

Beyond the normal everyday stresses that most families feel today — the frenetic schedules and the family bank account — are other, sometimes more intangible, emotional stresses that pull and gnaw at Jewish families. As the following essays demonstrate, Jewish families vary widely in what they look like and how they interact with their communities. This issue seeks to open a communal discussion on inclusivity and the word “welcome.”

Properties of Being: Jewish Families

Marla Brettschneider

The face of Judaism is changing. Think about that statement for a moment. *Sh'ma*, listen. The face of Judaism is always changing. And it always has been changing. I'm the sort of political scientist who feels uncomfortable with predictions and indicators. I'm a participant observer of humanity in history. My studies suggest that as long as there is a Jewish community it will always be changing.

Identity is not static; it is a collection of dynamic phenomena. Even when we tap into nostalgia about traditional Jewish families, we are reminded that traditions are forever created anew. This is because we are a living community, meaning each day we must recommit and live out our commitments, even as they are informed by tradition and history. Each time we perform even a traditional act, engage in a traditional pattern of community relations, such as family making, we are enacting in time and space and so each enactment is a renewal. In each renewal there is the opportunity for change. Renewal

as we live it is a dynamic process of recommitting to tradition and creating tradition anew.

In this issue we pause to take note of some aspects of this dynamic of tradition and change in Jewish family making.

I am a Euro-heritage Ashkenazi-born Jewish mother to two African-heritage Jewish daughters. My partner and these children's second mother is a white, Euro-heritage convert to Judaism. Our family is an adoptive multiracial Jewish two-women-headed family. So many within our extended family, neighborhood, and Jewish community have embraced us. And

yet our family constellation is still a shock to too many others.

Would you find it surprising to learn that I know lots of families who share various incarnations of our family constellation? Both my partner and I are Ph.D.s and Jewish professionals. We are considered middle class. We have a lively Jewish home and communal life. We also couldn't possibly afford Jewish day school or Jewish summer camp, or many other Jewish insti-

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INSIDE

Marla Brettschneider: Properties of Being 1
Yavilah McCoy: Changing Face of Jewish Identity 2
Angela W. Buchdahl: Kimchee on the Seder Plate 3
Stacey Shuster: Families Like Mine 4
Alex Coleman: Variations on a Theme 5
Heather Ellen Miller: Mitzvot During Christmas 6
Rela Mintz Geffen: Shifting Beneath Our Feet 7

Rosenblatt and Mayer: In Search of Jewish Life 8
Dayle A. Friedman: An Unacknowledged Challenge .. 9
Joshua Hammerman: Zeyde's Living Room 10
Susan Berrin: Divorce Is an Ugly Word 11
Roderick Young: *NiSh'ma* 13
Gary A. Tobin: 21st Century Judaism 14
Barbara Diamond Goldin: A Family Reading Tradition .. 16
Vanessa L. Ochs: The Torah of Love 16



tutional affiliations. While we want Jewish communal life to be “family friendly,” we must simultaneously work for it to not be family compulsory.

Many other family models and stresses need our attention as a Jewish community and raise questions about how Jewish families will address continuity, intermarriage, community education, child empowerment, gender parity, health insurance, job insecurity, relocation, violence, addiction, poverty, class climbing and class falling, and intergenerational support. How will our religious and secular institutions, our schools and our communities, support families

as they struggle and make choices, as they face new challenges as American Jewish families? Our families — in all of their wonderful, experimental, newly traditional, challenging, dysfunctional, joyful multiplicity — need understanding, support, and care. They require respectful questioning and some very smart answers that work for today.

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The Changing Face of Jewish Identity: Inside, Outside, and Other

Yavilah McCoy

As an African-American Jewish woman, I represent just one of many truly distinctive ethnicities that exist within Judaism. Over the course of my education, and the opportunities it afforded me for processing and reprocessing my experience, I have come to welcome my Black-Jewish heritage as a blessing, a source of pride, and a responsibility. My great-grandmother, who is still alive, was the daughter of an enslaved African. My other great-grandmother, who took the name “Naomi,” was the first in my maternal family line to investigate the spiritual possibilities of Judaism and take steps toward Jewish practice. My mother’s parents, though they never formally converted, took on Jewish identity in the 1940s and 1950s at the height of racial segregation in this country. My grandfather, a civil rights spokesman and labor union leader, took every opportunity to emphasize the importance and significance of the African-American struggle for freedom, justice, and equality and helped me to take pride in the courage and vigilance that African-Americans exhibited in their historical and present-day struggle toward equality.

My parents converted to Orthodox Judaism, and raised me and my five siblings as Orthodox Jews. My Jewish education has included a range of perspectives: Hasidic elementary school and Yeshivah University Modern-Orthodox high school, The State University of New York at Albany, and the Hebrew

University in Jerusalem. In my career as an English and Judaic Studies educator, I sought and found opportunities for teaching in Reform, Conservative, Modern Orthodox, and Hasidic day schools. As a young girl, my religious home life was inundated with the traditions of Sephardic Jewry as my mother and father settled and found their place in our Brooklyn Sephardic community.

In the various opportunities that God has afforded me, for seeing and appreciating the full diversity of Judaism, I have discovered a people that is beautiful, diverse, and rich in both history and wisdom. Yet, in my journeys I have also found myself struggling to make sense of the tension points where Jews of various distinctions fail to meet and appreciate each other around “difference.”

As I reflect on my experiences as a Jewish woman of color, I notice immediately that my consciousness of Jewish identity developed in two stages. Initially my education and community environment presented me with a picture of Judaism that was unidimensional in terms of geography, gender, religious status, race, and social class. But eventually I began to acknowledge the need for a more complex and complete picture of Judaism. I began to wrestle with the concept of “otherness” — “us” and “them” — in the Jewish community.

Through my work in the field of “Jewish diversity” (and my founding of the Ayecha Resource Or-