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Guilty Pleasures: When Sex Is Good Because It's Bad

REBECCA T. ALPERT

Although my formal education ended before the second wave of feminism took hold in the academy, and well before the postmodern era, the insights of both have been crucial to my writing and thinking for many years. One might even say that I learned them, albeit in nascent forms, during my graduate education in religious studies. There, I carefully noted the missing perspectives of women, but I also studied in an interreligious context that made me aware of the multiple perspectives through which the world may be viewed and consequently of how very partial my own truth was. I think I have learned those lessons well. I write only from my own (Jewish and feminist) perspective, and I make every effort to name that perspective and make it clear how particular a viewpoint it is.

These lessons came to me again in the course of working on this project with women from many religious and cultural perspectives. I can write only from my particular context: the privilege of living as a North American Jew at the turn of a new century, influenced by the feminist movement, supported by the presence of a gay and lesbian movement, trained to be a rabbi in a seminary that ordains not only women but gay men and lesbians as well. I thus live under conditions that permit me to write as an autonomous self. Comfortably located in the secular academy, I can afford to challenge the authority of the Jewish community; I can live openly as a lesbian and as a committed Jew and rabbi, inside and outside the community simultaneously. Without the oppression experienced by Jews at other times and places, and by women in many places today, I can both honor and critique my tradition and live with the ambiguity that such a position requires. I preface my work here with the acknowledgment of the privilege of being able to, as a rabbi, "say the darnedest things" as my colleague in the project Suwanna Satha-Anand pointed out. I offer my comments about Judaism

at the turn of the century in light of what I learned from my cocontributors and from those about whom they write, many of whom do not live with such privilege.

THE REGULATION OF SEXUALITY

Regulating sexual behavior is a significant dimension of most religious systems, and Judaism is no exception. Throughout its long history, Judaism has defined licit and illicit sexual desires, relationships, and behaviors. Over time, the form and content of what has been permitted and prohibited have changed, but a system of regulation has remained a constant. While some might wish to challenge the need for such a system, I am suggesting that some such system will always be in place, that even in times when regulations have undergone changes, new ones have arisen to take their place. Although these regulations have often been oppressive, they have also had unintended liberating consequences. My goal here is to examine the criteria for the regulation of sexual behavior in Judaism and the consequences in terms of their potential to redefine good sex from a Jewish feminist perspective.

Let me be careful to note that I am not using the terms good (and bad) in relation to ethics, but in relation to law. Sexual ethics are indeed important (as are the ethics of all relationships), but it is my contention that a system of regulation that defines sexual desires and behaviors as permitted or forbidden does not necessarily also define right and wrong. In this context, good sex will always be ethical, but it may also be forbidden.

Of course, I understand that it is inaccurate to make sweeping generalizations about Judaism. Judaism is not by any means a monolithic tradition, and it is an oversimplification to suggest that there is one Judaism. Rather, we are looking at a complex entity whose values vary by historical era and geographic location. Furthermore, Judaism is often defined based on passages from the Talmud, the main text of rabbinic Judaism, compiled and redacted around 500 CE, which itself is a complex document reflecting traditions of several hundred years and of several different communities. The voices of later thinkers and texts, medieval, modern, and contemporary, are often seen only as reflections of that work, while the biblical culture of the Israelites is viewed only as a precursor.

Often, the complexity of the Talmud itself is glossed over. Additionally, feminist insight reminds us that the texts that have been preserved reflect the traditions of the elite group of men whose thought represents only one fragmentary perspective of the world in which the Jews lived. We have no idea of the extent to which the rulings of this elite were taken seriously or put into practice even by the societies in which they lived. What we do know is that portions of those texts, usually taken out of context, are often used to serve some contemporary rhetorical purpose.

Given this complex reality, we must be extremely careful when making

generalizations about Judaism's perspective about sex. It is accurate to describe Jewish teachings on sexual desire as complex and ambivalent, containing both positive and negative elements, and changing perspective with time and location.¹

Still, it is of value to look for strands in Jewish thinking (whether or not they are representative or widespread) that could help us understand how sexuality was regulated in ancient Judaism. My goal is to take into account some of these ancient strands, viewing them through a lens of contemporary feminist thinking about sex in order to create a dialogue between those perspectives, with the hope that what emerges will become one more strand of Jewish thought.

HOW SEX IS REGULATED IN JEWISH TEACHINGS

Connecting Sex, Kinship, and Procreation

Jewish texts generally encourage sexual activity that will result in procreation in a marital relationship. Sexual desire is valued because it drives the reproductive impulse. A rabbinic teaching suggests that it is because of sexual desire that men marry, build houses, and have children.² To this end, physical acts of heterosexual sex between people who are obligated to reproduce are encouraged in ancient Jewish texts. Sex acts are broadly permitted within any union that has or had (or even in some cases will have) reproductive potential, which is understood as potential for Jewish continuity. There are traditions that explicitly permit sex in licit relationships which no longer are fertile: sex between infertile wives and husbands, sex with postmenopausal wives, and anal and oral sex within a marital relationship. In the biblical stories of Tamar and Ruth, it is obvious also that laws about sexual boundaries can be transgressed for the sake of procreation. Both of these biblical heroes commit sexual acts to ensure the continuity of the ancestral line—Ruth with a stranger, and Tamar with her father-in-law.

The corollary of this perspective is the prohibition of sexual acts that would in any way interfere with reproduction. One need only examine the biblical ritual for the *sotah*, the wife suspected of adultery, and the rabbinic adumbrations of that text, to see the negative attitudes toward sexuality that might interfere with appropriate procreation.³ The *sotah* (and to a lesser extent, the man with whom she is accused of committing adultery) is to be publicly humiliated. Although the *sotah* ritual was not practiced, certainly after the destruction of the temple, the rabbis' rhetoric about it shows their serious [dis]approbation of sex that counters procreative possibilities.

Sex and Order

Ancient Judaism also regulates sexuality as part of a larger system of creating an orderly universe. Many sexual activities are prohibited as a way to define boundaries between what is permitted and forbidden behavior for

Jew. What distinguishes these regulations is their arbitrary nature. They fit into the paradigm of "purity and danger" suggested by Mary Douglas. These activities do not necessarily interfere with procreation but are part of a system of containing sexual desire. For the purposes of procreation, sexual desire is understood as useful, but it is still called *yetzer hara*, an evil inclination, and must be controlled and limited.⁴ Therefore, activities such as masturbation that might cause someone to be tempted to break the rules are prohibited.⁵ Male homosexual behavior is also prohibited.⁶ The same logic prohibits sex with people with whom one is not supposed to marry (and therefore procreate), such as certain relatives or non Jews. This system also creates prohibitions of certain sexual activities within the marital context, such as sex during (and in rabbinic Judaism, one week after) a woman's menstrual period or during daylight hours or completely naked.⁷

Regulation by Gender

Sex is regulated differently for men and women. Because the rabbis thought that women were unable to exercise sexual control, rabbinic Judaism mandates that men are obligated to satisfy their wives' sexual desires, described as the obligation of *onah*. The conditions of satisfying that desire are the subject of much debate in ancient sources and by contemporary scholars.⁸ Their main goal is to limit women's sexual desire by making sure that it has a regularly moderated outlet.

Men on the other hand must control their sexual desire. Men are understood as having the duty (and the right) to give sexual pleasure, but not to satisfy their own sexual needs. Sexual control places men on a higher spiritual plane than women, as described by Michael Satlow: "For the rabbis, both Palestinian and Babylonian, Jewish piety was linked to self-control. At its (relatively rare) extreme, piety could manifest itself as asceticism. More commonly, however, self-control was exercised through adherence to the law, and above all, through moderation even in legally permitted activities."⁹ Manliness is expressed in terms of piety and control. Men were to subdue their powerful sexual desires through adherence to the law and the study of Torah. Women's sexual desires were controlled by men.

Adultery and marriage laws were also different for men and women. For a man, adultery was defined as having sex with another man's wife, tampering with the lineage and possession of another man. The Hebrew Bible is replete with stories of men with multiple wives and concubines. Ashkenazic Jewry did not outlaw polygamy until the year 1000, and it was never officially outlawed by Sephardic Jewry.

The question of homosexuality is also treated differently by gender. Male homosexuality was punishable by death during certain biblical periods (Leviticus 20:13), while female homosexual behavior was considered a minor offense.¹⁰ Male masturbation is discussed at length in the Talmud, while female masturbation is mentioned only once.¹¹

Sex and Commitment

Contemporary Jewish thinkers perpetuate these regulations by connecting them to the higher purpose of love and commitment. Orthodox discussions about sex strongly advocate for procreation. But they also explain regulating sex as a way of enhancing love and commitment. Norman Lamm celebrates the restrictions of *niddah*. Lamm suggests (and many Orthodox Jews testify to the fact) that being required to abstain from sexual relations for half the month increases the desire experienced when permitted to engage in sexual encounters and enables couples to prolong the romance of their marriage, thus helping to sustain long-term, committed, monogamous relationships.¹²

Liberal thinkers may disagree with many of the activities that ancient Judaism sought to regulate, but they too construct a system of regulation based on an ethic of relationships that highlights consent and mutuality. Rather than trying to find reasons for the ancient rules, this system creates its own criteria for sexual behavior (love and commitment) and then regulates behavior on that basis. This perspective of Jewish ethics is certainly well grounded in Jewish values about relationships, and the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.¹³ This perspective is supported in ancient Jewish texts where wife beating and rape within marriage were generally viewed negatively.¹⁴ These approaches create a hierarchy that privileges long-term, committed relationships, suggesting that other forms of desire, while valid, are less valued. But they do remove most arbitrary prohibitions, creating room for young people to experiment with sex (provided that they are moving toward commitment), for sex during menstruation, and for the recognition of gay and lesbian relationships.

THE PROBLEMS WITH REGULATING SEX

Regulating sexuality has both positive and negative dimensions. Looking at both dimensions enables us to begin to create new approaches to defining good sex from a Jewish feminist perspective. The various dimensions of sexual regulation in Judaism bring different problems that must be brought to light before we can imagine what benefits a system of regulating sexual desire and behavior might have for the promotion of good sex.

Sex as Instrumental to Other Values

Making sex an instrument to achieve other values like procreation and love is problematic because it does not allow for the possibility that sexual pleasure is a value in its own right. As we have already seen, sex was only acceptable if it was for a higher purpose. In most ancient texts, that higher purpose was procreation. Desire in the service of procreation had few constraints, even when it transgressed other norms.

Linking sex to procreation does not fit in contemporary society. Times have changed, and more sophisticated contraception, the possibilities of adoption,

fertility treatments, alternative forms of insemination, and acceptance of the validity of gay and lesbian relationships have severed the automatic connection between sex and reproduction, even in sexual encounters within marriage. Making sexual pleasure instrumental to other values shifts the focus from looking for the meaning and value of sex itself. There is a strong need for the focus to shift from regulation of sexual behavior to the discussion of sexual pleasure.

In contemporary Jewish sexual ethics, the higher purpose of desire is love and commitment. Sex is understood as a vehicle for intimacy and closeness, for the creation of a couple, as a primary value. This has the negative effect of creating hierarchies of sexual behavior, suggesting, for example, that committed monogamous relationships are the most valued, serially monogamous relationships or relationships before marriage less so.¹⁵ But there is not any place to locate a Jewish understanding of desire for its own sake, for the pleasure of sexual and sensual feelings, for touch and for physical release.

Differentiation by Gender

Regulating sex differently for men and women also limits the value of Jewish teachings on sexuality. As sexual power dynamics have changed, it is hard to imagine maintaining the idea that women as a group have less ability to control their sexual desire than men do. Contemporary male scholars of Jewish sexuality like to ask what might have been different if women had the power to write these texts. They urge contemporary feminists to construct a system of sexual desire that is good for women.¹⁶ But these requests miss the point. A reconstructed Jewish feminist view of sexual desire should be based not on defining a new erotic for women, but on the removal of gender as a defining characteristic of desire.

Recent theorists of bisexuality suggest that gender need not be the defining characteristic in choosing a sexual partner.¹⁷ Desire can be constructed around many other issues or pleasures. According to this theory, we are not necessarily attracted to someone because of their gender; we may be more attracted to their eye color, intellect, humor, or height. Sexual desire is not necessarily predicated on the gender of the object of that desire, so we should not assume rigid differentiation according to gender when we are looking at the agent of desire. There is no reason to assume different abilities to control desire, or to create different ways of constructing desire based on gender. So we are left with the idea that men and women have strong sexual desires and that men cannot be viewed as carrying the obligation of controlling women's desires for them. Both men and women need to work at finding a balance between limiting and enhancing sexual desire.

Making Sex Seem Bad, Dangerous, and Shameful

Another difficulty with a system that regulates sexuality based on arbitrary notions of order and chaos is that it connects illicit sexual behavior with shame. The rabbinic exhortations to the *sotah* are a blatant example of this connection,

as are contemporary Orthodox commentaries about male homosexuality.¹⁸ Even contemporary ethical writings tend to devalue sex that is not oriented toward the goal of love and commitment. Sex for pleasure, even autoerotic stimulation, is not examined for its possibility to enhance life. People choosing to be involved in sex for its own sake rarely find support within Jewish circles. People who are not in committed relationships are marked as suspect, or in need of being “fixed up” with someone. The language itself implies discomfort with a person whose sex life is not publicly visible and appropriately regulated.

Such a system is also harmful because it is punitive. In the Hebrew Bible, death is the punishment for many sexual transgressions, including adultery and male homosexuality. Although throughout most of Jewish history corporal punishments were not carried out, sexual transgressors suffered communal approbation and scorn.

This negative valuation of sex for pleasure or without the goal of procreation or commitment forces people to lie and hide their sexual desires. This consequence of the regulation of sexuality is particularly negative, because it additionally compels people to break other important relational values. Jewish practices for regulating sexual behavior are problematic because they differentiate desire by gender and thereby make assumptions about how men and women are; devalue sex for its own sake rather than to achieve some higher goal; make sex appear to be negative and shameful, requiring people without licit relationships to lie and hide; and misuse Jewish texts for the purpose of controlling sexuality.

THE VALUE OF A SYSTEM OF CONTROL

Given these negative dimensions, how can we find value in a system that controls sexuality? Despite the problems inherent in this system, it also provides some advantages and possibilities for good sex.

Acknowledging the Power of Sexual Desire

What is the purpose of a system to control desire? A system based on controlling desire starts from the assumption that desire is overwhelming and chaotic and will disrupt otherwise orderly lives. Forbidding people to act out on sexual desires affirms that sexual desire is dangerous. Acknowledging that everyone has sexual desire, and that desire is a powerful, dangerous, and chaotic force in need of regulation, is helpful within the context of such a system. Sexual desire has the potential to disrupt the order of society, and controls are important in moderating its effects.

Making room for the incredible power of sexual desire is valuable. Sexual desire is irrational and unpredictable. We do not know what creates and stimulates desire within an individual. Love may be gentle and kind, but passion isn't always, nor is it always wise to express or act on it. Recognizing the dangerous dimension of sexual desire can enable people to find creative ways to work with it.

Forbidden Sex

Ironically, a system that seeks arbitrarily to limit and control sexual desire unwittingly enhances the power of sexual desire. The efforts to control desire make it more desirable.

A look at the creation story will help to illustrate. In ancient rabbinic interpretations, this was not a story of forbidden sex. The rabbis assume that Adam and Eve had sexual relations in the garden—to be sure, in the service of procreation. But a Jewish mystical text from the Middle Ages suggests another interpretation: Adam and Eve had sexual relations but did not experience sexual desire until Eve ate from the tree.¹⁹ Eve disrupted the order of creation through her act and brought knowledge to humans. Part of this knowledge was that what is forbidden may be erotic because it is forbidden. This insight may also be apprehended in the Song of Songs, which graphically describes the power of secret love. In her commentary on the Song of Songs, contemporary interpreter Marcia Falk describes the ways in which this text presents lovers in covert, nighttime rendezvous, away from public censure.²⁰

Illicit sex is appealing because it is an opportunity to do what is forbidden, to test the rules. The erotic is connected to wildness, chaos, and disorder—just what the rabbinic tradition wishes to tame and make orderly. Part of the appeal of desiring the wrong person at the wrong place or time is precisely that they are wrong, that this desire breaks norms. Let me be careful again to make the point that wrong is not the same as unethical—sex that is bad or wrong can still conform to ethical standards. That is why setting up an arbitrary system of licit and illicit sex is helpful. One can break norms without performing acts that are harmful and still derive the pleasure that attends what is forbidden.

A system that regulates sex encourages people to lie about and hide sex that is not acceptable. While in many instances this is troubling, it is also true that the pleasure of illicit sex is enhanced through secrecy. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Not being able to talk about the sexual encounters you are having may serve to make them more exciting. This is clearly illustrated in the rabbinic text from the *baraita* literature, which suggests that when a man has a strong sexual desire he cannot control he should go to another town, dress in other garments, and fulfill his need, rather than doing so at home or among acquaintances.²¹ There was also something quite powerful about “the love that dared not speak its name”—before gay sex became something that could be discussed in public, the closet was sexy, even if oppressive.²² Gay people developed coded language with which to communicate. The need to be secretive was turned into an erotic of its own.

This kind of guilty pleasure may require no action. There is no need to assume that refraining from acting on these desires diminishes them—the desire itself may suffice to provide sexual pleasure. Forbidding sex in these cases may serve to heighten the desire to experience what we cannot. This kind of desire is guilty pleasure; it can be enjoyed for its own sake but enhanced by its transgressive nature.

Autoerotic sexual desire, having sex with animals, using inanimate objects as stimulation, cross-dressing, or having fantasies about other people when one is involved in a committed relationship that is defined as monogamous are all ways of transgressing the norms of sexuality. Sexual behavior or desire that in most cases harms no one and whose only goal is self-pleasure may be experienced with greater joy and intensity because it is forbidden.

Experiencing desire for the "wrong" person is another form of desire that must be kept to oneself and so is erotic because it is forbidden. This could include an unrequited love or attraction to someone who is married, to someone who would be an unacceptable partner (because of sexual orientation, class, religion, race, age, or familial relationship), or to a total stranger. Sex with the right or wrong person at the wrong place or time enhances erotic pleasure. Those who break the laws of *niddah*, who begin sexual encounters when time is limited to complete them, who have sex in public places, who visit porn shops or consume erotica on the Internet all indulge in guilty pleasures. While these activities might lend themselves to providing pleasure in any event, that pleasure is enhanced by the illicit nature of the act.

Assuming that forbidden sex is powerful because it is forbidden does not assume that licit sex without limitations cannot also incorporate desire, that forbidden sex cannot also take place within licit relationships, or that sex is automatically wonderful because one has acted on a forbidden desire. But forbidding certain sexual partners or situations can make them seem more attractive. Operating within a system that controls desires may serve ironically to enhance those desires and to contribute to the pleasure one experiences when acting on (or even thinking about) those desires. And it has the potential to challenge the privileged status of licit relationships.

Sex Talk and Sublimation

Talk about prohibiting sex invites discussion of sex and so can be most valuable. There are extensive discussions of licit and illicit sexual behavior in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature, as well as in later mystical and philosophical literature.²³ As Michel Foucault has suggested, talking about sexual behaviors and their prohibitions can be erotic for some and at the least sexually educational for others.²⁴ This is an unintended consequence of a system that regulates sexuality.

When sexual desire and behavior is controlled and limited, it may go underground as illustrated earlier, or it may take the form of sublimation. Even the rabbinic ideal of sublimating desire through the study of Torah can be a vehicle to guilty pleasures, albeit unconscious ones. Recent scholars have suggested the homoerotic nature of the house of study for men.²⁵ The exclusion of women from this site produced an environment presumably devoid of sex, but in fact full of sexual energy, as many same-sex environments tend to be. Furthermore, sexual topics were freely discussed in the houses of study, and these conversations themselves may have stimulated sexual desire. Proceeding from the assumption

that sexual desire is not determined by gender, bringing women into the house of study would not necessarily change the environment.

Rabbinic Judaism gave positive reinforcement to men for controlling their sexual desires through the study of Torah. One dimension of this activity of sublimation is to substitute God for the male and the people of Israel for the female erotic partner, such as is often demonstrated in prophetic literature. The Song of Songs, an erotic love poem, was interpreted as an allegory by the ancient rabbis, a description of the relationship between God and Israel, and the literal reading was ignored or denied. The sexual meaning attributed to the chanting of *L'cha dodi* certainly brings erotic energy to that ritual. It is a medieval poem recited every Friday evening in synagogue at the beginning of the Sabbath that uses imagery of marriage to describe the relationship between the people of Israel (groom) and the Sabbath (bride). Rather than eliminating the human dimension of the erotic, sublimation only connects Torah more deeply to eroticism. These allegorical moves are also helpful in creating possibilities for guilty pleasures, for those who are open to interpret them that way.

Employing the strategies of control and sublimation are effective means of dealing with sexual desire. They enable guilty pleasures, while at the same time providing moderating influences on powerful feelings and restricting actions that have the potential to violate ethical standards of relationships. And they connect Torah with the erotic so that the people of the book can also experience ourselves as the people of the body.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSGRESSIVE SEX

I have argued so far that the option of transgressing these restrictions may produce guilty pleasures, thus enhancing our sexual experiences. But having these experiences may have broader implications. The model of transgression entailed here is a model of resistance to power and to conforming to group norms. If gay men and lesbians had not persisted in transgressing Jewish rhetoric against same-sex relationships, those relationships might still be considered illicit by all of the Jewish community. Transgressing those laws enabled lesbian and gay relationships to be perceived as licit by at least some segments of the Jewish community. The same may be true for other sexual acts and desires that have the potential to be moral, but that are still considered forbidden. To set up a system that invites transgression teaches people that they can question the values of the societies in which they live, and the results may be dramatic in bringing about the possibility of social change.

To begin to think about good sex from a Jewish feminist perspective, we need to understand the power of regulating sex, even if those regulations are enforced only through discursive means. The rhetoric of regulation is problematic because it validates sex only when it is an instrument of procreation or commitment, links sexual differences and capacities to gender, makes sex for its own

sake both less valued and shameful, and encourages people to develop secret sex lives. On the other hand, a system of regulation helps us recognize the powerful nature of the erotic and ironically invites transgression, which at the least is seductive and at most transformative. It is a flawed system, but one from which we can benefit if we question it wisely.

NOTES

1. David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 104.
2. Genesis Rabbah 9.9.
3. Michael Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 303 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), 173–83.
4. The concept of *yetzer hara* makes clear the rabbinic ambivalence toward sexual desire, which was viewed at best as a necessary evil. See Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 43–47, for a full explanation of the concept of *yetzer hara*.
5. Satlow (*Tasting the Dish*, 246–61) says the prohibition was not against spilling seed, but against the temptation and disruption it would have caused. Autoeroticism was strictly prohibited, even to the point of forbidding the touching of the penis during urination.
6. Female homoerotic behavior is not included because it is not considered sex and therefore does not disrupt the order of things.
7. B. Niddah 16b, quoted in Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 299.
8. On the subject of onah, see Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 54; Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 265.
9. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 320.
10. See Rebecca Alpert, *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 29–34.
11. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish*, 264.
12. Norman Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses: Some Jewish Insights into Sex and Marriage* (London: Clarendon Foundation, 1968).
13. See works such as Robert Gordis, *Sex and the Family in Judaism* (New York: Burning Book, 1967); Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990); and Eugene Borowitz, *Choosing a Sex Ethic: A Jewish Inquiry* (New York: Schocken, 1969).
14. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 162–68.
15. See Arthur Waskow, *Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life* (New York: Morrow, 1997).
16. See Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 225; and Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 180.
17. Jane Litwoman, "Some Thoughts on Bisexuality," *Lesbian Contradictions*, winter 1990.
18. See Norman Lamm, "Judaism and the Modern Jewish Attitude to Homosexuality," *Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook* (1974).
19. Quoted in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 104.
20. Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 145–47.
21. Quoted in Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 357.

22. The closet was also regulated by laws that could punish gay people with loss of jobs, family, and housing, and even with death. This is still true in certain settings and detracts from rather than enhances the pleasure of gay sex because it renders it immoral and illegal rather than simply illicit, in the terms we are using here.
23. Biale, *Eros and the Jews*.
24. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
25. See Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: Excursis in an Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).