A Study of Factors That Deter Jews From Affiliating With Organizations in the Jewish Community

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A Study of Factors That Deter Jews From Affiliating With Organizations in the Jewish Community

A THESIS SUBMITTED

by

Janice Sands-Weinstein

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the degree of

Master of Nonprofit Administration

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A Study of Factors That Deter Jews From Affiliating With Organizations in the Jewish Community

This Thesis written by Janice Sands-Weinstein

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ABSTRACT

Communities and communal ties throughout America are weakening both in the secular and faith-based sectors. Strong community organizations are most often at the center of a vibrant community, buoyed by active participation of a wide array of community members. This study sets out to understand how Jewish community organizations can attract, involve and serve a wider array of Jews by helping to dismantle the barriers that have kept many away.

Jewish community organizations — synagogues, community centers, Jewish Community Federations, and others — provide a meaningful context in which Jews participate in the Jewish community, and thereby, preserve the Jewish heritage, culture, and traditions for future generations. The success of these organizations largely depends on their ability to continue to attract members and participants and to sustain their interest and commitment.

Jewish communal organizations are challenged by the fact that the character of and the needs within the Jewish community are both changing and fluid. Over the decades, the way of being Jewish in America — expressing one’s Jewishness, experiencing one’s Jewishness, communing with other Jews — has changed significantly. As highlighted in reviewed literature and the findings of this study, many Jews seek to experience their Judaism within a cultural and communal framework rather than within a religious one. Additionally, many Jews in this study, and likely in the general population, are either not married or without children and therefore are not linked to Jewish community through what was traditionally a family pathway. Such changes require that
Jewish communal organizations provide multiple pathways into Jewish community so that they remain in step with the needs and desires of the community.

Despite an intense desire on the part of many Jews for community, Jewish community for some seems inaccessible and unobtainable. By examining these barriers, this study hopes to help Jewish communal leaders better understand the roots of perceived inaccessibility to Jewish community so that Jewish organizations may successfully attract all those who desire to belong.

The conclusion drawn from this study is that there is no single barrier that prevented the interviewees from creating the connections they were seeking. Instead, the barriers consisted of practical and personal reasons including organizations' lack of openness to newcomers; spiritual disappointment and feelings of judgment; overemphasis on the family; activities offered; the high cost of Jewish living; and personal obstacles.
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When I began this project several years ago, I never imagined it would take as long as it did to complete. In the course of writing this thesis I got married, had a son and, as a family, made a long distance move and started a new life. In short, life happened.

As a result of this project, I experienced first hand the happenings of the lives of those of you whom I interviewed. I was granted a secret window into your past, and I joined you in your present journeys. To you, I thank you for opening yourselves up to me and for revealing both your distressing and cherished memories and for sharing your hope for personal and communal fulfillment in the Jewish community. Your stories, indeed your lives, served as my inspiration to produce this thesis so that other Jewish communities can better touch the hundreds of thousands of Jews like you who are seeking meaningful Jewish connections.

Now as I find myself in a new community, I draw upon and am inspired by the lessons I have learned. I am reminded of the slow, and at times lonely path to creating the lasting substantive connections from which I hope my family and I will draw upon during the many years we intend to be in our new home. I know we will get there, just as we have done before in Northern California.

I thank those many dear friends of Northern California who demonstrated the purpose and value of community, so many of whom are still a meaningful part of our lives, albeit from a distance. Finally, from the depth of my heart, I am blessed that my beloved spouse, Marti and son, David are by my side every step of our journey in life together.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Issue

*L'Dor V'Dor* – “from generation to generation” – the Jewish community has been built and sustained by a simple but challenging notion of passing a heritage on from one generation to the next. Judaism has indeed survived through the efforts of generations and generations of communities and families who have embraced a ‘living Judaism’ and imparted it to those who came next. Jewish survival can be attributed largely to the solid, yet dynamic community structure that has been built on member participation, inclusion, memory and responsibility, a community structure that must continue to evolve as the needs and conditions of its members change.

Jewish community organizations, like synagogues, community centers, Jewish Community Federations, and others, provide a meaningful context for which Jews participate in the Jewish community, and therefore, preserve our heritage and traditions for future generations. The success of these organizations largely depends on their ability to continue to attract members and participants and to sustain their interest and commitment. At the heart of these organizations is the essence of community building.

Noted 20th Century French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, suggested that community is what connects individuals and society. For many individuals, community provides the purpose and meaning in their lives by connecting them to one another and issues greater than one’s self. Yet, the attainment of community is not easy, and in fact is elusive to many people.

Historically, community has almost been synonymous with religious fellowship. Within the religious community, the necessities of communal involvement and support
provide the framework of tradition and ritual that Deutsch (1991) discusses in his article "Community as Ritual Participation."

A community, unlike a society, is for its own sake and is recognized as such by its participants. The actions of its participants are thus ritualized in the sense that they express precisely a devotion that is grounded in spirit, that they exhibit care and concern, an aesthetic form-giving content that seeks to promote an abiding harmony. Community as ritual participation thus becomes one of the highest expressions of human freedom. (p. 26)

For many Americans throughout our history, religious involvement, often in the form of church or synagogue membership, provided the basis for meaningful community participation. Involvement in religious or community organizations has linked individuals to one another, to larger communal and global issues, and to a continuum of time – the past and the future. The social network and support received by church or synagogue members have provided quality to people’s lives (Ellison & George). Indeed, religious organizations have been able to effectively create and sustain community in the past. However, Bernard Reisman who examines the quest for community in America vis-à-vis religious organizations in The Chavurah: A Contemporary Jewish Experience recognizes the weakening role of these institutions. He cites a 1970 study of Reform synagogues which found that "through all of our work, no single conclusion registers so strongly as our sense that there is, among the people we have come to know, a powerful, perhaps even desperate, longing for community, a longing that is apparently, not adequately addressed by any of the relevant institutions in most people’s lives" (Reisman, 1977, p. 30). How can these relevant institutions better address this “desperate” need for
community? Likewise, how can individuals be appropriately challenged to assume their share of creating and shaping community for themselves and others?

To understand the Jews and Jewish community of the new millennium, and the challenges they face, one must first understand the history of the Jews of America and the institutions they have created. These Jewish institutions, which provide the passageway into Jewish community, reflect the multifaceted history that began to take shape more than one hundred years ago. The staggering growth of the Jewish community (by the middle of the twentieth century the American Jewish population was estimated at 5 million, a 100-fold increase in a century) resulted in a dynamic and changing community infrastructure that shifted as the needs and the character of the community shifted (Goldscheider & Zuckerman, p. 173).

It has been suggested that Jews were the only group who arrived as a minority from countries where they also had been a minority. As a result of their previous minority experience, Jews were well prepared to adjust to a new life and a new society (Goldscheider & Zuckerman, p. 158). Adjust, they did. Though Jews were torn between two sets of values – those of integration and acceptance into American society and those of Jewish group survival – most blended into the dominant American culture within the first or second generation of living in America.

As Jews became more American and more modernized in America, they shed their religious particularism. Like many of the Americans who once belonged to religious communities, Jews became more secularized. They increasingly viewed religion as less central in their lives, and therefore began molding their religious observances to fit in with the dominant American culture (Goldscheider p. 151). By the
late 1960’s, the issue of survival replaced integration as a major concern of the Jewish community and Judaism appeared to offer only guilt as its motive: “Stay Jewish, for if you do not, our people will die.”

However what it meant to ‘be Jewish’ had changed for many during these early years of assimilation. The essence of being a Jew progressively transformed from being religious, to being of one people, to being of all people. Jews embraced the notion of universalism as an essential element in being a ‘good Jew.’ For a significant number of Jews, support for all humanitarian causes and concern for humanity are not merely essential elements of Judaism; they are the very purpose of Judaism (Goldscheider & Zuckerman, p. 165).

Indeed, one’s connection to Judaism and to Jewish community organizations today bears little comparison with many American Jews’ European great grandparents’ unyielding faith and practice. The schtetls, the small Jewish communities where Jews lived, worked, prayed and socialized, are a relic of the past. Modern American Jews on the whole neither appear physically different nor behave in ways notably distinct from those of the non-Jewish majority. Yet a desire to be a part of Jewish community remains.

Statement of the Issue

Over the decades, the way of being Jewish in America – expressing one’s Jewishness, experiencing one’s Jewishness, communing with other Jews – has changed significantly. For people who were born in immigrant communities or to immigrant parents and saturated with Jewish culture, it was possible to feel Jewish and stay Jewish even without any involvement with Jewish religious practices. But for the vast majority of American Jews today, few linkages exist to those immigrant communities. Some
observers, like Elliot Abrams feel that it is not now possible to transmit Judaism successfully if religious observance is not part of that transmission (1997). But with the separation of religion from ethnic elements of Jewish life, other forms of expression have emerged. Calvin Goldscheider (1986) optimistically concludes:

Before one can equate the decline of traditional forms with the loss of community, it is important to examine whether alternative ways to express Jewishness emerge…. These new forms provide a wide range of options for expressing Jewishness among those at different points in their life cycle. For some, religion remains central; for most, Jewishness is a combination of family, communal, religious and ethnic forms of Jewish expression. At times, Jewishness revolves around educational experience; for families with children, the expression of Jewishness is usually in synagogue-related and children-oriented celebrations. For almost all, it is the combination of family, friends, community activities, organizations, Israel. (p.152)

However, not only have Jews become less religious; many Jews have left behind organized Jewry, or never even participated in it, maintaining no connection to synagogues, charitable causes or Israel. In the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, fewer than half of the 6.8 million American Jews considered themselves part of a religious group (Goldstein, 1993). Goldscheider and Zuckerman assert that “the question of Jewish continuity in America relates to the quality of Jewish life and to the specification of which segments are likely to remain within the community…. Quality refers to cultural content is clearly associated with the presence of Jewish institutions of welfare, education, and learning” (Goldscheider & Zuckerman, 1984, p. 187).
In addition, in Silicon Valley, where the current research study took place, social connections and specifically connections to faith-based communities were very weak. For many of the high-tech workers of Silicon Valley who were faced with workweeks of over sixty hours and a highly competitive environment to work faster and harder, little time was left for civic engagement.

In this light, Jewish communal institutions are faced with complex and multifaceted challenges. Not only do they face the challenge of preserving and sustaining the Jewish faith, culture and memory, but they also need to provide the basis of Jewish communal involvement. Jewish researchers, sociologists, and practitioners have long lamented a decay of Jewish community. Numerous articles, lectures, workshops, and forums have been devoted to ensuring the survival of Jewish community. In his dissertation study, Jonathan Rabinowitz (1988) states:

Essential to community survival is member participation. Survival in the Jewish community means having active participation in Jewish life, much of which takes place within the community….Despite this emphasis on active participation in Judaism we face a social participation crisis in the Jewish communities across the United States. (p. 2)

To highlight this reality, a 1994 study of the religious and ethnic patterns of American Jewish baby boomers found that baby boomers are less likely than their parents to be active in Jewish organizational life, including membership in organizations. More than 78% stated that they had not volunteered for any Jewish organizations during the previous year and an even larger percentage of baby boomers belonged to no Jewish organizations at all (Waxman, 1994, p. 75).
Leonard Fein argues, “In the end, Jewish identity is not something one has, but something one does” (Fein, 1988, p. 3). Daniel Gordis challenges community organizations by asking “How can we make it possible for Jews to find their way home, to locate in Jewish life a system of meaning that will attract their attention and merit their commitment?” (1997, p. 30). And the question asked by tens, if not, hundreds, of thousands of Jews throughout the country becomes “Is there a place where I can belong within the Jewish community?” This is not to say that all responsibility should lie upon the shoulders of community organizations. Somehow, those same individuals should also be asking, “What can I do to belong?”

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that inhibit Jews from affiliating with organizations in the American Jewish community. Through personal interviews of Jews who seek but do not have meaningful connection with Jewish community in the San Francisco Bay Area, the research will focus on the following key questions:

A. What are the obstacles that have prevented Jews who seek meaningful and substantial connection to Jewish community from achieving this?

B. What can community organizations do to remove the obstacles and better reach out and welcome Jews into and involve them in Jewish community?

C. Who are these Jews who seek greater connections to Jewish community but are having difficulty in achieving them?

While this research will spotlight the role that organizations play or can play in attracting and appealing to Jews, it will also attempt to understand the role that individuals can and must play in achieving this goal.
Definition of Major Concepts

Major concepts throughout the research will be defined as follows:

- **Jew or a Jewish person:** anybody who has been born Jewish, has a parent who was born Jewish, or regards himself or herself as being Jewish.

- **Jew-by-choice:** a person who was not born into a Jewish family and has become Jewish through study and the acceptance of Jewish beliefs and traditions.

- **Jewishness:** “set of beliefs, images, feelings and practices that a person considers to be Jewish (Horowitz, 2000, p. 3).”

- **Jewish community:** the Jewish communal organizations that provide the infrastructure for participation and involvement, and the Jewish individuals who participate in Jewish activities.

- **Jewish community involvement:** (a) “formal” Jewish participation through contact with established Jewish organizations (e.g., synagogue membership, membership in Jewish organizations, volunteering for these organizations, and giving to Jewish charities); (b) “social” participation, through informal contact with Jewish community that may not directly involve membership of established Jewish organizations.

- **Barriers to Jewish community:** any real or perceived obstacle an individual has experienced that has hindered or prevented him/her from becoming involved in Jewish community.

- **Organizational activities:** activities sponsored and/or planned by an organization or organizations. Activities can take place either inside or outside of the physical location of the organization and may be religious, cultural, and/or social in nature.
• Cultural Judaism: the sentiment of having a strong connection to other Jews but one in which the religious aspects of Judaism are absent.

Importance of the Study

Communities and communal ties throughout America are weakening both in the secular and faith-based sectors. Strong community organizations are most often at the center of a vibrant community, buoyed by active participation by a wide array of community members. This study sets out to understand how Jewish community organizations can attract, involve and serve a wider array of Jews. It also seeks to gain a better understanding of Jews who desire a strong connection to Jewish community but have been unable to achieve this.

A myriad of Jewish demographic studies are replete with data about population size and growth or decline, intermarriage rates and assimilation. But as Sidney Goldstein offers in Profiles of American Jewry, "these are misplaced emphases; concerns should focus on Judaism, Jewish culture, Jewish education, the perpetuation of Jewish communal institutions" (1993, p. 78). The character of the American Jewish community is fluid, thus making it difficult to determine who is a Jew, who is a part of the Jewish community; who is the Jewish community reaching out to? From a policy perspective, Goldstein suggests, "this raises questions about how the community can retain those still in the core, how it can bring back those at the margin and those who may have left, and how it can draw in those still in situations where they must choose between being or not being Jewish" (1993, p. 89). Goldstein continues

We consist of a central core made up of persons identifying themselves as either Jews by religion or as secular Jews, many of whom live in entirely Jewish
households. Yet even within this core group wide differences exist in socioeconomic characteristics and Jewish practices.... There is no one Jewish population in America today... [F]rom a planning perspective it depends on what our goals are – to identify the basic core, to reach out to those in the margins, to make concerted efforts to attract those still confronting choices as to why they should be. (1993, pp 140-141)

An industry has been made out of studies of the Jewish community. Study after study of local, national, and international Jewish communities over the past fifty years have produced numerous accounts of modern American Jewish life. In the foreword to Perspectives in Jewish Population Research, Marshall Sklare, Director of the Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University at the time of the book, writes "the proliferation of Jewish population surveys indicates that even in a country where individualism is prized, and where individuals are – in theory – free to cast off their inherited religion or ethnic identity, a feeling of community survives" (Cohen and Woocher, 1984, p. ix). Studies of modern Judaism provide a range of information relating to religious life, philanthropic giving, level of participation in Jewish communal organizations, intermarriage/marriage/family, ritual observance and beliefs, to name just a few. Population studies are undertaken in order to help communal organizations better serve the Jews in their community. But often these surveys account for only those within the Jewish community – those who are members of a synagogue or other Jewish institution. Very little research has been performed on the "others," that is, on those who are not members of synagogues yet strongly identify as Jews and desire a connection in some form to the Jewish community.
This study will create profiles of twenty Jews who, while strongly identified as Jews, have not been able to create the connections they seek. It will examine the barriers that prevent the interviewees from establishing meaningful connections to Jewish community and what those meaningful connections to Jewish community look like. The thesis will conclude with insights and directives for community organizations so that they can better assist in involving Jews in Jewish community in order to maintain a dynamic and vibrant Jewish community and a culture that continues to be passed on from generation to generation.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The quest for and creation of community is multifaceted and complex, as is the role of community-based organizations in assisting this process. As researchers have noted, not only are there motivations for individuals to come together as community, but there are also motivations for individuals to remain together as community. Whether it is a basic pull towards a social community, a spiritual community, or a community built on heritage and tradition, people's quest for community has been widely studied and well documented.

People's involvement in religious communities in particular has also been the subject of numerous studies. Extensive research has been performed on church and synagogue affiliation and attendance, as well as on religious and ethnic identity. Research is minimal, however, on the topic of those who do not attend, or otherwise affiliate with a church, synagogue or other religious institution.

American Jews have a unique history that distinguishes them and their quest for community from other religious groups and minority groups. Much of the literature reviewed includes research and commentary on Jewish community of 20th Century America. Long subject to predictions that it would eventually disappear, the Jewish community has nevertheless continued to sustain itself primarily through Jewish community organizations.
Quest for Community

A Delicate Balance Between the Individual and the Communal

Researchers and sociologists have found that people are drawn towards community. As Robert Bellah explains in his hallmark book, Habits of the Heart, “the first language that people speak is that of profound individualism” (1985, p. 20). Yet our second language is that of community. Patrick Hill recognizes this clash in his article entitled “Religion and the Quest for Community.” He states that “there are the set of values associated with the still incomplete revolution of democracy (freedom, self-determination, individuality, …privacy) and another set of values … (loyalty, fidelity, rootedness, solidarity)” (Hill, 1991, p. 150). The values of loyalty and rootedness are linked with a sense of commitment to something larger than the individual self.

Eliot Deutch in his article, “Community as Ritual Participation” explains:

Members of a society are held together by their recognition and acceptance of the fact that their membership is necessary for their survival and growth; participants in a community by their loyalty to it….Loyalty is a noncalculating, open-ended offer to contribute of oneself whatever is required to sustain that presence of belonging-together which is the community. Participants in a community undertake this kind of tacit commitment. They will be loyal to the community because they place a special value upon it and are willing to give of their being to it. When, as persons who are free, we participate with love in a community, we give rise those very conditions that allow personhood to be fulfilled. There is nothing more natural than that persons should strive to achieve community, for in that achievement there is an enduring enrichment of their being. (1991, pp 24-25)
Today in modern America, many seek a balance between individual freedom and self-expression and between communal belonging and identification. Through our quest for community, we hope to link our spirit of individualism and the comforts and assurances of communal concern. We seek fluency in our "second language" while maintaining a command of our first.

It seems that many people – perhaps most – are drawn to community. Community means different things to different people, of course. In the introduction to book of compilation of essays "On Community," Leroy Rouner explains "for most of us, community is something we don't yet have in the way we want to have it: something lacking that we feel we need." Rouner goes on: "community for most of us means some sort of common identity in which we can maintain our personal freedom even while feeling at home with one another" (Rouner, 1991, p. 1). Community is about belonging.

Hill describes individuals' quest for community as "the variety of attempts to overcome the isolation, disregard, caricature or hostility among individuals or groups, by discovering, proposing, or establishing commonalties upon which to build the more or less frequent and sustained interaction of one sort or another which will likely be called a community" (1991, p. 150).

In the most recent research done on communal ties, Harvard University sponsored "The Social Capital Benchmark Survey," a comprehensive effort to measure the level of civic participation that binds individuals together as community. It is the largest scientific investigation of this kind ever conducted in America. Forty communities surveyed nearly 30,000 people on areas such as giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement and involvement in associations in an effort to better understand how local
organizations can help rebuild levels of connectedness in their communities. The findings are cited below.

Community Through Religious Fellowship

Religious involvement is an important dimension of civic life in most American communities. Religious affiliation has satisfied many people's quest for community. According to Hill, "in the Jewish and Christian traditions self-centeredness is often uncritically conflated with immorality; and community building with morality or holiness" (1991, p. 150). Beyond morality, many have discovered rich rewards as a result of religious affiliation and communal ties. Jonathan Rabinowitz states "religious involvement satisfies intrinsic, social and affiliation needs" (1988, p. 7).

Religious belonging is considered a particular American trait. Social observers have commented on the centrality and vitality of religion among Americans (Marler and Hadaway). In their research article on religious involvement across societies, Robert Campbell and James Curtis assert, "high rates of (religious) involvement by Americans occur because of the comparatively strong individualist values of Americans." They conclude that "the more pluralist and competitive the religious marketplace the higher the levels of religious involvement, [and]...separation of church and state has given churches great autonomy and has made for strong church pluralism" (1994, p.217). Additionally, they noted that for the scores of immigrant groups in this country, religious involvement provided a source of identity, and an avenue for integration into the new host culture and became the vehicles for transmission of culture to the next generation.

Another study researched various "trend-setting" churches and synagogues through individual surveys and interviews. The study concluded, "the high value placed
upon intimate community is so ubiquitous among the groups that it tends to overshadow other goals and interests” (Reisman, 1977, p. 30). The fact that many have come together for ostensibly religious reasons that resulted in communal bonds and a powerful sense of community carries important insight for the work of religious organizations which are attempting to build community amongst their members.

Leonard Fein in his book *Where Are We?* explores the ways American Jews regard being Jewish in the 20th Century. Even amongst those who gather for religious observance, Fein recognizes, their “goal is not faith, but understanding or, more often, community” (1988, p. 55). Indeed, it seems that, for many, community “may be their principal motive, too, more important as a reason for their membership than specific religious conviction” (Fein, 1988, p. 55).

**Religious Behavior and Organizational Involvement**

Many studies have been conducted to learn about the religious behavior of Americans, and the association between religious behavior and socio-economic factors. In Robert Campbell and James Curtis’s study, “Religious involvement across societies: analyses for alternative measures in national surveys,” they note that less than half of the Americans who declared volunteer membership were actively involved in them (53% vs. 21%). When the respondents were asked if they considered themselves to be religious, the proportions agreeing to this were much higher than those who attended church weekly (p. 217).

In his doctoral dissertation, Jonathan Rabinowitz examines the relationship between community size and communal behavior. Specifically, he finds that Jewish communities have an inverse relationship between community size and formal
participation and a direct relationship between community size and informal participation. That being so, it is not surprising to find that synagogue attendance is associated with smaller community size. He finds that as community size increases, rates of formal communal involvement decrease. Rabinowitz posits that residents of larger communities do not need voluntary organizations to preserve their overall community and therefore do not seek greater participation in the community. He deduces that for sub-community to exist there must be a critical mass of similar people. Involvement in community affairs is influenced by the salience of a community to individuals and by the number of decision-making positions available in the community (Rabinowitz, 1988). In Campbell and Curtis' research they discovered that larger community size, higher education level and higher employment level all had negative effects upon church attendance, beliefs and volunteering. Education level showed a moderate positive effect for volunteer activity (p. 217).

The Social Capital Survey cited earlier noted that 88 percent of the national respondents reported some religious affiliation and 84 percent of this sample indicated that religion was very important to them. Yet, only 58 percent were members of a religious or spiritual community (p. 2). The study also found that involvement in religious communities is among the strongest predictors of giving and volunteering for both religious and secular causes. Further, religious involvement positively associated with most other forms of civic involvement (p. 3).

In their study of the participation of marginal members in the church, Penny Long Marler and Kirk Hadaway (1993) recognize that there are notable distinctions in behavior and attitude amongst church members. Their research was based on an 86-item
questionnaire of a sample of 2,012 Protestants aged twenty-one or older. From this research they identified four types of marginal members: "traditionalists," "liberals," "lifelong marginals," and "critics." In contrast to the Gallup Poll definition of the "unchurched" as persons who are not church members or have not attended church in six months, and are therefore religiously indifferent or estranged, Marler and Hadaway found that their typologies of the "unchurched" suggest that many of these individuals actually have positive attitudes towards the church even though they go to church infrequently or are not even members.

These researchers further make a distinction between membership and affiliation: "membership implies a behavioral and attitudinal connection to a specific religious group," while "affiliation suggests a diffuse ethnic-like identification with a denominational family" (1993, p. 51). They label "marginal members" as members who attend church infrequently, if ever, while "mental affiliates" claim denominational affiliation, but are not church members and do not attend regularly.

According to Marler and Hadaway, "liberals" are low on the traditional religiosity scale and very high on the cultural liberalism scale. They see church as primarily for the children. According to the study, liberals have a more positive image of the church than any other typology and they see themselves as religious persons. Even though they attend church infrequently, they do not feel disconnected from the church.

"Lifelong marginals," the youngest and most mobile cluster of the study, grew up on the periphery of the church. Their connection to the church is primarily from childhood. They do not feel church is particularly valuable but they are not critical of it either. They feel that they should go to church, and in fact feel guilty when they miss
church, but still are lacking the motivation for attendance. They are disconnected not only from the church, but also from many other expressions of religion. “Lifelong marginals” attend holiday services with family, continue to give money to church, and are likely to be involved in private religious practices. They also admit that personal contact with caring, open and honest church members attract them back to church more often.

The final category of Marler and Hadaway’s study relates to the “critics” of the church. Critics view church worship services as boring and feel the church is unconcerned about social justice. Most critics feel that churches are ineffective in helping people find meaning. They are not likely to come back to church on their own and would have to be drawn in very intentionally.

Silicon Valley Life

It is interesting that community ties are so weak in an area that business networks are so strong. As part of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Initiative, researchers from Santa Clara University conducted over 1,500 phone interviews with local residents. In comparison with national averages, civic conduct of Silicon Valley residents is significantly weaker. Residents in Silicon Valley report volunteering about 6.9 times per year, compared with 9.5 nationally. While the number and variety of religious communities are diverse in this area, overall residents here are less involved in faith communities than in other parts of the country. Weekly religious services are attended by 27 percent of residents versus 41 percent nationally, and 69 percent of local residents say that religion is very or somewhat important in their lives versus 84 percent nationally.
percent of the respondents say "a demanding work schedule or inadequate child care" is a major obstacle that keeps them from getting involved in community (2001).

In a more personal account, Carl Goldman's book, "Soul and Silicon" depicts the spiritual journeys of those in Silicon Valley. Through his interviews with over eighty people, Goldman identifies themes that can all be attributed to the influence of a culture within Silicon Valley. There is a sense of uprootedness since the vast majority of people who currently live in the Silicon Valley are originally from somewhere else. Thus, a spirit of tradition is lacking as well as continuity within community. The lack of time contributes to one's inability to engage in civic activity. Further, he found that most people, even amongst their family and closest friends, never speak about spirituality or faith (1997).

Personal Benefits of Religious Involvement

Ellison and George in their article "Religious Involvement, Social Ties, and Social Support in a Southeastern community," look at the socio-emotional benefits to church involvement that largely derive from friendships established with fellow church members. Friendships develop most readily between persons who share values, interests, and activities. Religious services and related activities offer regular opportunities for social contact between persons with common religious beliefs, and frequently common social and political values as well. Frequent churchgoers report larger social networks, more contact with church members, and more types of social support received than do their unchurched counterparts.

Ellison and George report that positive health behavior is promoted when individuals participate in a community of mutually caring individuals. Additionally,
many researchers have noted that religious practices and belief systems may provide a
sense of meaning, coherence and self-esteem. This religion-health relationship reflects
“the distinctive quantity and quality of social resources (social ties and social support)
available to the members of religious communities” (Ellison & George, 1994, p. 57).
Congregational members tend to provide help for other congregational members that
“may include socioemotional support (companionship, confiding), instrumental aid
(money, goods and services) and informational assistance (referrals to external agencies
or support groups)” (Ellison & George, 1994, p. 48). Frequent churchgoers are especially
likely to report feeling cared for and valued, and feeling that they are part of a system of
mutual obligation and a network of communication.

Indeed the benefits of communal association have been known for a long
time. Through his research on suicide rates in 19th century France, Emile Durkheim
reached the understanding that “to the extent that an individual was integrally related to a
socially cohesive community, he was helped to overcome the stresses and anxieties of his
personal life. Without the guidelines and social supports of a shared community, the
individual existed in a state of alienation, and accordingly was more likely to be a suicide
victim” (Reisman, 1977, p. 30).

American Jews – a Unique History

While many similarities in behavior can be found between modern day American
Christians and Jews, the unique history of the American Jews has profoundly influenced
the Jews of 21st century America. Jewish life in America began, at least for the vast
majority of Jewish families, in the decision of European Jews to leave their parents, their
synagogues, and their homes to go to America. According to Elliot Abrams, the Jews
who came to America for religious freedom came for the freedom to be irreligious (1997). Among the options that America offered to the newly arrived Jewish immigrants included that of choosing Judaism itself. Many attempted to melt into American culture and blend into the American landscape, to the extent they were allowed to by the larger society and within the limits of their undeniable cultural bonds, Abrams believes. Many Jews rejected, or at least distanced themselves from, the organizational bonds that long marked their ancestors as Jews. Most Jews, however, did not completely abandon their Jewish roots.

Daniel Gordis explains that there was tremendous tension "between being part of the larger world and retaining Jewish uniqueness and authenticity, between blending in and standing out" (1997, p. 49). The immigrant Jews struggled with what parts of Judaism to cling to and what parts to abandon and whether the community would define itself as Jewish by faith or ethnic inheritance.

Despite the strong desire of many Jews to blend into American society, "residential segregation, occupational concentration, and family centrality characterized the communities of the Jewish immigrants settling from Eastern Europe. Alliances and cleavages were formed among Jews from towns and villages of origin. These resulted in the development of new communal institutions and organizations, generating patterns of interaction in family life that reinforced Jewishness" (Goldscheider, 1985, pp 3-4).

The Proliferation of Jewish Organizations

The synagogue, which historically has been the center of Jewish communal life, continued to play a dominant and broad role within the American Jewish community
even for those who did not consider themselves religious. In the introduction to Kerry Olitzky’s book, The American Synagogue, Frances Weinman Schwarz explains:

While the synagogue served as a locus for a prayer community, Jewish immigrants initially founded synagogues to take care of the basic ritual needs...and social needs of community members....Unlike its European predecessor, the American synagogue developed as a voluntary religious association in accord with the democratic environment established by North American pioneers (1996, p.1).

Even though the number of synagogues increased, many needs of the growing Jewish population were not met. Several new organizations were created in response. The creation of The Hebrew Benevolent Society in the 1920s “demonstrated the possibility of creating a voluntary charitable organization outside the synagogue with a wide base of communal support and responsibility for a broad spectrum of social needs” (Jick, 1976, p. 106). By the late 1800s, modernization led to a weakening of Jewish communal life and by the mid 1950s, industrialization, urbanization and secularization challenged American Jewish communal life. Many decided that in order to “make it” in America, Judaism’s particularism would have to go (Goldscheider, 1985, p.151). Many Jews remained torn between two sets of values, those of integration and acceptance into American society and those of Jewish group survival. Jews adopted the values and lifestyles of the general society but they separated themselves from the rest of America in choosing marriage partners, friends, and places to live (Shapiro, 1997). It has long been documented “from both anecdotal and sociological sources that most Jews, no matter the
state of their ideological conviction, prefer the company of other Jews” (Fein, 1988, p. 136).

Goldscheider and Zuckerman observe that in the 1950s the centrality of the synagogue and the rabbis' authority declined. New institutions, as a result, “were created around specific aspects of Jewishness—ethnic, political, social providing alternative bases for Jewish cohesion” (Goldscheider and Zuckerman, p. 110, 172). Since being Jewish means different things to each Jew, the variety of Jewish communal organizations provided a range of avenues for affiliation. For some it is a matter of religion, for some history, for some culture, and for others ethnicity. In his 1997 article, Shapiro states: “for most Jews being Jewish has little to do with practicing Judaism. In their own minds, they are very good Jews because their version of Jewishness demands nothing of them” (Sep-Oct 1997, p. 14).

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and Other Demographics

Since the modes of “counting Jews” vary widely, the estimate of the Jewish population based on the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 1990 indicated that the number of Jews in the United States lay somewhere between 5.5 million and 6.8 million, 2.2 – 2.7% of the total American population (Goldstein, 1993, p. 92). Based on the findings of the 1990 NJPS, secular Jews and Jews-by-choice (converts to Judaism) were more likely to live in the West. Further, the study pointed to significant numbers of Jews who had moved from all regions of the United States to the West in the previous thirty years.

Interpreting the 1990 study, Sheler reports that fewer than half of American Jews considered themselves part of a religious group. In a 1986 Gallup poll, in answer to the
question whether religion was "very important" in their lives, 55% of Americans said yes and 14% said no. In contrast, 30% of Jews said that religion was very important while 35% said it was not important. Among fourth generation Jews, 8% of Conservative Jews and 2.5% of Reform Jews attended synagogue once a month or more. By comparison, Gallup found that 67% of Americans belonged to a religious institution and 58% attended once a month or more. (Gallup/Castelli) While more recent figures are not available, the Jewish responses likely would not have significantly changed.

Jewish identity, on the other hand, was perceived differently, and more positively, by American Jews than was their religious feeling. In Chaim Waxman's article, (1994), "Religious and ethnic patterns of American Jewish baby boomers," he compares the patterns of Jewish baby boomers to the patterns of the broader population. He compiled his findings from data collected in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey on the religious and ethnic patterns of American Jews who were born between 1946 and 1964. Waxman finds that Jewish baby boomers felt significantly more strongly about their cultural Jewish identities than they did about their religious identities. Forty-three percent (43%) indicated that Jewishness was very important in their lives, and forty-two (42%) indicated somewhat important. Thirty-two (32%) felt strongly about their religious identities and 15% felt somewhat strong (1990 General Social Survey). Indeed, of those with a college degree, almost half of the Jews believed the Bible was a completely human production versus about 19% of non-Jews.

According to Waxman's analysis, Jewish baby boomers are less likely to be active in American Jewish organizational life. More than 78% stated that they had not volunteered for any Jewish organizations during the previous year and a significantly
higher percentage of baby boomers belonged to no Jewish organizations at all. A significantly lower percentage of baby boomers stated that all or most of their closest friends were Jewish (33.9%) compared with middle-agers (50.9%). Further, compared with the previous generation, baby boomers were less attached to Israel. Waxman comments: “the significant decline in organizational membership appears to fit a pattern of which the decline in emotional attachment to Israel is another interrelated component” (1994, p. 74).

In a study of population trends, Goldstein identifies mobility as a “threat” to communal integration and involvement. In the thirty years to 1990, Jewish families have experienced increasing levels of population mobility and greater geographic dispersion. About 75% of all adult Jews no longer live in their city of birth, and one third have moved in the last five or six years (Goldstein, 1993, p.18).

Rabinowitz comments that “Jews are becoming more like religious majorities: shifting from locality-based Jewish communal affiliation to a national one” (1988, p.8). According to Rabinowitz, involvement in organizations is now meeting affiliation needs via a connection to a national community. Community involvement has decreased because it now meets fewer needs.

Modern Complexities

In their book, The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America, Professors Cohen and Eisen delve into questions regarding Jewish commitment and behavior in America today. Through in-depth interviews of nearly fifty “moderately affiliated” Jews from throughout the country, the authors discovered that communal loyalties and norms no longer shape Jewish identity as they did several decades ago.
Moreover, on the whole, these Jews had little interest in or knowledge of the organized Jewish community. The interviewees confirmed what the authors hypothesized: Today’s Jews have turned inward in their search for meaning. Notably, they have “moved away from the organizational institutions and causes that used to anchor identity and shape behavior” and that the importance of “organizational life which previously nourished and molded Jewish identity in this country…has severely diminished” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 2).

For those interviewed in the Cohen and Eisen study, Jewish discovery and practice occur primarily in the private sphere amongst family and friends. The interview subjects emphasized their quest for personal meaning as the “arbiter of their Jewish involvement” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 36). Their quest for Jewish meaning, akin to Bellah’s “first language,” takes place most often in the home with family, “the single most important source of Jewish identity,” according to the authors (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 9).

Involvement in and support of Jewish institutions by contemporary American Jews therefore take a back seat to their private Jewish lives. The role that these institutions play in their lives, if at all, is considered and reconsidered year after year. The interviewees felt comfortable with and justified in choosing their institutional loyalties in this manner.

Like Cohen and Eisen, Bethanie Horowitz, who studied American-born Jews born after World War II contends that young and middle-aged Jews of today do not confront the same choice between assimilation and Jewish distinctiveness that the children of immigrants to America fifty years ago did. She asserts that assimilation “no
longer involves a conscious rejection of Judaism or of being Jewish, rather it results from a basic indifference about the subject” (Horowitz, 2000, p. v). Horowitz’s research points to a mixed pattern of Jewish engagement for the large portion of her research subjects. In other words, they “are not indifferent about being Jewish, but their ongoing Jewish involvement depends on it both being meaningful and fitting in with their lives” (Horowitz, 2000, p. v). Additionally, less ritual involvement was associated with not being married or having a family (p. vi). “Being single and without children was negatively associated with intensive Jewish engagement” (p. vii).

Horowitz utilizes a salad-bar metaphor to describe the complexity of one’s Jewish identity. The buffet would contain a full array of ingredients possibly associated with Jewishness, including studying Jewish texts, observing Jewish traditions, belonging to a synagogue, eating lox and bagels, having memories of a Jewish relative (2000).

Attempts to Predict Involvement in Jewish Community

Predictors for Jewish involvement have been the focus of many studies. Many researchers have determined that experiences that Jews have had as children play a central role in shaping their Jewish lives. Cohen and Eisen assert that “the nuclear family, in particular, plays a vital role in shaping Jewish connections in childhood... (and) provides the prime arena for the expression of adult Jewish involvement” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 186). Likewise, Jonathan Woocher explains “for many, the journey either does not carry them far from or leads them back ‘home,’ at least in terms of conventional measures of Jewish attitudes and behavior” (Woocher, 1998, p. 59). Cohen and Eisen add that while upbringing remains a powerful predictor of adult Jewish involvement, it does not predict the nature of the involvement (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 194).
There are many factors that have been found to be predictors for Jewish involvement. Among them are Jewish observance in the family, spiritual discussion in the family, attitudes of parents about being Jewish, belonging to youth group, going to Jewish camp, memories of holiday gatherings, memories of religious/Hebrew school, years at religious/Hebrew school. Additionally, obstacles in the way of Jewish involvement include parental influence, Hebrew/religious school experiences, unsatisfactory interactions with Rabbis, synagogues, and Jewish institutions, ambivalent feelings about Israel.

In looking at the strongest ties between the individual and community, Goldscheider remarks that “the family represents the major connection between the individual and the community and is a core basis of group continuity (1985, p. 58).” Marriage and marital stability link Jews to the community through a broad network of family relationships. Since Jewish communal institutions are organized mainly around married couples and/or their children, family and community ties weaken in the period between the child leaving home and marrying. (Goldscheider, 1985, p. 74)

Married or not, so many Jews seem to have few, if any, meaningful connections to Jewish community. Fein remarks that not all Jews seek connection. “Jewishness has become an option and despite the renewed interest in roots, significant numbers have opted not to exercise the option” (Fein, 1988, p.136). Gordis notes: “In the open society alternatives certainly are available and many other Jews choose them and opt out of Jewish involvement.” He continues: “Many don’t engage in Jewish life because ideological, communal and institutions determents are too great and alternative addresses for engagement are found to be more attractive” (Gordis, 1997, p. 242). Fein remarks
that "those who have opted out do so not because the costs of being Jewish are onerous; in America, they very rarely are. It is instead, the nature of the benefits that have escaped them. The call to Jewish arms is almost always a call to responsibility rather than to reward, to burden rather than to benefit. It will be said that community itself is a benefit" (Fein, 1988, p. 55).

Looking ahead – reason for hope

Despite American Jew's movement away from traditional Jewish institutional affiliation, there is much to be hopeful about. Observers have noted that in the last twenty-plus years some Jews have begun to move back to tradition. According to Gordis "they are doing their spiritual searching inside Jewish life, looking for new ways to invest their lives with meaning, with sanctity, with spiritual substance" (Gordis, 1997, p. 72). The Jews studied by Cohen and Eisen, and by extension many Jews throughout America, are returning to ritual observance by "refashioning it" to fit their needs and interests (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 8). Cohen and Eisen believe that contemporary Jews experience an "ever-changing selection of Jewish activities and meanings...and do not worry about its authenticity" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 184). Ultimately, it is the self who is the "ultimate arbiter of Jewish expression" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 185). Likewise, after reading in-depth interviews with young American Jews, Horowitz was "struck by the many ways of being Jewish today....It is clear that a person constructs a sense of Jewishness from his/her own mix of experiences, engagements, interactions and contexts" (Horowitz, 2000, p. 9). Recognizing the many ways Jews choose to express their Judaism, Goldscheider asserts that there is no basis for arguing that non-
membership in a synagogue indicates a lack of commitment to Jewish community or a lack of Jewish identity.

Jonathan Woocher writes that we must examine the intensity of Jewish involvement by looking “beyond simple denominational labels to focus on the salience and centrality of Jewish identity and of its expression along a number of interrelated dimensions.” Similarly, Goldscheider acknowledges that “multiple bases of cohesion” characterize Jewish community. There is a wide range of ties to Jewishness. While religion has lost its centrality and dominance in Jewish life, religion “continues to play a supportive role in linking educational, family, economic and lifestyle issues to broader communal issues” (Goldscheider, 1985, p. 183).

Cohen and Eisen feel that Jews would like guidance and encouragement from Jewish institutions and professions who are not judgmental about their personal choices of Jewish observance. Woocher encourages Jewish communal workers and lay leaders to make an effort to understand what is actually happening in the minds, hearts and lives of American Jews. Woocher recognizes that Jewish identity today is extremely diverse, and likely to grow more so. Depending on which elements of Jewishness one chooses to look at, very different pictures of the strength of Jewish identity emerge. Woocher states that “there is a dynamic nature of Jewish identity – Jews growing more engaged, drifting away, making dramatic turns, being pulled in different directions – the more complicated the picture becomes – the more difficult to separate cause and effect” (Woocher, 1998, p. 59). Horowitz relates the ebb and flow of one’s attraction to and interest in being Jewish and connecting with Jewish community to changing circumstances in one’s individual and family life. As a result one’s Jewish involvement and practice also ebb and flow.
throughout one’s life. It is this dynamic, Horowitz exclaims, that has been missing from researchers’ understanding of American Jewish life (2000).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this section looks at several different themes that directly and indirectly speak to Jewish communal involvement in the 21st century. The literature addresses the significance of and people’s quest for community, and notes that people’s strong desire for community sometimes leads them to a religious community. The literature also explores the distinctions between participation in and identification with religious communities and suggests that some people maintain a strong identification with and connection to religious community despite a lack of attendance. The complex history of American Jews and Jewish community was also examined, as were the multifaceted ways that Jews see themselves as part of a Jewish people.

Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter related to religious community involvement is largely limited to those who are members or participants in religious organizations. In contrast, this study will focus on individuals who are not members of a religious organization yet seek stronger communal connections. Based on the related research, I anticipate that several key themes will arise from this study. In particular, I expect to find that those interviewed will express a strong desire to belong to community, yet an uncertainty of how to obtain it. Additionally, I anticipate that, as suggested in the literature reviewed, the interviewees will refer to their Jewishness largely in cultural and psychological terms rather than from a religious perspective. I also anticipate that whatever involvement each person currently has in Jewish community will be predominantly influenced by their family backgrounds and childhood histories. Further,
their current perceptions of Jewish community may also be the product of a single negative incident, or a small number of such, with a Jewish organization that has led to subsequent disaffection from the Jewish community at large. By examining the barriers Jews experience in their desire to affiliate with organizations in the Jewish community, I will be able to ascertain how Jewish organizations can better respond to the needs of unaffiliated Jews in our community.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The American Jewish community and the organizations within it face a growing challenge: that of attracting Jews to and involving them in Jewish organizations despite barriers – real or perceived – that have kept large numbers away from community activity. This study explores why unaffiliated or marginally affiliated Jews have not engaged to a fuller extent with community organizations and in community activities and how Jewish community organizations could better respond to their needs so that more Jews would affiliate and become involved in the Jewish community.

The key research questions investigated are:

A. What keeps Jews who desire meaningful connection to Jewish community from “formal affiliation” and involvement with the organized Jewish community?

B. What can community organizations do to better reach out and welcome these people and involve them in Jewish community?

C. Who are these Jews who seek greater connections to Jewish community but are having difficulty in obtaining it?

I elicited concrete ideas from the subjects about how Jewish organizations can attract individuals as participants and perhaps, ultimately as members. To develop an understanding of the complex nature of the attitudes and perceptions that hinder participation in community organizations, I used a qualitative methodology, which permitted respondents to share their own experiences and attitudes. I analyzed the data from each interview in aggregate and identified trends and key themes that emerged from the interviews. By delineating the key factors that have hindered people’s involvement in
Jewish community, I developed recommendations for Jewish organizations that will assist them in understanding the needs of those who desire meaningful connection to Jewish community but have not succeeded in finding it.

Subjects/Respondents

Beginning in 1994 leaders of the Jewish Community Federation recognized that thousands of Jews in the Peninsula region of the San Francisco Bay Area were interested in meaningful involvement in Jewish community yet were not actively engaged in the community. Not unlike other western communities, only twenty percent of the estimated 50,000 Jews of the Peninsula region belonged to synagogues. The outcome of a needs assessment was the creation of New Bridges to Jewish Community (New Bridges). Created in the summer of 1998, New Bridges helps to strengthen Jewish community by reaching out to and involving Peninsula Jews who desire greater connection to other Jews and involvement in Jewish community. Through a variety of activities or gatherings, such as informal focus groups, home-based holiday potluck dinners, interest-specific groups and events at synagogues, the goal of New Bridges is to facilitate connections between Jews and to introduce Jews to Jewish organizations. The leaders of New Bridges speculate that the likelihood of joining an organization and/or becoming involved in community activities increases as an individual creates meaningful Jewish friendships through which a sense of community evolves.

The subjects of my study were Jewish individuals who indicated a desire to become more involved in Jewish community by returning a questionnaire administered by New Bridges. In its first year, New Bridges attracted participants by distributing questionnaires at local events that traditionally draw large numbers of unaffiliated Jews.
The two selected events were the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, which holds a five-day run in Menlo Park each summer, and Stanford University’s High Holiday services, which are free to the public and attract over 5,000 Jews, most of whom have no affiliation with a synagogue. Questionnaires, which inquired about a participant’s Jewish community interests, current involvement, and demographics, were also mailed to individuals who had responded to advertisements placed in newspapers in the peninsula region, and in the New Bridges bi-monthly newsletter, which is set out in stores where Jews often shop. Many also learned about New Bridges through a weekly classified advertisement that runs in a popular secular newspaper. Currently, word-of-mouth has been the most effective method of acquiring new participants, most of whom now fill out a questionnaire on the New Bridges website. Once a questionnaire is filled out, the individual is considered a "participant" of New Bridges.

In surveying these individuals at the first point of contact, New Bridges was able to confirm its suspicions that these, largely unaffiliated Jews strongly desired a sense of Jewish community yet felt a great lack of community and community involvement. To date, over 1,000 individuals have signed up for and/or participated in one of the many activities originated through New Bridges.

Research Design

The study design was qualitative and based upon structured interviews. My sample population consisted of twenty individuals whom I interviewed in depth. The interview was based on the past and current attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of my sample population. These data were the basis for my findings and analysis.
My intention was to understand the experiences individuals have had with Jewish community organizations, and the perceptions they currently have of Jewish community organizations and Jewish community based on those experiences. The ultimate objective was to better understand the conditions that (on the one hand) keep people from feeling connected to Jewish community, or (on the other hand) foster such connections, so that Jewish community organizations can reevaluate their methods for reaching out to unaffiliated Jews. I explored the interviewees' childhood as well as adulthood experiences of involvement with Jewish community organizations and Jewish community. I also sought their suggestions about improving the way Jewish community organizations welcome and involve individuals in our community.

Instrumentation

The instrument questionnaire (Appendix B) included the following sections: demographics: general overview of the interviewees' years in the community and level of current involvement in Jewish and non-Jewish community organizations; family history and childhood experiences; the current level of importance of connection to Jewish community; the current involvement in Jewish community, and barriers to connecting with Jewish community.

The questionnaire was based on an understanding that motivations towards or hindrances in the way of becoming involved with Jewish community organizations have several variables that include attitudes, perceptions and memories from previous experiences. For this reason I included questions that relate to childhood experiences and perceptions as well as current data.
Procedures

This study was a hypothesis generating study. Therefore I used a qualitative methodology so that I could develop an understanding of the complex nature of the attitudes, perceptions and barriers that hinder participation in community organizations. The use of open-ended questions permitted the respondents to share their own experiences and attitudes. I employed specific procedures, which included the selection of subjects from a currently existing database of a Jewish organization, interviews of subjects, and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data.

Selection of Subjects

Subjects were selected from the current database of participants of the Jewish organization, New Bridges to Jewish Community. New Bridges, of which I am the Executive Director, is an effort sponsored by the Jewish Community Federation (of San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula counties). New Bridges is an innovative venture dedicated to creating and fostering meaningful connections for Peninsula Jews seeking a sense of belonging and involvement in Jewish community in traditional and non-traditional ways. New Bridges has been created as an interim step towards formal community involvement for Jews who have little or no connections to Jewish community yet desire them.

Criteria for Selection

I began by isolating only those individuals who indicated that being connected to Jewish community was very important while at the same time feeling little connection to the community. These attitudes are reflected in their answers on the questionnaire by answering “5” to the question, “On a scale of 1-5, 5 being strongly agree, how important
is it for you to connect to Jewish community” and, answering “1” or “2” to the question, “On a scale of 1-5, 1 being the least connected, how connected do you currently feel to Jewish community?” By limiting my sample population to those who have indicated a strong desire to connect to Jewish community, yet feel disconnected, I believed that I would learn from those with a strong motivation to get involved and who may be most aware of the reasons why they are not involved.

From this subset, which contained the names of 168 women and ninety men, I took a random sample of twenty names or 7.8%. I then stratified the sample by gender and for women only I stratified the group into age clusters (24-36 year olds, 37-46 year olds, 47-56 year olds, 57-66 year olds and 67 years and older).

To come up with the random sample, I ordered the men in alphabetical order by last name then assigned each a sequential numeric number. For the women, I divided them by age cluster first and then assigned a sequential numeric number. I then went to a Random Numbers Table and selected my sample of ten men and ten women and an additional twenty of each gender as alternates. For the women I selected four names from the first three age group clusters, and three names from the last age group cluster.

I pre-tested the instrument with two individuals who met the criteria to ensure the acuity of the questionnaire. I then further refined the questionnaire design and coding categories.

**Interview Questionnaire**

My interview questions were specifically designed to understand the barriers each person had experienced in becoming formally involved in Jewish community, and to ascertain their ideas of how Jewish community organizations could better involve them in
Jewish community. In some cases, research participants may have become involved with Jewish community since the time they completed the New Bridges questionnaire. In this case, my interview questions were specifically designed to understand how they were able to overcome the barriers. I utilized the following procedures, which were based on qualitative research methodology. Table 3-1 summarizes the interview questions.

The data I collected were primarily those relating to conditions (background information of the interviewees), strategies and tactics (what they are seeking from community and how they hope to obtain it) and consequences (current level of involvement, perceived barriers to involvement).

Table 3-1. Interview Questions and Analytical Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTION</th>
<th>Continuous (Means/Range)</th>
<th>Coded Data: Dichotomous/Categorical (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographics: (conditions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Is/was either your biological mother or father a Jew or have you converted to Judaism?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. What is your age?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Gender</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. What is your marital/partner status?</td>
<td>Single, Divorced, Widowed, Married/partnered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. (If partnered) Is your partner Jewish?</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Do you have children?</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. If yes, how old are your children?</td>
<td>0-5, 7-12, 13-18, 18+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. What is your level of education</td>
<td>HS, Some College, College, Some Graduate, Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. What is your occupation</td>
<td>Professional, High-Tech/Start-up, Homemaker, Retired, Student, All other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. How many hours a week do you work (if applicable)?</td>
<td>Less than 20 hours, 21 – 40 hours, 41-50 hours, more than 50 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW QUESTION</td>
<td>Continuous (Means/Range)</td>
<td>Coded Data: Dichotomous/Categorical (%)</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. General Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Where did you grow up?</th>
<th>Bay Area, West Coast, Midwest, Northeast, South, non-US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. How long have you lived in this community (i.e., Peninsula region of the Bay Area)?</td>
<td>Less than 2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Do you live here with other family members or significant others?</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. What is your current involvement with Jewish organizations, if any?</td>
<td>Number of organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. What is your current involvement with non-Jewish organizations, if any?</td>
<td>Number of organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Family History and Childhood Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. While growing up, did your family belong to a synagogue and/or were active in a Jewish organization?</th>
<th>Yes, No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (If yes to synagogue) Which denomination, if any?</td>
<td>Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Non-denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (If yes to synagogue) What was the level of your family’s involvement in the synagogue?</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (If yes to organizations) What kind of organizations were you involved with?</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. What kind of Jewish observances were practiced in the home, if any?</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Growing up, what were your and your family’s general attitudes about being Jewish?</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW QUESTION</td>
<td>Continuous (Means/ Range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Looking back on your childhood, how would you rate your memories of your Jewish experience on a scale of 1-5, 5 being most positive?</td>
<td>Ordinal data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Current importance of connection to Jewish community

| A. On a scale of 1 – 5, 5 being the most important, how important is it for you to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community? | Ordinal data |
| B. Why is it important for you to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community? | * |
| C. What would it be like to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community? How would things be different for you? | * |

5. Current involvement in Jewish community

| A. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the most satisfied, how satisfied are you with your current involvement in Jewish community? | Ordinal data |
| B. Tell me about your current involvement in Jewish community? | * |

6. Barriers to connection / forming meaningful Jewish community

| A. What are the obstacles, if any, to being as connected to Jewish community as you would like? | * |
| B. How can Jewish community organizations facilitate/assist/encourage meaningful involvement in Jewish community? | * |
| C. Is there anything that you can do to help create the community you are seeking? | * |

* Analytic categories for all open-ended questions will be determined after all data is collected
Interview Procedures

Before formally interviewing the study subjects, I pre-tested the instrument with two individuals who met criteria stated above to evaluate the acuity of the questionnaire and to ensure that the interview would take no longer than one hour. I then further refined the questionnaire design and coding categories. I received approval from the Human Subjects Committee of the University of San Francisco before the study subjects were contacted.

I conducted all the interviews between March and June 2001 in person. Many interviews took place at either the participant's home or workplace and a couple took place at a coffee shop. The interviews lasted anywhere from forty minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes. I prepared a chart beforehand with responses so that I could easily take notes during the interview.

I contacted the randomly selected individuals first by email or letter, and then followed up with a phone call. In the event that one or more of the individuals declined the interview, I randomly selected more individuals from amongst the group from which each had been selected.

Definition of Relevant Variables

The relevant variables that I examined in the course of the interviews include:

1. Jew or Jewish person: confirmed in question 1A.
2. Jew-by-choice: confirmed in question 1A.
3. Jewishness: referenced in many of the questions in the interview.
4. **Jewish community**: referenced in many of the questions in the interview.

5. **Jewish community involvement**: included current level of involvement, desire for involvement and connection within Jewish community and barriers from involvement. Jewish community involvement would be examined in questions 2D, 5A-5B and 6A-6C.

6. **Barriers to Jewish community**: included real or perceived obstacles an individual had experienced. Barriers to Jewish community were examined in question 6A.

7. **Organizational activities**: included activities sponsored by an organization (Jewish or non-Jewish). Organizational activities will be addressed in questions 2D, 2E, 3A and 5B.

8. **Cultural Judaism**: included an involvement in and/or identification with Judaism that does not include religion. Cultural Judaism is touched on throughout the questionnaire.

9. **Demographic variables**: included age, gender, marital status, children and ages of children, years living in geographic area, level of education, occupation will be addressed in questions 1B-1I and 2A-2C.

**Treatment of Data**

**Coding the Data**

During the interview, I documented all coded and open-ended responses on a specially prepared spreadsheet. I maintained a computerized spreadsheet for all coded and open-ended responses for easy tabulation and analysis. Table 3-1 summarizes the planned coding schema for the interview questionnaire. In addition to the ordinal and
dichotomous data, I collected qualitative data, and analytic categories were determined after all data were collected.

Analyzing the Data

Table 3-1 summarizes the analysis plan for each question in the interview. In addition to the ordinal and dichotomous data, data collected were also qualitative in nature and the analytic categories for all open-ended questions were determined after all data was collected.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study was the potential lack of representativeness of the selected Jews to the larger Jewish population and thus the invalidity of generalizations based on the small sample. Therefore the results are most specifically applicable to the Peninsula region of the San Francisco Bay Area. Further, the sample represented Jews who had learned about New Bridges and completed a New Bridges questionnaire. This was not a true sample of all Jews in this area who were interested in developing deeper connections to Jewish community.

Another limitation was due to my role as Executive Director of New Bridges, which may have influenced what was said in the interview, thereby weakening the internal validity of the data collected. I attempted to neutralize this weakness by explaining the nature of this study and its importance to community development. The work of New Bridges was not referred to in any form in the interview and I made clear that was research was not an evaluation of the New Bridges program or my performance. I also assured each interviewee that his/her comments would remain confidential and anonymous.
This study was also limited because the data collected were dependent on the participants’ memory, which might or might not have actually corresponded with what happened in their lives. It was expected that the interviewees would speak truthfully about their experiences, as they would have a vested interest in seeing change in the community, but accuracy may have been slightly tainted by each person’s memory or emotion associated with certain topics.

The findings of this study will likely be more applicable to the San Francisco Bay Area specifically and the West Coast Jewish communities than to East Coast or Midwestern Jewish communities, as there is a documented difference in trends and behaviors between the west and east coasts (the west coast typically reflects a ten to fifteen year jump start on Jewish community trends). Aspects of the study design that would limit its universality, credibility or applicability are: who is chosen to be interviewed; the way people present their responses; the one-sidedness of information; faulty memory; unrepresentativeness of the sample.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS/FINDINGS

The objective of the interviews was to better understand the barriers Jews face in the way of active involvement in Jewish communal organizations and to gain insight into ways that organizations can break down these barriers. Each interviewee’s Jewish childhood experiences and interest in forming connections to Jewish community were examined to better understand the individual’s current involvement in Jewish community. The following chapter outlines and elaborates the findings in the twenty interviews that were conducted.

The findings are presented by section of the interview instrument: descriptive demographics, family history and childhood experiences, current involvement in Jewish community, barriers to affiliation, recommendations to organizations to reduce barriers, and the role individuals can play in creating community.

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

Of the twenty interviewees, ten were woman and ten were men, ranging in age from twenty-five to eighty-one with an average age of forty-five. Of the twenty interviewees, sixteen were born to two Jewish parents, two were born to one Jewish parent and two were Jews-by-choice and were not born into a Jewish family (Table 4-1).
Eight (40%) of the interviewees were married and the remainder single, divorced or widowed (Table 4-2). Of those married, six (75%) were married to Jewish spouses. The majority of the interviewees (55%) did not have children. Of the nine who had children, four had children ten years or younger, one had teenagers and the remaining four had grown children.
### Table 4-2
Descriptive Demographics – Marital Status, Religion of Spouse, Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion of Spouse (if married)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. with Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of Children (Age Groups in Years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three fourths (75%) had graduate degrees or higher (Table 4-3). Three had bachelor degrees and two had some college (one is currently in college). Not surprisingly, since the interviews took place in Silicon Valley, ten (50%) of the interviewees were working in high technology. Six worked in other professional capacities, one was a student, one was a homemaker, one was retired and one was unemployed. Of those who were working, all but one worked fulltime. Their workweek ranged from twenty-six to seventy hours per week and, on average, the interviewees
worked 45.7 hours per week (Table 4-3). Eleven (55%) worked forty or more hours per week, and four worked fifty or more hours a week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Tech / Start-up</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Professional</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Week (Hours per Week)</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the interviewees (80%) were born in the United States. Only six (30%) were born in the San Francisco Bay Area. Of the nine born on the East Coast, seven (35%) were born in New York City. The four (20%) born outside of the United States were born in Argentina, Canada, Israel, and the former Soviet Union. Of the interviewees, only one (5%) had lived in the Peninsula for two years or less. The majority (65%) of those interviewed have lived on the Peninsula for six years or longer.
Table 4-4

Descriptive Demographics –
Place of Birth, Years Living on Peninsula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast (SF Bay Area, N = 6; 30%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Coast (New York City, N = 7; 35%)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside US</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SF Bay Area Peninsula Residence (Years)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family History and Childhood Experiences

Of the eighteen interviewees who grew up in a Jewish family, twelve (66%) belonged to a synagogue (Table 4-5). One half of those families had minimal involvement in the synagogue while one half had active and/or leadership roles within the synagogue. Eleven families or fifty-five percent of the eighteen belonged to one to three Jewish or other religious organizations. All but one of the families celebrated Jewish holidays. Five interviewees reported that their families kept kosher, many simply out of respect for grandparents who were living with them. Three of these families observed Shabbat (Jewish Sabbath). Two other interviewees reported that their families observed Shabbat.

For those who grew up in a Jewish family, the majority (61%) reported positive experiences and memories of their Jewish childhood (Table 4-5). Of those interviewed, regardless of their childhood experience, nearly all reported a sense of pride as Jews.
while growing up. The one person who reported negative feelings about her Jewish upbringing came from the Former Soviet Union where she experienced firsthand discrimination as a Jew. Despite her negative feelings as a member of a persecuted minority, she nonetheless maintained a sense of pride in her Jewish identity.

For those who had a neutral attitude about their Jewish upbringing (33%), all reported that they had both good and bad memories of their Jewish childhood experiences. Many in this group spoke about the mixed messages that they received from their parents. A married woman in her fifties who grew up in Brooklyn where “everything was Jewish” stated that “we were told that we couldn’t be too Jewish because we had to assimilate.” Some reported their dislike of attending religious school. For example, one interviewee explained that he “hated religious school because of the time commitment... and because [he] never bought the religious part.” He liked other aspects of his Jewish upbringing but his religious school experience still plagues him today.

Most of the eleven who reported positive feelings looked back to their childhood Jewish childhood experiences with nostalgia and longing. Many talked about a feeling of home in the Jewish community. One female interviewee in her fifties explained how “everything around us was Jewish. We were immersed in Jewish community.” Similarly a man in his fifties explained that even though his family was not observant, “life followed the rhythm of the Jewish calendar,” since his neighborhood and schools were mostly Jewish. Many in this group also talked about the caution received from their parents to “stick with your own kind because you can’t trust the outside world.”
Table 4-5
Family History and Childhood Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood Synagogue Membership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform (n= 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative (n= 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox (n= 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n= 0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Childhood Jewish (or other religious if from a non-Jewish household)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Organizations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 Organizations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Synagogue Involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Holy Days (Only)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional Attendance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Involvement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household Observances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrated Jewish Holidays</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat Celebration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood Memories of Jewish Experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denominator is based on 18 as two interviewees were not raised in a Jewish home

**One or more categories per subject.
Current Desire for and Involvement in Jewish Community

Nineteen (95%) of those interviewed indicated that it was important to them to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community (one reported it being neutral). When asked what meaningful involvement in Jewish community would look like for them, the majority of the interviewees described it first and foremost as having a community of Jewish friends. A married woman in her thirties explains it this way: “It is important to be connected to community in general. If I am going to be connected to community, it seems to make sense to connect with those who I have the most in common with. I have the most innate kinship to the Jewish people and I want to connect with those who are most like me.” Similarly a single man in his twenties explains, “There is a greater probability that I could find community within the Jewish community. Emotionally it feels better – I feel more connected to Jews.”

Several of the interviewees went further to describe the feelings of comfort and familiarity that come with greater immersion in Jewish community. One single woman in her fifties talked about wanting to surround herself in Jewish community. “I want to wear it like a shawl,” she said. Another woman sought others with whom to share Jewish customs and to obtain “an ease with things that are Jewish by doing things Jewishly with other Jews.”

A few people spoke about a sense of responsibility of maintaining a strong Jewish community. A single man in his fifties felt he owed it to the Jewish community that preceded him. He explains that his “grandparents were helped when they came here (United States). I want to help the survival of Judaism.”
Several interviewees also talked about their desire for holiday celebrations and a variety of other activities including social action and activities focused on Israel. Only two people spoke about wanting an increased connection to or involvement in Jewish community organizations. Only one interviewee spoke about the need for spirituality to create his meaningful connection to Jewish community.

While the desire of the interviewees for meaningful involvement was high, the level of satisfaction with their current involvement was generally low (Table 4-6). Eleven (55%) were not satisfied with their current involvement in Jewish community. Only three (15%) of the interviewees belonged to a synagogue, two of which indicated a high degree of satisfaction with their current involvement in Jewish community. Nearly 50% of those interviewed were involved in at least one community organization. Of the others, most indicated a tendency to “pick and choose” the events that they went to.

When asked what they could do to help create the community they were seeking, nearly every interviewee recognized that he or she could make more of an effort. Some spoke about the need to “push themselves” to do things or to endure their shyness in uncomfortable situations. A single man said that he would “try to be more receptive to different involvement opportunities….I need to force myself to get motivated. I should take more action to create what I am looking for.” Some acknowledged that volunteering was a good way to get involved. A married man who had been very involved in a synagogue in a different area said that he would like to volunteer as he could be “a resource to organizations but I don’t want to impose myself.”
Table 4-6

Level of Importance and Level of Satisfaction with Current Involvement in Jewish Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=20</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of importance in being meaningfully involved in Jewish community</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of satisfaction with current involvement in Jewish community</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers to Connection in Jewish Community

The interviewees reported a wide range of obstacles that had hindered greater involvement in Jewish community. In many cases, the interviewees acknowledged their own role (e.g., their lack of time and energy or their own "laziness"). In general, the barriers can be summarized into the following categories: organizations' lack of openness to newcomers; spiritual disappointment and feelings of being judged; overemphasis on the family; narrowness of activities offered; the high cost of Jewish living; and other personal obstacles.

Organizations' Lack of Openness to Newcomers

Five interviewees (25%) stated that organizations lacked openness to new members and/or new ideas and that they had felt "cliquishness" (i.e., excluded from groups) within the leadership ranks of organizations. A married man in his sixties who had been very active in a small town synagogue before moving to the Peninsula several years ago commented that synagogues here feel "very cliquey and that people don't really seem open to meeting new people or making new friendships." A Jew-by-choice confided that "it sometimes feels like a closed club of people who know one another. As a convert, I feel that Jews are often uncomfortable with those of us who have chosen
Judaism.” A single male in his thirties described this barrier as “inertia on the part of people.” He explained that people he had interacted with at organizational events “don’t really act like they care about building Jewish community…. Many lack social graces.”

Whether these attitudes are representative of the organization, or not, the perceptions that many interviewees experienced was that of not being wanted. Some talked about the feeling of being an uninvited guest. Several interviewees grew up in tight-knit Jewish communities in which one did not need to be a member of a synagogue to feel as though he or she was a member of the community. Belonging to a synagogue did not seem requisite to feeling part of the community.

**Spiritual Disappointment and Feelings of Judgment**

Surprisingly there was little mention of God or religious observances in the discussion about the interviewees’ current interests in Jewish connection. One interviewee struggled with the concept of God and felt that he had not found spiritual guidance from Judaism or from rabbis. A few other interviewees expressed feelings of being “judged by the Jewish community” for either not knowing enough (e.g., not able to read Hebrew in synagogue) or having different spiritual or religious perspectives than others.

**Overemphasis on the Family**

Even though the family unit is a vital and emphasized component of the Jewish community, many of those interviewed felt that organizations placed too much emphasis on family and excluded those who did not have family. A childless married woman in her fifties felt both excluded and condemned for her decision not to have children. She stated that there was “such an emphasis on pro-creation and families that it makes those
feel badly if they haven’t fulfilled the tenet of Judaism to raise kids….It [this criticism] feels very overt.” Likewise a single woman in her thirties felt uncomfortable at synagogue because “religion is very family focused. It feels like it is kids first and couples second in terms of priorities. There is a cultural bias against singles.”

Since fifteen of the twenty interviewees (75%) either did not have children or had grown children, it is not surprising that so many interviewees remarked about the family focus of Jewish community organizations, particularly synagogues.

Limited Activities Offered

In line with the feelings of many interviewees that organizations focus too much on family-centered activities, over 50% of the interviewees felt that programs were not geared to their particular age, marital status or interest. Most of the interviewees who were single felt that organizations were not attracting other singles since programs were rarely geared specifically to single participants. A single female in her thirties felt that this was not the time in her life to join a synagogue since “synagogues are geared to families, couples and older people. They are not geared to singles.”

Likewise many interviewees discussed the disappointment of “not seeing others like themselves in organizations.” Singles of all ages do not see a critical mass of singles; young adults do not see a critical mass of young adults; couples without children do not see a critical mass of other couples without children. In other words, most people were looking for people like themselves with whom to create community. The same single female mentioned above notes that “synagogues could provide a sense of community if they had more young adults. I cannot find a place for myself in a synagogue because it feels like it is largely older, married people there….It seems strange
to join a synagogue to put your roots down as a single person.” A single woman in her fifties, who quietly confided that she was gay, expressed feeling excluded from Jewish community organizations. She felt that if organizations did outreach to gays and lesbians then she would feel that she was wanted.

In contrast, a married man in his sixties noted that “We are almost retired…We are not united with others through children’s activities. It’s more difficult to connect with others as you get older.”

The High Cost of Belonging to Jewish Community

The discussion about money and Jewish community organizations during the interviews sometimes became uncomfortable and even emotional. “The high cost of Jewish living,” as some called it, forced people to weigh values against one another to determine what people could or would afford.

It is not surprising that many interviewees viewed the cost of membership in Jewish community organizations in market terms. As one interviewee noted, “I ruled synagogue membership out because it would be too expensive for the amount of time I would go.” A young mother of an eight-month old infant reported attending various synagogues occasionally but had not joined one. She stated, “because of the cost, synagogue membership has to entail more than it does to justify the expense…. I really need to justify the expense.”

Even though the interviewees recognized that organizations have operational expenses, they felt that organizations put an undue emphasis on money and the need to raise money from members or participants. A single woman in her fifties who recently
joined a synagogue for the first time in her adult life felt that “the Jewish community is obsessed with money. They don’t want you, they want your money.” Another woman in her fifties, who is not a member of a synagogue because of the high dues, felt that “organizations don’t need people like me who don’t fit the norm and who can’t afford to pay.”

**Personal Obstacles**

Over half of those interviewed took some responsibility for their lack of meaningful connections to Jewish community. They noted that a lack of personal time and energy stood in their way of finding or creating the community they were seeking. A married woman in her fifties who belonged to a synagogue admitted that “lack of time and inclination make it difficult to do the things I would like in the community and with the synagogue.” It is not surprising that she could not find the time as she worked between sixty and seventy hours a week. But even for those who work a standard forty-hour workweek or less (25%), many were without the time and energy they felt they needed to make involvement in community organizations fulfilling.

In addition, many interviewees discussed their own shyness or discomfort in new situations as a barrier to making Jewish connections within organizations. They felt that many gatherings were not structured in a way that could ease someone’s discomfort in a room full of strangers. In addition, interviewees discussed other psychological barriers such as negative experiences with clergy, or with Jewish leadership, or at synagogue.
How Organizations Can Help Individuals Overcome the Barriers

Many interviewees were not sure exactly how to direct their answer in terms of recommendations to Jewish organizations. The obstacles were much more indecipherable than the solutions for the interviewees. Most of the interviewees did not blame organizations for their own lack of community involvement. Interviewees recognized the complexities that confront organizations in helping Jews create meaningful connections to Jewish community.

Better Outreach and Integration

Some of the interviewees drew from their own experiences at organizations where they did not feel welcomed to try to identify the ways organizations could be more open and welcoming to newcomers. A single man in his thirties reflected that “organizations do not act like they want to attract new people. They are not driven to grow like companies who are constantly seeking new customers. Organizations need to help people feel like they belong…. They need to look at what it means to feel welcomed, and to explore the barriers of entry. They need to think about what makes an event feel safe (for someone coming for the first time) like knowing someone who will be there, helping people create individual connections, receiving a personal invitation to attend an event, having personal escorts or an activity to do when you enter a room.”

Some people spoke about the importance of having a “warm and positive person” do the outreach work. A single woman in her fifties who recently joined a synagogue explained, “It’s really a matter of the people who are doing the welcoming.” Those who did the welcoming needed to “take in the whole community…and need[ed] to better integrate members into the organization.”
Those who felt that organizations were not reaching out to their age group or other specific demographic characteristic (e.g., interfaith couples, singles) recommended that organizations do more targeted outreach.

More Inclusivity

There was a certain amount of skepticism on the part of the interviewees about organizations’ desire to be inclusive. Several people spoke about perceptions of or experiences with organizations from which they felt excluded. A married woman in her fifties, who felt outcast by the Jewish community over her decision not to have children, stated that she hoped that organizations would “really want to be more inclusive and to want and accept people who are different.” A single man in his thirties stated that he wanted organizations “to accept my lack of knowledge or my issues with the religion.” A man in his forties who, in his twenties, had been very involved in an orthodox community explained, “The Jewish community needs to be more accessible and inviting to Jews, like what Chabad does. Chabad [an orthodox sector that concentrates on outreach to all Jews] makes you feel like ‘you’re OK.’ The Jewish community needs to convey to people that they are welcome wherever they are.”

Creating Connections to Others

Most of those interviewed felt that the first step in creating meaningful connections to Jewish community was conducting effective outreach and an initial warm welcome. The next stop would be to provide opportunities for personal connections with others in the organization. The interviewees insightfully spoke about the need for “multiple ways of connecting” and the need for on-going connections. A man who had been very involved at a synagogue discussed the importance of “helping people meet in
different ways.” The woman who recently joined a synagogue realized that “one needs to make social relationships in order to feel that you belong.”

It was also important to several interviewees that organizational leaders be involved in creating connections with others. A married man, who sent his young children to a Jewish Day School and was a member of the Jewish Community Center but felt peripheral to both organizations, explained: “Organizational leaders need to devote more time to creating personal relationships [with the members]. They need to have one-on-one conversations with people.... People want to be asked what it is that they want.”

**More Involvement Opportunities**

Part and parcel of the need for personal connections is also the need for more involvement opportunities within organizations. A single woman in her thirties who was active in several young adult Jewish organizations reflected on her involvement in these groups. She realized that her involvement not only grew but also became more meaningful because she “was given a role and responsibility within the organization.”

The married man in his sixties who had been very involved in a former synagogue also reflected on his experiences within that organization. He explained that “organizations need to let lay leadership do more things for the organization...and they need to get people on committees.”

**Broader Programming and Activities**

Some interviewees explained that they would be more likely to participate in or join organizations if the organizations had programs and activities that were more appealing to them and their personal age or marital status. The list of programs that people asked for included more of such categories as lectures with scholars, singles
programming, Jewish learning opportunities, Israel-related programs, programs geared to young adults, and programming for singles or couples in their forties and fifties.

Several interviewees felt that there was a great need for more classes for beginners in Judaism and in Hebrew. A married woman in her thirties who had been actively seeking a synagogue where she would feel most comfortable felt that organizations needed to provide special programs “for those who are new, tentative or seeking. They should have a class called something like ‘Getting comfortable with Judaism.’”

**Increasing the Appeal**

Some interviewees hoped that organizations could increase the appeal and awareness of Judaism and Jewish community to other Jews. Many interviewees felt that they had discovered meaningful aspects in Judaism after deliberate searching. For them it was incumbent on Jewish organizations to acquaint people with the array of what Judaism has to offer. A married woman in her thirties felt that organizations could “help people go from curious to ready” in their quest for Jewish community. A married man who had previously been involved in an Orthodox community felt that “organizations should help people reinvest in their Judaism.” Another man who had become increasingly more involved in Jewish community in the last several years stated: “Organizations should ask what would attract more Jews to Jewish life and how can Jewish life become a priority for people.” One interviewee who was raised in South America explained: “Being a good Jew can be many things, not just a level of observance. Organizations can expand the sense of what a Jew is.”

In addition, several people discussed their hope that Jewish community
organizations could educate the larger community (e.g., schools and the workforce) about Jewish customs and beliefs: "[It is important] to increase a positive visibility of the Jewish community so that others have a better understanding of our traditions and of things that are different."

**Better Publicity and Promotion**

In addition to increasing the appeal of Jewish community to Jews, the interviewees also hoped that organizations would do a better job in promoting involvement opportunities in Jewish community. In general people felt that there was a lack of information about what was happening. A mother of a year-old baby said, "You often don't know what's happening unless you are already inside the community." Some people suggested that organizations should list their activities in the secular press as opposed to only within the Jewish press.

Additionally a few people felt that organizations could serve themselves well if they "marketed themselves in a more concrete way to make it clear what you get out of a membership." Many of the interviewees in general did not know what many organizations offered to their members.

**Easing the Financial Burden**

The cost of belonging to organizations in the Jewish community could be onerous for many. Most of the interviewees had something to suggest to organizations about the way money and membership costs were handled.

A single woman in her thirties who was involved in several singles groups felt that she had benefited from the different approaches these groups took towards membership costs. She felt that more organizations should "let people experience
involvement and give them time to get a taste before asking for money.” Similarly, another woman who goes to a variety of organizational activities without being a member stated, “I wish I could try it first and then pay. Financial arrangements feel unfair to single people. I guess it works for those who belong and it doesn't work for those who don't.” One woman who recently joined a synagogue felt that organizations “should encourage people to give what they can because the money will increase when people feel better [about their involvement in the organization]. If organizations are fulfilling people's needs, they will give back to the organization.”

Several people mentioned that they wished they could pay on an “a la carte” basis instead of paying the steep membership fees. A married woman in her fifties who did not belong to any Jewish organizations thought: “Organizations should have different price scales for members and non-members...I feel like an uninvited guest when I go to services since I am not a member and I do not pay anything. Because of membership it adds to that feeling of being in or out.”

Greater Convenience

A few of the interviewees felt that organizations could attract more members if they offered some basic conveniences such as providing or organizing transportation for those who do not drive. One interviewee who was reluctant to go to any event by herself due to her extreme shyness suggested, “Organizations should encourage people to carpool. This way they can meet one another and then people would be more inclined to go to things that are further away.”
God Talk

While the subject of God or even religious practice rarely came up, some of the interviewees did convey a discomfort with Jewish practice or theology. A woman in her fifties who had not found a synagogue that resonates with her stated that the Peninsula needed “secular Judaism options” and that she would likely join a synagogue if it were humanist. A single man in his thirties had always been challenged in finding a comfortable place within Judaism since he had “deep reservations about God.” He felt that he would likely not join a synagogue in the foreseeable future because of this conflict.

Conclusion

As predicted, the interviewees expressed a profound desire for Jewish community. For most, Jewish community did not necessarily entail membership of an organization or even a religious practice, but rather having Jewish friends and a sense of familiarity and comfort. For the majority of the interviewees, their form of Judaism had little to do with God and a great deal to do with history, both personal history and that of the Jewish people. Their desire to be involved in Jewish organizations, if anything, was largely predicated on their desire to be connected to others like themselves within a Jewish context. Many were open to involvement in or membership of communal organizations but felt that barriers, such as feeling unwelcome in or excluded from these organizations, made membership or involvement problematic. While all the interviewees felt they could make more of an effort to be involved, they also felt that organizations could do many things to make themselves more inviting and appealing to Jews.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Review of the Problem

As outlined in previous chapters, the character of and the needs within the Jewish community are both changing and fluid. The way Jews identify with their Jewishness and with Jewish community is largely a reflection of individuals' lives and the circumstances in which they live their lives. Despite a strong desire on the part of many, Jewish community for some of those seems inaccessible and unobtainable. By understanding the roots of perceived inaccessibility to Jewish community, Jewish organizations may more successfully attract those who desire to belong but feel it is hard to achieve. Woocher (1998), Cohen and Eisen (2000) and Horowitz (2000) describe the dynamic nature of Jewish identity and the fluidity in which Jews engage in their Jewishness. Numerous Jewish commentators have offered both their analysis of the conditions of Jewish life in America and their forecasts for the future. Yet both the challenges and solutions are complex and require extensive study.

Discussion of the Findings

In a qualitative research project such as this it is not possible, as in quantitative research, to make concrete correlations between data points. However, the anecdotal information collected in these interviews provide many fascinating insights and important recommendations for community organizations, as well as pointing to areas where further research would be helpful.
The Search for Community

The interviewees of this research were selected because they represented a subset of Jews who sought greater connections to Jewish community but had not been successful in this endeavor. The findings indicated that the challenge for all of the interviewees was to translate their strong Jewish identities into a meaningful connection with Jewish community. The interviewees articulated a strong pull to Jewish community and to Jewish people. For them Jewish community was having both Jewish friends and a feeling of familiarity and comfort. For some it was about returning to the feeling of their Jewish childhood. These findings are consistent with the research of Reisman (1977) that described the "desperate longing for community" by most people.

While this study specifically set out to assess the role that Jewish organizations could or should play in helping individuals create meaningful connections to Jewish community by understanding the barriers that have prevented these connections from occurring, most of the interviewees did not feel a particularly strong pull to Jewish organizations. Fein (1988) noted that for the people he studied, their involvement with synagogues and other organizations had less to do with religious observance and more to do with community. However the interviewees of this study described their desire for the feelings associated with community but rarely identified organizations as a source of providing such feelings. Despite the good works of Jewish communal organizations, Jews with little or no connection to these organizations do not see the organizations as purveyors of Jewish community.
The Changing Multiple Pathways to Jewish Community

Goldscheider (1986), and more recently Cohen and Eisen (2000) and Horowitz (2000) wrote fittingly about the need to have multiple pathways into Jewish community. However the “traditional” pathways that Goldscheider wrote about fifteen years ago are slowing deteriorating. Goldscheider reported that the alternative ways to express Jewishness include family, religion, concern for Israel and affiliation with organizations. The interviewees of this research project showed limited ties or interest in any of these areas.

The aforementioned authors discussed the important role that marriage and children play in linkage to Jewish community and engagement. However, fourteen of the twenty interviewees (70%) were either single or did not have children and two others (10%) had grown children. Further, the majority of the interviewees did not have immediate family in the San Francisco Bay Area. It appears the lack of family ties for them had contributed to weaker connections to Jewish community.

Only three interviewees (15%) discussed religion or God, and in two cases it concerned their “struggle with God.” This finding is consistent with a recent report about faith and community in Silicon Valley, where religion or religious observance did not rank high amongst those interviewed (Koch & Miller, 2001). The report further indicated a sharply lower involvement in religious community among Silicon Valley residents compared to the rest of the country. Similarly, the 1990 National Jewish Population Study indicated that the Jews of the West are more likely to be secular.

Israel, which once united Jewish people, was hardly mentioned by the interviewees as a pull into Jewish life. In fact only one interviewee (5%) expressed
interest in Israel. Waxman (1994), as well as Cohen and Eisen, suggested the decline in Jewish attachment to or support of Israel has further weakened Jewish involvement. The absence of family and the detachment or lack of interest in religion or Israel seems to have further distanced the interviewees from Jewish community. Despite their desire to connect, the gateways appear limited.

Changes within Jewish Community Life

The interviewees’ family backgrounds and Jewish experiences did not directly correspond with their own choices to belong to a synagogue or other Jewish organizations, as was predicted in Chapter Two, and as Gordis (1997) also suggested in his writing. However the findings did correlate with Woocher’s (1998) prediction that attitudes about one’s Jewishness would be strongly influenced by one’s experiences as a child. As noted in the previous chapter, all but one of the interviewees who were born into a Jewish family had positive feelings about their Jewish childhood experiences and every person interviewed had a positive identification as a Jew today.

Consistent with the changes in Jewish life noted above, Jewish community life has also changed significantly in the last fifty years. Fifteen (75%) of the interviewees either grew up in a time (e.g., 1950s) or place (e.g., New York City) when and where there were Jewish “ghettos” and at a time when the nuclear family was intact.

Many of the interviewees as children lived either with or close by one or more grandparent. Abrams (1997) suggested that the linkage to the immigrant grandparents made it possible to stay Jewish even without involvement with Judaism. Clearly without that linkage to immigrant generations, the interviewees’ feelings of connection to Jewish life were weakened.
Most of the interviewees were born at a time when Jews bonded together out of necessity, and therefore lived and went to school amongst large numbers of other Jews. Now that Jews no longer need the safe haven of Jewish community for their educational, professional and social lives, these Jews, like so many others throughout the country are immersed in their busy American lives. To have a Jewish life in these times, in this place, requires Jews to actively seek out other Jews and Jewish organizations and activities. It is not surprising that so many of the interviewees longed for their Jewish childhoods where it all felt so easy to be Jewish.

Many of the interviewees demonstrated the type of mobility, as opportunities opened up, that Goldstein (1993) described as a threat to Jewish community involvement. They left their families and their communities to create a new life. The interviewees of this study, like thousands of other Jews, have immersed themselves so completely in their work lives that little time can be found to engage in community activities.

Not Just Newcomers

Rabinowitz (1988) found that most Jews who found connection to Jewish community did so in their first five years of living in a new area. This was clearly not the case for the study interviewees. Thirteen (65%) of those interviewed had lived on the San Francisco Bay Area Peninsula for six years or more and still were seeking meaningful community involvement in their lives. It is obviously not just newcomers to a community that seek involvement opportunities but also those who have lived within a community for many years.
Barriers to Connection in Jewish Community

The interviewees addressed the questions about their barriers to Jewish community with a great degree of personal introspection and thoughtfulness. While most interviewees acknowledged that there was a notable gap between their desire for connection to Jewish community and their level of satisfaction with their current connection, each interviewee struggled to put his or her finger on specific reasons.

It became apparent that there was no single barrier that prevented the interviewees from creating the connections they were seeking. Instead, the barriers consisted of practical and personal reasons. For example, one practical reason that was repeatedly mentioned was that information about Jewish community activities was not easily found in sources outside of the Jewish network. One personal reason commonly reported was the discomfort that shy people faced when attending community activities where they did not know anybody present.

Additional barriers were those perceived by the interviewees that were not necessarily an accurate reflection of reality. For example, interviewees cited a lack of Jewish learning opportunities even though the community offers an abundance of Jewish educational programs. In this case, this inaccurate reflection likely resulted from lack of information.

Conclusions

Past studies have shown that marriage and children provide stimulus in and strong stability for Jewish community involvement. However as more Jews are not marrying, marrying later, divorcing, or not having children, new modes must be created for involving Jews in Jewish community. In my opinion, a new model of Jewish community
must emerge so that all Jews, regardless of marital status, age, or sexuality, can feel at home in Jewish life. As community organizations were created or altered to fit the needs of the emerging Jewish community of the 1950s, so too does our community need to respond to the new needs of the Jews in this new millennium.

Rabinowitz (1988) concludes his dissertation with the understanding that member participation is essential for community survival. While non-membership in a synagogue, as Goldscheider (1986) emphasizes, does not indicate a lack of desire for Jewish community, Jewish organizations are crucial to the quality of Jewish life and the level of participation of Jews within the community.

The challenge ahead for the community is how to maintain and grow a vibrant Jewish community that is accessible both to those who already are within it and those who linger on the peripheral. Jewish community organizations can play a critical role in helping people over the barriers that stand in their way.

Recommendations for Action and Future Research

Within the twenty interviews, after some struggle, the interviewees spoke eloquently and perceptively about the role that Jewish community organizations could play in helping Jews create meaningful connections to Jewish community. As the interviewees relayed their ideas, it became clear to them that Jewish community organizations could have an important role in helping individuals create meaningful community. The recommendations listed below are directed at organizations so that they can reduce the barriers that have stood in the way of individuals' quest for community.
Better Outreach and Integration

It is a natural human condition to be wanted, and certainly few people want to be somewhere where they do not feel wanted or welcomed. Several interviewees spoke about such experiences with Jewish community organizations. Organizations should create or strengthen a culture of warmth and welcoming. Even if an organization is not seeking growth, all organizations must put a welcome mat at each door and live by the biblical commandment of welcoming the stranger, or *hahnasat orhim*, whether to a visitor from another city, state or country or to a person or family interested in being part of the particular Jewish organization.

While the culture of an organization transcends any individual within it, it is often the individual that makes the difference, as highlighted in the interviews. It is essential for rabbis and organizational leaders not to stand on ceremony but rather to go out amongst the crowd, and particularly the strangers in their community, to greet them and welcome them to their organization. Additionally, those who interface with the community, whether in a lay or professional capacity, must embody warm and caring traits. At each event, organizations should have members and/or staff dedicated to greeting people at the door and being conscientious about providing assistance throughout an event.

Finally all organizations should think about every aspect of a newcomer’s experience from the initial phone call, to driving to the organization, to entering the building, to finding his or her way around, to interacting with others. Staff or lay leaders should try this experience for themselves at an organization that feels foreign to them so
that they can experience what it might feel like to approach a new organization for the first time.

**Inclusiveness**

As noted in the previous chapter, the interviewees were skeptical that organizations truly wanted to embrace those who are not the "norm." The norm, from their perspective, was couples with children. All others, like single parents, interfaith couples, singles of all ages, gays and lesbians, or couples without children were outside of this norm. Whether or not it is the organizations' intentions to exclude, the important factor here is that people outside the organization perceive organizations to be exclusive. Organizations should make every effort to demonstrate that all Jews, regardless of marital status, age, sexual orientation, having children, socioeconomic status, or their Jewish background, are welcome into their organization.

As some of the interviewees explained, they look for others who look like themselves at organizational events. Many of the interviewees discussed feeling like outsiders in Jewish organizations since they either did not see others like themselves or simply felt they did not fit into what they perceived to be the norm of an organization. They felt they did not belong or are not accepted. Organizations should consider targeting their outreach to particular groups by offering programming that may have particular appeal for each group. Organizations may also want to highlight their diversity and encourage their members who do not fit that perceived norm to be the ones who do the greeting or make the announcements.
Creating Connections to Others

As the interviewees noted, the logical next step for organizations after effective outreach and a warm welcome would be to provide opportunities for personal connections and relationship building with others in the organization. In the words of one of the interviewees, organizations must have “multiple ways of connecting” with others on an on-going basis.

People are more likely to join an organization if they have friends or acquaintances who are already members. Organizations, therefore, would be well served if they helped create personal connections between prospective members, participants, financial contributors, and others. They could help match up a prospective member with a current member with similar demographics or interests. The current member could ask the prospective member to attend an event with him or her, and either walk into the organization together or greet the prospective member outside of the building so that no one would walk in alone.

Events can be organized to help “break the ice” or facilitate discussion amongst attendees. New or prospective members are not the only ones who may feel uncomfortable. Sometimes existing members of an organization may not know others and also may feel like strangers.

Personal connections can be achieved by creating smaller interest groups within an organization. Synagogues have longed created chavurot, or friendship groups based on particular demographics of their members. Many organizations worry that smaller groups within a larger organization will serve to fragment the community. However, many organizations have been strengthened when their smaller groups were consistently
linked back to the organizational activities. This can be achieved by asking the smaller
groups to take on responsibilities for the whole organization, like organizing volunteers
for the organization’s social action programs or for a particular program that occurs on a
regular basis, for instance. Coordinators of these small groups can be called together on a
quarterly basis or so to report about their groups’ activities or to consult with other group
leaders for advice. The organizations also can promote their events more easily by
having these coordinators encourage their group members to attend organization-wide
functions. Indeed, people are more likely to go to an event if others they know are also
going.

More Involvement Opportunities

It is crucial for organizations to respond quickly to their new or prospective
members. Organizations will be well served if they integrate new and prospective
members into organizational activities at the earliest stage possible. Doing so will likely
result in a higher probability of converting a prospective member into a new member and
converting a new member into a long-term, dedicated member. For this reason,
organizations should identify many ways for people to participate within an organization
from the outset of their initial contact.

When someone is “shopping for a synagogue” or inquiring into a social or
cultural organization, he or she will likely be drawn to that kind of activity within the
organization that feels like there is something meaningful to which he or she can easily
connect. This may entail volunteering for a committee position, organizing an upcoming
event, or serving on a task force, for example. In addition to giving the person an
opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to an organization, it will also give him or
her a chance to meet other like-minded individuals within the organization. People who
serve on committees are likely candidates for future leadership roles within the
organization as well.

**Broader Programming and Activities**

As noted in the previous chapter, people were more likely to participate in or join
organizations if the organizations had programs and activities that were more appealing
to them and targeted their age group or marital status. Since the range of events cannot
be expanded in practice to cater to every conceivable demographic and interest, planners
could think strategically about what kind of programs may be missing from their array of
programs. Perhaps organizations may want to perform a needs assessment both for their
members and their prospective members so they can gauge what might be the most
popular or needed programs, with the objective of drawing together those of similar
demographics so they can meet one another. Additionally, organizations may want to
consider partnering with other organizations in order to have a larger draw of attendees
and to share the costs and human resources of such programming.

**Increasing the Appeal**

Research suggests that those who care about Jewish community are sure to be
pleased that Jews who were once disenfranchised from Jewish community but have found
their way back would want others to also experience and understand the power and
relevance of Jewish community in their lives. The stories of these individuals and so
many others are both powerful and common, and as Woocher (1998) advised, Jewish
communal leaders should hear these stories to better understand the dynamic nature of
Jewish community.
Organizations may need to focus more on how they can increase their appeal to the broader community. As Fein explained, the benefits of belonging to community and of being Jewish have escaped many of those who have chosen not to be involved. Fein argues that the benefits of community far outweigh the costs (1988). Knowing this, organizations should find ways to help people reinvest in their Judaism. Gordis (1997) challenged organizations to identify how they can “help Jews find their way home” in a way that attracts “their attention and merit(s) their commitment.” As one’s own feelings of belonging to and identification with Jewish community grow, one’s commitment to the community, as Deutch (1991) observed, is likely to be strengthened “by their recognition and acceptance of the fact that their membership is necessary for their survival and growth… and loyalty.”

Better Publicity and Promotion

Often the problem attracting people to events has less to do with the type of programming itself than with the organization’s ability to publicize the events to a broad audience. While organizations may do a good job of informing their members through newsletters and emails, non-members are often left out of the information loop. They should consider advertising in secular newspapers, publications and websites. This need not be costly, as many classified listings are free for organizations.

Jewish organizations need not feel in competition with each other. A more visible and vibrant Jewish community enriches and benefits every organization within it. Thus, they should consider sharing the costs of advertising with each other just as the private sector has successfully done for many years.

The benefit of expanded publicity goes beyond drawing in more people.
Those who come because they saw an event advertised in a publication would feel that they truly are welcomed as opposed to simply stumbling upon it on the organization’s website and wondering if they would feel like an unwanted guest.

**Assisting in the Creation of a Jewish Home**

As Cohen and Eisen highlight in their investigation into the lives of moderately affiliated Jews, a large portion of Jewish discovery and community take place in the home environment rather than the communal settings. As such, organizations should assist individuals in creating and fostering a Jewish home in which they and their families can celebrate Jewish holidays and other Jewish occasions. Music tapes, liturgy and explanations can be sent out to members and given to prospective members before each holiday so that they can have a more enriching holiday experience. “How-to” manuals with descriptions of household symbolic items can be made available at all events. In addition, more classes and programs could take place in homes since many individuals will likely feel more comfortable in a home setting.

**Easing the Financial Burden**

Most Jewish community organizations serve both members and non-members throughout the entire year. It is expensive to keep the doors open and the professional staff available to assist people. Yet the leadership must remain sensitive to the financial burden that individuals or families face when choosing to belong to a Jewish organization.

Several of the interviewees suggested that organizations prioritize involvement before membership or dues. Many felt that if they could first experience what it is like to be part of an organization and to feel the benefits of membership, they would then be
more willing to subscribe. There are several synagogues throughout the country which offer "volunteer membership," based on the belief that it is most important to bring people in the doors of an organization first. If the organization can provide meaningful involvement opportunities, people will feel more committed and will then be willing to pay the cost of membership. Organizations should consider different options for dues, perhaps offering lower dues for younger members or single members or a graduated rate as members grow more connected to and invested in the organization.

As many of the interviewees of the present research suggested, money should never be what separates an individual from Jewish community. Organizations must make it clear to individuals that they are wanted and will be accepted and treated as full members even if they cannot afford the dues.

Likewise, organizations should strive to educate members and non-members about the financial costs of their organizational work and their importance not only to individual members but also to the larger Jewish community. While members and prospective members may view the amount they are willing to pay for membership as a reflection of their interest in the organization, organizations can work towards instilling a greater sense of responsibility to Jewish community and to the organizations that provide the foundation of that community.

Greater Convenience

Undoubtedly, there is and will always be more an organization can do for its members or potential members. Fundamentally organizations need to see themselves as service providers to their "customers." Of course organizations will not be able to satisfy every need, but organizations can certainly be more responsive. Organizations should
foster a culture of caring, and encourage their staff to assist members when possible. For example, when staff become aware of congregants who need transportation to and from synagogue services, they could contact members who have offered to provide transportation to those in need.

God Talk

The beauty of Judaism, for many, is its ability to exist within a wide array of opinions. Biblical text is full of theological debate and disagreements between scholars and rabbis. In the Jewish tradition opinions are valued, even if it they are controversial. Unfortunately, some of the interviewees perceived Judaism to be dogmatic and resistant to their thoughts and opinions, particularly those related to their struggle with the existence of God. They were left feeling a spiritual void in Judaism.

Synagogues and other Jewish communal organizations that address religious issues should emphasize Judaism’s tradition of encouraging diverse opinions. Individuals should be invited to participate in debate and discussion, whether in a Torah study group or privately with a Rabbi or educator. These organizations should offer varying viewpoints when teaching theology and encourage individuals to actively involve themselves in discovering and challenging their own beliefs.

Additionally, many of the interviewees felt that they would not feel at home in a synagogue because they did not believe in God or struggled with the concept of God. While God is central in the Jewish faith, a belief in God is not requirement to joining a synagogue. Synagogues need to address this perceived dilemma with prospective members.
Jewish Gatherings and Public Places

With the exception of a few U.S. cities that have large concentrations of Jews, it is unlikely there will be a return to the days where everything in one’s immediate environment is or feels Jewish. Nonetheless Jewish communities throughout the country can be vibrant and visible. Communities need strong Jewish Community Centers where Jews of all persuasions can feel comfortable gathering. Jewish communities need to have a strong and visible presence within the larger community so that no Jew feels alone or isolated. A Jewish Street Festival that puts the Jewish community’s art, culture and organizations in a public area will make Jewish community feel more tangible to its Jews.

Future Research

As noted in Chapter Two, a great deal of research and large-scale demographic studies have already been published on Jews who are members of synagogues or involved in community organizations. While sociologists have learned a great deal about “affiliated” Jews (i.e., Jews who belong to synagogues), they know very little about Jews who are not members of Jewish organizations, especially those who nonetheless very strongly and positively identify themselves as Jews. Perhaps research can arrive at new ways of classifying Jews rather than as simply “affiliated,” or “unaffiliated” as there are many ways to express one’s Jewishness.

Work such as that of Cohen and Eisen (2000) and Horowitz (2000), which explores the complex journey of Jews, is the type that needs to be expanded upon. This research is interesting not only from a purely sociological perspective, but also from a policy and planning perspective, where organizations and community planners may draw upon the needs and the trends of Jews in their local communities.
Similarly, research is needed to examine ways that community organizations can effectively engage those who are single or without children, or the many other groups (e.g. interfaith couples, gays and lesbians, single parents) that often feel excluded in Jewish community. This may provide useful insight for other organizations to emulate.

Additionally, there are many opportunities for research on those who are working specifically with Jews who are not connected to their Jewish community. The experience of organizations such as that of New Bridges to Jewish Community in the San Francisco Bay Area Peninsula, for example is invaluable. As an organization, New Bridges’ mission is to build social bridges and create pathways for Jews seeking greater connections to other Jews and to Jewish community.

In its four years of existence, New Bridges has successfully helped hundreds of Jews discover or create a meaningful Jewish community through first facilitating personal connections with others. New Bridges recognized that positive personal relationships with existing members or participants of community organizations would often lead to increased engagement in Jewish activity. These personal relationships help break through some of the psychological barriers that have kept people away from Jewish institutions. As Jews engage more in Jewish activities and have affirming experiences at Jewish organizations, the likelihood grows that they will join. New Bridges has observed that many of their participants who have made this journey from non-affiliation to affiliation have done so through the personal relationships they developed. Further, many who joined synagogues in their quest for community were subsequently drawn into more religious activities because their friends were either already attending or willing to go if they had others to go with. New Bridges experience suggests that community
organizations and community planners can learn a great deal about the process in which Jews most effectively connect to Jewish community.

In conclusion, future research should strive to paint the many pictures of Jewish people and Jewish communities rather than a monolithic portrait. Jewish people and Jewish communities are diverse and complex and should be reflected as such.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: E-MAIL/LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE INTERVIEWEE

Dear _____

My name is Janice Sands-Weinstein and I am a graduate student in the College of Professional Studies at the University of San Francisco. I am also the Executive Director of New Bridges to Jewish Community of whose mailing list your name is on.

I am doing a study on the obstacles of formal affiliation with Jewish community organizations. I am interested in learning what Jewish community organizations can do to make affiliation a more attractive and interesting option for members of our community.

When you originally signed up for New Bridges you indicated that you sought a stronger connection to Jewish community than the one you had at the time you filled out the participant questionnaire. You were randomly selected based on your gender and age. If you agree to be in this study, I will meet with you for a face-to-face interview that will last for approximately one hour.

Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality however study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and only I will have access to the files. Individual interviews and results will not be shared with other participants of New Bridges or community organizations though the study as a whole will be shared with community members and organizations.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the Jewish community as a whole will likely benefit from the conclusions and suggestions I arrive at as a result of these interviews.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. New Bridges leadership is aware of this study but does not require that you participate in this research and your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence your status as a New Bridges participant.

It is possible that some of the questions on the survey may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time.

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at 650.631.0800. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco,
which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the
IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing
IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology,
University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please contact me at
Janice@newbridges.org or 650.631.0800. I will also follow this letter up with a call
within one week.

Shalom,

Janice Sands-Weinstein
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco
APPENDIX B: BARRIERS THAT DETER JEWS FROM JOINING JEWISH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Survey Instrument

Background and General Questions

Interview Questions

1. Demographics: (conditions)
I have a few brief demographic questions before we begin with our formal interview.

   A. Is/was either your biological mother or father a Jew or have you converted to Judaism?
   B. What is your age?
   C. Gender
   D. What is your marital/partner status?
   K. (If partnered) Is your partner Jewish?
   L. Do you have children?
   M. If yes, how old are your children?
   N. What is your level of education
   O. What is your occupation
   P. How many hours a week do you work, if applicable?

2. General Overview
The following questions are intended to allow me to understand more about your current situation – how long you have lived here, your current affiliations, etc...

   A. Where did you grow up?
   B. How long have you lived in this community (i.e., Peninsula region of the Bay Area)?
   C. Do you live here with other family members or significant others?
   D. What is your current involvement with Jewish organizations, if any?
   E. What is your current involvement with non-Jewish organizations, if any?

3. Family History and Childhood Experiences
I would like to learn more about some of your experiences with Jewish community - particularly your attitude about Jewish community, starting with your childhood.

   A. While growing up, did your family belong to a synagogue and/or were active in a Jewish organization?
      1. (If yes to synagogue) which denomination, if any?
2. (If yes to synagogue) what was the level of your family’s involvement in the synagogue?

3. (If yes to organizations) what kind of organizations were you involved with?

   B. What kind of Jewish observances were practiced in the home, if any?

   C. Growing up, what were your and your family’s general attitudes about being Jewish?

   D. Looking back on your childhood, how would you rate your memories of your Jewish experience on a scale of 1-5, 5 being most positive?

4. Current importance of connection to Jewish community

The following questions relate to your current interest in connecting to Jewish community.

   A. On a scale of 1 – 5, 5 being the most important, how important is it for you be meaningfully involved in Jewish community.

   B. Why is it important for you to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community?

   C. What would it be like to be meaningfully involved in Jewish community? How would things be different for you?

5. Current involvement in Jewish community

The following questions relate to your current involvement in Jewish community.

   A. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the most satisfied, how satisfied are you with your current involvement in Jewish community?

   B. Tell me about your current involvement in Jewish community?

6. Barriers to connection / forming meaningful Jewish community

The following – and final questions – relate to the barriers from the involvement you seek and to better understand how Jewish community organizations can do a better job on this front.

   A. What are the obstacles, if any, to being as connected to Jewish community as you would like?

   B. How can Jewish community organizations facilitate/assist/encourage meaningful involvement in Jewish community?

   C. Is there anything you can do to help create the community that you are seeking?