

The negotiation of closetable identities: A narrative analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer Jewish identity¹

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Abstract

We focused on the closetable identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer (LGBTQ) Jewish Americans through the use of identity narratives. Thirty-one people participated in narrative interviews about their identity negotiation decisions. The Communication Theory of Identity framed the inquiry by showing how the interpenetrations of identity layers and critical elements created changes and conflict in participants' lives that necessitated negotiating their LGBTQ Jewish identity. Analyses revealed conflicts related to self-perception, experiences, perceptions of others, and enactments of being LGBTQ and Jewish, many of which revolved around issues of alienation. The potential for identity gaps to emerge and produce largely negative outcomes was ever present in their lives as they sought supportive communities for one or both identity elements. This study has implications for individual and community support of multiple and stigmatized identities.

Keywords

communication theory of identity (CTI), identity, lesbian bisexual gay transgendered queer (LBGTQ), qualitative methods, self-disclosure, sexuality

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“I’m not interested in dividing my identity into different parts, like I’ll be a pervy dyke but not a Jew when I go out dancing, and I’ll be a devout Jew but not queer when I’m in shul.” (Lamm, 2000, p. 352)

Identity management processes are especially salient for lesbian gay bisexual transgendered queer (LGBTQ)² Jewish Americans because being Jewish and a sexual minority both are closetable or concealable identities (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Herek, 1998). These identities are not easily ascribable and typically become known through a disclosure process that allows or denies others access to this private information (Faulkner & Hecht, 2006). While LGBTQ Jewish Americans are not a monolithic group and are influenced by factors such as gender, class, race, geography, and religious identity, LGBTQ Jews “share a distinct sensibility” and often experience themselves and their relationships as “doubly other” because of the twin threats of negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals and anti-Semitism (Balka & Rose, 1989). Unlike some other identities (e.g., sex) that people often feel confident ascribing to others (even if mistakenly), LGBTQ Jewish American identity is inextricably entwined in a negotiation management process that involves the risk of stigma and feelings of otherness. Experiencing stigma, prejudice, and discrimination can cause minority stress and expectations of rejection and having to conceal identity (Knobloch & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010; Meyer, 2003). Schnoor (2003), for example, in a study of identity construction among gay Jewish men in Toronto, discovered that men’s perceptions of stigmatization within the community made it difficult to construct a Jewish identity that was personally meaningful.

These closetable identities then provide a unique opportunity to understand the nuances of identity negotiation processes at the intersection of multiple stigmatized identities (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005). The extent to which LGBTQ Jewish Americans conceal or reveal their identities, find supportive communities, experience pressure to leave their LGBTQ and/or Jewish communities, and how they experience themselves and their relationships varies according to factors such as self-definition and regard, social support, how they want others to regard them and how they feel their actions represent themselves (Golden, Niles, & Hecht, 1998; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Shneer & Aviv, 2002). For example, all but one gay Jewish man in Coyle and Rafalin’s (2000) phenomenological study in Britain experienced a conflict between being gay and Jewish. Most of their participants perceived the two identities to be incompatible because of negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals within Judaism and a pressure for the continuation of the Jewish people through marriage and parenting. This led these men to use strategies such as compartmentalization of Jewish and gay identities and changing the salience of being Jewish to manage identity threats. The closetable nature of being LGBTQ and Jewish and the potential for stigmatization and stress led us to ask the following research questions. (1) How do individuals feel about being LGBTQ and Jewish? (2) How do LGBTQ Jewish Americans negotiate multiple, and at times, competing or conflicting identities within close relationships? (3) How does being LGBTQ and Jewish influence personal and relational identities and close relationships? (4) Why do LGBTQ Jewish Americans decide to conceal or reveal their identities?

These research questions guide our examination of the communication processes of LGBTQ Jewish Americans' identity negotiation through an examination of identity narratives. We use the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as a conceptual framework that focuses on identity negotiation as a layered process before reviewing literature on being Jewish and LGBTQ. We then argue a narrative approach is valuable for understanding identity negotiation processes, particularly where conflict and competition exist, in order to explore what influences LGBTQ Jewish individuals' experiences of personal, relational, and community alienation and acceptance.

Communication theory of identity

In order to focus on interaction and relationships as central in the process of identity formation and negotiation, we use the CTI as a theoretical framework for the examination of LGBTQ Jewish identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2004). This study adds to CTI and the identity negotiation literature with a narrative investigation of the processes through which LGBTQ Jewish Americans decide to reveal or conceal their Jewish and sexual minority identities and the relationship between multiple identities given the relational circumstances that influence such decisions. CTI considers identity to consist of four layers or frames: (1) personal; (2) enacted; (3) relational; (4) communal in which messages are exchanged (Faulkner & Hecht, 2006). The personal layer references identity as an individual characteristic (i.e., self-concept, self-image, preferred identity label) while the *enacted layer* of identity is embodied in social interactions through an individual's presentation of identity. For example, an individual's view of her/himself (e.g., I am Jewish, I am a lesbian) falls within the personal layer while the expression of those attributes is the enactment of identity (e.g., attending a lesbian Seder). The *relationship layer* frames aspects of identity that are invested in social and personal relationships, as well as the relationships among various identities, including how one contends with ascriptions that others make about one's identities. For example, individuals may see themselves as members of a certain social network (e.g., LGBTQ Synagogue) in relation to a particular other (e.g., girl/boyfriend, Rabbi/congregation member) and experience juxtaposition in their identities (e.g., Jewish and bisexual). Finally, the *communal layer* references the idea of identity as group-based identification. CTI argues that communities hold collective identities in addition to individual identities. For example, these different conceptions of Jewish identity can be seen in a study on how a communal representation of Jewish Americans in the television show *Northern Exposure* influenced participants' personal, enacted and relational identities (Hecht et al., 2002). The common assumption that all Jews are New Yorkers, expressed at various times during the series, bothered some participants in the study because they felt that many people ascribe a "New York" identity to them because they are Jewish. Some even felt "less Jewish" because they were not from New York. The interpenetration of communal identity (media messages in which only New York Jews are shown) with the relational identity (ascription by others) influenced personal identity (feeling less Jewish).

This layered approach to identity allows a multi-faceted and process oriented understanding because at any one time all four frames are present and, in a sense, a part of one another. Feminist intersectionality theory as articulated by McCall (2005) offers a way of

viewing the intersection of layers by focusing attention on the intra-categorical, those places where minority sexual and religious identities cross boundaries. We argue that the process of identity management is more pervasive than ethnic or social identities and a more complex process, given the potential gaps between and among various layers. The study of LGBTQ and Jewish identity provides a unique opportunity to examine the identity management of closetable identities as well as unpacking the complex, dialectical relationships and border crossings between and among the interpenetrated identity layers in CTI. Identity negotiation processes point to areas where individuals feel conflict because of identity gaps, those places where their self-concepts and avowed identities conflict with others' perception and understanding creating dissonance and a need to negotiate the competing and conflicting identities. We see the matching or mismatching of these layers as being in dialectical tension with each other. This view has given rise to a line of research extending CTI by focusing on the dialectical tensions between and among layers, labeled identity gaps, that have provided a powerful explanatory construct for outcomes as diverse as understanding and depression (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). The implications of these gaps range from alienation to depression to lack of choice in identity enactments (Jung et al., 2007). For example, Hecht and Faulkner's (2000) study of Jewish Americans reveals how the interplay between personal (whether Jewish identity was central or peripheral) and relational (whether the person was a stranger, acquaintance or friend) levels of identity affected if, how, when, and to whom they chose to reveal their Jewishness. Further, participants in the study described how they dealt with their personal self-concepts as Jews at the same time they contended with others' perceptions of their Jewishness.

LGBTQ Jewish identity

Jewish identity constitutes an ethnic and cultural identity, as well as a religious one and includes "the process of assent when people determine for themselves what strategies they will use to define their Jewishness" (Golden et al., 1998, p. 63). One can answer the question, "who is a Jew?" by using the matrilineal principle where one's mother must be Jewish, the nonlinear principle of having one Jewish parent and being raised Jewish, and/or relying on cultural indicators such as gastronomy, traditional family and being involved in a community with the rituals, ceremonies and frame of reference/communal identity (Edelman, 2000; Golden et al., 1998). Some, like Edelman (2000, p. 40), consider Jewish identity as contingent on community participation.

"To be Jewish is to be active, at least to some extent, in the community. Even though the religious law defines Jewishness based on the mother's religion, it is clear that actual affiliation goes far beyond that definition."

Others claim Jewish identity as more than just a religious designation (e.g., Hornreich, 2001). Amyot and Sigelman (1996) used a regression model based on the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey to suggest that Judaism constitutes a central role in the definition and maintenance of a Jewish identity, though interpersonal relationships with other Jews also played an important role. They argue that for assimilated Jews, identity is ethnic rather

than religious. Jervis (2000) states that “my Jewish identity has very little to do with religion, organized or otherwise. I’m an ethnic Jew of a very specific variety: a godless, New York City-raised, neurotic middle-class girl from a solidly liberal Democrat family” (p. 65). In the present study, we explore these meanings of being Jewish through narrative interviews that query participants’ identification with Jewish communities, religious affiliation, observed rituals and personal conceptions of what being Jewish means.

Many LGBTQ Jews experience their identities as a bifurcated rather than integrated relationship; individuals may have to choose between being Jewish or LGBTQ depending on the kind of LGBTQ and/or Jewish community they experience (Rose & Balka, 2002; Shneer & Aviv, 2002). There are some reverent and LGBTQ Jews who believe that Jewish law condemns homosexuality as something contrary to natural order and see it as a rejection of the covenant between God and the Jews (Orbach, 1975–76). Among Conservative and Orthodox congregations, where these beliefs tend to be held more frequently, it is often imperative to hide being LGBTQ in order to remain a part of the Jewish community (e.g., Anonymous, 2001; Anonymous, 2002). Some individuals experience pressure to hide being LGBTQ in their Jewish communities because of family embarrassment and concern and are dissuaded from participating in communal prayers (e.g., Wolfman, 2002). Schnoor and Weinfeld (2005) examined the prevalence of Jewish “out-marrying” in a sample of gay Jewish men and the 2001 Canadian Census data to discover the rate to be 89% compared to a rate of 30% for Canadian heterosexual Jews. Two-thirds of participants, however, expressed a desire for a long-term relational partner to be Jewish because of a desire for similar cultural values, fear of anti-Semitism, and parental wishes for a Jewish pairing regardless of a partner’s sex. The authors conclude that the rejection of gay identity in the Jewish community and general anti-Jewish sentiment in society can lead to LGBTQ Jews internalizing negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals and anti-Semitism and expressing this lack of self-acceptance, in part, through inter-group partnering. These findings are a concern because the family is often a “central site of Jewish tradition and culture” (see Wolfman, 2002, p. 163).

Method

A narrative approach to the examination of LGBTQ Jewish American identities allows an examination of how participants make sense of and enact their identities, culture, and social world (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Narratives provide access to individuals’ interpretations of their identities, culture and social worlds; accounts of experiences show us individuals’ actual thoughts-in-context about LGBTQ and Jewish identity because human thought, behavior, and experiences are at least partially based in narratives (McAdams, 1993). Much of our everyday conversation can be considered “storytelling of one form or another” (McAdams, 1993, p. 28) making narrative an important cognitive form and communication process. The stories that individuals tell provide coherence to their experiences and often predominate in their communication with others (Lieblich et al., 1998). In many cases individuals create narratives of particular life experiences where there has been a breach between “ideal and real, self and society” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). Thus, stories are self-representations; we tell others stories that reflect how we want to be seen and how we see ourselves, which makes

narrative analysis a useful method for the study of identities, specifically the negotiation of multiple and stigmatized identities (Riessman, 2004).

Participants

The participants ranged in age from 19 to 73 (mode = 37, median = 44, mean = 42.7). Seven participants had children. Fifteen participants identified as lesbian, 10 as gay, four identified as bisexual (three women, one man), one as bisexual lesbian and one identified as transgender lesbian. The participants were highly educated; seven had an MA, eight had or were working toward a PhD, one had a PsyD, eight had a BA/BS/BFA, while the remaining six participants had some college or graduate school. The majority of participants grew up in Pennsylvania (10), New York (6) and New Jersey (8); other areas included Wisconsin, Washington DC, California, Utah, Delaware, Maryland, and Kentucky. The majority also reported being affiliated when growing up with Conservative (11) and Reform Synagogues (10), while one participant was affiliated with Modern Orthodox, one with Orthodox, and one with Reform and Conservative Synagogues. Current affiliation with Synagogues was different with nine participants reporting not being affiliated, eight affiliated with a Havurah, while seven participants were affiliated with Reform, two with Conservative, and four with Reconstructionist Synagogues. Most participants attended Synagogue one to three times a month (10), and for events (eight) and the High Holidays (eight).

Procedures

The study was conducted in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Participants for the study were recruited from multiple sources; Messages were posted on LGBTQ community list serve and not list server[k4] in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey and J-BAGL (a Jewish gay, lesbian, and bisexual undergraduate association). The first author also went to events in local communities (e.g., public lectures, J-BAGL meetings) to recruit participants and gain access and trust. Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, central New Jersey, and New York City offer an urban population, whereas central Pennsylvania is composed of smaller towns with proportionally few Jewish individuals. The New York area has many Jewish and openly LGBTQ individuals providing a balance of social situations in the study. Non-student populations were sought through a purposive snowball sampling procedure. Participants chose their own identity labels. To ensure validity, we sampled participants who possessed a range of experiences, were willing to discuss their experiences, and had reflected on them (Morse, 1992). This type of sampling is beneficial for hard to reach populations and for topics that are considered private, such as the present study.

When an individual expressed interest, the first author set up meeting times and places that were convenient and desired by the participants through phone calls and e-mail exchanges. Interviews took place in participants' homes, diners and offices, places of comfort, which are important criterion when selecting interview sites (Morse, 1992). Confidentiality was ensured and informed consent obtained before interviews began. Interviews averaged 90 minutes in length (range 60–120 minutes) and were audiotaped. Participants received their transcripts when transcription was complete and were asked

to correct and respond to them. The first author interviewed a total of 31 with recruitment ceasing once saturation was reached, that is when no new information was obtained and participants expressed similar themes (Glaser 1978; Morse, 1992).

Interview guide

A focused yet flexible interview guide was used during the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As suggested by Reissman (1993), we prepared broad questions aimed to elicit stories at the personal, relational, enacted, and communal levels of identity supplemented with probes if participants had a difficult time getting started. Sample questions included: (1) What label(s) are you most comfortable with that describe who you are? (2) How do you express your Jewish identity? (3) Have you ever experienced conflicts in close relationships because of being LGBTQ and/or Jewish? (4) How did being Jewish influence your coming out process? (5) How would you describe your Jewish community?

During the course of interviewing, participants helped determine what information to pursue in more detail when asked if the interviewer left anything important out and through informal conversations before and after interviews (Mishler, 1986). Specifically, we asked participants: (1) Do you have any additions to make? (2) Has anything changed for you regarding your Jewish and/or LGBTQ identity? Describe any new or remembered incidents that have changed or enhanced your understanding of your identity. This served as a form of member checking (see Lincoln & Guba, 1995). For example, three participants specifically mentioned the importance of children to Jewish identity and some participants felt that gender identity was highly relevant to their (and probably others') stories.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim from audiotapes and examined for categorical content (Lieblich et al., 1998). More specifically, we examined critical elements (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2004), those things that created changes in participants' behavior or events in their lives that required revealing/concealing/negotiating their LGBTQ Jewish identity and places where competition or conflict existed in regards to being LGBTQ and Jewish. For example, participants described conflict with partners about how open to be at work about being LGBTQ and whether children would be raised in a Jewish environment. We discovered four critical elements: (1) self concept/perception of being LGBTQ and Jewish; (2) relationships and being LGBTQ and Jewish; (3) enactments of being LGBTQ and Jewish; (4) experiences of being LGBTQ and Jewish. We used Reissman's (1993) two questions for narrative analysis to focus in on the critical elements and to see what was taken for granted by speaker and listener: "How is it [the story] organized? Why does an informant develop her tale this way in conversation with the listener?" The two researchers conducted this analytic coding independently and then discussed their coding and representative exemplars to triangulate the analysis, resolving differences through discussion (Maxwell, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse, 2007). We categorized the content of the stories to indicate the function that categories/themes performed, assessed the meaning of the stories, and connected the meanings to "more global

assumptions or worldviews held by individuals or within the culture under study” in order to avoid reading the narrative simply for content (Riessman, 1993, p. 61). For example, we found global themes in each narrative such as negative stereotypes of LGBTQ and Jewish communities as cliquy and insular, which kept some participants³ from identifying with them.

Results

“I’ve underestimated my attachment to being Jewish and my sense of it as a core piece of my identity. I think this is still very much evolving, my sort of understanding what it means to me to be Jewish, because I’m not a very religiously observant Jew. So much of who I am doesn’t have anything to do with being gay. But yet it’s like how do you take that out of the equation? You can’t. It’s so a part of who I am, which means it’s a hundred percent important to me. And yet in terms of how I live my day or what my dreams are, anything like that, it’s not a part of my day. It’s such a contradiction. It’s so hard to even imagine what it would be to not be either one of those things (bisexual lesbian and Jewish), they’re just so pivotal to who I am I can’t even think about separating them out or ordering them.” (Lydia, 37, bisexual lesbian)

This participant raises some important questions about the intersections of sexual and religious identities. How do individuals feel about being LGBTQ and Jewish? How do LGBTQ Jewish Americans negotiate multiple and at times, competing or conflicting identities within their close relationships? How does being LGBTQ and Jewish influence personal and relational identities and close relationships? Why do LGBTQ Jewish Americans decide to conceal or reveal their identities? When we examined the critical elements in the narratives to answer these research questions, we discovered some overarching themes. The critical elements represent behavioral and event triggers that altered and/or precipitated participants’ negotiation of identity, the considerations of how, when, where, and why to reveal/conceal/negotiate being LGBTQ and Jewish. The conflicts can be described as competition between and within identity layers (individual, relational, enacted, and communal) according to the CTI. These themes indicate critical incidents that created conflicts for participants related to self-concept (individual layer), experiences of being LGBTQ and Jewish in close relationships (relational level), enactment of LGBTQ and Jewish identities (enactment layer), and perceptions of LGBTQ and Jewish communities (communal layer).

Personal layer/self-concept

A critical element in the identity narratives was the shifting or altering of personal labels used to describe one’s self. Participants talked of adopting terms such as bisexual, queer and Jewish as personal identity labels when confronted with being outed, dating a non-Jewish partner and moving into communities with more (or fewer) LGBTQ and Jewish individuals. Lydia described shifting her personal identity labels:

“I had a number of very significant relationships with men and didn’t feel like I could just toss those out. They were a part of who I was, too. So I really clung to that label (bisexual

lesbian) for a long time. I think that it has actually made me in transition again now and I don't know exactly to where. I think because I've been living longer, like I went through a significant breakup about a year and a half ago and just realized I can't see myself ever going back to being with men. I think there is some kind of permanence to this that maybe feels like a new label, like I am shifting again."

Lydia's story of a gap between a personal label of bisexual lesbian and the enactment of no longer being able to partner with men speaks to how one's present life circumstances, including who you are surrounded by and where you live, influences the choice of identity labels and how one enacts identities. Being around other Jews, for instance, made it less likely that Joshua thought consciously about being Jewish; when he was younger he assumed that being Christian meant one still went to synagogue. He said he only chose to label himself as Jewish when he moved to a non-Jewish environment. Changing labels was also connected to more freedom and less selectivity in disclosing being Jewish and/or LGBTQ to others. Jill and Dana discussed how they chose to use the label Jewish lesbian when they moved to a community consisting of more sexual minorities than Jewish individuals. The interpersonal process of relabeling was one of searching for potential response cues from another in order to create a situation within which to be comfortable with just disclosing/enacting identity; letting others "just deal with it."

Relational layer/experiences of being LGBTQ and Jewish in close relationships

Conflict with a partner about being Jewish and/or openly a sexual minority created relational and identity problems. Lydia described a former partner's negative reaction to her enactment of her Jewish identity as rejection. Now she only dates Jewish women:

"At Hanukah time I put an electric menorah in the window of our house and she was very uncomfortable with it because she didn't want people to think she was Jewish. And that was pretty harsh. So it was things like that where she would sort of be rejecting of Judaism that made it hard for me to feel like I was wholly embraced."

Other participants broke up with relational partners who were not Jewish because they were concerned about "out marrying," felt a partner was anti-Semitic or unwilling to raise children Jewish. Lisa, for example, felt having a Jewish partner was more important to her after having a child because she felt Christianity was "too negative." When a person wanted a Jewish partner acutely, the conflict became how to find other LGBTQ Jews, especially in small and non-Jewish communities. Participants described how they visibly wore signs, such as a Star of David with a lambda in it or LGBTQ Pride shirts, as a signal. Having a non-Jewish partner was not always a source of conflict. Rachel said:

"When I've been with Jewish women it's been a source of closeness and intimacy and when I've been with non-Jewish women, it's been a source of interest and curiosity and learning."

Others said they preferred non-Jewish partners because it could be boring to date other Jews, it increased their own neuroses, it was easier to find partners, they did not

think it was important for their personal sense of identity and they liked to explore the differences.”

Enactment layer/enactment of LGBTQ and Jewish identities

The context surrounding participants' lives was vital to their experience of enacting identities in ways they desired and their experiences of downplaying or altering their identities in their relationships. Participants described feeling alienated because of differences with a relational partner about how open or closed to be about being LGBTQ and Jewish, not finding others in their communities like themselves and not feeling comfortable enacting their preferred identities. These perceptions tied into feelings of safety necessary for expressing and disclosing LGBTQ and Jewish identities in an anti-Semitic and homophobic culture. David explained the pressure this way: “I still think people think Jews are just undeveloped Christians and gays are like the Freudian (idea) of undeveloped adolescents.”

He said it was important to concentrate on being safe before concentrating on being in love. He described how the small town he was living in made him feel too “othered” because of what he labeled Christian-centric views and homophobia. In fact, shortly after we talked, he moved to a larger city he described as LGBTQ friendly because family gym membership included same-sex partners. Dina, who lived in a predominantly LGBTQ neighborhood in the Northeast argued that it is safer in America to be Jewish than is it to be LGBTQ:

“There’s certainly anti-Semitism out there, but I don’t think it’s as dangerous as homophobia is right now. You don’t find Jews being beaten up in the streets to the point of being murdered. It has happened to us historically, but it’s not the current situation. At least not here.”

Brian, for example, who lives in a predominantly Jewish area, told stories of how in high school his trumpet got stolen, dented and written on (i.e., homo fag) and how peers who discovered he was gay beat him:

“Two guys held me down while another wrote, ‘I’m gay’ all over my back and back pack. They ripped my shirt and nothing happened to them because they told me, if I moved, they’d kick me in the face.”

He described being comfortable with being gay but not overt in his expression, whereas he openly enacted his Jewish identity through his participation in numerous community organizations. Other participants also described feeling fine with concealment of parts of their identities if they feared negative repercussions (e.g., loss of job, violence), felt ashamed, or if being LGBTQ or Jewish was not as salient as other aspects of their self-concept (e.g., as a clinical psychologist). Susan, for instance, stated: “I think of myself more as a funny person than as a Jewish person or as a gay person.”

Peter spoke of feeling ashamed of being gay if someone had a negative reaction to a revelation (e.g., a potential roommate not feeling okay with his being gay and deciding not to live with him) and using strategies such as not placing gay-related groups he was a

member of on his résumé or graduate school applications. Steve described how he was destined to be an orthodox Rabbi from childhood and got married and had children. He did not have the courage to reconcile his romantic and passionate feelings for men until he became a Reconstructionist Rabbi where a key tenet of practice is to ask difficult questions. One issue for the salience of Jewish LGBTQ identities was the daily practice of enacting them. Those participants who considered being Jewish more of a cultural designation talked about how being LGBTQ had more weight in their daily interactions. Decisions such as whether to hold a partner's hand in the street, whether to place a picture of a partner on a desk at work, and whether to dress like a transgendered dyke took precedence. Farah described how having a child made being out a necessity:

"I'm not willing to be closeted anymore. It's just too hard, and especially, because I have a child. Being closeted and having a child is to inveigle your child into being complicit with you. So, I am fully out."

Others, though, felt that being Jewish was more important or relevant to daily life given the way they wanted to live (e.g., keeping Kosher, attending regular services, starting LGBTQ spiritual groups). Sarah considered that:

"My Jewish identity is so much richer as far as content and identity. I don't relate to the questions about the meaning of life from the point of view of being gay."

Lydia described how her mother's anti-Judaism stance as a Holocaust survivor created feelings in her childhood that being Jewish was negative and unrelated to her life, but she was beginning to explore.

Other participants found it impossible not to enact their Jewish and LGBTQ identities due to their social positions as teacher, poet and Rabbi and because being LGBTQ and Jewish were inseparable. These participants found a Jewish LGBTQ community in the form of informal spiritual groups (e.g., gay Havurot) or LGBTQ Synagogues and neighborhood Shuls (especially those in Pittsburgh, New Jersey, and New York City). Rachel stated that:

"if you are someone like myself who has a public forum, you're always negotiating the question of how much visible representation do I want to give to various identities."

David talked about being a "professional Jew" in his role as a Reconstructionist Rabbi at a Shul, Dana described being a Shul principle and Erin discussed her position as an anti-homophobia trainer at work. Participants who felt alienated in their communities discussed adopting strategies to pass as Christian and/or heterosexual when they felt it was safer (e.g., not wearing a Star of David, not displaying pictures of a partner at work). Joshua felt he had a certain privilege in deciding when to disclose being LGBTQ and/or Jewish because these were not easily discernible identities like skin color:

"If I meet somebody and don't want them to know that I was gay for whatever reason, and didn't want them to know I was Jewish, that's up to me . . . it's interesting to me to be a part of such a small minority group, relative to the whole population and not have that really

impact [me] in any negative way, necessarily, by people that you might not know because they don't really know that you are part of that group, just in appearance by looking at you."

Being outed as LGBTQ or Jewish meant that a participant had lost some choice in their enactment of identity, of being seen as heterosexual and Christian and perhaps having others' ascriptions influence their lives in ways they couldn't control. For example, Linda was outed in a local newspaper as a lesbian and had to contend with the small town school board where she worked as a teacher. Rabbi David felt pressure to come out at rabbinical school when the reason for his divorce became public.

Communal layer/experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ and Jewish identities

For participants, the communal representations of being LGBTQ and being Jewish in the media and surrounding communities often conflicted with personal and relational constructions. Conflicts centered on not feeling "Jewish enough" or queer enough because of family origins being mixed, not participating in enough community activities (e.g., LGBTQ pride parades, Seders) to be considered a good Jew or out LGBTQ, not living in a Jewish and/or LGBTQ community (or the right community) and not fitting a prescribed checklist. The fear was of having to account for who you felt you were in contrast to others' expectations. David said, "I'm either not Jewish enough or too Jewish." He admitted that he lies to his parents every year about attending High Holiday services because it was easier than dealing with the pain of telling them he was not being a "good Jew." These conflicts constitute identity gaps, which represent the interpenetration of identity layers. Here, for instance, Ann described how her personal and relational identity layers conflict with communal layers:

"Doesn't one just grow (up) with the religion and feel okay with it? I just attributed it to the fact that I came from this inter-faith (marriage), even though we were only raised with one (religion). When I tell people that my mom is Catholic and my dad is Jewish, they're like 'oh, so you're both' and I'm like 'no, I was only raised with one.' I consider myself Jewish because I've only ever studied Judaism."

There was fear of not fitting into the LGBTQ or Jewish community, of being in between groups, of not being a "real member" because one is too secular or too religious. Ann described the conflict: "I want to be part of the Jewish community, and yet I'm pushed out." She talked about how someone could biologically be Jewish but then if she did not fit a Jewish checklist, feel left out. In a similar vein, Cheri was afraid we would not interview her for this project because she doesn't feel Jewish enough as an atheist: "I guess I had a feeling like what if I don't qualify, you know? It would have felt really bad. That's why I didn't say anything that might lead to a disqualification."

The difficulties with identity gaps were particularly notable when examining a communal level of identity. There existed an integration continuum of being Jewish and LGBTQ. On the one end are those who considered being Jewish a secular, cultural designation that did not influence being LGBTQ and at the far end of the continuum, were those who could not separate the identities because they were wholly integrated into

LGBTQ Jewish communities (e.g., lesbian shul teacher, Reconstructionist Rabbi). There were participants who did not think of being Jewish on a daily basis or did not agree with communal representations of what being Jewish meant; Saul, for instance, stated that he wasn't that Jewish. And furthermore, now that he was "coming out," being Jewish did not feel as relevant in his life. Susan did not consider herself to be an integral part of the Jewish community because of the values she associated with it:

"I've never known Jews to live harmoniously; now this includes a short stint on a kibbutz in Israel. I think although I like certain Jews now I'll sound like the great anti-Semite, although I like certain Jews individually, I don't find that their best nature comes out collectively. And I find the community here pretty materialistic, money and prestige focused and I just find them as individuals and here I'll include most of my family, incredibly boring people. I just have no interest in what they want to talk about, which is real estate and how much money their kids are making."

Other participants felt embarrassed or disgusted by some of the Jews and LGBTQ individuals they met in their communities. Ann described being cut off in traffic by a Rabbi and finding other people that embodied negative Jewish stereotypes, such as being cheap or pushy. Linda described the LGBTQ community as shrill and Chris considered it back-stabbing, transient and splintered. Another subset of participants who represent the next step on the continuum considered being Jewish as more integral to their sense of self than being LGBTQ as Carol demonstrated in her story:

"Although it's hard to separate the two identities because they're so much a part of me, I'd have to say that being Jewish comes first and my sexual identity is so much more of a personal who am I that I don't wear on my sleeve. It's just who I am. It's just like asking any heterosexual well, who are you?"

For those who do not lie at either extreme on the continuum where one identity dominated, being queer and Jewish represent marginal identities that can create conflict for individuals and communities. The gap produced by conflicts demonstrates the slipperiness of trying to box-in identities and the difficulty with managing competing and conflicting identities. Joshua wanted to join the groups in college that his non-LGBTQ and Jewish friends would join. The communal was often reacted against because it conflicted with personal and relational layers of identity. Whether someone identified with the community, in part, had to do with perceptions of why some behaviors were directed at them. For example, participants posed the following questions: (1) Did you not get a hotel room because the last one had been taken or because you were Jewish? (2) Did you receive a glare because you were with your partner in the line at the store or because the person was just generally angry?

Discussion

We studied the negotiation of Jewish and LGBTQ identities in order to help us understand closetable and stigmatized minority identities, specifically where identity gaps

necessitated changing labels and evaluating relationships. As seen in these narratives, the LGBTQ and Jewish community surrounding participants influenced the integration of their identities into their self-concepts, relationships and perceptions of community (see Braithwaite et al., 2010). Cutler's (2006) ethnographic study of Jewish identity in a Southern Christian context also demonstrated the importance of geography for the enactment of identity. Her participants described enacting strategies of self-protection because of the perception of a hostile environment, an environment where there was a strong normative public Christian identity. Our participants revealed a very highly nuanced view of identity management that is consistent with responses to inter-ethnic communication issues that have been described (Hecht et al., 2002) where people utilized management of the conversation and relationship as well as self-statements to contend with identity gaps. The continuum of participants' enactments of LGBTQ and Jewish identity demonstrate that for some, the focus on parts of identity helped them manage gaps, from choosing a specific relational partner (Jewish or not), neighborhood (predominately Jewish or LGBTQ), social network (LGBTQ or Jewish) to résumé list (Jewish or LGBTQ organizations).

Shneer and Aviv (2002) ask how queer Jews can recreate communities and culture to make room for themselves and how they can make the "Jewish community more inclusive and create new forms of Jewish life?" (p. 4). The kind of social support present matters, whether a person feels accepted, comfortable, and identifies with Jewish and LGBTQ communities and within their personal relationships. Interestingly, none of our participants were affiliated with more conservative synagogues (e.g., Orthodox, Modern Orthodox), even if they had been growing up. The Reconstruction and Reform communities, for instance, have attempted to move beyond tolerance of LGBTQ Jews and the injunctions against homosexuality in mainstream Judaism with their blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of LGBTQ Rabbis. Beginning in the 1970s, organized movements of LGBTQ Jews fought for integration (Cooper, 1990). In 1972, for example, Beth Chayim Chadashim (a LGBTQ synagogue) formed in Los Angeles and was admitted to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) despite national controversy (Balka & Rose, 1989). In addition, the UAHC passed "The Human Rights of Homosexuals" five years later with 80% approval. Gay and lesbian rabbinic ordination was supported in 1974 by the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot and in 1993 they passed resolutions that explicitly welcomed LGBTQ members into their congregations. Congregations were asked to address heterosexist biases and affirm the right of Reconstructionist Rabbis to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies (Rose & Balka, 2002).

Another strategy for contending with stigma and negative reactions to being Jewish and LGBTQ was assimilating and passing as Christian and/or heterosexual. For many participants, the experience of being LGBTQ was different than being Jewish; they argued that being LGBTQ influenced daily life and decisions (e.g., talking about a relational partner at work) more than being Jewish, demonstrating that enactment of some identities may carry more consequences (McCall, 2005). Some participants still used passing (closeting) as a strategy because of fears of rejection, violence and misunderstanding, though others believe that being out is actually a religious obligation and not antithetical to Jewish practice in Reform and Reconstructionist traditions (e.g., Brown, 2004; Cohen, 2002; Petsonk, 1998). Participants who insisted on the integration

of their identities, regardless of their experiences with anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward LGBTQ, did not use closeting as a strategy and actively enacted their identities through their work and choice of community. Bowen (2000), for example, considers Reconstructionism to be a way for Jews to connect secular and religious life because it “retains elements of traditional Jewish ritual and observance with understandings relevant for living in the modern multi-cultural world” (p. 32).

Identity gaps affected self-labeling over time (Diamond, 2008). The interpersonal process of relabeling was one of searching for potential response cues from another in order to create a situation within which to be comfortable with disclosing and enacting identity. It also entailed a strategy to reconcile a gap between an enacted identity and personal one (e.g., Changing from lesbian to bisexual lesbian to show that one may still date men). A negative reaction or anticipated response created a need for some to change an identity label, for example from Jew to atheist Jew to let others “just deal with it.”

As we consider the strategies participants used, the potential for alienation and estrangement seems very present for all but the most secure. The themes reverberate from mere embarrassment to hostility, painting a background for identity negotiation rife with risk. This should not be a surprise to those who track hate crime statistics, where both groups rank among the top victims (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). When internalized, these negative attributions or relational identities put people at risk for an array of negative outcomes. The notion of “identity gaps” or disconnects between and among the layers of identity are reflected in our participants’ descriptions of how communities, families, friends, and even relational partners see them in ways that contradict their personal identities or self concepts. These gaps put people at risk for outcomes as minor as dissatisfying conversations in relationships to more significant outcomes such as depression (Jung et al., 2007), partner loss, job loss, internal anti-Semitism, negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals and alienation. The texture of these stories describes how gaps become salient in people’s lives and pose significant challenges to identity negotiation. They also add to CTI by showing the kinds of critical incidents (e.g., disagreements over children’s religious education, being outed, finding an accepting community) that create conflict and how participants negotiate these conflicts (e.g., identity label change, partner preference, moving).

Despite these challenges the narratives are not without successes. For some, emphasizing one element of identity over the other (e.g., seeing themselves as primarily LGBTQ *or* Jewish, but not a LGBTQ Jew) helped them embed themselves in a single community and find the support they needed to thrive. Others, however, honor both identities and for them the challenge is, perhaps, greater. As Cohen (2002) notes:

“The imperfect personal and communal means available may sometimes be insufficient for us to form enduringly integrated queer Jewish identities, relationships and communities. Perhaps provisional, imperfect and somewhat compartmentalized moments of integrated identity may be more reasonable goals.” (pp. 174–175)

An important part of negotiating identity was the appraisal process, deciding if it was safe to disclose and enact preferred identities (Meyer, 2003). The fear of rejection,

violence and misunderstanding was a powerful motivator and demonstrated the conflict between and within identity layers. But despite the odds, LGBTQ Jews find communities that provide love and acceptance, sometimes among others who share these two closeable identities. Recent anthologies of personal narratives about being LGBTQ and Jewish (see Alpert, Elwell, & Idelson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Shneer & Aviv, 2002) may indicate that LGBTQ Jews can move beyond the “traditional dilemma of bifurcated selves” and the choice to stay closeted within or leave entirely their Jewish communities (Rose & Balka, 2002).

Limitations of the present study

The study was limited in terms of the highly educated, religiously liberal, and varied aged sample. As seen in other work (e.g., Anonymous, 2001, 2002), being affiliated with more liberal synagogues and such as Reform and Reconstructionist often means more freedom, acceptance, and space to create LGBTQ Jewish rituals. For example, Sandi Simcha DuBowski’s documentary, *Trembling before G-D*, chronicles the silence and difficult choice for many LGBTQ Orthodox Jews of choosing between their families and Jewish community and sexuality. We also did not distinguish issues for women (lesbian, bisexual lesbian, bisexual), men (gay, bisexual), and transgendered in our analyses. In addition, identity negotiation changes as a function of age. There are some different issues in being open about sexual identities based on gender differences, age, and varying levels of negative attitudes toward LGBTQ men and women (e.g., Shneer & Aviv, 2002), although we decided to examine LGBTQ individuals together in order to discuss a wider communal level of identity.

Conclusions and future research

The balancing act that invokes a need for a highly refined sense of acceptance and rejection recalls the narratives of abused and neglected children who required trust *for* (or prior to) disclosure rather than building trust *through* disclosure (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Mont’Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Future research might profitably examine the resiliency factors that allow people to thrive in the face of threat and avoid or cope effectively with potential identity gaps. Clearly, interpersonal identity gaps for others may be equally problematic and there are personal characteristics that inhibit people from finding supportive communities. At the same time, the strain imposed by the decision to stay closeted seems to heighten the tension for our participants in a way that non-stigmatized identities do not share (Meyer, 2003). Other communities, such as LGBTQ and Christian, may experience similar pressures. This may suggest areas for researchers and practitioners to focus to improve the study and lives of individuals with multiple and stigmatized identities.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the 2003 annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, San Antonio, TX, USA.

2. We use the label LGBTQ for lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and queer individuals because of its prevalence in the literature we reference and stated preference by our research participants, even though, as a reviewer of this piece rightly pointed out, sexual orientation and gender orientation are often conflated in the literature and through the use of the label LGBTQ (e.g., a transgender individual may not necessarily identify as a sexual minority). The transgender individual we interviewed identified as lesbian and we assume that the other 30 participants identified as cis-gender given there were no explicit mentions when we asked for their preferred identity labels. Even though we did not explicitly use the term queer to recruit participants, we include it in the manuscript as a few participants indicated they preferred the label for ideological and political reasons. Queer denotes a refusal to fit a self into existing categories and, in many cases, the questioning of the use of categories and the assumptions they contain.
3. All names used in the manuscript are pseudonyms to protect participants' *confidentiality*.

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