Is the Mechitza Permeable?

An Exploratory Study on Navigating Jewish and Transgender Identities

Nicole A. Thalheimer

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree Doctor of Psychology

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Abstract

Identifying as a Jewish transgender woman can come with a plethora of stigma and challenges. Compounded by the ongoing existence of microaggressions and violence, a 2009 survey found individuals who identify as transgender are 40 times more likely to have attempted suicide than the national average. The invalidation of an already marginalized group is exacerbated by clinical invisibility and lack of empirical research. Participants took part in 90-minute semistructured qualitative interviews using a questionnaire created based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. After transcription, the researcher and two assistants ascertained eight major themes and four minor themes: (a) Family (spouse, parent, or sibling) Interactions; (b) Dynamics of Sexual Orientation; (c) Professional Help and Bureaucratic Red Tape; (d) Stealth and Disclosure of Transgender Identity; (e) Education; (f) What Does It Mean To Transition; (g) Changes to Community Interactions; and (h) Transgender Jewish Interactions. The four minor themes were: (a) Interactions with and Views of Israel, (b) Naming and Language, (c) Not Fitting In, and (d) Reaction of Children. The meaning and construction of the participants' transgender and Jewish identities varied greatly. Access to support and resources both in the Jewish and gender contexts either aided or hindered the participants' identity growth. Resilience and humor played roles in all participants' narratives. This study supports and validates the idea that there is no one right way to be a transgender Jewish woman.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> God separates us one by one so that we can see ourselves better. The Maharsha is trying to tell us that at least as important as the judgment which God makes on our lives, is the judgment we make on ourselves! All true knowledge begins with self-knowledge. Unless we know ourselves, our strengths and our weaknesses, we cannot change and become the people we really long to be. (Congregation Beth Am, 2012)

The Maharsha, a 16th century Jewish scholar, spoke these powerful words centuries ago. But perhaps his words resonate even more loudly today with the extreme hegemonic pressure to fit into societal binaries such as male or female, Jewish or gentile. What happens when you do not fit into these narrow boxes? Knowing yourself, as the Maharsha suggests, but finding that you are starkly outside the lines of these rigid binaries? What happens when the acknowledgement of difference results in risk and a lack of safety? Normative American society asks its members to check the male or female box. Modern Judaism seeks to place practitioners on either side of the Mechitza—the physical divider in a traditional synagogue that separates gender (Dzmura, 2010; Levkovitz, 2005; Michels & Cannon, 2002). What is the experience of individuals who identify elsewhere on the spectrums of both Judaism and gender? What is the psychological impact of holding multiple minority statuses? Explorations of these topical intersections are scarce. Research is needed to examine how women with these seemingly opposing identities navigate the world in order to reduce stigma and invisibility and increase safety in this marginalized population.

Psychological research on the intersectionality of women who identify as both transgender and Jewish is scarce at best. A plethora of physical and mental health problems can stem from the associated minority stress of a transgender identity. In 2009, the National Center

for Transgender Equality (NCTE) joined with the National Gay and Lesbian Task force to conduct a survey on suicidality within the transgender community. Out of the 6,450 participants, 41% of respondents affirmed having attempted suicide (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011). The national percentage of individuals who have attempted suicide stands at 1.6%. This significantly higher percentage of suicide attempts within the transgender community can be seen as a product of the stressors individuals encounter. The impacts of additional minority statuses and their intersections may be even more severe. It is not known how identifying as Jewish as well as transgender may contribute to both physical and mental health problems.

Identifying as transgender impacts aspects of an individual's daily life; for instance, from choosing which public restroom to use, to job security, to healthcare. Compounding the multifaceted ways a transgender identity may affect an individual, there is no uniform legal recognition of or protection for their gender status. Currently, only 17 states in the country, as well as Washington D.C., prohibit employment discrimination based on gender identity (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2014c). Federal hate crime legislation, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, includes sexual orientation, but not gender identity or gender expression (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2012). Moreover, there are only 15 states in the country, in addition to Washington D.C., that enacted laws addressing bias or hate of individuals based on gender identity (HRC, 2014b).

Transphobia entails fear, discomfort, hate, or other derogatory factions directed at a transgender individual (Fenway Health, 2010; Juang, 2006; Nadal, 2013). Additionally, most minority groups face a variety of overt and covert stigma and discrimination:

> Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults—whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons, based solely on their marginalized group status. (Sue, 2013, p. ix)

These systemic and systematic invalidations can have a dramatic impact on the identity formation, self-perception, feelings of security within any given environment, and psychological distress of individuals identifying within any marginalized group. The addition of another minority status, such as a minority religion, would conceivably highlight the myriad of complex social issues.

The subtle differences that exist in casual language contribute to the lack of understanding of individuals who may not fit into societal binaries. Sex and gender are often used interchangeably but, in fact, sex and gender are not the same. There are large discrepancies in how these concepts are used in the existing literature. For example, the World Health Organization's (WHO; 2012) definitions of sex and gender are disparate from the definitions in feminist or queer literature and research on sex and gender (Hines, 2007). For the purposes of this study, sex will be referred to as the seeming biological characteristics an individual is born with, penis or vagina, chromosomes, and hormones; (Bornstein, 1994; Stryker, 2006) while gender, in most cases, is composed of the characteristics and traits adapted by an individual within the larger contextual society, whether male, female, or any variations in between (Bornstein, 1994; Hines, 2007; Stryker, 2006).

Although gender identity is sometimes thought to be an aspect that an individual is born with (being "male" or "female"), in actuality, it is quite different. Gender identity is "a person's innate, deeply-felt psychological identification as a man, woman, or something else, which may

or may not correspond to the person's external body or assigned sex at birth" (Fenway Health, 2010, p. 7–8).

Gender identity is formed and influenced through cultural, peer, and general societal pressures. Perhaps most importantly, gender identity should be declared by the individual, rather than hegemonic society (Bornstein, 1994; Fenway Health, 2010). Gender identity can be expressed in a variety of ways, with individuals identifying at various points along the male/female spectrum. Gender expression is the outward presentation of an individual's gender (Nadal, 2013). Gender expression can be demonstrated in such ways as through clothing, makeup, hairstyle, or general physical presentation.

Gender assignment differs from both gender identity and gender expression in that gender assignment is the gender an individual is medically assigned at birth. For example, in dominant American culture, when a baby is born and the doctor sees a penis, the doctor automatically says that child is a boy (Bornstein, 1994). If the doctor does not see a penis, or the penis is arbitrarily defined as too small, the doctor may ascribe the term "girl" to the baby (Bornstein, 1994). It is estimated that 1 in 1,500 infants do not have genitalia that ascribes them to the male or female categories (American Psychological Association Task Force on Gender Identity, Gender Variance, and Intersex Conditions, 2006; Chase, 2006; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Doctors often put these individuals into the category of intersex. Intersex is an umbrella category that contains many different individuals with ambiguous genitalia. Fundamentally, genitals and our gender are more than binary.

Gender attribution refers to how others view an individual's gender, as man or woman, or perhaps something outside the binary. This construct is important as gender attribution often influences how an individual is treated. This idea is phallocentric; individuals are assumed male

until proven otherwise (Bazant, 2002; Bornstein, 1994; Fenway Health, 2010; Trans Student Equality Resources, 2013a). Gender is defined many different ways including physically, attitudinally, or contextually. For example, an individual who has short hair and wears baggy clothing may be attributed as a male, regardless of his or her gender identity. This is different from gender expression, as gender expression is a construct projected into society by an individual, whereas gender attribution is put upon the individual by society.

Sexual orientation, though often fused with various aspects of sex and gender, is a separate construct. Sexual orientation refers to an individual's romantic, physical, or spiritual attraction to others (Fenway Health, 2010). Understanding the differentiation between these two identities is critical (Bornstein, 1994; Meier & Labuski, 2013; Samons, 2009). Sexual orientation is often likened to gender expression. Heteronormative culture assumes that a person who identifies as a male (gender identity) and perhaps likes to wear makeup (gender expression), and who may be perceived as having feminine characteristics (gender attribution), is gay (sexual orientation; Bornstein, 1994; Fenway Health, 2010; Trans Student Equality Resources, 2013a). Regardless of how an individual interacts with his or her gender expression, gender attribution, and gender identity, sexual orientation is not indicative of gender and should not be assumed.

Individuals who are gender conforming or do not identify as transgender are known as cisgender (Nadal, 2013). For example, an individual who is born with a penis, has a X and Y chromosome, and identifies as both a man and male could identify as cisgender. The recent discourse has begun using “trans*” as an all-inclusive term for anyone who experiences their gender outside the hegemonic binary (Killerman, 2014). The academic nomenclature has not caught up with popular discourse, and consequently “transgender” will be used throughout this study. Transgender is an inclusive term referring to an individual whose gender identity does not

align with the sex they were assigned at birth (Bazant, 2002; Bornstein, 1994; Fenway Health, 2010; Hines 2007). Individuals who cross-dress, identify as drag kings, or drag queens be it for performative purposes or self-expressive purposes may or may not be classified as transgender based on their own identification (Nadal, 2013).

It is important to note that gender nonconforming individuals may identify as genderqueer or gender bending, identifying entirely outside the binary or spectrum. These identifications can be encompassed by the trans* umbrella, but for the purposes of this study, individuals who identify as transgender are the focus. Often the gender expression of individuals who identify as transgender goes against or breaks cultural norms and does not align with binary concepts. Transsexual is similar to transgender in terms of the lack of alignment with gender identity and sex, but transsexual often implies a "transition" from one sex to another, via surgery or hormones.

Should a transgender person decide to explore surgical options, there are many available interventions. In the extant literature, the term sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) is often used to refer to these interventions. This term is becoming increasingly pejorative and is no longer commonly used within the community. In recent years, language has moved towards gender affirming surgery or gender alignment surgery (GAS). Clinicians may call it genital surgery or bottom surgery (Fenway Health, 2010; Trans Student Equality Resources, 2013a). In the context of this study, genital surgery will be known as gender affirming surgery (GAS).

Both current hegemonic society and modern Judaism perpetuate the need for a sex and gender binary: if you are a male you are supposed to be masculine and if you are female you are supposed to be feminine. Historically, within Judaism it appears as though the binary was not always present. For well over a thousand years, Jewish scholars debated exactly how many

different gender categories may have been recognized (Bazant, 2002; Levkovitz, 2005; Suskin, 2002). Some scholars propose two categories existed (male or not-male). Others argue there could have been up to six or seven, including a category of individuals with ambiguous genitalia and individuals who had aspects of both male and female genitalia (Bazant, 2002; Levkovitz, 2005; Suskin, 2002).

Within Judaism today, addressing the idea of a gender spectrum varies largely on the degree of an individual's religious and cultural identity. Arguments have been made for Judaism as a culture, an ethnicity, and even a race (Blanchard, 2002; Brown, 2009; Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001; Kress & Elias, 2000). Furthermore, within the religious and traditional sectors there is an assortment of denominations or movements, the four most populous in the United States being Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist (Carlson et al., 1999; Jacobs, 1995). There are also many individuals who do not identify as religiously Jewish, but rather as culturally Jewish. The nuanced complexity of Judaism paradoxically makes it both difficult to study and uniquely beautiful.

No studies were found in the extant psychological literature that examine the experience of women who identify as transgender and Jewish. Some narratives exist in the form of memoirs and testimonials, but no psychological work has been published (Dzmura, 2010; Kanegson, 2002; Ladin, 2012; Michels & Cannon, 2002). The lack of scholarship may lead this multiple minority and marginalized group to be wholly invisible, not only to the psychological community but to the general population as well. Invisibility is problematic; it can be invalidating and cause psychological distress (Dzmura, 2010; Ladin, 2012; Nadal, 2013).

Through qualitative interviews within a Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory framework, this study lays a foundation for conceptualizing women who identify as transgender

and Jewish (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of transgender consisted of an individual living full time as a woman, having natally been assigned male at birth. Participants self-identified as Jewish and provided their own meaning to their Jewish identities. Individuals in this study held both transgender and Jewish identities. The research explores methods of coping, how individuals navigate the often-unsupportive context of their personal lives, as well as the greater framework of a society that often pathologizes their experiences. This study defines strategies that are employed in navigating the complexity of holding both transgender woman and Jewish identities.

The value of this study is that of both exposure and understanding intersectionality. A person does not hold one singular identity; rather, a person is an intersection of their held statuses. Psychology as a whole has been somewhat reluctant to take on the challenge of exploring intersectionality due to both its complicated nature and the difficulty of creating empirical guidelines to assess an individual's intersectionality (Cole, 2009). The fact that rates of attempted suicide in the transgender community are staggeringly higher than that of the general population reflects the psychological impact of such marginalization (Grant et al., 2011). Furthermore, with the addition of multiple minority statuses, the complexity and severity of stigmatization and pathologization may also increase. In order to reduce the stigma and increase the support of this multiple minority status population, there must be an increase in awareness, discussion, and research; a sense of validity can be attained through visibility.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Transgender Identity

In 2004, Devor created a transgender identity development stage model, beginning with anxiety and confusion surrounding assigned gender and sex and continuing on to discovery, confusion, tolerance, and acceptance of transgender identity. Ultimately, the individual reaches stages of transition, acceptance, and integration, culminating with a proud transgender identity (Devor, 2004). This model, although providing a framework for transgender experience, is problematic in the rigid categorization of the stages. The model does not account for fluidity between genders, and again emphasizes the hegemonic binary of starting in one place and fully moving to another, which may be relevant to some individuals and irrelevant to others.

Additionally, the model is problematic in that the last stage, pride, is achieved after completing gender affirming surgery (GAS). For some transgender individuals, GAS is the ultimate goal. For others, attaining hormones may be the ultimate goal, and for others, being able to live in their identified gender without physiological interventions is the ultimate goal. A stage theory of transgender identity formation ascribes a typical narrative, which may be wholly inaccurate and potentially dangerous for individuals who do not fit into that particular box.

If clinicians only reference Devor's stage model, they may either overtly or inadvertently invalidate the experience of transgender clients who do not fit the steps. In a recent study, invalidation, or "fear of prejudice and discrimination," by health professionals was cited as one of the several reasons why transgender individuals were hesitant to use several types of health care (Lombardi, 2007, p. 643). The promulgation of a normative transgender narrative has the potential to be psychologically dangerous for individuals who feel as though they have not transitioned "correctly." The transgender experience is diverse, trying to titrate an individual's

experience to fit a stage model or narrative experience can be wholly invalidating. Additionally, paths to identity development are multidimensional. An individual would not be experiencing changes in his or her transgender identity in isolation but rather they would be developing in conjunction with other identities, such as race or religion.

Individuals who place themselves under the transgender umbrella may dress in their experienced gender, may take hormone injections, may have surgery, or they may not (Dzmura, 2010; Hines, 2007; Ladin, 2012; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Transgender identity is not tied to a particular surgical procedure such as GAS. Many think only of genitals when discussing surgical options, when in reality many procedures may be undertaken. Coming out or becoming gender aware (Horton, 2008; Martin, 2007) is the process of acknowledging and potentially informing others of change in or hidden gender identity (Fenway Health, 2010). Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), laser hair removal, hair implants, or surgeries involving the chest, face, or hip area can all be part of an individual's surgical choice in the process of becoming gender aware. Surgical interventions may be unavailable to individuals who desire them due to financial and resource limitations. Depending on the doctor, geographical location, and procedures being undertaken, surgical costs can range anywhere from $4,000 to well over $50,000 (Horton, 2008; Martin, 2007).

Transgender individuals also may not feel that surgery is appropriate for them, and such individuals are no less “trans*” because of that decision. A typical example of transphobic micraggression includes transgender individuals being asked about their genitalia or surgical status by strangers, giving credence to the ways “transgender people’s bodies are often objectified or exoticized” (Nadal, 2013, p. 84).

Those who identify as transgender come from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and religions (Grant et al., 2001). From the Travesti of Brazil to the Hijras of India to the female husbands of Igbo Land in Southeast Nigeria, individuals who identify or whose culture has forced them outside the gender binary can be found across the world (Kulick & Klein, 2010; Nanda, 1999; Nwoko, 2012). Although attempts have been made in the past to create a normative transgender experience, research has shown transgender experiences are varied (Dzmura, 2010; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). The transgender community has a nuanced, expressed diversity that does not ascribe a particular path to being transgender.

Regardless of gender identity, gender can be expressed in a multitude of ways. Some individuals may identify as "butch" and present decidedly more masculine. An individual may also identify as "femme," which is a presentation decidedly more feminine. Presentation can also be used in a variety of ways not necessarily implying the sex of the individual (Fenway Health, 2010; Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

Although some transgender people may identify as MtF or FtM (male to female or female to male), these labels also emphasize the gender binary. Other ways of expressing a transgender identity include, but are not limited to, MtX or FtX, where individuals reject the notion of the binary completely, becoming something other than male or female.

An individual may also identify as "genderqueer," wholly rejecting the gender binary or feeling as though they do not fit well into the categorical existing gender boxes (Dzmura, 2010; Hines, 2007; Kanegson, 2002; Michels & Cannon, 2002; Samons, 2009; Shneer & Aviv, 2002; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). It is quite clear that gender expression and experiences are starkly more fluid and varied than merely male or female, feminine or masculine.

Transgender experience also varies based on when an individual "comes out" to her or himself and others as transgender, or becomes "gender aware" (Fenway Health, 2010). An individual who becomes gender aware may not automatically come out to others; rather, time may lapse between gender awareness and disclosure to others (Fenway Health, 2010). Moreover, should a transgender person choose to take physical advancements toward gender affirmation, he or she would inevitably out themselves to friends and family who knew them prior to their gender awareness. This inherent outing adds another complex layer to gender awareness.

Developmentally, an individual who becomes gender aware as a child may face a different set of challenges than an individual who becomes gender aware in late adulthood. For example, experiences with support systems, access to care, employment, familial and peer interactions may all differ based on the age of the individual. Additionally, the generational context may play a large role in an individual's gender awareness process.

"Coming out" as transgender in the 1980s would implicitly be different than coming out as transgender today, regardless of the age of the person. It is important to respect and understand an individual, child, or adult for their experience and the context in which they develop. Community, familial support, and feelings of safety may all tie into a transgender individual's self-identity. Although there is still much progress that needs to be made, transgender individuals are more visible than even ten years ago. In 2010, the importance for visibility was recognized with the advent of the International Transgender Day of Visibility, aiming to showcase positive images of transgender people (Cameron, 2014; Trans Student Equality Resources, 2013b).

A large issue in the transgender experience is that of "passing," which is often described as an individual being perceived by others as the gender which they identify themselves, most

often by dress and mannerisms tied to socially constructed norms (Fenway Health, 2010; Kroeger, 2003). Passing can be a terrifying, daily struggle; will an individual be "read" as male when walking into the men's bathroom? Will an individual be "read" as female while shopping for traditionally female clothing? In recent popular discourse, the term "passing" itself has become controversial itself in the implication that the individual is "passing" as something they are not (Trans Student Equality Resources; 2013a). Passing can be viewed as "passing" based on societal constructs rather than the transgender individual being something they are not.

In her 2012 memoir, *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Two Genders*, Dr. Joy Ladin chronicles her transition experience and poignantly discusses her first experience of passing:

> This is it, I tell myself. This is the moment I've been waiting for. In intimate visual and aural proximity to a perceptive woman, who, as a New York lesbian, is certainly aware of the range of the gender spectrum, I pass. This is the women-to-authentic-woman conversation I've fantasized about for years. My true self is being accepted as–my true self. (p. 76)

Ladin goes on to discuss her feelings of being inauthentic; no matter how hard she tries she cannot be a woman who was born and raised a woman (Ladin, 2012). Ladin's experiences of passing and being read as a female, or not, can be the very core of transgender violence. For some individuals, the hegemonic binary can be seen as so immutable that any "violation" of the male/female dichotomy induces anger and violence. These reactions may underscore the lack of safety that many transgender individuals feel.

In the transgender community, going "stealth" is the concept of not being "out" in a public way about his or her transgender status. In order to operate in stealth, the individual would

need to be able to pass (Fenway Health, 2010). Some controversy surrounds the concept of being in "stealth-mode." Some view operating in this way as unhelpful to the transgender community as a whole, wanting more positive visibility and "outness." Often for transgender women, stealth can be affirmation, possibly mirroring their true identities as women. Some view operating in stealth mode as a protective necessity for safety, perhaps fearing loss of employment or other negative societal consequences for being "out" regarding his or her transgender identity. At the same time, individuals operating in stealth mode may live in a constant state of unease in wondering whether or not other individuals know their transgender status, or if other individuals may "out" them. If a transgender person is operating in "stealth mode," what would happen if someone found out? In reality, the possibility for violence is high. Perceptions outside the gender binary can be very disarming for an ill-informed population and transgender individuals seen as "abominations" may provide an attempted excuse for those who commit transgender acts of violence (Fenway Health, 2010; Ladin, 2012; Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

In 2009, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) joined with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to conduct a survey to gain a comprehensive picture of the impact discrimination plays in the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The results were staggering, with increased rates of suicide attempts, loss of employment, denial of medical care, and experiences of bullying both in school and by teachers (Grant et al., 2011). Sixty-three percent of the respondents cited such intense incidents of discrimination that their quality of life was impacted (Grant et al., 2011). Additionally, federal hate crime legislation, according to the FBI, includes sexual orientation but not gender identity or gender expression (FBI, 2012). Therefore, when transgender violence occurs, reporting is most often aggregated with sexual orientation. Moreover, there tends to be a general underreporting of LGBT violence.

Transgender violence is much less visible with victims often being mis-gendered or the victims' transgender identity simply not acknowledged (Nadal, 2013).

Enacted and threatened transphobic violence and hate crimes figure into the lived experiences of individuals who identify as transgender. Violence against transgender women is of particular concern. In the winter of 2003, The Southern Poverty Law Center created an intelligence report on the recent eruption of transgender violence. Bob Moser focused on the outbreak of violence in Washington D.C., where a staggering 27 murders of mostly transgender women took place in just over a year and a half. Although it is difficult to ascertain if all the murders were hate motivated, all shared a common "overkill" theme, which is a common occurrence found in hate crimes (Moser, 2003; Potok, 2013). On a larger national scale, murders often go unreported or are inaccurately reported, therefore an accurate number of individuals who are murdered due to transgender violence is almost impossible to calculate, underscoring the dangers of being perceived or identifying as transgender. An annual Transgender Day of Remembrance is held each November and has been created to honor those who have suffered transgender or gender non-conforming violence and murder.

While researching the statistics for the rate of transgender murders, it was evident that the Transgender Day of Remembrance website was hacked. Instead of the data, a false advertisement for erectile dysfunction medication appeared. This anecdote again underscores the multitude of subtle and often-offensive microaggressions a transgender individual may regularly encounter.

Deepening the impact of transgender violence and discrimination is the lack of local or federal laws protecting gender expression (Bazant, 1999; Bornstein, 1994; FBI, 2012). In recent months, state laws have been rapidly changing with regards to transgender protection, but

currently only 17 states and the District of Colombia have sexual orientation and gender identity employment protections (HRC, 2014c). Fifteen states and the District of Colombia have gender identity as part of hate crime protection (HRC, 2014b). The underreporting of victims of transgender violence compounded with the associated stigma, results in a transgender identity being potentially dangerous (Bornstein, 1994; Potok, 2013; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Consequently, the alarmingly high rate of suicide attempts by transgender individuals, 40 times the national average, is sadly unsurprising (Grant et al., 2011).

Not being able to rely on police, medical personal, local law, federal law, or possible employers, it is clear to see the difficulties transgender women may face. Contextually, it is important to remember the stigma that can be attached to a transgender identity. Transphobia underscores the critical importance of education and increasing knowledge of both transgender issues and individuals who identify outside the gender binary. Transphobia not only includes acts of violence or discrimination, but also includes microaggressions. Microaggressions toward a transgender individual may include using incorrect pronouns, or being referred to as "it," "she-male," or "tranny." These derogatory terms or the misuse of preferred pronouns may be utilized to intentionally dehumanize the individual or to reflect a lack of knowledge as to language that may be offensive and hurtful to a transgender individual (Nadal, 2013).

The assumption of a normative transgender narrative may also be seen as a microaggression, emphasizing negative stereotypes learned from the media, familial upbringing, or religion (Nadal, 2013). For example, the stereotype that "all" transgender individuals become gender aware at a young age and dress in the gender normative clothing for the gender they identify with could be highly problematic. Some young male-assigned children may dress in clothing that is heteronormatively viewed to be female, but that does not automatically make the

child transgender. The assumption that a transgender individual is sexually deviant, pathological, or has HIV/AIDS can also be considered a microaggression (Nadal, 2013). Invalidations of a transgender individual's identity occur at systemic levels as well. Threat of harm, harassment, or creating an environment that is unsafe can also be considered microagressions (Nadal, 2013). Changing the gender on an identification that is issued by the government, such as a driver's license or a passport, can come with a plethora of microaggressive bureaucracy.

Another potential example of a subtle but far-reaching microaggression is that of the historical, amalgamation of sexual minority statuses. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) movement often adds the transgender 'T' at the end of the acronym without addressing the real differences of sexual orientation and gender identity. The assumption of shared applicability invalidates the different developmental experiences of both sexual orientation and gender identity. An individual's sexual orientation is quite different then his, her, or their gender identity, though both identities are held by any given individual (i.e. a person identifying as a transgender lesbian). It is important not to merge the experiences of sexual orientation and gender identity together without acknowledging the difference, as well as being intentional with the use of language surrounding these statuses (Meier & Labuski, 2013; Nadal, 2013).

Jewish Identity

Judaism as a religion is based on three pillars: God, the Torah, and Israel. Different denominations or movements may place emphasis on a different pillar (Jacobs, 1995). One of the complexities of Judaism is the fact that it can be viewed and discussed in the context of being a religion, ethnicity, and culture (Hines, Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida, & Weltman, 2005). Judaism has been in existence for more than five thousand years. Throughout history there have been pogroms, ethnic cleanings, murders, and holocausts targeting this population. Despite all the

challenges it has faced, Judaism has survived (Krausz & Tulea, 1998). Consequently, family has proven to be one of the cornerstones of Jewish living and much has been written about the role family plays on informing the next generation of Jewish people (Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001; De Lange, 2010; Schlesinger & Forman, 1988; Schlossberger & Heckler, 1998). Education and study of the Torah (the five books of the Jewish bible) is viewed as "a divine imperative" (Jacobs, 1995, p. 141). The family, community, and public spheres are all intertwined and equally important in Jewish lives (De Lange, 2010).

Although it has become somewhat of a cultural stereotype, there is an actual "religious imperative" to "be fruitful and multiply" (Berliner, Jacob, & Schwartzberg, 2005, p. 364). Research has shown "the family environment is essential in transmitting the Jewish culture to the next generation" (Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001, p. 325). The concept of *l'dor vador*, translated "from generation to generation," is held as a value. Jewish people are supposed to take care of their families, as well as future generations of Jews. When a people have existed, oppressed for 5,700 years, survival is not only a feat of strength and endurance, but the importance of family and the continuity of tradition and existence is further emphasized (Poll, 1998). There is an ongoing fear in the Jewish community of assimilation, with increased rates of Jews marrying non-Jews, and the question of future Jewish survival is often discussed (Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001; Hines, Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida, & Weltman, 2005; Poll, 1998; Schlossberger & Heckler, 1998).

Although they may look different based on geographical location and denomination, there are events that tie many Jewish families and communities together. When a baby is born there are certain rituals that occur depending on the gender of the baby. At eight days old, a Jewish baby who has been deemed male will have a *bris* or a ritual circumcision. Infants who are

deemed female will have a ritual baby naming, and depending on the degree of traditionalism, this may or may not be done in front of the congregation to which the family belongs (De Lange, 2010).

The next Jewish ritual occurs when a male child turns 13-years-old and is called to read from the Torah (Hebrew bible or Old Testament) for the first time; this marker is known as a Bar Mitzvah. Depending on the degree of traditional observance, a female may also be called to read from the Torah, which is called a Bat Mitzvah. Reading from the Torah in front of the congregation, family, and friends signifies the adolescent is now an adult in the eyes of Judaism (De Lange, 2010).

Another lifecycle marker is when an individual gets married. Adherence to ritual may shift based on how traditional a family is, but some traditions are quite popular even for secular Jews. A popular wedding ritual is stomping on a glass once the ceremony has finished, representing the destruction of the temple. The temple was the main place of worship in ancient Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Romans. All that remains of the temple today is the Western Wall, which is the holiest of holy places for Jews (De Lange, 2010). The rituals surrounding death mark another milestone in the Jewish family life cycle. In Judaism there are a plethora of scared rituals that surround the loss of a loved one. To care for the dead and perform the rituals which surrounds them is viewed as a sacred honor to be carried out by individuals who are the same gender as the deceased (De Lange, 2010; Greenhough, 2010).

Additionally, there are weekly rituals that occur both in and out of Jewish homes. Religiosity and traditional observance may shift the adherence to some weekly rituals. The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday night, and lasts until sundown on Saturday night. This is a day of rest, prayer, and family time. For some, this is a time to go to services and for others it is a

time for relaxation and reflection. In Judaism, all holidays begin at sundown the day before. Twilight holds a special place in Judaism, as it is neither day nor night. In twilight, possibilities abound the "in between" is respected, it is not surprising then, that some transgender Jews feel connected to this time of day (De Lange, 2010; Dzmura, 2010; Zellman, 2006). Many Jewish rites of passage, milestones, and traditions are tied to both the family and gender. It is clear that transgender individuals grapple both internally and interpersonally with their gender in the context of their religious and cultural Jewish identity.

Taking the breadth of Jewish experience into account, an ongoing discussion in Judaism is the consideration of what it means to be Jewish and ultimately, who should be called a Jew (Blanchard, 2002; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Kress & Elias, 2000; Schlossberger & Heckler, 1998). Judaism is matrilineal, meaning if a mother is Jewish, her children will also be Jewish. The meaning of an individual's or an individual family's "Jewishness" can be quite different. Thus, operationalizing Jewish identity can be quite difficult. For example, when examining North American Jewry, there are Jews ranging from highly traditionally Orthodox to those who practice no religious aspect of Judaism, but who deem themselves to be culturally Jewish (Sands, Marcus, & Danzig, 2006).

Individuals may also connect to their Judaism through Zionism, which is the national movement of establishing a home for the Jewish people in the land that is now known as Israel (Carlson, Wagner, Ambraziejus, & Perrin, 1999; Jacobs, 1995). The law of return was passed by the Israeli government in 1950 and denoted that any Jewish person has the right to immigrate back to Israel (The Jewish Agency for Israel, 2014). Immigrating to Israel is known as making aliyah (Carlson et al., 1999; Oxford Dictionary, 2014a). In the United States, many show their

"Jewishness" through attendance at synagogue, but there are those who ascribe to the traditions of Judaism without stepping foot into a religious service.

More specifically, Judaism can be viewed as being on a spectrum, with the Orthodoxy on one end and secular Judaism on the other. Individuals who ascribe to a particular denomination may experience Jewishness very differently. Hence, it is quite hard to know an individual's Jewish identity without more information. To help clarify, those who identify on the Orthodox end of the spectrum tend to be more traditonal, adhering to the written words of the Torah as direct words of God, without interpretation (Kor, Mikulincer, & Pirutinsky, 2012; Milevsky & Eisenberg, 2012; Sands, Marcus, & Danzig, 2006). This includes strict dietary laws, known as keeping Kosher, specific rituals, and rules to be obeyed, particularly regarding the separation of role by gender (De Lange, 2010; Jacobs, 1995; Kor, Mikulincer, & Pirutinsky, 2012).

According to Jewish law, men and women are viewed without difference (Jacobs, 1995). When it comes to religious law, women are "exempt" from certain activities including having no "obligation" to read or study Torah (Jacobs, 1995). This led to a lack of well-studied women to become be cantors or rabbis—the clergy who lead services—and this tradition has often remained within the Orthodox community (Jacobs, 1995). Though today in many ultra-Orthodox environments women are still not allowed to read or study the Torah, women may be found in more modern Orthodox settings learning Torah (Jacobs, 1995).

On the Orthodox end of the spectrum there can still be different identifications. Those who identify as Baal Teshuvah (BT) once identified elsewhere on the Jewish spectrum but now have returned to the Orthodoxy and a more Orthodox way of life (Jacobs, 1995). Some Orthodox individuals may refer to themselves as "frum," which is a Yiddish adjective meaning "observant or pious" (Yiddish Dictionary Online, 2014).

Conservative Judaism is another denomination. In the United States, the Conservative movement is the largest religious classification (Carlson, 1999). This denomination views Judaism as a combination of "religion and ethnic nationhood evolving from Biblical times to the present that embraces all human conduct and governs all human relationships and the relationship between an individual and God" (Carlson, 1999, p. 47). Conservative Judaism maintains Jewish law needs to be contextually flexible and adaptable to modern life. Here, women may be Bat Mitzvahed and can be ordained members of the clergy (Jacobs, 1995). The Torah is regarded as the word of God with a human component and thus is subject to some interpretation, as well as adaptations as times change (Milevsky & Eisenberg, 2012; Sands, Marcus, & Danzig, 2006).

In the Reform denomination, women are often treated as equals to men; they can be rabbis, cantors, and have Bat Mizvahs. Reform Judaism believes that Jewish law can be adapted as needed by contemporary society (Carlson, 1999). Here the Torah is not believed to be the word of God, but rather written and pieced together over time. God is viewed as more spiritually ambiguous (Milevsky & Eisenberg, 2012; Sands, Marcus, & Danzig, 2006). The Reform perspective is often that of universalism and the Jews duty to the greater person-kind (Jacobs, 1995).

Three-fourths of American Jews identify as part of the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements, regardless of their synagogue attendance (Ament, 2005). The smallest of the four major denominations within the United States is the Reconstructionist movement. In this movement, followers do not believe Jews are the chosen people, as belief in "privileged access to God" would create "dangerous feelings of superiority" (Carlson et al., 1999, p. 80). The Reconstructionist movement believes in the open interpretation of Jewish tradition, allowing

flexibility for the blending existence of modern life. Reconstructionists may describe Judaism as a society, or a civilization, which clears space for the inclusion of culture, food, music—aspects traditionally deemed secular (Carlson et al., 1999).

Additionally, there are individuals who identify as secularly or culturally Jewish, but who are not necessarily religious. In this group, individuals may adhere to some of the customs or cultural traditions of Judaism, such as a family dinner on Friday night, even perhaps saying some of the blessings before the meal, but may not attend temple (Amant, 2005). Due to the expansiveness of Jewish identities, individuals, families, and temples may experience Judaism quite differently. Clearly, with the variety of denominations, an overarching identity of a Jewish family is nearly impossible to create; family and community are often consistently important factors regardless of denomination (Amant, 2005).

Proposals have been made to expand the definition of what it means to be Jewish to encompass all aspects of the aforementioned spectrum. There are more traditional individuals who believe that those who adhere to a more liberal form of Judaism are not truly Jewish (Linzer, 1986). Linzer (1986) in particular referenced opening the definition of Judaism, as well as embracing "modern families," as threats to traditional Judaism. Blanchard (2002) posited a new model of Jewish identity construction that does not threaten traditional Judaism, but rather strengthens the bonds of culture and tradition in changing times. Kress and Elias (2002) talked about themes in Jewish identity development and how the religion can inform self-definition and identity and the contexts where religious identity development can occur. They specifically reference the bidirectional interaction between context and individual, which Urie Bronfenbrenner employs as the underlying theme of his ecological systems theory. Being able to clear space for diverse, intersecting identities within the context of Jewish identity would

conceivably make the experience of transgender people less difficult or perhaps even less dangerous.

Transgender-Jewish Identity

A review of the professional literature found no empirical research examining intersecting experiences of women identifying as both Jewish and transgender. General hegemonic society holds gender as pervasive. When a child is born, most often the first question asked is about sex (Schneider, 2002). This introduces the notion of the pink-blue dogma (Feinberg, 1998), which is set from birth. Judaism in particular holds different sets of roles and rules predicated on gender, which understandably would create difficulty in understanding the transgender experience. Judaism is matrilineal, meaning the faith is transmitted though mothers (Kroger, 2003). If a mother was born Jewish, regardless of the religion of the father, the children will be viewed as Jewish. For a women who identifies as transgender and Jewish, this matrilineality raises an assortment of issues. Would a transgender women, who was born of the male sex be able to then consider her children Jewish? These types of pervasive gender issues have yet to be discussed in terms of their potential psychological impact.

Dually important in terms of psychological impact and transgender Jewish identity is the power in naming. For an individual transitioning genders, being called by their identified gender's pronoun and proper name provides critical validation of his or her identity (Dzmura, 2010; Ladin, 2012). In Judaism, naming a child is of the utmost importance, involving a sacred ritual (De Lange, 2010). Within the United States, a child may receive both an English and Hebrew name. Each of these names is tied to the family in some way. For example, the first letter of a child's English name may be the same first letter as a deceased relative. This tradition adds meaning and importance to the act of naming. Imaginably, a transgender individual also

changing their Hebrew name would also be quite meaningful, possibly validating his or her transgender Jewish identity. There is weighted value and importance that women who identify as transgender and Jewish would face in obtaining a name to fit her true self.

A synagogue or shul is a traditional place of worship for those who identify as Jewish. Within denominations of Judaism that strictly adhere to Jewish law, there is a physical divider that separates the worshippers by gender in synagogues. This divider, called a Mechitza, provides an apt metaphor for some transgender individuals' experiences (Dzmura, 2010; Michels & Cannon, 2002). Traditional Judaism requires individuals to be on one side of the Mechitza, the male or female side, rather than somewhere in between. The Mechitza is not necessarily encompassing to the experience of all Judaism, but provides an apt metaphor for the experience of some transgender Jews. Historically, there has been a long and ongoing complex struggle for diversity within Judaism.

Arguments within parts of the Jewish community have been made that although gender transition itself may be against Jewish law, once the transition is completed and an individual fits squarely on the other side of the Mechitza, no Jewish laws have been violated (Levkovitz, 2005; Rabinowitz, 2003). In the context of this argument, a "completed" transition refers to surgical and hormonal interventions including gender-affirming surgery. Other arguments have been made that the concept of a "completed" transition, in and of itself, is a microaggression adhering to a normative transgender narrative and not leaving space for those who may chose not to employ surgical interventions (Nadal, 2013).

Levkovitz (2005) cited psychological well-being as a main reason the reform movement should accept transgender individuals. He argues that due to the high incidence of suicide and suicide attempts in the transgender community, being supported in transitioning may save a

Jew's life. With the ongoing fear held regarding Jewish survival and the Jewish imperative to populate the religion (Poll, 1998), his point on the importance of saving a Jew's life leaves an impact. Levkovitz (2005) addressed the psychological importance of gender expression, and how denying the lived experience of an individual who has become gender aware can have deadly consequences (Grant et al., 2011). The Mechitza provides another example of the hegemonic binary of masculine or feminine with very little room for anyone in between.

Further arguments have been posited that surgeries often associated with physically transitioning may be seen as against Jewish law. Castration, as well as body modification is viewed as breaking Jewish law. Therefore, many traditional Jewish denominations would not condone surgical aspects of the gender-affirming process. This leaves a significant conundrum. The surgical process of transitioning is condemned by the traditional, while the outcome of the surgery may lead to traditional religious acceptance.

What about transgender individuals who do not wish to partake in surgical interventions, but want to take hormones and live in gender affirmingly? How would these individuals be received within the Jewish community? Traditional Judaism also does not condone individuals who dress in opposition of their natally assigned sex. Additionally, Jewish rituals tied to death and burial are gendered; individuals who prepare the deceased are the same gender as the deceased. These rituals may become further complicated when it comes to burying a transgender individual as "Kavod ha'met or respect for the dead is central Jewish value" (Fishkoff, 2011, p. 2). Although some Jewish denominations have made statements regarding gender identity, there is no systemic-wide stance on gender identity.

It is critical to note that the strict gender binary underscored in modern times has proven to not be wholly historically accurate. Although there is some debate, historically, most Jewish

scholars recognize two different genders (male and not-male; Suskin, 2002), but some recognize as many as six different gender possibilities. One of the possible categories is called "androgynos," which describes an individual with both male and female sex characteristics (Suskin, 2002; Kukla, 2006; Levkovitz, 2005). Kukla (2006) cited over 500 mentions of "androgynos" in classical Jewish texts and law spanning from the 1st to 16th centuries Common Era. Another category is referred to as a "tumtum," where the individual's sex characteristics are ambiguous or obscured (Suskin, 2002; Kukla, 2006; Levkovitz, 2005). Kukla (2006) found over 500 mentions of "tumtum" in classical Jewish texts and law codes. A third category is an individual who is assigned the sex of female at birth, but upon reaching puberty develops male characteristics, or does not produce the signs of female sexual maturity by the age of 20; this category is described as "ay'lonit" (Suskin, 2002; Kukla, 2006). Kukla (2006) cited 120 mentions of "ay'lonit" in Jewish law codes and classical texts.

"Saris" is used to describe an individual assigned the sex of male at birth who does not show signs of sexual maturity by the age of 20, or develops female sex characteristics upon reaching puberty. There are a two different subcategories of saris: "saris khamah" and "saris adam" (Suskin, 2002; Kukla, 2006). Saris khamah is described as an individual who was innately born sterile, whereas saris adam describes an individual who is sterile due to castration or some other type of human intervention (Suskin, 2002; Kukla, 2006). According to Kukla (2006), saris are mentioned in classical Jewish text and law codes over 535 times. The recognition and mention of six possible genders emphasizes the notion that categorical gender expression of only masculine and feminine is based on temporal culture rather than moral, historical Judaism. Bazant (1999) sums it up best, "I was made out of all that is therefore, I must have been in this

world before" (n.p.). Providing further context to Jewish gender dynamics, "Jews historically have been seen as queer in the Christian West" (Brettschneider, 2006, p. 33).

More recently, both the Reform and Conservative movements have presented official position papers on transgender individuals. In 2003, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, a Conservative organization, approved an official "Status of Transsexuals" (Rabinowitz, 2003). In the official position paper, not only was the naming of a transgender individual addressed, but a variety of conclusions were drawn. To begin with, it was decided that only individuals who have undergone complete gender affirming surgery can be seen as changing the status of their sex; partial surgery or hormone therapies will not "count" as having changed the status of his or her sex (Rabinowitz, 2003).

The committee also addressed aspects of sexual orientation as well as local jurisdiction. In not breaking local law of performing same sex marriage, when local authorities recognize the new sex of an individual who has undergone GAS, a Jewish wedding can be performed (Rabinowitz, 2003). Additionally, the transgender individual should obtain a new name through a sacred prayer (Rabinowitz, 2003). Local and state laws are dynamic and changing rapidly, particularly with regards to same-sex marriage (HRC, 2014a). With the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly deferring to local law, it is critical to be knowledgeable about individual state's laws, as changes occur expeditiously.

In 2003, the Executive Board of the Commission on the Social Action of Reform Judaism also came out with a position statement on the Inclusion and Acceptance of the Transgender and Bisexual communities into the reform movement (Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 2010). Amending an earlier position paper on the rights of homosexuals from 1977, the Reform movement added support for both the bisexual and transgender communities

(Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 2010). The Reform community's resolve is shown through supporting legislation to provide the transgender and bisexual communities equal treatment, opposing discrimination (Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 2010). The Executive Board of the Commission on the Social Action of Reform Judaism encourages congregations to not only be more inclusive to these marginalized minorities, but to also to encourage engagement in ritual participation (Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 2010). Tending to be more liberal, the Reform movement appears to not only tolerate transgender and bisexual congregants, but also encourages open discussion and inclusion.

Two of the most followed Jewish denominations in the United States, Reform and Conservative, have published position papers on the status of individuals who identify as transgender within their respective Jewish communities (Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 2010; Rabinowitz, 2003). The Orthodox denomination has not yet addressed the existence of transgender community members. Rabbi Joseph Ozarowski is a community Rabbi at Jewish Child and Family Service in Chicago, Illinois, and he stated that the issue of transgender members of the Orthodox community has yet to become a topic of discussion (Rabbi J. Ozarowski, personal communication, November 26, 2012). With the publication of official statements from the Reform and Conservative movements, the existence of Jewish individuals who identify as transgender is slowly being validated within sections of the community.

Resources are starting to be compiled by Jewish transgender people. The anthology of essays, *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community,* was published in 2010. It is a compilation of essays written by individuals who identify under the transgender Jewish umbrella. The compilation spans a variety of experiences, from very conservative Jewish communities to much more liberal Jewish communities. Contributions examined transgender

experience and components of the Torah, tradition, practice, narrative, and inclusion (Dzmura, 2010). The book lends validity to the increasing presence of transgender individuals within the Jewish community.

In *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Two Gend*ers (2010), Dr. Joy Ladin shared her transition experience. She discussed how her gender awareness impacted her interactions with her family, her career, her friends, and her entire existence. Ladin became the first out transgender tenured professor at Yeshiva University, an Orthodox institution in New York City (Ladin, 2012). Additionally, the Internet has provided a gathering place for Jewish transgender people. From list-serves, to groups aiding religious transgender Jews who are not out, there seems to be a growing number of digital places for transgender Jews to connect. TransTorah is one example of a compilation of Jewish rituals, sermons, prayers, essays, poems, art, and resources (Meir, 2009) for people identifying under the transgender Jewish auspice. "TransTorah is a collective of rabbis, teachers, educators, and cultural workers" (TransTorah, 2014).

A point of unification, ultimately tying both transgender identity and Judaism together, is the notion of passing. Being seen by the outside world as one identifies can be a powerful experience in ways that can potentially be both positive and negative (Kroger, 2003). Similar to Ladin's personal discussion of being read as a women, followed by feelings of being a fraud (Ladin, 2012), passing is a topic that often needs to be understood and processed. The unique experiences of an individual needs to be validated. Individuals who are often read as Jewish, regardless of their actual identity, will need to contend with the presuppositions and potential biases of the meaning of being read as Jewish (Shenitz, 2004). Similarly, a devout Jew who is not read as Jewish may have to contend with the skeptical eyes of others within the Jewish

community. Passing can occur in a variety of ways, from accidental, unplanned passing to intentionally being able to use passing.

Devor's 2004 model of transgender identity development does not account for multiple minority or any intersecting or competing identity statuses. For example, how would the stage model incorporate a transgender individual's Jewish identity? Or even gender identity? A transgender man's and a transgender woman's identity formation would look quite different. Stage models, particularly in the case of transgender identity, appear to have the potential to be quite invalidating to an individual's held statuses and the complicated intersections of these multiple minority statuses.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner was a child psychologist who created an ecological and interactional model of development, which can be used to best help navigate the intersecting identities of individuals who identify as both transgender and Jewish. Bronfenbrenner (1979) created a bidirectional, contextual theory that looks at the interaction of an individual with his or her surrounding environments on family, community, cultural, and temporal levels. An individual affects and is affected by each of these spheres, perhaps making it the best way to discuss the complicated intersections of an individual who holds multiple minority statues.

The microsystem describes a level of interaction that is closest to the individual, such as interactions with family, friends, co-worker, or peers. In this sphere, the individual affects and is affected by the interpersonal interactions. Some may argue this is the sphere with the most influence, though all the spheres have the potential for impact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The next sphere is the mesosystem, which involves connections between aspects of the microsystem

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of a mesosystem interaction would be an individuals' neighborhood interacting with their temple or religious institution.

The exosystem references an individual's larger social system. Community based social support such as Jewish Child and Family Services, provides an example of the exosystem. The macrosystem is the sphere where cultural norms and values have an impact. Cultural laws and mores have a cascade effect, possibly shaping all the previous spheres. The chronosystem introduces a temporal facet to the ecological structure. The chronosystem includes aspects such as physiological development or the death of a family member—aspects of an individual's life that are out of their locus of control (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Due to the multidimensional aspects to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, it provides the best framework for attempting to understand the complex relationship between the held minority statuses of transgender Jewish women.

Clinical Issues and Current Study

Although there is an oft-cited stage model for transgender identity formation (Devor, 2004), a review of the literature yielded no empirical, psychological studies examining the intersection of transgender and Jewish identities. Anecdotal stories exist looking at individual experience (Bazant, 1999; Bornstein, 1994; Dzmura, 2010; Ladin, 2012; Michels & Cannon, 2002), but no research has been done exploring common themes amongst women who identify as both transgender and Jewish.

The compounded stigma, victimization, threat of violence, and microaggressions experienced by individuals who hold multiple minority statuses is exacerbated by the lack of visibility and clinical knowledge. The lack of empirical grounding provides no reference for clinicians who may have clients who identify in these minority statues. In having no research to

be able to reference the intersection of transgender, female, and Jewish identities, the clinician may not know what questions to ask, points to examine, or perhaps, what questions may be unnecessary to ask. It is important to address the individual client's experience of each of these held statuses, how they interact, and how they may or may not become integrated. Through semistructured qualitative interviews, common themes amongst women who hold both Jewish and transgender identities were explored.

Chapter 3: Methods

Holding both a transgender and Jewish identity can come with a plethora of stigmas and challenges. The invalidation of already marginalized groups is exacerbated by clinical invisibility and a lack of psychological research. This study explores common themes among the diversity of experiences in women who hold both transgender and Jewish identities. Gender is not immutable; rather, it is dynamic. Societal experiences and expectations of gender are varied based on where an individual identifies on the gender spectrum. Consequently, individuals who identify as transgender men or genderqueer would warrant their own unique studies and were not melded into this study.

The complex intersection of individuals who hold these identities is best examined through a qualitative method. The exploratory nature of this study, and the absence of previous empirical work, underscores the necessity for this work. Being that it is exploratory, the purpose of this study is to add to the limited foundation of existing literature, rather than being a comprehensive survey of women who identify as transgender and Jewish. The open-ended structure of this study allows for a more comprehensive examination into this marginalized population (Kazdin, 2003).

Participants

Participants were over 18-years-old and self-identified as Jewish (any religious/traditional or non-religious/non-traditional denomination). Additionally, attending synagogue, keeping kosher, or not having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah were not mitigating factors in being considered for participation in this study. For the purposes of this study, participants were defined as transgender women if they identified as such and lived full time as women (having been assigned male at birth). Living full time is demonstrated by adopting a female name and a

female presentation. Surgery status and possible hormone treatments were not mitigating factors to qualify as a participant. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to have been born and raised in the United States. To ensure the consistency of the sample, participants were chosen who had grown up with the mores of American culture. Experience of holding gender and religious identities in different countries may have introduced other variables, which would consequently merit their own study. Again, identifying as genderqueer, or as a transgender male, would equally warrant its own study.

Measures

Participants took part in individual, 60 to 90 minute, semistructured, qualitative interviews. The semistructured nature of the measure allowed for deeper exploration. Questions were created to address each of the bidirectional spheres of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory framework. Participants' experiences were addressed in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Questions addressed participants' experiences with interpersonal interaction, community interaction, culture, values, customs, and other impactful events. The navigation of holding multiple minority statuses was also examined. (See Appendix A.)

Procedure

Participants were recruited utilizing snowball sampling through professional contacts in Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; and San Francisco, California at community agencies, community service centers, and support groups. A research website was also created to list the recruitment script, information about the researcher, the purpose of the study, consent form, and contact information. The research website's URL is

http://www.nicolethalheimer-research.com/Home.html. The target sample was no less than five and no more than 25 participants.

Participants meeting the eligibility requirements were linked to the study by professional contacts. As part of the informed consent, participants were told that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could end participation at any time without penalty. The risks and benefits of participation were also discussed. The participants were informed that the researcher was available to address any further questions. Additionally, participants were told about confidentiality and the de-identification of their personal information.

Participants were given a unique identification number. Subjects gave verbal consent to participate in the study. At the start of each interview the participants were recorded stating that they read the consent form and agreed to its terms (see Appendix B for Informed Consent). If requested, a relevant referral list was offered to address any concerns that may have arisen during the interview. The list contained resources competent in working with these populations. Interviews were conducted in a setting deemed comfortable to the participant, while being able to ensure a degree of confidentiality. The interviews were recorded on a handheld digital recorder and transferred to a password-protected computer. The raw interviews, as well as the transcripts of the interviews, were individually encrypted on the password-protected computer. The recordings were then deleted from the hand-held recorder. The recordings do not contain any personal identifying information.

Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The transcriptions were also encrypted and password protected. Next, common themes were sought both within each individual interview and amongst all the interviews. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, it was unclear precisely which themes would be discovered. Ultimately, the themes were not

assigned to exclusive spheres within the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems framework, as it would have been reductionist to the complexities of the participants' intersecting identities. Consequently, a more holistic approach to the participants' transgender Jewish identities are discussed across Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In order to ensure inter-rater reliability, two dissertation assistants also read the transcribed interviews and sought thematic commonalities. The final results will be posted on the research website. Should participants choose, they can access the final results, having already been provided with the research website's URL.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory study was to introduce the ways in which women identifying both as transgender and Jewish navigate their identities, providing grounding for future research. Examining the intersecting identities of a marginalized population, particularly a minority population within the transgender community, is particularly important given the daily struggles with microaggressions, lack of protection under the law, and incidence of suicide attempts found within the community (FBI, 2012; Grant et al., 2011; HRC, 2014a/2014b/2014c; Nadal, 2013).

Ultimately, a total of five women who identified as transgender and Jewish were interviewed for this study. The semistructured interviews lasted from 90–150 minutes and utilized a questionnaire based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The questions addressed how participants saw themselves in the world, as well as in interactions with friends, family, and their communities. The questions attempted to ascertain cultural values and customs, as well as other life events that left an impact.

The participants ranged in age from late 20s to early 70s and had at least a college education. The women self-identified as being at various points in their "transitions." In addition, they ascribed different meanings to what transitioning meant. Some participants had a variety of surgical interventions, including gender affirming surgery (GAS) years prior to the interview. Although some participants underwent gender affirming surgery, others disclosed that they did not feel surgery was appropriate for her identity, and still others did not have adequate enough health for surgical intervention.

The participants reported current identifications with Judaism across a broad spectrum. The women identified as culturally Jewish, ethnically Jewish, spiritually Jewish, Orthodox, or

unsure about their current relationship with their Judaism. All of the women reported shifts within their own Jewish identities over the course of their respective lifespans. Brief descriptions of each participant are provided below, followed by a breakdown of common themes found amongst participants.

Participant One

Participant one is in her early 50s, having graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics and Jewish studies. She also had one year of graduate school education. She identified herself as middle class and as racially/ethnically Jewish. She reported living on the border of an urban/suburban area outside a large Midwestern city. She reported having "come out three times...first as Frum, then as Trans*, then as gay."

She made Aliyah with her ex-wife prior to becoming gender aware, and they had two children together. Their divorce was not amicable and participant one's ex-wife obtained a restraining order from the rabbinic courts in Israel, banning her from any contact with her children until they turned 18. This occurred when her children were quite young. Although she reported growing up "lukewarm conservative," participant one currently identifies as Frum. She shared that she had gender affirming surgery over 20 years ago. When asked about her identity, she first reported misfit, then "mom, Jewish...geek, objectivist." She reported being "gay and trans," but that "it's not...[her] identity." She is currently partnered with a female and together they are raising their adolescent daughter.

Participant Two

Participant two is in her early 70s and graduated with a master's degree in business administration and marketing. She self-identified as middle class and of "European/Caucasian decent." She reported living in an urban Midwestern city. When asked about her identity, she

reported being a senior citizen, and then a woman, a cancer survivor, a parent, a sibling, and a political trans* activist. She identified as a "Jew by choice," having adopted Judaism in her 30s, before becoming gender aware. She reported previously being married to a woman whose family "attended a traditional synagogue" and that being where she first encountered Judaism. She reported "my beliefs, how I view myself and a 'higher power' is best expressed for me through basic Judaism."

Participant two reported being a veteran of the armed forces, having been stationed abroad, though not in an active combat zone. She reported having previously been married three times and she has several children.

Participant Three

Participant three is in her late 20s and graduated with a bachelor's degree in performance studies with two minors involving both computers and art. She identified herself as being from a middle- to upper-middle class background. Culturally, she still placed herself as such, but economically she identified as lower to middle class. She racially/ethnically identified as "white or Caucasian." She reported living in an urban rental in a large Midwestern city.

When asking about identity, she first identified as trans* then geek, Chicagoan, reader, pianist, biker, board-gamer, kinky, sex positive feminist. Participant three described herself growing up in a household of Reform Judaism, though currently she "totally identif[ies] as a cultural Jew." Although she stated ethnically she is a "Russian Jew," it has never been a big part of her identity. She described herself as an activist and performer.

Participant Four

Participant four is in her early 50s and graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics and political science. She also had a year of graduate studies. She identified herself as poor,

though formerly upper-middle class, and racially/ethnically as White and Jewish. She reported living in a "small-ish" town of about 12,000. When asked how she identified, participant four said, "I identified as bi, so I used to be a gay male, now I am a lesbian female, and a bi female, and trans*, so I'm like the whole alphabet."

Participant four grew up as a non-religious Jew, becoming Baal Teshuvah during college, and for a long time identified as Frum. Currently, she reported being unsure of where she fits regarding her Judaism. She shared that she was married to a woman for over 20 years and that the marriage ended very badly, although they had three children together. Participant four reported having had severe health problems, including a massive heart attack and having a pace maker defibrillator installed about five years prior to the interview. She reported some frustration with not being able to work for nearly the last decade.

Participant Five

Participant five is in her late 60s and graduated with her bachelor's degree within the last twenty years. As such, she described herself as a "late-bloomer." She identified herself as having been both upper-middle class and lower-middle class at various times, but currently she reported being "very middle" class. She defined herself racially and ethnically as "Caucasian and Jewish," as well as being a "south-sider." She reported living in an area outside a large Midwestern city that is a mix of urban and suburban.

Participant five spoke about her identity as a Jewish woman and how that identification automatically puts her "into a certain realm of political, social, and economic life." She reported growing up "semi-kosher," but that "most of the people...[she] knew and associated with throughout high school and college were Jews. It's just the way it was." She shared that her

relationship and identification with her own Judaism had changed over the years, growing more positive.

Before becoming gender aware, participant five reported being married to a woman with whom she had two children. She reported being a veteran of the armed forces and being deployed to active combat zones. She received the Purple Heart. She stated, "You never come home from a war...It's always there. Every day you are there."

Themes Across Participants

Eight major themes and four minor themes emerged when examining the interviews of the five participants. Major themes were defined as themes that were addressed by all five participants and minor themes were defined as topics addressed by at least three participants. The eight major themes, in no particular order, are: 1) Family (spouse, parent, or sibling) Interactions; 2) Dynamics of Sexual Orientation; 3) Professional Help and Bureaucratic Red Tape; 4) Stealth and Disclosure of Transgender Identity; 5) Relevance of Education; 6) What Does It Mean To Transition; 7) Changes in Community Interactions; and 8) Transgender and Jewish Identity Interactions. The four minor themes are: 1) Relationships with Israel; 2) Naming and Language; 3) Not Fitting In; and 4) Reaction of Children. There was variability within each major and minor theme in the uniqueness of each participant's life experience. (See Appendix C for a table of themes.)

Major theme one: Family (spouse, parent, or sibling) interactions. There was a wide array of experiences amongst the participants regarding how their spouses, siblings, and parents handled the news of the participants' emerging gender awareness. Participants one, four and five were married to Jewish female partners when they became gender aware. Interestingly, all three participants reported their wives were initially "okay" with the news of the participant's gender

awareness. However, after the initial "cool-with-it" phase, each participant reported that their marriages ultimately ended, culminating in experiences ranging from an amicable separation to violence. Participant five stated, "The marriage didn't have enough gas. It was very sad, because I was looking forward to walking into the sunset with her."

Participant one recalled:

> What I hadn't counted on was that she wanted to get remarried and she was terrified that the specter of a "tranny" would make it difficult to get married. She got a restraining order against me...preventing me from making any contact whatsoever with...[my kids] until they turned 18.

Finally, participant four shared, "She ended up hitting me a lot...She threatened me with a knife. She said that I'm better off dead for everyone's sake."

Contextual foundation is important to note. Participant one was living in Israel roughly 20 years ago when she became gender aware and the restraining order was through the rabbinic courts, whereas participant four was more recently living in a tight-knit religious Midwestern community.

Two participants spoke about how family members were concerned about the participants' safety. Another participant shared that she was rejected by her brother once she shared her gender awareness: "My brother...he said something, he was concerned about, you know be careful, don't get killed."

Participant three spoke specifically to the concerns others had for her:

> My dad had seen shows of mine and those have helped him...My dad in particular had a lot of..."I'm worried about you for housing." That hasn't been a problem. "Well, I'm worried about you for jobs." That hasn't been a problem. "Well, I'm worried about you

for friends." That hasn't been a problem..."Well, I'm worried about you for dating." That hasn't been a problem...I don't think he owned his discomfort.

Participant four's experience was distancing: "I was getting rejected left and right by everyone. My brother...told me don't come around. 'You shouldn't even be in the neighborhood. Someone might see you and wreck the shit out of possibilities for my daughter who's unmarried.'"

Participant three spoke about potential partners and the importance of them having knowledge of her cultural Judaism: "I think I would want someone who has familiarity with what cultural Judaism means." Participant five spoke about dating her current boyfriend since before she had surgery, even though he is not Jewish. She reported being able to support him during his religious services, while "it has never had any negative effect on ... [her] Judaism."

Participants had a wide range of experiences with reactions from family members. Some participants' parents were supportive, while other participants' parents had passed away before the participant became gender aware. Some participants hoped their parents would have understood while others acknowledged it may have been more difficult for their parents to understand. Some participants' siblings adjusted well to the news of their gender awareness, while others rejected them completely. The three participants who were married when they became gender aware all ended up divorcing those partners; while another participant reported that she began dating her current boyfriend before she had surgery, but after she became gender aware. Contrastingly, the last participant talked about the importance of a potential partner understanding cultural Judaism.

Major theme two: Dynamics of sexual orientation. Sexual orientation was a topic that was addressed amply by all five participants, but in a disparate ways. Participants mentioned the

differentiation between sexual orientation and gender, and the ways in which a transgender identity impacts the physical body and building intimacy. Participant one talked about how it is impossible to know your sexual orientation prior to transitioning:

> I was hoping that I would be straight. You can't know! You can't know how you are going to turn out...I've met online, a bike dyke who...grew up a little boy in Williamsburg, a little Hassidic boy. I met a guy who was a lesbian separatist who is now a gay male drag queen...I figured it would make my life a little simpler if I was straight.

One participant struggled with being a lesbian in the Orthodox community, as members of her community were constantly trying to set her up with men. She stated, "I don't want to tell them I'm gay because...people are always saying 'why do you have to flaunt it'" (Participant one). At the same time within the Orthodox Jewish community, it would be assumed that something is wrong with the participant if she declined a romantic arrangement.

Multiple participants discussed experimenting with gender roles with intimate partners, prior to becoming gender aware. This may have included dressing up in stereotypically female lingerie, wearing high heels, or experimenting with sex toys. Before becoming gender aware, one participant mentioned "I wanted to have sex, but I...didn't want to be the guy in the sex, I didn't want to be the guy" (Participant four). Whereas after her sexual reassignment surgery and being on hormone replacement therapy, another participant disclosed, "Now being on hormones...my libido is like a 16 year old's...sexually, I am much happier person as a woman" (Participant five).

Consent, conversation, and meaning were important topics when discussing being intimate with a potential partner. Participant three spoke about the importance of consent saying that, "there has to be a lot of talk about consent and how things work...I am more likely to hook up with someone who is going to know to ask me what by body means and what to call it."

Before becoming gender aware, one participant stated, "I found myself identifying as male, attracted to those who were anatomically male, but presented female...I thought I was interested in dating trans* women" (Participant two). Prior to becoming gender aware, multiple participants discussed the lack of emphasis on being attracted to the "parts" of a potential partner, but rather the individual as a whole. Participant four referenced the diversity of individuals she was attracted to:

> My sexual orientation is I like people, its more personalities and visual...I mean I can like a 65-year-old woman or I can like a 22-year-old man...or I can like a trans* person, it doesn't matter...my understanding of my sexual orientation itself...was a protective factor.

Each participant discussed the importance of sexual orientation, meaning, conversation, and understanding from a potential partner. Positive and negative experiences, before and after becoming gender aware, were also discussed. The differences between sex and gender were emphasized. Some participants made the argument that an individual could not ultimately know what their sexual orientation would be until after she transitioned; whereas others discussed how they were not into specific "plumbing" before or after becoming gender aware focusing more on the "mental connection" (Participant two). Sexual orientation as a camouflage for transgender identity was also discussed.

Major theme three: "Professional" help and bureaucratic red tape. All five participants discussed interactions with paperwork, bureaucracy, and professional help. In contemporary North American society, bureaucracy is a constant stressor that individuals encounter. The participants explicitly spoke about how their gender statuses made navigating the bureaucratic more convoluted. Experiences ranged from a helpful and supportive therapist to a

surgeon questioning "which direction" an individual wanted to transition to and from. Some participants expressed frustration with the lack of understanding government agencies have regarding amending official paperwork, and other participants expressed relief at how the process was not strenuous. Birth location was a clear variable amongst the participants with regards to ease of altering paperwork.

Participants described interactions with therapists, surgeons, hospitals, and the Veterans Administration (VA) with varying degrees of supportiveness. Participant one was living in Israel and described her experience with medical professionals:

> He [the doctor] said there was international law...about what you can prescribe for what and...[he] would be in violation if [he]...were to do this[hormones], so I went to [the]...Hospital to talk to a surgeon and I walk in and I said, "I want to have a...a sex change" and he said, "from what to what?" Which might be a legitimate question, but it felt like he was making fun of me.

Participant three described a different experience with a large Midwestern hospital:

> I was very conscious of going to the hospital where trans* people have a history of being very poorly treated by practitioners ... ultimately nothing negative happened, hopefully that is because I had nice and competent doctors but I think that the fact that I am white I had good insurance...

Participant four described seeing a therapist who specialized in gender dysphoria and that the therapist told her she was the "poster child" for being "trans." She stated being somewhat surprised by her therapist's insight, but that ultimately she agreed and began getting the support she needed.

Participant five described generally "wonderful" experiences she has had with the VA system. However, she recounted a recent trip to the gynecologist at the VA in which she was informed that her chart still listed her as male. When she attempted to fix the situation she was told she needed a "court order."

> I said there is no court document on gender change. It does not exist. No court is interested in gender change. She kept asking me for the court document on the gender change. I said, "I have a court document on the name change. And actually, I've already produced that." She says "oh you've already gave us that." I can show you my birth certificate from the state of Illinois; I can show you my driver's license. My state ID.

Participant five described how this particular interaction was frustrating and ironic, debating with a VA employee about the documentation of her gender, while scheduling her next mammogram appointment.

Similarly, participant two spoke about a prestigious university in the Midwest where she earned her master's degree prior to becoming gender aware, that gave her a "hard time about changing... [her] name." She compared this to her undergraduate university, a different, but equally prestigious university in the Midwest, who changed her name without an issue. Participants described both positive and negative experience with the Social Security Administration, the State Department, the Department of Motor Vehicles, Medicare, and their respective state departments involved in altering official documentation regarding birth certificates. Misinformed staff and bureaucracy appeared to be common themes for the women who had difficulty with changing official government paperwork.

Major theme four: Stealth and disclosure of transgender identity. Participants shared a variety of experiences, opinions, and meaning making regarding the theme of "going stealth"

and when to disclose her transgender identity to both friends and family. Participant four talked about becoming gender aware and disclosing her transgender identity to her best friend:

> I came out to my best friend. He called me an abomination. He didn't say I was doing abominable act, he called me an abomination...He got up out of his chair and he left and that was it...and it sort of went like that in the Orthodox community, it turned me off and my ex got her divorce funded by the community.

Participant one discussed her nuanced experiences with going stealth early on, after becoming gender aware:

> The drive for stealth was making me crazy. Stealth means completely hermetically into the woodwork...nobody knows. But if you're stealth then if anybody finds out, it's the end of the world...I couldn't do that anymore...there's always going to be somebody that is going to find out and...if people find out...I'll deal with it.

Participants one and five talked about how although they are not operating in stealth mode, they are also not "completely out." Both spoke to how not being out affects their friendships.

> My friendships, for the most part, are not...real. Most of them. And I have friends who are really good friends except that they are not because they may not know this...which wounds the friendship itself. It means it's not whole. What makes it worse is that they might know, but there's no way to know without telling them. (Participant one)

Participant five discussed the difficulty of knowing when to disclose:

> The hardest thing is...do you tell someone and when do you tell them. Like this one girl...she doesn't know, I'd like to have a better friendship with her, you know go out and do things with her, but I'd have to tell her. I've learned my lesson that if I don't tell her,

someday, she's gonna find out and feel betrayed. But if I tell her, it opens a Pandora's Box...so it gets very, very difficult.

Participant five alluded to her experience of being "outed" by another person and the pain it can cause. Participant one described being called a "tranny monster" and being outed by an unknown person in her community to a rabbi within a group of which she was a member. Ultimately, this led to her deciding to disclose her gender status to another member of the group, who ended up being "very cool about it" (Participant one).

Participants touched on the importance of self-acceptance and disclosure to themselves regarding their own gender identity. Participants emphasized that most often disclosing their gender identity was not a one-time act, but an ever-present and ongoing endeavor. The process often included moments before becoming gender aware when women's clothing felt more comfortable, both in a sexual and non-sexual way:

> When I was like 3 or 4 years old, I slept over somebody's house and my clothes were dirty or something...They put me in girl clothes, and I liked it. I just felt comfortable in it. I remember that. So, it's like my oldest memory. (Participant four)

Multiple participants spoke to the point that becoming gender aware was a process, an "ongoing project," and at points wholly confusing. Participant four talked about how cross-dressing made her feel more comfortable. She would often "buy really butchy girl clothes, rip...the labels out and wear those" in hopes that knowledge of regularly wearing women's clothing would soothe her gender confusion. It did not:

> I got really fat and I was depressed and [with] the lower T levels and obesity I ended up getting breasts. They looked more like girl breasts...I'm going okay I'm 50 years old God

gave me breasts and I just opened up my dryer and all the clothes are girl clothes, I need to do something about that. (Participant four)

Participant five spoke about the importance of self-acceptance:

> This next 30 begins when the divorce takes place...I was at 60 so I said "okay so the next 30 is for me." And for me meant my transition. Because I finally accepted who I've been all along...Someone asked me..."how does it feel to be a woman?" And my response is...how does it feel to be you?

Contributing to self-acceptance is the experience of having other individuals see and treat the participants as their identified gender. Using correct pronouns and being seen as an "old lady" were cited as thrilling moments of being seen a female. Sometimes being seen as their identified gender had interesting repercussions. Participant one recounted an acquaintance who "had said some things about trans* people to me, that she would not have said to me if she had known" (Participant one).

Two participants described themselves as "trans* activists" and are publicly "out" regarding the disclosure of their transgender identity. They shared similar stories of feeling lucky to have been received so positively when they became gender aware. Another participant shared that within a particular religious organization she is out. Participant two discussed her experience of privilege:

> When I began to totally publicly transition...I am very, very sensitive to how fortunate I was. Retired, no job issues. Divorced, no family issues. And as you know it wouldn't have been a family issue because of [my daughter] and everything...I lived in [the local LGBT neighborhood] and there were other people dressed in my building, so I didn't have neighbor issues...

Participant three discussed feeling as though she was "lucky":

> I feel incredibly lucky as a trans* person, I still have really positive relationships with my family both immediate and extended, and job environments that I've worked at since before I transitioned and friends that I've had before I transitioned, and am something of a minority in the trans* community, in the amount of support, and the lack of cost, my transition has had...

Participant three further discussed how others often perceive her:

> But part of my experience as a trans* person even as a pretty damn privileged trans person and so I own that I am almost always perceived as cis. I am conventionally attractive. I responded well to hormones, and grew my boobs. I could afford hair removal. I have a family that is supporting me both emotionally and financially like and all of these ways I have...[my job] which stood by me when I transitioned. I have not been the victim of sexual assault or violence. I have not been the victim of partner abuse.

Participant two talked about an experience early in her transition wherein she used to politically lobby in "drab," meaning she would dress in men's clothing, wanting people to listen to her rather than look at her. Participant three discussed her privilege and how she wanted to use her privilege and out status to implement change, noting the following:

> And so I want to make sure that I am using my loud and powerful voice-part loud and powerful because I built it to be, in part loud and powerful because I was lucky enough to be born white and lucky enough to be born to parents who could afford to send me to college and lucky enough for all these other things—to remind people who might not like to be reminded of those things.

From losing friends to losing jobs to the collective lack of societal understanding, multiple participants highlighted the lack of safety, and oftentimes dangers, which can accompany the disclosure of a transgender identity.

> I was fired from a teaching job for being trans, it was a part-time teaching job, it was not a primary source of income. It's also fucking ridiculous that I feel the need, I think legitimately, to discount being fired illegally for being trans* as saying it's not that bad because in the trans community...having that as the only thing still makes me incredibly, incredibly lucky. (Participant three)

Participant four discussed the incidence of suicidal ideation within the trans* community:

> I think in seventy-three percent of trans* folks think of suicide. Fifty-something percent attempt it. Those are people who identify as trans*. But I think there's a host of people that...like when I was ten years old, I almost killed myself. And I didn't identify as trans*... So its astronomical how many people are dying from this.

Disclosure of transgender identity and the potential consequences of disclosure was an unsurprising theme. The consequences of disclosure varied, from being shunned and called an abomination to losing friends to gaining friends to a sense of being true to her own identity, all the way to a smoother transition, due to privilege or time of life. Some participants acknowledged being settled with the ambiguity of not knowing if others knew their transgender identity, while others spoke with fear about the same ambiguity.

Major theme five: Relevance of education. Educational experience, as well as importance, was a major theme amongst all five participants. All five participants graduated from college, earning at least a bachelor's degree, and three out of five completed at least some coursework towards a master's degree. Participant five described herself as a "late bloomer"

having graduated with her bachelor's degree 35 years after starting it. In describing her college experience, participant one stated, "sometimes you gotta get that degree and get out."

All five participants also discussed their Jewish education. Four out of five participants attended Hebrew school and were Bar Mitzvahed. The fifth participant became "a Jew by choice" in her thirties after marrying a Jewish woman and attending a "traditional" synagogue, yet before becoming gender aware. Participants three and five both said that after their Bar Mitzvahs they did not attend any type of religious service for many years. Participant four reported great discomfort after her Bar Mitzvah when people approached her stating, "today you are a man. What does it feel like to be a man?" She reported not only being uncomfortable with the gender piece, but she also reported frustration with the hypocrisy of having non-kosher food at her Bar Mitzvah.

Participant five reported feeling like she learned nothing during her years of Hebrew school and only recently, after transitioning, did she decide to seek out a more religiously Jewish connection. Participant three reported never feeling "a huge connection" with the Reform Synagogue to which her family belonged. She felt as though her "parents were being hypocritical by sending...[her] there" as it was "something that was not a part of their life" (Participant three).

Participant five discussed her experience in synagogue growing up, and her lack of understanding about what was going on:

> It never got explained to me...and I went to shul with my zayde[1], watched everybody daven[2], watch them all having the race to get done. It was, always a race, who could finish first. They had it all memorized and it was who could get it done first.

[1]Daven is a Yiddish term that translates to praying (Oxford Dictionary, 2014c).
[2]Zayde means grandfather in Yiddish (Oxford Dictionary, 2014e).

Participant four talked about her search for truth in that she grew up in a non-orthodox household and was confused by many of the contradictions she experienced. She took an active role in learning more about Judaism, eventually deciding to apply to an Orthodox Jewish university, which she was rejected from. She was determined and eventually gained admission. Similarly, participant one described growing up in a "lukewarm conservative" household. For her, Jewish summer camp was the space where her Jewish education bloomed, as she too eventually became Orthodox.

The Jewish cultural and religious imperative of education was discussed by many participants. Participant three discussed the context of her home growing up:

> I feel like Judaism is a religion of self-education and self-exploration and I feel like...growing up in a house of two educated parents, both of whom worked, and having lots of books in the house and reading be important and sort of being encouraged to explore whatever I felt like exploring...

The importance of attaining both a general and a Jewish education was discussed by all five participants. At minimum, each participant earned a bachelor's degree with more than half of the participants completing some graduate coursework. Four out of five participants spoke explicitly about their Bar Mitzvahs and many participants mentioned their experiences with Hebrew school.

Major theme six: What does it mean to transition? Each participant discussed their unique meaning of transitioning. The meaning-making of transitioning varied across participants. Time span, identification, or perception may have been addressed. Participant two shared:

> In my opinion you began to transition the day you questioned your gender and I would say...it's not over until they are putting dirt on the box and depending on your view of a higher power; it may not be over then.

Participant one took an opposite stance. She stated:

> That's not the picture I had of myself. It's why I don't identify as trans*...I'm not. I didn't transition male to transsexual. I transitioned male to female. Male to transsexual I would have...put my money on reincarnation and gone for another try.

Participant three almost mediates the two perspectives in noting that the "hierarchy of 'trans-ness' is really stupid" (Participant 3). There was overlap between participants four and five as represented by the statement, "You transition your whole life" (Participant four).

Participant four brings in another layer of meaning in stating that for her, gender affirming surgery (GAS) was unimportant.

> I was probably 10 or 11 or 12, I didn't realize that boys and girls had different parts, which probably saved me in terms of the gender identity issue...I just didn't perceive people having different parts...So that was good because I know people...who are trans*... just like dying to have an SRS, and it's not as important to me as other people. Because I never identified that way... (Participant four)

She clarified further by stating that her heart was in too poor of a condition to get GAS. She expressed happiness in hormone therapy "work[ing]...wonders." Participant five had a different experience:

> I could not transition, and not have the surgery. I am not one of those individuals...I would not feel whole...For me it was important, part of being truly a woman, was being

truly a woman. The only difference between me right now and you, is I don't have ovaries.

Participant five expressed a different meaning and a surprising result when she began taking hormones. For her, hormones "released that stern combat veteran" and she was "finally able to cry for [her]...mother," who had passed away more than three decades earlier (Participant five).

The meaning-making of transitioning and the steps that can be taken to achieve the desired transition vary based on the unique experience and desire of each individual. Some participants shared their desire for surgery or the lack of importance surgery had for them; some participants discussed their experiences with hormones. All participants expressed their individual experiences with what it meant to transition.

Major theme seven: Changes in community interactions. All five participants spoke about their interactions with their respective local communities. Interactions discussed were within the greater LGBT community, within local Jewish communities, or out in the general public wherein the participants resided. Participants reported an amalgamation of positive, negative, bullying, and supportive experiences.

Regardless of her Jewish identification, each participant had regular interaction with local synagogues, be it educational, conversational, or practicing perspective. Each woman shared her interaction with local synagogues, some experiences were part of weekly ritual while other experiences were painful. The religious aspect also tied into the theme of changes in community interactions. In some realms, an aspect of Jewish community was important, but so was an aspect of recognition of both transgender and Jewish identities. There is a religiously Jewish organization for LGBT individuals that was often discussed, although it had mixed reviews from

the participants. For example, some participants cited the organization provided space to be religiously Jewish as well as transgender, while others reported feeling unwelcome.

Participant three spoke of a shift in her interactions with the temple she grew up in:

> I have spoken at [the synagogue] a couple of times to their seventh grade class, following these conversations I had with...[the] Rabbi[s] where they were like, "if this was something that you wanted, then we should do this for our students." Which was really healing in a community standpoint. And had been really awesome to teach there.

She discovered a growing space within the Reform community where she could start to address topics that were not discussed when she was growing up from a religiously Jewish standpoint. Participant five spoke about the support she feels from the local LGBT-inclusive synagogue, where she is able to begin to process her emotions regarding the death of her parents.

> It's a maturing, it's gone from "Well I'm a Jew because I was born a Jew, my mother was a Jew, therefore I am a Jew." To "Yea, there is something to this religion that speaks to me." Now...I go to services and every so often I break down and cry. Particularly, something will set me off and...one of the women will come and put her arms around me....Loss. Emptiness. Loss. My mother and my father were my best friends, we talked earlier about friendship. They were my friends. (Participant 5)

Participant four spoke of the loss of her community. She discussed her love of being Orthodox, but that at the time of the interview, she found interactions with her Orthodox community to be "deeply painful" and "shunning." She spoke of her love for the community, the place to belong, and the camaraderie. She spoke of all the tzedaka (Hebrew for good deeds) she performed while active in her community and in return she reported receiving no support. She

addressed her gender awareness, saying that living as female was life-saving, but she expressed not getting the support from her community or family that she hoped she would have.

> My whole life, I've always tried to do what's right, and I've always gotten kicked in the ass...I got really hurt with the divorce, I got really hurt with the separation...but when I looked at it...for myself, I said it was saving my life. Because it was bothering me so much. I had to do it. Then I'll worry about getting forgiven later. (Participant four)

Three participants spoke explicitly of being involved with a transgender support group at various junctures since becoming gender aware. All three described the groups as being helpful and a positive experience in terms of their transgender identity development. Participant four articulated that she could "instantly relate" to the members within the group. Parents, Friends, and Families of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) was also discussed. It was described as "not the best" for transgender-identifying individuals, but in a more rural area, its' support was deemed better than nothing. Multiple participants expressed a surprise and disappointment in the LGBT community as a whole. While they may have been expecting unification under the rainbow flag, they discovered separate LGBTQ factions.

Major theme eight: Transgender and Jewish identity interactions. All five participants spoke explicitly about the interactions of their transgender and Jewish identities, though some of their experiences were similar, the common thread between all five participants was the unique way in which they held their transgender and Jewish identities.

> I think it's actually been good camouflage in a way. Anything that they [the congregants] see that's a little off, they chalk it up to ohh dyke. (laughs)...There are

> people who don't interact with me...at shul I am pretty um...accepted. Um...you know I run the website...As a member I am...relatively involved, compared to the average person. (Participant one)

Participant two discussed her study prior to her adoption of Judaism:

> I did a fair amount of study and reading ahead of time, even before I adopted Judaism, and continued to read about it or you know the surrounding issues, those things have not been a challenge to me in my transition, nor has my transition been a challenge in any way to my religious beliefs.

Participant three discussed similarities in her identities by stating the following: "Jewish people in my life have had very little problem with my trans* identity...because of the overlap in oppression." Participant four addressed her deep disconnect between her current Jewish and gender aware identities:

> I don't have any friends that are Jewish. I need to be with some Jews and I went to a dozen different temples looking for trans* folks—informally talking to rabbis, sometimes meeting with them and emailing some of them. I was really looking to see if there was any type of trans* community that was underneath the surface that was Jewish. There's a few Jews that I know of but they don't keep anything Jewish...And I asked them why and they said because everyone's got hurt by it.

Participant five addressed her intentionality with constructing her identities:

> I don't think that my Judaism (pauses) is that much of a factor in my transgenderism. However, that said, as I analyze that statement that I just made, part of it is the way I structured my existence, keeps it from being.

Participant one, two, and five have cultivated a religiously Jewish and transgender space for themselves. Participant one is out as a lesbian in her Orthodox community, while participants two and five often interact with an LGBT synagogue. Participant two notices how her traditional Jewish roots affect her interactions within the temple community. For her, living as a Jewish female and having observant roots means not enacting duties that would be seen as male, regardless of her current attendance at a Reform or Conservative synagogue.

> I adopted Judaism in a traditional or relatively traditionally observant form...One I'm not married, and I'm not presenting male, but I still cover my head. I have a particular white scarf that I wear when I go to services, I mean I don't know why, I do...I would not go up and read from the Torah, you know like for a Saturday service. I just couldn't do that, you know. I mean I have never been asked, but I wouldn't go and open the bimah[3], go up on the bimah[3] and open for the Torah. (Participant two)

Participant three fundamentally disagrees with many aspects of traditional Judaism, including circumcision. She cites the inability to consent to non-medically necessary body modification as unacceptable. Once an individual is old enough to consent, the choice is his or hers.

> As saying this is an important tradition for Jewish men, then allow Jewish men to make it and don't have it imposed on children, because part of what again, that idea of queer inclusivity and trans* and gender variant inclusivity requires not just accepting who someone is now, but that acknowledgment that new people who are entering this community as children, may not be who they seem to be today and may not be tomorrow, who they present as today. (Participant three)

[3]The bimah is the raised platform in a synagogue where the ark that holds the Torah is kept (Oxford, 2014b).

Participant three also mentioned the fundamental difficulties of trans* inclusivity within a congregation:

> I think in the same way if Judaism...or specific congregations want to be queer inclusive...not just accepting, but have queer people integrated into the fabric of that community, there needs to be really hard conversations about Hebrew as a really gendered language, and there needs to be really hard conversations about circumcision.

Each participant spoke about the unique ways they navigate their Jewish and transgender identities. Women spoke about how they structured their identities in such a way that there was not a conflict between their identifications, whereas other participants talked with great emotion regarding the pain they experience trying to integrate their life-saving female gender identity with their more religiously Jewish identity. Other participants have carved out space that is unique to the way the culturally and religiously hold their Jewish identity, allowing for a smoother integration of their gender identity.

Minor theme one: Relationships with Israel. Three participants discussed different aspects of their experiences with Israel. Participants discussed some of the ways their gender identity impacted their relationship or interactions with Israel. One participant made Aliyah and was living in Israel as an Orthodox Jew when she became gender aware. Living in Israel in the 1980s, her interactions with her gender and Israel were quite distinct. She was forbidden by the rabbinic courts from seeing her children until they turned eighteen due to her transgender status. It was while living in Israel that she experienced incompetent medical care in her attempts to obtain hormones or a surgical consultation for GAS.

> ...I almost went into politics in Israel, but I always remember back in '88 I told four complete strangers that I was trans* and because of that I couldn't...do it, because that's something that can come out. (Participant one)

Another participant referenced the "law of return and...automatically having dual citizenship" (Participant two), discussing politics and Israel as a theocracy. "I let my Israeli passport expire years ago...I wasn't getting out of the country for any reason, and now I'd have to start all over again anyways" (Participant two).

One participant spoke candidly about her anti-Zionist stance, stating that "religious statehood is incompatible to democracy" (Participant three). She went on to say that she views

> Israel as wanting to have its cake and eating it too, of getting all the benefits of being this glorious Western democracy and getting all the privileges of being an oppressed and constantly-in-danger tiny flickering flame that could be snuffed out at any moment. I feel like you can't have it both ways.

Participant three acknowledged the difficulty of her perspective in that "in the States whenever there is a critique of Israel, cries of anti-Semitism come up" and argued that it is possible to be anti-Israel and not anti-Semitic. She also stated that her candid disclosure is not often received well.

Interactions with and opinions of Israel were addressed by three of five participants. One participant talked about her interactions with rabbinic courts and the sanctions she experienced; for instance, not allowing her contact with her children due to her transgender status. She also addressed the poor transgender competent medical care she received while she was living there in the 1980s. Zionism, Israel as a theocratic state, and the law of return were all discussed. Each of the three participants had distinct opinions of and interactions with Israel.

Minor theme two: Naming and language. Four of five participants discussed the importance of naming, correct pronoun use, and the language surrounding both their transgender and Jewish identities. Participant one spoke of the "whiplash" of being "sir'ed and ma'amed within the space of five minutes" when she first began to dress in more stereotypical female clothing. She noted that when she writes she often uses a pseudonym. When attending a Jewish event, she signed up using her real name and when she arrived at the event she had two name tags. She reported wearing both name tags for the duration of the event. She underscored that her pseudonym is not a "sock puppet" and that it is still her voice (Participant one).

Participants spoke about the possibility of changing their Jewish name as well, with inclusion of a name changing ceremony at a local synagogue. One participant shared that her Jewish name was never gendered male, so she did not feel the need to change it. One participant talked about choice in naming:

> I think at sixteen everyone should be encouraged to choose a new name, with the knowledge at maybe at seventeen you're going to change it back...but name and gender...are remaining parts of our identity that you have no say in culturally, or very minimal say in... (Participant three)

Participant three discussed the distinctly important and detailed use of language tied to her transgender identity. Participant one spoke about the difference between "being" versus "identifying." Contrastingly, participant four talked about utter confusion regarding her identity, and not having language that felt fitting and descriptive to her. Participant two underscored the important subtle nuances of language in order to remain respectful to members of the transgender community: "trans* women don't wear wigs, they wear hair" (Participant two).

> I identify as a trans woman, so for me trans is an adjective modifier, which sounds really nit-picky and semantic but is actually really important, because...my womanhood is not provisional or requiring of context...and so by using 'trans*' I am adding information ...about my status as a woman, but it is important to me that it is a separate word, an adjective, so that it is not viewed as, or at least so I am not presenting it as um, a different of category of woman all together... (Participant three)

Participant one spoke about being versus identifying, saying "I put down Jew, I put down Orthodox, I did not put down gay or trans*...yes, I am, but that's not my identity." Participant four discussed her own understanding, "I was 50 years old, I didn't know what I was. I felt this way and I felt that way. I didn't...understand."

From the Hebrew name to the very specific language surrounding naming and identity, the importance of language and naming was addressed by four participants. Lacking the language to describe a felt sensation was also discussed. Participants addressed the importance of wording and language expressed by their own meaning, rather than others pressing meaning upon them.

Minor theme three: Not fitting in. Four out of five participants spoke explicitly about feeling as though they did not fit in—some referenced experiences of when they were younger, while others spoke about on-going feelings of not belonging. Some participants spoke about their feeling as though they were experiencing their gender differently than others. Two participants shared a sense of longing in to be "normal" as a child. Some participants cited feeling "different" when they were younger, but did not have the language to describe their experience.

> I was different. And I knew I was different and I felt different...I thought I was screwed up in the head. I was 24 before it ever occurred to me that...I may not be a guy with a messed up head, but rather a girl with a messed up body. (Participant one)

Participant three discussed a "knowing" before she became gender aware:

> In terms of growing up...I knew boy was wrong long before I knew girl was right. And the analogy I use...you can toss and turn at night, and know damn well sure you are uncomfortable, but still have no fucking clue what comfort would look like. And that sort of the analogy that I use, that for years I knew damn well sure I was uncomfortable but it took a long time to think of what that comfort might look like.

Growing up, participant five described herself as the "runt of the litter," and shared that her sister was her "protector." Though she had a cousin who often pushed her around, participant five recalled an instance whereas her sister "pushed him down a flight of stairs, and that put an end to him pushing me around."

Starting at an early age, some participants received messages that expressing their gender may be dangerous. At the age of 10, participant four reported playing dress up with a friend, and that a neighborhood boy saw her in stereotypical female clothing: "He befriended me sort of...and convinced me to wear girl clothes and then he raped me...So at the age of ten I realized that being who I am is not a good thing." Participant four spoke about how she was "super feminine" until she was 15 and that she shifted because she "got tired of being picked on." Long before she became gender aware, she reported bullying and physical violence at school. "When growing up, I was called faggot more than my own name...In the ninth grade I had my pants pulled down and was pushed down a flight of stairs" (Participant four). She went on to talk about

her ongoing hurt and how she did not fit anywhere and that she was unsure of what to do. In dealing with this, she turned to religion to try and "pray it away."

> It didn't work obviously. I really wanted to. I really, really wanted to get rid of this. I did everything I could to get rid of it. I thought getting married would help. I thought getting more religious would help. I thought davening more would help. I thought praying more would help. I thought working out more would help. I thought doing macho stuff would help. (Participant four)

Participant one spoke about her experience feeling as though she was different in regards to her Judaism. Specifically, she talked about when she began to wear a kippa[4] in college:

> When I was in college...I started wearing a kippa my sophomore year...seven undergrads ...wore kippot...including me. And I felt, "oh my god, everybody's looking at me." And I'm like "duh" I'm different! Of course they are looking at me!

Participant five described herself as often being "the token Jew in the room" and that although she identifies differently than her friends, no one seems to be "bothered by it."

Four out of five participants discussed various situations where they felt as though they did not fit in. Three of these participants spoke about feeling as though they did not fit in in terms of their gender, citing that from an early age something did not feel quite right though they were unable to describe what felt "off." Gender awareness arrived for each of these participants at very different ages. One participant spoke about feeling as though she did not fit in, but this feeling was not necessarily connected to her gender. A few participants spoke about not fitting in, in relationship to their Jewish identities, be it the degree of religiosity or traditional

[4]A kippa (plural kippot) may be worn daily by males or worn by any male while attending synagogue. It is a small skullcap (Oxford Dictionary, 2014d).

observance or Jewish identification as a whole. One participant attempted to utilize her Jewish beliefs to rid herself of her gender confusion, which ultimately failed.

Minor theme four: Reaction of children. The idea of when to disclose transgender identity to their children appeared to be salient and commonly discussed among the participants. Participants had mixed experiences and reactions from their children based on a variety of factors. Participant one spoke about how not being able to see her older children left them with little recollection of her male self and in some ways made their interactions easier. When it came to her daughter with her current partner, after some research of "when do you tell," they decided to tell their daughter when she was six. Participant one described it as "telling her about my past." She described her current relationship with her older children as developing, stating that, having been entirely absent until recent years, "It's weird, she's my kid, but I'm not her parent."

Participant three does not have children but mentioned future children in the context of her Judaism, rather than transgender identity. Participants two, four, and five described different reactions from each of their children upon disclosing her gender awareness. Some children adjusted quickly, others took longer, while others had never come to terms and consequently little relationship had been maintained over time. Interestingly, participant two reported that one of her children became gender aware at the same time she did. She described being able to share their experiences as "a lot of fun."

Participant four spoke about how she "did not want to hurt anybody, especially... [her] kids" regarding her gender awareness. She stated that her children had been through enough trauma related to the domestic violence with her ex-wife. She reported that her youngest son "adjusted really quickly" and he recently introduced her "as his mother" (Participant four).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The study was conducted utilizing a semistructured interview that was created to address the different bi-directional spheres of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in relation to the complex interactions of transgender women and Jewish identities. Although this template provided an excellent reference point to contextualize each interview, it did not provide an adequate structure to discuss the results of the interviews. The nuanced intersections of the participants' identities were too complex and overlapping to be parsed to adequately address each layer of the sphere. Attempts to do so proved to be reductionist.

Separating the participants' experiences to fit the various spheres as an organizational tool would have diluted the participants' lived experiences and narratives. The best way to organize the results of the interviews was thematically, addressing themes regardless of where they may relate within the Bronfenbrenner theory. This approach facilitated a more holistic picture of the participants navigating their intersecting identities. It is important to remember that although very distinct themes emerged relating to the navigation of transgender and Jewish identities, there was still much overlap amongst the themes, as each participant carried their whole-self and narrative-self with them. Some discussion will occur looking at all five participants in the context of the spheres of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and this framework is used to formulate intervention perspectives for clinicians.

The microsystem addresses the sphere closest to the individual, which is composed of interactions with friends, family, peers, or co-workers. Each participant addressed a great deal of interaction and impact within this sphere. Participants spoke about the impact both their Judaism and their gender identity had on individuals with whom they regularly interacted with, as well as the impact these individuals had on the participants.

Two participants cited their transitions as relatively "smooth." They each spoke to their awareness of how "good" they have had it. Participant three spoke about the fact that although she illegally lost a job due to her gender identity, she knows that she could have had it "so much worse." For her, this "privilege" has fueled her vocal activism. Participant two talked about a transition later in life, and how for her it made things "easier." As she stated, she had been divorced, retired, and already living in one of the LGBTQ friendly neighborhoods in her city.

Two participants noted surprisingly positive interactions in this sphere. They addressed the smoothness of the process of their gender awareness. They became gender aware at contrastingly different points in life and, for different reasons, both experienced support from a variety of systems. One of these participants no longer identifies as religiously Jewish, but strongly identifies as culturally Jewish, whereas the other participant adopted Judaism before becoming gender aware and still attends services at an LGBT inclusive synagogue. Both participants emphasized awareness, and perhaps even a sense of gratitude that they did not face the ostracism or violence that many transgender individuals experience. Both participants also expressed a sense of being settled with the integration of their Jewish and gender identities, with the acknowledgment that their identities have shifted and grown over the years. Perhaps the smoothness of their experiences contributed to the fact that both of these participants are active and vocal trans advocates, denoting a need for action. Due to their lack of struggle, there appeared to be a sense of necessity—a driving force—to advocate for other transgender individuals who have faced violence, ostracism, and a lack of safety.

The advocacy work that these two participants engage in provides examples of connectedness to Bronfenbrenner's other spheres, and also underlines the complexity with trying to separate a narrative experience neatly into boxes. Contextually, both participants discuss the

neighborhoods they live in, an example of the mesosystem, as examples of places they experience positivity and support for both their Jewish and transgender identities. Both participants are involved in community-based agencies, an example of the exosystem, where they are both able to use their voices to advocate for other transgender individuals, as well as educate the general public about gender and gender variance.

The participant who grew up Jewish spoke about the Jewish values of social justice and asking questions, and how she internalized and integrated that as part of the lens with which she views and interacts with the world, which is an example of a macrosystem. The participant who adopted Judaism discussed her value of trying to learn something from everyone with whom she interacts. Participant five stated explicitly: "We are a result of the environment we find ourselves in...we are not the result of the tasks we do."

The chronosystem affected both participants in similar and dissimilar ways. Both participants acknowledged that being transgender in today's world is unique, and that visibility and general knowledge are on the rise. But even as visibility increases, there is still much work that needs to be done, particularly regarding safety and the law. Each participant appeared to experience the chronosystem differently, as one participant is in her 20s and another is in her 70s. Inherently, living in today's world in these two different age brackets lead to a difference in perspectives.

Age of the participants was not a factor that was addressed prior to conducting interviews. The participants were in their 20s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, leading to a wide range of experience. Transgender older adults are going to experience another marginalized status: age. Health concerns, legal concerns, and financial concerns all may look different later in life (Cook-Daniels, 2006). Additionally, the age of an individual when she transitions is crucial. A

participant who became gender aware at a younger age and was physically healthy enough to begin to medically transition had a very different experience than a participant who became gender aware in her 50s. Even if the person who became gender aware at a later age wanted to, she could not surgically transition, due to health concerns. Age is a multifaceted status that encapsulates bias, health, and inevitability. Unlike other minority statuses, growing older is something every human will experience.

Unanticipated Outcomes

There were other factors that had not been considered before the study was launched, which quickly became apparent in beginning the interviews. The first noticeable problem was that 90 minutes to discuss the complex intricacies of intersecting identities was not enough time. In replicating this study, more time should be given in order to collect even greater amounts of detail, which would allow more time for follow-up questions.

Participant three identified herself as a "Jew by choice," having adopted Judaism when she was in her thirties before she became gender aware. Pre-interview, this identification and what effect it may or may not have on Jewish identity was not addressed. This is a point to expand upon. How would this effect a woman's Jewish identity? Some research shows that those who adopt Judaism convert in the context of intermarriage, which is what occurred with participant two (Mazur, 2007). The ways in which adopting Judaism later in life and by choice impacts an individual's identity development needs to be explored further.

Another surprising outcome was the fact that two participants were veterans of the military. One participant was in an active combat zone and consequently was awarded a national medal. She stated that "you never come home from a war" (Participant five). Military status, prior active duty status, and current interactions with the VA system add additional layers of

complexity to the participants' lived experience. Additionally, as both participants entered the military in their late teens/early twenties, it is conceivable that their military service impacted all aspects of their identity development. Further, examining the intersections of transgender, Jewish, women, older adult, and veteran identities warrants its own study.

The discussion of body and meaning making occurred regularly. Participant three in particular questioned the existence of a transgender inclusive Judaism in the face of circumcision. She discussed circumcision in the context of non-medically necessary body modification and how for all individuals, but particularly transgender individuals, surgery and the changing body can be examined through a different lens. Does surgery of a gender assigned baby boy need to occur to maintain the "covenant with Abraham" or is it time to move away from a physical act that has tied Jews together for millennia? She clarified that this point of contention is not at the top of the priority list, but she certainly raises a fascinating point on what true trans*-inclusive Judaism may look like. It is clear that in the Jewish community this perspective may not be agreed upon, but it appears to be an important discussion to have. Questioning and not accepting the status quo is not only a Jewish imperative but also a form of resilience.

Regardless of the age, level of religiosity, meaning-making of gender identity or place within her unique transition, the strongest common thread amongst all of the participants was resiliency; during all five interviews, through the stories of tragedy, fear, frustration, reframing, annoyance, prejudice, and violence, there was also laughter. Despite moments of despair, even the contemplation of suicide, the five participants are still alive, still in process, and doing the best they can. Not devoid of struggle and sadness, all five women were open and warm in sharing their experiences and were able to laugh and cry equally. Judaism and Jewishness, in all

its cultural, ethnic, and religious iterations is resilient, bringing being into the here and now and making the best with what you are given.

> I understand the heritage and I understand where it comes from, it's more than just a religion. It is a mindset. Jews tend to be liberal for social causes for a very good reason...the mindset of the religion is we are there for each other...we are able to accept the idea that this is all there is. We as Jews go, "hey this is it, do the best you can now!" You are not going to get rewarded for Tzedaka in heaven; you are going to get rewarded here. (Participant five)

It has been noted that Jewish survival itself is miraculous (Davies, 1998; Poll, 1998). Davies (1998) noted that humor has played a role in this survival; being able to laugh can demonstrate a way to show resilience and cope with stressors. Throughout the interviews, each of the five participants were able to laugh at the ridiculousness of some of the stories they told and experiences they had. Participant five highlighted the "this-is-it" mentality, that is, reframing to make the best of the here and now. Particularly when looking at the historical context of the struggles of Jewish people, the ability to laugh and find humor provides a protective factor for not just Jewish survival, but in the navigation of intersecting identities. Further research looking at humor as a resilience factor within the navigation of Jewish and transgender identities may prove to be fruitful.

Family

Two participants spoke about at least one parent having passed away before they became gender aware. The other three participants spoke about their familial interactions once they became gender aware. Due to their collective identification as Jewish, and the importance of intergenerational connectivity of the Jewish family, it could be expected that the participants'

families of origin would have been amply discussed. Most participants made mention of their parents or siblings, but across all participants, more explicit detail would have been expected. Participant four talked in explicit detail regarding her brother's negative reaction and participant two spoke about her father's process in moving towards accepting her transgender identity, but, in general, when talking about "family," four of five participants talked about their families in the context of their spouses and children. Across all participants it appeared as though family interactions and reactions with the participants' gender awareness could be protective or hurtful.

Sexual Orientation and the LGBTQ Community

Without being directly asked, each participant addressed the dynamic nature of their sexual orientation. Although experienced differently, it appeared as though there was some agreement that an individual would be unable to "know" their sexual orientation until after becoming gender aware at the minimum, or until after "completing" her transition. This narrative experience shared by the participants emphasized that sexual orientation and gender identity may be related, but not automatically affected by each other. Becoming gender aware does not automatically change or not change an individual's sexual orientation. The fluidity and separate developmental process of sexual orientation appeared to be emphasized by most participants. There seemed to be a general "wait-and-see" attitude once an individual was more settled into her gender awareness.

In the context of a more traditional community, one participant viewed her sexual orientation as a protective factor over her transgender status. This is a fascinating reframe on the interaction of sexual orientation and gender identity. For her, being gay and partnered provided cover for any suspicions community members may have. For clinicians and future researchers,

this concept may provide a captivating way to cope with interactions within a more traditional or Orthodox community.

Multiple participants spoke about being disappointed that they did not find or experience a greater sense of unity under the rainbow flag. It seems that as some of the participants became gender aware, they were hoping to be embraced by at least the transgender community if not the larger LGBTQ community. Most participants reported disappointment at the discovery of LGBTQ factions. Many participants spoke to their compounded minority status within whatever community they sought out. Within the LGBT community they were minorities for their transgender identity, and within that they were a minority due to their Jewish identities, and possibly within that, participants spoke to being a minority for their Orthodox identification. The sometimes three or four times minority identification must be supported and validated.

Mirroring

Devor (2004) addressed the importance of mirroring throughout the transition process. Mirroring can be related to passing, in the idea of being treated by others in societal contexts in gender affirming ways. This idea of mirroring was prevalent for all five participants. Mirroring is multifaceted and critical. Using gender-affirming language, including correct pronouns and names, can be an easy way to not only show respect but to also validate a transgender individual's identities. Gender-affirming actions occur daily, regardless of an individual's gender identity. A male-attributed individual holding a door or pulling out a chair for a female-attributed individual is gender affirming. Participant two said it best, “the first time you go out to dinner with a guy and he pulls out the chair at the table for you...it can be better than sex.” The power of these subtle daily experiences cannot be overstated.

Interestingly, there is a heteronormative assumption that is tied to daily mirroring activities. Being seen as a female, and consequently treated as such, also means the individual is now in the gender minority. There can be cognitive dissonance associated with both wanting to be seen as a woman or a female and then treated as the "weaker sex." The complexity of this seemingly simple experience must be addressed and validated by clinicians. A transgender woman, in being true to her gender identity, may need to also mourn the loss of the power she had in her male identification.

This can be seen in the Jewish community as well. Participant one talked about some of the male-oriented tasks she enjoyed prior to her transition. She reported finding outlets post transition, stimulating a similar sense of scholarship, but due to her female-identification, it could never be the same; whereas participant two was happy to embrace more of the female-oriented tasks. Clinicians must create space for the complex emotion of mourning the loss of privilege while also being able to embrace the excitement of new roles.

Picture of Health?

Faulkner and Hecht (2011) talked about "bifurcated rather than integrated" transgender identities (p. 833), perhaps emphasizing that the integration of identities is ideal. Well-intentioned professionals lacking experience and training with these populations rely on prescriptive stage models. Oftentimes clinicians emphasize that a healthy individual is an integrated individual. What if this was untrue? Here, there are examples of five different ways to structure intersecting identities, some of which are integrated, some of which are not. Is it possible for clinicians to recognize and validate the potential for irreconcilable differences between identity statuses? Clinicians may then be freed to validate the sometimes-necessary compartmentalization of identities, without it being pathological. Resiliency is the ability to hold,

integrate, compartmentalize, and selectively enact competing identities. The survival of the individual may depend on it.

In the example of this study, fundamentally for all participants, once they identified as Jewish, it was the Jewish identity that was maintained. It may have changed and shifted over time or was called into question in relation to gender awareness and seeing "truth," but ultimately, regardless of where the identification landed on the spectrum, it was still on the Jewish spectrum. Initially, it appeared that finding a way to make the individual's gender identity fit within the context of the existing Jewish identity was a process that the participants shared. For some participants, this worked and not much distress was experienced. For others, their experience of gender awareness was traumatic in the face of how they held their Jewish selves. One participant indicated being very much a work in progress of how her love of her Orthodox identity would fit in the context of her gender identity, while being unsupported externally by that very community. This is an important point in attempting to understand the layering and interaction effects of these complex identities.

Limitations

With five participants, this study does not purport to reflect the larger transgender Jewish population. The goal of the research is to begin to lay the foundation in some of the ways transgender Jewish women navigate their overlapping identities, providing clinicians with insight regarding topics to discuss and ways to support and validate their unique identities. The goal of the study was not to attempt to make generalizations about the population as a whole. In attaining a large sample size, the risk of losing the narrative depth and detail becomes much greater. The depth of detail and honesty of the participants is the strength of this study.

Gaining a sample of a population that generally faces such a large amount of stigma, violence, and a lack of understanding would not have occurred without a trusted member of the community "vouching" for the intentions of the researcher. Word of mouth is a powerful tool, but ultimately leads to a sampling bias. The fact that the sample identified themselves as educated, Caucasian, and either currently or formerly as middle class may also be a sampling bias.

Further Research

There is much more research to be completed on holding seemingly conflicting identities. Examining transgender Jewish identities from a resiliency rather than a pathological standpoint is a good place to begin. Moving forward, research needs to individually look at men who identify as transgender and Jewish, as well as individuals identifying as gender queer and Jewish. Eventually, research comparing the experience of transgender Jewish men, transgender Jewish women, and Jewish individuals who identify as genderqueer would be hugely beneficial to aiding the de-stigmatization of these clearly marginalized groups.

It is important to be aware of the potential difficulty of accessing a Jewish transgender population. A potential researcher may need an "in," a gatekeeper, or respected community member to vouch for the validity of the researcher's intentions. Considering the violence, discrimination, and microaggressions that this marginalized population experiences, being protective or wary of outsiders is unsurprising. Additionally, the religious affiliation of the investigator may be inquired about. In the context of this study, before the interviews began, each participant asked about the interviewer's religious identification and her own Jewish identification. It appears as though the researcher's identification as Jewish herself, as well as being vouched for by a trusted community member, laid a foundation for trust.

Clinical Implications

Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided an incredibly useful framework to discuss the multiple facets to conceptualizing a transgender Jewish woman, not from a pathological, but rather a resiliency, perspective. Clinically, it can provide support and awareness to the intersections of identities that clinicians need to be aware of, as well as ways clinicians can be sure that they are being inclusive of transgender Jewish women. Psychotherapeutically there can be ramifications at all levels of the ecological spheres. Clinicians need to examine their own closely held unconscious beliefs on gender [American Psychological Association Joint Task Force of APA Divisions 17 (Counseling Psychology) and 45 (The Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues), 2002].

The microsystem is the bidirectional sphere closest to the individual, and can include interactions with family, friends, co-worker, or peers. When working with a transgender Jewish woman, clinicians should thoroughly address her interaction with both her family of origin as well as with any partner or child, and her interaction with her own Judaism, as well as the interaction between her Judaism and her family's Judaism. This three-prong question approach could also be used to address her support systems as well, including friends, co-workers, or peers. It would be important to assess the individual's degree of involvement in the Jewish community. The degree of religiosity, traditionalism, and meaning-making would be quite important to explore in the context of her intersecting identities. In other words, at this point in time, how is she making sense of things? It is important to emphasize the dynamic nature of not just identity development, but of the interactions between her identities.

The mesosystem involves connections between aspects of the microsystem. Here it would be beneficial to inquire about how she has been received contextually by her supports. How did

the general temple community or workplace perceive her, beyond those with whom she personally interacts? Have rumors or misinformation appeared?

The exosystem refers to an individual's larger social system. Community-based social supports are vital in both a Jewish and transgender identity. Has the individual interacted with any of these agencies? What was their experience? Have they visited a medical doctor? How has their experience with institutional sensitivity—in relation to bureaucracy, name change, or being mis-gendered—been? As reviewed previously, the importance for validation on this level is staggering. Is there space on the institutional paperwork for the individual's gender? Are there boxes to check for transgender? Or, ideally, is there space for an individual to write in their own gender? Are there policies in place for understanding the importance of correct name and pronoun usage? Is the general staff trained to understand the importance of being aware of the subtle intricacies of transgender Jewish inclusivity?

The macrosystem is the sphere where cultural norms and values are addressed, and like the other spheres, affect the spheres that came before it. What cultural messages are being delivered? Not just in the context of the individual's culture, but also, what cultural messages the clinician is sending. What are the emphasized values? What loss or gain of values has been experienced? How is this handled? The chronosystem introduces a temporal facet to the ecological structure. Here the context of change can be discussed. What has been her experience over time when experiencing changes of viability, changes in law, or changes in perceptions of Jewishness?

Even with its small sample size, this study supports and validates the idea that there is no one right way to be a transgender Jewish woman. This validates that there is no normative transgender narrative, no one developmental pathway resulting in the often unrealistic notion of

an integrated individual. Identities are fluid. At various points in the life cycle, one aspect of an identity may be more or less fluid, but that does not mean that this aspect is done growing and changing. As clinicians, this requires us to do the work of figuring out the unique intersection of our client's transgender Jewish identity. This narrative perspective equally makes our work more difficult and also clears space for the possibility of stimulating factors that sustain our clients in their unique worlds. People are like living mosaics, the identities that create the whole person can be broken, jagged, overlap, or have space between them. It is only by taking a step back that we can see the beauty in the colorful intersections.

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Appendix A

Interview Tool

1. I'd like to know a little bit more about your identity. Can you help me understand how you see yourself in the world?

2. Can you tell me about your experiences with those closest to you in regards to your Jewish and gender identity?

3. Can you tell me about your experiences of how your Jewish and gender identity impacted those around you?

4. Can you tell me about your experiences of being able to utilize, or interact with, your community?

5. Can you tell me about the cultural values and customs pertaining to your Jewish and gender identity?

6. Can you tell me about any significant events that deeply affected you relating to your Jewish and gender identity?

7. Can you tell me anything else that has been of great importance to you in navigating the waters of identifying as both Jewish and a transgender woman?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Title: Is the Mechitza Permeable? An Exploratory Study on Navigating Jewish and Transgender Identities

Investigators: Nicole Thalheimer, M.A.

We are asking you to participate in a research study. Please take your time to read the information below and feel free to ask any questions before agreeing to participate.

Purpose: Holding both a transgender and a Jewish identity can come with a plethora of stigma and challenges. The current review of literature yielded no empirical studies that examine the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender women and Jewish and their interactions. This study will discern common themes amongst the diversity of experiences in holding both transgender woman and Jewish identities. Familial interactions will be looked at as a possible supportive or mediating factor.

Procedures: You will engage in a semi-structured, 60- to 90-minute qualitative interview conducted by the primary investigator.

Risks to Participation: Participation in the study is expected to contain minimal risk. You may be asked difficult personal questions, which may cause difficult memories to surface. Upon the completion of the interview, the researcher will be available to address any lingering questions you may have. You will be given the web address of the research so that you are able to review the results, if you desire. If requested, a relevant referral list will be offered to you to address any concerns that may arise during the interview. The list will contain resources competent in working with these populations.

Benefits to Participants: There are no direct benefits to participants, however the study will offer a chance for you to share your story and reflect on how you construct and hold your intersecting identities. Your participation in this study might help society in general, specifically the psychologically community, in reducing stigma and increasing visibility of your marginalized population. You will not be directly compensated for participation in the study, but your participation will result in a $5 donation to Keshet, an LGBT Jewish organization (http://www.keshetonline.org/).

Alternatives to Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from study participation at any time without any penalty, and you have the right to rescind your data.

Confidentiality: You will be assigned a unique identification number. Your name will not be recorded or attached to this research. The consent form will be kept separately from the data. The

data (recorded interview) will not contain identifying information. You will verbally consent on the recording. Interviews will be recorded on a hand-held recorder, which, when not on the interviewer's person, will be locked away. The data will be stored on an encrypted external hard drive. Once the study is complete, per APA guidelines, the research materials will be kept for a minimum of five years. After this time period, the consent forms will be shredded and the external hard drive will be reformatted and wiped clean.

Questions/Concerns: Please contact Nicole Thalheimer, at 773-644-1328 or nat3861@ego.thechicagoschooledu, or Dr. Braden Berkey, dissertation chair, at 312-467-2351 or bberkey@thechicagoschool.edu with any participation related questions. If you have questions concerning your rights in this research study you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of subjects in research project. You may reach the IRB office Monday-Friday by calling 312.467.2343 or writing: Institutional Review Board, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 325 N. Wells, Chicago, Illinois, 60654.

Appendix C

Themes Across Participants

Major Themes	Minor Themes
Family (spouse, parent, or sibling) Interactions	Interactions with Israel
Dynamics of Sexual Orientation	Naming and Language
Professional Help and Bureaucratic Red Tape	Not Fitting In
Stealth and Disclosure of Transgender Identity	Reaction of Children
Education	
What Does It Mean To Transition?	
Changes to Community Interactions	
Transgender Jewish Interactions	

Appendix D

Status of Transsexuals

Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly

YD 336.2003

Status Of Transsexuals[1]

RABBI MAYER E. RABINOWITZ

This paper was approved by the CJLS on December 3, 2003, by a vote of ten in favor, 2 oppossed, and 8 abstentions (10-2-8). Voting in favor: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Elliot N. Dorff, Paul Drazen, Robert Fine, Vernon H. Kurtz, Aaron Mackler, Hillel Norry, Paul Plotkin, Mayer Rabinowitz, and Elie Kaplan Spitz. Voting against: Rabbis Baruch Frydman-Kohl and Joseph Prouser. Abstaining: Rabbis Pamela Barmash, Jerome Epstein, Myron S. Geller, Daniel Nevins, Avram Israel Reisner, Joel Rembaum, Joel Roth, and Gordon Tucker.

שאלה

What is the sexual status of a person who has undergone SRS? Can SRS redefine the basic status of male and female?

תשובה

In order to discuss these issues certain terms and procedures must be defined so that the exact nature of what is being discussed is clear.[2]

- A *transsexual* is a transgendered person who wants to change his/her sex and gender and to live permanently in a new sex and gender status.
- *Gender Dysphoria* is the clinical term for transgenderism. The favored diagnostic term is *Gender Identity Disorder* (GID).
- *MTF* and *FTM* indicates the direction of the desired change and of the transition to accomplish it.
- *Transition* is the process of changing sex and gender role and also the time period in which the change occurs. It usually begins with the decision to change gender and ends with SRS.
- *Full-time* or *Real Life Experience* describes the situation of a person who is cross living "full time" in the desired gender status, professionally, socially and privately. It is a prerequisite for SRS according to the Standards of Care.
- *Harry S. Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders (SOC)* is the document that outlines the medical, psychological and psychiatric standards for working with transsexuals. Major points include recommendations of:
  1) three months of psycotherapy or real life experience before being recommended for hormonal therapy for either MTF or FTM person, or for breast sugery in FTM persons;
  2) one year of hormone treatment before being recommended for genital surgery;
  3) one year of real life experience before being recommended for genital surgery; and
  4) two psychological evaluations and a diagnosis of gender identity disorder before being recommended for genital surgery.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

• *Cross Dressing* refers to people who dress in clothes appropriate to the opposite gender. (An example this would be during their full time or real life experience prior to hormonal or surgical transformations.) Usually these people have no interest in changing gender.
• *Hormone Treatment* has major effects: breasts and hips for MTF persons; FTM persons will develop a lower voice, and facial and body hair. These effects are not reversible.[3] Significant side effects of long term usage include sterility and impotence for genetic males. Hormone therapy is necessary for transition, and is not without risk.[4]
• *Sex Reassignment Surgery* (SRS) is the term for surgery which changes sex status. It is sometimes also referred to as gender confirmation surgery. FTM persons have bilateral mastectomy and chest reconstruction, and a hysterectomy and salpingo-oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries and fallopian tubes.)[5] MTF persons will have cosmetic surgery to feminize the appearance, rhinoplasty, tracheа shave and breast implants, penectomy, orchiectomy (removal of the testes), and vaginoplasty.[6] In some cases SRS will be performed on people who will genetically remain the same as before surgery, and in other cases the surgery will match the genetic make up of the patient.
• *Non Genital Transsexual Surgery* refers to corrective or reconciliation surgery without a vaginoplasty for MTF or metiodioplasty or phalloplasty for FTM.

Halakhic Issues

Due to the nature of the subject matter there are not too many sources that deal with SRS. The basic text dealing with orchiectomy is:

ומעוך וכתות ונתוק וכרות לא תקריבו לה' ובארצכם לא תעשו.[7]

> You shall not offer to the Lord anything [with its testes] bruised or crushed or torn or cut. You shall have no such practice in your own land.

The Talmud states:

והתניא מניין לסירוס באדם שהוא אסור ת"ל ובארצכם לא תעשו בכם לא תעשו.[8]

> Surely it has been taught: How do we know that castration of a man is prohibited? From the verse "nor should you do this in your land." [This means] you should not do [thus] to yourselves.

This law is codified as follows:

אסור להפסיד איברי זרע בין באדם בין בבהמה...וענין הכתוב לא יעשה זאת בישראל בין בגופן בין בגוף אחרים וכל המסרס לוקה מן התורה בכל מקום.[9]

> It is forbidden to remove the genitals both from a human and from an animal...and the meaning of the verse is that it should not be done in Israel whether it is on their bodies or on the bodies of others, and anyone who does castration anywhere is biblically liable for flogging.

ובשלשה איברין אפשר שיפסל הזכר בגיד ובביצים ובשבילין שבהן תתבשל שכבת זרע והן נקראו חוטי ביצים.[10]

> And in three organs it is possible for a man to be invalid to marry if they are removed, the penis, testicles and the tubes in which the semen is ripened, and they are called the testicle tubes.

This ruling applies only to male castration. However the *Shulhan Arukh* states that sterilization of women (oophorectomy and hysterectomy) is also prohibited but not punishable.

> והמסרס את הנקבה בין באדם בין בשאר מינים פטור אבל אסור.[11]

> A person who sterilizes a female human being or any other species is not liable (for punishment) but it is prohibited.

A different issue that SRS raises is dressing in a manner that is associated with the opposite sex. The Torah states: לא יהיה כלי גבר על אשה ולא ילבש גבר שמלת אשה.[12] A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing.[13]

Additional issues that apply to operations in general as well as to SRS are: endangering oneself, חובל בעצמך, by undergoing surgery and anesthesia; and changing that which has been created, איסור שינוי מעשה בראשית.[14]

Once a person has undergone SRS additional halakhic issues are raised. What is the status of a marriage in which one spouse has undergone SRS? If the case is that of a MTF person, is a *get* necessary? Can a transsexual get married since the operation makes the person sterile? Is circumcision required for FTM persons? What gender specific *mitzvot* should the transsexual perform or refrain from observing?

Rabbinic Sources

Rabbi Hananel is quoted by the Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Leviticus 18:22[15] as follows:

> ואמר רבינו חננאל ז"ל כי יש מי שמחדש בגופו כצורת בשר אשה וזה לא יתכן בתולדה וי*א אנדרוגינוס.

> And Rabbenu Hananel said that there is one who fashioned something new in his body in the form of a woman and that is not naturally possible and some say it is an androgynous.

Rabbi Avraham Hirsch uses this as a proof that an MTF person is still considered a male, and therefore sexual intercourse with a male would be a violation of the biblical prohibition of homosexuality despite the presence of apparently female sexual organs.[16] Thus according to Rabbenu Hananel SRS can not change sex status.[17]

Rabbi Yosef Pelaggi[18] concludes that no divorce is necessary for the dissolution of a marriage contracted prior to SRS.

> בא שאלה אחת...אם צריך גט כדת משה וישראל אם יארע כזאת והוא בראובן שנשא אשה א' בתולה כאחת בנות ישראל והיה עמה כדרך איש ואשה ואחר כמה שנים קרה לה מקרה שנשתנית מנקבה לזכר בכל מכל כל מהו הדין לזאת שהיתה נקבה ואשת איש ונעשית זכר אם צריך ראובן זה לגרשה בגט כדת משה

וישראל כיון שהיתה אשתו אשת איש או דילמא אינו צריך כיון שאיננה אשה כי אם איש...ובעניין שאלתנו נראה דלא צריך גט דזכר הוא עתה ולא אשה דהרי נוסח הגט הוא דאיש נותן גט לאשתו וכותב אנת אנתתי ולא יש לפנינו אתתא כי אם גבר איש...וגם כותב בגט הרי את מותרת לכל אדם והרי אינה אשה שראויה ומותרת לכל אדם...על כל פנים נראה לע"ד דאינו צריך ראובן ליתן גט לאשתו שנעשית איש גמור ושלם.

A question came if a *get* is necessary if this should happen, namely, Reuven married a woman in the manner that Jewish women get married, and he had intercourse with her as men and women do, and after a number of years something occurred to her and she changed from a woman to a man in all ways. What is the law concerning this woman who was a woman and a married woman, and then became a man? Does Reuven have to divorce her with a *get* in accordance with Jewish Law since she was his wife, a married woman, or perhaps he doesn't have to give her a *get* since she isn't a married woman but a man...In regard to our question it seems that a *get* is not necessary for he is a man now and not a woman. The *get* procedure is that the man gives a get to his wife and writes in the *get* "you my wife," and we have no woman before us but rather a man...and he also writes in the *get* "you are permitted to any man" and she is not a woman who is permitted to any man...therefore in my humble opinion it seems that Reuven does not have to give a *get* to his wife who became a complete man.

Rabbi Pelaggi states that this woman has changed her sex status and has become a male. This person is no longer Reuven's wife and therefore a get is not necessary since the language of the get would not apply to a male. Therefore sex change does change the sex status of the person.[19]

In Besamim Rosh[20] a question is raised concerning a husband who had his genitalia removed, whether he needs to divorce his wife in order to dissolve the marriage, or whether a *get* is unnecessary since a person with a new sex status has appeared. No resolution of this question is reached. However the author asserts that once the male sexual organs have been removed the person is no longer competent to contract a valid marriage as a male. Sex status, in regard to marriage depends entirely upon the presence of male genitalia.

אשר שאלתני מאיש שנחתך הגיד והביצים שלו לגמרי ונשא אשה והיא לא ידעה אי הוי קידושיו קידושין...וסברתך דאי ידעה דהכי ודאי לא מקדשה נפשה שלא יהיה לv כלל חיבת ביאה ומספר כתובה נלמד ומיעל לותיכי...תשובה עד שאתה שואלני אם היא בסתם מתקדשת בכך שואלני אם שניהם רוצים אפשר שאין אשה מתקדשת אלא למי שיש לו זכרות וההוא כאשה דמי שאין האשה נושא אשה אפילו ברצונה ובקידושין שאין מסורים לביאה כאלו אפילו אביי מודה...אבל שדומה להתיר בלא גט אם נעשה זה לאחר נישואי' ולומר דגוף חדש אתי לכאן וכאשה דמי זה קשה בעיני ואין ולאו רפי' בידי.

That which you asked me about a man whose his genitalia have been removed, and he married a woman who didn't know that he had lost his genitalia, is this betrothal valid...and your reasoning that she would not agree to be betrothed if there would be no sexual intercourse, and we can derive this from the *ketubah* which states we will have marital relations...Answer: You are asking if she would agree to be betrothed in such a situation, I ask if they both agreed. Perhaps a

woman will not betroth herself except to a person who has male genitalia, and this man is similar to a woman, and a woman can not marry a woman even if she agrees, and in a case of *qiddushin* that can not lead to sexual intercourse even Abayee agrees (that it isn't valid)...but those who wish to permit her to marry without a *get* if this happened after the marriage saying that this is a new person, and is similar to a woman, yes and no, I am undecided.

The Trumat Hadeshen doesn't require a *get* from Elijah's widow since his status changed from human to angel, and the wife of an angel is not prohibited to others.[21]

אשת אליהו הנביא ז*ל או אשת ריב"ל אם יכולים לינשא לאיש אחר נפקא מינה לדורות גם כן אם יזכה אחד כמו הם ...תמיהני טובא למה טרחת לשאול שאלה כזאת הלא ידעת דאיתא בפרק תינוקות די"ב דברים שאלו אנשי אלכסנדריא את ר' יהושע בן חנניא' ובהן שלשה דברים בורות. אשתו של לוט מהו שתטמא' בן השונמית מהו שיטמא מתים לעתיד לבא כו' ופשטא להן מת מטמא ואין נציב מלח מטמא' מת מטמא ואין החיים מטמאין' אף על פי שודאי אשתו של לוט מתה' אלא שנהפכה לגוף אחר' ובן השונמית היה מת אלא חזר ויחי אף על פי כן אמר שאין מטמאין. הכא נמי יל אשת רעהו אסורה ולא אשת מלאך' שכולן רוחני ולא גופני.

The wife of Elijah the prophet of blessed memory, or the wife of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, are they permitted to remarry? The practical application of this question is for the future if someone should merit as they did...I am really bewildered why you bothered to ask this question, surely you know that in Chapter Tinoket (TB Niddah 70b) the Alexandrians asked Rabbi Yehosua ben Hananya 12 questions, among them three that were nonsense. Does Lot's wife cause ritual defilement, and does the son of the Shunamite woman cause ritual defilement in the future etc? It was clear to them that a dead body causes ritual defilement and a pillar of salt does not, and that a dead person causes ritual defilement but a live person does not. Even though it is clear that Lot's wife died, nevertheless she changed into a different thing, and the Shunamite's son died but he was return to the living, even so he said that they do not defile. Similarly here we say a man's wife is prohibited to others and not the wife of an angel who is non corporeal.

The Minhat Hinukh[22] is of the opinion that even a marriage that was contracted legally is automatically annulled if the husband could no longer betroth the woman. Therefore a *get* is not required.

וגם ניחא לי דברי בעל תרומת הדשן שכת' דאשת אליהו ואשת ריב"ל מותרת דלא נקראת אשת איש רק מלאך ולכאורה נהי דלא תפסי קידושין ממלאך דלא נקרא איש מכל מקום אם היה בה קידושין גמורין היאך נפקעין הלא למיתת הבעל צריכין ילפותא בקידושין שיתיר ובזה ניחא כיון דאין תופסין קידושין אם כן ממילא פקעו הקידושין ואין להאריך.

And the approach of the Trumat Hadeshen makes sense to me. He wrote that the wife of Elijah and the wife of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi are permitted to marry others since they are not wives of men but rather wives of angels. Apparently,

granted that betrothal by an angel is invalid, for he is not a man, nevertheless if she was fully betrothed how could it be annulled, since the release of a betrothed woman to remarry in a case where the husband died requires a derivation (and is not automatically assumed)? In this case it is fine since betrothal has no effect therefore the betrothal of itself is annulled, and there is no need to go into detail.

Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg[23] is of the opinion that a get is not necessary for the dissolution of marriage contracted prior to SRS.

והספק האמור בנהפכה לאיש אם צריכה גט יש להחילו גם על בלהיפך היכא שהאיש נהפך לאשה (כפי שנתפרסם מעשה כזה לפני כמה שנים שקרה בכזאת במדינה גדולה באירופה) אם אשתו זקוקה לגט פטורין ממנו' וכן להחיל ע"ז גם הספיקות .. באם שיארע ששוב יהפך לאיש. ובהרהורי דברים עולה בדעתי לדמות למה שמצינו בתרומת הדשן בפסקים ס' ק"ב שכותב לחקור על אשת אליהו הנביא ז"ל או אשת ריבו"ל אם יכולים לינשא לאיש אחר...ופשיט דאשת רעהו אסור ולא אשת מלאך שכולו רוחני ולא גופני ע"ש...ואם כן ה"ב בנידונינו יש לומר דאשת רעהו אסורה ולא אשת אשה. ואע"פ שכבר התחיל וחל האישות שהיתה אשת רעהו מכל מקום נפקעין מאליהן הקידושין בהיות דנעשית שוב אשת אשה.

...ויש להוסיף להסביר את זה ביותר על פי מה שהמנחת חינוך במצוה ר"ג ...דכל היכי דלא תפסו בה קדושין אם נעשה דבר זה תחת בעלה אינו צריך גט רק נפקא הקידושין ממילא ...ואם כן דון מינה גם לנידוננו שי"ל גם כן בכזאת דהא כשם דלא תפסו קדושין ממלאך כמו כן לא תפסי נמי קדושין מאשה ומכיון שכעת בעלה של זו נהפך לאשה לא תפסי כעת קדושין ממנו אם כן ממילא נפקעו הקדושין הקודמין מאליהן.

The doubt about a woman who has become a man if she needs a *get,* should effect the opposite, namely, where the man has become a woman (as the case that became famous a couple of years ago that took place in Europe) if his wife requires a *get* from him, and would also effect the doubts...if the woman changed back to a man. In contemplating these matters it occurs to me to compare this to what is found in Trumat Hadeshen, 102, where he writes to investigate if Elijah's wife or the wife of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi can marry another man...and he answers that a man's wife (is prohibited) but not the wife of an angel who is not corporeal, see there...and therefore the same would apply in our case, it is possible to say that a man's wife is prohibited and not the wife of a woman. And even though that it began as a case where she was a man's wife nevertheless the betrothal is in itself annulled because she became a woman's wife.

And it can be explained even more so on the basis of what is written in the Minhat Hinukh 203...that in all cases where the betrothal can not and do not have validity if this matter took place while she is married to her husband there is no need for a *get* because the betrothal is annulled in and of itself...and therefore derive from that for our case that it is possible to say the same in our case, that just as *qiddushin* by an angel is invalid, similarly *qiddushin* by a woman is invalid. And since her husband has become a woman, *qiddushin* at present from him would be invalid, therefore the prior *qiddushin* (before SRS) is in and of itself annulled.

His argument is based on the fact that this person no longer can contract a marriage as a male. The emergence of such a condition terminates any existing marriage. In effect undergoing SRS transforms the sex status of the person. Rabbi Waldenberg is following the position of Rabbi Pelaggi. Rabbi Waldenberg compares this case to the removal of the prophet Elijah from the earth. Just as the wife of a person who has been removed from the earth has had her marriage terminated , so too does a wife of a person who has had his sex status changed. Rabbi Waldenberg bases his position on the position taken by the Minhat Hinukh.[24] Rabbi Waldenberg is of the opinion that SRS does change the sex status.

Rabbi Waldenberg also permitted the removal of male genitalia of an hermaphrodite. This person was to be considered a female even though genetically the person was a male. What matters most are the external genitalia.[25]

ברצוני לשאול שאלה הלכתית שהתעוררה אצלי במשך עבודתי בבית החולים. השאלה קשורה בענינו של תינוק אשר נולד לפני יותר משנה. בלידה אי אפשר היה לקבוע בבירור את מינו של היילוד. המראה החיצוני נראה היה כנקבה. בבדיקה: האברים המיניים החיצוניים נראו כאצל נקבה...בתוך אחת השפות היה גוש בצורת אשך. בוצעו בדיקות...של תאי הגוף...הבדיקות העלו תאי זכר...ולא נמצאו אברי מין פנימיים...ונמצא כי גוש זה אכן היה אשך ...בסכום המדובר ביילוד שמבחינה חיצונית נראה כנקבה אך למעשה הינו גבר. מבחינה ניתוחית קל יותר לשנות לנקבה למרות שלא תוכל להרות...אך כדי שהיילוד זה יהיה נקבה יש צורך לנתח ולכרות את האשך היחיד הקיים כדי למנוע פעילות הורמונלית זכרית שתפריע להתפתחותה של נקבה. שאלתי היא: א. האם בכלל מותר להפוך את מין היילוד שמבחינה גנטית הינו זכר' לנקבה. ב. האם מותר במקרה שלפנינו לכרות את האשך היחיד ולהפוך לנקבה...

לפי דעתי סוג היצור הנולד שעליו מוסב שאלתו גם אילו ישאירו אותו כפי שהוא יהא דינו כנקבה' רצוני לומר' שלא יהא עליו אפילו דין אנדרוגיניס על השלוכותיו כי סימני אנדרוגינוס...שיש לו במציאות אבר זכרות ואבר נקבות... והילוד דנן כפי שתיאר אותו hc,fnc הרי למעשה האברים המיניים החיצוניים נראים אצלו כאצל נקבה' ואין לו שום סימן חיצוני מאבר זכרות' ורק הבדיקות המיוחדות שבוצעו בו הראו כי נמצאים בפנימיות גופו תאי זכר' ולכן דעתי הוא כנידון זה שגם אם נניחהו כפי שהוא דינו יהא כדין נקבה' כי האברים **החיצוניים הנראים לעין הוא הקובע בהלכה**... ולכן ברור שרק האברים הממשיים החיצוניים המשונים בין זכר לנקבה המה הקובעים בזה למעשה. בהיות כן נראה לפשוט בנידון השאלה שמותר איפוא לנתח ילוד זה ולהפכו על ידי כך לנקבה גם בפנימיות התפתחותו. ...ואם מותר לכרות האשך היחיד הזה כדי למנוע על ידי כן פעילות הורמונלית זכרית שתפריע להתפתחותה של נקבה ולא יעברו בזה על איסור סירוס...נראה דמותר לעשות זאת ולא יעברו על איסור סירוס כלל' וזאת משתי בחינות' האחת בהיות ואין לו אברי זכרות חוץ מגוש זה בצורת אשך ואם כן אינו בסוג זכר כלל...והשנית ...דאינו ראוי להוליד אינו חייב על סירוסו ושאפשר דאף איסור אין כאן....על כל פנים ...דעתי נוטה שמותר לבצע זאת הן באופן כללי להפוך את המין היילוד שמבחינה גנטית הינו זכר' לנקבה. וגם ...שמותר לכרות את האשך היחיד ולהפוך לנקבה הילוד אשר מבחינה חיצונית כבר נראה כנקבה.

I would like to ask a halakhic question about a case that occurred in my work at the hospital.The question is about a child that was born over a year ago. At birth it was impossible to determine with any certitude the gender of the child. The outward signs were female...the tests showed that the external genitalia were

those similar to a female...but in one of the lips of the vagina there was a lump that was shaped like a testicle. The body cells were tested and the results showed male cells...and no internal sex organs were found...and the growth indeed turned out to be a testicle. In summation we are dealing with a child who has the outward signs of a female but in reality is a male.

From a surgical point of view it is easier to change the child into a female even though she will be sterile...but in order to do so it is necessary to remove the existing testicle in order to prevent the functioning of male hormones so that they will not interfere with her physical maturation. My question is: A) Is it permissible to change the gender of this child who genetically is a male, to a female B) In our case is it permitted to remove the one testicle and to make the child a female?

In my view the type of child that is the subject of your questions, even if you were to leave him as he is, is considered to be a female. That is to say, that he isn't to be considered even as an androgynous with the implications thereof, for the signs of an androgynous is that he has male and female genitalia, and the child we are discussing, as described in your letter, in reality the external genitalia look like those of a female, and he has no external sign of a male genitalia, and it is only the special tests that were conducted on him that showed that he only had internal male cells, therefore in my opinion in this case that even if we were to do nothing and leave the child "as is" the child would be considered a female . That is because the external genitalia that are visible are the ones that determine gender for halakhah...Therefore it is clear that only the actual external genitalia that are different for males and females determine the gender as far as *halakhah* is concerned. This being the case the answer to your question is that it is permissible therefore to operate on this child and to change him thereby to a female as well as in his internal development.

...As far as the question about the permissibility to remove the testicle in order to prevent male hormonal influence in her female development and if this violates the prohibition against castration...it seems that it is permissible to do so, and there will be no transgressing of the prohibition against castration at all for two reasons. The first is since the only male genitalia he has is a lump in the form of a testicle, therefore he is not a male at all.The second is that since he is already sterile one is not liable for castrating him, and possibly there is no prohibition at all in this case...My position is that it is permissible to do this in general to change the gender of the child that is genetically a male to a female...and it is permissible to remove the testicle and to change to a female a child who externally already looks like a female.

Rabbi M. Tendler and Dr. F. Rosner[26] claim that SRS has no effect on sex status. According to them an MTF person could no longer enter a marriage as a male due to his inability to function sexually as a male, however this person can not enter a marriage as a female.

There is some discussion as to whether the prohibition of castration applies to one who can not procreate.[27] Rabbi Michael Broyde addresses SRS in an appendix to an article on *The Establishment of Maternity and Paternity in Jewish and American Law* and states that it is prohibited and there is no new sex status.[28]

There are a number of Reform Responsa dealing with SRS and they arrive at different conclu-

sions. Some prohibit SRS,[29] and others permit it.[30] Another deals with the question of a marriage between a man and an MTF person whose new sex status has been recognized by the state. After discussing the two polar positions found in our sources, i.e. is it a same- sex marriage or does the person have a new sex status, the issue of marrying a sterile woman is raised,.namely may one marry an *ailonit*. The answer given is: ...it would be wise to let the decision be based upon the reaction of the community to such a marriage. The issuance of a marriage license would be the determining factor.[31] The question of conversion and marriage after SRS is also discussed,.[32] and permission to marry after SRS even though one partner is sterile.[33]

It is clear from the sources that there are two polar positions concerning SRS. One claims that SRS has no effect on the sex status of the person, or in other words Halakhah does not accept the possibility of changing ones sex status. The other position is that a change in the sex status of the person can and does take place, since the external genitalia determine the gender.

What Is the sexual status of one who undergoes SRS?

Various authorities have dealt with SRS from these two positions on how to deal and treat those who have undergone SRS. According to some, the sex status will be determined by the surgery. Therefore an MTF person would be a female, and a FTM person would be a male. According to other authorities the sex status can not be changed, therefore those who have undergone SRS are halakhically the same as before the surgery.

The position that recognizes a change in sex status is based on the concept that one's sex status is determined by the external genitalia. This has been forcefully advocated by Rabbi Waldenberg,[34] especially in his responsum concerning the case where it was impossible to determine the sex of a new born. Even though tests showed the presence of male cells in the child, Rabbi Waldenberg decided that since the external signs indicated that the child was a female, it is permitted to remove a testicle, and to help the child mature as a female. Most of the other authorities quoted above recognize that the person who has undergone SRS is in fact a member of the new sex, and they accept this. They deal with the question of the necessity of a *get* but take for granted that there has been a sex change. These arguments are compelling and therefore we should recognize the new sex status of the person who has had SRS.[35]

The argument that is based on the statement of Rabbenu Hananel, that sex change is naturally impossible, may have been true in his time. It certainly is possible today. His position could very well change if he saw the results of hormonal and surgical treatment. Therefore to base one's position on such grounds seems implausible.

Those who claim that we can not change God's creation are closing their eyes to conversion, and to transplants as well as many other medical procedures which in fact do change God's creation. If we were to claim that sex change is prohibited on these grounds, we would have to prohibit many medical procedures as well.

Halakhah has always been macroscopic and not microscopic. Therefore, external organs determine the sexual status of a person. Genetic information may be helpful but at present are not considered the determining factor. The same is true as far as DNA is concerned in halakhic issues.

The position of Rabbi Waldenberg on this issue best fits the halakhic system, and therefore is the acceptable one for us.

What would be the status of those who do not undergo full SRS? This would refer to patients suffering from gender dysphoria who undergo hormonal treatment and partial surgery but do not have a metoidoplasty or phalloplasty for a FTM person or vaginoplasty for a MTF person. Based on the positions of those who do recognize sex change, that change has not taken place since the external genitalia are those of the original sex. Therefore they have begun the process but have not completed it

and would not be recognized as having changed their sex status. It would be similar to a potential convert who has completed the process for conversion except for *tevillah*. That person is still in the process and therefore their status has not changed. The same applies to those who have not had genital SRS.

Based on the arguments presented by many of the authorities mentioned above,[36] in cases where a couple was married and one spouse has had complete SRS, a *get* would not be required,[37] nor can it be given after SRS has been completed. A MTF person would be a female and can not give a *get*, and an FTM person can not receive a *get* since she is not a married woman (אשת איש). The *qiddushin* in these cases are annulled in and of itself due to the new status of the person. However since the process of transsexual change is a long one, we would recommend that a *get* be given before the process is completed in order to ease any doubts, and to make it acceptable to all. If a get is not given then we accept the automatic annulment of the *qiddushin* as explained in the sources quoted above.

The question of marrying someone who has had SRS revolves around the issue of marrying a sterile person, and the ability to get a civil marriage license. Many states[38] will amend a birth certificate or some other official document in order to recognize the new sex status. If the state doesn't recognize this change then a marriage license would not be issued because the state would consider it a same sex marriage which is prohibited at the present time.[39] However if the state accepts the sex change, then the marriage would be permitted.

The problem of marrying a sterile person is dependent on the knowledge and agreement of both parties. As stated in Besamim Rosh, [40] the agreement on the part of a woman to marry someone who is sterile would make the marriage valid. In addition the halakhah recognizes that sterile people whose sterility was בידי שמים , a heavenly act, are permitted to marry. Today many marriages take place where procreation is not part of the marriage and therefore we should permit one whose sex status has changed to marry.

An FTM person would not require a *hatafat dam brit*.[41] If the person would like to have *hatafat dam brit* we should permit it.[42]

The issue of a name has an odd twist. Names can be added according to Jewish Law, but there is no procedure for discarding a name. Since the person's sex has been changed and recognized and the person is no longer a member of the prior sex for which a name had been given, a מי שברך using the new name will be the ceremony through which the name will be bestowed. The old name will no longer be associated with this person. If the person was the child of a *kohen*, the person will still be the child of a *kohen*, the only change will be *bat kohen* or *ben kohen*. Once again this procedure will apply only to those who have a complete SRS.

Conclusions

1. Only those who have undergone full SRS (including phallosplasty/vaginoplasty) are to be considered as having changed their sex status, and recognized so by Jewish Law
2. A person who has undergone partial SRS is not deemed to have changed their sex status.
3. A brit or hatafat dam brit is not required for one who has had a phalloplasty.
4. A get is not necessary if one spouse undergoes SRS since the qiddushin are automatically annulled. However in the case of an MTF person a get should be given before the SRS is completed.
5. Recognition by the civil authorities of the new sex status is required in order to marry a person who has undergone SRS. This will prevent us from performing same sex marriages according to civil law.
6. A new name should be given to the person with a new sexual status by means of a me shebarach.

Appendix: Is SRS Permissible לכתחילה?

SRS can be justified on the following arguements which are based on treatment for a mental condition. However, for these arguments to be considered, reliable medical studies must verify that SRS is *letovat haholeh* - is beneficial for people suffering from gender dysphoria.

The major objection to SRS is the prohibition against סירוס, castration, which is a biblical prohibition, and sterilization which is also prohibited but not punishable.[43] It is considered a mutilation of the body and is clearly forbidden. While it is possible to argue that a male who has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of ורבו פרו, of procreation, is no longer obligated to perform that *mitzvah*,[44] and women are not obligated, nevertheless mutilation is prohibited. However according to some authorities, if the castration or sterilization caused by the removal of the sexual organs is due to disease or trauma, then it is considered to be a case of בידי שמים, a heavenly act, and the person is permitted to marry.[45]

It would seem that the people undergoing the long process of SRS as stated in the Standards Of Care,[46] are doing so because they are suffering from gender dysphoria, and SRS is treating the patient with gender dysphoria. Their pain and anguish is great and there is no doubt that they are suffering. This has led them to undergo the long and difficult procedures outlined in the standards of care. For them SRS is being done לטובת החולה, for the patient's betterment and health, and therefore would be permissible, just as it would be permissible to help treat a physical ailment.[47] We have permitted other procedures for mental ailments and have said that the mental illness is to be treated in the same way as a physical one.[48] Therefore SRS may be permissible and the prohibition against castration can be overridden in this case.

The same would apply to the question of חובל בעצמך, causing harm to oneself by undergoing an operation.

Hormonal treatment would also be permitted and would not transgress the prohibition of wearing the garments of the other sex or changing that which was created,[49] since it is a case of לטובתו, for the good of the patient, and בכל מתרפאין,[50] there are no restrictions on what type of medicine may be used to heal a person.

However due to the lack of studies about the long term effectiveness of SRS in dealing with gender identity disorder, we would recommend at this time that we counsel those who ask us for the halakhic opinion concerning this type of treatment, to consider the lack of sufficient studies that document the beneficial results of this treatment, and how this relates to our halakhic decisions. This in no way changes our conclusions concerning those people who have undergone SRS. They are to be considered as having changed their sex status as stated in the conclusions to this *teshuva*.[51]

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig for her help and guidance in writing this *teshuva*, Rabbi David Golinkin for his help with sources, Aaron H. Devor for comments and suggestions, and my students Tracy Nathan and Leonard Sharzer for their insights.

[2] The definitions of the terms are based on *The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders*, www.hbigda.org/soc.html, and input from Dr. Aaron H. Devor. Dr. Devor's articles on the subject can be found at web.uvic.ca.

[3] There are some hormonal treatments that are reversible. See the *Standards of Care* for a full description of which changes are reversible and which are not.

[4] See Version 6.0 of the SOC VIII. *Effects of Hormone Therapy in Adults*.

[5] Other procedures include vaginectomy, metoidioplasty, urethroplasty, placement of testicular prostheses and phalloplasty. Phalloplasty is usually not done at the same time as the hysterectomy and oophorectomy and may require several operations.

[6] The last three are usually done at the same time.

[7] ויקרא כב׳ כד.

[8] שבת קי׳ ע"ב.

[9] רמב"ם הלכות איסורי ביאה פט"ז׳ הל׳ י׳.

[10] שם׳ הלכה ג.

[11] שו"ע אה"ז סי׳ ה ס׳ יא.

[12] דברים כב׳ ה.

[13] See Rabbi Meir Amsel in Ha'Maor Kislev-Tevet 5733. He would extend the prohibition to all actions and behavior that is uniquely identified with the opposite sex and would include accordingly hormone treatment as well.

[14] See Rabbi Shalom Krauss in Ha'Maor Kislev Tevet 5733. He also includes additional prohibitions such as mixed species, לא תזרע כרמך כלאים, and grafting, הרכבה, and giving up the obligation to perform mitzvot such as tefilin for an MTF person.

[15] ואת זכר לא תשכב משכבי אשה. : Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman.

[16] Noam 5733, Volume 16.

[17] Sex refers to status based on genital markers and sexual refers to sexuality.

[18] Yosef et Ehav 3:5.

[19] For a different conclusion see J. David Bleich, Contemporary Halakhic Problems, Vol. I. pp. 100-105. See also Michael J. Broyde, "Sex Change Operations and Their Effect On Marital Status: A Brief Comparison" Appendix of The Establishment of Maternity and Paternity in Jewish and American Law. This is available at www.jlaw.com/articles/maternity_appendix.html.

[20] Teshuvot Besamim Rosh #340. This work is attributed to Rabbenu Asher but is of questionable authenticity. For a review of the history of the Besamim Rosh, see L. Jacobs Theology in the Responsa, pp. 347-52 (1975). While many would claim the Besamim Rosh can not serve as a valid precedent because it may be forged, nevertheless the arguements used in this work can certainly be applied to the issue we are discussing. This is a case of deciding if we should follow an authority, and in this case we do not know who the writer is, or the arguement, which is certainly available to us ,and we can judge it on the merits of the arguement.

[21] תרומת הדשן חלק ב סימן קב.

[22] Y. Babad, Minhat Hinukh 203.

[23] Tzitz Eliezer,X, no.25,chap.26, sec. 6.

[24] See above p. 6.

[25] Tzitz Eliezer XI, 78.

[26] Practical Modern Halakha 44 (1980).

[27] See Minchat Hinukh,ibid.

[28] See above note 19.

[29] Modern Reform Responsa,1971,pp. 128-133

[30] American Reform Responsa no.37 pp. 416-419 and Contemporary American Reform Responsa, 1987, no.199 pp. 293-296.

[31] Reform Responsa For Our Times, 1977 pp.196-200.

[32] Teshuvot For The Nineties,pp. 191-196.

[33] Contemporary American Reform Responsa ibid.

[34] See above p. 8.

[35] There are cases where the individual decides not to undergo genital surgery. For example those who decide to live a

celibate life. They will not undergo a metiodioplasty/phalloplasty or vaginoplasty, but will undergo all the other procedures. Some will argue that they should be considered as having their sex status changed. Others argue that the brain, more than the genes, reproductive organs or hormones, is the true sexual organ. Therefore phalloplasty or vaginoplasty should not be the determining factor.

My problem with these approaches is that it would become a case of having adjustable standards which make it difficult to follow-נתת דבריך לשיעורין. In addition Jewish Law has based gender on the genitals and not on the brain. If a position would be developed using non-genital evidence for determining the sexual status of a person, then this issue could be revisited.

[36] See above pp. 4-5.

[37] Some argue that a *get humra* should be given in order to take into consideration both positions.

[38] In a recent case in Virginia, a F2M sought to have his birth certificate amended. The Virginia Office of Vital Records refused to do so saying that because there was no phalloplasty surgery, this case did not meet Virginia's legal requirements. Lambada Legal Defense and Education Fund prepared a lawsuit, and the state Attorney General's office backed down and granted the birth certificate amendment. If this becomes the norm we will have to request information from the person in addition to the amended birth certificate. For information about civl legal developments see www.transgenderlaw.org.

[39] There have been some court cases that would allow same-sex marriage, and that will be determined by the state legislature who have been ordered to come up with legislation within 180 days. In Canada there are several jurisdictions in which same-sex marriage is legal.

[40] See above p.5.

[41] Medically there can be no circumcision.

[42] Even though we recognize that the phallic reconstruction is not a generative organ and is basically a tubular appendage that is a conduit for urine and has some prosthetic stiffening device to allow sexual penetration, we feel that if the individual wants to undergo a hatafat dam brit, he should be allowed to do so. The individual together with his Rabbi should develop some prayer or statement that would express his religious feelings now that his sex status has changed.

[43] See above pp. 2-3.

[44] TB Yebamot 61a.

[45] רמב"ם הלכות איסורי ביאה קט"ז הל"ט' טוש"ע אה"ע סי"ה ובב"ח שם ד"ה וס"ש רבינו ע"ש פרש"י' שו"ע אה"ע ס'ה ס'י.

[46] See above page 1 and note 1.

[47] For an article on recent books dealing with this see the New York Times, Tuesday October 29 2002, Health and Fitness section page F5. One of the books mentioned is How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States by Dr. Joanne Meyerowitz.
The number of studies about the effectiveness of SRS are very few and therefore it is hard to give figures about the benefits of the SRS, see HBIGDA Standards of Care section X. Surgery . But there are many documented cases of people who have "operated" on themselves because of this disorder.

[48] See the Responsa on abortion in Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement 1980-1985, pp3-37.

[49] See above note 13.

[50] TB Pesahim 25a.

[51] See page 12.

Appendix E

Inclusion and Acceptance of the Transgender and Bisexual Communities

Inclusion and Acceptance of the Transgender and Bisexual Communities

Adopted by the Executive Board of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism March, 2003

SUPPORT FOR THE INCLUSION AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE TRANSGENDER AND BISEXUAL COMMUNITIES

BACKGROUND

Throughout the Reform Movement's history, we have worked tirelessly to fight discrimination, support equality, and strengthen the rights of minorities and women. Similar to past systemic injustices that prevented a litany of minority communities from realizing equal rights, so too have the transgender and bisexual communities in North America been condemned to live as second-class citizens.

The transgender community has had an especially difficult experience in North America due to the community's unique needs which are overlooked or ignored by society. The barriers the transgender community faces have led to a high incidence of mental illness and an especially high suicide rate. Transgendered individuals are frequent victims of hate crimes and employment discrimination. Transgenderism remains a virtually unspoken and unaccepted element within our society; this has led to discrimination in health care and insurance coverage, access to public facilities, police, paramedic, and other emergency services and a variety of as yet fully unexplored legal issues ("Introduction," by Jamison Green to *Transgender Equality: A Handbook for Activists and Policy Makers*, by Paisley Currah and Shannon Minter, the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force).

The bisexual community has also suffered discrimination. Victims of workplace discrimination and hate crimes, bisexuals are consistently left unprotected by legislation created to protect America's minorities from xenophobia.

As currently defined by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, transgendered people are individuals of any sex whose identity or behavior is perceived to be gender atypical or falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. Biblical tradition teaches us that all human beings are created *b'tselem Elohim*--in the Divine image. As it says in Genesis 1:27, "And God created humans in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them." From this bedrock principle stems our commitment to defend any individual from the discrimination that arises from

ignorance, fear, insensitivity, or hatred. Knowing that this community is often singled out as victims of discriminatory violence and has a high suicide rate, we are reminded of the Torah's injunction, "do not stand idly while your neighbor bleeds" (Leviticus 19:16).

The Written Torah initially seems very exclusionary in this regard (see, for instance, Deuteronomy 23:2, which would exclude from the Jewish community one whose genitalia have been disfigured or removed). However, this position already was tempered by the time of Isaiah (56:3 ff.), and even more so by the rabbis of the Talmud, who argued that one's status as a Jew in such cases was not changed.