ABSTRACT

TO BE JEWISH AND LESBIAN: AN EXPLORATION OF RELIGION AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

by Katie Barrow

Although a sparse body of literature indicates that religion plays an integral role in the lives of sexual minority individuals, research on the experiences of lesbian Jews is lacking. Symbolic interactionism and social exchange theory guided the development of this qualitative study, for which 10 Jewish lesbian/bisexual women were interviewed to explore the role that religion played in their lives as adults and partners. Findings indicated that inclusive climates, including rabbis, congregations, and geographic locations, were essential to participants’ successful integration of sexual and religious identities. Participants also discussed how they dealt with discrimination and their status as “double minorities,” as well as their preferences for dating and partnering with other Jewish lesbians. Limitations of the study are shared, as are implications for practitioners, religious leaders, and researchers interested in the familial experiences of Jewish lesbians.
TO BE JEWISH AND LESBIAN: AN EXPLORATION OF RELIGION AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Katie Marie Barrow
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Advisor Dr. Katherine A. Kuvalanka
Reader Dr. Kevin R. Bush
Reader Dr. Charles Hennon
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To Be Jewish and Lesbian: An Exploration of Religion and Familial Relationships

With the face of the modern family continuing to diversify, it is becoming increasingly challenging for scientists to study the interconnectedness of religiosity and family life (Pankhurst & Houseknecht, 2000). Because the United States is a society predominantly catering to heterosexuality as the norm, and Christianity as custom, a plethora of research has been geared towards studying heterosexual Christians and their familial relationships, particularly those relationships with their spouses. People who live their lives outside of the American mainstream often get overlooked when it comes to research. Thus, it was the goal of this study to explore the experiences of a segment of this population who have been underrepresented in the social science literature on religiosity in family life. More specifically, the focus of this study was on Jewish lesbians.

Little is known about the religious behavior of sexual minorities, such as how often they attend religious-related activities and the degree of variability in their observance of religious traditions (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Smith & Horne, 2008). Even less is known about ethnic minorities, such as Jews, who identify as both sexual minorities and religious (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Previous research highlights the importance of studying various gay and lesbian populations (Kline, Martz, Lesperance, & Waldo, 2008), as well as their ability to cope with religion and family relations (Dollahite & Marks, 2005). Myers (2006) pointed out the importance of examining how, when, and why religion influences intimate relationships, as it has been found that heterosexual couples who share similar religious views, as opposed to very different religious views, report higher quality relationships. Presently, a small body of research exists that explores how same-sex couples integrate their religious and sexual identities (e.g., Rostosky, Otis, Riggle, Kelly, & Brodnicki, 2008). Jewish lesbians, specifically, have received very little time in the limelight; thus, little is known about how these women negotiate their romantic, intimate relationships and their religion. The present study delved into these topics, utilizing a qualitative approach to explore how Jewish lesbians negotiate intimate relationships and how their traditional Jewish upbringing has shaped their views on family, relationships, and themselves as members of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community.
Theoretical Perspective

In order to serve as a conceptual guide for this research, symbolic interactionism and social exchange theory were utilized. Symbolic interactionism focuses on socially constructed relations among members of a society that are constantly in flux and subject to personal interpretation and meaning; this process is aided by the fact that humans are able to purposefully evaluate their own life experiences, which ultimately influence the choices they make and the actions they generate (White & Klein, 2008). An integral aspect of this theory is the idea of role-taking and role-making and how each varies according to social setting. For example, some of the women in this study were mothers, some were partners in intimate relationships, and all were religious and/or spiritual beings with ties to an organized religion. Not only are participants’ abilities to create and define each of these roles important to their functioning, the responses of others are thought to have a significant influence on how participants interpret their roles. For example, if a Jewish lesbian woman perceives other members of a Conservative or Orthodox synagogue as unfavorably viewing her identity/role as a LGB person, mother, and/or partner, that woman may have a difficult time defining her role as a full-fledged member of that synagogue. Conversely, if a Jewish lesbian woman receives positive feedback and acceptance from her religious community, she may define herself as a more fully-involved and participatory member of that community. A goal of this study was to discover how these women negotiate and define their roles.

The other theory used to guide this study was social exchange. According to this perspective, members of society tend to want to increase their rewards and minimize their costs. There is a balance that people try to maintain between the psychological and emotional energy they put into something and the perceived incentive. If people perceive a situation as requiring too much effort and not enough profit, they may decide to opt out of the situation and seek profit somewhere else (White & Klein, 2008). As relevant to this study, it is important to ask the question: why would someone voluntarily commit to a religion whose members and/or doctrine openly, and sometimes vehemently, condemn their identity/role? Indeed, LGB participants formulate intimate relationships that Conservative and Orthodox Judaism adamantly oppose. Perhaps this research will reveal that these participants stay within these confines because mere doctrinal opposition to their identity/role is not enough of a risk for them to abandon their belief system, and that there is something more that keeps them coming back.
When it comes to exploring religion and family life, the existing research tends to be limited to Christianity, findings for which may not be applicable to other religions, such as Judaism (Chinitz & Brown, 2001). There is a need to extend basic knowledge beyond the dominant religions in the United States, uncovering the minorities that tend to go unnoticed. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study was to uncover how women identifying as LGB navigate their personal and family relationships with the tradition of Judaism serving as a guide. Before discussing the methods of this study, current literature on the influence of growing up as a member of Judaism, LGB individuals and religion, and religious heterogamy and homogamy in romantic relationships will be reviewed.

**Research on the Influence of Growing up Jewish**

Over six million Jews reside in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), and by its very nature, Judaism is a religion built on history, tradition, and family. Despite this tradition, there is no doubt that Judaism has been influenced by the gay and lesbian rights movement occurring in America, as evidenced by the existence of LGBT-friendly synagogues (e.g., Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, 2010). While plenty of LGB people opt out of organized religion, preferring private expressions of spirituality (Rostosky et al., 2008), many LGB Jews remain steadfast in adherence to Judaism (Ariel, 2007). This trend encompasses lesbian Jews embracing the familiarity of the Orthodoxy tradition – most likely a tradition that has been passed down to them – while also accepting that this tradition rejects their sexual orientation identity. This trend also encompasses the lesbian Jew who finds comfort in the acceptance afforded by a different branch of Judaism: Reform Judaism (Ariel, 2007). Both branches serve to anchor the spectrum of Judaism, with Conservatism holding down the middle. Another denomination of Judaism that is growing rapidly is Reconstructionist. Reconstructionist is similar to Reform Judaism in terms of general acceptance of LGB people and lack of rigid adherence to Jewish teachings; however, a unique aspect of Reconstructionist is that it emphasizes Jewish law as myth (Moss & Kern Ulmer, 2008).

Interestingly, despite the strict teachings of the Orthodoxy tradition, lesbian Orthodox Jews hold fast to their views, developing a strong foundation on which to build intimate relationships and raise children (Ariel, 2007). However, the fact that these women are Jewish may contribute to feelings of anguish over whether to engage in lesbian relationships and childbearing, as Margolis (2005) claims that LGB Jews in general face potential discrimination.
from several sources, such as family, society, and religion. It is difficult enough to be an ethnic and religious minority facing discrimination based upon physical appearance, name, or dress (e.g., Hasidism), but to add to that a sexual identity that is in the minority can create stress, confusion, and anxiety (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2008). For example, a 2006 study by Schnoor examined 30 gay Jewish men and found some of the participants became ultra religious (e.g., strict adherence to dietary law) to deal with shame they felt for identifying as gay. Beyond these studies, however, there is little information on sexual minority Jews, specifically lesbian Jews (Schnoor, 2006).

Evidence suggests that there remains some question as to whether Jews are more likely than individuals of other religions to enter into interfaith marriages. A review of a 1990 study on the Jewish population discovered that nearly half of Jews married non-Jews (Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar, & Scheckner, 1991). However, a study of gay Jewish men found that three-fourths of them wanted to be in a long-term relationship with another Jew (Schnoor, 2005). The present study will explore the role that religion plays in the intimate couple relationships of Jewish lesbians, as it is important to understand the motivation behind the relationship patterns of sexual minority and religious minority individuals.

**Research on LGB Individuals and Religion**

The religious and/or spiritual experiences of LGB individuals are understudied (Smith & Horne, 2007); however, the research is clear that many LGB individuals experience inner conflict regarding their religious affiliation and sexual identity (Smith & Horne, 2008). Schuck and Liddle (2001) examined 66 LGB individuals of various faiths, asking questions concerning their religiosity. Forty-four described inner conflict due to the negative teachings of religious institutions, bias in sacred texts, and congregational prejudice. Despite intolerance and stigmatizing worship climates, however, many LGB individuals still maintain ties with religious organizations (Rostosky et al., 2008; Smith & Horne, 2007; Yip, 2002). Given that organized, mainstream religions are often alienating, many LGB individuals prefer to speak of spiritual, as opposed to religious, experiences (Empereur, 2007), and many prefer to label themselves as spiritual (Yip, 2002). Overall, though, LGB individuals who successfully integrate their religion and their sexuality are more likely to report better psychological health, less internalized homonegativity (Lease et al., 2005), and increased self-acceptance (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001). LGB individuals who focus on enhancing their spirituality are likely to
discover more about their sexual identity, integrate personal life events, and find a healthy spiritual identity (Buchanan et al., 2001). Further, there is some evidence that LGB-affirmative worshiping climates may be beneficial for LGB individuals. For example, when looking at positive, affirming worship climates, Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) noted the successful integration of LGB individuals and their sexual and religious identities. Little is known, however, about LGB people’s religion in relation to their intimate relationships; thus, we turn to the general literature on intimate relationships and religion.

**Research on Intimate Relationship Patterns and Religion**

Research is abundant on religion and heterosexual married couples (Rostosky et al., 2008). The majority of married couples in the United States view themselves as religious and assert that their religion has considerable influence in their lives (Mahoney, Pargament, & Tarakeshwar, 2001; Rostosky et al., 2008). Research has consistently highlighted religious homogamy in married couples as a complementary and integral part of marriage. Religious homogamy is a powerful concept that reinforces compatibility and reduces the need for spouses to search elsewhere for similar views (Myers, 2006). Religious homogamy has also been shown to help decrease conflict and increase marital satisfaction (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990). Shared religious beliefs and practices also aid married couples in resolving conflict and prevent future problems from arising in the relationship (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Previous studies have shown that heterosexual married couples who believe their marriage to be a sacred bond and participate in religious activities together are more likely to share greater marital satisfaction, commitment, and collaboration (Mahoney at al., 1999).

When it comes to same-sex couples, these associations between religion and relationship quality/satisfaction need further examination (Rostosky et al., 2008). Although scientific observance of lesbian relationship patterns has been limited (Wood & Duck, 1995), existing research suggests that, when compared to heterosexual married couples, lesbian partners show more satisfaction and equality (Kurdek, 1995; Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004). In a study conducted in 1994, Metz, Rosser, and Strapko found lesbian couples to have not only the highest level of satisfaction compared to the heterosexual and male same-sex couples in the sample, but that they also engaged in the most effective styles of conflict resolution. One of the few studies shedding light on religious homogamy and heterogamy in same-sex partnerships was done by Rostosky et al. (2008) and looked at Christians, Jews, and those with no religious affiliation.
Several participant couples stated that they deliberately sought a partner who held a similar worldview of religion and spirituality. When there was a difference in religious belief, though, several couples explained the necessity of individualism and respecting differences. Participants also said that compromise and supporting each other was important in their relationship. However, more data needs to be collected on same-sex couples’ religious involvement, commitment, and participation in order to comprehend differences of those brought up under non-Christian religious traditions, and to further decipher the impact of religiosity on health and personal relationships (Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008). Thus, this study explored these possibilities, providing a distinct opportunity to inquire how they handled any religious similarities and differences in their romantic relationships.

**Purpose of Study**

To this researcher’s knowledge, Schnoor (2006) has provided the only qualitative study on Jewish LGB individuals, and he specifically looked at gay men. While other research has included Jewish lesbians in their research (Smith & Horne, 2008), no study has solely focused on Jewish lesbians. Further in-depth exploration of Jewish lesbians and how they negotiate religion in various aspects of their lives is essential in uncovering the role religion has (or does not have) in their parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, and their personal integration of a “double minority” status. Thus, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Jewish lesbians negotiate their sexual and religious identities?
2. How does religion play a role in the romantic, intimate relationships of Jewish lesbians?

**Method**

This section details the methodology for the current study. Given the scarcity of research investigations dedicated to Jewish lesbians and how religion affects different facets of their lives, this study was exploratory in nature. Qualitative methodology was used, as the researcher thought it was the best way to gain a better understanding of the detailed, lived experiences of Jewish lesbians (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

**Participants**

Ten Jewish non-heterosexual women participated in the present study (see Table 1 for a brief demographic description of each participant). All participants identified as Caucasian/White and ranged in age from 40-79 years old ($M = 50.8; SD = 11.12$). Participants
resided in the West ($n = 6$), Midwest ($n = 2$), and Southwest ($n = 1$) regions of the United States, as well as in Israel ($n = 1$). Nine women identified as lesbian, and one as bisexual. The majority ($n = 7$) claimed to be members of Reform Judaism (the most liberal of the branches, as well as the most open and accepting of diversity), while 2 participants identified as Conservative (typically not as liberal as Reform, and not as conservative as Orthodox), and 1 identified as a “Reconstructionist rabbi working in a Conservative institution attending a local Reform and Modern Orthodox congregation.” All women held a four-year college degree, and half ($n = 5$) had a Masters degree. Eight women were in romantic relationships with women at the time of the interview, with the average length of time in the relationship being 15.9 years. Two of the participants (Liz and Rosa) were partnered, but were interviewed separately. Additionally, nine women had children ranging in age from 1-56 years old ($M = 17.29$ years; $SD = 17.38$).

**Procedure**

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used for recruitment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). A letter detailing the purpose of the study was sent to directors of various Jewish organizations, as well as Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues, asking them to post an announcement about the current study (see Appendix A for the study announcement). Additionally, an email was sent to the rabbi leaders of various college campus hillels. Eligibility requirements for the study, which were stated in the study announcement, were that potential participants had to be at least 18 years old, and had to identify as female, Jewish, and as a sexual minority. Interested individuals then contacted the researcher to schedule a telephone or in-person interview and were asked to identify the following, in order to get a sense of their individual situations: (a) the branch of Judaism to which they currently belonged, (b) the ages of any children they had, and, (c) the length of time of their current romantic relationship, if appropriate. The interview was then scheduled.

Nine of the interviews took place via telephone, and one occurred in-person. All ten participants were emailed a consent form with explicit explanation and instruction describing the study, where to send the consent form, and that they would not be penalized if they decided to opt out of the study at any time (see Appendices B and C for consent forms). All ten participants emailed the consent form back to the researcher, expressing written consent. Furthermore, before each interview began, the researcher also obtained verbal consent. My contact information, as well as my advisor’s information, was given to the participants on the consent form in case they had
any questions or concerns pertaining to the study. The participants were also provided the phone number of Miami University’s Human Subjects Institutional Review Board in case they had any questions about their rights as a research participant. Each one-on-one interview was taped/digitally-recorded, and the interviews lasted, on average, 36 minutes. The participants answered demographic questions related to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and family structure, as well as open-ended questions such as: How does religion affect your intimate relationship? How do you transmit religious beliefs to your children? Please explain what it is like to identify as a Jewish LGB individual. (See Appendix D for the entire interview guide.)

The interviews were transcribed by either the researcher or a Family Studies undergraduate student, who received research credit for her help; Dr. Kuvalanka supervised her and assigned her a grade. The undergraduate worker signed a confidentiality form, thereby agreeing to keep identifying participant information confidential. The participants were given pseudonyms in transcripts and reports to protect their identities. Any other identifying words such as names of children, cities, schools, and friends were either changed or blacked out. The data will be kept in my private home office for no more than five years at which point they will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Qualitative responses were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). On my first several “read-throughs” of the interview transcripts, I made notes regarding initial codes in the margins of each of the transcripts. For example, one participant stated that she lived in the San Francisco Bay Area because she wanted to be in a place where “it did not matter if I was queer,” so next to this quote I made an initial comment of “open community/location.” Another participant reported that her Rabbi’s sermons on “Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for the past few years have always included the phrase ‘gay and lesbian,’” and next to this comment I wrote “accepting rabbi.” After making note of initial codes on all transcripts, I combined similar initial codes and renamed them to better reflect their broader meanings. For example, the previous two examples of initial codes were renamed “inclusive geographic regions/cities” and “inclusive synagogues/rabbis.” I then created a coding scheme chart, which listed each code, a description of each code, and the evidence (i.e., quotes) from each participant’s transcript that was relevant to each code. Utilizing the coding scheme chart as an organizational tool, I then looked for connections between codes in order to develop
themes. For example, the renamed initial codes of “inclusive geographic regions/cities” and “inclusive synagogues/rabbis” became sub-categories of the theme “inclusive climates are essential.” For the purpose of attending to biases that may have hindered the identification of relevant themes, I had my advisor check my coding and themes, and then made revisions in response to my advisor’s feedback.

Findings

Numerous findings related to participants’ experiences emerged from this study. In particular, the women discussed many aspects of their sexual and religious identities, and how they negotiated these aspects of their lives. They also discussed the role that religion has played in their romantic relationships. More specifically, participants discussed: (a) the importance of the inclusive climates of their synagogues/rabbis and communities; (b) discrimination they faced and how they dealt with it; (c) their religious minority identity and how it helped them integrate their sexual minority status; and (d) the significance of pursuing intimate, romantic relationships with a Jew verses a non-Jew. These major themes, as well as sub-themes, are discussed below.

Inclusive Climates are Essential

All ten participants discussed the importance of belonging to communities that were open to and accepting of their religious and sexual identities. Being members of synagogues that made participants feel welcomed and included was important to all participants, while some participants also discussed their need to live in cities/geographic regions that they deemed to have inclusive climates.

Inclusive synagogues/rabbis. All ten participants expressed that their synagogues were at least somewhat accepting of their non-heterosexual identities. Seven participants particularly noted the synagogue and congregation as a whole as helping to ease their own acceptance of themselves and their enactment of their roles as lesbian/bisexual women and/or mothers, while five participants specifically referred to the acceptance by their Rabbis as significant. As Deidre noted, the importance of belonging to an open synagogue and an accepting congregation is paramount to the internal acceptance of her own lesbian identity:

I would say that having the gay and lesbian synagogue here has made it a little easier for me to really be much more accepting of my lesbianism. Because it was just such an open place and a community, I could easily get involved [if I wanted to].
Another participant—Erin—who resides in the Midwest, shared how important it is for her and her family to attend synagogue, and describes here how accommodating her Conservative synagogue is of all families:

Our synagogue [has] a very family-friendly service…it’s about doing things in the synagogue as a family…Our synagogue does…one Sunday a month…it’s called, like, Bagels, Blocks, and Babies…so while Sunday school is going on, parents with little babies can go and just sit around. It’s a way for us to be part of a Jewish community and go to the synagogue but in a way we can still do with [our daughter].

As previously noted, five participants explicitly discussed the openness of their Rabbis. Here, Anne shares her feelings about her temple’s Rabbis and their supportiveness of her lesbian identity, especially when other members of the synagogue were not as supportive:

Those Rabbis [at my Temple] have been very loving and supportive. The very first one we just adored has just passed away, but he was just beautiful. He really took some people to task who were less than kind to me…So, he was very, very supportive. The Rabbi now is also very supportive and loving.

Additionally, Erin smiled with joy as she reminisced about the Rabbi in her Conservative synagogue who was so welcoming of her and her family, as well as supportive of having a baby-naming ceremony in the synagogue:

Our Rabbi was wonderful. Wonderful. He has been incredibly welcoming to us. When we joined the synagogue, he had us over to his house for a Passover Seder. When Shoshana was born, we did a naming ceremony for a girl, and when we talked to him about that [the Rabbi agreed it would] look exactly as if this were a heterosexual couple having a baby. So yeah, we feel so fortunate that…[the synagogue] is very, very welcoming.

Erin poignantly stated later in the interview that, as the leader of the congregation, the Rabbi can serve as a beacon of hope for gay and lesbian families:

The Rabbi sends such a strong message. I mean, his sermons on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for the past few years have always included the phrase ‘gay and lesbian’ in terms of inclusivity, and so I think he sets a tone for that.

**Inclusive geographic regions/cities.** In addition to the welcoming environment of their synagogues, six participants discussed the importance of community climate and geographic
region, while four participants explicitly stated that they chose to live in a particular geographic region because of its inclusivity. Marty, a woman who specifically chose to live on the West Coast, described how her place of residence aided in her celebration and acceptance of her own identity:

It was not difficult to maintain the identity of being a Jew, especially out here. I think if I lived anywhere else, which I couldn't, you know, where it [could be] oppressive…I specifically chose San Francisco because…I wanted to be in a place where it did not matter if I was queer. I didn't even want it to register that if I was holding somebody's hand it got another look. And, I felt the same level of tolerance with being Jewish…Being a queer Jew is kind of, like, I am really limited where I can go. In this city, I am a majority. This city was chosen specifically for my external comfort level of being a Jewish lesbian. San Francisco is so--it celebrates differences in diversity...I mean, a lot of people come out here to seek refuge. There is no condemnation of anybody else. You are not judged because of what you worship. We're kind of all in it together, us against them kinda feeling.

Similarly, another participant, Helen, revealed how living in San Francisco has shaped her feelings about being Jewish and lesbian:

I live in the San Francisco Bay Area and there's a reason that I do. And I feel like if I lived in a different place that I would have very different feelings about [being Jewish and lesbian]…[Our synagogue]…it's a very warm and welcoming congregation with a lot of outreach.

Thus, finding supportive Rabbis and congregations, as well as open communities and geographic locations, has helped many participants to seamlessly combine their religious and sexual minority identities.

Dealing with Discrimination

As to be expected, not all participants always encountered inclusive environments as discussed above. The next theme that emerged revolved around discrimination that permeated throughout each aspect of the participants’ lives. Although the issue of discrimination was not directly addressed, it did emerge as salient for several participants. Six participants spoke to issues of discrimination occurring at some point in their lives. Of these six participants, three felt there were times when they were discriminated against for both their sexual and religious
identities, two participants indicated occurrences when their sexual identity was the sole issue, and one participant spoke to her religious identity as a target of bias. Of these instances of discrimination that were shared, one occurred at the micro-level (family, friends), eight at the meso-level (workplace, synagogue), and two at the macro-level (larger society, federal government).

“I have to stand up for my Jewishness”. Four participants shared stories of prejudicial behavior surrounding their religious identity, which sometimes led to them having to stand up for themselves as Jews. As Anne illustrates in the following paragraph, some of this discrimination seemed to be a mere oversight of the fact that not everyone follows the same set of religious beliefs:

I don't get paid time off…even though it's a religious holiday and things like that…
When I took my first therapy job, I said to the people after they had already hired me, you know they gave my list of days off, and I said, ‘Okay…what do you want to do as far as my holidays?’ And the guy just kind of looked at me and he said, ‘Uh, oh, uh, well, uh, you could take a personal day.’ And I said, ‘Well, no, actually the law says…I don't need to do that.’ So that’s…kind of the environment that I live in, so it’s difficult.

Additionally, Deidre mentioned having to deal with being overlooked at her workplace as a Jew:
Because it’s a Seventh Day Adventist hospital system…I kind of have to occasionally stand up for my Jewishness! I mean, not in a major way… I mention at the time that I got to be off for the holidays or whatever.

Another participant, Lyssa, succinctly stated her feelings about being a Jewish lesbian, hinting to the month-long feelings of discrimination someone of non-Christian heritage can experience: “I feel more of a minority as a Jew in December then I've ever felt as a lesbian.” For Deidre, a participant who lives on the West Coast, her synagogue had to defend its “Jewishness” by hiring a security guard; she was not certain, however, if such precautions were taken due to the many lesbians who belonged to the synagogue:

We have a security guard at the temple, too. I don't know if that’s like all Jewish synagogues around because there’s been bombings in the street [of] Jewish places, but I don't know if it’s extra special because were damn lesbian.

Thus, it may be that being lesbian compounds the discrimination that some Jews may face.
“I have to stand up for my lesbianism”. It seemed evident that some participants may have experienced discrimination because of the intermingling of their two minority statuses. As Gretchen put it, “My mom said that being a lesbian rabbi is like shooting yourself in the foot.” Five participants opened up about feeling discrimination over their sexual identities from their rabbis and congregations. Furthermore, two of these five participants even discussed LGB discrimination on a much larger scale—by the Orthodox Jewry and the United States government. Beginning with discrimination at the meso (or community) level, Helen shares the story of her son’s bris (the Jewish ritual of circumcision) and the prejudice that surfaced:

When our second son [was born] we had a bris for him. And in our home was an Orthodox Rabbi who was the Mohel of choice for everybody. And that was a little weird, because he really clearly…it was very clear to him that he was not acknowledging [my partner] as the other parent. So, that was kind of wounding.

Anne, who lives in a small Midwestern city, detailed what happened when her Reform synagogue joined with the Conservative synagogue to form one large congregation:

This temple that I belong to…so small that they actually brought together what was left of the Reform and what was left of the Conservative movement in our town. [And because of the] combination of the two…I’ve just kind of made people deal with me…Initially some of them struggled with [my lesbian identity] and, you know, gave me and my family a difficult time.

And so, Helen, Anne and other participants had to deal with unwelcoming congregants as well as religious leaders who, perhaps, did not recognize or acknowledge their families as legitimate.

Other participants discussed the discrimination that occurred from the top-down in Judaism and in the United States. Lisa lamented about the Orthodox Jewry who deny her family as being Jews because they are: (a) a lesbian-parent family and (b) not born of Jews:

You know, it is the Orthodox in Israel who define who is a Jew, and neither my [adopted] daughter or my partner would be considered a Jew by these people, and I detest that. But, at the same time, I don't want to live in Israel and feel like they have that much control over my life.

In contrast to the previous participant, Gretchen moved from the United States to Israel so she and her partner, along with their child, could be together and gain legal protection as a family:
And so the other thing you should know about me is that we pretty much – I consider that we live in exile here in Israel. The reason that we moved here is because my partner is not from the States and we don’t have immigration rights in the States. Amazingly enough, for these participants, standing up for their lesbianism meant standing up for their families and their right to be recognized as such.

Re-conceptualizing the Jewish “religion”. Another theme that emerged, in relation to how participants dealt with the discrimination or non-acceptance they faced, was the conceptualization of Judaism as something spiritual and/or cultural, but not religious. It seemed that some participants did not feel comfortable being a part of a religion/institution that has taken (or is currently taking) part in marginalizing gay and lesbian individuals and families, and so chose to identify with the spiritual or cultural aspect of Judaism. Here, Anne discussed how she distinguishes religion and spirituality with her son: “[I discussed] more so spirituality with my son [than religion]. Um, again, religion in and of itself is not…central…the spiritual aspect and those kinds of things are very key.” Moreover, Liz distinguished between her cultural background and “religion”: “I really don't look at Judaism as a religion for me…for me it’s really more, uh, my culture…I would say that for me…Judaism was not a belief as much as…my cultural background.” Finally, Deidre spoke about the religion of Judaism, including its laws, and how it has nothing to do with her identity as a spiritual Jew:

It’s hard probably for the Orthodox to accept women…I think different Bible portions, Torah portions… it’s more ‘a man shall not lay with a man as with a woman’…And I don't know if they…kind of just look the other way when it comes to women laying with women, but…I just don’t think it has anything to do with [my] spirituality and… [who] can't be a Jew.

Thus, it seems that by distancing themselves from religion – or certain aspects of their religion, some Jewish lesbians may find it easier to blend their identities as Jews and as lesbians. Erin put it this way:

For me it’s, ‘Why throw away all of religion?’ because that’s just allowing the elements of religion…that are not inclusive…to just trump the inclusive aspects. So, if you can find a way that you can be true to yourself and your religious beliefs…and if that’s important to you…why would you let other people’s intolerant beliefs close you out of what you want to do?
For Erin, and, perhaps, other Jewish lesbians, it may be more detrimental to themselves to completely “throw away” their religion than to focus on the aspects that they deem most important.

**“Being a Jew Makes Being a Lesbian Easier”**

In addition to the importance of inclusive climates and finding ways to deal with discrimination in helping these participants to negotiate their religious and sexual identities, three participants also noted that being a member of a religious minority helped them to accept and integrate their sexual minority status. It seems of great importance and significance that these women were raised in a culturally and historically rich religious tradition that has survived persecution for generations. As Helen noted, “As a Jew, I feel just a tremendous ancestral bond and a responsibility to preserve my heritage, which has been under assault for hundreds and hundreds of years. I feel like, Jewish continuity depends on me and my kids.” Thus, three participants explicitly stated that it was the immense appreciation for the religion of Judaism that helped ease the union of being Jewish and lesbian, as Deidre illustrates:

I think it's being part of a minority culture, growing up as a Jew, [that helped me negotiate my identity as a Jewish lesbian]. You know, it's certainly harder to be a minority than a majority, but I think growing up as a Jew I felt like I got a lot of strength from that and I always felt good about being Jewish…so when I came into my sexual orientation…I did already have that ground work for feeling good about myself in another way and I wasn't going to ever say, you know, I’m not going to be Jewish because, you know, I’m gay or I’m going to find a place that will accept me as who I am. It’s never a question of having to choose one over the other. I think having been raised in a minority culture helped me better be a part of another minority culture.

As Deidre mentioned, some participants drew strength from being labeled a “queer Jew.” Here, Erin discusses how lucky she feels to be a “double minority”:

I think it’s a pretty cool combination [being Jewish and lesbian] for me because I’m very fortunate that things have come together nicely for me, I haven’t had to think about it probably as much as if I were facing more obstacles bringing these [two identities] together, because Judaism – obviously very important to me – and identifying as a lesbian - that’s just who I am.
Moreover, Anne reflects on being a double minority and the certain strengths she believes have developed because of it:

When a person is a minority or part of an oppressed group, strange characteristics are more fully developed. We tend to, in general…have more compassion…a more accepting heart, [and] children [who] are raised in same-sex families…[have] higher levels of acceptance [of other people].

Thus, Judaism seems to be a source of strength in these women’s lives, and being able to draw inspiration from their Jewish identity seems to nurture internal acceptance of their identity as a sexual minority.

**Importance and Cultivation of Judaism in Romantic Relationships**

Finally, when it came to integrating romantic relationships with their religious identities, nine participants spoke to the fact that dating and/or partnering with another Jewish woman was important. These participants talked about the importance of having a partner who is Jewish – for the benefit of the relationship itself, as well as, for some participants, the benefit of their children. Thus, a primary theme that emerged in relation to the integration of religion and intimate relationships was the importance of pursuing intimate relationships with someone Jewish and doing things connected to Judaism that enable the couple to be together and to grow.

For example, Marty reflected on her need to be romantically involved with a Jew:

> When I get out of Friday night services, I really want to share it with a partner. That has become a deal breaker. I would love my partner to experience what I experience… If they didn’t feel comfortable there, that would be a disconnect.

Furthermore, Elizabeth shared her hesitation of dating a non-Jew. As stated below, she claims a big part of who she is as a Jewish woman would be lost on someone who was not Jewish:

> [It is very important that my partner be Jewish] and the reason for that is because I feel that nobody that I would’ve [dated] that was not Jewish would understand about at least three-fourths of whatever is part of me, [and that] includes Yiddish expressions! I want to be with someone I can share my life with and we are able to do that because we both have had a Jewish upbringing.

Finally, Erin reflects on the significance of raising a child in Judaism with a partner who is also Jewish:
I feel lucky that the person I happened to meet, she is Jewish and so for me...I just feel again I feel very fortunate. Passing the Jewish family life [to my child] is very important to me and it would have been very hard for me not to have that and not to have passed all of this along to my child. And so yeah, it’s an important part of who we are.

Thus, religion seems to play a prominent role in these women’s intimate romantic relationships, in that finding a Jewish partner was deemed as encouraging closeness between the couple and as facilitating the transmission of Jewish beliefs to children.

**Discussion**

Guided by symbolic interactionism and social exchange theories, the present study considered the role of religion in the lives of ten Jewish lesbian/bisexual women. Prominent findings will be discussed in the context of previous research, and limitations of the study will also be considered. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a broad range of research questions generated from the findings will be shared. Lastly, implications of the findings for practitioners, researchers, Jewish communities, and Jewish LGB individuals and parents themselves will be presented.

Whether it was an appealing geographic location, an open rabbi, or a congregation accepting of its members, all participants spoke to the importance of inclusive environments. This is congruent with previous research, which found that LGB individuals seek out religious communities that are accepting of their sexual identities (Rostosky et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Some participants clearly stated that they were members of an LGB-affirming synagogue and felt comfortable enough to maintain ties to Judaism. This sense of security in their religion might be due to the openness of their rabbis, which half of the participants alluded to, or the all-encompassing environment of their congregation, which three-fourths of the participants discussed. Consistent with symbolic interactionism and the idea of role-taking and role-making, the feeling of acceptance led some of the participants to perceive themselves as belonging to their congregation, and to feel comfortable in their role as a participant in the congregation and religion. Furthermore, six of the participants lived on the West Coast, either in or near large cities like San Francisco or Los Angeles. Four of the participants explicitly stated that they chose their geographic location for its openness to and acceptance of both their religious and sexual identities. This finding supports the hypothesis of Henehan, Rothblum, Soloman, and Balsam (2007), who found that high percentages of gay men and lesbians chose to live in urban areas,
and posited that they did this to combat homophobia and to increase their support network of other gay men and lesbians.

Not at all surprising, especially given their “double minority” status, discrimination was a salient theme for a little over half of the participants. Consistent with Barret and Barzan (1996), who state that lesbians are often sent messages from religious institutions that they do not belong, five participants described instances of bias occurring in their synagogue or from their rabbi because of their sexual identity. As some previous studies have found (Rostosky et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2007; Yip, 2002), participants stuck by their religion despite a sometimes prejudicial climate. From a social exchange theoretical perspective, for some of these women it seems the cost of involving themselves with a stigmatizing synagogue/rabbi did not outweigh the benefit of being able to attend services and remain an active member of Judaism. As previously noted, one participant, Helen, wanted to initiate her child into Judaism with a baby-naming ceremony. Unfortunately, the only rabbi who was available to perform the ceremony was Orthodox and, throughout the entire ceremony, ignored the presence of Helen’s partner and the partner’s role as a mother. For Helen, the importance of the ceremony and her daughter’s welcoming into Judaism was a significant enough benefit that she was willing to forego the ugly cost of the rabbi’s insularity.

When it came to negotiating a minority sexual identity and a minority religious identity, some participants discussed their “double minority” status, with a few specifically noting the strength they drew from being a part of a religious minority and how that, in turn, helped them to negotiate their roles as lesbian/bisexual women. These findings are consistent with one of the few studies that have addressed LGBT Jews, specifically Schnoor’s 2006 study of 30 gay Jews living in Toronto. In his study, he noted that some of his participants saw a connection between anti-Semitism and gay oppression, and that already having a Jewish minority status in place helped later with having a gay minority status. However, unlike Schnoor, who found that some of his participants were willing to forego parts of their sexual identity because of a fonder appreciation for their Jewish identity, all ten participants of our study seemed to equally value their sexual and religious identities. Furthermore, another difference from Schnoor’s findings is that none of our participants discussed feeling ashamed of their minority sexual identity. On the other hand, one of Schnoor’s participants stated that he could easily switch religions, but that he could not easily switch his sexual identity. In contrast to this finding, none of the participants in
our study expressed a sense of being able to discard one of their identities. Lease and colleagues’ findings (2005) showed that, with a positive, LGB-affirming climate, LGB individuals successfully integrated their religious and sexual identities. All ten of our participants spoke to currently experiencing a successful negotiation of both identities, and perhaps one of the reasons for this is that – for the most part – all participants felt accepted in their places of worship. The relationships some of the participants described with their rabbi resembled that of a relationship with a significant other, as opposed to a generalized other, according to symbolic interactionism. The positive, reassuring messages some participants received from their rabbis contributed to a healthier integration of their religious and sexual identities, thus ensuring a “higher quality of role enactment” as mothers, partners, and adherents of a religious and/or spiritual belief system (White & Klein, 2008, p. 104). This is not to say, however, that they did not experience unsuccessful negotiation in the past or will not experience it in the future. Further, the fact that our participants volunteered for a study on religion and sexual identity likely influenced the results in that the participants might have come into the study with a stronghold on their identity as a Jewish lesbian/bisexual.

Another interesting finding was the preference by some participants to use the term “spiritual” or “cultural” when referring to Judaism rather than speaking of Judaism as a “religion.” Schnoor (2006) discovered that many of his participants expressed their desire to identify as spiritual or cultural Jews instead of religious Jews. It has been put forth by Empereur (2007) that the word “spirituality” can take on a more psychological meaning, as it often refers to a “path of human integration. It does not require any particular religious commitment or belief” (pp. 57-58). When viewed in this light, we can begin to understand Judaism as Schnoor (2006) called it—an “ethno-religious” identity, and come to understand spirituality as something that transcends every aspect of Jewish life, but does not constrict a person to a particular set of doctrinal beliefs. Further, perhaps identifying as spiritually or culturally Jewish helped some of our participants to reconcile being a part of a religion that may not fully accept their sexual identities.

Lastly, another principal thematic finding was the importance of Judaism in the romantic lives of the participants. The fact that nine out of ten participants spoke of the significance of dating and/or partnering with someone Jewish is strikingly similar to the abundance of studies conducted on heterosexual couples and their desire to be in religiously homogamous
relationships (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). These findings are also mirrored by Rostosky and colleagues (2008) in that the lesbian/bisexual women of various religions in their study also purposely sought partners who could share in their belief system. Furthermore, this theme is also consistent with Schnoor’s (2005) findings that the Jewish gay men is his study preferred to seek out Jewish partners. For partners to share in the uniqueness of their simultaneous Jewish and lesbian/bisexual identity perhaps brings them closer and, as some participants proclaimed, a sense of understanding could be had in place of what could potentially be a divide. This finding, however, is in contrast to Smith et al. (2006) who hypothesized that lesbians may be likely to seek out women from a different faith because traditional faiths have typically not served as adequate intermediaries for LGB individuals to meet and foster romantic relationships. Many of the participants in our study seemed to feel that raising a family and cultivating a partnership under a unified belief system is ideal.

**Limitations, Implications, and Future Directions**

Although this study has added to a very sparse collection of research conducted on Jewish lesbians, limitations of this study must be recognized and discussed. First of all, our sample included only ten participants, thus restricting the range of possible responses and perspectives that could have been gained had we interviewed more participants. However, a sample of this size was adequate given the goal of this study, which was to build upon and extend an incredibly limited knowledge base of the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians—not to generalize results to all lesbians, or even to all Jewish lesbians. Furthermore, although the inclusion of more participants would have increased the probability of saturation of themes, qualitative researchers often work with small samples allowing for the in-depth study of persons in context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The small sample size, however, does give way to other limitations of this study, primarily the homogeneity of the sample in regards to race and education level. Given that most Jews are of European descent, the entire sample consisted of Caucasians, but that does not mean there are not Jews who are of other races, just that they are fewer in number and probably more difficult to recruit. Moreover, the majority of the participants held advanced degrees, thus restricting their range of experiences and responses. Finally, the vast majority of participants identified as Reform or Reconstructionist (the two most accepting of the branches), so it would have been interesting to learn how the Orthodox lesbian Jew negotiates her identities. According to Ariel (2007), “Gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews are at
a disadvantage when they face the gay community; most of their members are far removed from the world of Jewish Orthodoxy and cannot comprehend why gays and lesbians would remain in or join such a culture” (p. 93). It would be fascinating to learn how gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews negotiate their sexual and religious identities and to note any similarities or differences between Orthodox and Reform Jews. Because the theme of discrimination was prevalent among Reform Jews in this study, it can be ascertained that discrimination of Orthodox Jews might be elevated. Future studies could examine LGB Jews and how they deal with prejudicial attitudes, possibly identifying reasons they stay committed to a religion that openly and adamantly rebukes their sexual identity.

As with many exploratory studies, the findings of this study serve as a springboard for future studies, suggesting numerous research questions that have yet to be explored within the families of LGB Jews. Our findings indicate that religion plays an integral role in the Jewish lesbian family and also serves to bind the sexual minority and religious minority status. Given that our participants spoke to the theme of the “double minority” status, future research could ask the following questions: How do Jewish lesbians see their double minority status as playing a role in the context of their family? Do Jewish lesbians see their double minority status as a hindrance or as a benefit to their parenting or romantic relationships, and if so, how does this affect these relationships?

Our findings also indicated a strong desire for Jewish lesbians to seek a partner with similar religious worldviews in their romantic relationships. Future studies could take a comparative look at Jewish lesbians who are in relationships with partners of similar and dissimilar religious worldviews, pondering questions such as: How do partners integrate religion into their parent-child relationships when identical religious worldviews are present, as well as dissimilar religious worldviews are present? Does the amount of familial time spent doing shared activities increase or decrease when partners are in a religiously homogamous or heterogamous relationship? How is the parent-child relationship affected by religiously homogamous or heterogamous unions?

Finally, the findings have implications for practitioners and religious leaders. Therapists should observe this study’s findings in that religion is a significant factor in the lives of Jewish lesbians. Instead of trying to assert one identity over the other, it seems that therapists need to understand the value of both identities and work towards helping clients strike an integration of
both identities. Concerning romantic relationships, again, therapists should not assume that religion is undervalued, and utilize the role religion has in the couple’s relationship and provide assistance in light of its role. Therapists might also consult with various religious leaders in the local community, providing information about discriminatory behavior and how to create a more accepting congregation (Lease et al., 2005). Lastly, religious leaders need to exercise awareness of LGB individuals, couples, and families (Smith et al., 2006) and remain sensitive to the fact that religion continues to maintain a strong presence in the lives of LGB people. Leaders need to try earnestly to practice what they preach by extending (and maintaining) a welcoming invitation to LGB families.
References


Appendix A: Announcement of Study

Study Announcement

“What is the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians?”

If you are a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) Jewish woman who is in a relationship with another woman (or have the capacity to reflect on past relationships) and have a child (or are considering having a child), you may be eligible to participate in a new study conducted by researchers at Miami University.

LGBT Jewish women are invited to participate in this study. The purpose is to help better understand how Jewish LGBT women integrate their religion into various facets of their lives.

If you volunteer, you will participate in an informal interview either face-to-face or over the telephone with an interviewer. The interview will last about an hour. Participants are eligible to be entered into a drawing to win a $50 gift card to Target.

If you would like to participate in this opportunity, please contact:

Katie Barrow
Principal Investigator
Miami University
(314) 640-2748
barrowkm@muohio.edu

For further questions regarding your rights as a participant, contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513) 529-3600

This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board: Protocol #: XXXX
Appendix B: Consent Form for In-Person Interviews

“To be Jewish and Lesbian: An Exploration of Religion and Familial Relationships”
Participation and Informed Consent

Dear ______________________:

I, Katie Barrow, am the Principal Investigator on this study. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with Dr. Kate Kuvalanka. You are invited to participate in an exploratory study on the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians. You will be asked to take part in a one-on-one in-depth interview, during which you will be asked to answer questions about yourself, your family, and your experiences as a Jewish lesbian. The interview will be audio-taped and/or digitally recorded; therefore by signing this form, or giving verbal consent over the telephone, YOU ARE AGREEING TO BE AUDIO-TAPED/DIGITALLY-RECORDED. Your answers to the interview questions will be kept confidential; your name and other identifying information will be kept separate from your interview transcript. Further, I will assign you a pseudonym that will be used whenever we refer to your specific responses. The interview session should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the session at any time or refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life. The benefit of the study, scientifically, is a broader understanding of how religion and sexual identity intersect. Your participation in this study makes you eligible for a drawing for a $50 gift card to Target. Regardless if you finish the entire interview session, or opt out of answering any of the questions, you will still be entered into this drawing.

If you have any questions during the study, please ask me at any time. If you have further questions about the study after the completion of the interview, please contact Katie Barrow at (314-640-2748, barrowkm@muohio.edu) or Kate Kuvalanka at (513-529-8058, kuvalanka@muohio.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation. We are very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting session for you. You may keep this portion of the page.

I agree to participate in the study of the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

Participant’s signature ________________________________

Participant gave consent via email (see email attached to this form)___________

Date ______________
Appendix C: Consent Form for Telephone Interviews
(if participant does not have access to email)

“To be Jewish and Lesbian: An Exploration of Religion and Familial Relationships”
Participation and Informed Consent

Hi (participant’s name), my name is Katie Barrow, and I am the Principal Investigator on this study. Currently, I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with Dr. Kate Kuvalanka. Let me first thank you for your interest in this study, and if you have any questions about this consent form or about the study in general, do not hesitate to ask me at any time today during the interview or after the study.

The present study is exploratory and examines the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians. During our interview today, you will be asked to answer questions about yourself, your family, and your experiences as a Jewish lesbian. The interview will be audio-taped and/or digitally recorded; therefore by giving verbal consent over the telephone, YOU ARE AGREEING TO BE AUDIO-TAPED/DIGITALLY-RECORDED. Your answers to the interview questions will be kept confidential; your name and other identifying information will be kept separate from your interview transcript. Further, I will assign you a pseudonym that will be used whenever we refer to your specific responses. The interview session should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the session at any time or refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life. The benefit of the study, scientifically, is a broader understanding of how religion and sexual identity intersect. Your participation in this study makes you eligible for a drawing for a $50 gift card to Target. Regardless if you finish the entire interview session, or opt out of answering any of the questions, you will still be entered in this drawing.

Do you have any questions at this point? (IF YES, answer questions.) If you have any questions during the interview, please ask me at anytime. If you have any questions about the study after the interview, please contact me (Katie Barrow) at (314-640-2748, barrowkm@muohio.edu) or my advisor Kate Kuvalanka at (513-529-8058, kuvalanka@muohio.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you understand that your participation is voluntary and that your name will not be associated with your responses. By giving your verbal consent, you acknowledge that you are 18 years or older.

Do you agree to participate in this study that explores the role religion plays in the lives of Jewish lesbians?
_____No, participant did NOT give verbal consent (thank the participant and end the session)
_____Yes, participant gave verbal consent
Date__________________

IF YES: Thank you for your participation. We are very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting session for you.
Appendix D: Interview Guide

Let me begin first by thanking you for taking time to talk with me about your religion and how it affects or has affected the various parts of your life. The first thing we must do is have you sign (or verbally agree to) a form indicating your consent to participate in this study. The form explains that you have the right to discontinue participation in the study at anytime if you feel uncomfortable. Additionally, it provides you with contact information for my advisor and I should you have any questions or comments about the study. (Read consent form to phone participants and await consent; give in-person participants the form to read and sign).

Okay, now let us begin with some basic demographic questions.

**Demographics**

What is your date of birth? ________________Age:________Race:______________________

What is your gender identity?____________________________________________________

Do you currently have a partner? __Yes __No

If yes, what is your partner’s date of birth?__________Age:_____Race:____________

If yes, what is your partner’s gender identity?_____________________________________

Do you have any children? __Yes __No

If yes, what is/are your child(ren)’s date of birth?

Child #1 ________________Age:__________Gender:________Race:____________________

Child #2 ________________Age:__________Gender:________Race:____________________

Child #3 ________________Age:__________Gender:________Race:____________________

Child #4 ________________Age:__________Gender:________Race:____________________

Other:
What is your sexual orientation/identity? ______________________

(If partner) What is your partner’s sexual orientation/identity? ______________________

Do you identify as an Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist Jew? ________________

(If partner) Is your partner a member of a particular religion? ______________________

If yes, which one? ______________________

(If child/ren) Do your children practice a particular religion? ______________________

If yes, which one? ______________________

What is your highest level of education? ________________

What is your current occupation? ______________________

(If partner) What is your partner’s highest level of education? ______________________

(If partner) What is your partner’s current occupation? ______________________

(If partner) How long have you and your partner been together? ______________________

Where do you live? (city, state) ______________________

Do you have any questions regarding the consent form or the present study?

**Ok now we are ready to start the interview. Is it okay if I turn on the tape recorder?**
1. Tell me about your upbringing. Specifically, describe the role religion played in your upbringing.

Prompts:

(a) What religion(s) were your parents/legal guardians?

(b) Were your parents religiously and/or culturally Jewish?

2. Through this study we’re hoping to learn about how people acquire their religion. So, describe how your parents passed (or attempted to pass) their religious beliefs onto you.

Prompts:

(a) Did your parents take you to a place of worship for worship services (i.e. church, temple, mosque)? If so, how often?

(b) How often did your parents discuss religion with you?

(c) How often did you and your family pray together?

(d) Were you required to participate in religion-sponsored activities (i.e. food drives, rummage sales, bake sales, youth groups, etc)?

(e) Were you required to attend a religious/private school or attend lessons at a Hebrew School/Bible School/etc? How often did you attend?

3. Tell me more about activities that occurred in your family in which religion played an integral role. Specifically, think back to holidays, marriages, births, deaths, etc. Did any of these events help in transmitting religious belief to you?

Prompts:

(a) How were the holidays celebrated? How did the celebration of holidays remind you of your faith (i.e. songs, school/church/temple plays, etc)?

(b) Did you experience any deaths in your childhood? How did your parents talk about death with you?

4. Tell me about the role religion plays in your life today?
Prompts:

(a) How often do you attend a worship service?

(b) How often do you pray?

(c) How often do you attend religious-sponsored activities (i.e. food drives, craft fairs, etc).

(d) How often do you observe religious holidays? Describe a typical holiday celebration in your family.

5. Tell me about the role religion plays in your romantic relationships.

Prompts:

(a) How important is/was it that you and your current/past partner share the same religion? Why or why not is it important for you to share a similar religion? Are there conflicts due to religious differences?

(b) How often do/did you and your current/past partner discuss religion?

(c) How often do/did you and your current/past partner engage in religious-related activities together (i.e. attending worship services, praying, bake sales, craft bazaars, etc)?

(d) How do you see religion playing a role in any future relationships you might have?

6. If you have (or if you were to have) children, how important is it/would it be that your child(ren) be raised Jewish? How have/would you passed/pass on religious beliefs to your child(ren)?

Prompts:

(a) Have you taken/would you take your child(ren) to worship services?

(b) Have you participated/would you participate in religious-related activities with your child(ren) (i.e. rummage sales, bake sales, food drives, etc).

(c) Have/would you pray with your child(ren)?
(d) Have/would you celebrate/observe holidays and/or discuss issues of death with your children?

(e) Have/would you enroll your child(ren) in a religious/private school and/or make them attend Hebrew School?

7. Tell me what it means to you to identify as an L/G/B/T person and as a Jew?

Prompts:

(a) Were there any moments in your life when you found it difficult to remain Jewish and identify as L/G/B/T?

(b) Has identifying as L/G/B/T strengthened or weakened your commitment to Judaism? Please explain.

(c) How supported by your religion do you feel as an L/G/B/T person?

(d) How supportive are members of the LGBT community of your religion?

8. Lastly, given the common misconception that L/G/B/T persons are not (or cannot) be religious (or maintain ties with an organized religion), do you ever encounter people (i.e. family, religious worshipers, clergy, etc) who suggest there is no place in Judaism for a L/G/B/T person? How does that make you feel? What have/would you say to these people?

Prompts:

(a) Have you encountered members of the LGBT community who do not understand why you maintain ties with an organized religion? How does that make you feel? What have/would you say to these people?

Thank you so much for your time and participation. Two final questions:

A) Would you like to be entered into the drawing for a $50 gift card to Target?

B) May we contact you in the future to share the results of our study with you?
Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics (N = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
<th>Length of Relationship</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Age of Children (in years)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Branch of Judaism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deidre</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>39 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>56, 54</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23, 21, 21, 18, 15</td>
<td>OH</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
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<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>OH</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9, 6</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Reform</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Gretchen | 48  | Lesbian        | 16 years               | 2                  | 6, 3                       | Israel   | “Reconstructio
nist rabbi 
working in a 
Conservative 
institution 
attending a 
local Reform 
and Modern 
Orthodox 
congregation” |

*Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities