

**Double or Nothing**  
**Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage in the United States**

A conference presented by the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute  
and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

April 25 and 26, 2004

Brandeis University

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**Picturing Interfaith Relationships**

**Moderator:**

Shulamit Reinharz, founding director, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute

**Presenters:**

Sylvia Barack Fishman, codirector, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute and professor of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University

Joan Hyler, president, Hyler Management and founder, the Morningstar Commission

**Shulamit Reinharz:** Tonight's session opens a special conference called "Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage." It follows on the heels of a December roundtable meeting on intermarriage throughout the world. During tonight's session and all day tomorrow, we're going to focus on mixed marriage in the United States. We will use as a basis of our discussion a new book by Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. The conference will focus on how a social scientist applied her skills to understanding

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this phenomenon about which everybody has an opinion yet very few people have real knowledge. We hope that when you leave, you will still have your opinions, but you will have greater knowledge.

We're very fortunate to have two groups sponsoring this conference: Harold Grinspoon, Diane Trotterman, and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation; and Annie and Art Sandler and their four children, Leila, Jessica, Max, and Dillon. I would like to begin this evening by having Harold Grinspoon make some welcoming remarks. Tomorrow you will hear a welcome from Annie Sandler.

Everybody is interested in what goes on in other people's marriages and what goes on behind closed doors: what goes on in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the living room, and what kinds of conversations people have. That's what this conference is about. In any kind of pairing, when two independent people come together, they create a new institution, a new unit called a family. The new family has to make some important decisions: What is the identity of the family going to be? Will both parties join together in real synchrony and harmony to create a single identity, or can the two parties stay separate? If they do, will they still have a single identity as a family? How is that done? Does it change over time? What about children? At this conference, we will go inside the closed door of other people's homes see what we can find.

This conference is an exercise in thinking about partnerships, about two becoming one. It is appropriate, then, that two research centers are cooperating to put this together: The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute (HBI)—which is itself a partnership between Hadassah, the World Zionist Women's Organization of America, and Brandeis University, a Jewish, nonsectarian university—and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, also at Brandeis University.

Representing the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute is Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, HBI

codirector. Representing the Cohen Center is director Professor Leonard Saxe.

Our speakers tonight are Sylvia Barack Fishman and a special guest, Joan Hyler, straight from Hollywood. We could sit here all night and talk about what's going on in Hollywood, but none of us really knows, because we don't work there. Joan Hyler does. She makes stars. She understands how films are developed. She understands what makes a movie a hit or a failure.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** What we've heard tonight from Sylvia, which she illustrated with her film clips, is earth-shattering. It's going to take a little while for us to absorb it. We have all heard the figures about intermarriage, but we have not absorbed them yet, because we have not analyzed certain cultural features. Advocacy for intermarriage is countercultural. It is difficult for one generation to explain this to another.

I'd now like to introduce Joan Hyler—who is not responsible for the theme coming out in all these films. Joan Hyler is president of Hyler Management, one of the fastest growing boutique management firms in the entertainment business, and a former senior vice president of the William Morris Agency. She coproduced the CBS series *Ladies' Man* and the off-Broadway hit *Almost Famous*. Hyler is a founding member and chair of Hadassah's Morningstar Commission. She created the entertainment council of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, producer of the prominent Jewish Image Awards, and she is a visiting professor at the University of Southern California.

**Joan Hyler:** I have been working in the entertainment business for over thirty years. I've met just about everyone and represented a lot of them. So I'm happy to answer any questions you want to ask, serious or not, during our Q&A.

Shula and Sylvia and other women from Hadassah came to Los Angeles about eight years ago to found the Morningstar Commission. As opposed to many groups, who come to look at Hollywood to analyze and understand, this group wanted to change things. They were one of the first groups ever, in the history of Hollywood, that was not simply studying Hollywood and trying to change it from the outside. They wanted to understand the industry professionals—the people who make movies, television, and theatre—who really need consciousness-raising. They created a real intersection between the mainstream Jewish community and professionals in the industry. I wrote this speech to challenge the people in this audience who represent mainstream Jewish culture—not just those who write books about it, but those who fund projects, think tanks, and conferences like this. I want to offer a challenge in my remarks, because I'm very serious about this work, which for a Jewish woman, is shocking. No wonder I don't have more Jewish boyfriends! After looking at what most of the culture looks at, day in and day out, I realized that the messages about Jewish women are not appealing, let alone sexually enticing. So I intend to change those things, to make the political very personal.

The issue of mixed marriages is a hot button political issue in Jewish life. I'm over 50. In Dayton, Ohio, where I was growing up, twenty percent of Jewish women married non-Jewish men, and 27 percent of Jewish men married non-Jewish women. Today it's much more—forty percent. When I was at Ohio State, I fell in love with a Jewish man, Bruce. Bruce was a curly-haired Jewish boy from New Jersey, and we lived together during our junior year. I was the kind of woman who loved Paul Newman, and I got over the fact that he married a non-Jewish girl, Joanne Woodward, because she seemed substantial. Even though he didn't marry a Jewish girl like me, he married a woman who had values.

I preferred Elliott Gould to Donald Sutherland and Robert Redford, and I really wasn't

sure why the adorable and brilliant Woody Allen revolted me so much. When we lived together, Bruce and I watched movies, and we shared Barbara Streisand albums. If you saw *Hairspray* in Boston this year, you might recognize Bruce. He played the mother, and in the third act he wears a full-length red dress and a beehive hairdo, and he dances around on heels. Yes, Bruce is gay. He claims that in our senior year I left him for the college radical, and he left me for the football team. I'm bringing up my first serious boyfriend, because what I don't hear in this conference on mixed marriages is the notion of same-sex marriages. I feel that I lost more men in my generation to homosexuality than I did in Vietnam. In order to understand what is going on in today's culture, I think we have to study same-sex relationships.

There is a group that started in Los Angeles, called the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLAAD, which is comparable to the Anti-Defamation League. They have done tremendous work to promote healthy and diverse images of gay life. They have worked in the mainstream Hollywood community ever since the AIDS scourge in the eighties, ever since Linda Evans kissed Rock Hudson. Remember that? Linda Evans was vilified for having kissed Rock Hudson. Everybody thought she would get AIDS from that kiss. The gay and lesbian response to the "gay cancer," as it was called at the time, was to start their own anti-defamation league, and I believe they've been more successful than the Jewish community. They have award shows, and they've worked on all fronts, political, social, cultural, and we now have a proliferation of gay-friendly shows on television.

Eric McCormack, who plays Will in *Will and Grace*, is a long-term client of mine. He happens to be straight. That show—as well as *The L-Word*, *Queer as Folk*, and now *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*—has done so much to promote positive, healthy, diverse attitudes about gay men.

My 13-year-old niece, Sarah, loves *Will and Grace*. She watches *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* with her 14-year-old brother, and they love it, because they see men on television celebrating life. I urge you to watch it, it's quite delicious. GLAAD has done a tremendous amount to promote healthy, diverse images of homosexual life. But the mainstream Jewish community has failed to address this issue in any real way. It has failed to account for and to change what we've seen tonight, not just for women, but for men.

Shula Reinharz, at a national convention of Hadassah in 1995 or 1996, said we must do something about [the disastrous images of Jewish women in Hollywood films]. We have to look, we have to study, we have to figure out how to make an inroad into Hollywood. Any Jewish girl who tries to model herself on popular culture will develop psychic scars. I can't prove that, but I'm sure there are studies that show the influence of those types of stereotyped images on the psyche and on growth and development.

About six years ago, with Shula and Sylvia and Carol and Annie and Shirley's blessing, and their funding, we formed the Morningstar Commission. We took our name from Marjorie Morningstar. Actually wanted to call ourselves Morgenstern—old name, old nose—but that was a Jewish women's in-joke. We thought the name Morningstar Commission would appeal to the women whom we wanted to attract in Hollywood.

The commission was a group of us in the entertainment business, mostly women, a few men, who were at high levels. They were writers and producers. Two heads of studios came to the table in 1997 at someone's home. We came up with the following mission statement: "To create a healthier diversity of portrayals of Jewish women in the media, to advocate at the highest levels in the entertainment business for such portrayals"—we're not just studying, we're advocating—"and to mentor the next generation of women who could carry on this work."

One of the commission's first tasks, in 2000, was to mount what became a profound and far-reaching study using four sets of focus groups. That's when Sylvia and Shula came to Hollywood. We unearthed some alarming but not surprising results. The Jewish men in our groups told us their ideal woman on television at the time was Dharma in *Dharma and Greg*, played by Jenna Elfman, because she didn't look Jewish. Of all the women in Hollywood, she was the most sexually appealing to Jewish men because, they said openly, she didn't look Jewish.

In this study, Jewish women were described, and often described themselves, as hard-working, bright, and charitable, but without the attractiveness of delicate features. We had prominent noses, we were dark-complected, and we tended to be overweight. We had learned through money how to take care of ourselves.

The findings of this study were published nationally and internationally and featured prominently in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and a number of women's journals. Now they are discussed in Sylvia's book, which I urge you to read.

Part of Morningstar's work is to enter into partnerships with other entertainment groups. I put Morningstar together with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, a forty-year-old agency that used to work exclusively in New York, but came to Hollywood four years ago led by Richard Siegel, whom I'm sure a few of you know. I told Howard Bragman, a gay activist in Hollywood who started GLAAD's Image Awards, "I'm outing you as a Jew. I know there is a Jew in there." So Bragman got involved in the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and three years ago we started the Jewish Image Awards. Hollywood does not need another award show. But we created one. We are now in our fourth year. One of the places to be in the fall is the Jewish Image Awards. The people we honor become incredibly moved. We honored Steven

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Weber, who wrote the TV show *Club Land*, and Gregory Smith, who starred in *Everwood*.

Because of us, Jeffrey Tambor wears a *kippa* on the show *Arrested Development*. I urge you to watch it. Tambor plays the former head of an Enron-like company who is in jail. He turns the company over to his wife so the government won't find the money. It's something crazy like that. His character puts on a *kippa* and becomes a born-again Jew. And Jeffrey Tambor hosts our awards.

In Morningstar, we designed a Woman of Inspiration Award to honor Jewish women in the industry. We've honored Pulitzer Prize-winning author Wendy Wasserstein and award-winning HBO filmmaker and executive Sheila Nevins. Some of these women say, "I'm not Jewish. Well, I'm Jewish, but you're really honoring me for being a woman of inspiration with Jewish values." Then, they come to the awards, and they're blown away. They come away with a finer sense of who they are as Jewish women. Sheila Nevins, who is really a genius and is responsible for all those HBO documentaries, is one of those women.

We honored Deborah Messing, who plays Grace Adler on *Will and Grace*, last year for her funny and gorgeous and consciously Jewish development of her character. Deborah, as I'm sure most of you know, is a Brandeis graduate. She's a fabulous actress, she's gorgeous, and she's challenging in a very funny, sitcom, *I-Love-Lucy* kind of way. She is also consciously Jewish. The first few years of the show, the show's creators, David Kohan and Max Mutchnick, concentrated on the gay theme, but once they had hit their stride and became a top-ten show, Deborah Messing stepped up and said she wanted her character to have a Jewish mother. She is played by Debbie Reynolds. Every year they have a Hanukkah dinner: they go out for brisket, and they fight. She has a menorah in her home. We've come a long way in television to get a menorah in a character's home. This is after fifty years of television broadcasting, but it's a

major accomplishment. The Jewish Image Awards and Morningstar honored Deborah Messing to highlight that accomplishment. We can't take credit at Morningstar for creating Grace Adler, but we can take credit for using our influence in the business to create positive and diverse images of Jews.

One Hollywood writer who is not Jewish, Gregory Berlanti, came to our Image Award ceremony because his lawyer is a friend of mine and was getting an award for community service. Berlanti was so inspired by what he heard at the award ceremony that in the second year of his show *Everwood*, the character Gregory Smith said Kaddish for his Jewish mother. A number of episodes were devoted to authentic Jewish mourning rituals. The mother then reappeared in flashback, and she was gorgeous. I was very happy about that, and we made a few new friends.

Two things recently have saddened and alarmed me. One is the image in popular magazines of Madonna going to Passover services at a high-end Miami resort, wearing a *kippa* and eating matzo with her son. The Kaballah Center with its movie stars Rosanne Barr, Ashton Kutcher, and Demi Moore, is the only image that most of Christian America is getting of Jewish life. A magazine recently compared the Kaballah Center, which they associate with Jewish mysticism, with Scientology. Somehow the Jewish community has to organize itself to create other conscious Jewish members of the show business community, so the only images of our values aren't Madonna and the Kaballah Center. Madonna is the only person in the entire business I've ever heard of telling *People* magazine she won't work on *Shabbes*. During her tour, she will not work Friday nights. To me, that's a caricature of who we are. I think we must do something to counter the influence of the Kaballah Center in California. Most of your children probably read *People*, *Us*, *In Touch*, and *Teen People*. The prevalent images of religious

Jews in these magazines are now Madonna and her Scottish husband, Guy Ritchie, dressed in white and wearing a *yarmulke*, going to *shul* with her son Rocco. It's a real indictment of us.

I was also very concerned about the hysteria and contentiousness of the way that members of the mainstream community approached the Mel Gibson movie, *Passion of the Christ*. I felt that Abraham Foxman's response to early screenings and pirated copies of the film prevented our group from getting across the message to mainstream America about what was really wrong with *Passion of the Christ*. With all due respect to him and the good work he does at the Anti-Defamation League, I think he snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The Jewish community could have had a moment where we could have explained the devastation caused by the movie, as well as its inaccuracies. But the opportunity was lost in hysteria.

Part of our agenda at Morningstar and the National Foundation of Jewish Culture is to bring into show business our love of being Jews. I know that may sound crazy and odd, but ninety percent of the women working in Hollywood who are Jewish have never lit *Shabbes* candles. In the groups I'm involved with, we have Friday night dinners, we have *havdala* services, we serve kosher food, and we talk about the Torah. We held an event called "The echoes of Esther," where a number of women in Hollywood, including one Academy Award winner, wrote pieces that were variations on the Esther theme. Being Jewish and understanding *ahavat yisroel*, the love of your fellow Jew, is in the mission statement of every group that I'm involved with, and every group that we're involved with. So I want to ask the Jewish leadership here to come to Hollywood, get to know us, and help us create and challenge these images. Help us educate the hearts and minds of Hollywood writers, directors, and producers, so we can stem the tide of devastating images of Jewish men and women in the culture.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** It was wonderful to hear the fresh breath of air of activism coming from

Hollywood. I'm sure that Joan Hyler has some receptive ears in this audience. Now we're going to have an opportunity for Q&A

**Edmund Case:** Sylvia, this is for you. I thought your presentation was really interesting. I thought it was very entertaining. But I was startled, after about an hour of different movie clips that you showed and commented on, when you said that dual religious observances are depicted as a cultural ideal, and that the media promotes religious syncretism in mixed marriage families. I heard two examples out of the 8 or 10 or 12 that you showed—I think what you were referring to were two examples of mixed-married households where there were Christmas trees.

I want to respectfully question whether it's fair and accurate, or a mistake, to assume that a Christmas tree in a mixed-married household is a religious observance and that there's religious syncretism going on.

**Sylvia Barack Fishman:** Ed and I have an ongoing discussion about the significance of Christmas trees. I understand your point that for many Americans, Christmas trees can be taken to be cultural rather than religious.

One of the striking things about the presence of Christmas trees in Jewish homes is the fact that they have declined dramatically in homes where both spouses are Jewish. In the 1940s and 1950s a Christmas tree in a Jewish household was simply a sign that the family was trying to be American. Today, however, there are Christmas trees in only six percent of households where both parents are Jewish, and there are Christmas trees in only two percent of households that belong to any kind of temple or synagogue. I think that figure of two percent says something about the significance of the tree as a religious symbol. I'm not saying it's a deep religious symbol, but it's a symbol that has some religious overtones. Today, having a Christmas tree in the home of a Jew is a sign that there is also a non-Jew living in that home. It's different from the

way it was when it was a cultural expression of wishing to be an American.

Religious syncretism is not a dirty word. It's a description of a situation. So I respectfully differ with you. When we have television programs in which blue and white streamers are wrapped around a Christmas tree and a Jewish star is put on the top of the tree, that that may be shallow religious syncretism, but it is still religious syncretism. What we have to remember is that the expression of Jewishness is also often shallow. So essentially, you have two shallow cultural expressions of a religious tradition. That's the way it looks to me.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** As moderator I would like to add that what we had tonight was a historical overview, which showed how these relationships changed over time. What was at one point an either/or is now considered the possibility of both. What Sylvia was saying is this possibility of both is no longer perceived as a real blemish in the media; it is seen as a positive good.

**Q:** I'm surprised that during the course of this discussion tonight there hasn't been any mention of the affiliation to Israel. I'm seriously concerned about the disaffection of many religious children from what they see as hypocrisy and lip-service. I think O'Connell had it right: *menschlichkeit* is what need to celebrate. So I'd like to hear you comment about the implications of equating Jewishness with support for Israel, and how that has an impact on the image of American Jews.

**Joan Hyler:** I'd like to answer that with a quick but complicated question. In Hollywood, our hearts are breaking because the situation is so complicated. As much as many people have opinions on one side, others say, "but on the other hand." I think everybody is caught in the mire of what to do with a broken heart.

Now, leave it to Steven Spielberg. He is making a movie about the effect of the terrorism at the 1972 Olympics, which will show the Mossad response to the killings of the Israeli athletes.

The movie will address, in a tremendously complicated, probably brilliant way—please God—how we got to where we are today. At least, that’s my hope. Many Jews in Hollywood feel a lot of confusion and heartbreak. I think most of us in Hollywood support the state of Israel and feel as we do about Iraq: “Oh, my God, how did we get in this mess, and how can we get out and save the world?”

I was fascinated watching Spielberg’s response; some people in the Hollywood community, when they respond, they really send a message. Very few mainstream liberal Jews in the Hollywood community supported *The Passion of the Christ*. But it’s a First Amendment issue. Mel Gibson got creamed, if you remember, last fall. He got vilified. Nobody said, “He’s got the right to make the movie. It’s his point of view. It’s his money, it’s not the studio’s money.” Nothing. Shush. Nothing. That was fascinating to me. Certain mainstream Jews in Hollywood, like Spielberg or David Geffen can set the tone. Spielberg has kept his movie about the Olympics under wraps, I think because he has a lot at stake. If I were him, I would be nervous about making this movie, because it is going to address the very complicated, emotional response to Israel. I hope that a year from now we’re all going to be as touched by what he’s done as we were by *Schindler’s List*. So I do think that although Israel is not in the forefront of everyone’s mind, it is in back of these images.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** It’s possible that Steven Spielberg’s movie will have a message that will make people think about Israel the way *Exodus* made people think about Israel. I don’t think there has been a movie since *Exodus* that dealt with the topic. And the lack of a movie on that topic is in itself a very interesting issue.

**David Aaronson:** As somebody who follows events in Israel and is very concerned about the state of Israel, I’m disappointed by the absolute cowardice of the liberal Jewish community in

Hollywood, who have been conspicuously silent since the *Intifada*, or whatever you want to call it arose, with the exception of the one gentleman—

**Joan Hyler:** Jason Alexander.

**DAVE AARONSON:** With the exception of Jason Alexander and the other gentleman on *The West Wing*, the liberal secular community has been silent, I think due to the fear of offending their liberal colleagues. They've done nothing. The only person who has done anything, ironically, is Madonna who has announced that she is going to appear in Tel Aviv and Eilat during her world tour. Most other entertainers have basically chickened out of even appearing. Now while I may have my differences with respect to her involvement with the Kaballah Center, I respect the fact that Madonna is willing to put her feet on the ground when the rest of the entertainers are just taking a pass.

**Joan Hyler:** You're absolutely right. Whitney Houston also went and got baptized. I used to represent Madonna. I was her agent when she did the only good movie she ever did, *Desperately Seeking Susan*. What I meant was, who can blame the press for covering Madonna; wherever she goes is news. But the Jewish community has failed to put up images of somebody who is a mainstream Jew going to *shul*. That the community has conceded that to Madonna I find shameful.

You have to understand something. Most people are terrified. Most people who lived in New York during 9/11 are still traumatized. The reason you don't see Hollywood running to the aid of Israel is, first of all, lack of consciousness. They don't support the government, and they don't know how to deal with it. There's fear and there is confusion and when you have fear and confusion, you have people who are stuck.

**Sylvia Barack Fishman:** It sounds like both sides need leadership.

**Joan Hyler:** Right. Recently we've started to meet with the Israeli Tourism Department. People will go to Israel. But right now, they just don't know what to do. They're frightened, and they're confused about the Sharon government. Most people support Israel. Most people support a lot of Sharon's opinions, but he is a lightning-rod in Hollywood and mainstream Hollywood hasn't figured out how to address it.

Christopher Reeve did go recently, although he's not Jewish. He went because good old Israel is on the cutting edge of scientific breakthroughs. We're talking about taking a group on Hanukkah to Hadassah Hospital, which is on the cutting edge on breast cancer research.

But basically it's fear and confusion that produce a tremendous amount of trauma and—not apathy so much as, “I don't know what to do so I'm going to do nothing.”

**Nahama Ben Moshe:** Sylvia, I was hoping you could talk about what you mean when you say “syncretism,” so that we all have a working definition and know where you're coming from. I know it's a term that is going to come up often, since it comes up often in your book

Also as I looked at all the film clips, I was thinking about identity, and how each of the individuals in the clips would identify—whether they would say that they are Jewish, and whether they are *halakhically* Jewish, and whether or not that's important. And I was thinking about your surprise that in a focus group of five teens, only one strongly identified as Jewish. So I'm interested in the images that come out in these films, and how we can understand people from interfaith families who identify with some elements of Judaism, but may or may not be *halakhically* Jewish. Or they may not be exclusively Jewish. How you would describe the connections to Judaism that are being developed and fostered through these different efforts?

**Shulamit Reinharz:** That sounds like a whole course! Sylvia, would you like to respond?

**Sylvia Barack Fishman:** One of the reasons it's difficult to talk about the important issues that

you raise is that we all know that throughout Jewish history, aspects of the cultures around the Jews were absorbed into Jewish culture. We can't pretend that Jews were living in a hermetically sealed bubble until 25 years ago, and that only now are there aspects of the surrounding cultures that have become part of Judaism. We know that kind of interchange goes way back in history.

But one of the things that is different about what is happening now is the support within the larger culture for the combining of two religions. That's what I mean by syncretism.

Syncretism is simply a description of a household in which two religions are observed and celebrated—in which two religions are part of the texture of the household.

In my book I distinguish between absorbing the nonreligious aspects of the culture into Jewish life and absorbing the religious aspects. Also, this is a unique situation in Jewish history, where the surrounding culture, rather than keeping Jews separate, by isolating them, actually has absorbed a lot of Jewishness, so that we have a kind of flow back and forth. We have radio announcers who use lots of *Yiddish* words. I see in the newspaper that non-Jewish kids have bar and bat mitzvahs, because they discovered that it's really cool to have a big party for yourself when you're thirteen years old. We have non-Jewish couples who choose to have a *huppa* or break a glass and yell "Mazel Tov!" at their weddings, because they have seen it on TV and they think it's really fun, it's really cool. So we have a lot of Jewishness out there, and we have a lot of American culture in Jewish households as well. That's what makes it so tricky to talk about what I really mean by syncretism. When I talk about syncretism, I'm talking about religious symbols that are incorporated into households which also have Jewish symbols. I realize that's not a completely clear-cut distinction, but I think we're going to have to be satisfied with things that are complex because we live in a complex world.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** Three words which could bolster what Sylvia said are *anti-Semitism*, which

is one way for the American community to relate to the Jewish community; *melting pot*, which is another way; and *pluralism*, which is away the Jewish world lives within the United States. I believe pluralism has become our ideal. Anti-Semitism is really not accepted. The melting pot is no longer a very attractive image. But pluralism, diversity, what does that mean? Multiple identities together. We think of it as neighborhoods. People want to live in mixed neighborhoods. You think about communities. The high school to which my children went had one hundred different communities represented, one hundred different backgrounds. That was considered a positive thing. But now we're talking about families that are pluralistic as well; that is, both kinds in one. We're talking about synagogues that are pluralistic, some families within a synagogue being people that are in a mixed marriage. In fact, they say that in the Reform movement, 25 percent of synagogue members are in mixed marriages. So pluralism is the new ideal. I think that pluralism and syncretism are very similar. This notion of the positive value of difference is the new ideal of the family, as portrayed in media images.

**Arlene Barr:** I would love to hear both of your comments about what you think of Fran Drescher's portrayal of the nanny. Here we have a Jewish woman who has power and control over images of Jewish women, and she was faulted by the Jewish community. The Jewish community said to her, "You have made negative stereotypes of Jewish women." She defended herself by saying, "No, this is my mother, and this is my grandmother, and I'm proud of them, and I want to show them." I share Fran Drescher's background, in that I am a born and bred Jew from Queens, and the mother and the grandmother on that program are also my mother and my grandmother. What do we do with the difference between Mr. Scheffield's beautiful house and her mother who has plastic slipcovers on the furniture? What do we do with the images of Jewish women when they're true but we don't like them?

And also, Joan, you said you would be willing to dish during the Q&A period, and I really don't know what to ask you and what you should dish about, but if you would like to dish about something, I really want to hear it!

**Joan Hyler:** Whatever you want to know. It's "Ask Joan." What's to dish?

**Shulamit Reinharz:** How about Fran Drescher?

**Joan Hyler:** A friend of mine who died of AIDS named Tim Flack discovered her and helped her create her show. So I am not the right person to talk about Fran Drescher, because I loved her from the minute Timmy brought her around to people's living rooms where she did that act. I know that there is a controversy, but I don't understand why. I think she is adorable. I am glad that she's around, and she is coming back with a new show this year. I don't think it will be as broad as *The Nanny*, but I think she's quite an extraordinary lady. In the focus group we did, there were a number of people who said they didn't think she was Jewish, they just thought she was from New York. The American audience sometimes doesn't really understand the difference between a New Yorker and a Jewish New Yorker.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** Can you answer from your academic point of view—

**Sylvia Barack Fishman:** I don't think I can give an academic opinion of the nanny. I think people either love her or hate her. I appreciate many of the same qualities that you do, Arlene, in terms of her being empowered, but when I speak in the Midwest, people are often excruciatingly embarrassed by her.

**Ron Wolfson:** I'm Ron Wolfson from the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. One of the issues in this conference will certainly be the encouragement of conversion. I wondered what your take was on the conversion to Judaism of Kristin Davis's character on *Sex in the City*. If they had a cleaned up version, I think it could be actually pretty good fodder for Jewish

education.

**Joan Hyler:** I'll tell you why I absolutely adored it: she loved being Jewish. I haven't seen anybody more excited about sitting at a *Shabbes* table or about loving a Jewish man. I was glad that she wanted to convert, and I think Michael Patrick King, the show's writer, got it right. What I welcome, what I look for, as someone who loves being a Jewish woman, is a character who loves being a Jewish woman. Her guy couldn't do anything wrong. He wasn't gorgeous, but he was her guy, and he was her Jewish guy.

**Richard Alba:** I'm a sociologist and not Jewish, which is important to what I'm going to say. My question, if it's a question, is addressed to Joan, too. It's so rare that we get a chance to talk directly to someone from Hollywood that we can't restrain ourselves. I appreciate very much what you said about stereotypes. But it seems to me that the problem is much broader than the one that you're addressing. I wonder if there isn't something inherent in the nature of our television and movie media, a kind of a superficial multiculturalism, which requires ethnic references in order to gain authenticity in the eyes of viewers. My name is Italian, and I'm very sensitive to the stereotypes of Italians on *The Sopranos* and other shows. Do you agree with the way I characterize the media? And, what can one do about it? I noticed, for example, that some people in Hollywood who are sensitive to some types of stereotypes seem to be insensitive to others. Maybe you are aware there is a Dreamworks film that is about to appear called *The Shark's Tail*. It's a gangster fish cartoon for children, and Spielberg is, of course, associated with it. You can just guess which voices are doing the gangster fish—they are all from *The Sopranos*. This has caused a great deal of upset among people like me, who have Italian names. So how do you respond to that?

**Joan Hyler:** First of all, comedy depends on stereotypes. On one hand you have Whoopi

Goldberg. A black woman, her name was Edna Mae something, she changed her name to

Whoopi Goldberg. On the other hand, if what you're getting is continual demonization, I suggest you get psychic scars in the absence of very attractive culture. Woody Allen, why shouldn't he like me? Why shouldn't Woody Allen want to be with a nice Jewish girl? I don't understand that, and maybe this has really affected my life and maybe it hasn't. I was shocked when I looked at Al Jolson again, in the blackface. I had forgotten that stereotype in the movie. But on one hand there's comedy, and on the other hand, when all you see is stereotypes, then there is a cause for alarm. So there is a difference I think.

**Richard Alba:** The gangster image is the image in about half of the films about Italian-Americans. It's very, very common.

**Joan Hyler:** It's very problematic. I'm sure stereotyping is as much of a problem in Italian culture as it for us. We share that.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** I've seen a study of Arab images in Disney cartoons. Arabs, according to Disney cartoons, are sneaky and stupid. It could be that the more we examine stereotypes, the more we will find that many of them are extremely negative. We must try to figure out why entertainment relies on this.

**Dru Greenwood:** I'm the director of outreach in the synagogue community for the Union for Reformed Judaism. I'm still practicing that name. It used to be the Union of American-Hebrew Congregations, and now it is the Union for Reformed Judaism.

Thank you so much for the work that you're doing to change those stereotypes. I can tell you that we use TV programs in Reform congregations. "Prelude to a Bris," was an episode of the *Thirty-Something* program is used in all of our synagogues to begin conversations in a tremendously rich way. I wanted to actually respond to something that Shula said. I'm delighted

to hear that 25 percent of Reform congregants are intermarried, because the Reform movement does not have this information. So it's possible that it's 25 percent, but I think it's probably not really known.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** It's probably a statistic like the intermarriage statistic. We had another session where Sylvia Barack Fishman presented her work, and we had five rabbis, one of whom was a rabbi in a Reform congregation in which, she said, over fifty percent of her congregants were mixed marriages.

**Dru Greenwood:** What I know is that there is a very broad spectrum within Reform congregations. In some instance, some are more than fifty percent. The question that disturbs me has to do with the idea of pluralism. When I think of pluralism—and maybe you can correct this perception—I think about your way of being in the world. Your way of being in the world, and your ethnicity, and yours, and yours, are all wonderful. But Reform congregations are not pluralist. We have a very diverse community, very diverse, but they are all Jewish families. We know that from the NJPF survey, from the material that we've gotten. So I urge us to be careful with talking about Reform Judaism as being a pluralist.

**Shulamit Reinharz:** Maybe I misspoke. I meant that American society is pluralistic, and now we're thinking that American families should be pluralistic as well.

We have a lot of food for thought here. One of the amazing things about this evening, if I can summarize in two sentences, is the omnipresence of Jewish images in films, from the early period through today, and continuing with new images all the time. I have always looked for a film in which a Jewish man or woman falls in love with another Jewish man or woman and decides to have a Jewish family.

**Joan Hyler:** *Crossing Delancey*. Created by Joan Silver, a Jewish woman. And I'm sure there

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**Shulamit Reinharz:** Why do I look for it? Because it's something that I'm interested in, and I like to have the images that I want to see reinforced. There are probably lots of other images that lots of people want to see that they don't see it in the movies. Joan Hyler and her colleagues are one group that can change that.