FUNNY, YOU DON’T LOOK JEWISH

Name of Congregation: Temple Sinai
Address: 2808 Summit Street
Oakland, California 94609
Phone Number: (510) 451-3263
Number of Members: 870
UAHC Region: Pacific Central West Council
Rabbis: Steve Chester, Andrea Berlin
Outreach Chairperson: Dawn Kepler

Brief Description: A panel was formed of Jews who didn’t look stereotypically Jewish.

1. Sophia: Sophia is a blonde Polish Holocaust survivor. Her fair looks helped her to survive the Shoah by passing as a Christian.
2. Henry: Henry is of Portuguese Marano descent. He was unaware of his Jewish roots until, during a trip to Portugal, he saw his family name on the wall of the synagogue. He spent the next several years researching his family’s background.
3. Melissa: Melissa is the daughter of an interfaith marriage. One parent is an Ashkenazic Jew and the other an Irish Catholic.

The three panelists sat on chairs together at one side of the circle. Participants filled in the rest of the circle of chairs. Participants were given three by five cards. The facilitator introduced the program and asked each participant to note down what about each panelist looked or did not look “Jewish.” These cards were entirely personal, not for sharing with the other attendees. After about 7 minutes panelists were asked to describe themselves and their background. Finally the discussion was opened, inviting participants to share what they had thought of the panelists’ appearance. Participants were also asked about their own experiences of being stereotyped.

Program Goal: Our desire was to help our community recognize the various “looks” of American Jews today. Children of interfaith couples, Jews-by-choice, and Jews of non-Ashkenazic background are often stigmatized for not looking “Jewish.” We wanted to encourage our community to see beyond appearances.

Target Population: The general Jewish population, including those who wanted to share their feelings about not “looking right.”

Number of Participants: 15

Number and Length of Sessions: One 2-hour session

Staffing Required: One facilitator and panelists

Total Cost of Program: Total cost: $190.00. (Create and mail flyer--$160) (Bagels/coffee--$30)

Source of Funding: Outreach Fund
**Fee for Attendees:** Free

**Logistics:** Chairs were arranged in a circle. Three by five cards and small pencils were provided. Coffee and bagels were arranged on the nearby table.

**Instructions to Facilitator:** This program invites participants to reveal their ethnic preconceptions. In exploring this topic be very gentle and accessible.

**Evaluation of Program:** The discussion was quite powerful. Though people were slow to reveal their internal prejudices about the appearance of the panelists, they were quickly stimulated to discuss their own experience of prejudice. A number of unexpected side issues arose--some people spoke of feeling more comfortable telling their coworkers that they are gay than that they are Jewish. Generally there was an excitement about the incredible variety of backgrounds and appearances that make up our Jewish community.

**Follow-up:** All participants were put on the temple’s Outreach mailing list. There was clearly a sense of camaraderie that developed among the attendees.

**Publicity:** Flyers were mailed to temple members who were interfaith or Jews-by-choice and to everyone on the outreach mailing list.

- The program was listed in the temple bulletin
- Free calendar listings were sent to the local Jewish newspaper and the local secular newspapers: *The Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, San Francisco Chronicle, The Montclarion, The East Bay Express,* and the *Oakland Tribune.*
- Bulk flyers were left at Lehrhaus Judaica, the two local JCCs, Hillel, Jewish Family & Children’s Services, and the local Jewish book and gift store.
- It was also listed on the local Interfaith Listserv.