Volume 89, 1
Fall 2014

A Periodical of Professional Trends and Developments

Journal of JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

All in the Family: Diversity in the Jewish Community

The pull of Jewish family values is apparent in many dimensions of today's American Jewish families: partnership marriages, which appear to be unusually stable and to produce happy, productive children and adults; women's entrepreneurial spirits and determination in working to achieve parenthood even when confronted by the physical challenges of infertility, the conflicting demands of high power careers and parenthood, or the absence of men; and the striking traditionalism and familism of many married or partnered gay and lesbian Jewish couples. Thus, even within change, Jewish populations exhibit a powerful attachment to what one might call "Jewish family values." The challenge to Jewish communities today is to find answers to a critically important question: how can Jewish communal institutions of all sorts support old and new forms of Jewish family life, for the greater good of both individuals and society?

Published by the JPRO Network

Racial Diversity and the American Jewish Community

Best Practices to Build Cultural Competence in Jewish Communal Organizations

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America is a vast marketplace of culture. As rapid technological innovation erodes barriers between communities, religious, ethnic, racial, and ideological lines are becoming increasingly permeable. Young people are growing up with unlimited access to information and are discovering an unprecedented sense of agency in the development of their identities (Pew Research Center, 2010). Though America has always been multicultural in the aggregate, today diversity is redefining identity at the community, family, and individual level. The choices made by individual Jews and their families present a challenge—to create a positive vision of the Jewish future that transcends differences in race, ethnicity, geography, class, ritual practice, and beliefs.

For a community that has largely relied on insularity, ritual, and bloodline, the free-form development of Jewish identity today can be unnerving. Fears of a loss of Jewish identity fuel an often-disparaging assessment of the frontiers of Jewish life. Yet, the youngest generation of Jews is proving that not only is the course of cultural inclusivity irreversible but also that Jewish identity is much more resilient than many may have thought. Instead of posing a threat, the diversification of American culture opens up an opportunity to allow Jewish identity to anchor the many identities young Jews hold today by accentuating the multiplicity of Jewish history and embracing the contemporary choices of American Jews as a celebration of Jewish identity.

The Jewish people have been and remain one of the most diverse and global people on the planet. Highlighting this fact, and developing proactive efforts to include the growing diversity of Jewish families, signals a readiness to participate in the marketplace of culture. How the Jewish community addresses race and embraces racial diversity has a broad impact on whether the Jewish community is seen as aligned with or in conflict with the increasing integration of communities. Racial dynamics act as a kind of litmus test in determining whether Judaism is compatible with the many differing affiliations a person and his or her family may embrace. As the very troubled racial history of America makes way for a future in which people of color make up a majority of the population, the Jewish community is facing an historic opportunity to represent the full complexity of Jewish identity.

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The perception of Jews as white, both in and outside the American Jewish community, is a relatively new phenomenon (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006). Along with many other "inferior" European immigrant groups flooding into America, Jews faced open discrimination ranging from quotas to outright exclusion. After World War II, many of these immigrant groups found increased acceptance and were integrated into the broader white European identity. For Jews, opting into white culture in America in many ways exemplified the opportunity to incorporate Jewish identity with other cultural influences, just as global Jewish communities reflect the dominant culture around them. However, as Eric Goldstein (2007) writes, "While Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their descendants went on not only to be accepted by their central European predecessors, but to become the dominant group among American Jews, the question remains as to whether Jews of color can overcome challenges of exclusion as easily, given the strength of racial prejudice and division in the United States."

While Jews maintained a sense of themselves as a minority, as evidenced by consistently progressive voting patterns, socially, Jews were gravitating toward identification with the white majority. The white status of American Jewry is a reflection of the assimilation Jews so avidly sought; yet it is this normalization of Jewish identity that now creates an imperative for intentional reform. The American Jewish community is not only estranged from its own rich history of Jewish diversity but it has become embedded to a degree in America's racialism, whitewashing Judaism's most valuable asset in an interconnected world: its diversity under a singular Jewish umbrella.

Perhaps the most important finding to come out of recent Jewish community surveys is that the overwhelming majority of Jews—94%—are proud of their Jewish heritage (Pew Research Center, 2013). In other words, regardless of their current level of community participation, Jews want to retain and incorporate their Jewish selves. According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of the popular book *Outliers*: *The Story of Success*, "What we do as a community, as a society, for each other, matters as much as what we do for ourselves" (Gladwell, 2008). Judaism, no matter how compelling it may be, will lose out if participation in Jewish life occurs outside of and separate from the prevailing trends in America of integration, multiculturalism, and identity innovation.

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THE AMERICAN CULTURAL EXPERIMENT

American emphasis on individual choice began with a commitment to religious freedom, but today reaches well beyond the scope of faith. In the 1990s, the ideology of multiculturalism emerged as a way of responding to the increasing cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender diversity within contemporary societies. Philosopher Charles Taylor argued that "recognizing the distinct cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities of different people and groups is not merely a question of civility, but a 'vital human need'" (Charmé, 2012). The traditional notion of a "melting pot" is giving way to a more nuanced understanding of difference. Today, cultural competency—the ability to accept and embrace difference—is fast becoming an essential part of modern American identity.

The demographics in America are changing. For the first time in American history, whites now account for less than half of the births in the United States (Tavernise, 2012). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, more than five million

marriages are between people of different races or ethnicities, a 28% increase since 2000. Among American children, the multiracial population has increased almost 50% (to 4.2 million) since 2000, making it the fastest growing youth group in the country (Saulny, 2011). This is not surprising given that the vast majority of Americans (86%) now approve of interracial marriage, a dramatic shift from 50 years ago when only 4% approved (see Figure 1; Jones, 2011).

One of the main influences underlying the shift in attitudes toward race is the contemporary rise of socially progressive young adults. The idealism of the 1960s is being realized by successive generations who are able to transcend community boundaries like never before. According to the 2010 Pew report on the millennial generation, those born in the 1980s and 1990s are more racially diverse than previous generations and form the first "always connected" generation (see Figure 2). A recent survey by Pivot and *Rolling Stone* described Millennials as "the most diverse, well-educated, interconnected generation in history, having lived their entire lives amid the greatest technological shift since the Industrial Revolution" (Dolan, 2013, p. 56). Now consider that Millennials account for nearly one-quarter of the entire American population, 80 million people. Their expectations are fast becoming a driving force in determining the long-term strategies of organizations and institutions across America.

The election of President Obama opened a new chapter in racial politics. An increased interest in racial identity and what it means to be "more than one" is reflected in television shows and advertisements that increasingly feature multiracial families, framed to appeal to target markets (Bates, 2014). An irreversible process is well underway, and the change we are seeing now will compound over time as each new generation is born into an increasingly multicultural society.

THE CHANGING JEWISH COMMUNITY

Since their arrival, Jews in America have been at the forefront of social change, and the blending of cultures is no different. Along with other Americans, taboos around interracial and LGBT unions are diminishing, the number of transracial adoptions is growing (Rosenberg, 1998), and people are increasingly regarding being Jewish as just one of many identities an individual might hold. As the racial makeup of the Jewish community begins to reflect full participation in these trends and the typical Jewish family moves toward including one or more persons of color, cultural competency within the Jewish community becomes vital to its future.

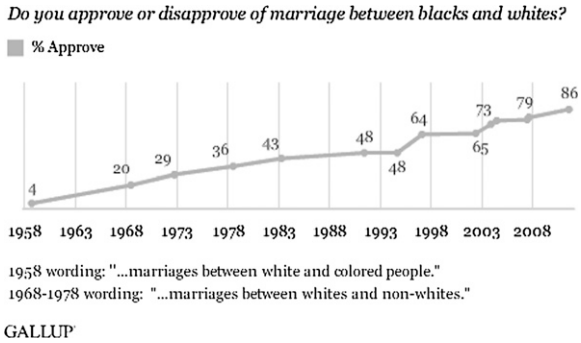

Figure 1. Growth in the rate of approval of marriage between blacks and whites, 1958–2008.

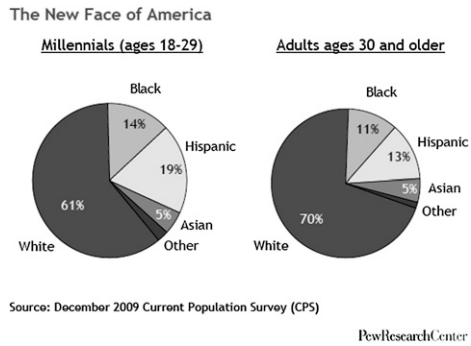

Figure 2. Successive generations are becoming increasingly racially diverse.

In 1999, the Institute for Jewish & Community Research (IJCR) conducted the "Study of Ethnic and Racial Diversity of the Jewish Population of the United States" (Tobin, Tobin, & Rubin, 2005). The research revealed that diverse Jews often feel isolated from Jewish life despite a deep commitment to their Jewish identity. Further research conducted by Be'chol Lashon[1] in 2004 discovered that Jews are more diverse than many assume—20% of America's six million Jews or 120,000 people are African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Sephardic (Spanish/Portuguese descent), Mizrahi (North African and Middle Eastern descent), and mixed race. In 2011, the New York Jewish Community Study[2] confirmed Be'chol Lashon's findings:

The study reveals that 12 percent of New York Jewish households are "non-white" (Black, Asian, Hispanic or bi-or multi-racial) and 13 percent are Sephardic (origins to North Africa, Spain or the Middle East) for a total of—with some overlap—an impressive 25 percent of the Jewish population of America's most Jewish city. Over 400,000 Jews are living in diverse Jewish households, approximating or exceeding the total Jewish population of any one country in the world, excepting the United States and Israel (Tobin, 2012).

The New York study highlighted the existence of Jewish enclaves from Syria, India, and elsewhere that were maintaining their identity at the periphery of normative Jewish communal life. "Integration" of these communities is changing the Jewish landscape in New York, but it is the changes internal to the Jewish family that are bringing race to the forefront of identity politics in the mainstream Jewish community across America. As Goldstein notes,

The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the American Jewish population that has taken place in the last few decades has been part of the larger social transformation of American Jews in the post-World War II period, when declining anti-Semitism and more fluid social boundaries allowed Jews to come into greater contact with Americans of all backgrounds. Increased incidence of intermarriage, conversion to Judaism and adoption from outside the Jewish community are among the aspects of this transformation that

[1] Be'chol Lashon, which means "In Every Tongue" in Hebrew, was founded in 2000 to meet the needs of a diverse Jewish people. As described by Stewart Charmé (2012), "[Be'chol Lashon] reflects greater denominational diversity and a more postmodern understanding of Jewishness as fluid and open-ended. They treat recognition as part of a commitment to Jewish diversity and multiculturalism, with less attention to traditional normative definitions of Jewish identity."

[2] For the complete study, see: http://www.ujafedny.org/jewish-community-study-of-new-york-2011.

have led to more people of color joining the Jewish fold and more being born as Jews (Goldstein, 2007).

Jews came to America as a diverse people entering a white-dominated culture. Achieving normalization and success pushed Jewish multiplicity into the background and highlighted the European roots of most American Jews. Today, as America's racial landscape changes, diversity is reasserting itself in the Jewish community.

Yet the number of Jews coming from nonwhite backgrounds tells only part of the story because the primary avenues by which diversity increases are amplified in the Jewish family. For example, one adopted African American child places race at the forefront of identity concerns for an entire Jewish family. Even the most culturally consistent Jewish family can have its assumptions challenged by the choices of one family member.

Although some families manage to internally embrace their diversity, interaction with the Jewish community may not offer the same comfort or acceptance. Many biracial Jews struggle to reconcile their Jewish and other identities, creating conflict. In an interview about her 2004 documentary film, *Little White Lies*, Lacey Schwartz, Be'chol Lashon's New York regional director who is biracial, explains, "For me it took a long time to integrate my two identities of being Black and Jewish. Initially I compartmentalized both identities and looked at being Black as disconnected from being Jewish. I had been raised in a world where being Jewish meant being white. I challenged myself and that assumption by connecting to the many racial and ethnic diverse elements of the global Jewish world."

Diverse Jews and their families are part of a growing constituency that represents an incredible opportunity for growth and engagement. Echoing Be'chol Lashon's original study, the recent Pew study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, found that Jewish identity is proving particularly resilient and that deviation from normative Jewish life does not necessarily indicate disaffection with Judaism. Among adult children of intermarried parents, it found that Jewish identification is actually increasing generationally, reaching 59% among Millennials—a 20% increase from the previous generation (Sasson, 2013).

Although participation in organized Jewish life may be declining, the American Jewish community is not losing Jews: Jews are just choosing new ways to identify. Among less connected Jews, the top forms of engagement include activities that can be conducted independently, including visiting Jewish museums, researching Judaism online, and conducting home-based holiday celebrations. Jews at the margins, or more accurately at the frontiers of Jewish life, are looking for ways to engage in Jewish life, and low traditional forms of engagement do not indicate gravitation away from Judaism generally, but rather dissatisfaction with the options available.

Racial uniformity is foreign to Jewish culture and is increasingly foreign to the American Jewish family. Despite Judaism's rich multicultural history, institutional inertia, individual racism, lack of knowledge, fear of change, and many other factors work to keep the organized Jewish world a largely white institution. Instead of offering an umbrella for a multitude of identities, identification with the organized Jewish community can then become a source of internal conflict—certainly for individuals who identify as Jews of color, but also for their families

and the millions of young Jews who are or will be deciding how their Jewish identity does or does not comport with the world around them.

BEST PRACTICES IN DEVELOPING CULTURALLY COMPETENT JEWISH PROGRAMMING

Meeting the needs of multiracial Jews requires a flexible and input-driven approach. There is no quick fix. While many Jewish professionals are already seeking to develop programming aimed at welcoming diversity, it is essential that they have the tools necessary to be successful. Race is a sensitive and potentially volatile issue for many, and well-intentioned efforts can easily become sidetracked due to basic misunderstandings. The following suggestions are designed to help organizations identify their unique needs, learn about their constituent community, and implement strategies that signal a commitment to cultural acceptance. They are not exhaustive and are intended to be interpretive.

Understanding Current Trends

Community surveys are an invaluable tool in helping determine trends and allocation of resources. However, data are only as useful as analysis allows, and too often the utility of surveys is limited by applying a fixed set of expectations, which Jews either meet or fall short of. Critics of trends in the Jewish community argue that the growth in "cultural" Jews or identification as "partly" Jewish correlates with low Jewish attachment. Yet correlation does not mean causation, and a number of intervening factors can influence how Jews identify and engage.

Religious identity is not static. A 2007 Pew study found that Americans are unique in their experimentation with religion. Though a Jew may hold a weak connection to Jewish life at one point in life, it is erroneous to assume that this reflects a permanent choice. Everyone has a faith trajectory, and rejecting an individual at any point can have damaging consequences for his or her Jewish attachment in the future. Moreover, we need to consider how the actions of Jewish institutions affect how Jews identify. After decades of criticizing intermarriage, is it really hard to predict that the children of those unions might find themselves unsure of exactly where they fit in the Jewish community? Condemnation of intermarriage has softened over time, but there remains little introspection about the lingering effects of an anti-intermarriage agenda nor sufficient commitment to assimilating non-Jews to Jewish life.

The 2013 Pew survey, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, for example, offers two contradictory narratives. One is that overall engagement is declining as a function of intermarriage and there is a resulting low level of Jewish socialization for the children of such marriages. The other is that Jewish identity is thriving even though a significant percentage of the Jewish community may feel alienated from mainstream Judaism. While the first narrative is not incorrect, it places the onus on Jews to avoid intermarriage as a solution to the problem and leads to further alienation of the existing population. The second opens up a valuable discussion about what Jewish communal professionals can do to decrease the feeling of isolation.

The importance of the Pew study's finding—that an overwhelming 94% of all self-identified Jews expressed pride in their heritage—cannot be overstated. Few questions asked on any topic elicit such a strong response. This finding

fundamentally challenges the notion that decisions made by Jews (or their parents) are bad for the Jewish community and raises the question of what the organized community can do to appeal to proud Jews who have yet to find their place in the community.

Trends are not necessarily negative or positive. The data inform us who we are today and offer a basis from which to build for the future, a way to discover innovation that reflects the contemporary Jewish people. Be'chol Lashon's work has grown to a national scale based on the principle of client-driven content and the conviction that "deficiency" in Jewish practice or identity among a population that identifies as Jewish is a supply-side rather than demand-side problem. We can continue to criticize Jews for a lack of engagement, or we can begin to listen to what the data are telling us: Jews want to engage, but many do not feel that they have the opportunity.

Who is a Jew: Envisioning a Positive Jewish Future

If we accept that decreases in Jewish engagement can be viewed as a supply-side problem and that each individual Jew has his or her own faith trajectory, then there is no such thing as a "bad" Jew. Building a welcoming community begins with the premise that all Jews are "good" Jews. Conveying negativity because young people are falling in love with the "wrong" people or making the wrong decisions about their lives is a nonstarter. Preemptively pushing Jews away out of fear that their choices will pull them farther from the Jewish community is counterproductive. We can either write them off or make the best case for why their Jewish identity should anchor their other identities.

It is understandable that, after centuries of persecution, the Jewish community sustains an underlying pathos. But blatantly broadcasting and developing a community strategy based on fear does not constitute an effective long-term approach to continuity. Life is a journey, and there is a fluid continuum of Jewish identity and behavior. Paying attention to and valuing all the choices that Jews make allow the Jewish community to remain relevant along the entirely of an individual's personal path.

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Moreover, although Judaism is not a proselytizing faith, a healthy Jewish community not only accepts conversion but it also encourages it. Recognizing those who may be interested in Judaism or who are on the path to conversion requires that we stop focusing on how un-Jewish a person is and instead identify those points of connection that can be built on. Many non-Jews are so entwined within the Jewish community that they feel Jewish, according to their own self-assessment (Pew Research Center, 2013). It is in our communal best interest that, no matter what the connection is with the Jewish people, it is met with encouragement.

Racial Catch-22: Are We Racist or Just Afraid of Messing Up?

America has a troubled racial history and the prospect of racism is ever present. Black Jews have reported feeling isolated within Jewish institutional settings, relaying many stories about nobody engaging with them or sitting near them in synagogue. The takeaway for many is that Jews are racist, yet most Jews do not think of themselves in those terms. So where is the disconnect? Oddly, fear of being racist can unintentionally lead to racism in effect if not intent.

One study suggests that some white people avoid racial conversations out of fear that they may say something politically incorrect or appear prejudiced (Tremmel, 2008). People who have little experience with interracial interactions may not feel comfortable in new, sometimes daunting situations—and avoidance and anxiety are the unfortunate results. "This anxiety precludes the encounters that would actually let people explore new interactions," explains study author Jennifer Richeson (NPR, 2008). Even as the Jewish community becomes more diverse, systemic change is slowed by an inability to actually engage the difference that Jews see around them.

Additionally, social cognition research provides a greater understanding of how discriminatory behavior can be exhibited even when an individual is intellectually committed to antidiscrimination. It suggests that human information-processing mechanisms lead to an unintentional "disconnect" between what we think and how we act (Burgess, Fu, & van Rhyn (2004). In other words, when we are busy with other tasks, distracted, tired, under time pressure, anxious, or otherwise engaged, we tend to rely on automatic unconscious processes (e.g., stereotyping), rather than conscious thoughts and feelings. These insights into human behavior underscore the importance of supporting interpersonal skills such as active listening, relationship building, and communication skills.

Language choices matter. When engaging another Jew different from ourselves, seemingly innocent curiosity can unintentionally give an impression of exclusion. Rather than asking, "Are you Jewish?" to an unfamiliar person sitting next to you during services, it would be better to engage them as you would any other fellow congregant or visitor. If a conversation ensues, a more appropriate response may be "I'd be interested in learning more about your Jewish journey." The individual and family histories of Jews have always been complex, and many Jews are already able to navigate divisions based on national origin, language, sexual orientation, and denominational affiliation on a regular basis. This same acceptance for disparate paths should extend to differences of race. A black, Asian, Latino, or mixed-race Jew should not raise any more eyebrows than any other Jew whose history you do not yet know.

Be'chol Lashon's goal is to create comfort around difficult issues like race. Our model of communication approaches difference by encouraging curiosity about and celebration of the differences between ourselves and others—asking honest questions with the understanding that it is okay not to know about someone else and it is even okay to make a mistake. "Culturally competency" is not a form of expertise—the less we presume to know about the "other," the better equipped we are to succeed. Rather than cultural competence, physician Melanie Tervalon suggests that "cultural humility" may be a better term: "It is imperative that there be a simultaneous process of self-reflection (realistic and ongoing self-appraisal) and commitment to a lifelong learning process" (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). This approach allows us to be more aware and flexible enough to let go of the false sense of security that stereotyping provides.

Is Being "Colorblind" Good or Bad?

In a similar conundrum, it is common for those seeking racial neutrality to claim not to see race—to be "colorblind." To some, it speaks to a vision of a world where the color of one's skin does not matter. However, we must be cognizant of how colorblindness can achieve the exact opposite of what is intended. Dismissing

racial identities does not signify acceptance. Even if Jews of color wanted to discard their racial identity, they cannot. The goal is to work toward including race in conversation and programming, not pretending it does not exist.

How race is acknowledged, integrated, and understood in our organizations is very important. By ignoring race, we overlook, for example, the impact of posters in our classrooms that portray only white Jews, unwittingly sending a message about who is Jewish and who is not. When people choose colorblind frameworks they are not just ignoring the bias and oppression but they are also ignoring a rich and varied Jewish cultural history. For example, whether we eat rice or not on Passover or one's particular style of chanting Torah is representative of the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity that enriches Judaism.

One can think of the Jewish community as an extended mixed-race family, and as the parents of children whose race is different from their own will tell you, differences in race cannot and should not be ignored (Maillard, 2014). Many of the families we work with root the Jewish identity of the family in their diversity. Judaism becomes the great equalizer, not because it washes away difference, but because the history of the Jewish people allows difference to become a focal point. Establishing an accepting Jewish community does not mean erasing difference. Quite the opposite, it means highlighting it.

Diversity and Inclusion: Not Just for Diverse Jews

Although race may present itself as the most "visible" identity, the reality is that Jewish identity is complex and is becoming more so. Diversity and inclusion are important components of the value system of many Jews and key lenses through which they make choices about engagement in Jewish life. The Internet and social networks are opening up the world and shaping our sense of self in dialogue with many cultures. As part of a generational shift, many young Jews embrace global identities and have diverse Jewish and non-Jewish friendship circles.

Traditional communal boundaries that created cohesion no longer exist for most Jewish families today. For Judaism to be relevant, it needs to reflect the values and identities of contemporary Jews. We need to educate our young people so that they see that the Jewish people embodies the ideals of global inclusion, acceptance, and diversity.

This is especially important because, for many Jews, the need for an inclusive community is no longer abstract. Every year, more and more Jewish families include at least one member of a nonwhite racial background. The ability to engage individual Jews relies heavily on the ability to involve the family as a whole. Synagogues, community centers, and other Jewish spaces do not have the luxury of simply appealing to the majority of white Jews, because many of them are now part of multicultural families. The demand for racially inclusive Jewish spaces is much higher than the actual population of Jews of color, and many organizations may be losing members without even knowing why.

The vast spectrum of Jewish traditions and expressions of culture practiced globally provides a rich resource on which to build a multicultural Jewish identity. As the 2013 Pew study showed, the youngest and most globally oriented generation continues to identify as proud Jews. Working toward a Jewish community that celebrates its diversity will go a long way toward helping these young Jews orient their Judaism at the center of their global identity.

What Language Should Be Used to Describe Multicultural Jews?[3]

A Jew of color is sometimes defined as anyone who claims heritages in addition to or other than Ashkenazi. However, this is hardly adequate to describe the innumerable ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the people who comprise the Jewish community. One sociological way of dividing the Jewish community by place of origin—Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi—denies the rich and varied cultural foundation of the contemporary American Jewish community. Moreover, as more and more families represent a mix of racial and cultural influences, how Jews identify and how they connect to their own family history will continue to diversify.

Sephardic is often used synonymously with Jews of color, whereas Ashkenazi is erroneously meant to equal white. The American black/white racial paradigm is inappropriately overlaid onto the Jewish community—bifurcating "Jews of color" and "Ashkenazi Jews" into two distinct, monolithic groups. However, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews are a mix of many peoples encountered during centuries of wandering throughout the Diaspora, and differences within each group may be greater than between them. "Jews of color," "diverse Jews," and "racially and ethnically diverse Jews" are all terms that refer to those who are in currently distinct subcultures from the majority Jewish community, but many people who fall into this category may not define themselves as "people of color." How do we talk about ourselves or others when the language we have is narrow and confining, like outdated racial categories on a census form?

The best approach is to allow Jews to self-define. Sephardic Jews may identify as white, whereas others may identify as Asian, Middle Eastern, North African, or other. Interracial families, adoptive families, and many others may embrace a variety of cultural influences, and it is paramount that people be permitted to self-define not only how they identify racially but also how they identify Jewishly. Be'chol Lashon's philosophy is to "meet people where they are."

It is paramount that people be permitted to self-define not only how they identify racially but also how they identify Jewishly.

Giving Diverse Jewish Communities a Voice: The Value of Local Programming

Full participation in communal life requires that reliable avenues of communication are built and maintained. Communication must be a two-way street, and advocacy is often needed to ensure that the voice of the "core" does not drown out that of the periphery.

The development of effective outlets for community expression requires flexibility and adherence to an input-driven process, permitting minority voices to define success and remain authentic. An oft-repeated desire among many diverse Jews is that the Jewish community reflects who they are. Decentralized programming requires local voices and local planning, because no two communities are exactly alike. Research at the local level can identify the programmatic needs of the community and facilitate the creation of more targeted and successful programs. It is tempting to aim for a predetermined goal when creating programming. However, the goals must be determined in concert with the community.

[3] This section is adapted from Tobin, Tobin, & Rubin (2005).

Identity formation is an unpredictable process and requires tolerance for uncertainty. Care should be taken not to pigeonhole diverse Jewish voices. The Be'chol Lashon's Speakers Bureau is a resource to the Jewish community at large, but more importantly provides an outlet for diverse voices in the Jewish community. Each speaker has his or her own unique area of interest; some discuss their background in depth, whereas for others their identity takes a back seat. Although their inclusion in the Speakers Bureau is predicated on their identity, they may chose to discuss anything from their childhood to the finer points of *halakha*. Normalization of racial diversity in the Jewish community means that, although highlighting difference is positive, diverse Jews should be allowed to be just Jews. When working with diverse Jewish communities and leaders, it is important to not simply appeal to an aspect of their racial identity, but to listen to what they would like to accomplish.

Programming for Diverse Jewish Families

Jewish families of color should not be considered a "group" or a "community." They have different backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives on their relationship to Judaism. The only thing that they share may be a sense of marginalization, of not seeing themselves reflected in Jewish life. Our research revealed that diverse Jewish families are interested in sharing Jewish experiences with (1) Jewish families who share their specific racial or ethnic group exclusively, (2) other diverse Jewish families, and (3) the general Jewish community. The key is that all three types of programs fulfill different facets of their identity and need to be considered to fully engage diverse families.

All Jewish programming presents an opportunity to recognize and celebrate identity. A Bar or Bat Mitzvah, for example, can be a defining moment in the development of one's Jewish identity (Magder, 2014). For the growing population of families with mixed racial, ethnic, religious, and other backgrounds, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah may be the first setting where the varied familial and sometimes nonfamilial influences of a young Jew come together under Jewish auspices. It can be a valuable opportunity to celebrate and honor the multiple elements of a child's identity, as illustrated next.

Music: Most American synagogues rely on music that is either American or European in origin. However, there are rich Jewish musical traditions representing the myriad of places where Jewish communities exist today and did so in the past. Additionally, there is a long tradition of adapting secular tunes to sacred words. This can connect the songs of one culture with the prayers of Judaism.

Dress: Kimonos, saris, or kilts are all perfectly acceptable for the child and the family members. Kippot can be made from any kind of material and look great in tartan, African cloth, or Thai Batik. Similarly, *tallitot*, prayer shawls, can be made from any cloth as long as there are four corners with proper *tzitzit* knotted on each.

Language: If family tradition includes other languages—Korean, Amharic, or Italian—send out multilingual invites or consider sharing some of the blessings in that language. Even though many may not understand the words, the experience will still be meaningful.

Food: Instead of or in addition to bagels and cream cheese, kimchi or Jerk chicken are just as appropriate for a Kiddush or party. Family recipes are a great way to share cultural traditions.

Artwork: Art from another culture, such as Japanese origami, can be incorporated into the celebration in a variety of ways: on the invitation, in the insert in the prayer books, or as decorations.

Mitzvah Project[4]**:** Many communities have made doing good works or Tikkun Olam a part of the process of preparing for becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah. From collecting money for a project in a distant land to volunteering to help new immigrants from a familial country of origin, there are countless ways young adults can use their mitzvah project to bridge the components of their identities.

Programming for those differentiated by ritual practice, family structure, ethnic/racial background, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age is a major challenge. Building tolerance for others is the coalescing theme—sharing the basic precept that all forms of Jewish practice are respected and highlighting the different ways to celebrate around the world. Diverse Jewish programming provides an obvious benefit to diverse Jews, but providing a diverse, forward-thinking, and globally reflective Jewish community is of value to all Jews.

Case Study: Seeking Symbiosis

Jewish professionals can look for opportunities to create inclusive programming that is mutually beneficial to the sponsoring organization and the target population(s). Proactive efforts at inclusivity need not be viewed as an overture or sacrifice for a needy population. On the contrary, many organizations need the involvement of a diverse Jewish community as much or more than the community needs its programming. For example, Jewish human service organizations often serve diverse clients, and a disconnect can exist between what many see as separate identities: Jewish and communities of color. However, the Jewish community includes Jews of color who can be a valuable resource in bridging gaps in communication between the organizational leadership, its staff, and its target population.

The New York Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS) began an examination of institutional racism in 2008. The JBFCS clients and staff are racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. The agency's leadership committed to developing a dialogue on "difference" with the goal of raising awareness and improving relationships among staff and between staff and clients. Judith Levitan, LCSW, JBFCS director of Clinical and Community Support Services, explained, "As we examined the Jewish Communal Services Division of JBFCS through the lens of anti-racism, we realized that we knew very little about Jews from other cultures and that this vibrant part of the New York Jewish Community was not a group we were serving or seeking help from."

JBFCS invited diverse Jewish speakers to help inform its staff how they could be more racially sensitive, and it also cosponsored a lecture/seminar series

[4] "What is the Be'chol Lashon Mitzvah Project?" See http://www.bechollashon.org/cart/index.php?cPath=27.

on diversity with the JCC on the Upper West Side.[5] JBFCS successfully met its core needs and in doing so also became aware of existing needs within the local community. Alisha Goodman, who was then on the JBFCS staff, noted, "This initiative helped us to listen to one another in new and more honest ways." Concrete outcomes included revising brochures and adding questions about race to the intake process. Judith Levitan went on to explain, "When I interviewed Lacey Schwartz, Be'chol Lashon's New York director, our next steps became clear. We determined that an affinity group for Jews from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds would be an excellent place to begin." JBFCS's organizational needs thus created an organic opportunity to engage with and begin to serve the local diverse Jewish community.

The Be'chol Lashon New York group at JBFCS has been successfully meeting monthly for four years. The format is structured to foster friendship and tolerance among members who may come from a wide range of backgrounds and religious observance, while the content is flexible to accommodate participants' priorities. The group links personal interests with broader Jewish themes through discussion, presentations, and interactive experiences. Levitan stated that "it is gratifying that we have provided a safe space for the community to meet and that it is a step in the direction of more opportunities for community-building and inclusion." The satisfaction expressed with the program and its longevity speak to the value of rooting proactive efforts in existing needs and expertise.

CONCLUSION

The increasing pace of cultural experimentation that is changing the composition and priorities of the American Jewish family offers an exciting opportunity to build a Jewish community that can thrive into the future. The Jewish people are poised to embrace a globalized world and be innovators in the incorporation of multiple identities—but nothing is guaranteed. Transitioning from fear to optimism and insularity to openness is a difficult process, fraught with confusion, misunderstanding, and defensiveness. Yet this is an exciting time for Jewish professionals who are on the ground and charged with guiding the process. Reform depends on strengthening the individual abilities of Jewish professionals, the innovators who will help lead the process.

A growing body of knowledge exists to help Jewish professionals develop the necessary skills to instigate change. Yet much more is needed. Professionals need the opportunity to obtain further training and the tools to effect actual change. They need new and actionable data. Perhaps more than anything, the Jewish community needs more and better ways for the Jewish people themselves to tell us who they are and what they want. Whether through discussion groups, open forums, or individual interviews, it is imperative that Jewish professionals learn directly from Jews themselves not only what they require but also what they know.

The American Jewish community is far from uniform. Every community, family, and individual will approach the issues of identity, race, and diversity

[5] Noted speakers included Professor Lewis Gordon, University of Connecticut; Joan Adams, director of JBFCS anti-racism task force; David Billings, director of the People's Institute; Samuel Friedman, *New York Times* reporter; Avishai Mekonen, filmmaker; and Dr. Ernest Adams, psychologist and author.

from a different starting point and with a different perspective. Undoubtedly, some communities will be further along in the process than others and more willing to recognize the role of race and the importance of cultural competence in the development of Jewish identity. The best practices provided here can help Jewish professionals begin the conversation and take steps to implement programs. They offer a range of recommendations to meet each community where it is and facilitate building a tailored approach. That is, in itself, a core finding of our work: successfully welcoming all kinds of Jews requires that the work be driven by the community's needs, not the other way around.

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