



The Jacob Rader Marcus Center
of the
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES



WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

4:00pm

Mr. Gregg Drinkwater

Ph.D. candidate

University of Colorado, Boulder

The Herbert R. Bloch Jr. Memorial Fellowship

***Building Queer Judaism:
Gay Synagogues and the Transformation
of an American Religious Community,
1965-1990***

In 1972, a group of gay Jews in Los Angeles, unable to find Jewish spaces in which they could fully express themselves as both gays and lesbians, and as

Jews, founded Beth Chayim Chadashim (The House of New Life), the world's first "gay synagogue."

Within twenty years, American Judaism's Reform and Reconstructionist movements not only embraced gay synagogues and the need for gay Jewish space, but both officially changed their ordination policies to allow for and encourage openly lesbian and gay rabbis. How did this transformation happen, and why did it happen so rapidly? To help answer these questions, we will look at the institution of the gay synagogue, a modern and uniquely American phenomenon. In the 1970s and 1980s, gay synagogues sparked social, cultural, and religious transformations around American Judaism's relationship to non-normative sexuality. They helped foster the rapid and radical incorporation of lesbian and gay Jews into American Jewish life, and contributed to increasing support for lesbian and gay people in American society broadly.

The history of gay synagogues shows that American Judaism had within it mechanisms that allowed for a shift away from the presumption that gays and lesbians were antithetical to religious communities. Gay synagogues helped reshape the relationship to gender, sexuality, and identity among American Jews and amplified the visibility of gay and lesbian people within the American Jewish community.

~~~~~

***All seminars are held in the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Seminar Room,  
located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center  
of the American Jewish Archives, on the Cincinnati campus of:  
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
Cincinnati – New York – Los Angeles – Jerusalem  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220***