

Being more inclusive

THE Jewish community values marriage highly. Attend a Friday night service and hear the Sabbath welcomed as a bride. The implication is that marital happiness is the ultimate in Jewish joy. So much of Jewish discourse is constructed around "family values" that it is almost impossible to conceive of a classic Shabbat meal not located within the framework of a nuclear family.

The effect of this, however, is that many people who are not married tend to fade out of Jewish observance and away from the community, rather than contend with a culture which might undermine their lifestyle or imply that they haven't made it. While the majority of adults in the Sydney Jewish community are or have been married, the predicament,— the plight? — of those who do not fall into this category has manifested itself in differing ways in recent days.

In the past month, the *Australian Jewish News* has published letters from a Bondi reader, Renate Grossman, poignantly encapsulating the situation of the elderly and single. "Make some time for us," she pleads. "Keep us company. Remember us." In a related development, figures recently extrapolated from the 1996 Census show that about 50 percent of the adults in the Australian Jewish community are currently married; the corollary is that half are not. There is a significant proportion of the community in "single" situations — separated, divorced, widowed, never married. A quarter of Sydney Jewry is over 60, and a high proportion of these, particularly women, live alone. Then there are the gay members of the community. While many have partners, they obviously do not fall into the conventional definition of "married".

The common denominator between Ms Grossman's appeal, the Census statistics and the size of the Jewish float in the Mardi Gras is that there is a significant number of people in our community who do not fit into the conventional definition of "family", yet regard themselves as part of the community and want to be accepted as such. It is tempting for those who do fall into the conventional category to ignore — or worse, look down upon — those who do not. It is incumbent on each of us to remember that there are no guarantees, that we can never afford to be self-righteous, that we all need to be more humane and more inclusive.