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Being Gay and Jewish: Negotiating Intersecting Identities

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Abstract

Due to the emphasis on “traditional” gender roles, the “nuclear family,” procreation and conservative religious values, many gay and lesbian Jews

feel a sense of alienation from the Jewish community and develop an ambivalent or conflicted relationship about their own Jewish identity. As a result, gay Jews often struggle to find ways to successfully negotiate their ethno-religious and sexual identities. Based upon in-depth interviews of thirty gay Jewish men in Toronto, this work offers a case study to empirically and theoretically explore the varied experiences of these intersecting identities for this under-studied population. Recent research on other ethnic minority gays and lesbians tend to simplify this question by suggesting that the minority gay individual will simply choose to prioritize one of these identities while repressing the other. Building upon studies of gay Christians that stress more fluid, dynamic and evolving approaches to identity construction, this paper underscores the complexity and variability of this phenomenon as it applies to gay Jews.

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