous beliefs and sexual practice to the Jewish radical tradition of Emma Goldman, again demonstrating the links between participants' sense of Jewishness and bisexuality, and the ways that they utilized Jewish history to bolster their unorthodox sexualities.

Yet there were tensions around non-monogamy within this community, particularly when one person in a primary partnership was disinterested or less interested in having other sexual partners than her partner. One monogamous interviewee was distressed when she and her girlfriend attended community events and she realized that it was considered appropriate for others to flirt with and potentially become sexually involved with them in spite of their status as a couple. A second participant who was older than the average member of the community felt that there was too much focus on sex among some community members, and some negative judgments toward members who made monogamous choices.

A positive effect of this non-monogamous, communal value system was the pressure it relieved for members regarding compulsory procreation. When I started the interviews, I asked how being Jewish and bisexual impacted participants' decisions to have or not have children. This question is of particular interest to me as a woman in my late 30's who will probably not bear children and who stands at the generational end of

two family lines that have not produced any Jewish children. The decision not to have children may be particularly painful for Jewish women who are given the cultural charge to help counteract the losses of mass genocide through the birthing and raising of Jewish children. Since many lesbian and bisexual women do not form nuclear families or bear children, we must grapple with the difficult emotional fallout resulting from our repudiation of cultural expectations.<sup>69</sup> Yet I soon found that many participants were at peace with their decisions about childbearing: by participating in a Jewish community and living in or planning to form communal households or co-housing projects, raising children was theoretically viewed as a communal responsibility rather than one that was tied to a nuclear family model. A woman did not need to physically bear a child in order to perpetuate Jewish culture: this could also be accomplished by assisting mothers with childcare, living with children, and educating children through teaching in synagogues, Havurahs, and other Jewish settings. Many respondents were under thirty and most did not live in a communal environment or have children; thus, much of this ideology of communal childrearing was future oriented and theoretical rather than based in current practice.

### **Class Fluidity**

Just as participants confronted me with a fluid sense of their genders and sexualities, many also offered a mutable sense of class identification. As I conducted interviews with three people who self-identified as coming from poor backgrounds, six from working class backgrounds, and two from the lower middle class, I realized that I

had entered the project with common preconceptions of Jewish class and assumptions that most participants would be from the same middle to upper middle class background that described my own nuclear family origins. This assumption was based on my own unconscious imaginings of similarity with other Jews, and internalization of anti-Semitic stereotypes of uniformly privileged Jews. Instead, I found a more complex picture that helped me interrogate the unfolding of my own family's class origins, including my grandmother who dropped out of school after sixth grade to work in a factory, and my father who started college on a football scholarship. Rather than presenting static pictures of their class identifications, some participants described their early childhood in a family of modest means, their family's climb in income and status, and discrepancies in class identifications and financial expectations between older and younger siblings within the same family. Ari describes elements of poor, middle, and working class identification within her family:

My class background is that I grew up poor when I was a young kid, we were on welfare and food stamps and the whole bit. No furniture in the house, and eviction notices in the mailbox when I'd come home from school, and piles of bills that would go unpaid 'til the last minute, no food in the refrigerator. And then as I got older, my father started working and there was a little bit more money around, so maybe we moved up to working class. And my mom is definitely quite middle class now, she has a well-off boyfriend that she lives with and doesn't pay rent and makes a good salary. It's funny, I'm still here living in the 'hood. (giggle) I'm definitely working class.

Others described the financial impact of divorce, or migration related to the Holocaust, the blacklist, and the Vietnam draft. Many described rapid climbs in income and status from their grandparents' to parents' generation, leaving the participant with a

jumble of class values and expectations described by one as “class vertigo.” Others described their poor and working class backgrounds, declines in family resources as a result of mental illness, and class disparities between divorced parents.

### **Jewish Bisexual Community: Discomforts and Alienations**

A number of interviewees expressed a sense of alienation and lack of belonging in the various forms of Bay Area Jewish bisexual community building. For instance, while Jane discussed the ways that the ‘80’s group became like a family to her, she relates her discomfort with the newer manifestations of Jewish bisexual community. Jane’s perspective suggests the variation among Bay Area women who consider themselves Jewish and bisexual, and the tensions and subtle exclusions that arise. People recounted alienation with community building projects based on factors including their religious affiliation, their age, their class upbringing and identification, and their monogamous values or practices.

Jane is a culturally identified, non-observant Jew. Whenever there are religious references or activities in the Jewish bisexual groups, she feels like she has more in common with her non-observant Christian friends:

...I don’t want to be in that community, it’s not a place where I’m at home.... I think partly it’s because ...in the Jewish bisexual group ... there is more of an awareness of being religious Jews than I want....[F]or example, if I go to a potluck, and you’re not supposed to bring certain kinds of foods because on this holiday we don’t eat those foods, unless somebody specifically tells me I won’t know. Cause I don’t follow that end of it. I’ve seen people do Havdalah service and it’s beautiful, but you’ll never find me doing it. The Jewish religious aspect is not where I’m at.

To an extent where it’s about being religious, I have less in common with those people than I do with my Christian friends who are not religious. And in

some ways I'm more comfortable in an Orthodox Easter ceremony because it's acknowledged that I'm an outsider, it's not my religion, whereas among Jews if they're religious I should be too, and... I'm not. So I don't connect with religious Jews very much or very well....

Jane, who is in her mid-forties, also talks about her estrangement from the group based on her age. She does not "identify very much" with the many members of the bisexual groups who are thirty and under:

I don't relate real well to what I call baby dykes, whether they're bisexual or lesbian, to a lot of the young bisexual people who are under 25.... I'm old enough to be their mother, and that's not to say on an individual level I can't enjoy their company and have some good laughs and a nice hot tub splash, it is to say I find them not as interesting as friends my own age....

Ari, who grew up on welfare in a Northeast ghetto area, expresses her sense of alienation from Jewish and bisexual communities that project largely middle class and privileged values.

A lot of times when I've tried to go to different Jewish community events, or even bisexual events, or Jewish bisexual community events, the vast majority of people that I've met there come from far more middle class or upper middle class backgrounds, and I don't feel a lot in common with them, other than the fact of being Jewish. I tend to feel more comfortable around people of color for the most part. Two of my best friends are Jewish and bisexual, but my experience has been, and I've actually thought about this a lot lately in the queer community... that it tends to be pretty racially stratified, and partly that has to do with class, and partly that just has to do with different cultural values and different experience in the world and who you feel comfortable around because of it.

It's kind of funny, to me going into white, gay, queer places is a really different feeling than going into places in Oakland that are predominantly African American, and to me I'm actually more comfortable most of the time in places that are predominantly African American, Latin. I've gone to different events where the[y] were predominantly white... just hearing people say things that were really not conscious, or just their whole values and way of approaching life and what they talked about and everything. I felt like just stepping into a world that was not mine.

When I asked Mira, a religious Jew who is active in Jewish Renewal, why she was not part of Jewish bisexual spiritual community, she expressed her discomfort with their non-monogamous values and practice. Thus, a rare opportunity for her to find “key aspects of her identity” in combination did not become her choice of community:

I think the issue of non-monogamy and monogamy is really it for me.... [T]he Jewish bisexual community that I was connected with, the one that I would have more likely explored my possibility for community with would have been in that environment, and I don't feel safe there. And since Judaism and bisexuality for me are key aspects of my identity, I would want to be in a place where those were combined or at least expressed or accepted or whatever, and I'm sure that there are other places, no, maybe there aren't, I mean, there is a Jewish bi support group ...and I just haven't gone to it.

Another interviewee who considers herself a lesbian-identified bisexual woman is more likely to spend time in lesbian communities of color. According to Dalia, the bisexual community in general “doesn't have the resources” because of its relatively small size and marginalized status. The fact that it feels too small is related to her African-American identification, and the fact that the relatively small Bay Area bisexual community, as well as the Jewish bi community, is predominantly European American. She sees the potential for this to change as more and more people with bisexual feelings or practice identify as bisexual and join bisexual community:

...As the bisexual community grows, the more feasible it seems...it's still not at a size where I feel that it can give me the level of support that the lesbian community can. It just doesn't have the resources at this point in time. Ultimately, it has the potential to be bigger than the lesbian and gay community, because if every bisexual came out, there has to be at least as many...[M]ost of the bisexuals are hiding out either in the lesbian and gay community ...and calling themselves lesbian and gay, or hiding out in the heterosexual community and calling themselves straight if they call themselves anything at all....But it's not there yet. But as it's been growing, it's come to look more and more feasible as a

community that I could call home and feel that it was giving me what I needed in the sense of community.

Aliza explains that she had been part of lesbian community before she shifted over to Jewish bisexual or queer community. While she appreciates the presence of gay men in Queer Minyan, few lesbians participate. At the time of her interview, most of the women who were part of her circle of friends were in cross-gender primary relationships or dating men. She wishes for more of a “balance” of sexualities within her community:

...[M]y community became more queer rather than more lesbian. Which has its pros and cons....[T]he gay men [in Queer Minyan] are cool...[but] there are not as many lesbians as I would like....Me and Hannah have been talking about this lately, we've been missing lesbians in our lives, or lesbian identified bisexuals, because [she] and I are both that way, we both pretty much put women first, and are with women sexually, and most of our inner circle, most of our community is bisexual but in cross-gender relationships, and more inclined that way in general. Not that they're not as strong feminists as we are or anything, but it's just the energy's a little different.....I just want a balance.

## **V. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

### **Introductions: Multiple and Shifting Identities**

The complexity of the multiple identifications in my sample suggested in the previous discussion of alienation from Jewish bi community emerges in the introductory segment of the focus group. As I previously elaborated in the methodology section, language analysis is a useful methodology for exploring the complexities of identities, including the ways that people reinforce or subvert hegemonic categories of identification, and the ways that people's identifications intermix. A brief description of individual focus group participants is available in Appendix 1. [Will forward later]

In the beginning of the group, I asked participants to tell us a bit about their life journeys as bisexuals and Jews. All participants included information about their Jewish and bisexual identifications in their introductions. Rather than presenting a static picture of their identity histories, participants spoke of their changing ways of identifying as Jewish or bisexual over time. They also discussed their family backgrounds in the introductions, which focused on their Jewish identifications.

In this part of the group, the speakers give a sense of the variety of Jewish experience, and of the importance they attach to placing themselves within that intricacy rather than as "generic" Jews. They introduce their specific placements within Jewish culture, as well as additional identifications that are not specifically Jewish or bisexual and are central to their self-concepts.

Elana: ...[M]y life of identities has always been a journey because I'm of mixed race and bicultural and bilingual and bisexual, it's really been just part of my existence to always have different poles that I navigate between and, you know it took me awhile to come to identify them, but the journey of being a Jew is not unlike my journey of being a bisexual, in that I wasn't always- my Jewish identity has not always been foremost in my life.

Elana begins a discourse of identification as “different ...poles that I navigate between,” a vivid description of the uneasy fit of identity categories that is pursued and echoed in other introductions. She forefronts her mixture of different identities. Like Raquel's discussion of her negotiation of her Jewish and Latina heritage referred to earlier in this paper, Elana also introduces the ways that she has emphasized certain identifications at different points of her life, letting others recede into the background. The importance of her different identities has shifted over time. She terms this movement “navigation” between categories of identification.

This concept of movement between identifications, claiming and reclaiming identifications, or shifting meanings within an identity (e.g. religious vs. spiritual vs. secular Jew) recurs throughout the focus group and many individual interviews. It is also worth noting that the two people who start the introductions are the two women of mixed heritage. This may perhaps indicate that they feel particularly comfortable within this group to explore the complexities of their identifications, or perhaps that their identifications are particularly contested and therefore expressed with more urgency.

Cara: Basically I can really identify with what you're saying in terms of just having a split background, and...having a mother who's Christian, really really poor, and a father who's Jewish and much more... well off and comfortable, and always navigating

between those poles. And it taking me a long time to really positively identify as Jewish because I associated it with classism for a long time...[A]nd, you know of course with bisexuality there's that navigation going on all the time so that's my little introduction. My journey. ((LG))

Cara follows Elana by speaking of her “split background” of class, religion, and sexual orientation. She echoes Elana by describing her mixed background and identities as a navigation between poles. The term “navigation” suggests that living between recognized categories or binaries of identification (Jewish/Protestant; heterosexual/lesbian; poor/wealthy) is not a simple, unconscious process or an automatic reflex, but demands skill and attention to wend one's way through potentially rocky waters. Unlike the “stable” categories of Jewish, Protestant, poor, and rich, bisexuality is presented by both Cara and Elana as an inherently hybrid category, a mixture of lesbian and heterosexual that one must “of course navigate...all the time.”<sup>70</sup> She also alludes to the ways that her Jewish identification has shifted over time, in this case related to her internalization of popular anti-Semitic messages and the disparity between her mother's and father's class status.

Zorra: ...[M]y name's Zorra, and ...I am somebody who grew up in a very Jewish family, both my parents were Jewish, secular Jews, but at the same time very Jewish identified. But as that sort of secular, left- wing Jewish culture has ...dissipated, it belonged to their generation, ...my identity has become sort of vaguer in a Jewish way. I'm also, in addition to being bisexual, I'm bi-coastal ...but still in some ways basically- I really feel like ...a New York Jew, but yet there's no reason why I should feel like that. ((LG))  
....  
...[B]ut also as far as the class thing goes, I'm kind of a mixed class background in that ...my grandparents were all very

poor immigrants and my father, because he was a brilliant academic, would have been straight on his way up into the middle class except ...for the blacklist. So my parents were very poor for a long time.... [W]hen I was about twelve I guess is when we reached middle class status, but it was all sort of shaky for a long time. So ...I kind of feel like I'm both working class and middle class and so that's another mixed identity ...issue.

Zorra then introduces herself as the daughter of left-wing, secular Jews who were subject to the blacklist. She informs us of her uncomfortable place within post- McCarthy era United States Jewish culture, which shifted from a plurality of secular and religious communities to a predominance of synagogue-based, religious groups.<sup>71</sup> Her own Jewish identification is presented as both specific and problematic. She also describes her bi-coastal background and the fluctuation of her family of origin through different economic classes as central to her sense of identity. These descriptions again give a sense of the uneasy fit of constructed identity categories, and the ways that participants see themselves belonging between or fluctuating within categories at different points of their lives.

Hannah: My name's Hannah and wow, it seems to me we have a theme here. I'm bi-citizen-al ... and... bilingual or, maybe occasionally trilingual....  
[M]y being female has actually been ... a pretty good influence on how I negotiate those [Jewish and bisexual identities], and I think... being a young woman in an Orthodox Jewish school where the women had to sit behind a curtain was kind of a big part in- being a woman who wanted to do things other than be a wife was just as queer as wanting to have sex with women. Maybe more so.

Hannah states that her sense of Jewish identity has been largely shaped by her childhood participation in an Orthodox Jewish community. She explains that this specific Jewish background has shaped her experience of her later identification as bisexual, making her desire to sleep with women just another way of stepping outside of a highly confined female role. Her other important identifications are that of US and Canadian citizen, and her gender identification as woman.

Aliza: My name's Aliza...I'm a- my father's from Transylvania, so I'm a Transylvanian Jew. ((LG))  
 ....  
 ...[A]nd ...my parents are both immigrants, and I'm tri-citizenal and my father being a survivor of the Holocaust [had] a big impact on ...what Jewish felt like growing up. You know... I was fed on that sort of terror...and history.

Next, Aliza explains that her own Jewish identity is related to being a child of a Holocaust survivor and immigrants. Her sense of Jewishness is not just based on where she has lived but which parts of the "old country" her Jewish heritage is rooted. She describes herself as a Transylvanian Jew. She also informs us that she has lived in three countries.

Jesse: So, my name is Jesse, and ...I guess major influences in my life have been the Holocaust, but in a very unusual kind of way, because nobody in my immediate family was lost in the Holocaust. Yet being born in '46, I think I got it by osmosis- got the terror.... I never actually heard the Holocaust, I never heard anybody use it until about 1968 or '69....Another ...big influence in my life around this Jewish bisexual stuff was that ...my entire family was actually thinking that I was a middle class person.... [S]o there was ...kind of ricocheting around ...the working cl- you know, having lots of working class friends and getting along with working class people and not getting along with middle class

people, but thinking that I was middle class.... That was a really queer and isolating kind of experience for me....

The last person to introduce himself is Jesse. He describes the impact of growing up in the United States in the immediate post-Holocaust period; this experience has been labeled “secondary Holocaust trauma” in psychological literature.<sup>72</sup> Jesse also declares his working class roots, and the ways that strictly defined class categories have been a source of turmoil for him since he was raised in a family with “upwardly mobile pretensions.”

### **Some Difficulties of Conceptualizing the Intersection of Ethnicity, Race, Religion, and Sexual Orientation**

During the course of interviews, I asked all participants a few questions in an attempt to elicit information about the ways that their ethnic and religious identification as Jews and their sexual identification as bisexuals or queers were integrated in their lives. These questions included:

1. How do you see yourself in society as a bisexual and a Jew?
2. How does being Jewish and bisexual intersect?

An important barrier that I faced in trying to join these two identifications together in one project was the ways that we have been taught in this country to see sexual orientation/preference and ethnicity/race as different, disconnected systems of identification. I became fascinated by the disparity between the conceptual systems that we have been offered, and the very significant ways that these different “systems” blend

and interact in our daily lives and speech. Are ethnicity and sexual orientation completely different conceptual systems, “parallel lines” or separate “boxes” as initially expressed by two women I interviewed? Or are Jewishness and bisexuality identifications that actually have much in common? Does this commonality ease the process whereby a Jew comes to identify as bisexual, and a bisexual identifies as a Jew?

While some respondents had ready answers to questions about the interaction of these identities, many others who had spoken extensively about being bisexual and being Jewish in previous questions had great difficulty when they were asked to join the two concepts together. During the focus group, Elana talked about her initial disorientation when she was asked to put bisexuality and Jewishness together during her prior individual interview.

Elana: .... [W]hen I heard you were doing this project around those two issues, my first instinct is that I thought, oh, I’ve never really thought about this concept and this concept in the same box, I never tried to make the connection, so what is the connection ...why would somebody do a whole thesis on this topic?

Group: ((LG))

Elana: Or ... is this a issue or is this a topic? But as we started to do the interview I became aware that it so happens in my experience- learning more about my Jewish ethnicity, learning more about Jewish ritual ...once that I started to actually come into Jewish community ...for the first time about a year and a half ago, it just turns out that almost everybody that I’ve been meeting in that year and a half is bisexual.

Group: ((LG))

In this dialogue, Elana suggests that her concepts of (bi)sexual orientation and (Jewish) ethnicity reside in separate boxes in her mind, and that she “never tried to make the connection” explicitly before the interview. Therefore, when she considered an entire thesis which would join Jewish and bisexual identities, the thought seemed absurd. This reaction was confirmed by other focus group participants when they laughed along with her remark.

Dalia, a woman of African American and Ashkenazi Jewish descent, answers that her struggles around sexuality and ethnic identity are parallel lines rather than intersecting efforts. This imagery recalls that used by Elana, which describes sexual orientation and ethnicity as residing in separate boxes:

I think the whole issue of identification around my sexuality... is more parallel with my ethnic identity struggles ... I don't see it as directly connected.

In the course of individual interviews, I noticed that organizers, theorists, and writers on Jewish and bisexual issues often had ready answers to questions about the ways that their Jewishness and bisexuality were interconnected. Yet people such as Elana, who were less involved in activism and theorizing around these identifications, were initially uncomfortable with the explicit idea of combining sexuality and ethnicity. I also noted that after this initial period of disorientation, interviewees were able to find common ground or revealed an overlap of identifications in their speech and stories.

The following are other immediate reactions to the question about the intersection of bisexuality and Jewishness excerpted from individual interviews. Emily, a woman who doesn't practice Jewish religion, answers:

I honestly don't see what one has to do with the other. If I were religious, and if I worried a lot about the proscriptions of the religion, and what sort of behaviors I was allowed to engage in, there might be a conflict. But I really don't see the connection.

According to Emily, there would be a negative connection between her bisexuality and her Jewish identity if she were religious; since she is not religiously identified, her sexual orientation and Jewish ethnic identity seem to her to be unrelated.

Jane sees them as two of her many identifications that she doesn't "always connect ...together," such as her identity as a woman and, humorously, a short person. Her inclusion of the reference to her height highlights her perception of the absurdity of expecting that one's various identities, such as sexual orientation and Jewish heritage, would be connected. She explains that she "relate[s] to them [Jewishness and bisexuality] as different."

I know other people feel much more of a connection than I do. I relate to them as different.

I'm also female. Okay? I'm also a short person. All of those figure into my existence, but I don't always connect them together. This is not an area that I connect together very strongly. Except that they're both ways in which I feel pretty "out."

....

To me in my life, they don't relate ...much., except that I have very specific reasons for being the outspoken person I am in both of them. One is for fear of survival, that I feel like silence... gave me a family that I can count on one hand.

Yet Jane then acknowledges that both identifications are “ways in which I feel pretty “out.” They are identities that offer her a choice to be more or less visible, and for which she has chosen to be “out.” She uses the language of alternative sexual orientation to describe her visibility as a Jew by referring to how “out” she is as a Jew, suggesting that her experience of being bisexual helps to frame the terms with which she negotiates her Jewish identification. In a similar way, her experience of growing up with “a family that I can count on one hand,” a Jewish experience of coming from a family that endured the Holocaust, seems to color her experience of being bisexual, her attitudes about sexual closets and silence regarding minoritized sexual orientations, and her decision to be pretty “outspoken” and “out” about her bisexual identity. In fact, in her brief discussion of being “out” and “outspoken,” her choices about negotiating her bisexual and Jewish can hardly be extricated from each other.<sup>v</sup>

Some interviewees insist that both bisexuality and Jewishness are “at the core” of their identities. They reflect on the fact that their circle of friends is mostly Jewish and bisexual, and rejoice in the ways that they have found “home” and finally “fit in.” Having a community where both identifications are central and understood is very important and special to them. The following exchange is excerpted from an interview with Sarah, who was raised in an Orthodox community:

Hinda: How do you see yourself in society as bisexual and a Jew?

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<sup>v</sup> While I asked a question about how “out” Jane felt as a Jew, my question was positioned later in the interview.

Sarah: I'm not sure I know what that means.

Hinda: [Asked the question in a few other ways until she had an answer.]

Sarah: This is the first community I've ever been in, the bisexual Jewish community, that I feel is home. This is home. I feel like I should have grown up here. I am so happy. This is probably the happiest I've ever been in my life. And I'm pretty damn happy. ((LG)) I feel like...these folks come from my blood...I feel like I fit here. So, I feel like there's a lot of room within this community, and in extended family. And ... within my families, my family of choice's extended family, like Aliza's friends from other spheres and Aaron's from other spheres... there is so much room for me to grow into my own authenticity here. And to embrace that, not to be afraid to look at who I am and to show who I am to other folk. There's no hiding here.

After her initial confusion about my question, Sarah expresses her joy in finding home, community and extended family within her circle of Jewish and bisexual friends. Her present community is more of a home and family than any one she has ever been part of, including her family and community of origin. She utilizes corporeal imagery that probably would not come up in a conversation about a bisexual or lesbian community that is not also ethnically based. She also expresses that because her community is an "extended family" which intersects and encompasses larger bisexual and Jewish communities, "there is so much room for me to grow into my own authenticity here."

Liza is a woman of mixed heritage and working class background. She had the following to say about her Jewish and bisexual identities, and the same Jewish bisexual community referred to by Sarah:

I mean, they're definitely separate things and yet they're definitely...really together because ...[they are] at the core of who I am. I never felt so comfortable

around a group of people until I was in a group of Jewish people and then suddenly, like, oh my God, I fit in here I can be myself. And I'm so much like the other women around me, you know? I'm big, I'm strong, I'm smart, I'm loud, you know, all those things that...I always stood out in... that huge, white America.

Liza states that being Jewish and bisexual are “definitely separate things and yet they're definitely...really together because ...at the core of who I am. She echoes Sarah's discussion of the community by referring to the special comfort and ability to “...fit in here I can be myself.” She suggests that some personality characteristics are shared by the Jewish bisexual women she knows; they are unabashedly big, strong, smart, and loud, representing a positive reclamation of negative stereotypes. She also contrasts herself to “that huge, white America,” suggesting that she sees herself as somewhat alienated and outside of white American culture.

Why do we conceptualize minority sexual orientation and ethnic/religious/racial identity as being disconnected, in different boxes, parallel lines without intersection? Why, when we speak about our identities and our lives, does the often unconscious interweaving of these identities become apparent with critical analysis? The “invention” of generic non-heterosexual identities discussed in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, placed these identifications outside of and often in opposition to older ethnic, religious, and racial identities, disavowing a history of man-man and woman-woman love and sexual behavior rooted in ethnic communities. While there has been some recognition and exploration of ethnic lesbian communities and the ways that lesbianism intersects with ethnicity in women's activism and writings within the last two decades, helping to

challenge the separation of lesbian and ethnic identifications in US culture, there has been little public acknowledgment of the ways that bisexuality and ethnicity intersect.<sup>73</sup> Part of this is due to the newness of bisexual identity and the recent formation of bisexual community. Prior to the 1990's, the intersection of ethnicity and sexual identification was mostly experienced on an individual level, outside of community.

The segregation of non-heterosexual and ethnic identifications is also a way to interfere with potential solidarities and alliances between oppressed groups; for example, if the Jewish community sees itself as separate from lesbian or bisexual communities, rather than recognizing that its members, its daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, may share both identifications, the former community is less likely to acknowledge the connection of its fate with non-heterosexual activists and work in coalition with these communities. The segregation of non-heterosexual and ethnic identifications also suggests the ways that ethnicity/race and sexual orientation are not the same type of identifications and cannot be conflated with each other.

We do not speak, think, and live in identity boxes, a disjointed, crazy-making experience of only being bisexual one day and Jewish on another. Our self expression is a weave of perspectives and identifications, moving fluidly from one to another, one point of view influencing and bleeding into the other. The reality of our lives, our speech and the thoughts it represents, transcends the categorical separations that we are offered. Recognition of this phenomenon may challenge assumptions that we must abandon our ethnic affiliations in order to celebrate our minoritized sexual identifications.

### **Expanded Use of the Word “Queer”**

One example of the ways that Jewish and bisexual realities interact in participants’ lives was an expanded use of the word “queer” that recurred in individual interviews and the focus group. In the focus group and in limited individual interviews, the term “queer” was used in an way that linked participants’ outsider status by sexual orientation to other ways that they have felt like outsiders, including their Jewish and class backgrounds.

In Jesse’s introduction, he uses the term “queer” as a signifier of a conglomeration of identifications of “otherness” and resistance against assimilation. He describes his sense of fundamental difference during childhood using the word queer, and paints a picture of a “really queer and isolating experience.” The focus of Jesse’s description is the confusion of growing up in a Jewish family that was working class with “a lot of pretense ... towards upward mobility.” Yet his history of growing up in small towns in a hushed period immediately following the Holocaust, his working class reality and middle class identification, and his attraction to boys and girls from the age of ten all seem to contribute toward making his childhood a “queer” experience in many realms:

Jesse: [T]hinking that I was middle class ...you know that was a really queer and isolating kind of experience for me, and ...then the sexuality stuff, I... was attracted to boys and girls from ... the age of around ten on....

Jesse retroactively declares that he had a sense of being “queer” long before he “came out” with his attractions to other men. That sense of queerness again seems to not only be located in his sexuality, but in a cluster of experiences that made him feel like

“everywhere I walked... people were just looking at me all the time...” This queer experience seems to strike a chord with other group members. One interrupts his speech to tell him that she “really know[s] that feeling.”

Jesse: Well, it's [ ]that assimilationist drive ...to fit in and to be accepted... I think is pretty strong and of course that's a lot of what drove ...the dynamics in my family-

Hannah: Uh huh.

Jesse: was that you need to fit in, and of course when ...you grow up queer, or ... even- I mean I didn't come out until I was 40, but ...there was always this place in me that was very queer. I mean, I... deeply identify with the Jim Morrison song, “When You're a Stranger,” and ...everywhere I walked ....people were just looking at me all the time and-

Zorra: I really know that feeling.

Not only does Jesse express his “queerness” as a sense of being different but, echoing the earlier description of queer politics, he presents it as the impossibility of and resistance against assimilation into middle class, Christian dominated culture. In spite of pressure from parents, siblings, and community to “be like everybody else,” he knew “at the core of [his] soul” that he would remain different.

Hannah uses the term “queer” in yet another way during the focus group. She gives further ethnic specificity to its use, offering yet another definition based on her experience of rebellion against gender roles within an Orthodox Jewish community. Her concept of “queer” encompasses “being a woman who wanted to do things other than be a wife,” making the step toward being sexually intimate with women just one more move away from an Orthodox woman's role. Hannah elaborates on the ways that her sense of

queerness came from challenges of gender roles such as “wanting to learn Talmud, or wanting to play softball.” This personal history changed her experience of coming out as a woman who sleeps with women, transforming it into just another item on “this whole list of things women can’t do.” According to Hannah, when she came out, “I never had any of this ...angstful guilt about... oh my God, I’m having sex with a woman... it was just the same as any of the other stuff.”

The theme of being queer as a radical stance that includes resistance against assimilation as a bisexual and Jewish person (into heterosexual and White, Christian identity and society) was most strongly developed in the individual interview of Shoshana, a disabled student who grew up in the South. Shoshana describes her life as a pursuit of “hav[ing] as big a vision as possible.” For Shoshana, this is accomplished by being attentive toward and embracing her own and other people’s “otherness,” “being queer religiously and sexually, willing to stand out as different”:

A lot of my life is spent looking for wider lenses. Whether it’s been ...in Judaism adding different prayers, or being queer, I want to have as big a vision as possible, and that’s part of being bisexual. I don’t want to limit myself in any way or cut off my experience or invalidate any of my experience, or anyone else’s.

...

For me it’s about broadening the lens, it’s about being really attuned to otherness, being queer religiously and sexually, willing to stand outside as different.

Shoshana’s sense of otherness and solidarity with the “queer” in others stems from her specific experience of not only being a bisexual Jew, but her other identifications as disabled and Southern:

And I also grew up disabled, so that was another way I was Other, and so I was always very in tune with any Other, whether it was a black, or gay, or whatever, the underdog.

....

Well, it sort of goes with the theme of not assimilating. Because I don't assimilate on any level, really. Part of my life comes really strongly from being a Southern Jew, I am different and I know I'm different. I'm going to stick out anyway, so I might as well do it....I'm not afraid to...speak my mind, or to think differently....

Shoshana's multiple minoritized identifications are subsumed in the idea of "queer," an anti-assimilationist stance in solidarity with "underdog" identifications, and a vision of multiculturalism and inclusivity that could be termed a "queer ethics."<sup>74</sup>

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

### **Multiple Identifications: Separate Boxes, Intersection, or a Weave of Identifications?**

The ways that participants' multiple identifications interweave in their lives and speech leads me to question the use of the term "intersectionality" as a description of the confluence of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of identity in individual lives. I find this a more apt concept when looking at the intersection of communities or groups of people, where, for example, gay community and Jewish community will intersect at a point, outside of which point people are either Jewish, gay, but not both.

Yet this vision of intersecting communities is still problematic, since it assumes that communities are built cross-culturally around rather uniform categories of identity including lesbian, gay, and bisexual. In fact, global gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity and community do not exist, since people of many cultures who practice "homosex" either do not form identities according to their sexual practices or form indigenous identities according to culturally specific, non-Western models. These terms reflect contemporary, Westernized notions of sexual identity. For example, in his research on Mexican and Chicano sexuality, Tomas Almaguer demonstrates that "...the Mexican sexual system actually militates against the construction of discernible, discrete 'bisexual' or 'gay' sexual identities because these identities are shaped by and draw upon a different sexual system and foreign discursive practices."<sup>75</sup>

While there is some recognition that ethnic culture influences one's concept of sexuality, making a "Chicana lesbian" or "tortillera" different from an Anglo Saxon lesbian, there has been less recognition of the ways that one's minoritized sexuality may influence one's experience of ethnic culture or the ethnic culture itself. When individuals utilize self-definitions of sexual orientation, their ethnic cultures may be transformed or reinvented in the process, making questionable an assumption that traditional ethnic meanings are grafted onto their queer identities. Thus, sexuality cannot be envisioned as a separate axis extricated from cultural meanings, and vice versa.

The concept of intersectionality is highly problematic in the case of individuals. Its image brings to mind a point where one is both gay and Jewish along longer axes where one identifies as only Jewish or only gay. I find the imagery of interaction or weaves of identifications more apt, and capable of encompassing potential fluctuations in the enactment of one's various identifications, one being emphasized (or secluded) more than another at different times. The area of overlap, of alchemical interaction where one identification is influenced by another in beliefs and speech is very broad, and should be emphasized over the area where identifications act as independent variables.

### **Jewish Bisexual Women of the San Francisco Bay Area: Embracing Complexity?**

Cara: I mean I do, on a visceral level, feel that my queerness is connected to my Jewishness, it's connected to this message I got, you know, very early on from- from my father and my stepmom to ... resist and question.

Group: ((Chatter))

Cara: And to ... continually question and- there's never a resting place,

and there's never an answer, you know? And that... queerness is very much about that. And it's questioning the most fundamental things about, you know, (if he's) a boy or a girl...and who... you're going to get involved with and all that stuff, the things that seem fundamental.

...

Hannah: ... I think this thing about questioning is really key-

Aliza: Mmhm.

Hannah: I mean, even in the most Orthodox, most right-wing of Jewish traditions, questioning is valued.

Cara: =But I also think that whole thing of questioning is really important...it's not hard... to reject a tradition... that doesn't allow you to question. But where there's flexibility, where you can push against the walls of our tradition, and-

Zorra: =yeah.

Aliza: =it can travel from generation to generation.

Zorra: Yeah.

Jesse: ...I have a former roommate who ...grew up Orthodox...in England and Israel...and who is bisexual.... We had a number of discussions ... one of the interesting things that he tossed out was that... our tradition is actually based on ...iconoclasm... going right back to Abraham, who smashed his father's idols. That ...as Jews and bisexuals, ...there's a certain weight, a traditional weight...or authority even... that ... comes with our... presence ...of challenging, questioning the stereotypes and the mold in which many of us were tempted to be placed.

Zorra: So you're saying that gay and straight are like graven images?

Jesse: In a certain kind of way, ...I think that's a really excellent metaphor-

Group: ((LG))

Aliza: You know, I was going to say I think some of the complexity

...feels like some of what (blends) Jewish and bisexual... that brings it together. I think what Hannah is saying is there is in the tradition a kind of embracing of complexity-

Jesse: Wow, wow, thank you.

Group: ((LG))

....

Aliza: And I think that bisexuals are saying...yes, yes, let's embrace it all, let's struggle ...in the same way, you know, as a Jew. And there's also a way I see us really ...taking on very aggressively and recreating the culture- both cultures.

In this exchange toward the end of the focus group, the group members decide that their Jewish heritage and religious legacy offers them an opportunity to “embrace complexity.” The practices of constructing multiple interpretations of Talmud through creating new midrash and the tradition of Talmudic debate, the story of Abraham smashing false idols, and the long history of resistance to oppression forms a religious and traditional buttress for members’ questioning not only of compulsory heterosexuality, but of the binary opposition of homosexuality vs. heterosexuality. These traditions of questioning and debate within Judaism and Jewish culture also enable Jewish bisexuals to “push against the walls of our tradition” rather than reject it, “aggressively...recreating” both Jewish culture and systems of sex, gender, and sexuality.

This questioning is not without its contradictions and incompletions. Some of the main contradictions that I see in this community are a subtle drift toward conformity, including what Elana calls “the slippery slope of heterosexuality,” whereby most community members who were dating or partnered were involved with men at the time of

the study. Since there is a strong stigma against dating bisexually-identified women in the lesbian community, it is hard to know how much of this tendency is due to choices controlled by the study participants, and how much is a result of the unavailability of women partners outside of small, bisexually- and transexually- identified communities.

Another potential problem is the community's valuation of multicultural<sup>76</sup>alism and anti-racist ideology, and the limits placed on its practice by forming Jewish community in a country where the majority of Jews are of middle class, European, Ashkenazi background. The group is exceedingly diverse for an Ashkenazi Jewish community, yet how far can this diversity go? The challenge of advancing a multicultural agenda while aggressively embracing our Jewish identities and reforging Jewish communal ties is one of the critical ones facing progressive Jews in the United States at the end of the 20th Century.

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<sup>1</sup> See Myerhoff, Kugelmass, and Gilad. For a rare ethnographic treatment of gay Jewish community by an Israeli anthropologist, see Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. The use of "Gay" in the title is not misleading, since the book concentrates much more on the gay male congregants than lesbian participants. This focus is partly due to the historic domination of gay men in that synagogue. There have been a number of excellent books on gay and lesbian Jewish themes (see footnote 3), but Shokeid book is the only ethnographic account of gay and lesbian Jewish community in print.

<sup>2</sup> Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994, 274.

<sup>3</sup> For writings on Jewish lesbians, see Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992; Irena Klepfisz, *Dreams of An Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes*. Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1990; and Ellie Bulkin, in *Yours in Struggle*. For new ethnographies about lesbian community, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993; Ellen Lewin, *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender in American Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993; Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993; and Kath Weston, *The Families We Choose*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. Without the groundbreaking work of these, my own study would not exist.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminism," in Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Fraser and Nicholson, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Liz A. Highleyman, "Identity and Ideas: Strategies for Bisexuals," in Naomi Tucker, ed., *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995, p. 82-3.

<sup>8</sup> Tamara Bower, "Bisexual *Womén*, Feminist Politics," in Tucker, Naomi, ed., *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995, p.103.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Howard Eilberg Schwartz in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> For a gendered analysis of the complicity of Jewish men in the creation of an idealized Aryan woman in television, see Susan Kray, "Orientalization of an 'Almost White' Woman: The Interlocking Effects of Race, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity in American Mass Media." For imaginings of the life of Jewish Barbie, see Rhonda Lieberman, "Goys and Dolls (the perception of beauty in society)," *ArtForum*. April 1995 33 (8): 21-2.

<sup>12</sup> In a personal ad in the local paper in Arizona, one "DWPJF" (Divorced, White, Professional, Jewish Female) offers that she is a "non-JAP" in her seven word self-description. Thus, we may define ourselves in reaction to pervasive, negative stereotypes of Jewish women in our search for sexual relationship and partnership.

<sup>13</sup> Howard Eilberg Schwartz, *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, 43.

<sup>16</sup> While we often think of Nazi Germany as the historic center of the discourse of Jewish "impurity," a similar discourse was active in Spain around the time of the Inquisition and brought into the New World by Spanish conquistadores. According to Ana Alonso in her book on the Mexican frontier, "a concern with protecting the 'purity of blood' from Jewish and Moorish 'contamination' was incorporated into the code of honor. Brought into the New World by the Spanish conquerors, an ideology of honor, in which the purity-impurity of blood was central, became the basis for racial distinctions, which evoked the dichotomy of associations between Christian and heathen and differentiated the conquerors from the conquered." (Alonso, 53)

<sup>17</sup> According to an a survey of 332 lesbians on bisexuality conducted by sociologist Paula Rust, "96% said that they would prefer to date a lesbian, and 74% said that their preference to avoid dating bisexual women is very strong. Only 13 lesbians said that they don't care whether the women they date are bisexual or

lesbian. Many are willing to be friends with bisexual women, however.” (Rust, 100) In one interview that I conducted with a woman who identifies as lesbian rather than bisexual yet was previously married to a man and agrees that she is still attracted to men, she explained that her former (Jewish) lesbian partner would not date bisexually-identified women because she didn’t want her mouth near “one drop of sperm.”

<sup>18</sup> In his book **Socialism of Fools**, Michael Lerner discusses the non-economic form of anti-Semitism in the contemporary U.S.:

Jewish oppression did not take this form [economic oppression]. Not that all Jews have “made it.” ...the fact is that there are Jews who are poor, many Jews who are part of the working class, and many who are struggling in lower- or middle-income jobs...But while not all Jews are affluent, Jews are not economically oppressed *as Jews*- that is, their Jewishness is not a primary factor in preventing their economic mobility.

For an insightful discussion of contemporary anti-Semitism, see Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, “To Be a Radical Jew in the Late 20th Century,” in **The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, and Resistance**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> According to Dinnerstein’s book **Anti-Semitism in America**, of Jews who married from 1985 to 1990, 43% married Jews and 52% married non-Jews. Leonard Dinnerstein, **Antisemitism in America**. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 241.

<sup>20</sup> The overtly non-monogamous participants in the study were very aware of safer sex practices and creative uses of latex, condoms, and dental dams. One interviewee worked on the Safer Sex Slut Team for a year; this group was led by national bisexual activist Lani Ka’ahumanu and did outreach in bars, sex clubs and other sites, explicitly and playfully demonstrating safer sex techniques.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Pramaggiore and Donald E. Hall, eds., **RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire**. New York: New York University Press, 1996, 292.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Douglas, **Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo**. London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, 3.

<sup>23</sup> For a useful discussion of the ways that Jews have been used by the capitalist class, see Michael Lerner. **The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism on the Left**. Oakland: Tikkun Books, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> While this discussion relies on the generality that most U.S. Jews are part of the middle class, there is also a significant and highly invisible segment of the Jewish population who are working class or poor, or who come from these backgrounds. I was surprised by the wide range of class backgrounds that were represented in the community that I studied. For writings on Jewish women and class, see Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, “Jews, Class, Color, and the Cost of Whiteness,” in **The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, and Resistance**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992; tova, “Mir zayen do!/We are Here! Some Notes on Being a Working-Class Jewish Lesbian,” **Journal of Women and Religion** v12 (Winter 1993): 40-46; Felice Yeskel, “Caught Between Two Cultures (Working Class Versus Middle Class),” **Journal of Women and Religion** v12 (Winter 1993): 16-20; the regular working class column in issues of **Bridges, A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Their Friends**, and volume 3 No. 1 that featured the writings of poor and working class women.

<sup>25</sup> Clausen in Marjorie Garber, **Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life**. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995, 154.

<sup>26</sup> The popular anthology **Bi Any Other Name** was edited by Bay Area bisexual activists Lani Ka’ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, and draws from the life stories, energies, and ideas of many Bay Area bisexuals, including participants in this study.

<sup>27</sup> In an interview conducted by Naomi Tucker, Jewish bisexual activist David Lourea speaks of an earlier bisexual movement in which he participated. He explains that the San Francisco Sex Information Center (SFSI), formed in the ‘70’s, “was a haven, the primary community in San Francisco for people who were bisexual.” In 1975, six years after the Stonewall riots, Lourea and 21 others formed the Bi Center in San Francisco. “We were a social and political organization fighting for recognition within the gay community,

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working on the concept of ‘make love, not war.’” He terms the late ‘60’s and early ‘70’s the “Sexual Freedom Movement,” a time when “swingers were exploring their sexuality and challenging the stereotypes within the context of group sex scenes. In the process, many people began to open up to bisexuality.” (Delourea in Naomi Tucker, pp. 48-49.)

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent article on the ways in which gender and bisexuality interact, see Dallas Denny and Jamison Green, “Gender Identity and Bisexuality,” in **Bisexuality: the Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority**. This article also offers helpful definitions of terms including intersexuality, transgenderist, transexual, sex reassignment, and “gender dysphoria” from a politically informed perspective.

<sup>29</sup> I had a related difficulty writing about Jewishness and bisexuality without dividing them from each other, for example, discussing the ways that someone is Jewish and then bisexual sequentially rather than as inseparable phenomena.

<sup>30</sup> Two members of the study identified themselves as actively involved in this political struggle during the course of their interviews

<sup>31</sup> This explanation of Avi’s choices should not be taken to mean that I or other Jewish bisexuals am against transsexual surgery or other medical interventions on cultural or religious grounds. This is just an example of Avi’s personal choice; other Bay Area Jewish bisexuals and their friends have made choices to undergo this surgical procedure and hormone treatment with full support for these choices. In fact, according to Emily, bisexual communities are often seen as particularly safe places for transgendered people. She explains that part of the reason why she became involved in a bisexual support group on campus was because “I ...thought being bi, they might have more openness to somebody like me, which turned out to be true. And I even thought I might be more likely to find partners there (giggle).”

<sup>32</sup> I was confronted by these outer boundaries of Jewish possibility when I attended a Jewish women’s group. One woman joined us based on recurring dreams where her deceased father chanted Hebrew words from a book. She decided that her father was a hidden Jew, and she wished to identify as Jewish. While this story did make many group members uncomfortable and there was some unspoken reluctance to consider her Jewish, she was not challenged on her right to attend the group. The fuzzy boundaries of Jewish religion and heritage made it difficult for us to overtly deny her Jewish identification.

<sup>33</sup> Shane Phelan discusses the dilemma of white lesbian appropriation of Anzaldua’s theories of “the new mestiza” in her book **Getting Specific** (pp. 57- 75.) Her argument that “the simple analogy” between lesbians and the new mestiza is “culturally imperialist” may be extended to my discussion of bisexual, Ashkenazi Jews.

<sup>34</sup> Kennedy and Davis, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Kennedy and Davis, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Shane Phelan, **Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Phelan, 87-88.

<sup>38</sup> According to Naomi Tucker in her introduction to the anthology **Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions**, BiPOL is a bisexual political action group that formed in the Bay Area in 1983. For an exploration of Jewish bisexual organizations, see the section of this paper entitled “Bay Area Jewish Bisexual Communit[ies]: Some Organizational History Since the 1980’s.” See Appendix I for the demographics of interviewee participation in various Jewish congregations, havurahs and secular groups.

<sup>39</sup> For further information about Bay Area Jewish bisexual community formation, see the section of this paper entitled “Bay Area Jewish Bisexual Communit[ies]: Some Organizational History Since the 1980’s.”

<sup>40</sup> Phelan, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Alonso, Ana Maria, “The Effects of Truth: Re-presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community.” **Journal of Historical Sociology** I (1): 51.

<sup>42</sup> Kobena Mercer, “Dark & Lovely: Black Gay Image Making,” in Mercer, Kobena, **Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies**. New York: Routledge, 1994, 226.

<sup>43</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," in Mercer, Kobena, **Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies**. New York: Routledge, 1994, 257.

<sup>44</sup> Mercer, 258.

<sup>45</sup> For discussions of the reclamation of negative, gendered Jewish stereotypes, see Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "To Be a Radical Jew in America," in **The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, and Resistance**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992 ; and Daniel Boyarin, "Masada or Yavneh? Gender and the Arts of Jewish Resistance," in **Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies**. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, Eds., Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997..

<sup>46</sup> I use the pronoun "she" because Toun explained that people usually attribute her to the female gender; I do not know what pronoun she chooses to use. I hope that this uncertainty will be seen more as a failure of language than a serious oversight on my part.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Kray wrote about the idea of Jews, and in particular Jewish women, as "almost white," an important theoretical concept which allows us to position Ashkenazi Jewish women somewhere between white women and women of color. Her concept echoes an earlier piece by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Jews, Class, Color, and the Cost of Whiteness," in **The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, and Resistance**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992. In this piece, Kaye/Kantrowitz explores U.S. Jewishness by borrowing the racial categories of apartheid.

<sup>48</sup> For excellent commentaries on the political issues facing Mizrahi Jews in Israel, see Ella Shohat's powerful essay "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims" and the relevant writings of anthropologist Smadar Lavie. My own thinking about the importance of including Jewish women of color in discussions of Jewish community issues was spurred by a fellow Women's Studies student, Rinat, and deepened by the aforementioned writings. A Mizrahi Jewish woman of Israeli background, Shohat insistently reminds Jewish thinkers and scholars that we do a disservice to the international "community" of Jewish women when we place Ashkenazi Jews at the center of our thinking about Jewish culture. She delineates the oppression of the Mizrahi Jewish majority by the Ashkenazi Jewish minority in Israel, and the ways that the state of Israel and philosophy of Zionism has undermined potential solidarities between Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian Arabs who may have more cultural commonalities than exist between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews.

Unfortunately, this struggle over the representation of Jewish culture is not adequately portrayed in my thesis due to my inability to recruit any Jews of Mizrahi or Sephardic background to interview in spite of their presence in Jewish bisexual circles. I hope that this silence is a low yet insistent hum beneath our words, a testimony not only to the low percentage of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews living in the United States, but to their particular invisibility within and isolation from majority Ashkenazi Jewish religious and cultural networks in this country.

<sup>49</sup> Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," **Social Text** 19/20 (Fall 1988): 1-33.

<sup>50</sup> Lynn Gottlieb, **She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of Renewed Judaism**. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

<sup>51</sup> Colin J. Williams, Martin S. Weinberg and Douglas W. Pryor, **Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality**. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> "Earth-based" is a term used in pagan circles.

<sup>53</sup> Behar, Ruth and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., **Women Writing Culture**, California: University of California Press, 1995.

<sup>54</sup> Smadar Lavie, "Border Poets: Translating By Dialogues," in **Women Writing Culture**, Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., California: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 412-27.

<sup>55</sup> See Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., **Nice Jewish Girls**; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, **The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1992; Irena Klepfisz, **Dreams of An Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes**. Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1990; Ellie Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith, **Yours in Struggle**:

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**Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism.** New York: Long Haul Press, 1984; and Clare Kinberg, Managing Editor, **Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends.**

<sup>56</sup> Marshall, 115.

<sup>57</sup> Maynard and Purvis, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Kennedy and Davis, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Miranda Joseph, co-chair of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Committee at the University of Arizona, helped me clarify this problem in personal communication.

<sup>60</sup> Marshall, 116.

<sup>61</sup> The term "communal trauma" is borrowed from psychologist Barbara Hammer's article "Anti-Semitism as Trauma: A Theory of Jewish Communal Trauma Response," in **Jewish Women Speak Out: Expanding the Boundaries of Psychology**, eds. Kayla Weiner and Arinna Moon, Seattle, WA: Canopy Press, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Gold, 2. For information on how to organize a focus group for research purposes, see Richard Krueger, **Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research.** CA: Sage, 1988.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Gal, "Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender," in Michaela di Leonardo, **Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge.** California: University of California Press, 1991, 189.

<sup>64</sup> Gal, 177.

<sup>65</sup> Mizrahi Jews are Jews of Arab or Middle Eastern descent.

<sup>66</sup> See Judith Plaskow, **Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective.** New York: Harper and Row, 1990; and the books of Savina Teubal.

<sup>67</sup> David Lourea, who was spoken of lovingly by a number of participants, died of AIDS in 1993. Jewish bisexual activist Naomi Tucker said the following about him in an introduction to an interview she conducted with him:

David's contributions to the world were numerous- from pioneering bisexual activism in the 1970s, to developing some of the earliest safer sex information, to healing people as a therapist. And David touched my life...a kindred spirit who also juggled roles in counseling, teaching, bisexual activism, and Jewish organizing. Always true to himself and his vision of social justice, he wore all of these hats and then some. His activism never ceased for a moment.

Naomi Tucker, "Bay Area Bisexual History: An Interview with David Lourea," in **Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions**, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Two respondents also stated that they were celibate, which represents another form of challenge to the nuclear family model. A minority of participants expressed discomfort with the culture of non-monogamy of a number of community leaders.

<sup>69</sup> For a classic essay on the difficulties of the decision for a Jewish lesbian not to have children, see Irena Klepfisz, "Women without Children/Women without Families/Women Alone" in **Dreams of An Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes.** Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1990, pp. 3-14. Klepfisz discusses this question from the particular point of view of "an only child, a survivor of World War II," whose mother was her only other surviving family after the Holocaust. (11)

<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of the concept of cultural hybridity, see Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817," in **The Location of Culture.** London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>71</sup> For a classic discussion on the erosion of secular, Ashkenazi Jewish culture and the problems that ensue in the construction of contemporary Jewish identities, see Irena Klepfisz, "Secular Jewish Identity: *Yiddishkeit* in America" in **Dreams of An Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes.** Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1990.

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<sup>72</sup> Kayla Miriyam Weiner, "Survivors Nonetheless: Trauma in Women Not Directly Involved With the Holocaust," in Kayla Weiner and Arinna Moon, **Jewish Women Speak Out: Expanding the Boundaries of Psychology**. Seattle, WA: Canopy Press, 1995.

<sup>73</sup> For books that explore the interaction of lesbianism and ethnic or racial identity, see Gloria Anzaldua, **Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza**. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987; Evelyn Torton Beck, ed.), **Nice Jewish Girls A Lesbian Anthology**. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989;; and Giti Thadani, **Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India**. London: Cassell, 1996. For a rare piece on the interaction of ethnicity and bisexuality, see Paula Rust, "Managing Multiple Identities: Diversity Among Bisexual Women and Men" in the excellent anthology **Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority**, ed. Beth Firestein Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996.

<sup>74</sup> For a different discussion of "queer ethics," see Daumer, Elizabeth, "Queer Ethics; or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics," *Hypatia* Vol. 7, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 91-105. In this playful essay, the author attempts to develop a framework for "an ethics dedicated to creating values that would nourish the queer in all of us and help us- whether we are male or female, gay- or lesbian identified, bisexual heterosexual, or undecided- separate from straightness..." (92)

<sup>7575</sup> Tomas Almaguer, "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior," in **The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader**. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, eds., New York: Routledge, 262.

## APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATIONS

1. / /  
/ / overlap
2. underline emphasis, louder
3. ... excised material.
4. ((LG)) laughter or other expression without words.
5. comma, pause, or as in written speech
6. dash- interrupted speech, self-correction.
7. ( ) unintelligible section
8. (blah, blah) unclear speech
9. {knock} background and non-verbal noises.
10. = latching, when a speaker follows on the tail of another speaker's  
turn without pause.

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

31 interviewees

**Jewish group affiliation (current)\***

Reform	
Shahar Zahav	3
Renewal:	
Queer Minyan	11
Pardes Rimonim	5
Kehilla	3
Other Renewal	1
Orthodox	1
BiPol Support Group	3
none	10
	<hr/>
	37

**Religious affiliation (childhood; includes schooling)**

Reform	3
non-observant	7
Catholic	2
Orthodox	4
secular, left-wing	3
Reconstructionist	1
Conservative	2
Unitarian	1
	<hr/>
	23

**Mixed heritage**

Mother Jewish	2
Father Jewish	6
Parent of Jewish children	1
	9

\*(This includes two or more identifications for 1 individual)

**Geographic Origin\***

Greater NY	11
Northeast, other	5
South	1
California	4
West, other	2
Midwest	2
Southeast	1
Canada	1
Israel	2
South Africa	1
Caribbean	1
multiple moves	2

**Class Background\***

poor	3
working class	6
lower middle class	2
middle class	9
upper middle class	6
inherited wealth	1
<u>declined to answer</u>	<u>1</u>
	28

**Employment\***

educator	2
teacher	1
teacher's aide	1
writer	2
college student	1
graduate student	5
erotic massage	1
sex worker	1
psychologist	3
counselor	1
social worker	3
scientist	2
hospital worker, paraprofessional	1

**Employment, continued**

financial district	1
office manager	1
Jewish communal worker	1
artist	1
self-employed	1
intermittent employment	1
unemployed	1
temporary disability	2

**Age**

20-24	2
25-29	8
30-34	8
35-39	2
40-44	6
45-49	2
50-54	1
55-59	1
60-64	0
65-69	1
has permanent disability	3
legally married	2



16. How important is it to you to have a Jewish partner? A bisexual partner? A lesbian partner? A Jewish bisexual partner?

17. Do you feel you have Jewish, bisexual, or Jewish bisexual community in your life? What does this community mean to you?

18. Is there anything else you would like to say?

#### APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP MEMBER PROFILES

The participants in the focus group were as follows:

1. Elana- mid-20's, mixed heritage Latina and Ashkenazi Jew, working class background. Active in Jewish Renewal.
2. Jesse - early 50's, Ashkenazi Jewish parents, working class background, leader in Jewish bisexual organizing, works in the financial district. Active in gay and lesbian reform synagogue.
3. Hannah- mid-20's, Ashkenazi Jewish parents, graduate student, upper middle class background. Active in Jewish Renewal.
4. Aliza- mid-30's, formerly lesbian identified, middle class background, leader in Jewish queer organizing and Jewish feminist ritual. Co-founder of two Jewish Renewal groups.
5. Cara- early 20's, daughter of a poor, Christian mother and middle class Ashkenazi Jewish father. Active in Jewish Renewal Havurah.
6. Zorra- early 40's, Ashkenazi Jewish parents, middle class background, student. Unaffiliated with a religious group.

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