SEARCHING FOR THE MISSING GENERATION:

ENGAGING 20s AND 30s

IN JEWISH CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Rabbinical Program

New York, New York

Spring 2010

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Chapter 1: What is the Problem?

Walk into almost any Reform synagogue on Shabbat, on a Friday evening or a Saturday morning and more often that not, you will see a very specific age range in front of you: an aging one.

Walk into almost any synagogue office and peruse their membership database and more often than not, you will see a plethora of ages ranging from nursery school through the elderly. Yet one significant group will be missing: those between the ages of 20 and 40. A few younger thirty year olds may slip in, perhaps those with young children, and a few from established families in the synagogue who keep their post-college-age children on the rolls. However, in general, their numbers will still be low in comparison with other age groups in the synagogue.

Walk into almost any committee meeting, any Torah study, any synagogue happening and you'll witness this same phenomenon over and over again: the lack of young adults in the room.

What is going on here? Where are the Jews in their 20s and 30s? Why aren't they in the room? And where are they instead?

They're out there. They haven't disappeared from the planet. They're just not in shuls. Some are sleeping in. Others are in coffeehouses. Some are at the independent non-affiliated minyan held in the local church. Others are at yoga class. Most are living their lives without a synagogue affiliation. Some care about this fact, while it simply doesn't cross others' minds. Some have made the conscious choice *not* to affiliate with the

synagogue, an institution they deem as old-school, bland, boring, establishment, and/or non-relevant. Jews in their 20s and 30s, as a whole, are not engaged.

This thesis is an attempt to locate these Jews, to describe what drives them from the synagogue, and what might possibly draw them back in. It is an examination into today's 20- and 30-year olds, both who they are generationally across the country and who they are particularly as Jews and what distinguishes them from the generations that have come before them who currently occupy the religious institutional scene, including synagogues. It is also an examination of Reform synagogues, who they attract and who they don't, and what tools can be used to remove the obstacles that prevent synagogues from creating a thriving culture that attracts young Jewish adults. It is a look into specific models currently being employed in congregations with an analysis of their successes and failures.

What is the problem facing the Jewish community? The problem is that Jews in their 20s and 30s are largely absent from engaging in the Jewish community, particularly in congregational life. Congregations are not adequately equipped for attracting this population. Not only that, but many synagogues are either not interested for a variety of reasons or potentially worse, aren't even aware (or admitting) that there is a problem.

It is easy to maintain the status quo. Those in power in synagogues, those of the Builder and Baby Boomer generations, are relatively happy since their needs are being met by synagogue life. They are the membership of synagogues - and clergy, staff, and boards strive to keep the membership happy. Those in their 20s and 30s are not the membership and therefore they are not demanding change from within the organization. Their needs are simply not being voiced. Since most in-married Jewish couples

eventually join a synagogue when their children reach religious school age, synagogues ask themselves why should spend the resources to reach a population that will eventually seek synagogues out anyway.

Another reason why synagogues don't try to engage 20s and 30s where they are at is that they either don't know how to do so or assume that they don't have the capacity to mount a solution to the challenge. It is unclear what the right road ahead is when it comes to creating thriving 20s and 30s Jewish life within a synagogue. Synagogues (and just about everyone else studying this problem) have trouble understanding what this generation is all about and what it wants and needs.

For those synagogues that *are* interested in reaching out, the path is a difficult one with many obstacles that need to be overcome. This is a generation that marries later, if at all and has children later, if at all. What in previous generations was understood to be the way in, having children and needing to educate those children Jewishly can no longer be taken for granted. The period of time before Jewish couples have children is lengthening, providing more and more time for Jews to be absent from organized Jewish life, jeopardizing the possibility of an eventual return. Not only is synagogue affiliation no longer a sure thing for in-married couples, but rising interfaith marriage rates (currently at about 50%) also challenge the status quo approach for most synagogues.

In addition to the prolonged period of singlehood for many young Jews, the numbers are rising for those who never marry and never have children. Synagogues are family and child-centered. As such, few provide environments that are attractive and friendly to those who enter without children. In many synagogues that are child-centered, adults are approached as parents of pre-schoolers, elementary students, high-schoolers,

and as empty nesters. Their congregational identity is linked to the age of their children. For someone of the younger generation to integrate into 'adult' programming that is not linked in some way to children often means mixing in with a crowd sixty and older, not an appealing option for a young 20-something who would prefer an outlet with their peers.

Geographic mobility is also an increasing factor for many young 20s and 30s' disengagement from synagogue life. Many in this generation, in comparison with their parents, are likely to be living in cities that are not the cities in which they grew up. Only 20% of Jews currently live in the same city where they grew up.[1] They are away from their parents, home communities, and home congregations, leading to situations where these Jews are living in communities without Jewish roots.

This rising generation is different from previous ones in several other ways as well. We are learning that this generation's version of Judaism is more permeable than previous generations'. They prefer systems that allow for permeable boundaries that allow them to opt in and out at will as well as systems that blend the Jewish and non-Jewish.

They conceive of loyalty in a qualitatively different way from previous generations. Their parents' and grandparents' generations stayed and worked at one company their whole lives, lived in one city, one house their whole lives, but this is not today's reality. It is common for 20s and 30s of this generation to change jobs and move cities often. If a job doesn't fit, they look for a new one. The concept of paying

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[1] Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, 85.

membership and belonging to one synagogue through thick and thin when the synagogue does not fit their specific needs does not make sense to them.

Those who make up Generations X and Y grew up in a highly consumer-based culture. They have come to expect high-quality, personalized goods and services. In this environment, they ask themselves why they would join a synagogue with its one-size-fits-all mentality when there are so many communities out there that personalize their services directly to their consumers. They can get much of what synagogues offer - social connection, networking, sophisticated conversation on matters political and spiritual, even God - in many places other than the synagogue that are more relevant to them and provide more 'bang for their buck.'

Steven Cohen has a theory as to why this generation is particularly unengaged in Jewish institutional life. It's his ABCD list.[2] A) They're **a**lienated from both synagogues and the older generations that dominate them. B) The prior generation's way of doing things is **b**oring and **b**land to the current generation. C) Jewish institutions appear **c**oercive to today's 20s and 30s, placing expectations on them with values that do not speak to Generations X and Y such as the push for in-marriage, for raising Jewish children, and for supporting the state of Israel. And D) They see the older generation and synagogues as particularly **d**ivisive, polarizing the world into areas Jewish and non-Jewish.

If Cohen's description of how today's 20s and 30s view synagogues and the Jewish establishment is true, then Jewish institutions, especially the synagogue, have a

[2] Cohen, Steven. Notes from a talk, "From Jewish People to Jewish Purpose: The New Age of Social Innovation in American Jewish Life" given by Steven M. Cohen at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London, UK, December 2 2009.

large dilemma on their hands. Not only must they understand and reach out to the next generation, but they must also undergo change that represents no less than a major cultural shift and transformation.

The problems have been laid out. Our challenge is that we are not seeing many young Jewish adults in their 20s and 30s in synagogue life and in conventional Jewish life in general. Those in their 20s and 30s are losing out on the benefits of Judaism and Jewish community. Congregations, in turn, lack the interest, the capacity and the confidence to connect 20s and 30s to Jewish life generally and to congregational life specifically.

By examining the relevant literature and the data provided by several synagogue sites currently engaged in this work, we can begin to examine and answer some of the questions confronting those most concerned with engaging those in their 20s and 30s in Jewish congregational life.

Questions:

1) What are the obstacles to engaging today's 20s and 30s in Jewish congregational life?

2) What are the opportunities for engaging today's 20s and 30s in Jewish congregational life?

3) What techniques and practices are especially important in working with 20s and 30s?

Approach and Methodology

My own interest in this subject comes from several sources. I, like many others, am distressed by the lack of participation of 20s and 30s in organized Jewish life, specifically in synagogue life. As a late-20-something, I am surrounded by my Jewish friends, my peers who have no interest in synagogue life, see no compelling reason to join, and for whom Judaism as a whole does not speak. I worry about my friends and I worry about the future of Judaism. As a Reform rabbinical student months away from ordination, I am also personally committed to the revival of the synagogue. I believe that synagogues are capable of revival and of reaching those in their 20s and 30s with the right tools and the right understanding of what the rising generation is all about.

I come to this thesis with a background of working with this population in synagogue settings. Before entering rabbinical school, I interned at Temple Israel in Boston, MA as a graduate student in Jewish Communal Service from 2004-2005. My focus was education and my portfolio was primarily in the religious school, but I insisted on spending at least a small amount of my time learning about what felt like a novel initiative in 20s and 30s life. It was the Riverway Project led by Rabbi Jeremy Morrison. Working with Riverway, even in the small capacity that I did, I saw promise and possibility for something new that spoke directly to my generation. My work with Riverway primarily consisted of helping to arrange their Leadership Trip to Israel for approximately 20 participants as well as attending and observing a year's worth of events.

After returning from my first year in rabbinical school in Jerusalem, I became the Rabbinic Intern at the Reform Temple of Forest Hills in Queens, NY. There, I discovered

a need for 20s and 30s programming. Working with three mid-late 20-somethings who were committed to the idea, we developed RTFH 20s and 30s. We had monthly Torah study sessions with free dinner and drinks. Over the year's time that I worked on this project, we added in Shabbat dinners, onegs, and a Havdallah event. From 3 people, we expanded to 25-30 people in attendance for Torah study by year's end. Through this work, I developed a passion for working with this population.

After I became the rabbinic intern at Temple Tikvah in New Hyde Park on Long Island in New York, I tried to develop a similar program there, but with limited success. The demography was different; the 20s and 30s of the New Hyde Park area were primarily young families as opposed to the single population I had worked with on the subway line in Forest Hills. My time was also much more limited. And there was no expressed need within the congregation like there had been in Forest Hills. I received my first taste that there is no one-size-fits-all model when it came to 20s and 30s programming.

During my last year of rabbinical school in 2009-2010, I was invited to volunteer with Synagogue 3000's Next Dor program, an initiative focused on creating 20s and 30s programs across the country in major Jewish centers in synagogues. This developed into a voluntary internship where I was allowed access to not just the five sites currently under Next Dor (some sites from Next Dor are briefly discussed in this thesis), but also the leadership of Synagogue 3000 who are thinking deeply about this challenge in Jewish life and developing solutions on the ground.

My work on this generation comes primarily from the literature out there on this subject, literature ranging from the general religious and sociological world to the Jewish

world. The general literature includes looking at religion across generations. I also spent time reading literature, which focuses specifically on the 20s and 30s problem in the Christian world. Much of their work can be generalized for synagogues as well.

As opposed to what feels like a plethora of Christian resources, the material out there pertaining specifically to Jews in their 20s and 30s is scarce. The work that is out there primarily comes from Steven Cohen, a sociologist, who is also acting as my thesis advisor.

Despite the enormity of the problem, it is clear that we do not have enough material out there identifying and evaluating it.

My primary field research centered around two New York City groups, Saviv based out of Temple Emanuel and JetSet based out of Temple Shaaray Tefila. These sites were chosen for my primary field research because of my accessibility to them, their frequency of events, and their reputations for doing good work. I felt that there would be an adequate amount of research to be mined from each site, both from events and from the rabbinic professionals running them who were both open to my observations. I observed events at each site in the spring and fall of 2009 and interviewed the Jewish professional at each synagogue for about an hour and half each. Both rabbis were forthcoming about their organizations, their synagogues, their visions, and their frustrations. I asked questions about their targeted constituency, the relationship between their 20s and 30s initiative and the synagogue, their approaches and methods, their successes and failures, and why they do the work that they do. I also used any materials that were available about the organization, including e-mails and flyers that they

distributed, Facebook messages they sent out, the siddurim that they used, and their websites.

I also interviewed the professional of Brooklyn Jews based out of Beth Elohim in Brooklyn for an hour and a half about his experience running Brooklyn Jews for three years from 2006-2009. I asked him similar questions to the ones I had asked of the professionals of Saviv and JetSet. I did not attend events at this site personally. I gleaned information from its founder about Brooklyn Jews, but not through direct conversation; rather, I learned from him through class seminars at HUC-JIR in which he talked about the founding of Brooklyn Jews and its evolution over the years, including its successes and its failures, and its eventual merger with Temple Beth Elohim. I used literature about Brooklyn Jews, including their emails and website. Brooklyn Jews provided a different kind of model for this study, one that began outside of the synagogue and eventually merged with one.

I utilized my experience working for the Riverway Project based in Temple Israel in Boston, MA from 2004-2005, including numerous one-on-one meetings during that time with Riverway's founder and current professional to construct my understanding of that site, as well as conversations with its founder since then. I also used literature from Riverway itself, including its web materials and literature written about the organization by its founder.

Through my work with Synagogue 3000 Next Dor, I have had extensive exposure to their five Next Dor sites spread across the country since the fall of 2009. I bring in research from two of those sites for this thesis: Next Dor St. Louis based out of Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis, Missouri and Nita based out of Congregation Rodef

Sholom in San Rafael, California. These sites were chosen because I have had the most exposure to these two sites of the five in the Next Dor program and because they provide different models to examine as both are sites that operate outside of the synagogue's walls. They are also the furthest along among the five sites currently in the Next Dor program and had the most data from which to pull. St. Louis Next Dor provided the only model with a non-rabbi as its professional and Nita provided the only suburban site in my study as well as the only female professional.

The sites chosen represent a variety of models from sites based in congregations to sites based outside of them, from sites that appeal primarily to young single 20-somethings to sites that appeal to young parents beyond the age of 40.

The combination of my exploration into the literature and my research into these 20s and 30s initiatives paint a picture of what the rising generation looks like, what their needs are, and why, overall, they reject traditional models of synagogue life. This thesis describes what synagogues are doing to meet the needs of today's generation and begins to lay a foundation for the next steps that need to be taken.

Chapter 2: Who are Today's 20s and 30s?

In order to best understand today's generation of 20s and 30s, it is important to first engage in a discussion about how we determine who comprises and what defines a generation. By understanding the criteria that is being used to distinguish between one generation and the next, we have a better grasp of who a particular generation is and what binds them together.

It can be easy to say that a generation is made up of a simple age cohort: those born between this year and that one are a generation; for instance, those born between approximately 1946 and 1964 in the United States make up what has commonly become known as the Baby Boom generation. But a real determination of what defines a generation is much more complex than a simple set of dates. How those years are determined requires a nuanced understanding of the sweep of history and the cultural influences of any particular period in time. There is no one singular way to differentiate and label a generation; one can choose a world event such as World War II or 9/11 to ground a generational identity or choose a demographic trend such as the Baby Boomers or the much smaller generation that followed, sometimes referred to as the Baby Busters. Determining the starting and ending points of a generation often feels more like an art rather than an exact science.

In their book, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations,* Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof define a generation as a term for "a set of

unifying social experiences binding members into a self-conscious collectivity."[3] This definition of generation is clearly more than just a simple age cohort; it is one based in experience and a particular cultural collective memory. German social philosopher Karl Mannheim defined a generation as "a carrier of culture that successively redefines worldviews, values, and lifestyles and thus is an important agent of social change within a society," as a "social unit" who share "a common destiny."[4] Generations are about making and re-making culture, taking it in and redefining it for a new world; each one becomes the messenger of culture, culture in its broadest sense, reforming it in their own image. One's 'generational identity' refers to the particular lens through which a member of that generation is likely to see the world and "derive meaning from that world."[5]

In terms of who makes up any particular generation, self-selection is one way of determining 'membership.' A generation and its members will view themselves as different and distinct from the generations that precede and follow them, as in we are not like *them,* therefore, we are an *us.*

Another way of determining who comprises a generation is to note the major social, cultural, and historical events that occur during that generation and exert influence over their group identity over time. At what point those events occur in a person's lifetime has been shown to determine the power of its influence. Carroll and Roof note that when asked about crucial social influences on their lives, people tend to continually return to those experiences from when they were in their teens and early twenties. It is the

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[3] Carroll, Jackson W. and Roof, Wade Clark, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations,* 5.
[4] Karl Mannheim from "The Problem of Generations" in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge.* As quoted in Carroll and Roof, 5-6.
[5] Hayes, *Googling God,* xiii.

particular events that happened at this stage in their lives that are most determinative of their future tendencies as both individuals and as a cultural group. In terms of defining and labeling a generation, it is to these peak experiences that social scientists tend to turn. It is at this time that individuals develop their attitudes about crucial areas in their lives such as family, sex and gender roles, politics, lifestyle, and notions of the sacred, all of which will have a major effect on the relationship between this generation and religion, including how they will regard religious institutions such as the synagogue.[6]

A man in Carroll and Roof's study on generational cultures in congregations described the change in generations as easily illustrated by the declining dress code at religious services: moving from coats and ties and formal dresses for the oldest generation to ties without jackets for the next generation to no ties at all and perhaps even to jeans for the youngest generation.[7] This example is rich because it encapsulates so much more than a change in clothing style. Dress in this case has the potential to represent attitude towards religion and religious institutions (a suit and tie is not necessarily more respectful than jeans; rather, it is determinative of a particular attitude and expectation of the church/synagogue that is meaningful to that generation) and the generational identity one chooses by identifying physically through dress with their age cohort.

Even though each generation has its own distinctive features, there still exists a certain blurriness from one generation to the next. One place where that blurriness certainly exists is in religious life. Religious life, with all of the values inherent in religious life, is passed down from one generation to the next, but after it is digested, it

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[6] Carroll and Roof, 6-7.
[7] *Ibid*, 1.

always becomes a "hybrid mix of the old and the new,"[8] combining aspects of the previous generation's orientation to the world with new events and social changes. It is each cohort's responsibility to take what exists and remold and change it to fit its own needs. Each generation is constantly engaging in a "conversation with the past."[9]

While it is hard to define exactly what creates the boundaries for generations, we nonetheless will look at how researchers have done so to create a picture of what our current 20s and 30s look like, taking into account that boundaries are porous, exact definitions and descriptions of generations are impossible, and that no one description can capture every individual within a generation; rather, this is a big picture view.

Our focus in this paper is to describe those who currently are in their 20s and 30s (this paper is being written between the years 2009-2010). Those who currently are in their 30s are from the later half of what has become known as Generation X. Those who are currently in their 20s are from the beginning of what has become known as Generation Y or the Millenials. In order to describe those in Generations X and Y, it is helpful to define who they are not. We will begin by looking at who currently dominate the synagogue sphere – the generations that precede Generations X and Y.

The Builders: The GI Generation and the Silent Generation

The oldest generation found in synagogues today, often referred to as the Builder generation, is a combination of what is known as the GI generation (describing those born approximately between 1900 and 1924), who experienced war in their formative

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[8] *Ibid*, 7.
[9] Robert Wuthnow from *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s.* As quoted in Carroll and Roof, 8.

years, and the Silent Generation (describing those born approximately between 1925 and 1946), most of whom were too young to serve in World War II. The GI generation overcame both world wars, rationing, and the Great Depression. While those in the Silent generation didn't serve in World War II, they were heavily influenced by their parents and supported the institutions that the GI generation built when they came home. The Builders, the combined GI and Silent generation, built many of the civic institutions of today, including our churches and synagogues.

The Builders are a generation known for its loyalty. It included a stable family (or at least the appearance of one) with established gender roles, a low divorce rate, and a one-income household. The husband usually stayed with one company throughout his entire life, expecting the loyalty he put into it to be repaid. One could expect to move up within the company and expect to be taken care of. Trust in institutions and organizations existed and hierarchy was accepted.[10]

The Boomers

Congregations are also made up of the Baby Boom generation, generally born between 1946 after World War II and 1964, named as such because of the boom in birth rates during those years.[11] This was the time of such cultural and political influences as the advent of more television access, the Cold War, numerous political assassinations, the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, Kent State, rock and roll, the sex revolution, the birth control pill and legalized abortion, illegal drugs, Watergate, and the resignation of

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[10] Hammett, Edward H. *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60,* 37.
[11] *Ibid*, 38.

President Nixon. As a result, this generation, especially in comparison with the generation that preceded it, developed a strong mistrust in authority and government.

It is a generation where much social change occurred in the home as well. More women were working than ever before. It is the first generation where more than 50% of marriages end in divorce.

Typically, Boomers went to church and synagogues as children, left as teenagers and young adults, and then returned when they had children of their own. Now as their children are leaving the nest, so, too are many baby boomers leaving their institutional religious homes as well. It is a generation that became known as the "me" generation and one that defines itself in terms of relationships. Boomers tend to look outside of the church and synagogue for those essential relationships. As Hammett describes it: "Instead of mentoring the next generation of church leaders, boomers are still looking for what is fulfilling for themselves."[12]

Interestingly enough, though many of their previous attitudes remained, they have also become more conservative as they have aged. This is likely less an indicator of any particular social influence and more an indicator of how maturity and age affects an individual, and in our case, an entire generation.

Because of their great size, Boomers have exerted and will continue to exert great influence on American culture as a whole and specifically on religion. They will be the largest group in congregations if not now then in the future. For those that choose to stay in congregational life, they will require more and more time from the clergy and professional staff of congregations, requiring pastoral and sick visits as they age,

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[12] *Ibid.*

potentially exacerbating the current problem of lack of resources being provided to the youngest adult population.

Generation X or the Busters & Generation Y or the Millenials

In his book, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion,* Robert Wuthnow expresses skepticism about how to adequately determine and describe the generations that come after the Boomers who make up today's 20s and 30s.[13] While using a demographic trend or a major historical event may have worked for recent previous generations, it is more difficult to do so for the current youngest set of Americans since they, arguably, haven't been shaped by any. The lack of major life-shaping events brings into question the method by which all generations have previously been described. It is a methodology, Wuthnow argues, which may be inappropriate to impose upon younger adults.

This generation following the Boomers has been called a variety of names. Hammett and others prefer the Busters, which makes for a nice alliteration with the Builders and Boomers. Hayes places those he deems as the Busters as being born between the years 1965 and 1983 although social scientists tend to disagree about the beginning and ending dates. Another common name for this generation is Generation X and others put their dates around 1960-1980.

Those in Generation X have often been defined in contrast to the previous generation because of its time period's distinctive lack of major historical events. Their lack of a definitive identity with clear historical markers lends itself to the moniker given

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[13] Wuthnow, 5.

to this generation: X, a generation without a title, without a true identity. Their definition is often conceived of in contrast to the Boomers: they are *not* Boomers; therefore, they are Gen Xers. This rather negative description can have a sobering effect on a generation; it strives for an identity of its own that exists independent of the Boomers.

It has been argued that Generation X *has* major historical events that have had wide-spread influence. Potentially, one could point to the Iranian hostage crisis, Tiananmen Square, and the fall of the Berlin wall as these events. However, none of these events have quite affected the generation as thoroughly and completely as the Depression, World War II, or the Civil Rights Movement did for previous generations.

Generation X has been influenced in numerous ways by their parents' generation. Hayes argues that there is a trickle-down effect of a mistrust of authority from the Boomer Generation. It, like other 'values' is part of an overlap from one generation to the next.[14]

The concept of community is also key for this generation due to the fact that this is the first generation that either grew up in divorced families or at the very least, knew a divorced family. Carroll and Roof argue that because many were deprived in their stable primary relationships, they may turn to build those relationships elsewhere, including within a religious community. "Identity [for Generation X] becomes deeply rooted with a social network."[15] Experience is central to this generation's method of connection and making meaning in this world. In his research on Catholics, Hayes writes that Gen Xers in his opinion "eschew Sunday Mass in favor of working at a soup kitchen as their

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[14] Hayes, 5.
[15] Carroll and Roof, 65.

Sunday ritual."[16] They're more about experience than about any previously understood definition of God or belief system to be imposed upon them.

This is also a generation that is 'entertainment-conscious',[17] watching more television than any other generation, the majority of whom grew up with TVs in their homes and some in their bedrooms. Generation X is far more comfortable with technology than previous ones as well, though not as comfortable as those in Generation Y as we will see. The impact of the internet and social media on this generation, which is far-reaching, will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

Generation X is followed by Generation Y (another title indicating the possibility of a distinctive lack of identity), or as it is becoming more commonly known, the Millenials with a blurry start date for this generation anywhere between 1980 and 1983. Coming of age in the year 2000 and beyond is what many researchers use as a distinguishing line between them and their older X peers. In terms of major events, certainly the tragedy of 9/11 will loom large for Generation Y and the ensuing "war on terror." Columbine and Hurricane Katrina may also play a role in their generational identity formation. It is difficult to be able to determine this entirely just yet. As a result of the events that occurred during their formative years, Gen Yers or Millenials may be looking for certainty in an uncertain world and potentially for a god who is in control in contrast to Gen Xers who suffer from a lack of meaning and instead seek certainty out through relationships rather than through any system.

Hayes describes Millenials as the "most watched-over generation in history." They grew up never leaving the house without bicycle helmets and in an era of child-

[16] Hayes, 6.
[17] Carroll and Roof, 22.

centered parenting, accepting authority figures as trust-worthy and rules as good for them.[18] 'Rules are made to be broken' is not a line that applies to this generation, certainly not in the same way that it has for others. In terms of religion, Hayes writes, "For the unchurched Millenials… religion may be less threatening than it was for their Gen X counterparts, who found religion to be for crackpots and weak-minded people."[19] Religions and their institutions may thus prove to be more attractive to the Millenials than they ever were for Gen Xers.

Our study here will focus mainly on those at the second half of Generation X and the first half of Generation Y. What is difficult is that our approach to those in the 20s and 30s must include an understanding of both of these generations and their differences. While there is clearly much overlap between the two generations, there is also plenty to differentiate between them as well. Understanding both generations, what they want and expect, their overlap as well as their differences is crucial to any congregational initiative being designed to reach out to them.

If Generation X are those who were born between approximately 1964 and 1980 and the Millenials are those who were born after 1980, that would mean that in writing this thesis in the timeframe of 2009-2010, those in their 30s are Generation X while those in their 20s are Millenials. While sharing some overlapping features, each generation is also unique and must be approached and catered to differently. It is important for congregations to keep this in mind as they plan and prepare to reach the next generation. Today's 20s and 30s are *not* one big block, but rather distinctive, each with their own needs and attitudes towards religion and life.

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[18] Hayes, 8.
[19] *Ibid*, 9.

Key Trends for 20s & 30s

Delayed Marriage & Child-Bearing

Life expectancy in the United States has increased from generation to generation. In 1900, life expectancy was 46.3 years for men and 48.3 years for women. In 1950, it had increased to 65.6 years for men and 71.1 years for women and by the year 2000, the average life expectancy for men was 74.3 years for men and 79.7 for women. This means that the midpoint of adult life has increased to 49 from 44 in 1950.[20] This increase in life expectancy allows for a longer period of time for 'younger adulthood' than ever experienced before. The urgency one may have felt in the past, especially at the earlier part of the twentieth century to get married and have children has dissipated for our current youngest generation. The same can be said about choosing one's career in life. It is not uncommon for one to go through their twenties and some into their thirties before 'settling' into a career; it is becoming more common to change careers once, if not more.

While some in their 20s and 30s postpone these developmental tasks to a later date, others do not complete them at all, raising the question of whether or not these tasks should even be expected. Research has shown in comparing statistics from 1960 with those from 2000, that the supposed major transitions to adulthood (leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child) were completed by 77% of women and 65% of men by age 30 in 1960 and only 46% of

[20] Wuthnow, 9-10.

women and 31% of men by age 30 in 2000.[21] Expectations of what it means to be an adult are challenged by these findings.

While it is taking Generations X and Y longer to complete these tasks (as least in comparison to the previous generation), they are also paradoxically beginning the growing up process even earlier than other generations. The onset of puberty is occurring earlier and sexual maturity without marriage is also occurring much earlier. The wider range of time that accounts for these so-called adult behaviors is creating a new period of time previously unaccounted for in such numbers. Sociologically, this period of time is just beginning to be understood so it is no wonder that congregations don't yet have a handle on it. Congregations are currently prepared to attract children through their teen years and young adults with children. The span of time in between these two transitional parts used to be short and often was covered by college and a few years post-college. Now that that span of time is large and in some cases, permanent, a new approach is needed.

The proportion of Americans never married has risen from 20% in 1960 to 27% in 2000.[22] The combined effect of both delayed marriage and never marrying leaves a greater proportion of single young adults than ever experienced before. In 1970, 59% of men in their 20s were married whereas only 31% were by the year 2000. For men in their thirties, that number dropped from 83% to 59%. For women in their twenties, 69% were married in the year 1970; by 2000, only 42% were. The drop went from 81% to

[21] *Ibid*, 11.
[22] *Ibid*, 21.

64% for women in their 30s.[23] No one trend is quite as stark as this one and its effects are long-reaching.

This trend is directly linked to that of delayed child-bearing. In 1976, 10% of women ended their childbearing years without children whereas by 2000, that number had risen to 19%. Mothers are also giving birth later; the median age at which a woman gave birth in 1959 was 21.6 years and in 1999, it was 24.5 years.[24] It is also not uncommon for women in their late thirties and early forties to be having their first children.

In Wuthnow's research, he found that there occurred a gap between the expectations of today's generation with the reality that will probably occur for them. While only 2% say that they don't intend to become parents, the reality will be that almost 20% of them will *not* become parents.[25] While parenting and having children is still considered an ideal, for many in this generation, it will not be a reality for a variety of reasons including not finding a mate and remaining single, and for couples, beginning the child-bearing process later in life leading to a shorter period of time in which to bear children and an increase in fertility-related problems.

For Jews compared with the nation as a whole, the numbers are even starker. From the early 1970s on, the number of Jews in Wuthnow's study who are married dropped from 68% to 43%. The number divorced or separated rose from 4% to 17%.

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[23] *Ibid*, 22-23.
[24] *Ibid*, 24.
[25] *Ibid* ,27.

Those never married rose from 38% to 39% and those without children increased from 44% to 54%.[26]

These demographic trends are major contributing factors to adult Jews' declining participation in synagogue life. Those without children have the potential to go through significant amounts of periods of time without affiliating, sometimes reaching thirty years without a religious institution reaching out to them. Synagogues cater to those with families and are fairly successful at reaching young parents with children. There is an assumed need to join on the part of many families who want to raise their children in a religious home with a religious education. The gap between prior Jewish engagement in the synagogue and when a Jew has children is larger than ever.

Given the long expanse of time that will have passed without prolonged exposure to synagogues, it can no longer assumed, however, that when they do finally have children (if they do) that they will choose to affiliate. A hypothetical situation: a Jew ends her involvement with the synagogue at age 13 after her bat mitzvah, goes through an extended singlehood, marrying later than her parents' generation and perhaps has children at age 40. That is a 27-year gap. It wouldn't be absurd to ask why she would even return after being away for so long. Or to make this situation even starker, what if she never marries or never has children? What if there is no traditional motivating factor for her to return? If this is the case (and it is the case for many young Jewish adults) she may indeed be lost to organized Judaism forever.

The assumption is that Jews will join synagogues when their children reach the age for religious education, be this at age 3 with pre-school, at age 6 with first grade, or at

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[26] *Ibid*, 86.

age 10 for fourth grade (synagogues often require enrollment in religious school by third or fourth grade to be eligible for bar and bat mitzvah through their congregations). Jewish communities have been family-focused for generations, but the extent to which synagogues are child-centered was pushed with the baby boomers. With an increased need for synagogue services focused on the child, synagogues made that their base. Now, however, a gap arises between how synagogues function (still in the model of the baby boomers) and the current young generation that is increasingly childless for longer periods of time.

In *Uncoupled: How our Singles are Reshaping Jewish Engagement,* Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman examined the growth in singles and the decline in the in-married for non-Orthodox Jews aged 25-39 between 1990 and 2000. They found that in 1990, 33% of those polled were single whereas that number jumped to 50% by the year 2000. If we know that synagogues currently cater primarily to the married with children, then this increase in singles will have and already has had a great impact on the Jewish community with many young Jews are not being reached. Singles are often alienated from synagogues that are built around families, both in terms of programming as well as membership costs. In comparison with the in-married, single Jews score lower on all measures of institutional affiliation with 19% of singles belonging to synagogues as opposed to 51% of the in-married.[27]

As a result of the later age of marriage and child-bearing for 20s and 30s, there is a period of time emerging for these 20s and 30s, which Cohen and Kelman identify as

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[27] Cohen, Steven M. and Kelman, Ari Y. *The UnCoupled: How our Singles are Reshaping Jewish Engagement,* 12.

"extended singlehood."[28] This is a new challenge for the Jewish community (and for all communities), one never quite dealt with before. As congregations are currently depending on the arrival of children in families' lives to drive them into synagogues, congregations will see less and less young Jewish adults walk through the doors, leading to alienation on both sides.

Economic Factors

The greater consumption of goods that began with the Baby Boom generation is accepted and generally unchallenged by today's youngest adults. The rise of the dual-income family has been one way to deal with this and other economic challenges. It is also a sign of the acceptance of another trend begun in the baby boom generation – that of the push towards gender equality in the workplace and home. In 1970, 26% of women in their twenties worked; that number rose to 45% in 2000. For women in their thirties, the number rose from 24% to 53%. Wuthnow points out how significant a trend this is for today's younger generation: to *not* work as a woman in this age range is to be in the minority while the opposite was true for the prior generation.[29]

In previous generations, the expectation was that one be financially independent upon leaving the home or finishing college, but that is no longer the case. Many more young adults continue to be dependent on family well into their late twenties and some into their thirties. The increase in those seeking out higher education is also a factor in this lingering parental dependency.

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[28] *Ibid*, 8.
[29] Wuthnow, 28.

This generation is likely to switch jobs more often and even careers more often; staying with one company throughout one's lifetime is a thing of the past. This has carry-over implications for how Generation X and Y view loyalty to institutions as a whole. Loyalty is a two-way street and this generation neither shows nor receives loyalty from the workplace. From the point of view of maintaining relationships including friendships and marriage, family planning, and major financial decisions such as purchasing a home, high job turnover is difficult as its impedes the ability of young adults to make long-term commitments. 20s and 30s are less likely to stay in one location and set down roots, including seeking out a religious home. In Wuthnow's study, only 20% of young Jews reported that they live in the same city in which they grew up, thus depriving them of a potentially stable support system.[30]

The current financial crisis as of the writing of this thesis from 2009-2010 is of utmost concern for today's young generation. The dependency on parents and the substantial rise in debt that has risen in general for this population has been exasperated by the current economic downturn whose long-range effects are as yet unclear.

Wuthnow points out that though it is somewhat unclear how economic factors exactly affect religious attitudes and behavior, the uncertainties caused by increased economic strain often cause stress in marriages and on home and family life, all places where religious institutions can offer their support to today's 20s and 30s.[31]

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[30] *Ibid*, 85.
[31] *Ibid*, 35-36.

Change in Social Relationships & Impact of the Internet

Wuthnow notes an interesting trend among young adults, that of a change in the types of social relationships that their parents and grandparents enjoyed. Whereas Robert Putnam described this trend as 'bowling alone,' Wuthnow prefers to characterize it as a change rather than as a decrease in social relationships.[32]

Whereas this generation is unlikely to join any long-term volunteering programs, they may take on short-term ones that occur more sporadically to fit their schedules. Those in Generations X and Y are less likely to participate in certain traditional civic obligations and institutions, such as voting – that is, until recently. The campaign and election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States in 2008 has challenged this notion. The use of new social media tools and a message and a candidate that appealed to a younger demographic eager for change energized a generation previously thought too apathetic to care. Rather than having less relationships or social obligations than the previous generation as some might think, they, instead have different types of relationships. This is affected by a desire for fluidity in identity, globalization, and the influence of the internet.

Today's young Jews tend to have more fluid identities than in the past. They strongly value their ability to cross boundaries, to merge the Jewish and the non-Jewish in their lives. Most non-affiliated young Jews' exposure to Judaism is through the cultural realm rather than through other means such as the overtly religious or through institutions such as synagogues. Young unaffiliated Jews seek out this "cultural hybridity" that allows them to experience both the Jewish and the mainstream, to piece together an

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[32] *Ibid*, 38.

identity for themselves that makes more sense in today's world.[33] Joining a synagogue involves identifying solely with a Jewish institution, which young Jews tend to reject, rather than the play that occurs within the merging and mixing between Jewish and non-Jewish sources.

Globalization also plays its part in the creation of today's young adults' identities. Other cultures and ways of life are more accessible than ever before, making them easier for 20s and 30s to 'sample.' Examples include the musical merging of Matisyahu with his reggae style or Pharaoh's Daughter with its Sephardic Arabic style.[34]

People in their 20s and 30s have enormous choice in terms of brands, friends, and identities. This is exemplified by one of today's major social networking sites: Facebook, where participants can have hundreds and thousands of 'friends' and can start and join a customized group at will. One's identity is broadcast throughout the site. Users are able to craft their identities and opt in and out at will from online communities, all of which is changing the nature of what it means to belong, to have 'friends,' and to be a part of a network, thus profoundly changing the nature of the in-person relationship as well.

Along with Facebook are other new social media and networking sites like Twitter and Youtube that are subtly and not so subtly affecting social relationships. Information in general is available to this generation more abundantly and certainly more quickly than ever before. While the tail end of Generation X may have grown up with computers, those in Generation Y almost certainly grew up with them or at least were exposed to them in some way. In 1984, 8% of households had home computers; by 2000,

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[33] Cohen and Kelman, *Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York*, 8.
[34] *Ibid*, 23.

that number was 51%. In 1997, 18% of households had internet access; by 2000, just a mere three years later, 42% were connected.[35] Gen Xers and Yers operate at a faster pace, have access to more information than ever before, and have certain assumptions about what can be expected from organizations that cater to them. Synagogues, never known for being at the forefront of technology, are often not web savvy and can easily be deemed unprofessional and not worthy of the time of 20s and 30s.

The massive rise of NGOs worldwide and the 'long tail phenomenon' as popularized by Chris Anderson in his October 2004 *Wired* magazine article,[36] has also had their effect on this generation. The long tail phenomenon is best described as the shift away from mainstream products at the head of the demand curve towards the millions of hits at the long end of the tail. Since physical buildings no longer need to be counted on to stock products due to the explosion of the internet, there is less need to rely on the mainstream. Products with small niches can be just as profitable as those with mass market appeal. This phenomenon need not only apply to business. Its effects can be seen on how marketing towards this generation is driven across the board in realms other than the merely commercial. It affects politics, culture, religion, relationships, and more. As a result, today's 20s and 30s are primed to expect customized products and to be treated as the special niche that they expect that they are. Like on Amazon.com, they expect to be able to find exactly what it is that they are looking for at all times. The expectation that 20s and 30s hold about what community should mean and how it should personally speak to them is now enormously high. When this system is applied to synagogues, synagogues fall expectedly short.

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[35] Wuthnow, 45.
[36] Anderson, Chris. "The Long Tail," Wired Magazine. October 2004.

Synagogues cannot reasonably expect to be able to compete in such a market. But how far off the mark they are may make an enormous difference to today's generation.

Summary

These trends affect the general young adult population as well as the Jewish young adult population in profound ways. What it meant to be an 'adult' has changed dramatically in the last 30-40 years. Where it once meant getting married, being financially independent, and having children, today those are tasks that more and more young people are not completing, raising the question of what should really mark adult status. Institutions such as synagogues that follow the outdated system of what it means to be adult are falling short of attracting those in their 20s and 30s. They are not seeing today's 20s and 30s for who they are and for the choices that they make. Extended singlehood is having a profound effect on who these 20s and 30s are, who they socialize with, and what kinds of communities they associate with. These are Jews that are more geographically spread out without a homebase, including a religious one. They don't 'bowl alone,' but they do operate in different types of social networks than previous generations.

The influence of the internet and globalization has facilitated new ways of establishing relationships and self-identities. Jews in their 20s and 30s are especially interested in keeping their identities porous, looking for different communities with which to opt in and to opt out, sampling pieces that they like, letting go of those that they don't like. They are interested in crossing boundaries and merging Jewish and non-Jewish culture and space. Synagogues and Jewish institutions represent the opposite; they

are Jewish spaces and therefore are regarded as parochial and insular. People in their 20s and 30s expect marketing to individually target them; synagogues and what they are selling simply don't measure up. The gap appears to be ever-widening between synagogues and 20s and 30s and the future of Judaism looks dire to many.

Chapter 3: What is Happening on the Ground?

Saviv – Temple Emanu-El – Rabbi Howie Goldsmith

Saviv is the 20s and 30s initiative based out of Temple Emanu-El on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in New York. Founded in 1845 by German Jews, Temple Emanu-El today is a large congregation with four clergy members (three rabbis and one cantor) that is known for its classical Reform worship services.

Rabbi Howard Goldsmith, Emanu-El's assistant rabbi, organizes Saviv along with Daniel Mishkin, Emanu-El's Director of Youth Services.

Howie Goldsmith inherited the group when he began his tenure there almost three years ago right out of HUC-JIR's rabbinical school. The remnant of a singles club was all that was left of Saviv. Howie has spent the last three years rebuilding and reshaping Saviv.

"There's no way out there for Jews in their 20s and 30s to explore liberal Judaism," Howie offered when asked why an initiative based on 20s and 30s was necessary in his synagogue. He explained that the Orthodox are good at providing ways for Orthodox Jews in their 20s and 30s to explore Orthodox Judaism. And liberal synagogues are good at providing ways for liberal Jews in their 60s and above to explore liberal Judaism, but there's nothing out there for young Jews.

When asked about who is his target constituency for Saviv, his immediate answer was those who are "successful" and "socially competent." There is a whole group of people out there who are successful in every area of their life except for their spiritual

ones. He wanted to give those people the same spiritual success that they received elsewhere in their lives.

When pressed on who exactly his target constituency is, Howie responded, 20s and 30s who are unengaged and unaffiliated (though he is quick to point out that affiliation is not his goal). When pressed even more, he answered that the target age range is probably around ages 23-36 or 37, both married and non-married, without children. They are "post-college" and "pre-kid."

In Howie's first year, he created a focus group to ask what people wanted. They responded that they wanted to understand the "big questions" out there and what Judaism has to contribute to answering those questions. However, Howie knew that they didn't want to be told the answers. And they didn't want a "b-s experience" either. They were looking for something more "authentic;" they were looking for meaning.

Howie didn't want to just create another social club or singles scene. The people he wanted to attract already had social outlets and they didn't need the synagogue to help them find friends. Rather, he recognizes that the synagogue does unique work. It has a greater purpose and any group aimed at 20s and 30s has to embrace that fact. It wasn't a social club, but he assumed that any friends made at Saviv would be "more enduring friendships" because they came out of this atmosphere of purpose and meaning.

Tefillah was not on the focus group's list of things that they were looking for, but Howie was committed to bringing them tefillah and assumed that those in the focus group just didn't know that a 'good' tefillah experience was possible. He waited until Saviv was running on other fronts before he introduced Saviv Shabbat.

Howie began to build up Saviv with his own friends and the friends of Danny Mishkin, the other coordinator of the group. That expanded to friends of friends, a lot of like-minded folks to set the tone for the type of people that they hoped to attract. He never put ads out into the Jewish papers. He figured that those people who would be reading the Jewish papers were already engaged and he was primarily looking to involve those who weren't already in the know in the Jewish community.

In terms of resources and community buy-in, Howie thinks he was supported. When he approached the temple board about Saviv and its budget, he asked them, do *your* kids belong anywhere? The answer was overwhelmingly no. They were supportive with funds from the get-go. They recognized that there existed a gap between when teens leave synagogues and when they had children of their own and that very few young Jews in that gap period came back willingly to synagogue on their own. It was only the birth of children that brought them back through the door. But that gap before child-bearing was widening and a new approach was needed. *This,* Howie argued, the board 'got' and understood.

Since Emanu-El already had a long and historic philanthropic streak, it was easy for them to want to set aside resources to devote to their generation, even if it did not garner a significant pool of potential members for the synagogue or reach their 'own' kids. As long as it was reaching the younger unaffiliated generation in New York City, they were willing to devote resources to the cause. Saviv was part of a greater mission to reach the youngest generation that everyone else was apparently missing.

Despite being supported in this way by the board and by the senior staff, Howie considers Saviv and where it is currently at to be a failure. He blames this on the amount

of time he was able to put into it. It was expected that he would put 50% of his time into Saviv, but in reality, it became more like 10%. As the assistant rabbi at a large urban synagogue, Howie had numerous responsibilities and though Saviv was a priority, there was only so much time to be carved out for it out of his very booked rabbinic schedule. He never advocated for taking other responsibilities off of his plate nor did anyone else urge him to. This does raise the question of how much buy-in from the synagogue and its senior staff there really was if no one recognized the problem with the amount of time he had left for Saviv.

Looking back, Howie also believes that his not living in the city also prevented from having more success with Saviv. He lived in Westchester, north of the city proper, which sometimes prevented him from staying out late at night. It also prevented him from being a host to events in his own home, which he thinks would have helped, but proved impossible since he lived far away and in a location inaccessible by subway, the primary mode of transportation in Manhattan.

Howie, in his early 30s, is also married with a young child, currently under 1 year of age. He questions whether or not he fit his own demographic anymore and if that contributed to the challenge.

There is no lay board for Saviv. This was a conscious decision made by Howie. He argues that these were not people who wanted to order sandwiches or have their peers teach them. They wanted professionals to do the work. However, Howie's ideal leadership model would be a small cadre of lay leaders who held a long face-to-face meeting once a year as well as a few short meetings by phone every year to answer major strategic questions. They would be acting similarly to an advisory board. Howie just

didn't have the time to develop this ideal lay leadership model and never found the right people.

As for the group professional, he envisioned his ideal leadership model to be a rotating leadership to account for the undeniable change in age and life stage status for the professional. The ideal would be for someone to start in their mid-20s who would continue their leadership as they aged, bringing the group with them as they aged as well. Then someone else also in their mid-20s would enter and also work with the group, perhaps working part-time, while the first professional catered more to the 30s. This way, the leadership rotated as individuals aged, but the group was still able to maintain some stability. There would be multiple professional role models who fit multiple demographic models to draw in a range of participants.

Howie thinks that the ideal leader of a 20s and 30s group would be someone who is similar to his target constituents hence the conundrum of what to do when you become a parent, but wish to primarily attract non-parents. He also thinks that having an ordained rabbi leading the group is crucial. The group needs a "heksher," a Jewish stamp of approval, someone who is able to up the ante on what the group is about; it can't just be a social group if a rabbi is in charge, he figures.

What does Saviv look like? Saviv activities center around worship (through Saviv Shabbat held twice a year), study (Torah study and other study sessions, currently held infrequently), and social action (their work with underprivileged children in the local school system that occurs approximately every two months). There are also a few social events each year, including their Purim karaoke night.

The group holds Saviv Shabbat twice a year. Doing Shabbat for Howie adds a sense of "authenticity" to the enterprise. These Shabbat programs once started quickly became core to what Saviv was all about. His tefillah is based on Friday Night Live in LA with Craig Taubman.

He sought out the best Jewish musicians that he knew: Shira Kline and Josh Nelson who also exhibited to him a sense of "authenticity." Shira was already plugged into the congregation as a musician at Emanu-El's Tot Shabbat. Shira and Josh primarily lead the Friday night service with a band accompanying them. Howie wanted to create a liberal Jewish prayer service that was inspiring and accessible and different from what young Jews might expect. The band along with Shira and Josh costs Saviv $3000 each Shabbat service. Services and the free dinner that followed, which Howie put at $100 a head is admittedly a high cost, but Howie thought it was vital to the program's success to have both "good music" and "good food." Mediocre was not a possibility; he wanted participants to "be blown away."

Emanu-El is known for its cathedral-like sanctuary, but that is not where Saviv services are held. Instead, they are held on one of the upper floors of the building in a large room. Chairs are placed in a rounded style facing the band. Howie uses a 'siddur' he created himself. Of the Hebrew that exists, which is rather minimal, it is transliterated. Howie felt strongly that it needed to be extremely accessible. Many traditional prayers have been cut and replaced by modern poems or songs. Howie does not lead the prayers himself. He leaves it to the musicians. The only time participants see Howie is for the drash on the Torah portion. He feels it is crucial for him in particular to give the drash because it is important for people to see him as the rabbi and to offer some teaching

during the service. For the two Saviv Shabbats from this past year, he took on a 'character' as he spoke, acting as Jacob at the most recent Saviv Shabbat, recounting his tale of a midnight fight with another being. Telling stories is something that Howie has currently been experimenting with; he also feels a traditional drash is not appropriate for this group.

As for the service itself, the musicians vacillate between playing music and/or prayers and speaking in a way as to create the tone for the service while a guitar's strumming is played underneath the speaker's voice. At the last Saviv Shabbat, Shira was the primary speaker at the service and she was intent on creating what I would deem a spiritual or a soulful atmosphere. She didn't mention God or a divine being in the English, but she made numerous references to the spiritual. She kept urging those in attendance to try to get in touch with something deeper about why they were there and to "let go of ordinary time and be in the moment." She modeled this bodily through her swaying motions, her closed eyes, her raised arms, and the semi-smile almost permanently etched on her face during prayers and musical pieces.

The two Saviv Shabbat programs that ran in 2009 were considered successes for Howie. The first averaged 70-80 people and the second around 40 people. He estimates that at the last Saviv Shabbat 60-65% of those in the room had already been to something that Saviv had offered, showing a sense of being able to retain a core of young Jewish adults. The second Shabbat was also held on a night when another Reform synagogue was running a Shabbat service aimed at 20s and 30s. This was JetSet at Shaaray Tefilah (also profiled in this thesis), a large synagogue further up on the Upper East Side. When I mentioned the conflict to Howie, he was unaware and admitted there is no

communication between the different synagogue and community-run outreach groups towards 20s and 30s in the area though he would like there to be.

Another part of Saviv is its focus on study. It has had relatively low turnout (approximately ten people come to a study session), but Howie feels it is still integral to what Saviv and a 'good' 20s and 30s group is all about. He feels that having ten people engage in a deep conversation is worth it; after all, Saviv isn't about the numbers. But he did admit that the time he put into the study portions of Saviv were numerous. He would easily put 12 hours into preparing for a Saviv Torah study session preparation because he felt that the study sessions really had to be stellar. They had to provide depth, meaning, and relevance. Last year, the study sessions occurred approximately every month. Now they are less frequent and occur only a few times a year. Howie admitted that they have "faded out." Howie attributed the lack of attendance to people in New York being very busy.

Saviv also has a significant social action identity. Their current initiative is helping disenfranchised children with school and preparing for college. Volunteers head out approximately every few months to meet with students.

I asked Howie if he thought that those who attended Saviv events were looking for God in any way. He responded that though he suspects that they don't know what God means exactly, they were still looking for what he would term as God. They were open to looking for meaning in multiple places and not turned off by the question of meaning, spirituality, and God, but they wouldn't necessarily use that language. Howie would.

Howie did have some "hard-core atheists and agnostics" within his group, which he felt was more about their religious school backgrounds (which he assumes were poor) and an outdated God-concept. If they could be exposed to a more mature concept of God, Howie figured, they might be more open to it. This applies not just to God, but also to everything Jewish. This ultimately is his mission with Saviv and with all of his congregants – to expose people to a relevant Judaism.

With Saviv, Howie wants to provide a high quality Jewish experience for people in their 20s and 30s. He wants depth. He wants to deeply explore Jewish issues with them – this could range from social action to all things ritual.

Howie is currently in his third year as assistant rabbi at Emanu-El. Nothing that he has created at Saviv is institutionalized yet nor does he think that it will since he has chosen to leave the synagogue at the end of this year.

He hopes to create a 20s and 30s group at his next congregation where he will be the solo rabbi. The congregation is suburban and small (under 400 families) in comparison to the mammoth Emanu-El and a very different feel from the Upper East Side of Manhattan. But he argues that the core idea he tried to promote with Saviv is the same – he wants to provide the opportunity for young Jews to explore progressive Judaism in an authentic, open, and serious way. He imagines a "souped up Tot Shabbat" as a way to reach the parents. He recognizes that his constituency will change in a suburban, wealthy environment. His age range will likely rise and will be centered around parents, a demographic, interestingly enough, that is more like him.

He thinks that ultimately, "people want to do right by their Judaism." They're seeking out purpose and meaning, which he thinks he can deliver in attractive ways.

Towards the end of our conversation, I asked Howie if he had any advice to share for others doing this work. This is what he said:

The professional must have time in their schedule to do this work, especially open nights. If they are married, they must have a patient spouse and family.

He warned against giving into the desire to do events like “Latkes and Vodkas.” He pushes for more ‘authentic’ programs, rooted in tradition.

He warned against purposefully seeking out those who are already going to singles events to be a part of 20s and 30s events. These individuals are essentially already plugged into the community and not in need of our help. Instead, he argues looking for those people who are social connectors, who will raise the bar in terms of the people who are attending (and therefore attract more people like them) and the quality of the discussions.

In terms of tefillah and study, he talked about having a willingness “to go off of the traditional page.” Authentic does not equal orthodox. Modern musical pieces are modern day piyyutim.

His measures of success, he argues, were never about the numbers. His emphasis was always on the community and on the quality of the conversations that occur: Quality versus Quantity. He would rather have ten engaged folks at a torah study than one hundred people at a latkes and vodkas event. A purely social group would disappear once one’s friends disappeared from the group. However, if Saviv was built on something more, on a tradition that’s stretched back over hundreds and hundreds of years, people would keep coming back.

JetSet – Temple Shaaray Tefila – Rabbi Josh Strom

JetSet is the 20s and 30s group based out of Temple Shaaray Tefilah. Shaaray Tefila is a large Reform congregation on the Upper East Side of Manhattan with a history stretching back to 1845. It was originally a traditional synagogue that slowly shifted over to a Reform identity. It currently has more than 1500 families. It considers itself a "traditionally oriented synagogue affiliated with Reform Judaism."

Jetset stands for **J**-Jewish **T**-Twenties and Thirties at **S**-Shaaray **T**-Tefillah. JetSet was created approximately eight years ago by the rabbinic intern at that time, Steven Wise.

Rabbi Joshua Strom is the assistant rabbi of the congregation who is currently in charge of JetSet. He is in his second year as assistant rabbi at the congregation, coming to Shaaray Tefila directly out of HUC-JIR's rabbinical school. He was also with the congregation for two years as their rabbinic intern so Josh has been plugged into the congregation and into JetSet for four years. Josh will be continuing in his current position next year.

Shabbat Unplugged, JetSet's Shabbat service, has always been a cornerstone of this initiative. Josh described it as "spiritual and musical, but not an old-school style of Reform." For Josh, worship has always been and continues to be the center of JetSet. Much of JetSet's programming is centered around Shabbat Unplugged.

Shabbat Unplugged currently occurs once a month. When Josh started at Shaaray Tefila, there were approximately 40-50 people coming each month. Now he gets between 100-125 people on any given Shabbat due to his work reaching out and making social connections. He reported that it is usually different people who show up each time. I

asked if he had a core. He replied that potentially there was a core of 20-30 people who are regulars within the 100-125 people that show up on JetSet Shabbat Unplugged nights.

While currently Shabbat Unplugged only runs once a month, he is excited to run it twice a month starting next year when he will have more time for it in his schedule. Currently, Shaaray Tefila employs both a senior rabbi and an assistant rabbi. Last year, there was an associate rabbi and Shaaray is currently on the search again. The addition of a third rabbi will free Josh up tremendously from other responsibilities such as being on the bimah as often and allow him to focus more on JetSet.

JetSet Unplugged does not take place in the main sanctuary. Rather, the space is in a large basement room with individual chairs rounded out to surround the band in the corner of the room. During the service, Josh hands out instruments. He notices that there is a shyness for participants to use them, but some do. He wants the service to be as participatory as possible.

He leads the service himself with the band. The head songleader of the band is Evan Schultz, currently a third year rabbinical student at HUC-JIR. The band does not play together outside of Shabbat Unplugged. They are individual musicians who only come together to do this. A few musicians are volunteers from the congregation and do not get paid (members can not get paid for their services per regulation of the synagogue) and a few are paid musicians from outside of the synagogue. Josh feels that having “good music” is “key” and the “glue” for JetSet Unplugged.

In Josh’s first year as assistant rabbi, he spent a considerable amount of time rehearsing with the band prior to a service to make sure they were all on the same page. This year, he doesn’t feel the need to do that unless they are introducing something new.

They have gotten into a groove with one another, which is helpful since Josh had added rabbinic responsibilities this year.

Josh spends the majority of his time preparing for Shabbat Unplugged writing the drash that he gives in the middle of each service. “I try to break the image of the rabbi and the sermon… I am kind of an iconoclast.” His drash is usually full of pop culture references and relatively short and is given in an informal tone.

He created the prayer book that JetSet uses. It is bound into a spiral book and contains Hebrew, transliteration, and translation on almost page, including a Kabbalat Shabbat service. The service does not skip over any major part of a Shabbat service though some prayers are shortened.

He feels his community is not very well Jewishly educated. Those who do attend are generally from a Reform and Conservative spectrum. He admits that a sizable number of the people who come are either personally connected to himself or to Hope Chernak, the Director of Youth and Informal Education at Shaaray Tefila. He identifies her and himself as natural social connectors. There are also quite a few HUC students and HUC graduates who attend. He defines the service as a “HUC people kind of service,” meaning that it is the type of service a student at HUC in the rabbinical, cantorial, or educational school might want to attend personally.

At the end of the service, there is always an abundant oneg with non-traditional oneg items like sushi. There is always alcohol.

About tefillah in general, Josh says, “We have got ourselves in boxes,” referring to how many religious services in synagogues are run, especially in Reform synagogues.

Rather than in these “boxes,” he wants prayer to be “fun and joyous, but also respectful… We don’t have to be solemn.”

Josh believes that young Jews are hungry for connection and are missing it with older styles of worship that don’t work for this generation. “We need to more experimental.” He believes that people are looking for the spiritual and also for the religious, but they don’t want to call what they are searching for religious because of negative connotations associated with that word.

He hopes that his JetSet services can be an introduction to the synagogue’s regular services. He wants it also to be open to those Jews who already are informed, educated Jews. Balancing this is a healthy challenge for Josh. JetSet Unplugged allows Josh the room to play in terms of creating and refining his own vision of a ‘good' service. He is proud that he has recently implemented a silent amidah and that it has ‘worked’ for the JetSet group.

Josh has also advertised Shabbat services in the main sanctuary on non-Jetset nights where the group is invited to sit as a group and then head out to drinks together at a local bar afterward. He does this both as a way to open the group up to the synagogue as a whole as well as to other modes of tefillah.

In addition to Shabbat Unplugged, JetSet runs several social holiday programs such as a 20s and 30s social get-together following the temple’s Tashlich service at Rosh HaShanah, a social event during Chanukah, and a Purim get-together at a local karaoke bar.

For JetSet, worship is the starting point and its center, but Josh is interested in expanding into other areas, specifically Torah study and social action. He admitted that

he doesn't have a clear picture of what other groups in NYC exist, what they stand for and what their niches are. He doesn't talk to the other rabbis and professionals working in this area.

He described his group as not as interested in the "academic." It is about their interests. When asked how he gauges their interests, Josh reported that he learns what they want through informal conversations when people come up to tell him after a service, for instance, and tell him what they think and what they want.

Josh does have a lay committee, but he admits that it is not very active. Last year, the group found it very difficult to find a time to meet in person. So they 'met' primarily through group emails. Josh reports that they haven't met in person or emailed in a "long time" and that it is a "real challenge for these people to follow through" given their schedules. He notes that people often come up to him with great ideas, but they are unable to carry them out themselves and he does not have the time to implement all of their ideas himself. Recently, he has been asking for ushers for Shabbat Unplugged and he was having trouble even getting people to commit to that for any given Shabbat.

Josh's biggest frustration is that he is primarily running the group himself and that he does not have a more active leadership group. He inherited a leadership committee when he began the position, which has essentially remained the same through today. There are 5-6 people on this committee, none of whom have kids. Two are married to each other and the others are singles. Occasionally, he has had a few other people step forward to help with certain types of events like social action or social events.

He blames the lack of leadership involvement on city life. He explains that it is especially difficult for this age range to commit. They are more likely to be single and

therefore more likely in his opinion to be working later hours in their careers. His constituency as he reports it is mostly young people, singles and couples without children. He suspects most are in their mid-late twenties. Currently, he fits his own profile. He is married and 29 years old. However, he and his wife are expecting a child. When I asked him how he thought that would change his relationship with JetSet, he replied that he didn't expect anything to change. He assumes he will still be "of the group" in other ways, primarily through age and attitude. He cited his affinity for pop culture as a way of connecting with this group.

He notes that there are a few people who join Shabbat Unplugged who are above the 20s and 30s target age range. So far, it hasn't proved to be a problem for Josh or the group. It appears that he enjoys the fact that a particular couple in their 80s always attend.

Josh reports seeing the influence of JetSet on the rest of the temple. Music is its biggest influence. There was most recently a band for Simchat Torah in the main sanctuary. The Unplugged band has played in the main sanctuary a few times and he has never experienced any pushback that he is aware of. The Unplugged band in the regular sanctuary service is not quite the same experience as it is with JetSet downstairs. According to Josh, it is less participatory due to the community in the room and the set up of the sanctuary with its bimah and pews.

He is very thankful to have inherited the group as opposed to creating it from scratch. It allowed him to hit the ground running. There was already buy-in for JetSet in the congregation and he believes it is a "priority for the synagogue." Josh has, in his opinion, the full support of the senior rabbi, Jonathan Stein. The synagogue leadership

has allowed him a lot of room with the program and a lot of creativity because they recognize that there is a real need for outreach to this community.

When I asked him how much time he devotes to JetSet, he said it depends on the time of the year and what is going on. Now that there are two rabbis instead of three (there were three when Josh first started), he has found that his time available for JetSet has been cut. But in other ways, he doesn't have to spend as much time as he did his first year since he is using the same band as he did the year before and no longer needs to prepare as heavily. JetSet officially accounts for 15% of his time according to his contract. Josh's other portfolio responsibilities as the assistant rabbi include involvement in the formal and informal education of the synagogue's youth as well as other rabbinic duties including that of the pulpit, life-cycle events, and pastoral visits. Since Shaaray Tefila is looking for a third rabbi for next year, Josh anticipates having more time to devote to JetSet in the future.

Josh reports no pushback or tensions that he knows of regarding the issue of membership or non-membership. Josh estimates (though he has never really taken any type of poll or looked through membership records) that approximately 30% of the people that come to his services are already members of the temple.

He thinks it is relatively easy monetarily to join Shaaray as a young person. These rates were set before Josh entered his position. There is an introductory rate for those in their 20s of $18 per person and $36 per couple. After that, he believes it jumps to $144 per person through their 20s. However, he was not entirely sure, which leads me to believe that membership is not a conversation that he has very often with JetSet participants. Regular membership prices begin at age 30. He has not engaged with

anyone at the synagogue in any real way in a conversation about membership and has continued the policies that were set before his arrival.

He thinks it is important to encourage membership in some way because it shows that those who attend are committed to something. “There is something about belonging.” If you belong, you have a different approach. You are attached to the organization and perhaps root for it and then work to help make it succeed. He believes there is a broader mission at the synagogue to reach this age group that is also far beyond the concept of membership alone.

JetSet has an official budget line at the synagogue, but it got slashed by half this past year due to finances at the synagogue after Josh’s first year. Josh had a conversation with several staff members and board members, including the president about this and more money was freed up. Josh is unaware of exact costs or what his budget amount is; he is not involved in the "nitty-gritty of the finances." What he asks for, he generally gets.

Some of his frustrations include getting people to be more active in their involvement. He also wants to eventually incorporate more of JetSet into the larger Jewish community at the synagogue. His frustration is that they are currently rather sectioned off. He believes in the community as whole. He thinks that will happen naturally as individuals age up, but he doesn’t want their entry into the rest of Shaaray Tefila to be a shock.

In terms of advertising for JetSet, Josh maintains an email list and a Facebook group, which he messages often. He also alerts his list of events at the temple, which might be of interest to the population, but are not only JetSet events. For instance, he publicized Shaaray’s MLK service featuring the Afro-Semitic experience, a popular

band. He also sent out information on the temple's efforts to send relief to Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake and ways that people could help out on his list.

Josh believes that JetSet stands on four pillars – study, social action, social connection and worship. Worship is their focus, but he hopes to expand. He doesn't see himself in competition with other 20s and 30s groups in the NY area. He has "a broader sense of mission. The rabbinate is about the Jewish people." He thinks it would be interesting to pull all of the 20s and 30s professionals in the area together, but there is currently no plan to do so.

He thinks it is important to talk to 20s and 30s directly to see what they want instead of spending the time, energy, and resources putting together various types of programs that might not appeal to the group.

Interestingly, there exists another group that has some overlap with JetSet at Shaaray. Cantor Kipnes started what Josh described as a young professionals group called Chaverim for people who are a bit older in the congregation, late 30s and 40s. Josh qualifies it as the next stage-of-life group – mostly married with kids, people who wouldn't be interested in JetSet. So far, Josh reports that there has been no tension between the two groups even though there is a clear age overlap. Shaaray's website lists JetSet as a group for 20s and 30s and Chaverim as a group for roughly 30s and 40s. Chaverim advertises events that are adult only as well as events that include children. Given the demographic of the two groups, it appears one is targeted for those with children and one for those without.

When asked if he felt strongly that his being a rabbi affected his role in JetSet, he responded, "Being a rabbi does have an effect…. It has a different level of gravitas for

people and they respect the title." He also enjoys breaking the image of who a rabbi should be, an idea he referred to multiple times throughout our interview together.

Brooklyn Jews – Beth Elohim – Rabbi Andy Bachman, founder and Matthew Soffer

Brooklyn Jews is the 20s and 30s initiative based out of Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, New York. Beth Elohim is currently the largest Reform congregation in Brooklyn with over 750 family units. Rabbi Andrew Bachman is the current senior rabbi, but before he joined the congregation in this position, he was the founder of Brooklyn Jews, an initiative that started independently without any synagogue affiliation. Now that Andy is the senior rabbi, other professionals lead Brooklyn Jews, which has been incorporated into the temple. Marc Katz is the current professional. For this study, I primarily spent time with Matthew Soffer, who was its professional from 2006-2009.

Brooklyn Jews was started in 2003 by Andy Bachman and his wife, Rachel Altstein in their home. Andy Bachman was the Director of NYU's Hillel at the time. They lived in Park Slope, Brooklyn, where there was a flood of young Jews moving into the area that he believed were not satisfied with the synagogue establishment and that no one had reached out to. He garnered this information primarily as a resident that had lived there for a significant amount of time and through talking with Jewish friends and friends of friends.

This dissatisfaction led to Andy convening a group to discuss what could be done. Word of mouth led to a significant crowd of 20s and 30s, some without children and some starting families gathering in his living room. He asked them what they wanted and what he heard back was "learning and a way to come together around the holidays."

Andy started teaching to this group and invited other young scholars and rabbis in to teach as well – all out of their living room. Realizing what they had started, they

quickly applied for and received grants from the Bronfman Foundation and the Revson Foundation. The Revson Foundation became their primary funder when Brooklyn Jews eventually merged with a synagogue in 2006 and ended up funding other professionals' positions within Brooklyn Jews.

Before this merger, Andy and Rachel were still teaching out of their home. Families began asking for a place for their young children to learn about Judaism. So Andy and Rachel started a nursery school in their apartment called Gan Shalom. They also had young children of their own at this time who took part in their nursery school.

The experiment took off and fairly quickly, the question arose around what to do for the high holy days. Andy, along with Ari Kelman rented space in Prospect Park in Brooklyn using their grant money. When a couple hundred people showed up on Rosh HaShanah, they realized that this was a critical turning point for Brooklyn Jews both in terms of numbers and appeal and in terms of the type of programming that Brooklyn Jews could offer. Before then, worship had not been a major part of Brooklyn Jews' identity. The preponderance of Jews who arrived that day proved to them that worship could be a part of the 20s and 30s equation.

As one of the 50 new, innovative organizations profiled in *Slingshot: A Guide to Jewish Innovation* in 2005, Andy described the beginning of his initiative: "Focusing grassroots community efforts on meetings in people's homes with learning, celebration, and social action, as well as Shabbat and holiday programs, Brooklyn Jews has emerged to build a new Jewish life that is creative, joyous, meaningful, and rooted in learning for this population that demands authentic connection, intellectual content, and fun."

By 2006, the group had expanded exponentially and was seeking out a physical space to house their many initiatives. Andy reports from that time that it was ironic that he had so many Jews with no space in an area surrounded by empty synagogue space with no Jews. That same year, Temple Beth Elohim, a congregation in Park Slope of 550 families was beginning its search for a senior rabbi. Andy decided to apply for the position. There was an understanding between Andy and the synagogue that Andy came with Brooklyn Jews. Right next door, Brooklyn Jews had been operating successfully. This was a chance for Beth Elohim to bring in that population as well as to find a fresh, new, innovative leader. Andy had long been a believer in the power of the synagogue model even though he had been working outside of synagogues for a while. This was his chance to create a different kind of synagogue. Rabbi Andy Bachman was hired and Brooklyn Jews and Beth Elohim were to work in partnership and begin a merger.

Matt Soffer got involved with Brooklyn Jews that same year. Matt and Andy knew each other from Kutz Camp during a summer when Andy was teaching there and Matt was working at the camp. Matt described Andy when he first encountered him as this "cool, funky, renegade rabbi who operates outside of the box." While Matt was studying in Israel for his first year of rabbinical school at HUC-JIR, he contacted Andy and told him that he was looking for a job and interested in being a part of Brooklyn Jews, which he had been hearing about. Upon Matt's return from Israel, Matt began his work with Brooklyn Jews as Andy transitioned to the position of senior rabbi of Beth Elohim.

Matt's job was entirely supported by the Revson grant. His main duties involved his work with Brooklyn Jews as well as social justice organizing for the synagogue. He

also taught in the religious school. He worked on Brooklyn Jews with another HUC student, David Singer (who has since left HUC and become a AJU rabbinical student). Andy became more of a guide than a leader to Brooklyn Jews.

That year, as the two communities began their merger, Rosh Hashanah for Brooklyn Jews was held in Prospect Park while Yom Kippur was held in the social hall in the synagogue. This was a conscious decision, a way to introduce Brooklyn Jews to Beth Elohim "in a way that was not off-putting."

There were some growing edges for all involved in the merger process (which by 2010 is still going on, according to Matt). In Matt's second year with Brooklyn Jews, the lay leadership wanted to put a pledge card to Beth Elohim on everyone's seat in Prospect Park for the Rosh HaShanah service just as a pledge card was placed on every seat for the high holy day services that were held inside the temple space. About this, Matt reports that he "got riled up," thinking that this should not be the first message that 20s and 30s get when they arrive at a Brooklyn Jews event. After all, this was what they were trying to get away from; "They don't want to go to a place like that." So Matt simply took the pledge cards off of the seats. It was the day of – there was no one to check out this decision with and plus, Matt noted that he had the authority to do. Matt recognized this as a point of tension between the synagogue with its "membership thinking" and a new way of doing outreach as expressed through Brooklyn Jews. Knowing that the leadership of the congregation would say that they have a financial obligation to sustain this program, Matt decided that when he spoke to the community, he would fold that 'ask' into the thank-you's that occurred at the end of each service. Just as the community was asked to say thank you to the many volunteers that helped make the high holy days with Brooklyn

Jews happen, so, too, should they consider donating to the temple that also contributed to making the high holy days with Brooklyn Jews happen. He felt that this was a softer approach, making it one part of a larger thank you speech rather than allowing so much emotional and physical space to be taken up through the use of a pledge card.

Matt does thinks that 20s and 30s should give in some way. Every year since Brooklyn Jews has begun, he reports that the ask has become a little more articulate. Brooklyn Jews asks everyone to make a contribution of some sort during the high holy days and they always note that no amount is too small. There is no suggested amount; it is up to whatever anyone wants to and/or is able to give. The amounts run the gamut. A few people give several hundred dollars, but usually never over $1000. Each year, Brooklyn Jews just about breaks even for the costs associated with the high holy days through this giving and sometimes they come away with some programming money for the year as well.

Only once does Matt remember charging a specific amount for an event. It was last year's costly Tu B'Shevat event where they charged for admission by the head.

After three years since the merger, Beth Elohim's membership has risen from 550 families to 750+ family units. Many of these new members come directly from the Brooklyn Jews community. Matt believes that the synagogue now believes that "this is what outreach is in the 21st century – outreach and engagement." Matt reports that the merger is perceived as a win-win for Brooklyn Jews and for Beth Elohim. Brooklyn Jews found a physical space and a larger community into which to age. Their rabbi in Andy as Brooklyn Jews founder is now their rabbi as senior rabbi of Beth Elohim and Andy is transforming much of synagogue life based on his time and exposure with Brooklyn

Jews. Beth Elohim is winning through the infusion of new members and new ideas. They also share many professionals. The Revson grant that paid for Matt's position also paid for his time doing the social justice work of the entire synagogue. Brooklyn Jews is now officially "a project of Beth Elohim that engages Jews in the neighborhood in their 20s and 30s." The grant that once supported Brooklyn Jews is now over and Brooklyn Jews is now fully incorporated into the synagogue.

In terms of lay leadership for Brooklyn Jews, before the merger, Andy had an 'advisory' board, but by the time that Matt came on, he reported that that committee had mostly faded away. Today, it is primarily staff-driven, but what it looks like is a partnership with many volunteers.

Volunteers are needed to make the newest Brooklyn Jews project happen. Right now, the new initiative within Brooklyn Jews is 'Shabbat in the Hood,' a revival of sorts of Brooklyn Jews' roots when it originally met in Andy Bachman and Rachel Altstein's home. Shabbat in the Hood is a neighborhood initiative where volunteers open up their own homes on Friday nights to however many local people their home can hold. They arrange for a Shabbat dinner. Beth Elohim and Brooklyn Jews then coordinate with the host and send a rabbinic student, usually one already associated with Brooklyn Jews, including Matt Soffer to each of the homes participating in the event that Shabbat. The rabbinic student works with the individual or couple hosting to plan for the evening and the student leads an informal Shabbat service in the home. This lessens the nervousness of the hosts who are in charge of "doing Shabbat in their own homes." This occurs once and sometimes twice a month at multiple homes on the same evening. Matt thinks that

Brooklyn Jews is really "onto something important" around this neighborhood initiative that only continues to grow.

The Brooklyn Jews congregational service has evolved over time. When Matt first ran Brooklyn Jews, he and David Singer held Brooklyn Jews Friday night services in the non-sanctuary synagogue space a few times a month whenever another local minyan was not using the space. He reported seeing between 20-30 people each time. When David left after a year, this fell apart and Matt went back to once a month, which he led with Andy Bachman. Each time, there were well over one hundred people in attendance. Today Marc Katz, Brooklyn Jews' new leader who began in the fall of 2009 after Matt left, leads worship. For the service, it is an amalgam of the traditional and more contemporary. Guitar is used and there is a silent amidah. Matt reports that Brooklyn Jews run the gamut when it comes to the denominational background of its participants so there is a necessity to blur denominational lines in worship.

The Jewish learning that was once based in Andy Bachman's living room found a new home in the education programs of the synagogue. It, like the nursery school, was one of the components that could easily be folded into the existing program while simultaneously transforming the existing program. Classes are open to members and non-members of Beth Elohim.

There has been a blurring of lines when it comes to the social action component of Brooklyn Jews. It was a natural place for Beth Elohim and Brooklyn Jews to come together. Since Matt coordinated every social action effort of the temple as well as running Brooklyn Jews, he simply marketed the social action program of one to the other so eventually there was one merged collaborative social action program. For instance,

when volunteers were needed to work at the local homeless shelter, he reached out on lists both for Beth Elohim and Brooklyn Jews and found volunteers from both communities.

Matt has noticed that the constituency of Brooklyn Jews is becoming more and more people who do not have children. At the last Sukkot gathering for the community that Matt attended, he looked around and realized that only one person in the room had brought their baby. While it is possible that some people had come to the event and left their children at home, Matt's knowledge of the group and its make-up led him to the conclusion that the vast majority of people in the room were those without children.

For a variety of reasons, Brooklyn Jews, in its merger with Beth Elohim has become more about those without children. Matt reported that the reasoning was that the easiest thing to fold into Beth Elohim from the existing Brooklyn Jews group was its nursery school program that Andy had originally run out of his living room. Since Beth Elohim was already trying to serve young families, it made sense for that aspect to be covered by the synagogue. Matt is quick to note that the two entities were no longer separate - one was the other at this point. The lines were blurring. But the majority of programs that were marketed as Brooklyn Jews were no longer targeted to those who had children.

Andy was married and had children when he founded Brooklyn Jews and one focus among many for Brooklyn Jews at the time was its nursery school. After the merger with Beth Elohim, the leadership of Brooklyn Jews was taken on primarily by Matt Soffer, who was married at the time (and since divorced) who did not have children. The other professionals working with the group over the years, David Singer, Kevin

Kleinman, and Marc Katz, some of whom are married, some of whom are not, are all also without children.

Of Brooklyn Jews' major initiatives, the learning, social action, and nursery school programs have been merged with those of Beth Elohim. What remains primarily under Brooklyn Jews is the worship component and the social component.

Matt reported that it was important that Brooklyn Jews began thinking of itself as a brand. Last year, they collaborated with JDub records and created a 'Jewltide' party at a bar. JDub was primarily responsible for the event, but Brooklyn Jews was able to add its branding to the event as well, a win-win for all involved since Brooklyn Jews boasts a 1000+ person listserve. Brooklyn Jews was also able to do this with the program, 'Taste of Limmud' and for its 2010 Tu B'Shevat co-sponsored meditation seder with the Jewish Meditation Center of Brooklyn. Co-sponsoring events has become more and more common for Brooklyn Jews.

When asked about how God is talked about within Brooklyn Jews, Matt responded, "I don't think God is a good motivator for the group as a whole." He noted that every year at the high holy days, attendants fill out questionnaires that ask them to reflect on what they are looking for, who they are, and what brought them to Brooklyn Jews. On those questionnaires, Matt reports that he rarely got an answer like 'I want to feel God's presence.' However, the most frequently used word in the survey every single year is 'connection,' which he sees as linked with the God question. People mention that they are 'looking for connection," looking to "connect with important values," and "to connect to community." Occasionally, he notes, they also mention spirituality.

In terms of tangible ideas, they highlight holiday gathering, ongoing learning opportunities, and 'cool services.'

Matt named a counter-cultural vibe as an important part of Brooklyn Jews. "It started against something else, against 'bad' synagogue culture, against the establishment." This was a large part of its appeal. He argued that this was enough, during Andy Bachman's tenure as the main professional of the group, to unite people with and without kids even though they may have different needs.

When asked about the future of Brooklyn Jews, Matt responded, "As long as they retain a reflective approach, Brooklyn Jews will be great." Matt reported in our interview that he had just had coffee with Marc Katz who took on Brooklyn Jews a few months ago after Matt's departure. They both agreed that it is clear that Brooklyn Jews ideally would be served by someone whose sole job was thinking about Brooklyn Jews and enacting its vision. It needed a "full-time visionary employee." According to Matt, Brooklyn Jews took up a great deal of his time, but due to the other responsibilities inherent in his rabbinic intern position, it still didn't account for the majority of his work. What did were lesson plans for classes or organizing for a rally for the social justice part of his job. Brooklyn Jews could be a better program if it had a devoted staff person. He reported that the problem of Brooklyn Jews and of how to engage his entire generation often kept him up at night with questions such as "How do you convince the older generation to support the religious life of the younger generation?" He argues that it is a conundrum that needs serious thought and needs people devoted on a regular basis to dealing with it.

Andy never viewed Brooklyn Jews as a stand-alone project. He envisioned that there would be much to learn from his organization that could be cultivated elsewhere. In

his vision for Brooklyn Jews as laid out in *Slingshot: A Guide to Jewish Innovation*, Andy wrote, "Brooklyn Jews will serve as a national model for creating an open and flexible institution in Jewish life that meets this age 'where they are at' right now, helping them to build on their own terms the best kind of Jewish life they can. For a generation that often embraces the universal values of American life as much as or more than the particular values of Jewish life, there are great challenges ahead. And on the most human level, each person hungers for home, friendship, and community—all of which combine for a rootedness in a meaningful life. Brooklyn Jews will work directly with this population—from recent college graduates to newly professional; from recently married to new parents—and help them make Jewish choices that are rooted in both the personal and the communal; the particular of Judaism and the universal of American culture. Waiting 'til they have kids,' for many, may be too late."

The Riverway Project – Temple Israel, Boston, MA – Rabbi Jeremy Morrison

The Riverway Project is the 9-year-old 20s and 30s initiative based out of Temple Israel in Boston, MA. Temple Israel is not only Boston's largest congregation, but also New England's largest Reform congregation with over 1700 families and a history that spans over 150 years.

Rabbi Jeremy Morrison is the founder and current professional in charge of the Riverway Project. In mid-2010, he will end his leadership of Riverway, but he will stay on as a rabbi at Temple Israel becoming their Director of Lifelong Learning. He is leaving Riverway because he believes that he has personally aged out of the group at age 40. Temple Israel currently has a search underway for a new rabbi to replace Jeremy as the professional in charge of the project.

While Jeremy was still a rabbinical student at HUC-JIR, he proposed to the clergy of Temple Israel, the synagogue in which he had personally grown up, the idea of opening a storefront synagogue in the South End of Boston, a location with a large demographic of unaffiliated Jews in their 20s and 30s. The initiative was originally envisioned as "An Extension of Israel," as a physical space external to the synagogue. The idea was converted into a project housed within Temple Israel (and also in neighborhood homes across the Boston area) when the high costs of such a venture were discovered.

Riverway began as a series of house meetings in 2001 in the living rooms of unaffiliated young Jews in neighborhoods across Boston. When asked what they were looking for, they replied that they were looking for Shabbat meals, services in an intimate setting, serious learning about Judaism, and social action projects. Rather than promoting

a singles initiative (which they quickly rejected), they instead wanted a mix of participants from single to married, across the age range of 20s and 30s, and interfaith couples. They also primarily wanted to base their initiative out of their homes rather than out of the synagogue.

On today's Riverway website as part of their advertising for the initiative, they still acknowledge the problem of big synagogue life by asking the question, 'Do temples feel too big, too impersonal, too expensive?' Riverway recognizes most young Jews' aversion to the idea of the synagogue by explicitly naming it. Riverway then provides a solution to this discomfort through the part of the Riverway program that continues to be based in neighborhoods rather than in Temple Israel proper.

After securing funding initially for one year (this funding was then extended) from an outside private donor interested in reaching out to this population, Jeremy along with his wife moved to the south end of Boston in 2001. Their apartment stood as homebase for Riverway's initial events. The program took off quickly and began to grow.

Today, Riverway holds its programs both in and outside of the congregation's walls. In addition to meeting in Jeremy's home, they also meet in neighborhood homes for Shabbat services, meals, and study sessions, creating smaller communities based on neighborhood within the larger Riverway family and the larger Temple Israel family. Rabbi Jeremy Morrison leads services in peoples' homes working in conjunction with the hosts. The neighborhood groups and the relationships made through those groups are the core of Riverway, according to Jeremy.

At the temple, Riverway hosts a monthly Shabbat evening service for 20s and 30s called Soul Food Fridays bringing in well over 200 participants each time. Services are

held in the main sanctuary or, in summer months, outside in a courtyard of Temple Israel. A professional band plays the service; Jeremy joins them on the bimah, singing along, and interjecting reflections between prayers. He also gives the dvar Torah in the middle of the service. It is usually informal, sometimes reflecting on the Torah portion, sometimes not. For the majority of Riverway's initial years, musician Josh Nelson and his band played at Riverway for Soul Food Fridays before he relocated to New York. Josh Nelson was profiled as one of the current prayer leaders for Saviv at Temple Emanu-El.

Another initiative of Riverway are the bi-weekly study sessions called Torah and Tonics on Tuesdays where participants study the weekly Torah portion with Jeremy and are served free drinks and dinner. This takes place within the temple and usually attracts between 25-40 people each time.

Torah and Tonics requires no Hebrew or prior knowledge, which is very important to Jeremy who believes in accessibility of the text. Being a master Torah teacher is a goal for Jeremy who is studying part-time for his PhD in Bible and the Ancient Near East at nearby Brandeis University.

In terms of Riverway's education initiatives, there is also a neighborhood based four-session course called Mining for Meaning, designed to teach about Jewish rituals. Jeremy teaches in local homes for the first four sessions and then the group is encouraged to continue learning together as a group with peer leadership.

Riverway has also worked in partnership with the local Federation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies and Hebrew College to offer a Me-ah program (a two-year college-

level intensive Jewish studies program) specifically designed for 20s and 30s and taught by someone within their demographic.

Riverway Tots, a monthly pre-Shabbat experience for parents with children up to age 5, is another program that developed within Riverway. This also happens within the Temple space and represents a growing demographic, that of young parents within Riverway.

Riverway supports several holiday celebrations. 'Salsa in the Sukkah' is a popular event where Mexican food is served and salsa dancing is taught underneath Temple Israel's large sukkah. Riverway also partners with another of Temple Israel's growing initiatives, Ohel Tzedek, their organizing effort for social justice within the congregation on social action and justice projects. Many participants of Riverway overlap with those of Ohel Tzedek; they easily feed into each others' programs.

Jeremy describes Riverway as a relational-based model of organizing. He sees his position as a facilitator of connections between participants around their common interests. It is important that participants, specifically the leaders that emerge view themselves as owners of Riverway and the experiences that they have with Riverway.

Instead of creating an official lay committee, Jeremy has a core of 20-25 participants, a group that rotates its leadership. They meet four times a year and act as "visionaries" for the program, helping to plan for it and evaluate it. In 2005, Jeremy brought his leadership team on a Riverway tour of Israel. Jeremy still primarily runs Riverway itself. But he finds it extremely important to work in collaboration with those who attend events. His programs need the support of the community. He reports that "the

few times early on, when we created programs not initiated through collaboration, they didn't succeed."

Jeremy has "fostered a relational model of partnership between professionals and participants," meaning creating leadership in specific areas and for specific events based on their interests and time. One of Jeremy's examples of this is through the Mining for Meaning series. After Jeremy completes the initial four-week learning session, participants continue learning on their own with and from their peers in the group. The leader of the session meets with Jeremy or a colleague of his to prepare, empowering them in their learning and in their leadership. They also lead Havdallah at these gatherings.

Jeremy has been working with the Riverway Project since 2001 for nine years, the most amount of time of any professional serving their 20s and 30s community in this study. He has literally aged with the group, turning 40 this year and choosing to step down and bring in a new professional though he will still stay on as a rabbi at Temple Israel. A portion of the group has aged with him as well. Those who started at his age are now also aging out and most, like Jeremy, are integrating into other parts of Temple life. More couples with children are a part of the group now than there were at Riverway's inception, which makes sense if they started as singles or young couples when they began and stayed with the group throughout Jeremy's tenure. Jeremy himself began the program married without children. He is now the father of two young children, matching his aging demographic.

Jeremy notes that the age of participants is generally over 25, 50% of whom are married or in on-going relationships. Jeremy also reports that about 25% of his

participants are in interfaith relationships. A growing number have children. Most participants to Riverway come from a Reform background. Jeremy reports that most come with a low level of Jewish knowledge and ritual and virtually no Hebrew skills.

Over 1500 young Jewish adults have come into contact with Riverway programming. 16% of the membership of Temple Israel report that they entered Temple Israel through the Riverway Project. Membership to the synagogue is offered at a low rate of $36 to new members under the age of 35. Lowering the financial barriers to membership was an important victory for Jeremy.

He views Riverway as a gateway to synagogue involvement. "In the neighborhoods we've created circles of folks doing Jewish activities, but it's always seen as an extension of the synagogue," he says. "We use the same siddur, I'm the rabbi, most of the tunes are the same. My goal was to get people across the threshold of Temple Israel, to connect them with the synagogue community." Unlike Saviv and JetSet, Riverway uses the same siddur as Temple Israel arguably making the transition to the rest of Temple Israel life, particularly its worship, easier.

The synagogue itself has changed throughout the time that Riverway has been a part of it. Certainly, having Riverway's participants become a significant proportion of the membership has played a role in that. In addition, Riverway's relational model is now used throughout the synagogue as they strive to create more "qualitative relationships" based on Riverway's relational model among all congregants.

Jeremy was initially hired to run this project and that was the bulk of his duties after he was ordained and became a rabbi at Temple Israel. He did take on other duties within Temple life, but his primary focus was and has been on Riverway and its outreach

to those in their 20s and 30s. Jeremy acknowledges that a rabbi hired for primarily this purpose can be an expensive endeavor and not a possibility for all synagogues. To answer that challenge, Jeremy responds that not every synagogue needs to follow the same model as Riverway; rather, a synagogue can refocus and reprioritize a clergy member or even another professional's duties. It was easier for Temple Israel to allow Jeremy to work almost full-time on this project since the position is primarily funded by an outside donor and because the synagogue is so large; Temple Israel currently has five clergy members: four rabbis, including Jeremy and a cantor. Temple Israel has clearly bought into the concept of the Riverway program, but it was easier for them to do so because of the vast resources at their disposal compared with other synagogues of lesser size, stature, and budget.

Jeremy attributes some of the success of Riverway to its focused approach. Rather than trying to be everything to everyone, he has chosen instead to "mine our niche": to only offer programs that deal with ritual, study, or social justice. There are a variety of projects already underway in the Boston area sponsored through other organizations such as Federation and the JCC that also appeal to 20s and 30s. Each has their own approach. Other programs focus on the social and networking aspects that 20s and 30s are interested in. Riverway instead focuses primarily on ritual and study and co-exists with the other groups in Boston rather than directly competing with them.

St. Louis Next Dor – Central Reform Congregation – Yoni Sarason

St. Louis Next Dor is the 20s and 30s initiative associated with Central Reform Congregation, a young congregation (founded only in 1984) of over 750 families in St. Louis, Missouri. Its professional is 25-year-old Yoni Sarason. He is the only professional working with 20s and 30s who is a non-rabbi in this study. He is also the youngest.

St. Louis Next Dor is a different model from the other sites in this study. The initiative happens entirely outside of the synagogue space and operates independently of Central Reform Congregation. This relationship began when the synagogue purchased the house that was sitting next door to it in 2002. The plan was to use it as extra temple space for educational classes and other synagogue functions, but ultimately that did not work for the synagogue. Its floor plan did not meet the temple's needs. The house then stood vacant for a number of years. In that time, it became rundown and the target of vandals.

Eventually, Rabbi Susan Talve, Central Reform Congregation's senior rabbi developed an idea for the house that resembles Moishe House. Moishe House is a network of houses set up across the country (and now the world) that acts as hubs for Jewish activity and community for Jews roughly aged 21-30. Young Jews live in a Moishe house and host a series of events within it that are open to the larger young Jewish community.

Yoni's background is with Moishe house. Talve connected to Yoni and presented a proposal to the Next Dor program of Synagogue 3000, from which they received a $40,000 grant as well as professional support and guidance for Yoni and the congregation as they begin this endeavor together. St. Louis Next Dor is one of five congregations

chosen to be a part of the first cohort of congregations across the country dedicated to creating a 20s and 30s initiative. Nita is another initiative out of Next Dor that is profiled in this study.

St. Louis Next Dor, the newest of all of the projects presented in this study, only started this year with the official opening of its Next Dor house in November of 2009. However, it has been quite busy throughout the fall and into the winter with multiple events scheduled each week. The house is used for Next Dor events and also for groups in the St. Louis area looking for community space. Yoni focuses much of his energy on reaching out to the community and existing organizations in the area across denominations and institutions to use this space. "We're more of a venue than a programming organization," Yoni reports. The Next Dor house was never imagined as space to be used only for Central Reform Synagogue or the Reform movement even though Central Reform owns the house and supports the project with resources. Rabbi Talve calls the house an incubator. Yoni sees this house as the potential for a renaissance experience for the young Jewish adults in the greater St. Louis area, a place to “incubate new ideas and culture.”

Events held in the Next Dor house include *Shulchan Ivrit* (Hebrew Table) for young Jews interested in working on speaking Hebrew together over snacks and beer, an impromptu fundraiser for victims of the 2010 Haitian earthquake called Hops for Haiti, and a Tu B’Shevat seder. The house has hosted outside groups as well such as a rabbinic delegation meeting and the local Jewish law student society. There are also plans to grow an organic garden on the house’s property.

The house itself is still in the process of being remodeled. It currently lacks many furnishings, but it does have multiple flat-screen TVs and a fully-equipped kitchen. The popular video game Rock Band is set-up in a prominent location as one walks into the house, sending the message that this is a place where one would want to hang out. The $40,000 grant from S3K Next Dor was only enough for this project to get started. Their main source of funding comes from local donor Michael Staenberg. They are supported by Central Reform Congregation and its senior rabbi, Susan Talve, but Yoni is also actively reaching out to other area synagogues and organizations for funding and support. St. Louis Next Dor also accepts donations through their website from participants and donors willing to give.

St. Louis Next Dor's vision is posted on its website, part of which reads: "The mission of Next Dor is to strengthen the Jewish community by creating a post-denominational (the idea that Jewish self-identification is of greater importance than denominational affiliation), non-institutional, urban Jewish community space for young adults in St. Louis." By claiming a post-denominational stance, St. Louis Next Dor opens itself up to the larger community and responds to the negative feelings many young Jews feel towards denominationalism and towards boundaries in general.

Yoni himself is described as being an incredibly sociable person. He is a social connector. When a S3K colleague attended one of their events, she reported that almost all thirty of the people in the room were there personally through a connection to Yoni.

He is working on creating a St. Louis Next Dor board with local participants who come from different backgrounds to guide the group and take ownership of it. He wants the board to work together to build up the house, the brand, and the group itself. Yoni

knows that he is a social connector, which is why he is working so hard on building up the board so that he does not become too central to the success of the organization. He knows that he is its central player and much revolves around him. He expressed a concern for what could happen when and if he leaves at any point if that continues to be the trend.

Marketing for St. Louis Next Dor is accomplished through word of mouth and through the use of social media. Yoni maintains a constant presence for St. Louis Next Dor through Facebook, Twitter, a blog called the St. Lou Jew (stloujew.blogspot.com), and through the website for the group. He posts and sends messages through these sites approximately four times a week.

The door to the house is theoretically always open – literally. Not just open to organizations, it is also open to individuals who want to use the space, to utilize the growing library or to just hang out. Yoni imagines that it is a place where young Jews should just be able to *be* – even though he realizes this is a real compromise on his own part to his privacy and private social life. As the only professional literally living with his 20s and 30s, the personal demands are undeniably high.

Rabbi Talve and the synagogue's leadership have given Yoni and Next Dor a significant amount of independence to develop the house, their own board, and their own programming.

So why is the synagogue so involved then? What is the benefit to Central Reform to initiate and support this project?

Rabbi Talve sees a greater mission in the project. Yes, it can one day generate individuals who are ready for synagogue membership affiliation, but that is not the point for Talve and for the synagogue's leadership. The point is to create a positive post-

college Jewish community in St. Louis and to support those in need of connection to Judaism before it is too late. Interestingly, there is no mention of Central Reform Congregation on St. Louis Next Dor's website and also no mention of St. Louis Next Dor on Central Reform Congregation's website, indicating the strict separation that has occurred between the two, the most extreme example among all of the sites in this study.

Nita – Congregation Rodef Sholom – Rabbi Noa Kushner

Nita is the 20s and 30s initiative based out of Congregation Rodef Sholom in San Rafael outside of San Francisco in Marin County, CA. Rodef Sholom was founded over 50 years ago and is the only suburban site included in this study. Its participants are primarily, but not entirely, young parents.

Nita is one of the five Next Dor sites in the first cohort of Synagogue 3000's Next Dor program. Nita receives funding ($40,000 for the first year), guidance, and support from this national organization as well as the chance to network with other congregations doing similar work across the country, including fellow Next Dor site, St. Louis Next Dor, also profiled in this study.

Rabbi Noa Kushner is the professional in charge of Nita. She is the parent of three daughters and matches the profile of the majority of her participants. Noa works in her position at Rodef Sholom part-time, splitting her time between her Nita work and her other rabbinic duties at the synagogue. Very recently, there has been talk about making her Nita work her sole portfolio.

In Nita's vision statement written for Synagogue 3000 Next Dor, Noa makes certain comparisons to describe Nita and its approach. Nita should be compared to the internet (participant-driven) rather than to a news program (top-down), to a farmer's market (interactive, local, and organic) rather than to a commercial supermarket chain (known for the gap between buyers and sellers), to a start-up (innovative) rather than to an established corporation (bureaucratic, resistant to change). By making these comparisons, Noa is responding to and taking advantage of 20s and 30s' fears of

synagogues as institutions to draw in the young and unaffiliated in the area. She is making known that this Jewish organization is *different* from what one might expect.

The vision continues: "By removing the emotional barriers to living a Jewish life (for example, judgment from others for what one does or does not know or practice), the cultural barriers (the dissonance between their lives and their perception of the range of Jewish expression) and the perceived financial barriers (membership models), we believe that Jews and their families will become engaged in the Jewish experiences we hope to create… Real engagement means that an individual has the power to do, to practice, to live a Jewish life outside of the institution."

Nita is particularly interested in reaching out to those who are disenfranchised from institutional life, which is apparently the majority of the Jews in the area. According to Nita, 90% of the Jews in the area are unaffiliated.

In her statement above, Noa explicitly names the competence barrier, which keeps many Jews from entering the synagogue, afraid of what others might expect of them and their Judaism. At the high holy days (Nita's first real success), Nita created cards called 'Deal breakers' to deal with many of the issues that young Jews might be facing. They were placed on each attendee's seat to read and were an attempt to address some of the relevant questions young unaffiliated Jews might ask and might be worried about.

An example of a deal breaker card is the question: "What if I don't believe in God?" The answer on the card reads: "Whether or not you believe in God isn't really a good litmus test for whether or not you should pray or develop a Jewish practice. The place to start should probably just be: 'do I want to do Jewish stuff?'"

Another deal breaker card reads: "What if I'm not Jewish? (or) What if my

girlfriend / boyfriend / partner / wife / husband / child / aunt Susie isn't Jewish?" The answer: "Don't get hung up on who 'technically' is Jewish or not. All that really matters is who wants to do Jewish or not. Let's put it this way, you could be a direct descendant of Moses, but if you aren't interested in trying anything Jewish, the ride is pretty much over. By the same token, you can be Santa Claus himself, and if you decide to jump on the Jewish train, and are open to seeing where it takes you, then the ride has just begun."

These cards address some of the major concerns young Jews, especially unaffiliated Jews might feel. Other questions concern how to pray, what it means if one doesn't feel anything during prayer, and what it means to raise one's children as Jewish. Nita is attempting to break down barriers, meet today's young Jews where they are at, and begin to formulate responses to the perceived questions that are important to them.

Besides their successful high holy day services, Nita also hosts events throughout the year. An example of a recent Nita event is a waterfall hike with Dan Nichols, a well-known Jewish musician, an outside educator, and Noa herself who leads a Jewish teaching on the environment during the hike. The event is advertised as kid-friendly. Other events include Shabbat dinners and short services with free babysitting and Havdallah get-togethers. Having events that are friendly to child involvement is extremely important for Nita. Nita's base is situated in an area with many young families and Noa is primarily appealing to them. They are Nita's base.

The relationship between the synagogue and Nita is still evolving. Though Rodef Sholom has bought into supporting the work of Nita, there has been conflict around membership and non-membership, around what kinds of services should be offered to those members who pay full dues and those who do not pay any. Since Nita serves many

of the same members that Rodef Sholom might potentially attract on its own without Nita (the young family demographic), they need to figure out and clarify what their mission is, together and separately, how they can best support each other, and ultimately what Nita is all about.

Nita has a leadership team, which consists of a mix of young Rodef Sholom members and a mix of non-affiliated Nita participants, but Noa continues to be the center of the organization. The leadership group has spent significant time with Noa constructing the vision, purpose, and goals for the initiative. After losing an active Nita lay leader this year, Nita is currently trying to groom new leadership, clarify the responsibilities of leadership so they don't again lose their lay leaders, and spread out its demands and responsibilities more widely.

All advertising for Nita has been primarily through word of mouth and based on social connections accomplished in part through one-on-one conversations and house parties. Nita is looking into creating a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and a blog. This is in addition to their website and their e-mails that go out to their listserve approximately once a month.

Nita is funded through the Synagogue 3000 Next Dor network and are currently seeking funding from additional donors and foundations to support their work. Nita also asks for donations from participants, but donations are not required to participate. Nita events are generally self-pay when there is a cost involved. For instance, participants pay for their own dinners (including ordering delivery) after Shabbat services.

On their website, Nita's tagline is: 'Get your Jewish on.' It then reads: 'Nita is for anyone who wants to do Jewish stuff.' Nita is appealing widely, trying to broaden the

base not only of its participants, but also of who might consider themselves Jewish or at the very least, capable of doing Jewish stuff.

Chapter 4 – *What Does It All Mean?*

After examining the literature on Generations X and Y, both general and specifically Jewish, and compiling the research on the congregational 20s and 30s initiatives described in Chapter 3, a few interesting trends emerged:

There is a direct correspondence between the demographic profile of the professional and that of the group.

In the groups that I profile and research here, there appears to be a direct correspondence between the profile of the professional and the profile of the group. This is especially the case for the life-stage that begins with child-bearing. Those professionals that were parents led groups that primarily consisted of participants who also were parents. The reverse was true for professionals who were non-parents and groups that primarily consisted of non-parents. Those whose profiles did not entirely match struggled.

Yoni Sarason, the professional of St. Louis Next Dor is in his mid-20s and single; Yoni's group is primarily of the same make-up: young students and professionals without children. Noa Kushner of Nita in Marin County is a young parent; her group appeals to young parents (which, given, is her main demographic).

Howie Goldsmith noticed mixed results from Saviv. He admitted that having a family (he is a young, new father) challenged his time and wondered if his not being within his own targeted demographic affected the success of the group. Josh Strom of JetSet currently does not have any children and his targeted constituency is primarily

made up of those without children. Now that he is an expectant father, he does not expect it to change anything, but the research tends to offer the opposite answer.

When Andy Bachman started Brooklyn Jews, he was a young father and he was able to appeal to young parents. When the group transitioned its primary leadership to Matt Soffer who did not have children, the group also transitioned. Those with children transitioned into Beth Elohim and Brooklyn Jews began serving mainly non-parents. When I asked explicitly about this transition, Matt wondered aloud, "If I had kids, would I have been thinking more about people without kids and are still not engaged with Beth Elohim and other synagogues?"

It is clear that the choice of the professional with a match of the intended targeted constituency is crucial. Howie's idea of a rotating multiple-leadership model, which would consist of several leaders matching different demographics rotating in and out as they changed age and life-stage status, is an intriguing one for communities that are looking for stability over time in terms of leadership while also not losing the targeted constituency.

Those in their 20s and 30s expect groups targeted towards them to be professionally-driven.

The expectation of participants in 20s and 30s groups is that their initiatives be professionally driven and run. However, it must be acknowledged that this thesis does not include research on groups that have primary lay leadership. I have only examined groups that employ a professional with time specifically carved out for this work in their

contract. In these cases, the professional was the main source of leadership even when advisory boards and committees were involved.

This is an interesting finding considering the generational drive for participation and the desire to avoid hierarchical and corporate culture that they see inherent in synagogue life. On the other hand, if seen from the perspective of consumerism, those in their 20s and 30s may simply be looking for a product that meets their needs. They want to add their input and personalization, but, in the end, they also want a well-done professional product. In an age when they can shop around for the best product to fit almost any need, they are more likely to find this with a professionally-driven program that allows them to opt in and out at will rather than one that is lay-driven and therefore not as polished or may require effort on their behalf.

Saviv at Temple Emanu-El in New York City is primarily professionally driven, mostly under the direction of the assistant rabbi. Howie, the current assistant rabbi, is at the center of the organization. Though there was a singles club in existence prior to his arrival in 2007, the idea for Saviv in its current state was primarily his idea and continued to be his project during the three years of his tenure at Temple Emanu-El. In our interview together, he lamented the fact that he had not been able to put together a lay board. Though it was a conscious choice on his behalf not to engage a lay board, the only reason he says that he did not do so was because he did not have the time to create it the way he ideally envisioned it.

Rabbi Josh Strom, like Howie, is also at the center of his organization. It is his vision that guides the group and decisions are made primarily through him. Interestingly, he, too, like Howie at Saviv lamented the fact that he was the sole leader of his group

with an inactive lay committee. He wished that he had the time to engage a committee in a more active way.

While there is a board in place for Brooklyn Jews, Matt reports that it is primarily staff-driven. However, "what it looks like is a partnership." While the vision and decisions are still professionally-driven, there is active membership for particular initiatives within Brooklyn Jews such as the 'Shabbat in the Hood' campaign.

Young adults in their 20s and 30s want to feel like their needs are being served. Employing a professional to specifically seek out and meet those needs arguably creates the better product in the end. Each of these locations has chosen to have a professional who devotes part of their time to developing a vision for their local Jewish young community. A professional with a charismatic personality who fits the targeted demographic is the leadership expectation for 20s and 30s groups today.

Those in their 20s and 30s seek out space outside of the 'regular' synagogue space.

Young adults see synagogue space as uninviting space. Even synagogues that do hold events primarily in their synagogues rarely hold services in their own sanctuaries. Saviv at Temple Emanu-El and JetSet at Temple Shaaray Tefila opt instead for prayer space in other large rooms with movable chairs and a lack of bimah, a space devoid of what the sanctuary might impose. This means that the professionals setting up these spaces have already internalized that young people don't want what is already being offered.

Many services and events are also being held outside of temple spaces. Both the Riverway Project and Brooklyn Jews began their initiatives outside of the synagogue,

instead holding meetings and services in local homes. Riverway has maintained this by continuing to hold services in neighborhood homes while also integrating in a sanctuary service to the rotation once a month. Brooklyn Jews began as a non-synagogue endeavor. However, when it merged with Beth Elohim, it continued this outside-of-the-synagogue feeling by continuing to hold its high holy day services in Prospect Park. Interestingly enough, Brooklyn Jews has started a new campaign in the past year called 'Shabbat in the Hood,' essentially returning to its roots by reviving services in people's homes. This is in addition to the 20s and 30s services held in synagogue space once a month. St. Louis Next Dor and Nita hold the majority, if not all of their events, entirely outside of the synagogue.

Space is essential and who is seen to own that space is also essential. Young adults in their 20s and 30s need a space that is not the 'regular' space used by the rest of the synagogue as a way to define themselves against the synagogue that they do not want to be a part of.

Those in their 20s and 30s are drawn to groups that express a counter-cultural vibe.

This generation is seeking out a counter-cultural vibe, at least in opposition to the synagogue. Matt Soffer of Brooklyn Jews said this explicitly, "[Brooklyn Jews] started *against* something else, against 'bad' synagogue culture, against the establishment." The fact that even synagogues often stay away from utilizing their own space speaks to this. This also partly explains why young 20s and 30s don't join synagogues in the first place; synagogues represent what has 'always' been done and people in their 20s and 30s feel no need to follow in line for following-in-line's sake.

Josh Strom of JetSet calls himself an 'iconoclast' and mentioned numerous times during our interview together how he tries to break the images of the rabbi, the sermon, and the Shabbat service. Being out-of-the-box was important for him and for the group; it helped to define the group's identity.

In Nita's own vision report written in the fall of 2009 for Synagogue 3000, it states: "On a spectrum, Nita will be more like a start-up than an established corporation… corporations and companies are known for being bogged down by red tape, slow decision-making, and resistance to change. Nita will be risk-friendly, culturally forward, open to change and dynamic in its approach. There will be no decorum for decorum's sake. We will have a porous leadership structure. We will have a sense of humor about ourselves and the audacity of what we are trying to do. As an experimental community in Marin County, Nita will be willing to fail and will apply lessons learned to vibrant and new approaches to Judaism and Jewish life."

Nita is sending a very explicit message to appeal to those who are running away from institutions like synagogues that are perceived as being bogged down by "slow decision-making and resistance to change." Participants should expect something new and different from Nita, not the same-old synagogue or Jewish community that they are used to.

Defining oneself *against* something else, usually the old-school model of the synagogue is a trend noticed across the board for 20s and 30s initiatives. It is important for the group to be *other* and *new*, thereby shirking off the baggage associated with anything this generation and/or the local culture would deem unattractive.

A community initiative like Next Dor St. Louis that is based in a house rather than a synagogue is definitely sending a counter-cultural message in an American Jewish scene that is based around the congregation. Synagogues that hold their 20s and 30s events in bars also follow this trend. Even services in auditorium rooms in synagogues rather than in sanctuaries are trying to project an image that breaks the status quo and departs from the expected. Synagogues will go out of their way to *not* be synagogues when trying to attract those in their 20s and 30s in an attempt to be bold and counter-cultural. From the groups observed here, as long as it is not just a superficial switch of room or space, but rather representative of a response to a deeper need, this strategy appears to be working.

Another way these groups set themselves apart is through the creation of their own siddurim. Some are several sheets of photocopied pages stapled together (Saviv) while others are loosely bound (JetSet). What these groups have in common is that despite the synagogue having a siddur that they regularly use and may otherwise stand by (for instance, Emanu-El is known for and takes distinctive pride in its uncommon usage of the Union Prayer Book), these groups felt the need to create something *else,* producing another example of how 20s and 30s groups go out of their way to be different from their home institution. What is contained in the siddur appears to vary; some groups prefer more Hebrew, others less. Whereas Saviv's siddur is primarily secular rock songs, JetSet's siddur contains extensive Hebrew in comparison. What they all have in common is transliteration for accessibility.

Those in their 20s and 30s are not asking for God. However, they are willing to attend services.

God and searching for God are not major expressed interests for today's 20s and 30s.

Brooklyn Jews offers questionnaires each year at the high holy days, asking what interests attendants have. Matt reported that while 'God' never comes up as something people are looking for, 'spirituality' occasionally does. The word that occurs most often is 'connection,' used in such phrases as 'looking for connection,' looking to 'connect with important values,' and 'connect with community.' Matt sees this as related to the question of God, but not quite there.

When asked what they were looking for in a series of house meetings when Riverway was in its beginning stages, the participants responded, "Shabbat meals and services in an intimate setting, serious learning about Judaism, and social action projects." Seeking anything related to God or spirituality was not explicitly mentioned.

However, just because 20s and 30s are not looking for God initially does not mean that it should be entirely counted out. When asked how his Saviv participants interact with the concept of God and if they were seeking God, Howie responded that though they wouldn't use that language themselves necessarily, they were open to it. As a rabbi, he felt compelled to bring God into the conversation and to specifically engage with them using that language. There are many words he said that could be synonyms of the same concept of God such as spirituality. He feels that it is his role as a rabbi to open the term God back up to them in a progressive setting as a possibility. The Saviv Shabbat service in December of 2009 dealt a lot with spirituality, but it steered clear of

mentioning the word God itself. Shira Kline who led that service used the word spirituality throughout, apparently a much safer word for this generation.

Services may be a pathway to talking about God in some form and though services are not always at the top of the list of what 20s and 30s are asking for, they still seem to come out to them in numbers. This may be because prayer services are seen as an essential form not only of acting on one's Judaism, but also of acting on one's religion societally. Attending religious services is the major way of counting one's 'members' in churches. Services also allow for the other important needs such as the social and the communal to be met as well.

There is no one-size-fits-all model of success for 20s and 30s groups. Much is dependent on local demography and culture.

What the different models have shown in this study is that there is no one model of success. Knowing the local demography and culture and being able to adapt to those specifics appear to be key. The Synagogue 3000 Next Dor network (of which Nita and Next Dor St. Louis are a part) is healthy because it currently supports several different models, taking into account what each local community wants and needs. Nita in Marin County is a suburban community. A program model that focused on methods aimed at 20-something singles would not have been successful. Marketing to a suburban population with young children on the other hand is successful. Matt's experience moving from Brooklyn Jews to his new Philadelphia congregation this past year is an example of how one model of reaching 20s and 30s is not necessarily translatable to a different community. Matt, a success in Brooklyn with Brooklyn Jews for three years,

was unable to transfer that same model to a new community. There is no one uniform model that can be transplanted from location to location and from population to population. Though there are trends to be aware of and tools that can be utilized, there is no one set way to build a community – for any age range.

With these findings now in place, it is time to return to the questions first posed in Chapter 1:

1) What are the obstacles to engaging today's 20s and 30s in Jewish congregational life?

Delayed marriage and child-bearing have had a major effect on Jewish organizational life. Previous expectations of when and how a young Jew would become engaged in a synagogue can no longer be relied on. Congregations, accustomed to reaching out to and meeting the needs of the Builder and Boomer populations, are generally not prepared for nor do they understand the needs of Generations X and Y.

As for specific obstacles for engaging Jews in their 20s and 30s in congregational life, fear, on the part of congregations, is a major obstacle. For current stakeholders in congregations, the fears may be: *If we start to appeal to them, will there be room for me? Will everything change? Will this congregation even look like mine anymore?*

While at first, it may appear that the question of whether or not to engage and empower the next generation would a no-brainer, the reality is that proposing a shift that will allow those under 40 a space in synagogues can be a frightening prospect.

It is difficult to make the argument to the older generation that clergy, staff, and resources should also be devoted to the unaffiliated when the affiliated demand attention. They are, after all, the ones who provide the financial resources for congregations to do

their work. What the congregation's 'work' is provides the real question. One argument is that their work should be about serving paying members with the resources that they have provided. Alternatively, it can be argued that the resources should also be put towards strengthening the Jewish people as a whole, which includes outreach to the youngest adult generation.

The larger question of what exactly is the congregation's mission comes into play when considering the opportunities and the obstacles to bringing in 20s and 30s. A congregation and its members must ask themselves if their mission is primarily to serve those who pay dues or do they also have a responsibility to reach out to the Jewish people outside of their congregation. As Edward Hammett puts it in his aptly titled book: *Reaching People Under 40 while Keeping People Under 60*, 'Do we have a missions or a maintenance mentality?'[37] Translated for the Jewish world and for the specific problem being dealt with here, it can be asked: Is a congregation interested in a larger mission involving the Jewish people or in maintaining the status quo?

Due to this common problem and misunderstanding about ambiguity of mission, there is a worry in congregations that current stakeholders will withhold their dues and their gifts if they see the synagogue going in a direction that does not directly serve them. Reaching out to the next generation may seem like an easy decision - however, when it means that the rabbi may not be available on certain Shabbatot, or it means that 'regular' services begin to incorporate alterations so that they appeal more to a younger sensibility, it is easier to understand why such resistance takes place. The question that can be asked

[37] Hammett, 27.

by a current stakeholder is: *Why pay attention to those who don't care when* I *care and* I *need attention?*

Maintaining the status quo is quite comforting. Resentment can boil over when resources, especially when those resources are few and far between, are shared with those that don't provide them. Blame can easily be placed on Generations X and Y: *Why aren't they providing an equal share of resources? Why aren't they engaged? It's their fault, their problem, not our problem and our resistance of change.* "[T]rading the secure for the unknown may mean losing the older generation, while it may or may not reach the younger crowd."[38] It's a risk to make change. There's a risk of failure.

Congregations face a crucial crisis in deciding how best to proceed and exactly how to assign resources. Synagogues may not necessarily have the staff or resources to do the outreach necessary. In order to create them, synagogues would have to make adjustments to their expectations of time from staff and/or from existing resources, rethinking what services they can reasonably live with and without.

To make the decision to devote resources to 20s and 30s (especially for congregations that lack abundant resources) represents the beginning of a shift in congregational culture, one from maintenance to mission, one from serving members to serving the Jewish people as a whole.

If the reason to reach out to the younger generation is merely to generate new members and therefore new income for the congregation, then the initiative is likely to fail. Synagogues are alienating to today's 20s and 30s for precisely this reason; they reject and resent being courted to fulfill the needs and expectations of the prior

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[38] *Ibid*, 5.

generation.

A shift in congregational culture is needed, one in which its leadership and its members feel a sense of a greater responsibility to the Jewish people and a profound sadness at the possibility of a lost generation because of the way that Judaism has been packaged for them. A congregation must exhibit a real desire to build Judaism up, one soul at a time. It's about the participants rather than the synagogue, and in the end, hopefully both will be transformed.

Those in their 20s and 30s will best be engaged in Jewish life through congregations that understand this. The models studied in this thesis understand or are beginning to understand this concept. Emanu-El with its historic philanthropic streak knows that it is their mission to reach out to New York City area 20s and 30s even if those Jews do not end up affiliating with the congregation and has begun to set aside staff and resources to do just that. Central Reform Congregation sponsors Next Dor St. Louis even though from one perspective, Next Dor St. Louis' goal is not to build up the congregation. In fact, Next Dor St. Louis' official vision statement on its website[39] states that its mission is to create "a post-denominational, non-institutional, urban Jewish space for young adults in St. Louis." Nowhere on the website is there a mention of the Reform institution, Central Reform Congregation, which funds and supports it.

Congregations do not need to be nor should expect to be entirely selfless in this endeavor. Riverway has generated hundreds of members for Temple Israel in its almost ten-year existence and so has the relationship between Brooklyn Jews and Beth Elohim. What is important is the congregational shift that took place that allowed for independent

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[39] http://www.nextdorstl.com/vision.html

or at least semi-independent visioning and programming, a lack of focus on membership, and a zeal to support this endeavor for the purpose of building up the Jewish people rather than any particular synagogue. Synagogues that have engaged in this major culture shift, that are more about mission rather than membership, are primed for successful 20s and 30s initiatives.

2) What are the opportunities for engaging today's 20s and 30s in Jewish congregational life?

As Carroll and Roof point out in their study on generational changes in congregational life, "Congregations constitute the demographic form of religious gathering in American society."[40] The congregational form of religious participation is so dominant that even those religions that don't necessarily gather as congregations such as Hinduism and Buddhism tend to do so in the United States. The congregation is ingrained in American religious life, including Judaism.

The synagogue is currently the best model that we have for Jewish communal life that has the potential to reach Jews of all ages, at all life-stages, and can fulfill their educational, communal, and spiritual needs. Is every synagogue filling its potential today? No. But that does not mean that the synagogue as a model should be wholly discarded. By taking part in the cultural shift from maintenance to mission discussed earlier, synagogues can be in a better position to not just serve 20s and 30s, but the entire spectrum of Jews needing their services.

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[40] Carroll and Roof, 9.

The advantage to a synagogue for serving 20s and 30s is that, if positioned correctly, a synagogue has the capacity to follow a Jew throughout their life as opposed to forcing an individual to look for a new organization once they age or stage out of a specific community. A 20s and 30s initiative based within a synagogue provides a natural flow for an individual once they marry, have children, and enter their 40s as opposed to an initiative that is targeted only to 20s and 30s and is not connected with another institution to hold them when they no longer fit that profile.

Initiatives targeted towards 20s and 30s based out of synagogues that focus more on their unique appeal, that of meaning-making, connection to roots, and an amalgamation of tradition and the contemporary are more capable of drawing in 20s and 30s. Synagogues that drop their push for immediate membership and are able to respond to the 20s and 30s mindset rather than the Baby Boomer one will be more successful. Synagogues are advantageous for this type of work because of their potential access to a variety of avenues for exploration including tefillah, social justice work, the arts, and social connections. They have physical space (which cannot be overlooked) as well as the potential for staff and resources to devote to the cause. As the current natural base for Jewish communities, synagogues can be and are beginning to be primed for bringing in today's 20s and 30s.

3) What techniques and practices are especially important in working with 20s and 30s?

Knowing Your Target Constituency

It is important for any congregation to understand who their target constituency is. It would not make sense, for instance, for a suburban congregation in an upper-class

neighborhood to primarily try to attract young single 20-somethings. This might be a more appropriate response in an urban setting or college town. Specifically, a congregation should understand its own demography: are they urban or suburban, are they planning primarily to reach those with children or without children. Focus groups, house meetings, and one-on-ones are all helpful ways to understand what those in the community are looking for.

It is important that the congregation also acknowledge who and what else in the area is targeting this age range, including other Jewish organizations of various denominations (and non-denominations) and institutional backgrounds (independent minyanim, JCCs, etc.) so as to partner with like organizations and/or to carve out a particular niche for an unfulfilled need. If social justice needs are successfully being met by another organization, having social justice be the core of the new congregational 20s and 30s initiative is not a prudent idea.

It is also crucial for congregations, their leadership, and the 20s and 30s professional to have a basic understanding of the sociology of this generation. This could translate into educating temple boards and staff around why outreach that may appeal to Baby Boomers wont work on Generation X, their rejection of a membership mentality, and statistics around delayed marriage and child-bearing so as to create new expectations and less room for disappointment with results.

There is no one-size-fits-all model; knowing your community is key.

Hiring the Right Professional

As discussed in the above findings, there appears to be a direct correspondence between the demographic profile of the professional and the profile of the targeted constituency. Once the targeted constituency has been established, finding a professional who is of that demographic tends towards a higher likelihood for success.

As in any profession, but especially in this one, charisma counts. Those in their 20s and 30s are seeking out relationships and the relationship that one builds with the professional is key. Also key is the 'authenticity' of the Jewish professional as well as how representative they are of the generation. This translates into an individual who takes Judaism seriously and who is perceived to have successfully and meaningfully merged a Jewish life with a contemporary American life.

As Howie pointed out, participants are also looking for some kind of 'hekhsher,' a Jewish stamp of approval. A rabbi, though not necessary, can provide that hekhsher.

However, a professional, no matter how charismatic or authentic, can only be as successful as the amount of time they are able to allot to the initiative and how committed they are to the endeavor. All of the professionals in this study, with the exception of Jeremy Morrison whose full-time position is primarily focused on the Riverway Project, complained about the lack of time they had to devote to their groups due to their other professional duties or to their part-time status. Synagogues (senior rabbis, boards, etc.) need to find the resources to allow their professionals to focus on their 20s and 30s initiatives, which might entail taking other duties off of their plates if those duties interfere with their 20s and 30s work.

The Power of the Personal Invitation

In terms of extending the personal invitation, the right professional here again is key. Everyone desires to feel wanted, appreciated, needed, especially those in their 20s and 30s who are used to customized treatment.

Personal one-on-one conversations are the means to learning more about the target constituency and about their particular needs and desires. By doing so, it allows one to narrow down what people are looking for and what might be successful in reaching and drawing them in. It also allows for a personal relationship to flourish. A personal invitation depends on a personal relationship. Without the relationship, there is no incentive for Gen Xers and Yers to join. Young Jewish adults have invitations to many groups, events, and communities. A stock fill-in-your-name invitation is one of many that they receive. A personal invitation, on the other hand, arrives out of a genuine desire to plug this person into a worthwhile endeavor that one believes will benefit their life and will benefit the Jewish people. It arrives out of personal relationship, out of a one-on-one that explores who this person is and how this person's life can be enhanced through their involvement in a 20s and 30s initiative. The personal invitation is an important way to acknowledge the individuality of each young Jewish adult.

Low barriers to entry

Gen Xers and Yers who enter into Reform synagogues' 20s and 30s initiatives are most likely to possess a low level of Jewish knowledge and a basic understanding of Jewish ritual. Often these individuals are quite accomplished in other areas of their lives. The key is to raise the bar of relevant conversation in a way that also accounts for a

beginner's level of Judaic knowledge. No one, including Gen Xers and Yers, want to feel incompetent. Fear of incompetence and of being outed for that incompetence can be a major alienating factor for Jews of all ages.

A skilled teacher/professional who is able to teach while not making the participants feel unintelligent is crucial. Riverway's 'Torah and Tonics on Tuesdays,' their bi-weekly Torah study session mixed with dinner and drinks as well as 'Mining for Meaning,' their 4-week class on ritual held in Riverway participants' homes are examples of raising the bar of knowledge and conversation while also not highlighting participants' lack of knowledge during the teaching. Each event is advertised as requiring no prior Jewish knowledge. The basis is community, especially the class held in neighborhood homes, rather than showmanship about who knows more about what material.

Another common barrier to entry is Hebrew. Most young Jews who would enter a 20s and 30s group sponsored by a Reform synagogue enter with no to very little Hebrew skills. All of the siddurim used by the models studied in this paper have transliterated their Hebrew texts so as to allow for the most accessibility to the communal tefillah experience. Many bands that play on Shabbat for these groups often incorporate modern musical styles as well as songs that are not necessarily Jewish as ways in for the non-traditional and for those lacking a Hebrew background.

Synagogues need to offer an open door to 20s and 30s that allow them to feel confident about their Jewish identities without any criteria to check off on the way in or knowledge necessary to understand a teaching or a service. It all must be accessible or 20s and 30s will not return.

'New'[41] Social Media

This generation has more tools for communication at their fingertips than any previous one. They expect sophisticated outreach. This includes knowledge of specific social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and podcasts and how the youngest adult generations use them, which means that they can't be viewed simply as a replacement for newsletters, mailings, and even e-mails. Rather, their use involves a new understanding of how this generation operates.

In a recent article on the use of new media by synagogues, Lisa Colton, founder and president of Darim Online, a Virginia-based nonprofit that helps Jewish organizations utilize new media stressed, "When synagogues and religious schools first turn to new media, they tend to use them to perform typical tasks, just more efficiently. They send event invitations by e-mail instead of snail mail, or create a Web site that clergy and staff use as an online bulletin board. The messages arrive quicker at homes, and without stamps, but it's still one-way, top-down communication. By delving deeper, Jewish clergy, educators and others discover that these media tools demand a different way of talking and listening, encouraging active participation and grass-roots involvement."[42] The use of new social media is not just about replicating the old in newer, flashier formats; it's about changing the nature of the conversation completely by engaging more people in the conversation. This is an essential understanding of how the

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[41] 'New' as of the writing of this thesis. This writer humbly acknowledges that this section on social media will most likely be out of date in about six months from the completion of this thesis in the year 2010.

[42] http://jta.org/news/article/2009/12/20/1009812/synagogues-blogging-and-tweeting-their-way-to-new-kinds-of-communication.

younger generation operates in general, simply represented through this new means of communication.

Tefillah Aesthetic

Over and over again in this study, professionals spoke up about creating a particular tefillah aesthetic that appeals to 20s and 30s. What that aesthetic is exactly appears to vary from location to location, but all professionals agreed that they wanted "good music." When applied to tefillah, this means, in some cases, utilizing relevant and current styles of music in prayer and in other cases, utilizing what some would render as an 'authentic' Jewish style of music in prayer. 'Authentic' can mean a great many things; here, it means what it is perceived to be traditional.

Many 20s and 30s groups in Reform settings find success using bands that put traditional Jewish prayers to more modern settings. Some groups prefer more Hebrew and some less. What is seen across the board is the desire for a prayer leader (in their 20s and 30s) who understands Jewish prayer and is able to translate it for today's generation, is clearly not performing (who is perceived to be praying for their own sake rather than to impress a crowd), and who exudes charisma.

Congregational Cultural Shift & Membership

Congregations that "get it" have shifted their focus: they have a mission over maintenance mentality. They have begun a transformative culture shift of what it means for a young Jew to be affiliated and engaged as well as a shift in the priorities of the synagogue. Synagogues needs to think communally rather than solely about their own

institutional needs. A 20s and 30s initiative cannot be based in the hopes of creating eventual membership in the home congregation. Instead, it primarily needs to be based in strengthening the Jewish people as a whole.

When synagogue membership is offered, it needs to be membership that is financially accessible and for more than just an introductory year. Membership that lacks a specific amount or at least includes a sliding scale is most acceptable to today's 20s and 30s.

Congregations Invested in Constant Innovation

Key to this project is innovation. What today's younger generation wants and needs will not be what tomorrow's younger generation will want and need. Just as we have seen major cultural and demographic shifts in the last fifteen years, so we will see them again. This can be frustrating to be sure. Just when we think we have a clear snapshot about who this generation really is and a model that is just right for reaching them, they've moved onto the next lifestage and age stage in their lives and it's time to figure out what the newest post-college generation is all about. That is why congregations cannot afford to get too comfortable and must be primed for and committed to constant innovation and the change process. They must realize that the model for reaching 20s and 30s will continue to be in flux as the generation changes.

Summary – Putting It All Together

American Jewish life has long been organized around the synagogue and arguably, it is still the best model that we have for meeting an individual throughout all of the stages of his or her life and for communal gathering as well. Many are not ready to throw away the synagogue just yet even if it is failing at reaching the next generation of adult Jews.

The generation of Jews now in their 20s and 30s differs from prior ones. Many young Jews are experiencing an "extended singlehood," as they are marrying and having children later than ever before. Some are not marrying or having children at all. The traditional synagogue model is one that is more appealing to couples with school-age children. This model is not one that will work for many young Jews. A significant amount of time is lost reaching this generation if synagogues simply wait for and rely on Jewish couples to have children. The rising rates of intermarriage challenge this assumption even further.

Other factors drive Jewish 20s and 30s away from synagogue life. They feel as if it does not speak to them. Generation X and Y are used to customized marketing and customized products. A synagogue's one-size-fits-all approach is not attractive nor frankly needed or wanted by today's generation. Today's 20s and 30s have no need for a membership model that is based on a system of loyalty and obligation that they simply do not relate to. Instead, they are looking for personal meaning, for communities to opt in and out of at will, and for porous boundaries, particularly between Jewish and non-Jewish life. One could easily argue that the synagogue is the opposite of porous boundaries. It is

the definition of Jewish space. All of the above points to the many barriers that stand between the Gen Xers and Yers and synagogue participation.

However, some communities are trying new approaches and seeing varying amounts of success. The sites studied in this thesis have made it their mission to begin to think through the barriers that currently stand in the way for today's young adults and to present formulations of possible solutions. Their approaches vary, but they have all bought into creating change in their synagogues.

The professional in each location is extremely important to the entire endeavor. Jews in their 20s and 30s are seeking out role models that understand them and who develop visions for initiatives that think outside of the box, are countercultural, and provide space and room for non-conventional Jewish activities. Some focus on worship, some focus on study, and others focus on culture. Some models appeal primarily to the single 20-something crowd while others target older 30-somethings with children. No one model can be replicated perfectly in every location. Each site plays with a different variation on what works dependent on the regional culture, the demography, the synagogue culture, and the resources at hand.

Groups focusing in on this age range have not been around for very long and more research, short and long term is needed to unpack what this generation is all about and what the best steps are for reaching them. This thesis is a step in that direction. One of the most important learnings from this study that I have gleaned is the need for synagogues to first acknowledge the problem that exists and then be willing to change and even transform themselves accordingly. Reaching 20s and 30s is not about building up a particular synagogue's membership base; rather, it is about buying into the greater

mission of building the Jewish people up, one individual at a time. It is about Judaism, not Temple Beth X or Congregation Beth Y.

Ultimately, the Jewish community will be best served if synagogues become reflective institutions, capable of constant innovation. The truth is that as soon as we get this problem solved, the problem of how best to serve today's 20s and 30s (as if we ever really will), then they wont be in their 20s and 30s anymore. We will have a new generation of 20s and 30s with which to contend, representing a whole new set of needs. It is important to remain innovative and capable of change, to not settle into any boxes, and to be open to what the new generation has to offer.

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