

WE ARE YOU

**An Exploration of Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Transgender Issues
in Colorado's Jewish Community**

A Publication of:


Mosaic

The National Jewish Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity

**Dr. Caryn Aviv, Gregg Drinkwater
and Dr. David Shneer**

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600 South Cherry Street, Suite 1200

Denver, Colorado 80246-1712

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The National Jewish Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity

PO Box 18743

Denver, CO 80218

www.jewishmosaic.org

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About Mosaic

Mosaic: the National Jewish Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity partners with Jewish organizations, communities, and individuals of every denomination to create a world where all Jews are fully included in Jewish communal life, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Founded in summer 2003 and based in Denver, Colorado, Mosaic is a managed project of the Shefa Fund.

Mosaic manages a wide range of projects while also participating in the national and international Jewish community via training programs, conference presentations, community lectures, educational workshops, and scholar-in-residence programs. Mosaic staff members also provide significant consulting support to local, regional and national Jewish organizations based in communities throughout the country.

Mosaic's primary clients are the staff and leadership of Jewish communal institutions (synagogues, JCCs, community federations, day schools, etc.).

Cited as one of the 50 most creative and effective Jewish organizations in the United States,* Mosaic encourages LGBT inclusion in Jewish life through the following goals:

Visibility: Mosaic works to increase the visibility of LGBT Jews as integral members and leaders of Jewish communities. We work to insure that LGBT Jews are supported and encouraged to lead active Jewish lives with integrity and pride.

Advocacy: Mosaic advocates on behalf of LGBT Jews and their allies who need support, partners, knowledge and resources to bring about change in their own communities.

Education: Mosaic educates Jewish institutions, communities and individuals of all denominations on how to create more inclusive and diverse communities.

Research: Mosaic conducts needs assessments and policy research to help Jewish decision makers, funders, and organizations create more inclusive communities and policies.

For more information, visit:

www.JewishMosaic.org

*Mosaic was included in the 2005 edition of *Slingshot*, a guide to 50 "of the most creative and effective [Jewish] organizations" in America. *Slingshot* was compiled by 21/64, a division of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

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Executive Summary

The leaders of Colorado's Jewish communities have publicly cited the values of inclusion, respect and tolerance as important goals for the community. Yet Colorado's Jewish communal world has been relatively slow to meet the needs of LGBT Jews and their families. Although there are bright spots and examples of institutions pro-actively welcoming LGBT Jews, too many of Colorado's thousands of LGBT Jews and their families have not felt welcomed, recognized, or supported, and choose not to affiliate or participate in the organized Jewish community.

The entire Jewish community benefits when diversity and inclusion are valued in accordance with traditional Jewish commitments to ending prejudice and discrimination. Sexual orientation discrimination and equality for LGBT people are Jewish issues of concern that involve basic Jewish values such as tzedek (justice), tikkun olam (repairing the world), and pikuach nefesh (saving lives).

This study seeks to understand how LGBT Jews in Denver and Boulder experience the organized Jewish community in terms of being or becoming a place to express meaningful Jewish identity. Our evaluation examines what tactics are currently used or could be developed by Jewish organizations and professionals in the Denver/Boulder metro region to provide more opportunities for Jewish engagement, involvement, and participation of LGBT Jews and their families.

Through face-to-face interviews with 32 Jewish communal professionals and 21 LGBT Jewish individuals, we examined whether and how the Jewish community of Colorado has provided a welcoming hand to LGBT Jewish individuals in ways that make Judaism and Jewish life a compelling and meaningful choice for LGBT Jews. We also considered whether and how Jewish communal organizations might take concrete steps towards opening their doors, inviting people in, and providing welcoming environments for LGBT Jewish people.

The professional staff we interviewed for this report represent 22 different institutions throughout the metro region. In addition, interview subjects made repeated references to or shared detailed anecdotes about their experiences with another 12 institutions, bringing the total number of Jewish communal organizations examined directly or indirectly for this project to 34.

Some key findings of this report are:

1. Jewish communal institutions in the metro region can be categorized using a four-part typology ranging from those organizations that are most welcoming of LGBT people to those that are least welcoming (the categories we used are: inclusive, tolerant, invisible, and unwelcoming). The majority of the institutions that would be categorized as "unwelcoming" are based in Denver,

while most of the agencies that would be labeled "inclusive" are located in Boulder.

2. The staff of secular and/or community-wide Jewish organizations seem to embrace LGBT inclusion with relative ease and few of the difficulties that can often face those organizations where the leadership feels bound by denominational and/or halakhic constraints towards LGBT issues.
3. The professional staff at Colorado's Jewish institutions generally perceive their organizations to be more welcoming than LGBT Jews find them to be.
4. To be inclusive, an institution needs the regular participation of openly LGBT individuals. Those institutions without visible LGBT clients or members seemed unable to make the policy decisions necessary to move toward full inclusion.

In our interviews, LGBT Jews said that they would participate in the Jewish community if they knew that they and their partners and families would be met not just with tolerance, but with acceptance and inclusion. We estimate that there are over 5,000 LGBT Jews residing in the metro Denver/Boulder area, with 88% of Jewish communal professionals reporting that their organizations already have some LGBT members or constituents (suggesting that barriers to participation are not absolute).

In order to make Colorado's Jewish community more inclusive, LGBT Jews need to be asked to walk through the open and welcoming doors of community organizations. It is not enough for the Jewish community to expect LGBT Jews themselves to gather up the courage and seek out organizations to meet their needs. It is the task of the professional and lay leadership of the Jewish community to promote structural change by pro-actively and repeatedly inviting LGBT Jews to participate as full and welcomed members of the community.

The Jewish community of Colorado needs to invest in structural change and provide Jewish professionals with comprehensive training and education about LGBT issues. Jewish leaders and organizations need to take risks by reaching out to LGBT Jews and their families, and to promote policies and practices that demonstrate true awareness, inclusion and sensitivity, not just 'tolerance' of gay people.

The Colorado Jewish community stands to reap generous benefits by pro-actively welcoming and including LGBT Jews and their families. LGBT Jews have religious, cultural, social, and lifecycle needs that are often overlooked by the Jewish community, and thus they seek to meet those needs elsewhere, often from secular organizations that do not affirm their religious, cultural and ethnic heritage. Faced with lower rates of affiliation and Jewish community participation than in other Jewish communities in the United States, Colorado's Jewish institutions cannot afford to let this vital subgroup remain apart from the Jewish communal world.

Introduction

"It is the responsibility of the group in power to become inclusive, not the responsibility of the disenfranchised group. Racism is the responsibility of the white community to fix. It is the Denver Jewish community's responsibility to fix homophobia."

-Gay Jewish man from Denver

The values of inclusion, respect, and tolerance were cited as important goals by the *Vision 2020* report, a comprehensive assessment and strategic plan for the Colorado Jewish community produced by the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado in 1998-1999. Yet Colorado's Jewish communal world has been relatively slow to meet the needs of LGBT Jews and their families. Although there are bright spots and examples of institutions proactively welcoming LGBT Jews, too many of Colorado's thousands of LGBT Jews and their families have not felt welcomed, recognized, or supported, and choose not to affiliate or participate in the organized Jewish community. Others participate in the community, but remain "in the closet" about their sexual orientation or gender identity, facing the constant stress of deciding when, where and if to disclose their identities to communal professionals, lay leaders, family and friends.

The entire Jewish community benefits when diversity and inclusion are valued in accordance with traditional Jewish commitments to ending prejudice and discrimination. Sexual orientation discrimination and equality for LGBT people are Jewish issues of concern that involve basic Jewish values such as *tzedek* (justice), *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and *pikuach nefesh* (saving lives). These, and other Jewish values related to inclusion, respect, and welcoming, are included in the left-hand sidebars of each page of this report as a reminder of the teachings and ethics that sustain the Jewish world.

Jewish communities throughout the country are concerned about issues of continuity, low rates of communal affiliation, and the effects of assimilation on Jewish identity. One set of questions that communal leaders focus on revolves around the topic of "meaning": how to make Judaism and

*There is
nothing as
good in all
the world as
listening.*

**-Orchot Tzaddikim
(Ways of the
Righteous)**

Jewish life more meaningful and vibrant so that people will want to maintain a connection to their Jewish identity and community in the first place. Another set of questions relates to tactics: how to become more inclusive and welcoming to all potential Jewish participants of a given community, so that if people consider joining they will feel welcome enough to want to stay.

The influential *National Jewish Population Studies*, conducted in 1991 and again in 2000-2001, highlighted relatively low levels of formal affiliation and high levels of alienation from the organized Jewish community, especially in the Western United States.¹ In their 2000 study *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community* (Indiana University Press, 2000), Arnold Eisen and Steven Cohen explored both the questions of meaning and tactics regarding the problems of Jewish inclusion and continuity. The researchers found that the Jews they studied have minimized their participation in Jewish communal organizations. Celebrating Jewish holidays with family has become the primary expression of Jewish identification, with synagogue affiliation a rather distant second.

These, and other recent research reports, are relevant to the questions we pose through the lens of LGBT inclusion. In the context of declining communal affiliation rates, what role might LGBT inclusion play in a comprehensive organizational outreach strategy? Can becoming welcoming of diverse constituencies help revitalize Jewish institutions? How might Jewish understandings of sexuality and gender help or hinder efforts to foster inclusion of all Jews?

This study seeks to understand how LGBT Jews experience the organized Jewish community in terms of being or becoming a place to express meaningful Jewish identity. Our evaluation examines what tactics are currently used or could be developed by Jewish organizations and professionals to provide more opportunities for Jewish engagement, involvement, and participation of LGBT Jews and their families.

¹ In a section on regional variations, the authors of the 2000-2001 study found that, compared to Jews in the South, Northeast, and Midwest, "Western Jews report the lowest levels of in-group friendships, many ritual practices, synagogue membership and attendance, charitable giving to federation and other Jewish causes, and JCC and other Jewish organizational memberships." The complete report can be found on the Web site of the United Jewish Communities at: www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=60346



*Why is it my
responsibility
to reach out*

to gay Jews?



*Our doors are
already always
open to anyone.*

*-A Jewish professional
in Denver*

Through our interviews with Jewish communal professionals and LGBT Jewish individuals, we asked whether and how the Jewish community of Colorado has provided a welcoming hand to LGBT Jewish individuals in ways that make Judaism and Jewish life a compelling and meaningful choice for LGBT Jews. We also asked whether and how Jewish communal organizations might take concrete steps towards opening their doors, inviting people in, and providing welcoming environments for LGBT Jewish people. In addition, we explored how Jewish leaders respond to LGBT issues in general, and whether or not they embrace LGBT issues as topics of Jewish interest.

This report is one of the first such comprehensive evaluations of its kind in the United States, and has three primary goals:

- **To interpret qualitative and quantitative findings from a comprehensive needs assessment on LGBT awareness within Jewish communal institutions in Denver and Boulder;**
- **To explain how and why LGBT awareness and outreach are everyone's responsibility in order to create change, inclusion, and more welcoming Jewish environments for LGBT Jews and families;**
- **To suggest concrete steps the Denver/Boulder Jewish community might incorporate as strategies, policies, and benchmarks to move towards better outreach and inclusion of LGBT Jews and families.**



Hospitality to

wayfarers

is greater than

welcoming

the Shekhinah

-Talmud,

Tractate Shabbat 127a



Opening Doors

Nearly all of the LGBT Jews interviewed for this needs assessment described moments of alienation from the Jewish world because of their sexual or gender identity, and many of the interview subjects described experiences of explicit hostility from community leaders that have marked their perceptions of the organized Jewish world. Several participants said that their alienation from the Jewish world began when they came out of the closet to someone in the Jewish community who responded with hos-

tility, disdain, or lack of interest. Here are a few excerpts:

"I had an uncle who was a rabbi...and I wrote him a letter when I came out. I guess I was looking for acceptance. He wrote me back this scathing, unaccepting letter, and that's what pulled me away from the Jewish community.... He was Orthodox - he took the Orthodox [view] that was in the Bible, that it's a sin. He was looked up to by the whole family, and that rejection from a family member [caused me to just say] Judaism is not for me in its organized fashion. I kept my identity as a Jew but I stopped [attending synagogue]."

-A Jewish lesbian

"Did I seek any support from the Jewish community when I came out? No....I always thought of it very separately. It's like being Jewish is one thing and being gay is another thing. It's probably because there was no resource. There was nothing for gay Jews."

-A gay Jewish man

"You learn that there are certain things that the straight people just don't want to talk about, so we just go off and do our own thing."

-A Jewish lesbian

This needs assessment found that in order to make the Jewish community more inclusive, LGBT Jews need to be asked to walk through the open and welcoming doors of community organizations. It is not enough for the Jewish community to expect LGBT Jews themselves to gather up the courage and seek out organizations to meet their needs. It is the task of the professional and lay leadership of the Jewish community to promote structural change by pro-actively and repeatedly inviting LGBT Jews to participate as full and welcomed members of the community.

The Jewish community of Colorado needs to invest in structural change and provide Jewish professionals with comprehensive training and education about LGBT issues. Jewish leaders and organizations need to take risks by reaching out to LGBT Jews and their families, and to promote policies and practices that demonstrate true awareness, inclusion and sensitivity, not just 'tolerance' of gay people.

*Why is it always
our responsibility
as gay Jews to
have to reach out?
It would be nice
to sometimes
simply be asked,
or to see Jewish
organizations
represented at the
Gay Pride Parade.*

-A gay Jewish man in
Denver

Jewish community leaders need to explicitly take up the cause of civil rights and equality for LGBT people. By embracing LGBT equality as a Jewish value, community leaders make it clear that the Jewish world celebrates all forms of diversity. Everyone in the Jewish community has LGBT family members, friends, co-workers, or neighbors. LGBT issues impact the lives of all Jews, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In our interviews, LGBT Jews said that they would participate in the Jewish community if they knew they and their partners and families would be met not just with tolerance, but with acceptance and inclusion.

*You shall
not judge unfairly;*

you shall

show no

partiality...

*Justice,
justice shall
you pursue*

-Deuteronomy 16:19-20

*I think that the
issues that affect
the gay community
affect all of us ...
it's a topic of
interest to
everybody because
[gay people are
part of] everybody's
family and
everybody's friends.*

-Director of a
community-wide
organization

Colorado on the National Scene

"My brother is gay and ...[I'm] trying to convince him to move here, but he won't come here because of the reputation Colorado has."

-Staff member at a Jewish institution

"I have never lived in a place in the United States where my gayness was such an issue, both negative and positive. My sexuality has never been more an object of scrutiny than here in Denver."

-A gay Jewish community leader

*When a stranger
resides with you
in your land,
you shall not
wrong him.
The stranger
who resides
with you
shall be to you as
one of your citizens;
you shall love him
as yourself,
for you were
strangers in
the land of Egypt...*

-Leviticus 19: 33-34

Although Denver and Boulder are home to relatively large and well-established LGBT communities, at the national level Colorado is perceived by many LGBT people as an unwelcoming place. In 1992, the electoral initiative known as Amendment Two passed by a small margin in Colorado. This amendment, which was later found by the U.S. Supreme Court to violate the Equal Protection Clause, would have repealed basic protections for gay and lesbian people by amending Colorado's state constitution. Civil rights activists across the country quickly labeled Colorado the "Hate State" and called for a boycott of the state until the amendment was repealed or overturned. Despite the Supreme Court ruling nullifying this amendment, the public perception of Colorado among many LGBT people across the country remains unfavorable.

This negative perception of Colorado is strengthened by the presence in the state of well-known conservative Christian advocacy organizations, most notably Focus on the Family, which actively promotes anti-gay sentiment and rhetoric in its many print and on-line publications, radio programs, and television broadcasts. This perception has also been reinforced recently by the debate over the Federal Marriage Amendment, a bill introduced in both houses of Congress by Colorado representatives (Rep. Marilyn Musgrave and Senator Wayne Allard). The proposed constitutional amendment, which would define marriage as only between one man and one woman, is seen as deeply anti-gay by most LGBT peo-

ple. Mosaic believes that the Colorado Jewish community is indirectly and negatively impacted by the common assumption, held by Jews and non-Jews alike, that Colorado is intolerant of LGBT people.

The Colorado-based Gill Foundation –one of the largest funders of LGBT organizations in the country – has worked diligently in the years since Amendment Two to help improve the climate for LGBT civil rights in Colorado. Some of the state's Jewish community leaders have, over the last 15 years, taken visible stands in favor of LGBT civil rights and have contributed to improving Colorado's public image. Others have remained silent on LGBT questions, not seeing them as "Jewish" issues. A few have actively argued against legal protections for LGBT people. Mosaic suggests that a concerted effort by Colorado's Jewish community leaders to speak out in favor of civil rights for LGBT people, as a Jewish social justice issue, will make a significant contribution to the state's public image, while also generating immeasurable benefits for Colorado's Jewish communities.

Creating more welcoming communities and increasing the involvement of LGBT Jews have had positive effects in a number of cities across the United States. Some communities have created programs, organizations, and staff positions to capitalize on the strengths, talents, and vision of LGBT Jews:

- The Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco hosts its own LGBT Alliance, a division of the Federation's annual campaign, which offers year-round programming, opportunities for Jewish LGBT leadership in philanthropy, and boasts a full-time staff member (currently the only full-time LGBT-outreach staff position at a Federation in the United States). In 2004, the LGBT Alliance raised almost \$100,000 from LGBT Jews to support the Federation's annual campaign.
- Boston is home to Keshet, a highly successful Jewish LGBT advocacy and support organization funded partially by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston. Keshet organizes social events and support groups, mobilizes the Jewish

I think the community is too negative [toward LGBT people]... I've [met with] people who have been really wounded in different congregational settings where they felt marginalized or ignored – not intentionally. That's the irony. I think if you surveyed the majority of synagogues, [they] would probably say, 'Oh yes, we're totally open.'

-Administrative director of a synagogue

community on LGBT-related political issues such as the recent Massachusetts Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage, sponsors a "Safe Schools" project, and trains Jewish communal professionals on how to create more welcoming organizations.

- In 2002, the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Fund, a donor-advised fund of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, conducted a needs assessment that argued that "the overarching need for lesbian and gay Jews is to be fully accepted and included in the life of the Jewish community." The following year, the fund awarded \$50,000 to six Chicago organizations to promote and increase LGBT inclusion and awareness.
- In early 2005, the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, with support from the Shefa Fund, released a guide to LGBT-related services at Jewish family service agencies nationwide. The guide covers agencies in 24 cities, ranging from El Paso to Atlanta, Albany to Portland.
- A collaborative consisting of six Jewish community institutions in Tucson received funding in 2005 to hire a 25%-time outreach coordinator as part of a year-long LGBT-inclusion project involving diversity workshops, social and educational events, and an expansion of services at the local Jewish family service agency.
- In 2005, the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle announced the formation of Bashert: The LGBT Initiative, which was modeled after the San Francisco LGBT Alliance (see first bullet point, above). The goals of Bashert are to create a welcoming and inclusive Jewish community and to offer opportunities for LGBT Jews in Seattle to come together in an affirming Jewish environment.
- Several Jewish congregational movements have made explicit efforts to expose their leaders to LGBT issues. A number of rabbinic institutions have taken preliminary steps towards integrating LGBT-related content into the curriculum.²

Separate reeds

are weak

and easily

broken:

but bound

together

they are

strong and hard

to tear

apart.

-Tanchuma, Nitzavim 1

The Potential Impact of LGBT Inclusion on Colorado's Jewish Community

The Colorado Jewish community stands to reap generous benefits by proactively welcoming and including LGBT Jews and their families. LGBT Jews have religious, cultural, social, and lifecycle needs that are often overlooked by the Jewish community, and thus they seek to meet those needs elsewhere, often from secular organizations that do not acknowledge or affirm their religious, cultural and ethnic heritage. Faced with lower rates of affiliation and Jewish community participation than in other Jewish communities in the United States,³ Colorado's Jewish institutions cannot afford to let this vital subgroup remain apart from the Jewish communal world.

- **We estimate that there are over 5,000 LGBT Jews residing in the metro Denver area.**⁴
- **88% of Jewish communal professionals we interviewed reported that their organizations already have some LGBT members or constituents (suggesting that barriers to participation are not absolute).**
- **LGBT Jews are significantly more likely than non-LGBT Jews to be unaffiliated, despite a desire to be involved in the Jewish world.**⁵

² For example, the Hebrew Union College (Reform Movement) has established an Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation and the Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center (JHVRC) on Sexual Orientation Issues in Congregations and the Jewish Community to increase awareness and knowledge about LGBT issues among Reform Movement professional and lay leaders. The Reconstructionist Movement's Kolot: Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies provides training, resources, and educational materials that often include analysis of sexual orientation and gender that pertain to LGBT issues. See www.huc.edu/libcenters/centers.shtml#ijso and www.kolot.org. The Conservative Movement has yet to integrate LGBT issues into its rabbinical and professional development programs, although two student groups (Keshet JTS in New York and Dror Yikra at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles) have formed in the past several years to advocate for "social and religious equality for Jews of all sexual orientations within the Conservative Movement." See www.keshetjts.org.

³ For details on Colorado affiliation and participation rates, and how they compare to other communities, see both the *2000-2001 National Jewish Population Study* and the *Vision 2020 Report* produced by the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado in 1998-1999.

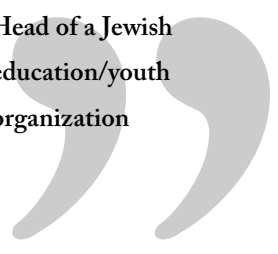
⁴ For a detailed explanation of these population estimates, see appendix.

⁵ The Jewish Outreach Institute (www.joi.org) is attempting to quantify this variance in affiliation through a national research project focused on LGBT Jewish affiliation and interfaith coupling. Nearly every LGBT Jewish leader in the country would agree that LGBT Jews are less likely to be affiliated, but in the absence of research on this topic it remains anecdotal. The JOI report, once released, will hopefully provide the raw data necessary to spur local and national Jewish institutions to create new outreach programs targeted at LGBT Jews.



*The more
diversity we
get in this place,
the better we are.*

-Head of a Jewish
education/youth
organization



- **LGBT Jews are also much more likely to be involved in interfaith relationships than non-LGBT Jews.**⁶

In addition to supporting the stated values of the *Vision 2020* report, LGBT Jewish inclusion benefits the Colorado Jewish community through LGBT Jews' and their families' potential:

- Philanthropic dollars
- Synagogue memberships
- Lay leadership or involvement with communal boards of directors
- Professional leadership as staff in organizations
- Tuition dollars at Jewish day and supplementary schools
- Volunteer time, energy, and ideas in community organizations
- Advocacy for *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) in Jewish and LGBT communities.

In contrast to many other similarly-sized Jewish communities in the United States, Colorado offers few organized, specific, or targeted outreach programs designed to attract and encourage LGBT Jews to participate in the Jewish community. This lack of outreach initiatives is a noticeable gap within the full range of community policies and programming. In contrast, Colorado's Jewish communities have expended a great deal of effort in recent years to improve the climate for other previously marginalized or stigmatized groups, such as Jews-by-choice, interfaith married couples/families, and single heterosexuals.

“*The world*

rests

on three

things:

justice,
truth,
and peace.”

-Pirkei Avot 1:18

⁶ Interfaith relationships will also be measured in The Jewish Outreach Institute's upcoming research project. Currently, only anecdotal evidence exists. This anecdotal evidence, though, suggests that the failure to pro-actively welcome the non-Jewish partners of LGBT Jews further alienates those involved in interfaith relationships. Several LGBT Jews interviewed for this report specifically referenced unwelcoming attitudes toward interfaith couples within Jewish institutions in Colorado as one of the reasons for their lack of affiliation.

*I think the resources
can be better used
someplace else.*

Not that I don't

think that

[LGBT issues are]

important,

but I think it's a

triage issue.

There are so many

unaffiliated Jews

here that I think

we just need to

do more massive

marketing to reach

the general

unaffiliated Jew.

-An Orthodox rabbi

Denver vs. Boulder: Different Models of Community

A few strong examples for creating inclusive, welcoming Jewish communities around LGBT issues already exist in Colorado. These examples, found primarily in Boulder, also highlight one of the key findings of this report: The Denver and Boulder Jewish communities differ in their comfort about and embrace of LGBT issues, offering two different perspectives and models regarding LGBT inclusion in the Jewish community. These differences raise important policy and programming questions about how to be more inclusive and welcoming, and provide a useful and valuable window into how to create communal change. This report focuses on three major areas in which the Denver and Boulder Jewish communities differ regarding LGBT inclusion:

- Awareness, exposure, and comfort levels of Jewish professionals working in the community;
- Organizational climates: the differences between inclusive, tolerant, invisible, or unwelcoming environments and their implications for LGBT inclusion;
- Policies, practices, and programming.

"I do commitment ceremonies. I have done pretty extensive reading around gay issues, but with weddings I had to read specifically about Judaism and what you could do and not do by Jewish law."

-Boulder Jewish professional

Overall, we found that professionals in Denver had less exposure and awareness, and higher levels of discomfort in addressing LGBT issues, compared to their colleagues in Boulder. All of the Boulder Jewish professionals we interviewed demonstrated significant exposure to and awareness of LGBT people and issues, both in their personal and professional lives. These participants said that they knew LGBT people who were either active in their Jewish organizations (as lay leaders and/or professional staff, members or current clients), or had friends and family members who had 'come out of the closet' and deeply influenced their understanding and awareness of LGBT issues. One Boulder professional explained:

“

*Let
the honor
of your
neighbor be*

*as dear
to you
as your own.*

-Pirkei Avot 2:10

"I teach about gay and lesbian material in the Bible, in the rabbinic world, in contemporary [denominational movement] stances, about being created in the image of God. I've also counseled [LGBT people] and I've referred people [to outside resources]."

Other Boulder participants said there were LGBT people in their organizations who regularly acted as 'point people' for resources, guidance, and troubleshooting when LGBT issues came up.

This visibility of Jewish leaders willing and ready to address LGBT issues did not go unnoticed by LGBT Jews who are involved in both communities. In all of Mosaic's interviews with Boulder LGBT Jewish individuals, they mentioned key leaders and staff of Jewish organizations by name as examples of how inclusive and welcoming the Boulder Jewish community seems to be towards LGBT Jews (although all of the Boulder-based LGBT individuals interviewed also noted limits and concerns around LGBT inclusion in their community). In contrast, the LGBT Jewish individuals interviewed in Denver mentioned few specific individual Jewish communal professionals as exemplars of inclusion and awareness, and a few Denver LGBT Jews said they regularly drove to Boulder to attend Jewish events because they felt more welcome in that community.

Why the Gap?

"This is Boulder.... It's just not charged....Maybe I'm wrong but it seems like such a non-issue these days."

-Boulder Jewish professional

"Boulder in that way is a different universe ... Boulder is a pretty sophisticated town."

-Head of a Boulder Jewish institution

We speculate that there are several reasons for the differences between Boulder and Denver:


1. As a university town, Boulder is generally a more politically liberal Jewish and secular community, and thus fosters a more inclusive environment in which people's general consciousness about LGBT issues is higher.

In a secular Jewish organization it is inconceivable to me that [homophobia would] continue to be an issue.

-Director of a community-wide Jewish institution

2. Denver's Jewish community is long established and maintains deep generational roots. Jewish families and individuals who have moved to Denver over the last 20 years have repeatedly characterized the Jewish community as 'closed' and harder for newcomers to join (see the *Vision 2020* report for a detailed exploration of this issue). In contrast, Boulder is a comparatively younger Jewish community and is home to many transplants from coastal - and relatively liberal - Jewish communities who actively participate in communal institutions. This openness to newcomers encourages a broader openness to multiple forms of difference.
3. Several Denver Jewish professionals commented during their interviews that Denver is generally a much more politically and socially conservative city than Boulder, and that this conservatism extends to LGBT issues.

Although the general political and social climates of the two communities play important roles in defining their respective communal atmospheres, attitudes around contentious issues are not the only significant elements that differentiate Boulder and Denver. Based on the analysis of our data, organizational environments, policies, and practices also play important roles in whether or not Jewish communities are willing and able to move towards more pro-active inclusion of LGBT Jewish people and their families. Our data suggests that most of Boulder's Jewish institutions demonstrate deeper commitments to diversity, collaboration, and inclusion than do the bulk of Denver's institutions, commitments that became evident through the two community's different approaches to LGBT Jews. In other words, more of Boulder's Jewish institutions have made specific policy choices reflecting a commitment to inclusion than has been the case in Denver.



Hillel taught,

"Judge not

[another person]

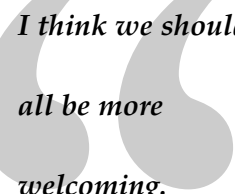
until you have

been in that

person's place."

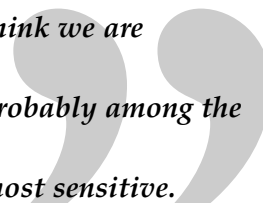


-Pirkei Avot 2:4



*I think we should
all be more
welcoming.*

*I'm feeling guilty
doing this interview
because I realize
that there's some
place we're not
being sensitive and
we could be so
easily, but we're
going to think
about it. And I
think we are
probably among the
most sensitive.*



-A Reform rabbi

Institutional Climates

Mosaic staff interviewed professional and lay leadership at 22 different institutions. In several cases, Mosaic interviewed multiple staff at various levels in a particular institution. Four of the 22 institutions are based in Boulder, and another four have branches in Boulder or explicitly serve the entire metro Denver/Boulder region. The 22 organizations directly examined for this project included six general community agencies, four educational institutions (involved in both formal and informal Jewish education, and not including synagogue educators whose interviews are counted under the "synagogue" category), 11 synagogues (from all denominations), and one advocacy/policy institution. In addition to the 22 organizations at which Mosaic interviewed professional staff, interview subjects made repeated references to or shared detailed anecdotes about their experiences with another 12 institutions located in both Denver and Boulder, including six synagogues (of all denominations) and six general or community-wide organizations. For this report, Mosaic staff asked the Jewish professionals surveyed:

You shall not

hate your

neighbor

in your heart...

Love your

neighbor

as yourself.

-Leviticus 19:17-18

- How comfortable they thought an LGBT person would feel coming out to board members, staff, and general members/clients of the institution;
- How comfortable they thought a member or client might feel discussing or seeking advice from the institutions staff about an LGBT family member or friend;
- Whether the institution had any affiliated LGBT members, clients, students or staff and whether the institution's leaders had spoken publicly about LGBT issues;
- What institutional barriers there might be at their organization to hiring openly LGBT staff or welcoming potential members or clients who are LGBT;
- Whether participants would be willing to share any anecdotes about how LGBT issues or people have affected their institution.

We have developed a typology of institutions in the Denver/Boulder area that outlines the characteristics that contribute to an inclusive or unwelcoming environment on LGBT issues. This typology directly relates to Jewish professionals' answers to the questions above, and was developed by analyzing that data and then comparing the findings with those gleaned through interviews with LGBT individuals. We found that LGBT Jewish individuals had several specific suggestions for what might make a Jewish institution more welcoming, based on their personal experiences of feeling unwelcome in Jewish institutions due to invisibility, isolation, or homophobia. Those suggestions helped inform the typology offered here.



*I would be really,
really shocked
if our board even
considered
[hiring] an
openly LGBT
person.*

-Staff person at a
Conservative
synagogue

TYPOLGY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Type/Characteristics	Leadership	Institutional Climate
<i>The Inclusive Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive experience with LGBT individuals • High comfort level with public discussion of LGBT issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal or informal institutional constraints • Openly gay staff, lay leadership, and constituents (or very open to hiring/acquiring) • Inclusion of LGBT issues in programming
<i>The Tolerant Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate experience with LGBT individuals • Relative comfort with public discussion of LGBT issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal institutional constraints (perhaps informal) • Perhaps some openly gay staff, lay leadership, or constituents (or open to hiring/acquiring) • No inclusion of LGBT issues in programming
<i>The Invisible Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some to little experience with LGBT individuals • Discomfort with public discussion of LGBT issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal institutional constraints • No or very few openly gay staff, lay leadership, or constituents • No inclusion of LGBT issues in programming
<i>The Unwelcoming Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no experience with LGBT individuals • Discomfort with/opposition towards public discussion of LGBT issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal institutional constraints • No openly gay staff, lay leadership, or constituents • No inclusion of LGBT issues in programming

OF JEWISH COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS

Policies and Practices	Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral gendered language in forms • Non-discrimination clause in employment policy • Staff training for LGBT awareness/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution provides outreach, marketing, or programming towards LGBT Jewish individuals/families • LGBT issues/families seen as important constituents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral gendered language in forms AND/OR • Non-discrimination clause in employment policy AND/OR • Informal staff training for awareness/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential interest in outreach or programming towards LGBT Jewish individuals/families • LGBT individuals/families seen as constituents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms use neutral gendered language OR • Non-discrimination clause in employment policy • No staff training for awareness/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interest in any outreach or programming towards LGBT Jewish individuals/families • LGBT issues/families not seen as priority for institution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms use traditional gendered language • No non-discrimination clause in employment policy • No staff training for awareness/sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interest in any outreach or programming towards LGBT Jewish individuals/families • LGBT issues/families not seen as relevant to institution

Key Findings:

1. The majority of the institutions that would be categorized as "unwelcoming" (using the guidelines above) are based in Denver, while most of the agencies that would be labeled "inclusive" are located in Boulder.
2. The staff of secular and/or community-wide Jewish organizations seem to embrace LGBT inclusion with relative ease and few of the difficulties that can often face those organizations where the leadership feels bound by denominational and/or *halakhic* (Jewish law) constraints towards LGBT issues.
3. The professional staff at Colorado's Jewish institutions generally perceive their organizations to be more welcoming than LGBT Jews find them to be.
4. To be inclusive, an institution must have the regular participation of openly LGBT Jews. Those institutions without visible LGBT clients or members seemed unable to make the policy decisions necessary to move toward full inclusion.

G-d created man

in His image,

in the image

of G-d he

created him,

male and female

he created them.

-Genesis 1:27

The Inclusive Institution: "We Are You"

"Our mission statement ... says 'all members of the Jewish community'."

-Boulder Jewish Professional

"Being welcoming is a symptom of a healthy Jewish institution."

-Gay Jewish man

Characteristics of Inclusive Institutions

Of the organizations we surveyed, there are three pro-actively inclusive and welcoming Jewish environments in Colorado that fully accept and embrace LGBT Jews and their families, based on the criteria of leadership, organizational policies and practices, and the number of LGBT Jews who actively participate.

All of these institutions are located in Boulder, are influenced by feminist ideas about gender egalitarianism in leadership and policy, and are characterized by the integration of LGBT issues and people in the institution. In inclusive institutions, Jewish professionals are well-versed in LGBT issues through personal and professional experience, and discuss LGBT issues in public settings as part of their work. Interviewees from pro-actively inclusive institutions listed many examples of LGBT individuals who have participated in lay and professional leadership, as well as examples where the Jewish community aligned with the broader LGBT community on common issues of concern (notably on Amendment Two, gay marriage, and a controversy over homophobia in the Boy Scouts). One Jewish professional in Boulder explained:

"There are no barriers to participation. First of all, historically a large national percentage [of the institution] is lesbian, and part of that was because it was an egalitarian movement that brought in a lot of spirituality but encouraged women leaders, and it was one of the very few places that lesbian women could feel comfortable. In fact we actually have [LGBT people on the board], because we are trying to get as diverse a board as possible because the board is supposed to represent the community; we actually ensure that there's a slot that we have different sexual orientations represented, and that is a value of the board."

When I
realized

I didn't have

to hide one

part

of myself from

another it

was really good.

-A Jewish lesbian in
Boulder

*Each person is sent
down to this
world in order
to fulfill a specific*

divine task,

to carry out on

earth a lofty,

heavenly purpose.

This is the mission

of human beings on

earth; moreover,

for as many

people as G-d sends

down to earth, G-d

has just as

many different

tasks and purposes.

-Reb Zushe of Anipoli

As with the congregation described above, LGBT issues at inclusive institutions are routinely included in programming (such as havurot, life-cycle rituals, institutional participation in annual LGBT Pride parades, hosting of LGBT Pride Seders, etc.). LGBT families are seen as important constituents and members of the community. For example, a Jewish professional in Boulder explained how LGBT families are integrated into one Boulder congregation:

"We have a lesbian havurah, and they're almost all moms, and we have another havurah where there are two lesbian couples who are out. So I think people are pretty comfortable, and young people feel comfortable coming out. We've had life cycle ceremonies like namings and bar mitzvahs where there have been two moms or two dads."

LGBT individuals involved in pro-actively welcoming institutions echoed many of the comments made by Jewish professionals about inclusion and acceptance. One gay man explained that he feels fully "at home" in his synagogue because LGBT people are always included in the list of people who are welcomed during Shabbat services, and the lesbian and gay havurah functions as an important source of community for him.

Ultimately, the presence of LGBT Jews is the most important marker of an inclusive institution. As one gay Jewish man stated:

"Symbols, language and structures are necessary, but not sufficient. Inclusion is about community, and community is about people. Evidence of openly queer Jews is the biggest symbol of [inclusion]. For example, rumors have it that [a particular synagogue in Denver] has a fairly large lesbian membership. I don't know the rabbi and I've never seen any LGBT material in their marketing, but the fact of the rumors about lesbians has made me consider attending services there."

The Tolerant Institution: "We Welcome Everyone No Matter Who You Are, Gay, Straight, Black, White."

"It's a Non-Issue."

-Jewish Professional

Characteristics of Tolerant Institutions

There are five institutions in this study that we defined as "Tolerant Institutions." These institutions are characterized by leadership that expressed some experience, awareness and comfort with openly discussing LGBT issues and faced few institutional constraints to becoming more explicitly welcoming. Some of these potentially welcoming institutions also had openly gay or lesbian staff or lay leadership, and expressed openness to the future hiring of out staff members in certain leadership positions. Tolerant institutions have provided some informal staff training on LGBT issues, or at least discussed issues among staff when they come up. The professionals interviewed in these institutions also recognize that LGBT individuals and/or families are potential or current constituents (parents and families, teens in youth programs or schools, senior citizens, college students, young professionals) and expressed an interest in learning more about how to conduct outreach/marketing and create programs for such constituents. But these communal leaders are often hampered by a lack of knowledge, time, resources, or institutional support to pursue more inclusive strategies. **We see great potential for institutional change among the tolerant institutions.**

Tolerant institutions currently do little in terms of pro-active outreach, policy, or practice to signal that they might be welcoming towards and inclusive of LGBT Jews and families for three main reasons:

1. A false presumption that the institution is already welcoming and/or a false presumption that members of the community would automatically recognize the institution as welcoming - not just to LGBT Jews but to everyone. Statements such as, "It's a non-issue," or "I'm

I think of people in my position in the different Jewish agencies and ... I find them to be a very open, forward thinking kind of a group that would be very comfortable with these kinds of issues and would want to find ways to be more inclusive.

-Jewish educator

*You shall not
commit
a perversion
of justice;
you shall not favor
the poor and you
shall not honor
the great;
with righteousness
shall you judge
your fellow.*

-Leviticus 19:15

the first person who meets with people. I could care less. We have so many mixed families, so many different things that it wouldn't be any different of what we already have." Or "I would say there needs to be more outreach to all of the unaffiliated. While I don't advocate that we present ourselves as a straight synagogue versus an LGBT synagogue, I think that there needs to be more cogent communication of the openness that we have for people of all orientations." These statements suggest, on the one hand, a wonderful openness to diversity but, on the other hand, a lack of awareness of the structural impediments that prevent LGBT Jews from involving themselves with the institution. The statement "it's a non issue" dismisses the fact that sexual orientation actually is an issue, even if it is an issue that can and will be dealt with positively and affirmatively.

2. At tolerant institutions there is a perception that LGBT issues are a low priority in comparison to other challenges, such as assimilation or interfaith relationships.
3. There is a presumption among leadership that institutions serving dues-paying members, or that represent community-wide constituencies, need to cater to, rather than lead, members of the community on issues of LGBT inclusion. One leader of a communal institution stated:

"Someone's sexual orientation for a job where they didn't interface with the outward population would be of no issue to me whatsoever, but someone's sexual orientation or how they present themselves is always going to be a factor in hiring somebody for a job that interfaces with the public I don't think it [has] to do with discrimination as much as our clarity on how effective that person could be, whether people could get over it ... so I think if a transgender person who is obviously transgender ...were to apply for a job and they were clearly qualified and would work well behind the scenes, there would be no question, but I would have a question if that person were going out and working with the rabbis and part of their job was to engender connection."

Or as another Jewish communal professional put it:

"Synagogues need to stick with the middle of the road in terms of making it outreach for the sake of outreach and not necessarily discriminating as to who they are going for. So by the same token I wouldn't say that we're trying to reach out exclusively to straight Jews just as I wouldn't necessarily advocate that we create a marketing portal for LGBT Jews."

Tolerant institutions project LGBT invisibility to LGBT Jews.

Most Jewish professionals in tolerant institutions perceive that the Jewish community is generally open already to all kinds of people, including LGBT Jews. This perception of openness contrasts significantly with the interviews we conducted with LGBT individuals, who talked about feeling invisible, alienated by homophobia, or ignored in subtle and overt ways in different Jewish communal institutions. As one gay Jew put it:

"I am expecting to be a parent soon and it never crossed my mind to check out Shalom Baby.⁷ There is no presumption that I would be welcome there. As a group organized around families, I presumed that, because Denver's Jewish community is so conservative, that any group organized around families would not welcome non-traditional families. I have no idea if this is true, for all I know there could be gay families in Shalom Baby, but the fact that it doesn't occur to me to check it out is a public relations problem of the Denver Jewish community..."

One lesbian described feeling like she "wanted to walk out" of a speech by a rabbi who said "gays were welcome there and that he/she was very supportive of gay civil rights, but then he talked about how he refused to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies at that synagogue because even if the denomination supports that right, it's not civil law." A gay man expressed deep pain that when his partner died, the rabbi of his congregation refused to recognize him as the life partner at the funeral, and that the accurate description of their relationship was deleted from the obituary run in the *Intermountain Jewish News*. Another gay man said that if there were no overt signs of being welcoming (in particular, no other visibly gay

*I think LGBT
issues are talked
about hardly at all.*

Just because you

are not being

yelled at from the

pulpit doesn't

mean that you

have a place.

'Don't ask,

don't tell'

doesn't go very far.

-A rabbi in Denver

⁷ Shalom Baby is a program for new parents based at Denver's Jewish Community Center.

members and no statement of inclusion or welcome in institutional literature) then he assumed the institution was "not welcoming by default." Finally, several interviewees expressed frustration and alienation over a debacle several years ago when members of a local gay Jewish group asked a Denver Holocaust program to include new scholarship about the persecution and murder of lesbians and gays by the Nazi regime,⁸ but were rebuffed and rejected by Holocaust program organizers.

Tolerant institutions assume that there are so few LGBT Jews that inclusion and outreach do not need to be priorities.

Some Jewish professionals erroneously perceive that there are few LGBT Jews in Denver, so for them, LGBT issues are not a big priority requiring pro-active response given other pressing concerns, such as heterosexual interfaith relationships and assimilation. One Jewish professional explained the relatively low priority of LGBT issues:

"We never even really thought about [LGBT inclusion] when we put our brochure together. It's something we should think about. ... My first gut reaction is that it would make me a little uncomfortable [adding marketing images or text about gay families] within our brochure, although I know it should be in our brochure, but that's my gut reaction. My reaction too is if we put that in the brochure then we need to put that we are [also] open to Jewish Christians, Jewish Buddhists and Jewish Pagans."

What few Jewish professionals realize is that by not prioritizing LGBT Jewish needs, or by lumping them with other marginalized but unrelated groups, they are unwittingly excluding many potential members and clients. There are approximately 5,000 LGBT Jews in the greater Denver/Boulder area, and many are not affiliated with the Jewish community because of perceptions of homophobia or indifference. Many LGBT Jews, like heterosexual Jews, face issues of assimilation in their own lives and families, and many LGBT Jews are involved in interfaith relationships, thus experiencing a 'double marginalization' in the Jewish community around their sexual orientation and their choice of intimate partner relationships.

Ben Zoma said,

*'Who is honored
and respected?*

*One who honors
and respects
others.'*

-Pirkei Avot 4:1

⁸ For more information on the Nazi persecution of gays, see the online exhibit created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at: www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/hsx/

In addition, nearly all non-LGBT Jews involved in the Jewish community have family members or friends who are LGBT. Many of these "straight" Jews have experienced moments of alienation from or frustration with Jewish institutions because of a perceived invisibility of their family members and friends.

Tolerant institutions recognize that not every Jew is "straight," but find it difficult to address this institutionally.

One Denver Jewish professional who was very aware of institutional heterosexism explained:

"[People] really know from me how important it is to try and challenge the [members] not to be heterosexist. Another bad example [of heterosexism] I'll give you that always used to drive me crazy was for several years, some of the [institutional members] used to do an event, it was a big thing. And the pictures on the event poster always were a male and female [couple] together. I still think we have probably a very long way to go to make sure that just as we are striving to do this with Judaism as a whole that people don't pre-decide that we're not open to that. But there's a lot of work that we need to do, the commitment's there, the tools aren't all in place."

Another professional in a tolerant institution talked about the slow process of change - of moving away from unconscious heterosexism towards more awareness, and how difficult that can be:

"I remember [a member] coming to me and they were instrumental in moving our congregation forward about 15 years ago in changing our whole structure about looking at membership. They came to the board, and they came to the membership committee and they asked for these changes so that gay people could live together and be considered a unit. We never did that before, we never had the ability to do that before. And that was a really important process in terms of staff and the board. After that educational process was started people were much more open although there were some people on the board who were very closed. Their homophobia was so great that never was going to change."

*Are you trying to
bring people into
your community
and make people
feel welcomed,
or are you trying to
create a separate
community
within your own
community?
I'm a little
ambivalent because
while I think that
everyone deserves a
place at the table,
the table holds
things for everyone,
and you can pick
and choose.*

-A cantor in Denver

The Invisible Institution: "We Don't Have That Issue."

"I guess my bias has been not to make it an issue."

"If people don't know about it they don't know to have any reaction to it."

"[LGBT issues] just puzzle this congregation ... I didn't realize you could stick your head in the sand as much as you can in the year 2005."

-Three Jewish communal professionals

A significant number of Denver Jewish communal institutions, and a small number of Boulder Jewish institutions, tended to fall under the category of invisible institutions.

Characteristics of Invisible Institutions

These institutions are characterized by leadership that have little to some experience with LGBT issues and/or individuals, might feel somewhat uncomfortable addressing those issues directly, and in general presume that their institutions do not have LGBT Jews or their family members. Although some of these institutions have staff that might or might not be gay, those staff members are definitely not "out" about their sexual orientation. Some, but not most, of these institutions face specific barriers or constraints to inclusion (such as *halakhic* considerations). The majority of these institutions do not pro-actively offer any programming, curriculum or client services that are LGBT-specific, nor do they provide staff training on LGBT issues, or conduct any outreach or marketing that might attract potential LGBT members, clients, or donors.

An invisible institution makes LGBT Jews invisible by assuming that everyone who participates is heterosexual, and if not heterosexual, then at least 'quiet' about one's sexual orientation, rather than 'flaunting it.' Indeed, some Jewish professionals at invisible institutions argued that

*It is not our
responsibility to
finish the task
[of repairing the
world], but neither
are we free to
leave the
status quo alone.*

-Pirkei Avot 2:16

anyone's sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or lesbian/gay/bisexual, was irrelevant to the life of their institution, as this Jewish professional explained:

"Because I believe strongly that at the end of the day, a Jew is a Jew so it doesn't make a difference what their orientation is, we need to make sure that they are included in the community. Again, it has to be with a sensitivity on both sides that ultimately one's sexual orientation is one's own business. It shouldn't be something that I'm parading about."

The language of "flaunting" or "parading" one's sexuality appeared occasionally in interviews with people from invisible or unwelcoming institutions. Such language presumes that a same-sex couple's presence in public space is a form of "flaunting" while a mixed-sex couple appearing together in public is "normal" or "natural" and they are, therefore, not "flaunting" their (heterosexual) sexual orientation.

In invisible institutions, sexual orientation – in the form of heterosexuality – is deeply embedded in the life of the institution. In the case of synagogue life, Jewish weddings and Jewish families (usually heterosexual), and the birth of Jewish children (almost always into families composed of heterosexual couples) are an integral part of communal life that sustains the institution from generation to generation. The point here is that minimizing or downplaying the role of sexual orientation in Jewish communal life actually masks how deeply heterosexual Jewish communal life really is, but is so taken for granted as the 'norm' as to become invisible unless challenged by difference - i.e., the presence of gay people.

This makes the institution unwelcoming not just to LGBT Jews, but also to LGBT Jews' families and friends who frequently have to make their family members and friends invisible. As one respondent said, "I would say - I mean the realities of most of the individuals who are ... either gay or lesbian may not be affiliated with the synagogue. So sometimes it's the parents who are actually the ones that are dealing with the issue." In contrast to invisible institutions, inclusive institutions recognize that LGBT issues affect all Jews.

[When I was coming out] it never occurred to me that any Jewish structure that I was involved in would have anything to say to me about sexuality.

-A gay Jewish man in Denver

Invisible institutions often suggest that LGBT issues are a minor problem compared to "more important" areas of discrimination in the Jewish community. Several professionals made this point:

"I think that within the Jewish community there is discrimination on a lot of levels....There's discrimination against interfaith, discrimination based on economic status... and discrimination based on lineage in terms of who your parents were and how long they've been in Denver."

LGBT inclusion should be part of an overall process of inclusion, of all kinds of Jews. As one gay Denver Jewish man stated, when asked to define an invisible institution, "No proactive engagement with diversity in all forms. When thinking about LGBT diversity, I think about diversity in general. And Jewish institutions that attract relatively homogenous populations, I assume them to be unwelcoming in general towards LGBT Jews." This respondent argues that inclusive institutions have a particular outlook that brings in diverse populations of all kinds, while invisible institutions tend to render any kind of difference invisible.

When the leadership of invisible institutions use the language of "family," they are assuming that the heterosexual family unit is the basis of an institution. As one leader of a synagogue stated:

"[The synagogue is] very family oriented ... I think it is also hard for single people. Anything that is outside the normative family model is difficult in a synagogue, especially a synagogue where the vast majority of people are either grandparents or parents because that's mostly who joins synagogues."

By using the word "family oriented" and then bringing up "single people," the respondent implies that unmarried people do not have families. This institution's "normative family model" presumes a husband, wife, and children, and does not pro-actively account for divorced families, single parents, families with adopted children, and LGBT families. The leader of this synagogue is failing to recognize that because the organization projects an image of homogeneity, its membership reinforces that image. A synagogue with a homogeneous membership is not simply reflecting the inherent homogeneity of the potential member base. The failure to imagine and then pro-actively strive for diversity becomes a self-reinforcing trend.

*You shall not be a
gossipmonger
among your people,
you shall not stand
aside while your
fellow's blood
is shed...*

-Leviticus 19:16

The Unwelcoming Institution: "We Don't Want You"

"I would not feel comfortable telling anyone at my [Orthodox] synagogue that I'm gay.I think in general the more Orthodox it is, the more likely it is that it would not be welcoming ... I kind of just don't mention it. ... It's an annoyance because I feel I can't be open. People ask me "So why are you not married?" or "Should I hook you up with my daughter or granddaughter?" I just say "no, thank you." ... I would love to say, "I'm gay and I can only marry in Massachusetts." I wish I could. I wish I had more of that strength to do it but I find it so annoying and I just don't ... Maybe I need to find another shul."

- A gay Jewish man in Denver

Only a few Jewish institutions in Denver and no institution in Boulder fell under the category of unwelcoming.

Characteristics of an Unwelcoming Institution:

These institutions are characterized by discomfort with or opposition towards public discussion of LGBT issues, and intentionally have few or no openly gay clergy, staff, or members.

There was a general presumption that Orthodox religious institutions would be uniformly unwelcoming because of *halakhic* considerations and the prohibition against male homosexual sex acts in Leviticus 18.⁹ This unfair and inaccurate assumption misrepresents the position of some Orthodox leaders. One Orthodox rabbi frustratingly explained that "most people assume that I have a certain agenda, that I represent *halakha*." Like all Jewish communities, Orthodox communities are not monolithic, in terms of individual responses and cases, and in *halakhic* interpretation.

⁹ Recent films, such as Sandi Dubowski's *Trembling Before G-d*, and Ilil Alexander's *Keep Not Silent*, demonstrate some of the range of responses to LGBT individuals and relationships within diverse Orthodox communities in the United States and Israel. Additionally, there is growing public debate amongst Orthodox scholars about the tension between Jewish values of inclusiveness and openness, such as *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life), welcoming the stranger, and *B'tselem Elohim* (the idea that we are all created in the image of G-d), and the *halakhic* constraints stemming from Leviticus and other Jewish texts. A small number of scholars and leaders have also questioned the traditional interpretations of Leviticus 18:22 and other relevant texts. To explore a diverse range of relevant opinions and *halakhic* interpretations, see Rabbi Steven Greenberg's recent award-winning *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and Rabbi Chaim Rapoport's *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View* (Mitchell Vallentine & Company, 2004).

*It sort of amazes me
that the Orthodox
community is so
threatened to
have us around
because we're gay.*

-A gay Jewish man in
Denver

Some Orthodox communal leaders are pro-actively welcoming of LGBT Jews, within the constraints of their understandings of *halakha*, while others are less comfortable with LGBT people and LGBT issues. In some situations, Jewish professionals said that that they would be open to LGBT members as *individuals*, as long as they were discreet about their sexual orientation (i.e., not open about it), and as long as those potential members remained single and not openly part of a couple or an LGBT family. A minority of Orthodox leaders offered no such limitations, suggesting they welcome partnered LGBT Jews into their congregations or communities as Jews, regardless of potential differences over sexual behavior.

Although the personal views of individual staff or leaders may vary, unwelcoming institutions project a public face of discomfort, indifference or hostility toward LGBT issues. There is a sense among the organizational leadership at unwelcoming organizations that their institutions must not publicly or officially show approval of or support for LGBT inclusion. This viewpoint was most clearly and publicly articulated by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, the longtime executive editor of the *Intermountain Jewish News*, the region's Jewish newspaper. In a Jewish Telegraphic Agency article by Deborah Nussbaum Cohen published in summer 1995, Rabbi Goldberg offered a rationale behind the IJN's refusal to publish announcements for Tikvat Shalom, Denver's now defunct gay congregation. In the JTA article, Goldberg is quoted as saying that his newspaper "will not knowingly print a notice of an intermarriage just as we won't print something about a gay synagogue." He explained that "We're here to promote the welfare of the Jewish people and Jewish community." The article went on to say that Goldberg considers a newspaper to be the "major sanction in a community. When the sanction breaks down, the intermarriage rate goes up, and the same thing goes for homosexuality or anything else ... we're very conscious of our role as being a public sanction."

Unwelcoming institutions often use *halakha* to explain their discomfort with LGBT Jews.

"Obviously, somebody who is gay or lesbian is more than welcome here just like anybody else, but it's not a philosophy here that it is okay

“
Normally,
we worry about
our own material
well-being and
our neighbors souls;
let us rather worry
about our
neighbors' material
well-being and
our own souls.”

-Rabbi Israel Salanter

because obviously as a more traditional [institution] we can't condone the lifestyle. But that doesn't mean we don't appreciate their role as part of the Jewish people."

"Halakha ... I think a lot flows from there. In other words, people want a leadership here that reflects the ideology of the synagogue, so board members would sense that it is inappropriate and members of the synagogue would sense that it is inappropriate for [an openly LGBT person] to be in a leadership position. It doesn't mean they aren't welcome as members."

The *halakhic* prohibition on same-sex relations is, for most Orthodox and traditional leaders, not open for discussion. However, many Orthodox leaders accept that most people do not live to the letter of Jewish law and therefore welcome LGBT Jews in the same manner that they would welcome individuals who drive to synagogue on Shabbat or do not observe all of the Jewish dietary laws. For many of these leaders, that "tolerance" reaches its limit when the *halakhic* violation becomes visible to the community.

"That being said, the people here are very culturally committed to tradition even though they themselves may not be personally observant. And therefore I think there is a visceral reaction to having somebody who is - people know whether they agree or disagree that traditional Judaism does not condone homosexual behavior - having somebody like that or a person of that orientation being in a leadership position for the synagogue. They may not be able to explain to you why, and that's one of the challenges here - it's a cultural thing."

The rabbi quoted above points out the biggest challenge facing unwelcoming institutions. General homophobia and society has helped to reinforce Jewish resistance to LGBT people and to LGBT issues, in both traditional and non-traditional Jewish settings. The combination of a perceived *halakhic* constraint, homophobia and general LGBT invisibility fosters a deep resistance to LGBT people within the culture of unwelcoming institutions. Such an ingrained culture of resistance to LGBT people can lead to the sort of "visceral reaction" described above and is very difficult to change without pro-active efforts on the part of the institutional leadership.

*I think the way
that people have
dealt with*

*[LGBT Issues] is
to not deal with it.*

*It's not something
synagogues really
spend a lot of time
thinking about or
discussing policies*

*on. ... We just don't
talk about it.*

*It's not really about
being positive or
negative, we're just
not dealing with it.*

*-A Jewish community
professional at a
community-wide
organization*

For unwelcoming institutions, partnered LGBT people or LGBT couples with families create more discomfort because their sexual orientation is visible. Visible LGBT people can cause discomfort for other members of the institution.

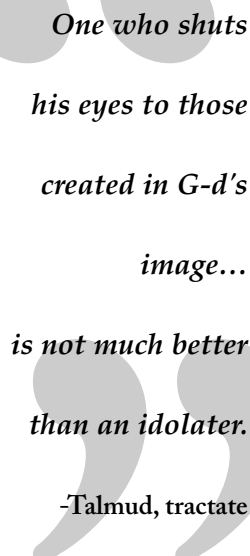
All but two of the Jewish communal leaders interviewed for this project responded that they had LGBT friends or family members, while 88% knew of LGBT individuals affiliated with their Jewish institutions. Clearly, LGBT individuals are present in every Jewish organization in Colorado, either directly as constituents or indirectly as the immediate family members or friends of constituents. Yet many of these LGBT individuals remain closeted, or are at least "discreet" about their sexual or gender identities. One gay Jewish man recounted a moment when a friend from synagogue invited him and his boyfriend for Shabbat dinner. He said that after extending the invitation:

"She wanted to be really clear that there'd be no public displays of affection..... Like we were going to throw each other down on the table or something.... I was actually shocked at that because this is a very good friend, who recognized her narrow minded-ness and apologized in what I considered a very acceptable way."

Staff at unwelcoming institutions referred to the persistence within their organizations of disturbingly homophobic stereotypes about a link between LGBT people and pedophilia or common myths, such as the idea that LGBT people have the power to turn people into homosexuals.

When asked if his institution could welcome LGBT members, one respondent stated this explicitly:

"There would be halakhic issues, and institutional constraints. There certainly would be board objections, and parent or member objections... There's a fear that you make homosexuals; they don't develop on their own. You influence them; there's a fear of abuse, sexual abuse. ... I think people that are a little more sophisticated would not fear any abuse. But those who really don't think about



*One who shuts
his eyes to those
created in G-d's
image...
is not much better
than an idolater.
-Talmud, tractate
Ketubot 68a*

these issues very much are afraid for their children."

Because unwelcoming institutions foster a climate of fear, shame, embarrassment, or stigma, it is not surprising that few or no members of this type of institution are openly LGBT. In our interviews, few LGBT Jewish individuals said they would be interested in or willing to join an institution that would require such discretion or lack of welcome for their partners and/or families. Thus, there is little incentive for unwelcoming institutions to change their culture or policies because of entrenched perceptions or religious considerations, and there is little incentive for LGBT Jewish people to want to participate in such institutions that are openly hostile or unwelcoming.

Overt Homophobia in Institutions

"We have a [teenager] who is currently struggling [with his sexual orientation] and he gets a lot of flack for it. So while [the other] guys are fooling around, the next minute they will be making totally homophobic anti-gay statements."

While 90% of Jewish professionals said they were comfortable talking about LGBT issues with adults, and 88% said that their organizations had LGBT members or constituents, we found that most professionals do not necessarily intervene to interrupt incidents of homophobia when they witness them and do not pro-actively work within their organizations to promote more LGBT inclusive environments.

According to individuals we interviewed, no institution has formal processes to address homophobic incidents nor any formal diversity training to prevent homophobia.

Some professionals recognize that there is a need to be more pro-active, particularly in cases such as the example above, where there is overt homophobia in the form of teasing, taunting, and stigmatizing. However, few professionals have ever received any training on how to intervene or prevent homophobic situations, and several participants commented that

About 10 years ago, the Denver Jewish Community Center put on a community festival, and Tikvat Shalom (Denver's former LGBT congregation) was told they couldn't have booth space. A bunch of rabbis, including some Orthodox rabbis, signed a letter saying Jewish events should be open to all.

-A gay Jewish man in Denver

they were unsure of what to do. Others are uncomfortable with directly addressing these issues, or perceive organizational challenges in creating a more inclusive environment. Another participant explained how and why being pro-active was so difficult:

"Would a [client/member] talk to a [staff person] they trusted? Sure. Would they talk to me? If I had a relationship with them. The organization has never put itself in a situation where anyone would believe it was equipped to be of help, and so the real answer to all of these questions is no."

“

Rabbi Hillel said,

"What is hateful to

yourself do not

do to your neighbor.

That is the entire

Torah; all the rest is

commentary..."

-Talmud, tractate

Shabbat 31a

”

Homophobia in Jewish Educational Settings

"It's uncomfortable - they're not going to risk coming out. They have no reason to believe [the organization] is going to be helpful."

-A Jewish educator in Denver

The issue of heterosexism and homophobia is particularly acute when considering LGBT issues in Jewish educational settings. First, most members of educational institutions are children and, therefore, are not there by choice. In other words, they do not have the power to opt in or out of unwelcoming institutions, compared to the adults we interviewed who suggested that they would not attend events at an organization they considered unwelcoming. This makes issues of tolerance, diversity, and inclusion in educational settings all the more important.

Silence, invisibility, and tolerance of homophobic teasing seem to be the norm at many Jewish institutions that work with youth – not necessarily out of deliberate staff actions, but out of benign neglect of the issue and a lack of experience with how to address heterosexism, sexuality and sexual orientation in general with teens. Particularly in Denver, Jewish professionals seem to be aware and concerned about overt displays of homophobia in their educational settings, but express confusion and frustration about what to do to intervene, interrupt, or prevent it. The following quotes are from two different interviews:

"There are a lot of negative reactions from other kids. There are still a lot of jokes and things that they do that are inappropriate that are really hard to rein in, really hard to be overly critical of them because they would just be 'Oh, whatever.' Less of the word 'faggot,' but a lot more just 'gay.'"

"We had a young woman who was openly lesbian, and a couple of boys made some stupid remarks or something about her being gay, and it was a learning opportunity. We brought them together and they did some learning together, some apologies. I don't think it was as much homophobic as much as just being male, stupid, and a teenager."

You can't answer questions on a survey like this

without examining

your own heart,

and I keep thinking

that I know I've

got homophobic

issues because I'm

not evolved enough

that all of my

phobias are gone.

-A Jewish educator

Why is the tongue

like an arrow?

If a person

draws a sword

to kill a neighbor,

and the neighbor

begs for mercy,

the person's mind

can change,

and the sword can

be returned unused.

However, once an

arrow is loosed,

it can never be

called back, even if

the person who

shot it has a

change of mind.

-Midrash Tehillim 120:4

At Mosaic, we are particularly concerned about the implications and costs of homophobia in Jewish educational settings. When LGBT youth see that teasing and harassment are permissible or tolerated, what message do they receive about being gay and Jewish? If kids go through a Jewish educational system learning nothing about the contributions of LGBT Jews to Jewish and American culture, what does that say about welcoming all members of the community? Or even worse, when Jewish educational institutions condone, or ignore, the stigmatization of youth for potentially being or acting 'gay,' why would kids who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity want to stay Jewish and affiliated with the Jewish community as they get older and make their own choices? And it is not only about the students. One interview subject described an incident in which a Jewish educator came to him for help because the educator's own students were using slurs like "fag" towards him.

Although many of the educators we spoke with expressed a desire to learn how to create more inclusive classrooms, few had taken any concrete steps toward this goal. To our knowledge, few Jewish educational settings in Denver or Boulder have implemented "safe zone" programs where adult allies, trained in how to respond to the needs of LGBT youth, identify themselves as allies for support. At Jewish day and supplementary schools, there are few examples of curriculum instruction or materials that convey 'it's okay' to be gay or that LGBT Jewish individuals have contributed in key ways to American Jewish culture and community. Some Jewish institutions for youth tolerate overt homophobia and staff members seem to do little to intervene, stop, or educate youth about why homophobia is not acceptable. Few LGBT teens are openly gay in these institutions because there is no existing climate or culture of safety and inclusion. And because there has been no concerted effort to reach out to the wider LGBT community, there are few openly LGBT Jewish individuals and families who choose to affiliate and actively participate in the Denver Jewish community. **We think this is both a serious danger and a wonderful opportunity to change past institutional responses by proactively addressing the scope of the problem with training, education, and curriculum resource development.**

*I feel that my
being involved
with some Jewish
institutions helps
move them
forward [on being
welcoming toward
LGBT Jews].*

*It's my little
contribution.*

-A gay Jewish man
active as a lay leader

The Individual Jewish Communal Professional: Gaps in Awareness, Comfort Level, Knowledge and Skill

The level of awareness, knowledge, comfort, and skill in addressing LGBT issues among Jewish communal professionals is uneven and could be improved across the board. There is an unmet need for training and education about LGBT awareness and diversity issues in the Jewish community.

We made the following findings based on our interviews with 32 professionals who work in the Denver/Boulder Jewish community:

- 88% of Jewish professionals reported that their organizations had LGBT members or constituents.
- 57% of Jewish professionals said they had either a high or moderate level of exposure to LGBT individuals or issues in their professional lives (staff, clients, or members of organizations).
- 43% of Jewish professionals said they had little exposure to LGBT issues or individuals through their jobs.
- Only two Jewish community professionals said that they had no LGBT family members or friends.

These findings show that Jewish communal professionals know that LGBT Jews are part of their institutions but few understand what they should do about this fact.

We also found that a significant percentage of Jewish professionals in Denver did not know the meaning of some terms commonly used to talk about LGBT issues. The overwhelming majority of professionals were familiar with the terms 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'bisexual,' and 'homophobia,' but nearly 20% of respondents did not feel comfortable defining 'transgender'

Devote yourself

to justice;

aid the wronged.

Uphold the rights

of the orphan;

defend the cause

of the widow.

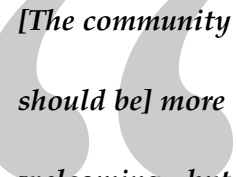
-Isaiah 1:17

and nearly 40% could not explain what the term 'heterosexism' meant.¹⁰ Often Mosaic staff explained these terms during the course of the interview.

Previous Training and Exposure

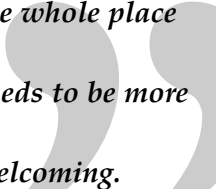
The majority of professionals we surveyed had never received any training about or exposure to LGBT issues in their formal education or professional development. Only a minority of respondents mentioned this kind of prior exposure or education. For this small number of professionals, this included discussion panels at conferences, courses, lectures, or text study in rabbinical school or graduate programs in social work that explored LGBT issues in other fields. One professional explained:

"We have discussed these issues as part of our [professional] conferences, not only from an ideological perspective, more importantly from a human perspective. [We're] really trying to formulate a strategy that is both loyal to tradition and at the same time inclusive of humanity."



[The community should be] more welcoming - but I think that's true for all populations.

It's not just for one group. I think the whole place needs to be more welcoming.



-A Jewish community professional at a community-wide organization

¹⁰ Transgender means a person who was born one gender, but over time decides to transition to live their life as another gender. This can involve changing one's clothing, mannerisms, physical appearance and body through surgical and non-surgical interventions. For an excellent resource and introduction to transgender issues, see Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* (Routledge, 1997). Heterosexism is commonly defined as the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and can pervade the most mundane of everyday conversations and interactions. For example, a man is asked by a co-worker, "Where does your wife work?" assumes that the man is not only heterosexual, but also married to a woman.

Talking about LGBT Issues: "It's Not All About Sex."

"I don't have an issue personally but I'm not just representing myself. It's like asking someone if you're comfortable bringing up sex with little kids..."

- Denver Jewish professional

"My rabbi talked about homosexuality as a sin in the shul... and I vaguely recall an analogy about sex with giraffes...I found it so absurd."

-Denver gay Jewish man

Differences emerged among Jewish professionals when asked about their comfort level in discussing sexual orientation and family diversity issues with various age groups and populations. In many of our conversations, the questions we asked had to be clarified. Several participants worried that by talking about LGBT issues, we meant talking about sex. We emphasized and reassured participants that LGBT issues pertain to questions of identity, community, physical and emotional safety, and a sense of belonging. **Nonetheless, the majority of respondents either assumed or equated LGBT issues with talk about sex and sexual acts.**

In response to the question "Please rate your comfort in discussing/handling LGBT issues in an age appropriate manner," we learned the following:

- 90% said they were comfortable talking with adults
- 79% said they were comfortable talking with youth ages 12-18
- 70% said they were comfortable talking with younger children from ages 5-12
- 62% said they felt comfortable discussing talking with children younger than 5

Most of the participants who expressed discomfort about discussing LGBT issues with children and youth mentioned the issue of sex, and said they didn't talk about 'any kind of sex' with kids. The equating of LGBT

“
One who shames

his neighbor

in public

is guilty of

a terrible sin.”

-Bava Metzia 59a

issues with a focus on sex, rather than on identities and diverse forms of families, is a form of homophobia that we found to be quite common among Jewish professionals. The LGBT Jews in our study are aware of this perception in the Jewish community, and this homophobia makes LGBT Jews and their families feel unwelcome and hesitant to join Jewish organizations.¹¹

When we asked participants about their level of professional experience in assisting LGBT individuals or family members in relation to such topics as sexual orientation, gender identity, sexuality, dating, family, the numbers look different:

- 65% counseled, offered advice or other concrete interaction
- 47% have referred a LGBT person or family member to other individuals or resources (such as books, therapists or counselors, supportive organizations)
- 25% had never been approached

The data shows a discrepancy between what Jewish professionals say they would be comfortable doing and what they actually do about these issues on the job. This raises the issue of whether Jewish professionals miss opportunities to notice moments where they could intervene or help the people that they interact with professionally.

Another Jewish professional explained that sometimes one's level of knowledge and abilities, rather than comfort, hampers their capacity to help an individual on LGBT issues:

"I have helped people, and one of the things we learned in school was if you don't know the answer... if you feel that it's reached your level of professional ability then it's OK to send someone on to someone else. And if I send someone on, it's not because I'm uncomfortable with the issue.... So I have sent people, not for lack of comfort but because I've reached my professional limit as to what I can do."

¹¹ We recommend two wonderful videos that provide ways to talk about LGBT diversity with kids without talking about sex. One is *It's Elementary*, which was the first film to address anti-gay prejudice by providing adults with practical lessons on how to talk with kids about gay people. The second film, *That's a Family!*, is a heartwarming and playful documentary that helps K-8 kids understand the various shapes that families take today. Both films come with educator teaching guides and are available at www.womedia.org.

It would be really nice to bring a gay rabbi to Denver ...

who could sit at the table with all of the other rabbis in the rabbinical council, and to always have a voice at the table.

I would just love to see these Orthodox rabbis sit next to a gay rabbi all the time. It [would help] them

understand that we're here too.

[I want to] make sure that we have a place at the table.

-A gay Jewish man in Denver who is active in a number of Jewish institutions

The majority of LGBT individuals we interviewed said that they reached out for help, particularly during the coming out process, from professionals *not* affiliated with the Jewish community (i.e., rabbis, social workers, counselor, etc.), because they assumed Jewish professionals would not be supportive or helpful.

“
*You
must
not
oppress
your
neighbor.*”

-Leviticus 19:13

*Everybody is at a
different place on
the ladder of*

Jewish growth

and we're not

asking people

how they get to

synagogue.

We're just here to

help them engage

and learn.

-An Orthodox rabbi

Recommendations for Change: Towards a More Inclusive Jewish Community in Colorado

We recommend three primary changes in Colorado's Jewish community regarding LGBT issues:

1. **Structural change at the communal and institutional level that makes LGBT issues a visible communal priority.**
2. **Systematic diversity training and educational programming at the communal and institutional level on LGBT issues.**
3. **Leaders at individual institutions taking risks to push their constituents, rather than be pushed by them, and to act upon what they already say and believe.**

Structural Change

The Mosaic study found that many Jewish communal professionals do not see LGBT issues as a priority, even though 75% of those surveyed agreed that the community should be more welcoming to LGBT Jews and 71% agreed that explicit outreach to LGBT Jews is needed. This disconnect appears to come from a difference between ideal visions and what people are actually willing and able to do within their own organizations. Welcoming this important segment of the Jewish population is not a communal priority. We recommend that institutions at the communal level recognize the lack of inclusion of LGBT Jews as a *social* and *communal* problem. We recommend such actions as:

- the Allied Jewish Federation establishing an LGBT task force;
- the Denver Jewish Community Center regularly creating explicit LGBT Jewish programming (something the Boulder JCC already does);
- the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education pro-actively championing LGBT inclusion within the region's Jewish educational

A man walking

on a road saw

a pack of dogs

and felt afraid

of them,

so he sat down

in their midst.

-Genesis Rabbah 84:5

institutions.

- all institutions should implement sexual orientation and gender identity non-discrimination clauses.¹²

Change on these issues will not come automatically and it will not necessarily be easy. As one communal leader put it, "every change at [our institution] takes intentional, systematic work." Only when the community's leaders see LGBT issues as a priority will they be willing and able to bring the necessary intention and energy to the task of becoming more welcoming.

Training and Education

The study found that a significant problem, especially in Denver's Jewish community, was a lack of access to information, lack of awareness about what LGBT issues are, and a lack of skills about how to address homophobia and heterosexism. In other words, Jewish communal professionals lack the education and skills to pro-actively transform their institutional settings to become welcoming. Mosaic recommends comprehensive training and education for Colorado's Jewish communal institutions. This includes, but is not limited to, diversity training workshops for the staff and boards at all institutions that do not already fall into the "welcoming" category; special training for educational professionals (such as dealing with homophobia in the classroom and including LGBT issues in the curriculum), and using non-heterosexist language in institutional forms, Web sites, and marketing materials.

¹² Fewer than 50% of the Jewish communal professionals surveyed for this study worked at organizations that currently have written nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation. Only two individuals said that their organizations' nondiscrimination policies also included gender identity. Of those surveyed, 22% said their organizations offered domestic partner benefits.

I think it's similar to the intermarriage issue. We can't afford to be in denial about it. We need to be able to be accessible to Jews who are affected, whether it's directly or indirectly, by LGBT issues.

-A Conservative rabbi

Leadership

Leaders in Jewish institutions need to begin taking risks by pushing for institutional change. This study showed that leaders quite often were afraid of constituents' and members' own level of homophobia, but rather than confronting homophobia or educating their constituents, they acquiesced. We recommend that leaders use their power and influence to push for institutional change. This includes, but is not limited to, making proactive statements about LGBT Jews and LGBT issues in classrooms, from the pulpit, and in newsletters and Web sites, responding to homophobic comments from board members and staff, hiring openly LGBT people in positions that deal with the public, and participating in community-wide social action projects related to diversity and LGBT issues (such as becoming involved in the campaigns over same-sex marriage amendments to the Colorado and U.S. constitutions).

Ultimately, inclusive institutions project diversity that includes not just LGBT Jews, but people of all ages, genders, and sexualities. Inclusive institutions presume that LGBT Jews *are* members, constituents and leaders in the institution. They do not use the language of tolerance, which still maintains a distance between "we," the presumed heterosexual members, tolerating or welcoming "you," LGBT Jews. If our interviews with LGBT Jews in Colorado have shown anything, it is that their Jewishness is important to them and that they *want* to be equal members of the Jewish community. They want Jewish institutions to treat them as such. It is up to those institutions and their professional and lay leadership to promote structural change by *pro-actively* and *repeatedly inviting* LGBT Jews to participate as full and welcomed members of the community.

*The first human
was created alone
in order to teach
that if anyone
causes a single
soul to perish,
Scripture imputes
to that person
the destruction
of the entire world;
and if anyone
saves a single soul,
Scripture imputes
to him/her
the saving of the
entire world...*

-Sefer Aggadah 2:54

When I was 21

I went home to

come out

to my parents,

and I said I had

something to

tell them.

When I said I was

gay they said

'Thank G-d! We

thought you were

going to say you

were becoming

religious.'

-A gay Jewish man in

Denver

Appendices

Population Estimates

The LGBT population estimates included in this report were derived by Mosaic staff in consultation with several experts familiar with LGBT and Jewish demography. For this report, Mosaic first created an estimate of the current Jewish population of the metro Denver/Boulder area. The most recent demographic data on the region's Jewish community comes from a 1997 population study prepared by Ukeles Associates, Inc., in partnership with the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado and others. That study, the "1997 Greater Denver/Boulder Jewish Community Study," reported 63,300 Jews living in the metro area. The metro-region's population has increased roughly 18% from 1997 to 2005, according to estimates presented by the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation. Applying that rate of increase to the 1997 Jewish population estimate suggests that the region's Jewish population in 2005 approaches 75,000 individuals. That figure is likely a very conservative estimate, given the finding in the 1997 study that the Jewish community in the metro region had been increasing at nearly double the rate of the general community since 1980 (largely due to migration from other parts of the country). It is unlikely that this disproportionate increase among Jews changed significantly in the years since 1997.

Mosaic next created estimates of the percentage of the Jewish population that can be identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Accurate demographic data on LGBT populations is notoriously difficult to come by. Data from the 2000 census shows that same-sex partner households make up just under 3% of all Denver households. The census data on same-sex households has been widely disputed, with some researchers suggesting that it undercounts the gay population by as much as 63%. Other estimates of the LGBT population can be based on data compiled by staff at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to estimate populations of men who have sex with men (a broader category than "gay" or "bisexual," since it includes men who might identify as heterosexual). Using CDPHE data compiled as part of the 2004-06 Comprehensive Plan and applying it more broadly to the general population suggests an LGBT population size as large as 9% in the metro region. For this report, we are using a mid-range population estimate of just under 7%. Although this number might seem high in comparison to statewide or national estimates, researchers accept that regional urban hubs, such as Denver, generally have higher LGBT populations than rural areas or smaller cities due to in-migration of LGBT individuals from the hinterland of the regional urban hub, in this case, the entire Rocky Mountain Region.

Methods

Mosaic staff conducted this comprehensive needs assessment of the Denver/Boulder Jewish communities through research surveys and tape-recorded, face-to-face qualitative interviews with Jewish communal professionals and LGBT Jewish individuals.

Jewish Professionals

Mosaic staff conducted 32 interviews with Jewish professionals who currently work in the Jewish community. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. The range of professionals interviewed included: clergy (rabbis and cantors) of every denomination, executive directors (of synagogues, communal service agencies, advocacy organizations, etc.); general staff members; and educators working in formal and informal Jewish settings. Participants were identified following an intensive analysis of the Denver/Boulder Jewish community with an attempt to identify the most representative organizations across denominations and services. At each institution selected for inclusion, Mosaic contacted between one and three staff depending on the size of the institution. In most cases, the individuals interviewed were the most senior or most public staff, such as executive directors or senior rabbis. Of the 45 Jewish communal professionals contacted for this project, five never responded to our requests, five individuals formally declined to participate in the study, citing lack of interest or a feeling that the topic was not relevant to their organization or not relevant to their position within the organization, and another three were unavailable due to extended travel or other scheduling conflicts.

Each participant signed a consent form and answered questions within four major topic areas:

1. Their personal and professional experience with LGBT issues and individuals;
2. The general organizational climate around LGBT issues in which each professional works;
3. The specific policies and practices of each organization;
4. Their overall perceptions of the Denver/Boulder Jewish communities about LGBT issues and awareness.

The answers from each completed survey were tabulated and transcripts of the taped discussions were produced for detailed analysis by Mosaic staff.

LGBT Jewish Individuals

Mosaic staff conducted 21 interviews with Jewish individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered. The age of participants ranged from late twenties to mid-sixties. The level of participation in Denver/Boulder Jewish communities among these individuals ranged from not at all (completely secular) to highly affiliated (synagogue membership, communal board leadership and/or paid employment in the Jewish community). Individual participants identified as single or partnered, some lived without children,

some were actively raising children and others had adult children. LGBT Jewish individuals were identified and solicited for interviews through Kehilatelynu (an informal Jewish LGBT social group), word of mouth, e-mail broadcasts, notices in OutFront (local LGBT newspaper) and snowball sampling. Each participant signed a consent form and answered questions within five major topic areas:

1. Background demographics;
2. Jewish background;
3. Coming out and identity;
4. Current Jewish practices;
5. Institutional affiliation.

As with the interviews of Jewish communal professionals, the answers from each completed survey were tabulated and transcripts of the taped discussions were created for detailed analysis.

The interview transcripts for both groups were coded for qualitative themes and quantitative trends. Mosaic staff read through each transcribed interview several times to develop a comprehensive analysis of the major themes and trends consistently voiced across the interviews. All identifying information about individuals and/or organizations has been removed or changed to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the study's participants. Some minor modifications have been made to quoted material in order to ensure confidentiality. These modifications were not substantive in nature and primarily involved adjusting specific references to individuals or organizations to more general references so that the institution in question can not be identified.

Authors of the Study

CARYN AVIV, Ph.D, a co-founder of Mosaic, is a Marsico lecturer in the School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Denver, and academic director of the Certificate Program in Jewish Communal Service in the university's Graduate School of Social Work. Aviv, along with David Shneer, is the author of *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, published in October 2005 by New York University Press. Aviv and Shneer have also co-authored the forthcoming *American Queer, Now and Then* (Paradigm Publishers, 2006), and co-edited the anthology *Queer Jews* (Routledge 2002). Dr. Aviv's new book project, entitled *Peace Camps*, explores gender and national identity politics in two conflict resolution programs for Israeli and Palestinian youth. She conducts research on and teaches in the areas of gender, sexuality, Zionism, Israel and contemporary Jewish cultures. Dr. Aviv is the former director of a youth leadership development initiative at San Francisco's Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, a member of the Experiment in Congregational Education Task Force, and a former board member of the LGBT Alliance of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation. Aviv earned her Ph.D. in sociology at Loyola University, Chicago.

GREGG DRINKWATER, is Mosaic's director and one of the organization's three co-founders. Prior to joining Mosaic, Drinkwater worked in nonprofit communications, as a journalist in Russia, and as the news editor for San Francisco-based PlanetOut Partners, publishers of *Gay.com* and *PlanetOut.com*, the world's most popular LGBT Web sites. Drinkwater has been a volunteer in a variety of capacities with LGBT, Jewish, and social justice organizations for over 17 years, most recently serving as the vice-chair of the community funding panel of the Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado, helping co-found *Kehilateynu*, Denver's LGBT Jewish network, and serving as a member of the advisory committee of the Hearts and Hands Homemaker program at Jewish Family Service of Colorado. Drinkwater earned his B.S. and M.A. degrees at the University of California, Berkeley, where he also devoted several years to a Ph.D. in history.

DAVID SHNEER, Ph.D., a co-founder of Mosaic, is an associate professor of history and director of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver. His work concentrates on modern Jewish culture, Soviet Jewish history, and Jews and sexuality. His most recent books include *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, 2004) and *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (NYU Press, 2005) co-authored with Caryn Aviv. Shneer and Aviv are also co-authors of the forthcoming textbook *American Queer, Now and Then* (Paradigm Publishers, 2006) and co-edited the groundbreaking anthology *Queer Jews* (Routledge, 2002). His latest book project, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, looks at the lives and work of two dozen World War II military photographers to examine how Soviet Jewish photographers encountered evidence of Nazi genocide on the Eastern Front. As a board member of Mosaic and as a scholar, Shneer speaks widely about issues of Jews and sexuality, most recently giving talks about the role of LGBT Jews in advancing Jewish culture at *Rejuvenation: The Future of Jewish Cultures*, a conference held at the University of Toronto in October 2005. Shneer earned his Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Berkeley.



The National Jewish Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity

PO Box 18743 | Denver, CO 80218 | www.jewishmosaic.org

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