Abstract

Title of Thesis: INCREASING INCLUSIVITY FOR QUEER FAMILIES IN JEWISH

INSTITUTIONS

Suzanne Feinspan, Master of Arts, 2011

Thesis Directed by: Professor Maxine Grossman

Department of Jewish Studies

This study sought to understand the current state of inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer families in Jewish institutions and to provide suggestions on how these institutions can become more welcoming of these families. The study included a survey of local institutions' inclusion practices, a review of LGBTQ Jewish history, an analysis of other religious institutions' paths towards inclusion and the creation of an inclusion guide to be distributed to Jewish institutions. The guide includes a variety of suggestions, both administrative and programmatic, of how Jewish institutions can adapt themselves to become more inclusive.

INCREASING INCLUSIVITY FOR QUEER FAMILIES IN JEWISH INSTITUTIONS

by

Suzanne Feinspan

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

2011

Advisory Committee:

      Dr. Maxine Grossman, Chair

      Dr. Sheila Jelen

      Dr. Hayim Lapin

Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to Dr. Maxine Grossman, without whose support, it would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Analysis of Inclusion

"[Inclusion means] placing no conditions on admission to the family of God"

- Bill Lasher, Methodist Pastor[1]

In the 40 years since the Stonewall Riots sparked the Gay Rights movement, the Jewish community at large has been transformed by the voices and contributions of Queer Jews.[2] However, even as this change has been in motion, Queer Jews are still not fully welcomed into most mainstream Jewish institutions. Sometimes this exclusion takes the form of explicit policies and responsa, while other times it is a more subtle kind of "othering" expressed through the language used on registration forms and the types of families discussed in Hebrew school. This study's aim is to create an inclusion guide for Jewish institutions, primarily religious communities, which can serve as a resource to assist them in the process of making their institutions more welcoming and inclusive of Queer families. For the purposes of this study, inclusion or welcoming is defined as a state in which Queer members feel that they belong, are fully valued, can bring their full selves to the community and in which they don't experience cognitive dissonance as a result of their interactions with the institution or its members. The study focuses on families rather than individuals because this approach allows for a more comprehensive treatment of the idea of inclusivity, as it looks at the needs of the children of Queer

---

[1] Jane Fishburn, ed., *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 27.

[2] In this paper, the term Queer serves as an umbrella term to include anyone whose sexual or gender identity falls outside of the mainstream, defined as straight and traditionally male/female. This could include those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and genderqueer, as well as those who accept the label of Queer because they feel they do not fully fit into any other existing label (e.g. people who are attracted to both men and women but do not accept a binary gender system and thus do not refer to themselves as bisexual.)

parents which can differ from the specific needs of Queer adults. The guide is geared towards communities which are already receptive to the value of being more inclusive but may not have the knowledge necessary to most effectively accomplish that; it is not meant for institutions which for religious or social reasons do not acknowledge the value of welcoming Queer Jewish families into their community. The contents and approach of the guide have been informed by two major pieces of research: a review of existing secular and religious guides to increasing inclusivity in institutions and an analysis of the processes through which several religious institutions went to become more welcoming of their Queer members. This paper will focus on exploring this second piece of research.

Queer Jewish History

To understand the current state of Queer inclusion in the Jewish community, one must first have an understanding of Queer Jewish history. Jews who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender first started bringing those two identities together in the wake of the Stonewall Riots and as a result began to found gay synagogues around the country. Initially these synagogues served mostly gay men, though over time they have also worked on becoming more inclusive of lesbian, bisexual and transgender members. Between 1972 and 1980, nine gay synagogues were founded in cities such as New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston. The first of these communities, Beth Chayim Chadashim, was founded after many Queer Jews began attending a gay church in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Community Church, and were encouraged by the minister

there to form their own gay Jewish community.[3] All of these synagogues and

communities were founded by gay and lesbian Jews who were "feeling unwelcome in

mainstream synagogues, and inspired by the founding of gay-friendly churches...These

were to be 'safe spaces' where gay and lesbian Jews could worship in peace, and without

disapproval" and express both of these salient identities simultaneously.[4]

In the late 1970s, the International Conference of Gay Jews was founded, which later

gave birth to the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations.[5] In 2001,

this organization became the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender

Jews: Keshet Ga'avah.[6] Keshet Ga'avah currently includes approximately 50

communities worldwide.[7] Two of the communities in the United States produced new

siddurim which were gender-sensitive and acknowledged the unique experiences and

spiritual needs of their members, something which had not been done previously.[8]

In the early 1990s, as a result of denominational policy changes in the Reform

movement which will be discussed below, many mainstream Reform synagogues began

exploring how to make their communities and institutions more welcoming of gay and

lesbian Jews. This caused some gay and lesbian Jews to feel comfortable joining

mainstream congregations, rather than worshipping exclusively at gay and lesbian

synagogues. Currently most of the gay synagogues that were started in the 1970s

---

[3] D'ror Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, 20.

[4] Anthony Weiss, "As Acceptance Grows, Gay Synagogues Torn Between the Straight and Narrow," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, http://www.forward.com/articles/12994/.

[5] Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 48-9.

[6] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 20.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Richard F. Address, Joel L. Kushner, and Geoffrey Mitelman, eds., *Kulanu: All of Us – A Program and Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Inclusion*, (New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2007), 43; Shokeid, *A Gay Synagoge in New York,* 44.

continue to exist as distinct entities, some having individually affiliated with the Reform

movement. In the early 2000s, however, a few of these communities chose to merge with

local Reform congregations and become minyanim or havurah groups within a larger

congregation.[9]

Alongside the growth of the gay synagogue movement, there were also changes

taking place within various Jewish denominations related to inclusivity of gay, lesbian,

bisexual and transgender Jews. The Reconstructionist movement was the frontrunner on

issues of inclusion, permitting the ordination of gays and lesbians in 1984, more than 15

years before the Reform movement; transgender Reconstructionist rabbis have been

ordained since 2003.[10] Reconstructionist rabbis have been officiating at same-sex

wedding and commitment ceremonies since 1984, with official sanction from the

movement since 1993.[11]

The Reform movement has also made great strides in inclusion institutionally in the

past several decades. In 1975 and 1977 the movement passed resolutions "calling for

civil rights for homosexuals in the civic arena" and in 1987 passed another resolution

"encouraging gay and lesbian Jews to participate in the life of all synagogues."[12] In 1987

the movement also resolved that synagogues should not discriminate based on sexual

orientation in their hiring practices, except for rabbis. It was not until 1990 that the

Reform rabbinical schools began accepting openly gay and lesbian applicants and not

---

[9] Congregation Beth Ahavah, *Congregation Beth Ahavah Home,* http://www.bethahavah.org/; Anshe
Chesed Fairmount Temple, *Chevrei Tikva Chavurah*,
http://www.fairmounttemple.org/ChevreiTikvaChavurah.htm.
[10] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 20.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, 21.

until 2003 that the first transgender rabbinical student was admitted.[13] In 1997, the

movement published the first edition of Kulanu, a guide for synagogues on becoming

more welcoming of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Jews. An updated edition of

this guide was released in 2007. Reform rabbis were permitted to officiate at same-sex

weddings and commitment ceremonies beginning in 2000, however these ceremonies are

legally classified differently than a heterosexual wedding ceremony.[14] In 1999, the

Reform rabbinical school, Hebrew Union College, began an initiative which later

developed into the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, the mission of which is

"preparing Jewish leadership with the capacity, compassion and skills to change

congregational attitudes, policies, and, indeed, Jewish society so as to include each and

every Jew, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."[15] These denominational

decisions and initiatives were not only symbolic, but also directly affected the lives of

individual congregations. Many of the programs that currently exist in Reform

synagogues that focus on inclusion of LGBT Jews and their families began soon after the

1987 statement welcoming gay and lesbian Jews.

As for the Conservative movement, the Rabbinical Assembly issued a "Consensus

Statement" in 1992 that "welcomed homosexuals into the community, but denied them

admission to the seminaries and cantorial schools"; it was not until 2006 that, after much

internal pressure, the movement's Rabbinical Assembly issued several legal opinions –

one of which permits the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis.[16] This 2006 decision also

included one opinion that permits Conservative rabbis to officiate at same-sex wedding

---

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, *Mission & Vision*, Hebrew Union College –Jewish Institute of Religion, http://huc.edu/ijso/about/.
[16] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 21-2.

ceremonies. Given the absence of a single decisive opinion on these matters, the implementation of these decisions varies from synagogue to synagogue and rabbinical school to rabbinical school.[17]

In the Orthodox world, while the film "Trembling Before G-d" significantly raised visibility and awareness around gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews, ordination of openly gay rabbis is still forbidden, as are same sex weddings.[18] In addition, open and virulent homophobia and transphobia still exist in some parts of the Orthodox world.

While, as one can see from this history, progress has been made in each of these denominations in recent decades, there is still much work to be done to carve out safe and welcoming spaces for Queer Jews and families across the Jewish denominations.

Analysis of Best Practices

The denominational policy changes outlined above suggest that some synagogues do want to become more welcoming and inclusive of Queer families. One of the most strategic ways to make the necessary changes begins with examination of the successful steps taken by other religious communities who shared a similar goal. This section will examine six congregations that engaged in a process of change to become more inclusive and will identify factors, procedural steps, opposition and outcomes that they shared. Before identifying common traits of the various congregations, a brief introduction to each institution and the method of analysis used is necessary.

---

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 22.

Epworth United Methodist Church is located in Chicago, Illinois and is a small and ethnically diverse congregation that has struggled from time to time to pay the bills needed to keep its doors open.[19] The congregation is strongly committed to justice work (e.g. they began a "warming shelter" for homeless men in 1986 that is still in operation today).[20] The welcoming process that Epworth engaged in was initiated and guided by Pastor Bettye Mixon, who came to the congregation in 1990.[21] The congregation chose to become a Reconciling Congregation[22] in 1996.[23]

Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church, located in Saratoga Springs, New York, is a large and vibrant congregation of approximately 900 members with a strong "mission orientation" and commitment to social justice.[24] The process of inclusion that the congregation went through was begun by Pastor Jane Borden, who had been Associate Pastor with her husband until his murder in 1984. The process was continued by Pastor Bill Lasher, who took over upon Jane Borden's retirement in 1994.[25] The congregation chose to become a Reconciling Congregation in 1995.[26]

---

[19] Fisburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 83-85.

[20] Ibid, 84.

[21] Ibid, 85-6.

[22] The Reconciling Congregations Program was created by Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian/Gay Concerns in 1982. The program encouraged local Methodist congregations to adopt "a statement affirming lesbians and gay men and inviting their full participation in the life of the local church" (Reconciling Ministries Network, http://www.rmnetwork.org/about-us/history/1982-1985/). The program provides instructional materials, trainings and technical support to congregations engaging in this process. The Reconciling Congregations program has existed in contradiction to Methodist denominational policy which forbids same-sex unions and the support of homosexuality and has been consistently challenged and thwarted in its efforts by the denomination at large. In October 2000, the Reconciling Congregations Program became the Reconciling Ministries Network (Reconciling Ministries Network, http://www.rmnetwork.org/about-us/).

[23] Fisburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 83-85.

[24] Ibid, 19-21.

[25] Ibid, 21 and 24-5.

[26] Ibid, 33.

Claremont United Methodist Church is located in Claremont, CA, and is a church of

approximately 500 members.[27] Previous to their process to become more welcoming of

gay and lesbian members, the congregation had undergone a similar process to become a

Sanctuary Church, meaning that they provided protection, social services, and advocacy

for Central American refugees during the 1980s in direct defiance of United States law.[28]

The inclusion process at Claremont was initiated in large part by a lay leader, Lois

Seifert, and was undertaken during the tenure of Pastor Harry Pak.[29] The congregation

additionally received pressure from their regional conference, which released a statement

in 1992 encouraging congregations to consider a similar process.[30] The congregation

chose to become a Reconciling Congregation in 1993.[31]

North United Methodist Church, located in Indianapolis, Indiana, is a large and active

congregation of approximately 1,000 members who are highly engaged both in the

church's internal affairs and in the community more broadly.[32] Though the congregation

underwent a process of reflection about becoming a Reconciling Congregation, they

chose in the end not to complete this procedure, though they did establish a social and

support group for gay and lesbian members.[33]

Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church is located in the Castro district, the heart of gay

San Francisco. Before the influx of gay congregants to the parish and its work for

---

[27] Ibid, 40.
[28] Ibid; New Sanctuary Movement, *Building on Powerful Tradition*,
http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org/build-tradition.htm.
[29] Fisburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 53.
[30] Ibid, 49.
[31] Ibid, 41.
[32] Ibid, 64.
[33] Ibid, 80.

inclusion of them, it was a largely "graying" community made up primarily of older Irish

Catholics and was in decline in both numbers and energy.[34] The congregation's work

towards welcoming its gay members began in the late 1970s and was in full swing in the

mid-1980s after the appointment of a new pastor, Father Anthony McGuire.[35]

Temple Beth-El, located in Great Neck, NY, is a thriving Reform Jewish congregation.

Beth-El "was one of the first – and is still one of the strongest – congregations to actively

welcome gays and lesbians into the community."[36] The inclusion process at Beth-El was

spearheaded by John Hirsch, a gay member who has been chair of the community's Gay

and Lesbian Inclusion Committee since its inception in 1991.[37] There has also been

continuously strong leadership from the synagogue's clergy around inclusion.[38]

Methodology

    The observations which will follow came out of a three-step analysis. The first

was a review of accounts of the history of each congregation's process of inclusion. For

the Catholic and Methodist congregations this information came out of sociological

studies conducted by researchers about the congregations' welcoming journey. For the

synagogue, the information was from first-hand accounts of the process as reported both

on their website and in the Union for Reform Judaism LGBT inclusion manual, Kulanu.

During the initial review, I identified several aspects of each congregation's process in

---

[34] Donal Godfrey, *Gays and Grays: The Story of the Gay Community at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in San Francisco*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 11.

[35] Ibid, 27.

[36] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 57.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee, *Who We Are – Our History*, Temple Beth El of Great Neck, http://www.tbegreatneck.org/community/lgbt/glic__who_we_are/.

which there seemed to be similarities: community factors, procedural steps, types of opposition and outcomes. Once I had identified these categories, I analyzed each account again to pull out specific data about each of these aspects. I then compared the data to identify similarities that reached across several congregations.

Community Factors Shared by Congregations

The results of the analysis of these six congregations' journeys towards inclusion show that there are several factors that these communities shared in common that likely led to their success. The first factor was that they had previously engaged in some kind of community-wide conversation about either sexuality or homosexuality. For some congregations this had been a structured adult education class on the topic, for others it was a conversation about whether a gay group could use the institution's space and for others it was an earlier conversation about increasing inclusivity. Each of these conversations had broken the ice around the topic of sexuality and previously encouraged at least some members of the congregation to engage with one another around the topic of sexuality and religion.

A second factor that many of the congregations shared was the pace of their process. Most of the congregations thought strategically about how to engage in a process that moved forward at a pace that made steady progress but which did not move so fast as to cause straight community members to shut down or disengage.[39] Additionally, the facilitators of the process in most of these communities kept a finger on the pulse of the community and made sure to gauge the status of the community's engagement before moving forward.

---

[39] Godfrey, *Gays and Grays*, 34.

Another factor which several congregations shared was the previous introduction of gender-inclusive language into worship services. Many of the congregations had engaged in dialogue in the prior decade or two to change the language of services to be gender-neutral or at least more inclusive of women. In some communities, such as Saratoga Springs, this first "inclusion" process created some tension and many there believe that "the 'struggle' over language laid the foundations for later studies of homosexuality."[40] These previous conversations both allowed the congregations to learn how to engage with one another around controversial issues of inclusion and proved that becoming more welcoming of an oppressed group did not have negative effects on the congregation.

A fourth factor that all of the congregations shared was a commitment to service and justice, which was exhibited through the ways that the institution and individual members spent their time and money. For the Methodist congregations, each put a large amount of their budget towards "mission" work locally, domestically and abroad which included such things as supporting a "warming" center for homeless men and investing in community redevelopment.[41] All of the congregations also had programs that allowed members to engage in service with the broader community through activities like staffing the congregation-run shelter, gift drives for the holidays or serving meals at soup kitchens. In addition, most of the communities also envisioned themselves as "mission-driven" or committed to social justice. This existing community culture allowed the issue of gay and lesbian inclusion to be framed as a justice issue, something which the communities had already expressed commitment to in a variety of ways.

---

[40] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 24.
[41] Ibid, 21, 64 and 84.

Another factor that many of the congregations shared was the presence of Queer individuals in the congregation, prior to the initiation of the welcoming process. The fact that these individuals or couples were already members of the community put a human face on the issue of inclusion, allowed straight members to hear Queer individuals' stories of exclusion in religious settings, and lent an urgency to the issue that might not have existed if it was purely theoretical. In addition, in many of the congregations these individuals either initiated the process or were founding members of the task forces set up to facilitate the inclusion process.

An additional characteristic that many of the congregations shared was strong, visionary leadership on the topic by the clergy. This leadership was exhibited in many ways. Some clergy were outspoken in their sermons and advocated on the issue of inclusivity within the congregation, as well as preaching about gay and lesbian rights more generally.[42] Other clergy gently challenged congregants in their personal interactions with them to check their assumptions and open their minds and hearts to the issue.[43] Still others shared their own personal journeys around wrestling with the issue of homosexuality and inclusion as a model for their congregants.[44] Finally, some clergy were the ones in the congregation who raised the issue of inclusivity and initiated the process within their congregation.[45]

In addition to clergy leadership, many of the congregations also had strong lay leadership around the issue of becoming more welcoming to Queer members. In most of the congregations, lay leaders were the ones who raised the issue of inclusivity initially

---

[42] Ibid, 24-5.
[43] Ibid, 89-91.
[44] Ibid, 41.
[45] Ibid, 87.

and drove the process as it continued. These lay leaders served as members of task forces planning the inclusion process, taught classes on issues related to homosexuality and facilitated conversations amongst their fellow congregants about the issue and process. Many of these lay leaders had some pre-existing relationship to the issue of Queer inclusion; for some their connection was that they had a friend or family member who was gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, while for others they identified this way themselves. These individuals carried the process through and were role models to the rest of the congregation around the issue of inclusion.

A final factor that the four Methodist congregations shared was the existence of a denominational structure for engaging in dialogue and decision related to inclusion - the Reconciling Congregations Program. The existence of this organization provided congregations with a road map for the process, professional support in confronting challenges, and connections to other communities who had engaged in a similar process. In addition, the existence of this program established a specific goal for the congregations to work towards, in this case whether or not to become a Reconciling Congregation, rather than a more vague desire to be more inclusive.

Procedural Steps Shared by Congregations

In addition to common community factors shared by congregations in this analysis, there were also five procedural steps that most of the congregations engaged in during their welcoming process. The first step for all of the congregations was that the issue of inclusion was raised, usually by members of the laity, but occasionally by the clergy. In all of the communities, this then led to the formation of a committee or task

13

force to explore the issue of inclusion. In most of the congregations this decision was approved by the institution's Board of Directors. As mentioned above, this committee generally included members of the laity who were either Queer-identified themselves or who had friends or family who identified as such.

A third step that most congregations engaged in was the facilitation of a variety of educational events for the congregational community. These events included book groups, study groups, speaker series, facilitated dialogues, as well as community meetings. The topics of these sessions included homosexuality in the Biblical text, analysis of memoirs by gay Catholics, presentations on current medical and sociological understandings of sexual identity, the sharing of personal stories by Queer congregants and more.[46] The events allowed members of the community to be introduced to new information that broadened their understanding of the topic of sexual identity, addressed some of their misconceptions and humanized the issue.

Another step that most of the communities engaged in was to create a new mission statement, which included explicit mention of the congregation's commitment to welcoming members of all sexual and gender identities. The final common step that most congregations shared was review of the newly created mission statement by the Board of Directors or the congregation as a whole and a vote on whether to accept the new statement.

---

[46] Godfrey, *Gays and Grays*, 29; Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 70-1.

<u>Common Point of Opposition</u>

While these six congregations had many community factors and procedural steps in common, they had only one point of opposition that was shared by multiple institutions. This opposition was a belief among some members of the congregation that the community was already welcoming to members of all sexual orientations. This assumption, likely compounded by homophobia, led these members to resist the idea that the congregation should explicitly announce their inclusive nature in a public manner.

<u>Outcomes Shared by Congregations</u>

Finally, the congregations studied shared several outcomes that resulted from their initiation of a process of becoming more inclusive. The first outcome that most congregations experienced was a change in membership. Many of the congregations lost a small number of members who disagreed with the process or its results. These members usually moved to other nearby congregations with more conservative approaches to the issue of sexual identity.[47] While some members left, most congregations also saw an increase in Queer membership, as well as in individuals and families who were looking for a religious home that was inclusive, regardless of their own sexual identity.[48]

A second shared outcome was some kind of public acknowledgement of the communities' commitment to inclusivity. For some congregations, this meant advertising their status on their outdoor sign.[49] For other congregations, this acknowledgement was included in their printed materials, bulletin or on their website. The acknowledgement

---

[47] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 96; Godfrey, *Gays and Grays*, 38.
[48] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 32.
[49] Ibid, 34; Godfrey, *Gays and Grays*, 102.

was sometimes in the form of the organization's more inclusive mission statement and other times included both this and a visual identifier such as a rainbow logo.

Another common result of the welcoming processes was a change in the content of sermons. After congregations had engaged in the process of becoming more inclusive, the words gay and lesbian tended to be used correctly and in a positive manner more often than they had been previously. In addition, clergy preached more regularly about issues related to Queer rights than they did before the process.[50]

A final shared outcome by many of the congregations was the ongoing existence of a group within the congregation which focused on the needs of Queer members. At North United Methodist Church this group, Leaven, provided social events for gay and lesbian members.[51] At Temple Beth-El, the Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee not only hosts social events, but it cosponsors Queer-themed educational events with other synagogue committees and hosts a toy drive for children infected and affected by HIV at Channukah. These events are open to all members of the synagogue community, other Queer Jews in the area, as well as their friends and family.[52]

Other Themes from Analysis

In the study, *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations*, Mary Elizabeth Moore draws out several themes from the specific experiences of the Methodist congregations included in the analysis above. In her analysis, she is considering two main questions: "What experiences and concerns move a

---

[50] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 80; Godfrey, *Gays and Grays*, 146.
[51] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 80.
[52] Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee, *Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee*, Temple Beth El of Great Neck, http://www.tbegreatneck.org/community/lgbt/

16

congregation to consider a risky ethical stand? What helps and hinders a community's

ability to make meaning and build community in the midst of confronting difficult

issues?"[53] Moore identifies some similar themes to those mentioned previously including

congregational commitments to diversity and justice, the importance of congregational

learning on the topic and the value of clergy and lay leadership.[54] She also identifies

some themes that were not included above, including "personal story-telling, sharing

pain, and confronting dissonance."[55] She suggests that these experiences of pain and

discomfort "emboldened [these congregations] and intensified their concern for people

within and beyond their congregations."[56] Moore also highlights the importance in the

congregations studied of "symbolic forms" including "symbolic events, people, spaces

and language."[57] These symbols encouraged congregants to "glimpse God's movements

in the past and God's promises for the future" and symbolic figures also served as "signs

that pointed to the congregation's story and hope."[58] Moore's analysis supports many of

the commonalities identified early in this analysis and also demonstrates that different

denominations are likely to have some characteristics that may be shared internally but

are not necessarily applicable in an interdenominational manner.

---

[53] Fishburn, *People of a Compassionate God*, 132.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid, 155.

Impact of Analysis of Best Practices on Inclusion Guide

The analysis of best practices above will inform the content of the guide which will make up the second part of this study. The above analysis identifies several important elements to be included in the information provided by the guide. First, the guide should encourage a process which is slow but steady. Such a process must be gradual enough to maintain the participation of less enthusiastic members but fast enough that Queer members and their allies see that progress is in fact being made.

The guide should also highlight the importance of strong and visionary leadership by the rabbis and other members of the clergy. These individuals are opinion leaders within congregations. If they model inclusivity in their language and actions and champion the cause of being a welcoming community, this can encourage members of the congregation who might otherwise be ambivalent or skeptical of the process to engage with it.

Additionally, the guide should encourage the establishment of a committee or task force within congregations to spearhead the inclusion effort. This group should be composed of individuals who value the issue of inclusivity of Queer members and who have time to usher the process along. Having such a group means that there are a set of individuals within the congregation who are able to focus their time and energy on the issue of inclusiveness and who can hold the congregation accountable for moving the process forward.

Another important piece of content which the guide should include is a section focusing on educational events. These events are a chance within the inclusion process to increase the congregation's knowledge base about issues related to sexual identity and to begin conversations on the topic amongst members. The guide should include

suggestions and resources for the types of events that would be most successful, based on the events hosted at the various congregations analyzed above.

Finally, the guide should also encourage congregations to create a statement of inclusivity or to add something about the congregation's inclusivity to their existing mission statement. This information should be made public by advertising it on their website and print materials. This step is important in that it publicly acknowledges the community's commitment to inclusivity. This is likely to encourage Queer individuals or families who are looking for a community to consider the congregation more seriously and announces to others that the issue is one that the institution is committed to.

The other impact that the analysis of best practices has for the guide is it highlights the usefulness of having a denominational structure to support communities' processes of inclusion. Such a structure provides staff support for congregations, allows them to share best practices and provides an explicit goal which the institution is working towards. The guide might include an afterward considering the benefits of establishing such a structure within the Jewish community.

Summary of Process for Creation of the Guide

The creation of the guide that will follow was partially informed by the analysis above and the lessons learned from the six congregations studied. In addition, a variety of existing inclusion guides - secular and religious, Jewish and Christian – were also reviewed. After reviewing all of these guides, I identified the most relevant and impactful aspects of each guide. These aspects included both tools – such as specific ideas for congregational assessments – and approaches – such as ways to talk about

inclusion as it relates to religious education of children. The content of the guide is thus based on a combination of the information culled from these two sets of analyses.

The content of the guide was also influenced by some of the findings from the Welcoming Synagogues Project. The project's survey identified that "73% of rabbis think their congregations do a good or excellent job welcoming gays and lesbians but only 31% of Conservative rabbis, and 49% of Reform rabbis, said their congregations are actively welcoming of gay and lesbian Jews to a great extent."[59] This finding suggests that there is both openness to the idea of welcoming Queer Jews, especially in these denominations, and room to improve on how that welcoming happens. Additionally, the project found that "36% of rabbis feel they know very little about transgender persons and issues," which highlights the importance of including content related to transgender inclusion in the guide.[60] Finally, the study found that "only 33% of rabbis report that their congregations have held programs or events related to gay and lesbian people," which again highlights the importance of hosting Queer-related educational events, both for the purpose of educating straight congregants and for addressing the needs and interests of Queer members.[61]

While the guide will be the only one of its kind which pulls together all of this information in one document, it is also unique because it does this within an explicitly Jewish framework. Many of the best guides that exist are ones based in the Christian faith and this is clearly demonstrated in the language and examples that the guides use. Most of the Jewish guides that exist are much less comprehensive but use Jewish

---

[59] Drs. Caryn Aviv, Steven Cohen, and Judith Veinstein, "Welcoming Synagogues Project: Preliminary Results from the 2009 Synagogue Survey on Diversity and LGBT Inclusion," http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/SynagogueSurvey2009_DiversityAndLGBT.pdf, 13.
[60] Ibid, 16.
[61] Ibid, 24.

language, texts and tradition to support their assertions. The most comprehensive Jewish

guide, the Hillel guide, is focused on the specific demographic of college students. This

new guide will combine the best of all of these guides to offer to the broader Jewish

community the resources its institutions need to engage in this important process.

Kol Echad: Improving Our Welcome of LGBTQ Families
A Guide for Jewish Institutions Interested in Becoming More Inclusive

What is Kol Echad?
This handbook is meant to serve as a resource for Jewish institutions that are interested in becoming more welcoming and inclusive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer Jews and their families. The guide provides a variety of ideas and strategies that can be implemented to make institutions more LGBTQ-friendly, as well as ideas of how to engage Jewish communities in the process of inclusion. While the guide can be read as one coherent document, individual sections can also be used as resources for specific topic areas or as tools for specific professionals within an institution. In addition to the suggestions included here, the guide also provides references to other resources that could benefit a community engaging in a process of becoming more welcoming.

Why is a guide like this important?
LGBTQ Jews Are Everywhere: Whether or not they self-identify or speak out on these issues, LGBTQ people and their allies are in every community. Even if a congregation has no self-identified LGBTQ members, engagement in such a process is still important, as the historic and ongoing exclusion that many LGBTQ people have experienced in mainstream Jewish settings can often lead them not to disclose their identities.[62] Additionally, if there are no LGBTQ people, whether out or not, in a congregation, this does not mean that LGBTQ people are not interested in participating in finding Jewish communities where they feel at home; it likely means that the congregation has "more work to do to locate, engage and serve" LGBTQ members.[63] It is incumbent upon all communities to reflect on their current practices and policies around inclusion so that no Jewish individual or family feels unwelcome in a Jewish institution because of their identity.

Inclusivity Benefits All Children: All children have the right to feel safe and secure in our community. They deserve the chance to see their own lives reflected in the learning they engage in and the structures that surround them.[64] This can only happen when our communities fully value and include all families, including ones with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents. In addition, while experiences of exclusion and discrimination are particularly hard on those at whom they are directed, homophobia and transphobia[65] hurt all children. When children receive the explicit or implicit message

---

[62] D'ror Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, 12.

[63] Lisa Mottet and Justin Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People: The Nine Keys to Making Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Organizations Fully Transgender-Inclusive," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/opening_the_door.pdf, 16.

[64] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," Human Rights Campaign Foundation, http://www.hrc.org/documents/An_Introduction_to_Welcoming_Schools.pdf,14.

[65] Homophobia is a fear of (and/or hate expressed towards) LGBQ people. Transphobia is a fear of (and/or hate expressed towards) transgender people.

that certain behaviors and identities are less valued than others, this limits their social and intellectual development as well as their personal expression and creativity. Finally, gender or sexuality-based name calling and bullying not only affect those whom they are directed at. They also have negative implications for the perpetrators and bystanders of the act as well.[66]

Discrimination Still Exists: While virulent homophobia is less common in the American Jewish community than it once was, discrimination based on gender and sexual identity is still prevalent in Jewish communities. Despite the many policy decisions and programs initiated by several of the movements over the past couple decades, "many LGBT people still find a gap between the public words of support [from various movements] and everyday inclusion."[67] Support for same-sex ceremonies is still lagging in many congregations and many LGBTQ rabbis find themselves coming up against a glass ceiling professionally.[68] In addition, LGBTQ membership at mainstream synagogues rarely is above a token amount, which likely indicates some barriers either to membership or public disclosure of one's identity.   One lesbian Jew quoted in a recent publication said, "If I have a choice between a congregation that will go out into the world with me (i.e. a LGBT synagogue) and one in which I'll spend a lot of time needing to work on changes right there, I choose the former."[69] We must work as a community to make all congregations ones that will "go out into the world with" their LGBTQ members and ones where they do not feel as though they must engage in extensive work just to make a comfortable place for themselves in the community.

It's The Right Thing to Do, But It's Not Easy: Many congregations, clergy and staff support the idea of inclusion and would like to see their organizations be more inclusive. In fact, in the 2009 Welcoming Synagogue's project, "73% of rabbis [reported that] their congregations do a good or excellent job welcoming gays and lesbians but only 31% of Conservative rabbis, and 49% of Reform rabbis, said their congregations are actively welcoming of gay and lesbian Jews to a great extent."[70] While the desire to be more inclusive is there, figuring out how to engage in such a process, especially with the many competing priorities that face a community, can be difficult. This guide will provide the tools and resources necessary to make such an undertaking less daunting. As one of the contributors to *Kulanu* suggested, "the proportion of GLBT members at 'pluralistic' congregations will remain below the proportion of GLBT Jews in any given area until groups of congregants become proactive in their own communities to educate themselves about GLBT culture, figure out what they can genuinely offer to prospective GLBT

---

[66] Ibid, 10.

[67] Richard F. Address, Joel L. Kushner, and Geoffrey Mitelman, eds., *Kulanu: All of Us – A Program and Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Inclusion*, (New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2007), 43-4.

[68] Ibid, 44 and 84.

[69] Ibid, 44.

[70] Drs. Caryn Aviv, Steven Cohen, and Judith Veinstein, "Welcoming Synagogues Project: Preliminary Results from the 2009 Synagogue Survey on Diversity and LGBT Inclusion," http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/SynagogueSurvey2009_DiversityAndLGBT.pdf, 13.

members, and maintain open and ongoing dialogues with each other and their GLBT members about feelings, perceptions, and needs."[71]

Our community is already welcoming of all people, why do we need to be explicit about our inclusion of LGBTQ individuals and families?
Congregations that already have a spirit of welcoming and inclusivity have already made one important step towards the goal of full inclusivity of LGBTQ Jews. However, the history of negative messages from religious institutions about sexual and gender identity has created an expectation among many LGBTQ individuals of faith that they are not welcome in religious institutions.[72] The discrimination that LGBTQ people have faced may cause them to assume they are "not welcome unless there is active facilitation of inclusion."[73] By publicly declaring this specific type of inclusivity, congregations identify their communities as safe spaces and this can also serve as a form of outreach to potential LGBTQ members. This type of public visibility also positions communities to be able to take an ethical stand on justice issues related to LGBTQ people.[74]

---

[71] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 44.
[72] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation*, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/index.shtml.
[73] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide,"12.
[74] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation*.

Terms and Definitions

As with any cultural group, LGBTQ communities have a variety of terms that are used within the community that may not be as well known to individuals outside of the community. One aspect of a community becoming inclusive is members taking the time to learn this language, so that they can use it appropriately and comfortably with LGBTQ members. This section will provide some information about some of the most commonly used terms. The definitions that follow are excerpted, with some alterations, from the Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide [more substantial additions appear in brackets].

Gay:
1. One who has significant sexual or romantic attractions primarily to members of the same gender or sex.
2. Often used as a synonym for gay male.
3. A sometimes out of date umbrella term for LGBTQ. Lesbians, Bisexuals [and Transgender individuals] often do not feel included by this term.

Lesbian:
A girl/woman who has exclusive sexual and romantic attractions to other women.

Bisexual:
One who has significant sexual or romantic attractions to members of both the genders and/or sexes. [This terms assumes that there are only two genders/sexes, which some LGBTQ individuals disagree with].

Transgender:
A person whose gender identity does not match their born biological sex. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. When referring to transgender people, it is appropriate to use the pronoun they have designated for themselves.

Queer:
Historically a negative term used against people perceived to be LGBTQ, "queer" has more recently been reclaimed by some people as a positive term describing all those who do not conform to rigid notions of gender and sexuality. Queer is often used in a political context and in academic settings to challenge traditional ideas about identity (e.g. "queer theory"). [Queer is also often used as an umbrella term similar to LGBTQ].

Homophobia:
1. A fear of (and/or hate expressed towards) sexual attraction to the same gender or sex.
2. A fear of (and/or hate expressed towards) LGBTQ people.

Coming Out:

To be "in the closet" means to hide one's identity. To "come out" is to publicly declare one's identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Many LGBTQ people are "out" in some situations and "closeted" in others. Coming out is a life-long process—in each new situation a person must decide whether or not to come out. [Some LGBTQ people choose to come out simply by *being* out, without making formal declarations.]

Intersex:
One whose external genitalia at birth do not match the scientific standards for male or female, or one whose sex glands or sexual development do not totally match the sex assigned at birth. (Note: Many intersex infants are surgically "corrected" to conform to the sexual binary of "male" and "female." However, the Intersex Movement seeks to halt pediatric surgeries and hormone treatments.) Hermaphrodite is an outdated and politically incorrect term for intersex.

Genderqueer:
A gender identity between or outside the binaries of masculine or feminine. May also refer to people who identify as both transgender AND queer, i.e. individuals who see gender identity and sexual orientation as overlapping and interconnected. Some genderqueer people use gender neutral pronouns. [This term is most often used by individuals of younger generations].

Transition:
The period of time in which a person begins to live in a gender role which is in accordance with their internal gender identity. Transition may include some or all of the following: changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents, hormone therapy, and possibly some form of chest and/or genital alteration.

Questioning:
Refers to people who are actively aware of uncertainty as to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

What's the Difference Between Gender Identity and Sexual Identity?
The definitions above relate to two different types of identities – gender identity and sexual identity. "Gender identity has to do with self perception and body. This refers to the way a person acts, dresses, and identifies in terms of masculinity, femininity, or anything in between."[75] The terms above that refer to gender identity include transgender, intersex, genderqueer, and transition. "Sexual orientation [or identity] refers to a person's sexual and romantic attractions to others. Attraction is complicated and diverse so folks in the LGBTQ community encompass many different permutations of sexual orientation."[76] The terms above that refer to sexual orientation and identity include gay, lesbian, bisexual, and homophobia. Several of the terms above can

---

[75] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 13.
[76] Ibid.

encompass both sexual and gender identity and these include queer, coming out and questioning.

What's the Challenge with Definitions and Labels?
The challenge with labels is that it's easy to forget about diversity in groups that identify themselves by shared labels or identities. Jews who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, genderqueer and more come from a variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. Though they may choose to identify with the same label, there is still immense diversity in the way that they understand and live out those identities. In addition, it's also important to note that even within LGBTQ communities there is disagreement on the meaning and application of some of these terms. For example, some people strongly prefer to identify as queer rather than lesbian, gay or bisexual, while others find the term queer to be offensive and would never want to self-identify in that way.

Making Institutional Change Possible

Once an individual or small group within a Jewish institution decides that they would like to increase the ways in which their community is welcoming to and inclusive of Jews who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer, the next step is to figure how best to approach this goal.

Planning for Change:
Jumping straight in to demand change in an institution without strategically considering the situation first is often ineffective. To create an effective plan to increase inclusion in an institution, a few steps should be followed:

- *Assess the level of support for such an initiative with various stakeholders[77]*
  If issues of sexual and gender diversity have not come up previously in your institution or have not been dealt with in a public manner, it may be hard to tell who would be in favor of becoming a more welcoming institution. Having conversations with key stakeholders including clergy, educators, lay leaders and active parents can provide insight into the existing level of support for inclusiveness. Given the role that clergy, especially rabbis, play as opinion leaders within Jewish communities, an inclusion process will be helped immensely if any rabbis associated with the institution are willing to be public proponents of the issue.
- *Understand the positions of the institution and movement (if applicable) relative to issues of sexual and gender diversity[78]*
  Many Jewish institutions already have some kind of policies related to sexual and gender diversity, at the very least in the form of a non-discrimination policy. In addition, each of the Jewish movements has made policy decisions around issues related to sexual and gender identity, which affect the positions of local institutions. Before engaging in a process to increase inclusion, it's important to understand the institution's current public position on the issue and how that is impacted by the position of any movement the institution is affiliated with.
- *Identify ways that becoming a more inclusive institution could be connected with the institution's core values, mission statement and/or policies and help others understand these connections[79]*
  Part of engaging in an effective inclusion process is framing the process in the existing language and symbolism of the institution. Does the institution have a core value around diversity or embracing difference? Does the mission statement include language about creating a welcoming institution? Once you've identified these connections, think about how you can most compellingly share them with others.
- *Identify key challenges currently being faced by the institution and ways that becoming more inclusive might address these[80]*

---

[77] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 11.
[78] Ibid, 12.
[79] Ibid, 13.
[80] Ibid.

Every institution has a variety of challenges it is facing at any given moment. Some of those demands might actually be addressed or alleviated by engaging in a process of becoming more welcoming to people of a variety of sexual and gender identities. For example, if an institution is struggling with dwindling membership, creating a more inclusive community might bring an influx of new LGBTQ members to help increase membership.

- *Consider the pace of the process*
  An important final consideration is the pace of the process. An inclusion process needs to move quickly enough so that those in the congregation who identify as LGBTQ or as allies feel that progress is being made. However, the process must move slowly enough that those individuals in the institution who might not initially identify with the issue have time to adjust to the changes gradually.

Creating an Inclusion Committee:
Once you have done the background research described above, the next step is to create an Inclusion Committee to initiate the process and support its progress. The committee should be composed of individuals in the congregation for whom the issue of LGBTQ inclusivity is an important value. This is likely to include LGBTQ members of the institution and individuals who have LGBTQ family or friends. Once such a group has been formed, it should engage in the following activities:

- *Assess the climate of the institution around inclusivity*
  One of the first steps that an inclusion committee should engage in is an assessment of the current state of inclusion in the institution. This assessment should evaluate where the institution is already succeeding at inclusion and where there are areas for growth. To make this exercise as effective and comprehensive as possible, it is important to make sure that a variety of stakeholders participate including clergy, staff, lay leaders, individuals of a variety of ages, and people who identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.[81] See the Appendix for sample questions to include in such an assessment.

- *Raise visibility within the institution around the issue of inclusion[82]*
  Part of the task of an inclusion committee is to bring the issue of LGBTQ inclusion into focus for the institutional community. Many members of the community may not consider the importance of inclusion unless it is highlighted for them, but once it is they may support it.

- *Initiate educational events within the community[83]*
  One important way to raise visibility and move a community in the direction of inclusion is to facilitate a variety of educational events related to sexual and gender diversity. These events should be designed so that they are appropriate for the particular community and meet community members where they are.[84] See the next section on "Educating the Community" for specific ideas.

- *Reach out to other institutional committees to investigate the possibility of collaboration*

---

[81] Ibid, 25.

[82] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 60.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid, 61.

There are a variety of ways for an inclusion committee to partner with other synagogue committees to get their message out. Educational events can be cosponsored with Brotherhoods or Sisterhoods. Community service or political action events focused on LGBTQ issues or rights can be cosponsored with Social Action Committees.[85]

- ***Engage clergy and staff in the process[86]***
  Clergy and staff are among the most important allies to an inclusion process. Due to the power that they hold both politically and in terms of public opinion, one of the key goals of any inclusion committee must be to form alliances with institutional staff and compel them to be active supporters, or even drivers, of the inclusion process. In some institutions clergy and staff may already be on board with the issue. In these cases, identifying the ways that their time and energy can best be used is crucial.

- ***Advocate for the issue***
  While, as Fredrick Douglass said, "power concedes nothing without a demand," the challenge in an inclusion process is to be assertive without being obnoxious.[87] Changing the status quo is not an easy process, however individuals and institutions also do not react well to being bullied. Striking this balance is essential.[88]

---

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Frederick Douglass, "The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Volume 3: 1855-63. Edited by John W. Blassingame. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 204.

[88] Ibid.

Educating the Community

As mentioned in the previous section, an important element of any inclusion process is to educate the community around issues related to sexual and gender diversity. Educational events can serve to provide individuals in the community with information that they had not previously had access to and to challenge assumptions they may have about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer. In addition, if these events include opportunities for LGBTQ individuals to share their stories, this can help to humanize an issue which can be solely theoretical or political to some individuals.

There are a variety of types of education events that an Inclusion Committee might consider hosting, catering to various audiences. Some particularly effective ones include:

- For adults:
    - A showing of the Human Rights Campaign's movie "For the Bible Tells Me So" and facilitated discussion afterwards utilizing the accompanying study guide. See Resources section for more information.
    - Facilitation of the Human Rights Campaign's "Gender Identity and Our Faith Communities" study series. See Resources section for more information.
    - Screenings of the movies "Hineini" or "Keep Not Silent" or "Trembling Before G-d," followed by discussion using the accompanying discussion guides or other discussion questions. See Resources section for more information.
    - An open forum for community members to ask questions that they have but have been afraid to ask for fear of being offensive.
    - Facilitation of the educational session "Know the Heart of the Stranger: A Curriculum on Combatting Assumptions and Stereotypes" by Rabbi Geoffrey Mitelman and Joel L. Kushner, Psy. D. See Resources section for more information.
    - A panel with LGBTQ community members where they can share how their sexual and/or gender identities impact their personal and religious lives, as well as their life within that particular community.[89]
    - One-on-one or small group meetings or discussions to share experiences related to sexual and gender identity and discuss the inclusion process.

- For parents:
    - An educational forum on the effects of hurtful teasing and name-calling, especially related to gender and sexual identity, which provides specific skills to help parents intervene.[90]
    - A workshop on how parents can most effectively use the many teachable moments that arise around sexual and gender diversity with their children.[91]

---

[89] This kind of event should only be considered if LGBTQ individuals offer to participate and should be framed in a way that acknowledges the complexity of their identities and the fact that their sexual and/or gender identity is only part of who they are.
[90] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 12.

- o Host "Answering Your Children's Tough Questions: An Evening Workshop" created by the Welcoming Schools program, which provides parents with a chance to practice answering some of the difficult questions that arise when discussing sexual and gender identity with children. See Resources section for more information.

- For families:
  - o Screening of the movie "That's a Family," which explores the diversity of American families. Include a facilitated discussion afterwards that allows participants to reflect on similarities and differences between the families in the film and their own. See Resources section for more information.

---

[91] Ibid.

How Staff Can Foster an Inclusive Community

Another important step towards becoming an inclusive community is to make specific changes within an institution that either proactively include the needs and interests of LGBTQ individuals or that address current barriers to their inclusion. Clergy, administrators and religious educators all have the ability to foster an inclusive community by making intentional choices within their areas of responsibility.

Clergy

Rabbis and cantors can address issues of inclusivity in their approaches to worship, sermons, ritual facilitation and pastoral care. These steps should be considered, regardless of whether there are any current members of the community who openly identify as LGBTQ or not.

- **Worship:** The language of worship can serve to welcome all involved into community and fellowship or to alienate some while including others. Clergy should look at the language they use during services. Some questions to consider include:
    - o When God is mentioned what gender is used? Is there a way to refer to God and human beings that is non-gendered?
    - o When families or romantic relationships are addressed in the language of the service, is this done in a way that acknowledges the diverse forms that these structures can take?
    - o Are assumptions made in the language of the service that all of those who are listening are straight or that all in attendance identify as either male or female? How can language be changed to address this?
    - o Are there prayers that acknowledge the specific experience of LGBTQ people during the service? Is there a way to include them?
    - o Are there ways that a Shabbat service or other holiday service could be used to educate the community about LGBTQ issues and inclusion?
    - o Are there ways to acknowledge various events in LGBTQ history throughout the Jewish year (for example, acknowledging gay and lesbian victims of the Holocaust at a Yom Hashoah memorial service)?[92]
    - o Are there guidelines that should be shared with others who are involved in leading services to encourage them to use language that is inclusive? If not, could guidelines be created?[93]

---

[92] Congregational Consulting Group, "18 Ways to Make Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Members Feel Welcome in Your Congregation," Union for Reform Judaism, http://urj.org//cong/membership/resources//?syspage=document&item_id=12098.

[93] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Action Steps to Become a Welcoming Congregation*, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/23357.shtml.

- o Will a *gabbai* treat the *aliyah* of someone who is called to the Torah and provides a Hebrew name with two mothers or fathers in the same way that they would any other?[94]
- o Are there ways that traditionally observant members of the community might react negatively to a transgender or genderqueer member who wants to participate in a service? Are there ways that clergy can serve as advocates and mediators in this type of situation?[95]
- o Can particular passages of the Torah (such as the laws against certain kinds of sex between men) be read in a way that notes their challenge to modern communities (e.g., by reading them in an undertone)?[96]

- **Sermons:** Sermons and divrei torah are regular forums for clergy to share their thoughts with a community and can serve as an opportunity both to influence public opinion on inclusion and to model the use of inclusive language. Some ways to do this include:
  - o Consider the language and examples used in sermons to make sure that they are inclusive of people who might identify as LGBTQ. For example, rather than referring to "all men and women" in a sermon, referring to "all of humanity" or "all people."[97]
  - o Regularly use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or queer in "honest and accurate ways."[98]
  - o When speaking about issues of diversity or human rights, include LGBTQ issues and individuals.[99]
  - o If social justice issues related to LGBTQ individuals arise in the local or national community, speak out on these issues and advocate for other members of the congregation to take action.[100]
  - o Consider developing a theological statement of welcome and inclusion for LGBTQ persons and share that with the community[101]
  - o Explicitly address the two Torah portions that legislate against certain kinds of sex between men.[102]

- **Rituals:** Clergy assist and support members of communities to engage in a variety of rituals throughout their lifecycles. LGBTQ members sometimes have unique needs around these rituals. Some issues to consider include:

---

[94] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide,"68.

[95] Ibid, 60.

[96] Dr. Max Grossman, comments on document, April 22, 2011.

[97] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Welcoming Congregation 101,* Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/23348.shtml.

[98] Fr. Bob Kennedy and others, "What Every Parish Can Do as the Body of Christ," Rochester Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry, 2007.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation.*

[101] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 47.

[102] Dr. Max Grossman, comments on document, April 22, 2011.

- o Does the institution allow for LGBTQ members to use the main worship space and services of clergy for lifecycle events such as marriages and baby-namings? Why or why not?
- o Would LGBTQ members be comfortable being open about their identity in the planning process for a ritual and in front of the community? Are there ways that their comfort could be increased?
- o For sensitive events related to the body, such as *mikvah* and illness-related rituals, are clergy prepared to be sensitive to the needs of transgender individuals? How can their needs and experiences be elicited in order to make these situations as comfortable as possible for them?[103]

- **Pastoral Care:** Beyond worship, sermons and rituals, clergy provide immense amounts of support to community members through pastoral care. These one-on-one interactions also provide opportunities for clergy to practice inclusion. Some ways to do this include:
  - o Be explicit about the availability of clergy to support families and parents who are struggling with the sexual or gender identity of their child.
  - o Maintain a list of organizations to which you can refer community members who are struggling with issues related to sexual and gender identity or their family members.[104]
  - o Educate yourself on issues related to coming out and transitioning so that you can serve as a resource to community members who might be going through these processes. Be especially cognizant of issues that might be particularly important in the Jewish community around these issues, including fears about continuity, inability to have children, etc.[105] See the following section on Individuals Questioning Their Sexuality for details.
  - o Educate yourself around issues related to spirituality for transgender Jews and ways that you might support community members grappling with these questions. Some of these issues include fears about exclusion from future ritual participation and whether God will disapprove of them because of their gender identity.[106]

---

[103] Ibid, 126.
[104] Kennedy and others, "What Every Parish Can Do as the Body of Christ."
[105] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 46-9.
[106] Ibid, 59.

Administrators

Institutional administrators often have the ability to set both the tone and the policies for an institution. Administrators can work towards a more inclusive environment by setting an inclusive tone, reflecting these values in institutional publications, thorough professional development for staff, in the institution's physical environment, through organizational policies and by conducting a needs assessment.

- **Setting the Tone:** Administrators can "provide strong leadership that models and engenders respect," which allows all members of the institution to feel included and valued.[107] Administrators can also establish an organizational culture where clergy and educators feel "safe when they use inclusive materials or respond to teachable moments."[108] Finally, administrators can assume the presence of LGBTQ individuals and families in the institution and act on that assumption, even if none are explicitly known, which will lead to a greater sense of inclusion.[109]

- **Internal Publications:** Administrators can review all publications distributed by the institution (including handbooks, directories, and newsletters) to make sure that they use language that is inclusive of LGBTQ individuals and families.[110] If a transgender individual or same-sex couple has requested to be listed in a certain way in publications, this request should be honored.[111] Administrators may also want to consider whether it makes sense to include explicit language in the institution's mission statement about inclusivity with respect to LGBTQ members. Finally, the institution's newsletter can include a column on gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender issues as a regular part of the publication.[112]

- **External Publications:** In addition to internal publications, LGBTQ members should be able to see themselves and their families in the materials that are used to advertise the institution. Administrators may also want to consider including a welcoming statement for LGBTQ individuals and families in these advertising materials.[113]

- **Forms:** Administrators can design forms so that they are inclusive of partners of the same-sex as well as transgender individuals. For membership categories, "committed relationship" can be offered in addition to "single" and "married."[114] On forms related to children, "parent" or "guardian" can be used instead of "mother" and "father." When requesting an individual's gender on a form, the request can include "male," "female" and "other:_____" or it can simply read "gender:_____."[115]

---

[107] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 31.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation.*
[110] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 31.
[111] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Action Steps to Become a Welcoming Congregation.*
[112] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 127.
[113] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Action Steps to Become a Welcoming Congregation.*
[114] Congregational Consulting Group, "18 Ways to Make Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Members Feel Welcome in Your Congregation."
[115] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People," 25.

- **Professional Development:** While some staff may theoretically want to create a more inclusive environment, this endeavor will be most successful when they are given specific tools to do this and a chance to practice. Administrators can provide staff with trainings around "interrupting gender-based or anti-gay name-calling or bullying." Trainings can also be provided around answering questions that members may ask about LGBTQ issues and members who identify as such. Staff should also have a chance to discuss what language is most inclusive when discussing members who identify as LGBTQ. These trainings should be available to all staff including clergy, educators, support staff, administrative staff and maintenance staff, as all of these individuals are likely to interact with LGBTQ members or issues at some point.[116] Administrators may also want to consider consulting with nearby institutions to see what trainings they may be interested in offering and whether there are ways to collaborate.[117]
- **Physical Environment:** There are many ways that an institution's inclusivity can be demonstrated in the physical environment. Pamphlets and posters with LGBTQ-related themes can be displayed around the building, including the Human Rights Campaign's "Living Openly in Your Place of Worship." Notices about local LGBTQ events can be posted on bulletin boards. Staff who feel comfortable can be encouraged to display a "Safe Zone" sticker on their office door which alerts members that they are someone who is open to discussing issues related to gender and sexual identity. See the Resources section for more details. Finally, LGBTQ groups outside of the institution can be invited to rent or use institutional space for their meetings and events.[118]
- **Policies:** Administrators can ensure that the institution has non-discrimination policies that cover all aspects of institutional life including membership and hiring practices.[119] Administrators can also work with other staff, especially those working with children, to create policies on how the institution will respond to harassment related to gender or sexual identity. These policies should include both strategies for preventing harassment and clear disciplinary protocol for when it does happen.[120]
- **Needs Assessment:** Once an institution does have some LGBTQ members, administrators may want to consider conducting a needs assessment with these members. As Lisa Mottet and Justin Tanis point out in their inclusion guide, "Far too often, we waste precious money and resources on programs based on what we think that people will need or want rather than taking the time to find out what the genuine needs are. Conducting a community needs assessment can be a valuable investment to ensure that you are planning the right type of events and services."[121]

---

[116] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 31.
[117] Kennedy and others, "What Every Parish Can Do as the Body of Christ."
[118] Ibid.
[119] Welcoming Congregation Program, *Welcoming Congregation 101*.
[120] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 31.
[121] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People," 42.

Religious Educators

Religious Educators can create safe and inclusive classroom environments for all children, including those who may identify as LGBTQ, may be questioning their sexual or gender identity or who are the children of parents who identify as LGBTQ. Educators can do this through setting the tone in the classroom, in the ways they deal with gender and through the ways they approach specific curricular topics.

- **Setting the Tone:** One of the first things an educator can do to create an inclusive learning environment is to have students create a list of group rules or norms that include "respect, caring for classmates and not hurting each other with words or actions."[122] Educators can then "make the most of teachable moments to reinforce these guidelines."[123] It can be useful to prepare yourself for these types of moments by considering how you might respond to various questions that students might ask about gender and sexual diversity or derogatory comments they might make. You can also focus time within the curriculum on developing interpersonal skills such as "listening, talking things out, conflict management, being an ally, developing friendships and the ability to work with students who are different," all of which will empower students to deal respectfully with those who are different than them.[124]

- **Dealing with Gender:** Numerous messages are conveyed to children and young adults every day about gender in educational settings. It's important to think about what these messages are and how they are affecting young people. Some questions to consider include:
  - What do the words and images you use – in books, posters, music – teach about how different genders are "supposed to be"?[125]
  - How are children taught about Jewish ways of respecting and welcoming many different kinds of human beings? Could transgender people be included?[126]
  - What gender messages or stereotypes are conveyed by the stories, books and games used in the classroom?[127]
  - Are there ways to convey messages that expand rather than limit children's thinking and understandings about gender?[128]
  - What kind of role models are provided for children of each gender? Are they presented with a wide range of models of who they could become? Is this range limited in any way by their gender?[129]
  - Do you make assumptions about "appropriate" behavior for boys and girls? Is this communicated to the children? How might this affect them?

---

[122] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools,"33.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid, 33-34.
[125] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 127.
[126] Ibid.
[127] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 56.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

- o Do young people have a chance to consider the messages they receive about male and female identity?[130] Do they have a chance to critique these messages?
- o How often are the phrases "boys don't…" or "girls don't" used in the classroom? Are there ways to change these statements to "all children do…" instead?[131]
- o When organizing children into groups, how often are these groups determined by gender? Are there other ways to identify groups, such as birthday or first letter of last name?[132]
- **Specific Curricular Topics:** There are curricular topics that are likely to come up in the course of an educational cycle that require specific consideration.
  - o *Holidays:* For example, religious school classes often celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day. Educators should consider that not all children in their classroom may have a mother or a father. Instead, these holidays can be used as an opportunity to discuss honoring and appreciating your elders or they can also be used as an opportunity to discuss all adults who raise children and all kinds of families.[133] Another holiday that is often discussed in religious schools is Yom Hashoah or Holocaust Remembrance Day. This observance is a great time to integrate some LGBTQ Jewish history into the curriculum by discussing the victims of the Holocaust who identified as gay or lesbian.[134]
  - o *Sexual and Gender Identity in Jewish Texts:* A variety of Jewish texts that may be addressed in a religious school setting can be used as a chance to discuss issues of sexual and gender identity. When the creation story is discussed, make sure to include both versions of the story and explore the differing messages conveyed about gender by both. When discussing the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, educators can share both the traditional interpretations of the text as well as alternative re-readings. When discussing the stories of David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi, educators can discuss the love shared by these two sets of characters.[135]

---

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid, 58-9.
[134] Congregational Consulting Group, "18 Ways to Make Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Members Feel Welcome in Your Congregation."
[135] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 80.

Creating an Inclusive Environment for Specific Sub-Groups of the LGBTQ Community

While many of the suggestions listed in the previous section can help in creating a community that is welcoming of LGBTQ members generally, there are some specific sub-groups of this community for whom additional steps can be taken to further improve inclusion.

Transgender Members:

In the Welcoming Synagogues Project, a 2009 study of synagogues nationally which looked at inclusion of LGBT members, 36% of rabbis reported feeling that "they know very little about transgender persons and issues."[136] This lack of awareness around transgender issues both on the part of synagogue staff and laity, suggests that it's especially important for Jewish institutions to be intentional about making changes to be more inclusive of transgender members. This inclusion can be accomplished through increased sensitivity, changes to physical space and active attempts by staff and members to act as allies.

- **Sensitivity:** The most important part of sensitivity when dealing with gender identity is language.
  - *Pronouns:* In classes or group discussion settings, it's helpful to begin an event with a chance for individuals to share their names and anything relevant to the group about their identities, including what pronoun they prefer to be referred to by. If this is not possible, it's important not to assume anyone's gender. If someone's gender is not clear, you can ask them "What is the respectful gender pronoun that you'd prefer I used for you?" Once you know a person's preferred pronoun, it's respectful to use that pronoun whether that person is present or not. Changing the pronouns that we use for others is difficult and you are bound to make mistakes from time to time. If you do, just correct yourself or accept correction and continue. [137]
  - *Questions:* Another place where sensitivity is required is around the questions you ask a transgender person. Open-ended questions permit a transgender person to set the ground rules for discussion ("Would you like to tell me about yourself?" or "What are your interests?") Many times non-transgender people ask many questions of transgender individuals out of curiosity. However, this sort of attention can make a transgender person feel uncomfortable or as though they are being singled out. Avoid asking about an individual's medical history. Whether or not someone has had surgery or is taking hormones in order to transition is information that is personal. In addition, questions about someone's life before they transitioned can often bring up complicated feelings for a transgender

---

[136] Aviv et al, "Welcoming Synagogues Project," 16.
[137] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People," 24.

person. Allow a transgender person to bring this topic up if they are comfortable with doing so, rather than asking about it. Finally, any questions that undercut someone's gender identity such as, "Are you really a man, you look so much like a woman?" or "Why would you choose to be a man, you made such a good woman?" are never appropriate.[138]

o *Public Language:* It's also important that the public language used in Jewish institutions be inclusive. When speaking in services or making an announcement in the newsletter, rather than using "men and women" you can use "people of all genders." When referring to generally to parents you can use "parents" or "parents and guardians" rather than "mothers and fathers."

- **Physical Space:** Issues related to gender identity and physical space come up most often in relation to bathrooms and to housing for off-site events.
    o *Bathrooms:* Many non-transgender individuals still are not comfortable with transgender people, and bathrooms are often a place where this discomfort is most visible. There are several steps that institutions can take regarding bathrooms to make them safe spaces for transgender members. At the most basic level, an institution can clearly communicate a policy to staff and members that individuals are free to use whatever bathroom they feel most comfortable using. In addition, if a building has any single stall bathrooms, these can be marked simply as "Restrooms" rather than being given a specific gender. If such bathrooms exist in addition to multiple-stall bathrooms, clear signage near the multiple-stall bathrooms should indicate where private bathrooms are located.[139] Finally, these steps should be followed both for permanent buildings and also for any temporary buildings that are being used for events, such as retreats.[140] See the Resources section for more information around bathroom access.
    o *Housing:* Many Jewish institutions host events such as trips or retreats that include overnight stays at an off-site location. The default way that institutions often deal with transgender members is by assigning them a single in these situations. Rather than making this assumption, institutions can ask the transgender person whether they would prefer to have a single or whether there is someone else who will be attending with whom they would feel comfortable sharing a room. Alternatively, on registration materials for such an event in the housing section there can be an option where participants can check a box if they are comfortable sharing a room with a person of any gender.[141]
- **Being an Ally:** Institutions can also increase their inclusivity of transgender people by encouraging staff and members to act as allies. Allies take it upon themselves to educate themselves about issues related to gender identity. They proactively support transgender individuals in their chosen gender identity by

---

[138] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 124.
[139] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People," 22.
[140] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 126.
[141] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 58.

using the correct pronoun and showing interest in transgender people as individuals. Finally, allies politely correct the pronoun and language use of other individuals in the community when they make mistakes or use offensive language.[142]

---

[142] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 125.

Bisexual Members

Bisexual individuals are often the most invisible members of the LGBTQ community because it is easy for others to assume that they are either gay/lesbian or straight, depending on who they may currently be in a relationship with or romantically interested in. Some ways that institutions can be inclusive of bisexual members are:

- Educating the community around issues related to bisexuality in addition to those related to gay, lesbian and transgender individuals.
- Encouraging staff and members not to assume that because an individual is in a relationship with someone of the same sex that they are gay/lesbian or if they are in a relationship with someone of a different sex that they are straight.[143]
- Advocating for staff to intervene when they hear derogatory comments or terms being used towards bisexuality, including words like referring to it as a "phase" or referring to a bisexual person as a "fence-sitter" or "switch-hitter."[144]

Children of LGBTQ Parents

The children of LGBTQ parents also have some specific needs that should be taken into consideration by Jewish institutions. Most of these issues are ones that are most likely to be dealt with by clergy or religious educators, though they may come up in other circumstances.

- **Asking About Families:** When asking about families, staff can ask about a child's parents rather than their mom and dad, not assuming that they have one of each. In addition, if a child does reveal that they have same-gendered parents, staff can refrain from delving into the details of the child's birth and background, unless the child raises the topic.[145]
- **Coming Out:** Children of LGBTQ parents must constantly decide how open they are going to be with other children and adults about their family. Staff can assist these children by supporting them in whatever decisions they make about disclosure and providing a safe space for them to talk about these issues.[146]

Individuals Questioning Their Sexual or Gender Identity

The process of questioning one's sexual or gender identity and possibly coming out is a challenging one for many individuals. Often times the support and guidance of a trusted advisor can be incredibly valuable to individuals at this stage. In order for institutions to be most supportive of individuals going through this period, it's important to understand some basic information about the coming out process.

One of the most widely accepted models for the steps of the coming out process was developed by Vivienne Cass, though no one model will accurately depict each

---

[143] Ibid, 111.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 67-8.
[146] Ibid.

individual's unique process. Cass' model suggests that the process includes six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and identity synthesis. During each of these steps there are specific issues the person is grappling with and unique needs they may have, as well as specific ways that those around them can support them.[147] The most important ways to show support during any stage of the process are to normalize the person's experience, be accepting of any feelings they may be having and to serve as a sounding board when needed.[148]
Coming out within the Jewish community brings an added set of challenges, some of which are similar to other identity groups but some of which are different. Many Jews have internalized a sense of homophobia or transphobia based on what they have learned about the Torah's perspective on the subject or through strong Jewish cultural norms such as a "fear of extinction as a result of not reproducing, entrenched gender role expectations, and the importance of family as a primary social unit."[149] It's important to take into consideration these cultural factors when supporting someone who is questioning their sexuality, while also being open to the possibility that other cultural identities, such as racial or ethnic ones, may impact someone's experience of the process.[150]

See the Resources section for more information on resources to support those who are coming out.

---

[147] Susan Young, "Sexual Identity: The Cass Model," Edith Cowan University, http://www.ecu.edu.au/equ/resources/docs/Sexuality_cass_model.pdf.

[148] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 44.

[149] Ibid, 45.

[150] Ibid.

Creating Inclusive Programming

Another important way that institutions can work towards becoming more inclusive of LGBTQ members is by hosting educational and social programming with LGBTQ-related themes. By including this type of programming in the calendar, an institution communicates its interest in addressing the interests of LGBTQ members while also providing educational opportunities for straight members. Some possible programs include:

- LGBTQ Pride Month or National Coming Out Day Celebrations[151]: These celebrations could include a Shabbat service, social event, educational event around a LGBTQ-related current event or discussion group around different types of "coming out" (i.e. as LGBTQ, a Jew, etc.)
- Transgender Day of Remembrance Commemoration: This day serves to commemorate all of those individuals who have been killed because of hatred against transgender people. This commemoration could be marked by a memorial service, a Shabbat service with related readings or by bringing in a local transgender group to talk about current local issues facing this community.[152]
- Queering Jewish Texts Study Group: There are many Jewish texts which can be read through a new lens to "explore same-sex desire and/or gender non-conformity."[153] Some of these texts include the stories of David and Jonathan, Resh Lakish and R. Yochanan, Naomi and Ruth, and Isaac and Rebecca.[154]
- Arts and Culture Events: There are a vast array of movies, books, theatre pieces and music performances with LGBTQ and Jewish themes which can be hosted by Jewish institutions.[155] See the Resources section for more details.
- Transgender Topics: Due to the more recent arrival of transgender issues in the public eye, it's important to also include events that specifically focus on these issues. Institutions can "invite authors, artists, or scholars who can speak about trans issues in a Jewish context."[156] See the Resources section for more details.
- Discussion of Transgender Issues in Jewish Text: In the past several years, scholarship around transgender issues in Jewish text has become more common and widely available. Sponsoring a text study around these issues can be a good way to bring together issues of transgender and Jewish identity. See the Resources section for more details.
- LGBTQ Singles Events: Many Jewish institutions sponsor events aimed at helping Jewish singles meet potential partners in a Jewish context. As hard as that process is for straight individuals, it can be even more challenging for LGBTQ Jewish singles. Sponsoring LGBTQ singles events for Jews would provide a valuable service to this community.

---

[151] Ibid, 90.
[152] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 125.
[153] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide,"110.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid, 113-40.
[156] Ibid, 58.

Supporting Inclusive Jewish Rituals

Institutions which include observance of Jewish rituals may also want to consider offering some rituals designed specifically for LGBTQ Jews or supporting these individuals in creating their own Jewish rituals for various events in their lives. These rituals may be private rituals that individuals are encouraged to perform on their own or ones that are open to the entire community.

As Rabbis Jason Klein and Mychal Copeland explain, "What makes queer Jewish ritual? Sometimes it is as simple as Jewish ritual performed by queer Jews or in queer communities, such as a Friday night service in an LBGT synagogue. Sometimes it is a reworking of a Jewish tradition to make it more accessible and meaningful to LBGT Jews, such as an addition of a reading about the Stonewall rebellions to a Passover Seder or the changing of 'bridge and groom' to 'bride and bride' at a lesbian wedding. Additionally, it might be a more thorough reconstruction of Jewish tradition altogether when the tradition seems particularly sexist, queer-unfriendly, or heterosexist to [the] contemporary eye."[157] However one defines it, providing and supporting rituals that affirm the lives of LGBTQ individuals is an important step towards inclusivity.

Some queer Jewish rituals that institutions might consider include:
- Circumcision Ritual for the Male Child of Lesbian Parents: Often times the ritual of circumcision and naming for a male child is seen as a tradition passed on from father to son. The story of Tziporah, Moses' wife, who circumcises her son herself can provide a basis for creating a circumcision ritual for lesbian parents.[158]
- Rituals and Blessings for Coming Out: Over the past few decades a variety of rituals and blessings have been created to honor the process of coming out. The simplest of these is to say a *shechiyanu* blessing (the blessing said when doing something for the first time) after each experience of coming out to a new person.[159] Rabbi Jason Klein has also adapted the *kiddush levanah* (blessing of the new moon) ritual to be used as a celebration of coming out.[160] In addition, Rabbi Rebecca Alpert has written a new blessing in both Hebrew and English for coming out.[161] See the Resources section for more details on accessing these blessings and rituals.
- Seders: The Passover seder has a lot of potential for incorporation of LGBTQ themes and new rituals. Some communities sponsor explicitly Queer Seders, while others incorporate readings or rituals on these topics into other seders. See the Resources section for resources to use for incorporation of LGBTQ themes at seders.
- Rituals and Blessings for Transitioning Genders: A few Jewish scholars in recent years have begun to create rituals and blessings for individuals transitioning

---

[157] Ibid, 72.
[158] Ibid, 71.
[159] Ibid, 75.
[160] Ibid, 79-81.
[161] Ibid, 83.

genders. Rabbi Elliot Rose Kukla has developed a set of blessings for transitioning.[162] Tova Rosen also recently translated a medieval Jewish poem about a man's desire to become a woman which could be used as the basis for a ritual around transition.[163] See the Resources section for more details on accessing these blessings and readings. Additionally, transgender individuals may want to create a ritual using the *mikvah* to mark their transition. Finally, because of the connection that bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies have to become a Jewish woman or man, transgender individuals may want to study for and celebrate an adult bar or bat mitzvah after their transition.[164]

- Taking the Gender Out of Ritual: Some Jewish rituals, especially circumcisions, baby namings and bar/bat mitzvahs, have an intensive focus on the gender of the child celebrating that particular milestone. For children and youth who may either be intersex or already identify as transgender as a teen, this focus on gender can be alienating. Finding ways to celebrate the important parts of these life cycle events while allowing for fluidity around the idea of gender can make these events more inclusive of these young people and their families.[165]

---

[162] Ibid, 62-3.

[163] Ibid, 63-4.

[164] Ibid, 81-2.

[165] Rachel Biale, "Beyond the Binary Bubble: Addressing Transgender Issues in the Jewish Community," in *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community,* ed. Noach Dzmura. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 214-16.

Reaching Out to the LGBTQ Community

Once an institution has engaged in the various steps mentioned previously, the next step is to work on performing outreach to the LGBTQ Jewish community in the area and welcoming more LGBTQ members into the institution. As mentioned earlier, because of the discrimination and exclusion that many LGBTQ people have experienced, many assume that they are not welcome unless that welcome is made explicit. Outreach is one way to accomplish this.

When doing outreach, the framing is important. If LGBTQ people feel as though they are being encouraged to attend to address an institution's desire for diversity, rather than because the community is interested in what they as individuals can bring to and learn from the community, this can be a serious turnoff. As Lisa Mottet and Justin Tanis suggest, "The bridge you are trying to build is likely to be much more travelled if you have crossed over it first, and arrived with an open mind and potential resources rather than [a] fixed agenda and a need."[166]

Some specific tips that Jewish institutions can follow for reaching out to the LGBTQ community include:

- If there are any LGBTQ members of the institution already, ask them about their experience and what drew them to the congregation. Ask if they might be willing to reach out to their social networks.[167]
- Contact LGBTQ groups in the area to ask for their input and for them to advertise the institution to their members. Consider co-sponsoring events with these groups.[168]
- Consider hosting an LGBTQ specific outreach event. Some folks choose to avoid situations where they are likely to be the token LGBTQ person. Hosting an event where there will be many LGBTQ individuals can help to alleviate this concern.[169]
- Keep at it! As Lisa Mottet and Justin Tanis highlight, "Remember that it takes perseverance to develop authentic relationships, especially among those who have been stigmatized and excluded in the past. You will need to prove that your organization is trustworthy and truly welcoming of [LGBTQ] people. Don't expect a huge response to a first invitation."[170] Continuing to engage in outreach, even if it doesn't yield immediate results, is likely to produce results eventually.
- Don't be shy about sharing publicly any changes your congregation is making to be more inclusive. LGBTQ people will value the time and intention the community is devoting to the issue and be more likely to consider joining.[171]

---

[166] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People,"18.
[167] Ibid, 17.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid, 19.
[170] Ibid, 18.
[171] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 127.

Dealing with Challenges

While some Jewish communities may engage in a process of becoming more inclusive of LGBTQ people without any tension as a result, it is common that challenges will arise during the process. These challenges are likely to occur in two forms, either as challenges to the process itself or as incidents of homophobia or transphobia. This section will include strategies for dealing with both of these.

Challenges to the Process:
Challenges to the process of inclusion itself most commonly arise in the form of resistance based on discomfort and on concerns about negative impacts on children.

- *Dealing with Discomfort:* Often times discomfort arises as a result of ignorance. The more information and resources that members of the institution have about the process and issues of sexual and gender identity, the less likely they will be to feel uncomfortable with the process.[172] In addition, clergy, administrators and educators can support the inclusion process by gently challenging the discomfort of members about the process and encouraging reflection on the root of those feelings.
One place where discomfort is most likely to arise is around use of restrooms and transgender members. Feeling uncomfortable can sometimes lead non-transgender members to react in a strong or angry manner to a transgender person's use of a certain bathroom. It is important for an institution's staff to acknowledge that person's feelings while also asserting the transgender person's right to use whichever bathroom they feel is appropriate for them.[173]

- *Concerns about Children:* Much of the resistance to communities becoming more inclusive of LGBTQ individuals centers around concerns for the welfare of the children in the community. People often mistakenly believe that in order to be inclusive around issues of sexuality when working with children, one must talk about sex. In fact, when talking about LGBTQ issues with children, you are "talking about families, name-calling, discrimination and current events," which most people would accept as appropriate topics of discussion.[174] All children benefit from these types of conversations, which expand their world view and help them develop critical social skills.[175] Working for inclusion also involves talking about respect and creating environments where all children feel valued and respected, regardless of their sexual or gender identity or that of their parents.

Incidents of Homophobia or Transphobia:
The other form in which resistance to a process of inclusion might arise is through homophobia or transphobia. It is important for institutions to have policies and procedures for dealing with such incidents. These steps should include actions by staff to support the person who was the target of the comment or action and help them process

---

[172] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 19.
[173] Mottet and Tanis, "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People," 22.
[174] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 13.
[175] Ibid, 18.

the experience. They should also incorporate procedures for addressing the perpetrator to help them understand the impact of their actions, educate them about gender and sexuality-based discrimination and provide appropriate consequences if necessary.[176]

---

[176] Ken Rigby, "Addressing Bullying in Queensland Schools," Department of Education and Training of the Queensland Government, www.education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/protection/docs/sm-vodcast5.doc

Taking the Next Step: Advocacy

Once an institution has taken steps to become more inclusive of LGBTQ people and has worked to bring more of those individuals into the community, engaging in advocacy on LGBTQ issues can be an important way of putting institutional values into action.

There are many ways that this kind of advocacy can occur in an institution, including:
- If the institution has a Social Action Committee or agenda, issues related to LGBTQ rights can be included, such as advocacy around marriage equality, non-discrimination laws and hate crime legislation.[177]
- The institution can sign on to pledges, letters and petitions calling for awareness of LGBTQ issues and advocating for specific rights.
- The institution can respond to instances of homophobia or transphobia in the broader community by having clergy or staff write opinion pieces to local or Jewish newspapers, by participating in rallies and by acting in solidarity with those targeted.

---

[177] Chankin-Gould, ed., "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide," 41.

Conclusion

Hopefully this guide has provided a variety of strategies for increasing the level of inclusivity at your institution. The entire Jewish community will be strengthened when more of our institutions open their doors to LGBTQ Jews and fully integrate these individuals into our communities.

While this guide provides helpful resources for individuals and institutions who are interested in engaging in the process of becoming more inclusive, it does not provide an organizational structure for such a process. Other denominations have created structures, such as the Methodists' Reconciling Ministries Network and Unitarian Universalists' Welcoming Congregation Program, to support congregations wishing to engage in this type of journey.[178] The benefits of having such a structure include:

- Ability to provide staff support to congregations undergoing the process
- A structure for congregations to share best practices
- Creation of a specific decision for a congregation to make (i.e. Should we join this program or accept this label?), rather than the more general goal of "being more inclusive" which can be hard to evaluate progress on
- A consistent label that congregations who have undergone the process can use to identify and publicize themselves

Jewish institutions, such as the various movements or Jewish LGBTQ organizations, may want to consider creating a similar structure for the Jewish community.

---

[178] Reconciling Ministries Network: http://www.rmnetwork.org/ and Welcoming Congregation Program: http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/index.shtml

<div align="center">**Resources**</div>

Educating the Community:
- The Human Rights Campaign's "For the Bible Tells Me So" Documentary and Curriculum: http://www.hrc.org/issues/10750.htm
- The Human Rights Campaign's "Gender Identity and Our Faith Communities" Curriculum: http://www.hrc.org/issues/11618.htm
- "Hineini" Movie and Discussion Guide: http://www.hineinithefilm.org/
- "Trembling Before G-d" Movie and Discussion Guide: http://filmsthatchangetheworld.vswebdev.com/The-Films/Trembling-Before-G-d
- "Keep Not Silent" Movie: http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/specialcollectionsandoffers/pdf/jewish_films07.pdf
- "Know the Heart of the Stranger: A Curriculum on Combating Assumptions and Stereotypes" in *Kulanu* (see Bibliography), pp. 93-109.
- "Answering Your Children's Tough Questions: An Evening Workshop" from "The Welcoming Schools Guide": http://www.hrc.org/documents/wschools_Answering_Tough_Questions.pdf
- "That's a Family" Movie and Discussion Guide: http://www.hrc.org/documents/wschools_Thats_a_Family_Family_Forum.pdf

How Staff Can Foster an Inclusive Community:

Administrators:
- The Human Rights Campaign's "Living Openly in Your Place of Worship" Brochure: http://www.hrc.org/about_us/7163.htm
- Other Distributors of Posters and Brochures:
  - http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-posters.html
  - http://syracuseculturalworkers.com/taxonomy/term/84/posters_unframed
- Safe Zone Posters and Kits:
  - http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/SafeZone_SafeSchoolsCoalition.pdf
  - https://safespace.glsen.org/about.cfm

Creating an Inclusive Environment for Specific Sub-Groups of the LGBTQ Community:

Transgender Members:
- **Other Resources about Bathroom Access:**
  - Transgender Law Center's "Peeing in Peace": http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/publications.html#bathrooms.
  - The Sylvia Rivera Law Project film and companion resource, "Toilet Training": http://www.srlp.org/index.php?sec=05A&page=toilettraining.

Individuals Questioning Their Sexual or Gender Identity:
- The Human Rights Campaign's "Straight Guide to LGBT Americans": http://www.hrc.org/documents/Straight-Guide-to-LGBT-Americans-September-2010.pdf
- The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide: http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, pp. 43-9

Creating Inclusive Programming:

Arts and Culture Events **and** *Transgender Topics:*
- The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide: http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, pp. 113-40

Transgender Issues in Jewish Text:
- *Balancing on the Mehitzah* edited by Noach Dzmura (see Bibliography)
- TransTexts: Exploring Gender in Jewish Sacred Texts, sponsored by Jewish Mosaic: http://www.jewishmosaic.org/verses/about
- "Gender in Genesis" by Gwynn Kessler in Lillith Magazine : http://www.lilith.org/pdfs/Lilith%20Trans%20Sp02.pdf
- "What the Talmud Says about Gender Ambiguity" by Alana Suskin in Lillith Magazine: http://www.lilith.org/pdfs/Lilith%20Trans%20Sp02.pdf

Queer Jewish Ritual:

Blessings for Coming Out:
- Rabbi Jason Klein's Kiddush Levanah: The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide: http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, pp. 79-81
- Rabbi Rebecca Alpert's Blessing: The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide: http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, p. 83
- Other Coming Out Ceremonies/Prayers: http://elearning.huc.edu/jhvrc/rea_che.php?subcategory=Coming+Out&category=Liturgy%2FRitual+Resources#Coming Out

Passover Resources:
- Stonewall Seder Haggadah: http://www.anotherqueerjubu.com/SederforSite.PDF
- Orange on the Seder Plate Reading:
  - http://elearning.huc.edu/jhvrc/upload/Why%20Is%20There%20an%20Orange%20on%20the%20Seder%20Plate%20by%20Lisa%20Edwards.pdf
  - http://haggadot.com/clips/susannah-heschel-explains-orange

- Example of a GLBT Haggadah:
  http://elearning.huc.edu/jhvrc/docs/JQ%20Haggadah%20Final%20no%20pics%204%209%2008.pdf
- Description of an Alternative GLBT Seder Plate:
  http://guydads.blogspot.com/2010/04/our-gay-passover-seder-plate-of.html

Rituals and Blessings for Transitioning Genders:
- Rabbi Elliot Rose Kukla's Blessings: The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide:
  http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, pp. 62-3
- Tova Rosen's Translation of Poem: The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide:
  http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf, pp. 63-4

Other Resources of Queer Jewish Ritual can be found at the Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center sponsored by Hebrew Union College's Institute of Judaism and Sexual Orientation: http://elearning.huc.edu/jhvrc/rea_che.php

Other Relevant Resources:

From Welcoming Schools Guide:
- Workshop for Educators on "Practicing Responses to Questions about LGBT Topics": http://www.welcomingschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Welcoming-Schools-Connecting-Practicing-Responses-Extended.pdf
- Handout on "What Do You Say to 'That's so gay!'":
  http://www.welcomingschools.org/what-do-you-say-to-thats-so-gay/

Books about Transgender Issues:
- Boylan, Jennifer F. *She's Not There: a Life in Two Genders*. Random House, 2003.
- Brown, Mildred L., and Chloe Ann Rounsley. *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism--for Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals*. Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- Conover, Pat. *Transgender Good News*. New Wineskins Press, 2002.
- Cromwell, Jason. *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities*. University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Currah, Paisley, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter, eds. *Transgender Rights*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Green, Jamison. *Becoming a Visible Man*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.
- Peters, Julie Anne. *Luna*. Little, Brown Young Readers, 2006.
- Rudacille, Deborah. *The Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism, and Transgender Rights*. Pantheon, 2005. Non-fiction
- Sycamore, Matt Bernstein. *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*. Seal Press, 2006.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. *Parrotfish*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2007.

Movies about Transgender Issues:

- *Boys Don't Cry*. Dir. Kimberly Peirce. Perf. Hilary Swank. DVD. 20th Century Fox, 1999.
- *Call Me Malcolm*. Dir. Joseph Parlagreco. DVD. United Church of Christ, and Filmworks, Inc., 2004.
- *Cruel and Unusual*. Dir. Janet Baus, Dan Hunt and Reid Williams. Outcast Films, 2006.
- *Ma Vie En Rose*. Dir. Alain Berliner. Perf. MichèLe Laroque, and Jean-Philippe ÉCoffey. DVD. Sony Pictures, 1997.
- *The Brandon Teena Story*. Dir. Gréta Olafsdóttir. DVD. Docurama, 1998
- *Transamerica*. Dir. Duncan Tucker. Perf. Felicity Huffman, Danny Burstein, and Andrea James. DVD. Weinstein Company, 2005.
- *TransGeneration*. Dir. Jeremy Simmons. DVD. New Video Group, 2005.

Appendix: Sample Questions for Institutional Climate Assessment

Adapted from Welcoming Schools Guide[179]:
- Does our congregation have core values or a mission statement that includes respect for diversity and multiculturalism?
- Does our congregation have a written policy protecting members from harassment, violence and discrimination with regard to real or perceived sexual or gender identity?
- Does our religious school have an anti-bullying policy that specifically identifies bias-based bullying?
- Do our forms that families fill out reflect diversity, including households with parents of the same-gender?
- In the last three years, has our institution held trainings for staff on bullying and name-calling that address bias-based harassment, including harassment related to a person's real or perceived sexual or gender identity?
- In the last two weeks, have staff heard students use words related to any of the following as slurs:
    o Gender (sissy, tomboy, "…like a girl")?
    o Sexual orientation (fag, queer, "that's so gay")?
- In the last two weeks, has staff seen students physically harass other students while using slurs or put-downs related to the above?
    o If yes, have they interrupted the behavior?
- Does our library [and/or classrooms] have books that show a diversity of families, including families with two moms or two dads?
- When doing a lesson plan to enhance understanding of different kinds of families, do educators include diverse families – including some with two moms and two dads?
- Do educators in our congregation feel comfortable defining the words "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," or "transgender" to students?
- Which of the following present obstacles for our staff to addressing family diversity or intervening in anti-gay language used by students?
    o Fear of parental dissatisfaction
    o Students are too young
    o Lack of time in curriculum
    o Educators lack training
    o Educators lack resources
    o Religious objections
    o Inappropriate to discuss outside home
    o There are no obstacles
- Which of the following present obstacles for our staff to addressing gender roles and expression with students?
    o Fear of parental dissatisfaction
    o Students are too young
    o Lack of time in curriculum

---

[179] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," 25-30.

- o Educators lack training
- o Educators lack resources
- o Religious objections
- o Inappropriate to discuss outside home
- o There are no obstacles

Adapted from Building an Inclusive Church's Congregational Assessment and Welcoming Process Outline:[180]
- Does the congregation welcome/include a diverse population?
    - o No, seeks a homogeneous environment
    - o Yes, but only some types of diversity are accepted
    - o Yes, and many types of diversity are accepted
    - o Yes, and gay and lesbian folks are encouraged to attend
    - o Yes, and LGBT people are encouraged to attend
- Are you aware of parents or family members of LGBT persons in the congregation?
    - o No
    - o Yes, but they do not accept their children
    - o Yes, and they accept their kids, but are in the closet in the congregation
    - o Yes, and they are out of the closet about their children
    - o Yes, and they are visible advocates
- Has the congregation already done or participated in blessings of same-gender relationships?
    - o No, never
    - o No, but clergy participated in such a service at another synagogue
    - o No, but two members did have a service which was private and not at the church
    - o Yes, but the service was private and at the church. The congregation knew.
    - o Yes and the congregation participated
- Does your rabbi use examples including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in sermons?
    - o No, never
    - o Maybe once or twice but it caused a problem in the congregation
    - o Yes, without comment from the congregation
    - o Regularly, without comment from the congregation
    - o Often, with positive comment from the congregation
- Does your congregation offer prayers that explicitly name LGBT persons and inclusion?
- Does your congregation offer religious rituals for its LGBT members around coming out, gender transitioning, and other life-cycle events?
- Does your congregation offer service trips for its youth group (and adults) that address specific LGBT issues?

---

[180] Welcoming Resources, "Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, http://www.welcomingresources.org/welcomingtoolkit.pdf, 15-8.

- Does your congregation offer letter writing, legislative visits and other forms of public advocacy on behalf of LGBT persons and families?
- Does your congregation offer gender-neutral bathrooms?
- Does your congregation have a sign on its building that declares it inclusive?
- Does your congregation make its space available for use by LGBT groups?

Excerpted from "Is Your T Written in Disappearing Ink?":[181]
- Does your program, publication, or policy refer only to "sexual orientation" or do you also include "gender identity"?
- Do the in-person and printed materials that represent your program or publication include identifiably transgender persons?

Excerpted from "Welcoming GLBT Jews into Our Synagogues":[182]
- Is the presence of GLBT people in our congregation/community/families ever evident in the word we hear from the pulpit?
- Do the rabbi's sermons presume that all Jews have been, are, or want to be married or to bear children? Or, are words such as "committed relationship" and "raising children" used instead, as not all the same-gender couples can get married or bear children?
- Is the clergy comfortable incorporating and using new liturgy and rituals that address the life-cycle events of GLBT people? Do they know where to find such liturgy (e.g, union ceremonies, coming-out prayers, transitioning blessings, rituals of separation)?
- Do GLBT couples receive joint *aliyot* and anniversary blessings?
- May GLBT couples celebrate *kiddushin* (Jewish holy union) in our sanctuary? Will our rabbi or cantor officiate?
- May GLBT families name children (born by artificial insemination, surrogacy, or adopted) in our sanctuary?
- If contemporary poetry, readings, and musical compositions are ever included in our liturgy, are works by GLBT authors/composers included?
- Are GLBT Jews in visible positions of leadership in our congregation as trustees, committee chairs, lay service leaders (e.g., Torah readers, *shofar* blowers), teachers, youth advisors, administrative staff, clergy?
- Are GLBT couples able to feel comfortable to hold hands in our synagogue? Or, is it only okay if they come to services as long as they don't touch each other?
- Are lesbian, bisexual or transgender women in our Sisterhood invisible? Do they feel welcome as they are, or do they feel that to be involved in the Sisterhood they must remain in the closet?

---

[181] Loree Cook-Daniels, "Is Your 'T' Written in Disappearing Ink?: A Checklist for Transgender Inclusion," FORGE and Transgender Aging Network, http://www.forge-forward.org/handouts/InclusionChecklist.pdf.

[182] Address et al, ed., *Kulanu*, 49-55.

- Are gay, bisexual, or transgender men in our Brotherhood invisible? Do they feel welcome as they are, or do they feel that to be involved in the Brotherhood they must remain in the closet?
- Are letters sent home addressed to parents or to "moms"?
- Do our textbooks, teaching materials, community presentations, and hands-on projects render GLBT people invisible or betray a heterosexual bias?
- How would a child of gay co-parents, a child of a single lesbian mother, or a child with a transgender dad and a straight mother feel in our school?
- Are our youth group events safe and accessible for queer and questioning teenagers (e.g., dances, support groups)?
- Can GLBT people talk freely about their work/lives at the *Oneg Shabbat* or the Brotherhood breakfast?
- Does our congregation extend "spousal benefits" to the partners of our employees? Is the health insurance we provide for a GLBT person with a partner an individual or a family policy?
- Do our membership conditions/materials presume heterosexuality or discriminate against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people and their families?
- If we have family memberships, do they apply to GLBT couples?
- Does our application say "member 1 and member 2" and then ask "relationship," or does it say "husband and wife"?
- Have we joined the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation or the World Congress of GLBT Jews – Keshet Ga'avah or other such Jewish GLBT organizations as a sign of our welcome? Is that membership noted in our materials and on our Web site?
- Do notices of events for "families" make it explicit that lesbians and gay men (as single parents or co-parents) are welcome with their children? (Or is the parent/toddler group called "Mommy, Daddy, and Me"?)

Other:
- Does your congregation work with your denominational advocacy group on issues related to LGBT rights?

Summary Report from Survey of Congregations

Background

In the fall of 2010, I conducted a survey of DC metro area Jewish congregations and day

schools about how they approached the topic of inclusivity of LGBTQ families. The

survey was distributed to thirty-two congregations and day schools from a variety of

denominations including Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Havurah,

and trans-denominational. Staff from thirteen institutions responded. This included four

day schools/yeshivot, seven synagogues, and two pre-schools. Four of these institutions

affiliated with the Conservative movement, two identified as community schools, one

affiliated with the Orthodox movement, one identified as Trans-denominational, one

identified as independent and one identified as liberal/progressive/unaffiliated. The

number of families attending the institutions ranged from eighteen to eight hundred.

Collectively the institutions identified no more than forty-five families (and probably

substantially less) engaged by their institutions that were headed by a single LGBTQ

person or a LGBTQ couple.

Issues raised by survey data and responses
- Low reporting of queer families: Given the total number of families served by all
  of the institutions that responded, the number of LGBTQ families reported is
  vastly lower than one would expect given the percentages of adults who identified
  as LGBTQ. This raises the question of why these numbers are so low. Are there
  really that few families engaged by these institutions? Are they engaged but
  remain closeted? Are they out but the staff of the institution is not aware of the

way that they identify? If there really are that few families engaged, that then raises the question of why. One survey respondent suggested that most LGBTQ families are located in urban areas (not suburban), however studies suggest that this assumption is inaccurate.[183]

- Lack of efforts towards inclusiveness because of low reporting: Several respondents mentioned that the institution has not made particular strides towards inclusion because there either are no LGBTQ families or very few. This raises the question of whether these efforts are only necessary when LGBTQ families are present in a community or whether there is inherent value in the process of becoming more inclusive, even if there are no LGBTQ members of the community.

- "The families are warmly welcomed as part of our community, just as all families are": One theme that came up in several survey responses was the idea that no special efforts towards inclusion were necessary because everyone is treated equally in the community. Having a "color-blind" approach to sexual and gender identity, though, is no more effective than the same approach to race. Not only do LGBTQ families have needs unique to them but it is also important for the children of these families to see themselves in the materials and content of their education, which is unlikely to happen unless explicit efforts are made towards this end.

- Protocols for dealing with disrespectful behavior towards LGBTQ families: Of the seven institutions that reported having some kind of protocol related to

[183] HRC Foundation Family Project, "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools," Human Rights Campaign Foundation, http://www.hrc.org/documents/An_Introduction_to_Welcoming_Schools.pdf, 18

disrespectful speech, all said that this type of speech when directed at a child of a LGBTQ family or the family itself would be treated under the same guidelines as any other disrespectful behavior. On the one hand, it's encouraging that these institutions are addressing it as another form of intolerance and disrespect. On the other hand, there are issues at play in discrimination based on sexual and gender identity that differentiate it from general disrespect and can require different responses. It's widely recommended that organizations have distinct policies for this type of hate speech, rather than conflating it with other kinds of intolerance.[184]

- Like with like: One respondent suggested that "in my experience, GLBT folks find communities that have other GLBT folks in it." While there is something to this idea of critical mass, it's also important that institutions and communities don't use this as an excuse for avoiding engagement with the process of inclusion. Critical mass is important when you're struggling against an institution which is not always welcoming of you. If Jewish institutions became more inclusive of LGBTQ families across the board, the need to find a community with other queer folks would decrease.

- Congregational inclusivity education: Out of the respondents, only two institutions answered that they do education with their community about inclusion of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. One of the respondents does it "in…everyday language," while the other does "nothing fixed" but sporadic things like speakers and movies. The lack of educational events of this nature happening in institutions may indicate that this is an issue which

---

[184] Ibid, 31.

63

congregations think no longer needs to be addressed, is too controversial to address in community-wide programming or is seen as being a lower priority to address than other issues.

- Inclusivity of forms: One positive discovery from the survey data was that the majority of institutions have moved to using more inclusive language on the forms that members fill out. Most organizations no longer use mother and father for school forms but instead use parent or adult. Additionally, most organizations do not request the gender of parents on forms.

- Homophobia in the Orthodox community: Unfortunately, the responses of the one Orthodox respondent to the survey only served to reinforce the idea that the Orthodox community is largely homophobic. This institution's response included statements such as "GLBT is a sin. No one who self identifies this way is welcome." When asked what resources the institution would need if it was interested in becoming more inclusive, the response was "completely uninterested."

Steps towards inclusion

Respondents shared a variety of ways that their organizations have considered or acted on making their institutions more inclusive. These responses provide a preliminary insight into what the mainstream Jewish community considers inclusion that may be useful to the creation of the inclusion guide. In the eyes of respondents, being inclusive means:

- Putting materials relevant to these families out in public areas of the building

- Telling these families about how they can engage with the institution

- Giving the families extra attention and checking in with them about their experience in the community

- Being welcoming

- Having a "mission" to be inclusive

- Providing a warm welcome

- Treating LGBTQ families just like other families

- Treating everyone with kindness

- Expecting decency and civility to all people

How might this information be useful

Findings from these surveys may be useful both to inform the content and approach of the inclusion guide and also more broadly for the Jewish community and activist groups that work on these issues.

Ways that the survey can inform the inclusion guide:

- The assumption that there are not many LGBTQ families that engage with the institutions that responded to this survey suggests that the guide should include some content both about why there may be more families than assumed and also why it is important to do this work even if there are very few LGBTQ families in a community.

- The common statement that LGBTQ families are treated just like everyone else suggests that it is important also to include some information about the particular needs of LGBTQ families and the children of these families.

- The switch that many institutions have made away from "mother" and "father" on forms could be applauded in the guide as an important step towards inclusion.

- The generally positive tone of most of the responses indicates that the responding institutions are open to this issue and interested in being welcoming which suggests that the guide could be a useful tool for these institutions. The guide can elaborate on some of the ideas that institutions have already been considering.

- The vitriolic tone of the one Orthodox reply reinforces the idea that the guide will be aimed at individuals and institutions who already accept the importance of this issue and that the guide will not try to convince those opposed to inclusion of its value.

More broad applications:
- The common assumption in survey responses that there are not many LGBTQ families that engage with their institutions is something that definitely warrants further exploration. If it is really that these families are not engaging with these institutions than it would seem that there is some outreach and inclusion work that needs to be engaged in (which the guide could help with). If it is that these families are parts of these institutions and are either closeted or the staff is unaware, then there would also be an opening for some inclusion work to be done to make members feel more comfortable being out, as well as a need for some education of staff. It might also be useful for some real data to be collected about how many LGBTQ families are really engaging with mainstream Jewish institutions such as those surveyed.

- There seems to be an opening for some significant work to be done in presenting basic public education around sexual and gender identity issues in Jewish institutions, given how few reported that this kind of education is happening. It would seem that an organization dedicated to that work would find more than enough opportunities to engage with various Jewish institutions.

Bibliography

Academic Approaches to Inclusion
- Brimhall-Vargas, Mark, email message, Feb. 18, 2011.
- Case, Kim and Briana Stewart. "Transgender Across the Curriculum: A Psychology for Inclusion." *Teaching of Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2009): 117-121.
- Comstock, Gary. *Gay Theology Without Apology*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1993.
- De Castell, Suzanne and Mary Bryson. *Radical In(ter)ventions: Identity, Politics, and Difference/s in Educational Praxis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Garcia, Stephen, Edward Shin and Alicia D'Souza. "The Application of Social Network Analysis as an Assessment Tool in the Field of Diversity and Inclusion." *The Diversity Factor* 16, no. 4 (2008).
- Goodwin-Smith, Ian. "Something More Substantive Than Social Inclusion." *Social Alternatives* 28, no. 2 (2009): 53-57.
- Greenberg, Rabbi Steven. *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- Michaelson, Matthew Thomas. "Inclusion and Social Justice for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Members of the Learning Community in Queensland State Schools." *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counseling* 18, no. 1 (2008): 76-83.
- Moone, Dawn. *God, Sex and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Robinson, Christopher. "Developing an Identity Model for Transgender and Intersex Inclusion in Lesbian Communities." In *Challenging Lesbian Norms: Intersex, Transgender, Intersection, and Queer Perspectives*, edited by Angela Pattatucci Aragon, 181-199. Florence, KY: Harrington Park Press, 2006.
- Smith, Linda Anderson and Theresa Roberts. "The Journey to Inclusion: The Role of Diversity Committees in Schools of Social Work…A Cautionary Tale." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 15, no. 1 (2007): 121-34.
- Thorson-Smith, Sylvia. *Reconciling the Broken Silence: The Church in Dialogue on Gay and Lesbian Issues*. Louisville, KY: Christian Education Program Area, Congregational Ministry Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1993.
- Thuma, Scott and Edward Gray. *Gay Religion*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005.

Christian Inclusion Resources
- Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. "Congregational Assessment Worksheet." Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. http://www.wabaptists.org/docs/Congregational_Assessment_Worksheet.pdf.
- Kennedy, Fr. Bob and others. "What Every Parish Can Do as the Body of Christ." Rochester Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry, 2007.

- More Light Resources. "More Light on…More Light." More Light Presbyterians. http://mlp.org/resources/MLonML.pdf.

- Welcoming Congregation Program. *Action Steps to Become a Welcoming Congregation.* Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/23357.shtml.
- Welcoming Congregation Program. *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation.* Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/index.shtml.
- Welcoming Congregation Program. *Welcoming Congregation 101.* Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/lgbt/welcomingcongregation/23348.shtml.
- Welcoming Resources. "Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit." National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. http://www.welcomingresources.org/welcomingtoolkit.pdf.

Jewish Inclusion Resources
- Adat Shalom Synagogue. "Adat Shalom Welcomes All Jews, Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity." Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue. http://www.adatshalom.net/gylspoli.html.
- Address, Richard F., Joel L. Kushner, and Geoffrey Mitelman, eds. *Kulanu: All of Us – A Program and Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Inclusion.* New York, NY: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2007.
- Aviv, Dr. Caryn, Dr. Steven Cohen, and Dr. Judith Veinstein. "Welcoming Synagogues Project: Preliminary Results from the 2009 Synagogue Survey on Diversity and LGBT Inclusion." http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/SynagogueSurvey2009_DiversityAndLGBT.pdf.
- Biale, Rachel. "Beyond the Binary Bubble: Addressing Transgender Issues in the Jewish Community." In *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community,* edited by Noach Dzmura, 211-23. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010.
- Chankin-Gould, D'ror ed. "The Hillel LGBTQ Resource Guide." Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/D1FF7DE9-070C-4300-B33C-69B476BAF436/0/GLBTQ_Guide.pdf.
- Congregational Consulting Group. "18 Ways to Make Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Members Feel Welcome in Your Congregation." Union for Reform Judaism. http://urj.org//cong/membership/resources//?syspage=document&item_id=12098.
- Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation. *Mission & Vision.* Hebrew UnionCollege – Jewish Institute of Religion. http://huc.edu/ijso/about/.
- Kukla, Rabbi Elliot Rose and Reuben Zelman. "Making Your Jewish Community Transgender-Friendly." 2007.

Jewish Queer History

- Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple. *Chevrei Tikva Chavurah.* http://www.fairmounttemple.org/ChevreiTikvaChavurah.htm.
- Congregation Beth Ahavah. *Congregation Beth Ahavah Home.* http://www.bethahavah.org/.
- Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee. *Gay and Lesbian Inclusion Committee.* Temple Beth El of Great Neck. http://www.tbegreatneck.org/community/lgbt/.
- Shokeid, Moshe. *A Gay Synagogue in New York.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Weiss, Anthony. "As Acceptance Grows, Gay Synagogues Torn Between the Straight and Narrow." *The Jewish Daily Forward.* http://www.forward.com/articles/12994/.

Jewish Queer Studies
- Brettschneider, Marla. *The Family Flamboyant: Race Politics, Queer Families, Jewish Lives.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Shneer, David and Caryn Aviv. *Queer Jews.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

Secular Inclusion Resources
- Casper, Virginia and Steven Schultz. *Gay Parents/Straight Schools: Building Communication and Trust.* New York, NY: Teacher's College Press, 1999.
- Cook-Daniels, Loree. "Is Your 'T' Written in Disappearing Ink?: A Checklist for Transgender Inclusion." FORGE and Transgender Aging Network. http://www.forge-forward.org/handouts/InclusionChecklist.pdf.
- Family Equality Council. "Opening Doors: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parents and Schools." Family Equality Council. http://www.gaycenter.org/files/imce/docs/families/opening_doors.pdf.
- Family Pride. "The Rainbow Report Card." Family Pride. http://www.familypride.org/reportcard/.
- HRC Foundation Family Project. "An Introduction to Welcoming Schools." Human Rights Campaign Foundation. http://www.hrc.org/documents/An_Introduction_to_Welcoming_Schools.pdf.
- Killoran, Isabel and Karleen Pendleton Jimenez. *"Unleashing the Unpopular": Talking about Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in Education.* Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education, 2007.
- Lipkin, Arthur. *Beyond Diversity Day: A Q&A on Gay and Lesbian Issues in Schools.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Mottet, Lisa and Justin Tanis. "Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People: The Nine Keys to Making Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Organizations Fully Transgender-Inclusive." National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/opening_the_door.pdf.
- Reconciling Ministries Network. *About Reconciling Ministries Network.* http://www.rmnetwork.org/about-us/.

- Rigby, Ken. "Addressing Bullying in Queensland Schools." Department of Education and Training of the Queensland Government. www.education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/protection/docs/sm-vodcast5.doc.
- Sennott, Shannon and Hadley Smith. "Translating Gender on Women's College Campuses: A Nonprofit's Work for Inclusion and Education." *Transgender Tapestry*, Fall/Winter 2008, 49-50.

Studies of Prior Inclusion Processes
- Fishburn, Jane, ed. *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.
- Godfrey, Donal. *Gays and Grays: The Story of the Gay Community at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in San Francisco*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007.
- Udis-Kessler, Amanda. *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Other
- Douglass, Frederick. "The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies." Speech, Canandaigua, New York, August 3, 1857; collected in pamphlet by author. In *The Frederick Douglass Papers*. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Volume 3: 1855-63. Edited by John W. Blassingame. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- New Sanctuary Movement. *Building on Powerful Tradition*. http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org/build-tradition.htm.
- Young, Susan. "Sexual Identity: The Cass Model," Edith Cowan University. http://www.ecu.edu.au/equ/resources/docs/Sexuality_cass_model.pdf.