Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader

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Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and Jewish Masculinity

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As I reflect on my coming of age in New Jersey, I realize that I had always been in some sense more of a 'girl' than a 'boy.' A sissy who did not like sports, whose mother used to urge me, stop reading and go out and play, in fifth grade I went out for—ballet. (Of course I explained to the guys that it was a kind of sophisticated bodybuilding.) This in itself is rather a familiar story, a story of inexplicable gender dysphoria, but one that had for me, even then, a rather happy ending. I didn't think of myself so much as girlish but rather as Jewish.

I start with what I think is a widespread sensibility that being Jewish in our culture renders a boy effeminate. Rather than producing in me a desire to 'pess' and to become a 'man,' this sensibility resulted in my desire to remain a Jew, where being a sissy was all right. To be sure, this meant being marginal, and it has left me with a persistent sense of being on the outside of something, with my nose pressed to the glass looking in, but the cultural and communal place that a sissy occupied in my social world was not one that enforced rage and self-contempt. In a quite similar account another male American Jew of my generation, Harry Brod, writes:

I found the feminist critique of mainstream masculinity personally empowering rather than threatening. As a child and adolescent, I did not fit the mainstream male image. I was an outsider, not an athlete but an intellectual, fat, shy and with a stutter for many years. The feminist critique of mainstream masculinity allowed me to convert my envy of those who fit the approved model to contempt. It converted males previously my superiors on the traditional scale to males below me on the new scale, for I had obviously shown premature insight and sensitivity in rejecting the old male mode. I could pretend that others' rejection of me had really been my rejection of them. Of course, I could not have admitted this at the time. To do so would have seemed effeminate, and confirming of my fears of others' worst judgments of me. (Brod 1988, 7)

Brod moves on to a critique of this sensibility, referring to it as a 'shield against other men.' While I share his concern about the self-serving (and triumphant) countenance of the 'use of my Jewishness to avoid being categorized as a "real" man, "real" understood as a term of critique rather than praise' (Brod 1988, 8), I want to use the sissy, the Jewish male femme as a location and a critical practice.

I am interested right now in investigating what critical force might still be left in a culture and a cultural memory within which 'real men' were sissies. The vector of my theoretical-political work, accordingly, is not to deny as antisemitic

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fantasy but to reclaim the nineteenth-century notion of the feminized Jewish male, to argue for his reality as one Jewish ideal going back to the Babylonian Talmud. I desire also to find a model for a gentle, nurturing masculinity in the traditional Jewish male ideal—without making claims as to how often realized this ideal was—a male who could be so comfortable with his little, fleshy penis that he would not have to grow it into 'The Phallus,' a sort of Velvet John. He whom a past dominant culture (as well as those Jews who internalized its values) considers contemptible, the feminized Jewish (colonized) male, may be useful today, for 'he' may help us precisely today in our attempts to construct an alternative masculine subjectivity, one that will not have to re-discover such cultural archetypes as Iron Johns, knights, hairy men, and warriors within.

I am increasingly called upon to clarify something that I have never quite been able to explain until now, namely, the grounds for, and possibility of, a dual commitment to radical reclamation of traditional Jewish cultural life/practice/study and to radical reconstruction of the organization of gendered and sexual practices within our society (including necessarily the Jewish subculture). The first commitment is generated out of a sense of cultural/religious continuity as a value in itself and of Judaism as a rich, sustaining, and fulfilling way of life; the second derives from a deeply held conviction (and the affective stance) that Jewish practices have been oppressive to people in ways that I cannot stomach.

I have learned these dual commitments through living experience. Growing up in a way typical of most American Jews of my generation (the 1960s), I experienced Judaism as a vaguely attractive, sometimes silly, sometimes obnoxious set of occasional instructions in my life, called Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Pesah. On the positive side, it represented for me a compelling passion for social justice which led me in high school to (almost) join the Communist Party of America. I finally turned, again like many American Jews of my time to Far Eastern mysticism as a mode of escape from the arid, nonspiritual microclimate that the synagogue had become and the equally arid possibilities and promises of a life without spirit at all.

Chance encounters—with a lulav-wielding Lubavitcher, with a terrorist who gave me an English translation of the Zohar, with a young disciple of Zalman Schachter—began to hint that there might be more to Judaism than I had been misled to believe by American liberal Judaism. One night, in my second year in college, I dreamed that I was in Israel, and so came to spend my third year of college in Israel thinking that I was destined for a life as a kabbalist. I wasn't.

The Talmud tempted me away from kabbal. Most American Jews don't have an inkling even of what the Talmud is. I certainly didn't. Sometimes I think I imagined it as a sort of commentary on the Torah (confusing it, I suppose, with midrash), sometimes as something like Euclid's geometry applied to precisely what I couldn't imagine, since my image of Jewish 'Law' was that it was something unambiguous and found in a book called the Shulkhan Arukh. I had never seen even the outside binding of the Talmud, let alone the Shulkhan Arukh.

My friend, the aforementioned disciple of Schachter, had said to me: 'Before you can understand Zohar, you have to know Talmud,' so at the Hebrew University I signed up for the preparatory course in reading the Talmud and was charmed—in the full antique sense of the word—from almost the first sentence we read. Here was a world so strange and rich, so colorful and exciting,
with myths and legends, challenges to the intellect, and, most of all, personali-
ties rendered so vital that they seemed living men, men, moreover, who devoted
their lives to the elaboration of what it means to live correctly, as a Jew. And this
was all ‘mine.’ I became Orthodox for love of the Talmud. I admit freely, if rue-
fully, that it was so absorbing that I hardly noticed they were all men, or that the
text was primarily addressed to me just because I was a Jewish man—I didn’t
recognize the exclusions and oppressions that those facts encode and mystify.

I believe there is no textual product of human culture that is quite like the
jumbled, carnivalesque, raucous, bawdy, vital, exciting Talmud. Nor is there
anything quite like the practices of study that characterize it and the whole way
of life that it subtends. These are not, of course, the adjectives that have been
traditionally used, either from within or from without, to describe the talmudic
life. I make it sound, and indeed I experience it, as if it were almost Rabelaisian.
When after a year and a half of study I came upon a text that described the death
of Rav, I underwent an emotional experience akin to hearing of the death of a
beloved teacher. It had become, I realized, almost unimaginable to me that Rav
was not alive, because he was so alive in the text—alive I would add because
not idealized, because the Talmud was as open to the flawed humanity of its
heroes as the Bible had been to its. I have discovered that I am not alone; there
are many people, including many women and lesbian people, who are just as
entranced by the Talmud as I have been and just as passionate about devoting
their lives to it.

I deeply love and feel connected to rabbinic texts and culture, and even more
to the Rabbis themselves, but there is much within them that I find deeply dis-
turbing as well, and much of that has to do with the oppression of women. [. . .]
My endeavor is to justify my love, that is, both to explain it and to make it just.
I explain my devotion in part by showing that Judaism provides exempla for
another kind of masculinity, one in which men do not manifest a deeply rooted
concern about the possible meanings of dependence on other males (Edelman
1990, 50) and thus one within which ‘feminization’ is not experienced as a threat
or a danger. I cannot, however, paper over, ignore, explain away, or apologize for
the oppressions of women and lesbian people that this culture of practice has,
and therefore I endeavor as well to render it just by presenting a way of reading
the tradition that may help it surmount or expunge—in time—that which I and
many others can no longer live with.

In this dual aspect of resistance to pressure from without and critique from
within, my project is homologous to other political, cultural acts of resistance
in the face of colonialisms. For the 600 years now, Jews have been the tar-
get of the civilizing mission in Europe. [. . .] Laura Levitt makes palpably clear
the homologies between the ‘liberal’ colonizing impulse directed toward those
Others within Europe and toward the colonized outside of Europe insofar as
for both it is constituted by a demand that their sexual practices be ‘reformed’
to conform to the liberal bourgeois regime (Levitt 1993, 152–73). One of the
most common of liberal justifications for the extension of colonial control over
a given people and for the maintenance of the civilizing mission is the imputed
barbarity of the treatment of women within the culture under attack (Builer
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behaved in ways interpreted as masculine by European bourgeois society to be simply monstrous. Modern Jewish culture, liberal and bourgeois in its aspirations and its preferred patterns of gendered life, has been the result of this civilizing mission. As Paula Hyman has recently demonstrated, the very Jewish religiosity of the modern bourgeois Jewish family is an assimilating mimicry of Protestant middle-class piety, not least in its portrayal of proper womanhood (Hyman 1995, 26–7). The richness of Jewish life and difference has been largely lost, and the gains for Jewish women were largely illusory (Mann 1995). This having been said, however, the Jewish anticolonial project—like any other—cannot refrain from a trenchant, unflinching, and unapologetic internal critique of the harsh oppressions within the very traditional culture that it seeks to protect from destruction from without, namely, the structure of systematic exclusion of women from the practices that the culture most highly regards and especially the study of Torah. This exclusion has been a breeding ground of contempt—sometimes quite extreme—for women and a perpetrator of second-class status within Jewish law. [..]

Male self-fashioning has consequences for women. I feel an inner mandate to see to it that a project of reclamation of Judaic culture from the depredations of civilizing, colonizing onslaught to which it has been subject does not interfere with (even perhaps contributes something to) the ongoing project of feminist critique of that same traditional culture from within—to see to it, as best I can, that is, that my practice, whether or not it is part of the solution, is not part of the problem. I thus try to meet the challenge implicit in Tania Modleski’s observation that male critique of masculinity is feminist when it ‘analyzes male power, male hegemony, with a concern for the effects of this power on the female subject’ and with an awareness of how frequently male subjectivity works to appropriate ‘femininity’ while oppressing women’ (Modleski 1997, 7). The dual movement of the political project, to resist the delegitimization of Judaic culture from without, while supporting the feminist critique from within, dictates the structure of my work.

Thinking about the sissy body of the ‘Jewish man,’ I think simultaneously about another discourse and practice—possibly but not necessarily liberatory—that constructs the male body in a very different way. The ‘gay male body’ is an example of another male body constructed as an alternative to the heterosexual male body. David Halperin (following in part D. A. Miller) has recently given us a brilliant and moving rejoinder to ‘straight, liberal’ attacks on gay male bodybuilding by arguing for an absolute, total differentiation between the ‘masculine straight male body’ and ‘the gay male body.’ ‘What distinguishes the gay male body, then, in addition to its spectacular beauty, is the way it advertises itself as an object of desire. Gay muscles do not signify power. He further makes the impeccable point that the (ideal?) gay male body does not look at all like the straight macho body (Halperin 1995, 117). [..]

This is inarguable—and I am hardly insensitive to the attraction of that ‘spectacular beauty’—but it nevertheless remains the case that the very standard for male beauty that is being prescribed is one of a certain form of muscular development that emphasized the dimorphism of the gendered body and thus participates, to this extent, in the general cultural standards of masculinity rather than resisting it. The pale, limp, and semiotically unaggressive ‘nelly’ or
sissy male body is not seen within this construct as beautiful or erotic at all, but this exclusion as well can be shown to be culturally specific and limited. [. . .]

The politics of my project to reclaim the eroticized Jewish male sissy has, however, two faces. The traditional valorization of ‘effeminism’ for Jewish men hardly secured good news for Jewish women. There is no question that women were disenfranchised in many ways in traditional Jewish culture. The culture authorized, even if it did not mandate, efflorescences of misogyny. If the ideal Jewish male femme has some critical force vis-à-vis general European models of manliness, at the same time a critique must be mounted against ‘him’ for his oppression of Jewish women—and indeed, frequently enough, for his class-based oppression of other Jewish men as well, namely, the ignorant who were sometimes characterized as being ‘like women’ (Weissler 1989). Any attempt at a feminist rereading of Jewish tradition must come to terms with this material fact and the legacies of pain that it has left behind. My goal is not to preserve rabbinic Judaism ‘as we know it,’ but to reconstruct a rabbinic Judaism that will be quite different in some ways from the one we know and yet be and feel credibly grounded in the tradition of the Rabbis. My work is one of changing ethos and culture and I hope it joins with a stream of feminist work on rabbinic Judaism that includes the research of Judith Baskin, Judith Hauptman, Miriam Peskowitz, Laura Levitt, Susan Shapiro, and others. [. . .]

What I want is to produce a discursive catachresis, not a quick fix by a halakhic committee but a new thing in the world, the horizon of possibility for a militant, feminist, nonhomophobic, traditionalist—Orthodox—Judaism. The reasons for Jewish conservatism are not essential but accidental. The force of my writing is to avow not that traditional Judaism does not need radical change but rather that it can accommodate radical change and still remain viable if the terms of the change themselves can be seen as rooted in the documents, traditions, texts of the Rabbis. The only reason—other than divine mandate—for seeking this accommodation is that such practice brings to many men and women an extraordinary richness of experience and a powerful sense of being rooted somewhere in the world, in a world of memory, intimacy, and connectedness, a pleasure that I call Jewissness. Note that I am not arguing for a continuation of Judaism on the grounds that it makes people better, although in some sense my justification for indulging in the extreme pleasures of Jewishness is the assumption that it does have something to contribute to the world as well. I treasure in principle and with deep emotion cultural difference per se—not only my own—and for me the disappearance of a cultural form is attended with a pathos and pain not unlike that experienced when people of a species of bird goes out of the world. The demand for cultural sameness, universalism, has done much harm and violence in the world, but cultural difference as well has to work hard to do no harm; to participate in this work is the calling of the scholar. [. . .]

Embodying Rabbis

The dominant strain within European culture [. . .] continues to this day to interpret activity, domination, and aggressiveness as ‘manly’ and gentleness and passivity as emasculated. Ashkenazic traditionalists have something compelling to offer, that is, a feminist reconstruction that is very much the same, of the very culture for its artistic purposes.

There is something about European representational models that is an antisemitic stenosis; it is an assertive art that the central new phenomenon of the ‘ideal of masculinity’ against which it could be measured is the normative procedure by which society provided the reverse of the socially modeled, language that were perceived as normal. For those so marginalized. However, not all of these options were limited to those who were increased by acts.

For Jews, male Jews society needed an image of the hypermale—as its identity was hardly defined physically) had enormous historical force the fact that in early modern times, at least in certain places as the others, rather than domination, we must face our relations. Premodern Jewish men as they are, not, moreover, a reproof or self-hatred. A new alternative gendering against its surroundings of the late nineteenth century.

By suggesting that I am not claiming a set of criteria but a set of performances, culture. This culture and as European in its romance that, while a Christian religious intensity through the
and passivity as emasculate or effeminate. I will argue that the early modern Ashkenazic traditional ideal Jewish male, 'unmaned' but not desexualized, has something compelling to offer us in our current moment of search for a feminist reconstruction of male subjectivity (while being ever mindful, at the very same time, of the absolute necessity for an equally trenchant critique of that very culture for its own systems of oppression of women). [ . . .] 

[There is something correct—although seriously misconstrued—in the persistent European representation of the Jewish man as a sort of woman. More than just an antiseptic stereotype, the Jewish ideal male as countertype to 'manliness' is an assertive historical product of Jewish culture. This assertion constitutes the central new point [ . . .], in contrast to the consensus, according to which the 'ideal of masculinity, indeed modern society as a whole, needed an image against which it could define itself. Those who stood outside or were marginalized by society provided a countertype that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm. Such outsiders were either those whose origins, religion, or language were different from the rest of the population or those who were perceived as asocial because they failed to conform to the social norms. For those so marginalized, the search for an identity proved difficult and painful. However, not all outsiders faced the same problems, though basically their options were limited to a denial of their identity or its co-option by the acceptable norm, until—in the last decades of the nineteenth century—these choices were increased by acts of self-emancipation' (Mosse 1996, 56).

For Jews, male Jews at any rate, one can neatly reverse this picture. Jewish society needed an image against which to define itself and produced the 'goy'—the hypermale—as its countertype, as a reverse of its social norm, and its self-identity was hardly difficult or painful (except, of course, for the pain of being mistreated physically). This form of Jewish stereotyping of the gentile Other had enormous historical tenacity. Emblematic, perhaps, of this relationship is the fact that in early modern Europe, the little finger was referred to by gentiles in certain place as 'the Jew,' while the thumb is called in Yiddish 'the goy.' In other words, rather than thinking of the stereotype as a one-way process of domination, we must begin to consider processes of complex mutual specular relations. Premodern Jewish culture, I will argue, frequently represented ideal Jewish men as feminized through various discursive means. This is not, moreover, a representation that carries with it any hint of internalized contempt or self-hatred. Quite the opposite; it was through this mode of conscious alternative gendering that Jewish culture frequently asserted its identity overagainst its surroundings. If anything, [ . . .] it was the process of 'Emancipation' of the late nineteenth century that produced both the pain and the difficulty of Jewish (male) identity.

By suggesting that the Jewish man was in Europe a sort of 'woman,' I am thus not claiming a set of characteristics, traits, behaviors that are essentially female but a set of performances that are read as nonmale within a given historical culture. This culture can be very broadly described as Roman in its origins and as European in its scope and later history (Veyne 1985). It is the culture of romance that, while always contested—in large part precisely by 'feminized' Christian religious men—maintained hegemony as a male ideal, ever gaining intensity through the nineteenth century and beyond.
However, and quite paradoxically, it is also this very insistence on embodiedness that marks the male Jew as being female, for maleness in European culture has frequently carried a sense of not-being-a-body also, while the body has been inscribed as feminine. A medievalist, Claire Kinney has written of another definitive moment in European cultural history: ‘Real men—that is, representative Arthurian heroes—don’t have bodies’ (Kinney 1994, 49). If this ‘not-having-a-body’ is defined as manliness, then Jewish men were not ‘real men’ at all, for they quite decisively were bodies, were defined by their bodies. This idealization of the male body and its reinscription as spirit with no body reached its apotheosis in the nineteenth century. As George Mosse has observed, ‘Above all, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, male beauty symbolized timeless order’ (1985, 31). The Lacanian distinction between the phallus and the penis reinscribes precisely the identical dualism that privileges ‘male’ incorporality over ‘female’ embodiedness. This cultural motive, which goes back at least to the pre-Socratics in Greek culture, privileges the ideal over the real, the homogeneous over the heterogeneous, and thence the phallus (as an ideal abstraction from the penis) over the female body, the sex that is not one. Insofar as the penis of flesh—as opposed to the phallus, which is a platonic idea of the penis—is paradoxically feminine in the European Imaginary because it is body (Montrelay 1994), it is this insistence precisely on the penis that inscribes the Jewish male as forever carnal and thus female. Another way of making the same point would be to avow that for rabbinic feminization is not equivalent to castration precisely because masculinity was not defined by possession of the phallus. To resist this sort of patterning, rabbinic thought must be anti-dualistic.

It seems highly significant that nowhere in rabbinic literature is there a representation, for instance, that would have the body of the embryo supplied by the mother, while the spirit is provided by the father, nor, a fortiori, one in which the father supplies the form and the mother the raw matter. Indeed, the standard and explicit myth of conception in rabbinic texts is a partnership of three in that the father supplies the white parts of the body: bones, teeth, the white of the eye, brain matter; the mother the red parts: blood, muscle, hair, the pupil of the eye; and God supplies the intelligence, the spirit, the soul, eyesight, motion of the limbs, and the radiance of the face (Nidda 31a). In other words that which in many of the surrounding Greco-Roman cultures was bestowed by the father is provided here by God. For rabbinic Judaism, the father and mother provide the matter—the white and the pupil—of the eye, and only God provides spirit, the capacity of the eye to see. The father and the mother provide the muscle and sinew, only God provides the spirit, the active motor capacity. [. . .]

Hardly feminist, rabbinic Jewish culture thus refuses prevailing modes through which the surrounding cultures represent maleness as active spirit, femaleness as passive matter, a representation that has dominated much (if certainly not all) of European cultural imagination and practice. Maleness is every bit as corporeal as femaleness in this patriarchal culture. This refusal provides a partial explanation for how Jewish cultural imaginings could conceive of a valued masculinity as being feminized in the terms of the dominant Roman culture. When Europe has sought female equality and autonomy, this has been achieved through dis-embodying the female (Boyarin 1993); we have, rather, to embody maleness. Only a new culture—re-embodies the male.

In the antisemitic movements in Europe and Asia as well, (Miller 1994), but a change in this representation of the feminine’ (1985, 296) as well. In a culture of,” rather than bodies, because it deals with women that I’ve already been described as male, the image of womanliness, but no man or the woman. In fact, the ideals of the male, their cultural identity, yet prove a resounding feminism calls for.

Lest this appear rather than idyllic image not resistant to psychoanalytic discourse, that Palestinian representations of penis, saying that again, the psychoanalytic psyche, neither to say it here lest I be repetitious, Modern Jew(ish)ism is misogynist. Modern Jew(ish)ism is misogynist, yet extremely violent in its rebuke to cultivate of literalism, culture, or even in Jew, Judaism is (mostly)

**Jewish Culture**

. . . Queer theory desires for ‘straight’ which the refusal and others provide desire are a culture known abhorrence
rather, to embody men, to take away the phallus and leave only the penis behind. Only a new cultural theme—not a mere transformation of the old one—could re-embody the male. [. . .]

In the antisemitic imaginary of Christian Europe (and perhaps Muslim Africa and Asia as well), male Jews have been represented traditionally as female (Mirrlees 1994), but as Sheila Briggs points out with reference to the latest forms of this representation, this obtained only with respect to 'the negative sense of the feminine' (1985, 256). There is, however, a positive signification to 'feminization' as well. In a cultural system within which there are only two genders, the only way to symbolize 'refusing to be a man' (Stoltenberg 1985) may be an assertion that one is, in some sense, a woman. This represents then, at least potentially, a positive oppositional identity to 'manliness' that is neither 'castrated' nor emasculate, because it does not read femininity as lack. [. . .] It is not the identification with women that bears here the 'feminist' potential but precisely the 'refusal to be a man.' The identification with women is an epiphenomenon of resisting manliness, but not one that implies 'castrated' status for either the unmanly man or the woman. Traditionally many Jewish men identified themselves as feminized, beginning with the Talmud and through an opposition to 'Roman' ideals of the male, and understood that feminization as a positive aspect of their cultural identity. Accordingly, while not feminist, rabbinic culture might yet prove a resource in the radical reconstruction of male subjectivities that feminism calls for.

Lest this appear an idyllic picture, I must introduce at this juncture some less than idyllic images, powerful moments within which early rabbinic discourse is not resistant to Roman representations of masculinity and violent exercise of sexual power but fully complicit with them. Michael Satlow has demonstrated that Palestinian rabbinic culture in the Roman period did no: eschew representations of penetration as marking status (Satlow 1994a). [. . .] It hardly needs saying yet again that the official discourse of this culture was certainly sympathetic neither to women nor to homoeroticism, and yet it is important that I say it here lest I be perceived (once more) as denying these nearly self-evident facts. Modern Jewish 'Orthodoxy' is marked by pervasive (though not ubiquitous) misogyny and by nearly ubiquitous homophobia. Clearly the seedbed for extremely violent discourses of gender and sexuality is well prepared within rabbinic textuality; my task here is not to deny the existence of these seedbeds but to cultivate other ones that are equally 'there' in the texts, even if not highly regarded or even noted by the current social institutions within which rabbinic Judaism is (mostly) lived.

Jewish Culture and the 'Rise of Heterosexuality'

[. . .] Queer theory is theory that recognizes that human desire—that is, even desire for 'straight sex'—is queer, excessive, not teleological or natural and for which the refusal of heteronormativity on the part of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and others provides a privileged but not exclusive model. The conformations of desire are a cultural construction, and traditional Judaic culture, for all its well-known abhorrence of a certain homosexual act, male anal intercourse, and its
near-universal inducement of marriage and procreation (Boyarin 1995), was not a ‘heterosexual’ culture—because ‘heterosexuality’ had not yet been ‘invented.’ As Michael Satlow has recently pointed out, ‘The rabbis [of the talmudic period] considered male sexual attraction to other males to be unexceptional,’ and ‘no evidence suggests that the rabbis defined people by the gender of the object of their sexual desire’ (1994a, 18, 24).

‘Heterosexuality’ is a peculiar institution of contemporary Euro-American culture. It has been best defined by David M. Halperin as ‘the production of a population of human males who are (supposedly) incapable of being sexually excited by a person of their own sex under any circumstances; and has been referred to by him as a cultural event without, so far as I know, either precedent or parallel’ (1990, 44). Neither the assumption that some (even most) people prefer to have sex with people who have different genitals than they do, nor even the tabooing of certain or all same-sex genital acts constitutes heterosexuality (see Halperin 1995, 44). Only the premise that same-sex desire is abnormal, that it constitutes, in Foucault’s words, a separate species of human being, creates this category. There is an enormous gap between the earlier condemnation of one who pursues certain forms of pleasure as a sinner, on the same order as one who eats forbidden foods, for instance, and the modern placing of that person into a special taxon as an abnormal human being. This is not to say, of course, that the earlier formation was more benign to those who engaged in same-sex practices than the latter, but the production of the heterosexual, as the normal type of human being, has powerful effects that ripple throughout the projects of constructing gender within a social formation such as our modern one. And as Satlow has concluded, ‘Penetration, not same-sex desire was problematic for the rabbis’ (1994a, 24). […]

Homophobia in this exact sense is a product of the modern culture of heterosexuality, in which male sexual desire for men or any effeminate behavior threatens to reveal and expose that the man is essentially not straight but queer. Without a doubt, and to somewhat understate the case, male–female sexual relationships were nearly exclusively prized within traditional Jewish culture. In that sense, one could surely claim that rabbinic Jewish culture has always been heteronormative, even if not heterosexual, that is, homophilic. The absence of heterosexuality permits a much greater scope for forms of male intimacy, eroticized and otherwise: ‘Who is a friend?’ a midrash asks, ‘He that one eats with, drinks with, reads with, studies with, sleeps with, and reveals to him all of his secrets—the secrets of Torah and the secrets of the way of the world’ (Shechter Aboth, ch. 10). ‘Sleeps with’ does not have the metaphorical value that it has in English or German, but the text is certainly reaching for a very intense and passionate level of male–male physical intimacy here. The ‘way of the world’ is sometimes ambiguous metaphorical term that can refer to several areas of worldly life, including business, but especially sex. Male intimacy, it seems, for the talmudic culture includes the physical contact of being in bed together while sharing verbally the most intimate of experiences, a pattern not unknown in other cultures. The image of two men in bed together talking of their sexual experiences with women is reminiscent of ethnographic descriptions of Barasana (Columbian) tribesmen, lying in hammocks, fondling each other and talking about sex with women (Greenberg 1988, 71). Thus, while we cannot draw conclusions such as a passage, we can certainly ‘homosexual panic’ such as ‘heterosexuality.’ The abatement permitted a much larger cultural context to affective relations between gentler, antimacho men without anything, this ‘kinder, ger forms of male power. […]

I do not say then, nor deny—that we find some colonized society. Gender, subaltern formations—and a very different sense of heterosexuality function within these sub-Ashkenazi Jewish culture resistant to and critical of transnormative. The alternation (literally, ‘nobility,’ but in Yiddish) was the Yeshiva-Bokhur (the secularized younger brothel).

Talmudic culture is the context of reading the Talmud, mediated through a complex of conditions, which frequent societies within which Jews are not a history, my book is about Ashkenazic on the cusp of possibilities that a certain way to describe the differrence I am not trying to recover what Jewish culture the already in the future. This ‘best’ is share, and the judgment is my life. Unfree to be a Jew and to be committed to its aut norms, including most traditionally gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Notes
1. Astonishingly to me, perfectly my sensibility w
2. unfold the text and to gigg
we cannot draw conclusions about the sexual practices of rabbinic men from such a passage, we can certainly, it seems to me, argue that it bespeaks a lack of 'homosexual panic' such as that necessitated by the modern formation known as 'heterosexuality.' The absence of homosexual panic in premodern Jewish culture permitted a much greater scope of behavior coded as 'feminine' within the larger cultural context to be normative in male performance in general and in affective relations between men. [...]

We do not say then, nor even suggest or hint—in fact I wish to expressly deny—that we find some sort of nonpatricrhal paradise in Jewish or any other colonized society. Gender and hierarchies do not cease to be a problem in these subaltern formations—indeed they may be exacerbated—but we do end up with a very different sense of how gender and the symbolization of the sexed body function within these subcultures. [...]

One of these subcultures, traditional Ashkenazi Jewish culture, produced a model of masculinity that was openly resistant to and critical of the prevailing ideology of 'manliness' that was dominant in Europe. The alternative Jewish form of maleness was known as Edelkayt (literally, 'nobility,' but in Yiddish: 'gentleness and delicacy'); its ideal subject was the Yeshiva-Bokhur (the man devoting his life to the study of Torah) and his secularized younger brother, the Mensch. [...]

Talmudic culture is the culture that is crucially informed by a pivotal practice of reading the Talmud as its most valued book. Actual cultural forms are mediated through a complex set of social, economic, historical, and cultural conditions, which frequently include the nature of the cultural practice of the societies within which Jews found themselves in different times and climates. Not a history, my book attempts to understand one Jewish social formation, Ashkenaz on the cusp of modernity, as one such a realization of the cultural possibilities that a certain strain of talmudic discourse made possible. Another way to describe the difference of this text from a history would be to say that I am not trying to recover the 'truth' of Jewish culture but rather the 'best' of what Jewish culture has offered in the past, and I want to suggest what it can be in the future. This 'best' is, of course, a value judgment, one that many will not share, and the judgment grows out of who I am, where I come from, and where I have been in my life. *Unheroic Conduct* also constitutes a narrative of how I take myself to be a Jew and to be a product of my love for the Talmud and my feelings of commitment to its authority, as well as my commitments to certain ethical norms, including most prominently my feminism and my identification with gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews (and the Queer Nation as a whole).^{15}

Notes

1. Astonishingly to me, I know not why, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has captured perfectly my sensibility when she writes of 'Talmudic desires, to reproduce or unfold the text and to giggle' (1990, 240). I am grateful for that sentence, as for much
else in her work. In contrast to this, I wonder at Christine Delphy's (1991) repeated use of 'Talmudic' as a pejorative for the discourse of false feminists. This remains a stumbling block for me in my appreciation of her otherwise quite wonderful work.

2 In earlier I had written: 'its Jewish agents, the "Enlighteners,"' but as Naomi Seidman has correctly admonished me, this was not entirely fair, since there was a genuine feminist impulse animating a not insignificant component of the Jewish Enlightenment as well. Nor am I prepared, of course, to entirely disavow the Enlightenment project as part of who I am. Nevertheless, the insufficiency of the Jewish Enlightenment that only an eradication of the "Talmudic spirit" could fit the Jews for civilization is an unremittingly colonialist project. As my student Abe Socher has pointed out: 'Jewish Enlighteners (Maskilim) even identified the mortifying "jargon" of Yiddish with the Aramaic of the Talmud. Just as Yiddish was a corruption of the pure language of German and, as such, an impossible vehicle for anything but Untbildung, so too was Aramaic a corruption of the pure Hebrew of the Bible. This equation between the two pure languages of biblical Hebrew and eighteenth-century German was epitomized in Mendelssohn's Birc, a Hebrew Bible with a running translation into High German, rendered in Hebrew letters. Almost a century later, the great nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz summed up the Maskilic attitude when he wrote of the eastern European Talmudists' love of "twisting, distorting, ingenious quibbling," which has "reduced the language of German Jews to a repulsive stammer."' (Socher 1995; see also Aschheim 1982, 14-15).

3 I write this way to indicate clearly that I am not ascribing some form of actual or essential femininity to certain behaviors or practices, as to a Jungian anima. For the toxic effects of that ideology, see Connell (1995, 12-15); and cf. now especially Garber (1995, 211-14). I am rather marking these performances as 'femme' within the context of a particular culture's performatives, and particularly as it intersects with other cultural formations. The point is then not to reify and celebrate the 'femme' but to dislodge the term. 'Phallic' and the 'femme' (and in only a slightly different register 'Jew') are fatally equivocal terms in Western discourse, insisting on their disconnection from real human beings of particular groups—men, women, Jews—at the same time that they inescapably declare their connection with these groups. Weininger goes through contortions to insist that everyone is 'Jewish' but Jews only more so, and that there can be Jews (such as Weininger) who escape being Jewish; by doing so he provides only one dramatic example of this aporia. For the coinage itself, compare Ed Cohen's "'fem'-men-ists" (1993, 174). I had, in fact, for a long time considered 'femmenize' but worried that it would be read as a pun on 'men' and not on 'femme.' My usage further distinguishes the cultural processes that I am describing from those referred to when one speaks of the 'feminization of the synagogue,' by which is meant the fact that in certain 'assimilating' communities only women typically attended the synagogue (at the same time that Protestant churches were being feminized in the same sense). This phenomenon, discussed most recently and cogently by Paula Hyman (1995, 24-5), is not what I am talking about here.

4 The project has nothing to do with men 'getting in touch with their feminine sides' or the anima or 'androgynous Judaism' but rather with unsettling and destabilizing the cultural models of gender that separate formulations and movements underwrite and reinforce for our culture (Garber 1995, 223-6).

5 More accurately, as pointed out by George Mosse, the romanticism of the nineteenth century involved a fantasized revival of medieval romance (1985, 8). Mosse provides a much more detailed and nuanced account of both what is retained or reappropriated from early ones—and what is wholly manliness (Mosse 1996).

6 For quite a different text, see Dinshaw (1994).

7 This sort of patterning naturalizations, an allegory she may never be the thing; for the signified as a kind of the same way.

8 This was based, of course, on the equivalent of semen (Satanic conceptions/s are quite the writing Jews, whose views

9 See the very interesting 10 Jonathan Ned Katz (1987, 1993) the convincing demonstrations of invention of sexuality that by a cynical and vicious fo had not even read the book.

11 Note the difference that treats the male politicized (Lentricchia 1987, 743) will not conform how to do conform' (774-75)! For d here with the 'poor' male but with the victims of this Israeli liberals, like Golda Mayer have forced them to.

12 As indicated by the 6 Tarfon said to her sister d sister's children. And eye according to the way of the Bereshit Rabba. 22. Now a for this collocation, it is c- less claim (because unfulfillable) it is hard to escape concluded for any recipient of this text.

13 I would like to express most accepted and validated and all, have been such about bisexual studies conference.

Literature

Aschheim, Steven E. 1982. German Jewish Consciences
Boyarin, Daniel. 1993. Ca
University of California
reappropriated from early ideals—Roman martial ones or medieval chivalrous ones—and what is wholly transformed from them in the production of modern manliness (Mosse 1996).

6 For quite a different—but not entirely irreconcilable—reading of the same text, see Dinshaw (1994).

7 This sort of patterning presumes an allegorical metaphysics, and in its crudest naturalizations, an allegorical physics, as well. Woman is man’s signifier. As such, she may never be the thing signified but allegorical discourse allows her to be taken for the signified as a kind of reading procedure. And man is God’s signifier in much the same way.

8 This is based, of course, on a notion of menstrual blood as being the female equivalent of semen (Satlow 1994b, 158–62). Here again, as Satlow points out, rabbinic conception(s) are quite different from the views of the more Hellenized Greek-writings, whose views were Aristotelian.

9 See the very interesting discussion in Dellamora (1990, 141–6).

10 Jonathan Ned Katz (1995, 33–55). This chapter of Katz’s is one of the most convincing demonstrations and exemplifications of Foucault’s hypothesis about the invention of sexuality that I have yet seen. Unfortunately this fine book is marred by a cynical and vicious foreword by Gore Vidal which demonstrates only that he had not even read the book when he wrote the foreword.

11 Note the difference between this account and a superficially similar one that treats the man policing ‘himself for traces of femininity’ as thereby victimized (Lentricchia 1987, 743) or that elides the difference between ‘teaching men who will not conform how to alienate and despise themselves’—and ‘even men who do conform’ (774–5)! For discussion, see Edelman (1990). I am not commiserating here with the ‘poor’ male who submits to heterosexuality by dominating others but with the victims of this practice. Lentricchia’s discourse is reminiscent of those Israeli liberals, like Golda Meir, who are most angry at the Palestinians because the latter have ‘forced them to be oppressors’.

12 As indicated by the following text among others: ‘When his wife died, Rabbi Tarfon said to her sister during the mourning period: Marry me and raise your sister’s children. And even though he married her, he did not behave with her according to the way of the world until after thirty days.’ (Kohellet Rabba, 9. See also Bereshit Rabba, 22.) Now although the sexual meaning is not the most frequent one for this collocation, it is certainly a readily available one. Thus while it is a meaningless claim (because unfalsifiable) that this is what the author of this text ‘intended’, it is hard to escape concluding that the sexual connotation would have been present for any recipient of this text.

13 I would like to express here my feeling that the spaces in which I have felt most accepted and validated as an ‘out’ Orthodox Jew in America, yarmulke, beard and all, have been such queer environments as Pride parades and gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies conferences.

**Literature**


DANIEL BOYARIN


Merritt, Louis. 1994. 'Representing "Other" Men: Muslims, Jews, and Masculine


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