Community Built Upon Relationships:

How Moishe House Engages the Millennial Generation

By

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Abstract

Ron Wolfson asks, "How do we transform our communities from institutions of programs to communities of relationships?" (Wolfson, 2013, p. 5). David Cygielman, Moishe House CEO and co-founder, asked similar questions focusing on a subset of the Jewish Millennial Generation (20-somethings). His curiosity was spurred by realizing that young adult Jews were not inspired by the current method of Jewish engagement. Rather than passively expect young adult Jews to feel traditionally obligated, as long-standing institutions such as synagogues have historically operated, organizations must emotionally engage their respective demographic by actively building one-on-one relationships.

Founded in 2006, Moishe House employs a bottom-up approach, where 3-5 young Jewish adults live in a house, offer holiday meals, social events, and other Jewish activities for their peers. It has since expanded to 58 houses in 14 countries and has been lauded by many sectors of the Jewish community. Residents engage people of their own generation. Young adults feel comfortable attending events, because it provides a "home away from home", acceptance, and relationships.

This thesis examines Moishe House's engagement model and how the fundamental features of which have helped it stand out within the Jewish community and the community at large. In an attempt to highlight how Moishe House can serve as a model for other organizations, a small qualitative study was conducted, supplemented by extant data. The research is based on interviews with 15 Moishe House residents and participants, and observations of 10 events at two sites.

The research revealed that some houses have frequent resident turnover. While this allows programs to evolve and attract new participants, it can be a source of internal conflict.

This thesis offers recommendations for strengthening Moishe House's important work in Los Angeles and beyond, and insights for other organizations that expect to emulate this successful model.

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Community Built Upon Relationships:

How Moishe House engages the Millennial Generation

On an average night, the pleasant residential street where the San Fernando Valley Moishe House (SFVMH) sits is sparse with cars. However, on a night with an event such as Shabbat, cars line the entire street. On a particular Shabbat evening, the house was filled with food, friends, and music. Two of the residents moved quickly around the kitchen preparing chicken and other Shabbat dinner items. Large living room French doors opened up into the backyard and patio where Tiki torches illuminated the outside. The guests seemed to be happily mingling with one another throughout the house and back yard. As I walked around I could hear laughter and great conversation. The remaining two residents made their rounds among the guests. It seemed as though they were attempting to, at the very least, acknowledge every guest. The guests appeared to respond positively to this interaction.

Approximately one hour later, everyone was beckoned into a guesthouse located in the backyard, which has been converted into what I affectionately refer to as a "banquet hall." This roughly 80-square-foot exterior room comfortably sat more than 60 people for dinner. As every Moishe House adopts its own traditions and develops its individual identity, the SFVMH has a practice that is performed during Shabbat dinners. That to which I refer is known as the "Shabbat Wish." Simply described, a Shabbat wish is anyone addressing the group during dinner with anything such as a wish, giving thanks, or merely saying hello to everyone. However the residents and many of the guests take pride in adding a bit more flair to their respective Shabbat wishes. That is, they will stand up with a drink in their hand (e.g. juice, wine, beer, or a shot) and toast as they present their Shabbat wish to the group. Those listening will

participate by toasting and cheering. This way everyone feels a part of Shabbat wish and closer to each other.

The above narrative provides insight into a Shabbat dinner at the San Fernando Moishe House. The SFVMH is just one of three located within the Los Angeles area. With one of the largest Jewish populations outside of Israel, Los Angeles is a city filled with diverse sects of Judaism and varied backgrounds, and it is often difficult to find strong, meaningful connections. Accordingly, it may be challenging, especially for young people, to find their place and root themselves in the community. There are more than 500,000 Jews in Los Angeles (Herman, 1998, p. 3). In an effort to build a meaningfully interconnected Jewish community, it is important to ask the right questions. How do we bring Jews together in a meaningful way? What attracts them to each other and what will keep them together? Is there something more that is necessary than simply being Jewish?

Moishe House has an extraordinary ability to bring young adult Jews together. Why has it been so successful? This inquiry may first beg the question, what is the measure of success? Is it simply a numbers game? If many people attend programs and events, then is it automatically a success? This is a dated method of measuring success and research suggests otherwise, "Success is not butts in seats, not more programs, not more one-offs" (Wolfson. 2013, p. 23). Instead the question to ask is, "Did we engage each person in significant relationship[s]" (Wolfson, 2103, p. 23).

The most significant observation at the Shabbat dinner was the relationship building. I saw guests forming, strengthening, and developing relationships. "[The goal is]...not gaining more members; it's gaining more Jews. It's about people, not programs" (Wolfson, 2013, p. 22).

The Moishe House residents adopt this perspective. At the SFVMH, the Shabbat wish is a custom that people do not simply follow; rather they participate in it and take ownership over it.

Moishe House does not attempt to engage by employing deterring practices often ascribed to other organizations, but by volunteerism and choice. This choice is a result of the bonds forged between everyone in this community. Accordingly everyone may come and share herself in a casual way that does not feel forced. Young adult Jews seem to grow from the relationships they build with each other. This is part of the process by which Moishe House develops the Jewish community.

Jonathan is a twenty-five year old Las Vegas transplant who moved to Los Angeles in order to attend graduate school. He describes himself as a tall, awkward individual and unfortunately has felt out of place within his new home.

Shana is a twenty-six year old Los Angeles native who currently works as an administrative assistant. Although she has a wide network of friendly acquaintances, Shana has struggled to develop strong, lasting, Jewish relationships. She explained that she feels like she is in a "state of limbo" and needs to transition professionally and personally.

I spoke to these two young adults Jews at Moishe House events. They come from different backgrounds and are both looking to be a part of something that will add Jewish resonance to their lives. They desire to be part of a community and maintain meaningful relationships. Moishe House serves to provide such a community and facilitate the development of these relationships. More accurately, it provides the opportunity for these individuals to carve out a more perfectly shaped niche that fits their lifestyle while simultaneously creating new and long-lasting relationships with peers. Another way to describe this is to say that Moishe House

engages Jewish Millennials in such a way that allows and promotes their ability to live Jewishly as they see fit.

Success Factors

As a Jew, a student, an amateur ethnographer, and a Jewish Millennial seeking a meaningful connection, I chose to study Moishe House in order to learn about its engagement model; how it works and why it is considered incredibly successful. Its "model…trains, supports and sponsors young Jewish leaders as they create" (Moishe House, n.d., About Moishe House, para. 1) and "provide meaningful Jewish experiences for young adults around the world by supporting leaders in their 20s as they create vibrant home-based Jewish communities for themselves and their peers" (Moishe House, n.d., Mission and Vision, para. 1).

With 58 houses in 14 countries, Moishe House orients itself as a non-denominational, pluralistic, international organization (Moishe House, n.d., "Is Moishe House affiliated?", para. 1). This is, in part, due to its unique business model that enables young Jews to create and cultivate Jewish community "on their own terms – for their peers, in ways that are meaningful and relevant" (Moishe House, n.d., The Moishe House Model, para. 1).

Jewish leaders from various sectors of the community have praised Moishe House for having one of the strongest and most promising engagement models for attracting and connecting with Jewish Millennials. Spokoiny (2012), President and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network, describes Moishe House as, "innovative, cool, grassroots, [and] refreshing; the poster-child for young-adult engagement in the Jewish community" (para. 3). This model is quite unique when compared to most organizations that attempt to engage a similar demographic. Additionally, other organizations have begun to adopt a comparable type of engagement model, thus testifying to the success of the Moishe House approach.

Moishe House provides a nonthreatening, inviting space where you will find "Jews but also…non-Jewish friends,…social butterflies and socially awkwards, having a genuine[ly] good time…. not because a synagogue or our parents told us to, but because we all *wanted* [emphasis added] to [and this] is what ultimately creates real community" (Rodarte, 2012, para. 4). Allowing non-Jewish friends to participate helps build a stronger Jewish community because it does not force Jewish Millennials to reform their social networks and existing community. In fact, this philosophy encourages them to embrace the Jewish value of Hachnasat Orchim, thereby inspiring a sense of personal Judaic pride.

Residents are excited to share their lives and build a closely connected Jewish community. At Moishe House, participants have the opportunity, "to see what…and how [the residents] think. Maybe some…ideas are foolish and need to be challenged -- [and participants will] certainly have the opportunity [to voice their opinions]. But [the residents] also have cutting-edge insights into [the Millennial] generation" (Yaffe, 2012, para. 7). These interactions foster a modern dialogue rooted in an ancient tradition of questioning and of developing a sense of community around Jewish tradition, like Shabbat, in a secular world.

A seasoned resident explains to her fellow Moishe House resident community that you must, "'be flexible, and open to your community in need. Don't think you're going to teach [everyone].' Instead, learn from them and 'cultivate leadership'" (Rosenblatt, 2009, para. 21). Rosenblatt (2009) responds that this is "good advice for [other] Jewish organizations striving mightily to reach young people, but too often with top-down programming" (para. 22).

A top-down organizational model, at least in this regard, has become obsolete, trite, and lethargic. Kim and Mauborgne (1999) explain that successful companies differ from less successful ones primarily due to the strategic assumptions adopted by the managers. "[L]ess

successful companies followed conventional strategic logic [while] managers of high-growth companies followed...the logic of value innovation" (p. 189). Ultimately this idea advocates for a more peripherally organized structure. This concept is a new take on an old line of thought suggesting that bottom-up is the opposite of top-down when it is in fact outside-in (Denning, 2011).

This conventional logic can be highlighted by one synagogue's struggle to adapt to the changing needs and characteristics of the community. It was proposed that this synagogue organize events across town as an effort to reach their congregants where they lived, but the suggestion was dismissed, "'we have a beautiful building, so why would we ever hold an event anywhere else?'" (Savenor, 2013, p. 11). This logic and inflexibility was a detriment to the organization. "By focusing on their building, this synagogue board let potential members, future leaders and opportunities for Jewish engagement slip through their fingers" (Savenor, 2013, p. 11).

Benor (2011) highlights a distinction between two organizational spheres: "'mainstream' (establishment)...and...innovative' (nonestablishment)...." (p. 65). Some leaders of innovative organizations adopt an "unconventional orientation" (Benor, 2011, p. 66), which is akin to Kim and Mauborgne's assertions (1999). Moishe House is the early adopter for this innovative home-based community engagement model and it has given them a first mover advantage.

"[Organizations with traditional engagement models] need to recognize that in today's complex world there are no "single bullets" anymore. This is particularly true in the area of 'young adult engagement' in which the theory of 'one size fits all' is long gone" (Spokoiny, 2012, para. 16). Relationship building is the next paradigm of young Jewish adult engagement. "People yearn for personal meaning not membership, for community not committees, and for a

sense of spiritual purpose not programs" (Savenor, 2013, p. 11). Jewish Millennials are able to grow and learn about themselves through the relationship they build with one another.

My research intends to discover the unique characteristics of Moishe House. What has allowed Moishe House to reach its current success? How is the organization structured? These questions help drive my research.

Research Questions

1. How does the Moishe House organization attempt to effectively engage Jewish Millennials?
    a. How does it compare to other similar organizations?
    b. How does it address the characteristics of Jewish Millennials as reported in previous research?
2. How do the various Moishe Houses within the Los Angeles community differ from each other with regard to participants, programming, and overall engagement?
    a. As a result of these differences, what respective identities do the houses take on?
    b. How are the approaches of the houses, if at all, a response to the community?

Literature Review

Organizational Engagement

American Jewry has evolved in countless ways since its inception. After World War II, there was an influx of Jews into America (Elazar, 1995, p. 71). Due to the increased population, the Jewish community became much more complex and as a result, societal norms transformed. "Since World War II a new kind of identification with Jewish tradition has developed. ...It would seem to be incumbent upon all Jews who wish to be part of the community to identify with some aspect of Jewish tradition" (Elazar, 1995, p.162).

It seems that Jews had a choice of how to identify, but with the caveat that they *needed* to identify in some way. "The acceptance of one's obligation to other Jews is...a crucial element in the belief system" (Elazar, 1995, p.162). This obligation is also reflected in more recent years, "The...term, 'Unaffiliated', reflects the importance that Jews attach to formal belonging" (Cohen, 2012, p. 1). Jews at this time were aware of the importance of being involved with their respective Jewish communities. However, there might be a danger from feeling obligated to get involved in ways that they otherwise would not have wanted. That is, they were, "subject to the pressures generated by the subgroups in the Jewish community to which the individual Jews belong" (Elazar, 1995, p.162).

In order to effectively engage Jews in any manner, it is important to understand their current engagement. This can be broken down into a few categories. Jewish affiliation as defined by Kakhnovets and Wolf (2011) "was made up of two measures: Jewish activities and membership and Jewish religious practices" (p. 513). Jewish activities, Jewish membership, Jewish religious practices were defined as "visiting places of Jewish interest...belonging to a synagogue...and celebrating the Jewish High Holidays, etc." (Kakhnovets and Wolf, 2011,

p.513) respectively. Their study revealed that, "the pattern of relationships with measures of well-being for Jewish ethnic identity and affiliation are different, and although Jewish affiliation is related to Jewish ethnic identity, these are separate constructs" (Kakhnovets and Wolf, 2011, p.513).

Although affiliation and engagement may be classified in this way in an effort to make it easier for organizations to orient themselves within a certain framework, it may in fact hinder their ability to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. American Jewish life continually evolves and manifests itself in a myriad of behaviors and practices. How Jews affiliate with and connect to their community, fellow Jews, non-Jews, and their Judaism itself changes from generation to generation. Cygielman explains this importance:

> Although the core values and traditions of the Jewish people have stayed fairly consistent over the past few decades, the way that we connect and relate with one another has decidedly changed. As a result of this continual global evolution, the Jewish community must also adjust its approach to serving its constituents around the world. (Cygielman, 2012, p. 22)

The way in which young adult Jews choose to be involved and engaged is fundamental to the way in which the Jewish community will take shape. Additionally, the way in which this involvement is interpreted by organizations helps further shape the future of the Jewish community. Cohen makes an interesting statement:

> "The Unaffiliated" is less a term of opprobrium than one signaling a social problem. "The Unaffiliated" connotes those who are lost –temporarily or possibly permanently –to the Jewish community, if not the Jewish people. Concern about intermarriage, ineffective Jewish education, and unattractive options for Jewish involvement have fueled the

> perception of large and rising numbers of Unaffiliated Jews, as well as increasing investment in "reaching" them. (Cohen, 2012, p. 2)

The claim that this demographic is a social problem may not be accurate. Instead it may be argued that this group represents a threat to the more traditionally affiliated Jews, that is, those that have memberships with various institutions such as synagogues and clubs. If this is granted, then this threat may be perceived as a social problem and the unaffiliated may appear to be "lost." However, If Cohen makes these claims based on the assumption that the unaffiliated do not have adequate options for Jewish involvement, then one might be inclined to see the problem as structural rather than social. Maybe the establishment of the institutions necessary to provide the draw for this sub-group of Jews lagged behind the social need. The unaffiliated represent an evolving population and they may simply be the next step in the evolution within the Jewish community. With further research, Moishe House may prove to be more than an adequate option for the unaffiliated.

Powers (2012) claims "the rich history of American Judaism can provide models for local community engagement...reorienting American Jews back toward their local communities" (para. 7). However, Frankel (2013) responds to Powers asserting that, "those models cannot simply be imitated, as shifting demographics are forcing us to constantly reevaluate them. In the past, synagogues, ...[JCCs], and local federations catered to a generally homogenous constituency and could focus primarily on programming for traditional ...[families]" (para. 7).

Jewish Millennials

"Our historical 'one size fits all' model is no longer sufficient in an increasingly bespoke world. Each generation represents unique challenges as well as terrific opportunities" (Schwartz, 2011, para. 2).

Strictly speaking, Moishe House strives to engage people in their twenties. Given that it is 2013, I have decided to focus on a portion of the generation that falls within Moishe House's target market, namely the Jewish Millennial Generation. It is essential to define particular terms before moving forward.

Winograd and Hais (2011) define the Millennial Generation as, "young Americans born between 1982 and 2003" (p. 199). Clearly, as of today anyone born in 1994 or later (younger than twenty) or 1983 or earlier (older than twenty-nine) is not part of the target market. Therefore, the populations of the Millennial Generation on which I will focus are those born from 1984 to 1993 inclusive. I stated above that Moishe House strives to engage the Jewish population of the Millennial Generation. However, there is an important distinction between the meaning of the terms *Jewish Millennial* and *Millennial Jew*. This pertains to the identity, or more accurately, the identities this generation possesses. I will come back to this distinction later on. Designations of these identities include, "American", "Millennial", "Jew", "Young Adult", "Jewish", etc. In this thesis, for simplicity, the definition of identity is an individual's self-awareness of who they are, or who they perceive themselves to be.

The 2006 Reboot study focused on the evolving Jewish identities of Generation Y (Millennial Generation), and is titled *"Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam..." Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices* (Bennett, Potts, Levin, and Abramson, 2006, p. i). The first half of this designation is significant because it highlights an interesting "Starbucks" metaphor about the Millennial Generation:

> [By] standing in line by the battery of "baristas" behind the counter...[one] realize[s] that we are living in an era where the possibility to have it "your way" rules. The desire and ability of the individual to mix and match the contents of his or her Grande cup translates

> into the power to choose the way he or she defines personal identity in America. ...This is the reality we face when listening carefully to young American Jews talking about their identities. (Bennett, et al., 2006, p. 3)

As of July 2012, Starbucks had a total of 17,651 company owned stores (Starbucks, 2012, p. 3). That number does not include the franchised stores such as those located within supermarkets. Of course this also does not include the many other (presumably) comparable coffee shops such as the Coffee Bean, Pete's Coffee's, etc. Clearly, Millennials have a myriad of choices where they can have it "their way." In this way, the Millennial Generation has had unique experiences when compared to its predecessors.

This metaphoric way of understanding American Jewish Identity is still applicable today. A similar yet updated analogy is Benor's (2012) use of the jTunes metaphor (p. 3):

> Just as consumers obtain music...and create their own...playlists, Jews select Jewish events, rituals, and elements of culture that are meaningful and relevant to them from the vast array of options available in LA.... As with music, they learn about and come to appreciate these Jewish options through web searches or more often through their social networks...especially through friends' recommendations. Just as they go through phases of listening to certain songs, performers, or genres more intensely, so too do they participate in Jewish life episodically. (Benor, 2012, p. 3-4)

Benor hits a very important point. That is, to be "Jewish" is an incredibly malleable notion that essentially can take on any form. As Jews grow and move through different stages in their lives, their values, beliefs, and practices may change and as a result, the Jewish community as a whole may change. The wealth of options is obvious. However, as many agree, too many choices can hinder the decision making process. How does a Jew find the appropriate "song" or

"genre" amidst the plethora of Jewish options? I conducted a Google search for "young jews los angeles" and received 74,600,000 results in .33 seconds. In an effort to narrow the results, I conducted a search for "young jewish activities los angeles" and received 32,000,000 in .34 seconds. For a young adult Jew, this may be incredibly daunting and discouraging.

However, an important conclusion to draw from the aforementioned metaphors is that the constituents of the Millennial Generation are able to have it "their way." Millennials have the opportunity to define themselves as Jews with greater flexibility than ever before. This is drastically different from previous generations where, essentially, the community defined you as a Jew due to, in part, the political and economic landscape. "Earlier generations of Jews felt a need to maintain tight connections as they experienced anti-Semitism, discrimination, [etc.].... therefore, [Millennials] are similar to their non-Jewish peers in that they worry about...grades, ...jobs and socializing...more than they worry about...religious identities" (Bennett, et al., 2006, p. 7).

Bennett goes on to say that:

> For American Jews in Generation Y, being Jewish is not their sole identity. This generation has unlimited access to American society, therefore Generation Y Jews behave much like all other Generation Y Americans, regardless of religion. Today's young Jews have multiple identities shaped by many factors, including intermarriage in their families, diverse social networks, and dynamic boundaries around geography and other identity characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation. Being Jewish is part of a larger identity mosaic for today's Jews. (Bennett, et al., 2006, p. 7)

Theses identities exist together. The ways in which these collective identities fit together help shape the way the Jewish community evolves. The aforementioned distinction between

Millennial Jew and Jewish Millennial identities is highlighted here. The former identifies first as a "Jew" since it is the noun and then it is qualified by the adjective "Millennial." The latter is just the opposite. The noun "Millennial" is simply qualified by the adjective "Jewish." This distinction is important because it emphasizes having the choice to live "episodically." Moreover, as this generation continues to have "unlimited access to American society" as well as move through life stages, the identities may shift. The same principle applies to an American *Jew* and a Jewish *American.* How we think about these differences will help the organizations within the Jewish community better understand their constituents and mold its structure to suit and attract them. How might an American Jewish Millennial differ from a Millennial American Jew with regard to their values and practices? The implications of this distinction will have lasting effects on the Jewish community.

In his capstone, Harris clearly explained the need for Jewish organizations and institutions to evolve along with Jewish Americans (Harris, 2009, p. 16). Moishe House exists in order to cater to these Jewish Americans as well as American Jews, Millennial Jews, Jewish Millennials, etc. The point is that Moishe House casts a wide net that attracts a multitude of various types of Jews.

The Millennial Generation considers themselves unique when compared to the other generations (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 13). The Millennial Generation is said to be "much more optimistic and entrepreneurial, and they're much more tech savvy" (Galagan, 2006, p. 27). "Millennials have grown up in the digital age. They show greater familiarity than previous generations with communication, media, and digital technologies" (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, and Kaifi, 2012, p. 89). This fact becomes more and more evident everyday as digital technology

keeps advancing. The Millennial Generation is already more digitally inclined than the previous generations, and continually becomes more advanced in this regard.

Furthermore, they tend to feel that they are the most deserving when compared to their predecessors because, "[they received]...prizes for graduating from first grade, for coming in eighth in a race, or just for just showing up. They are the most rewarded, recognized, and praised generation in living memory" (Galagan, 2006, p. 27).

Research shows that Millennials enjoy working with others, namely their peers (Phillips, 2008). "Members of this generation are described as preferring collective action, working in teams, wanting work that really matters to them, and being civic-minded, eco-aware, confident, conventional, optimistic, and socially conscious" (Kaifi, et al. 2012, p. 89). Moreover, "they long to do something "real" and meaningful" (Phillips, 2008).

Various organizations attempt to discover how to best engage the Millennial Generation. The question to ask is who knows best? The clear answer is the constituents of the generation themselves. "Millennials are bringing a fresh perspective filled with innovative ideas and ways to reach young unaffiliated Jews who otherwise may not become involved in Jewish life" (Klein and Liff-Grieff, 2009, p.325).

Yet, Millennials also have experienced significant similar events as their grandparents' generation, which consists of both the silent generation (born 1925-1945) and the baby boomers (born 1946-1964) (Winograd and Hais, 2011, p. 13, p. 14). The Millennial Generation experienced an enemy attack (9/11), had loved ones go off to war and endured one of the most significant economic downturns since the Great Depression. As a result, there might be similar fundamental methods for effectively engaging this generation, but with updated technology.

David Cygielman, CEO and co-founder of Moishe House, asserts that the unique engagement model is "effective in its outreach efforts because it relies on its young residents [he states,] 'by doing it peer-to-peer rather than staff person-to-the-program recipient, we find that a lot more people come'" (Wakefield, 2013, para. 13). Cygielman goes on, "'[the model] becomes very cost effective, and it takes on the personality, interests and needs of the generation taking on the programming, which is key. We don't have to continually figure out what young people want because it's being planned and created by young people' (Wakefield, 2013, para. 13).

Benor (2011) explains further that:

> It is not a given that Jews today will "engage Jewishly" (defined here as Jews doing things they see as Jewish) in their young adult years or even at all. If they do, they encounter multiple options for engagement, reflecting an increasingly diverse Jewish population and an interest in connecting over shared niche interests. (Benor, 2012, p. 1)

Nonestablishment organizations tend to hire younger staff in order to better relate to the similarly aged target market (Wertheimer, 2010, p. 10). As a result, these nonestablishment organizations will take on the characteristics of the younger generation.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, a large network of new programs and institutions has been created by Jews in their 20s and 30s. These so-called start-ups tend to be characterized by the following:

1. They do not hesitate to question the status quo.
2. They seem highly attuned to their clients—younger Jews.
3. They experiment.
4. They network with one another and arrive at innovative solutions.
5. They have the agility to associate seemingly unrelated fields and causes.

Moishe House is one of those organizations.

Methodology

Introduction

In order to appropriately and effectively address my research questions, I implemented a two-part method that would focus on the West Los Angeles Moishe House (WLAMH) and the San Fernando Valley Moishe House:

1. Ethnographic observations of 10 Moishe House events and resident planning meetings.
2. Interviews with 15 intentionally selected Moishe House residents and event participants.

The best approach to employ in order to gain an understanding of the programs, the method of engagement, the participant involvement, etc. is to observe the events. Furthermore, to gain more in-depth insight into the organizational model, it was vital to conduct both informal participant interviews during events as well as formally scheduled interviews with various residents.

Ethnographic observation.

Each house is required to host events from four different categories: repair the world, social, Jewish learning, and Jewish culture and holidays. Each house is "assigned a specific program quota, which is generally linked to the size of the population that the house is serving" (Moishe House, "How many programs", para. 2). The West Los Angeles location is considered to be a higher capacity house due to the size of the population of its participants. As a result it regularly hosts between eight and ten events per month. However, the San Fernando Valley location is not considered to be high capacity and therefore hosts only about five to seven events per month.

In order to ensure that my research would be sufficiently robust for my analysis, I set a goal of attending at least one of every type of program as well as spreading my attendance across

both houses. I observed 10 events, wrote notes on them afterward, and then analyzed them. The observed events were hosted at the respective houses as well as other venues such as parks, bars, restaurants, movie theaters, wineries, comedy clubs, etc. Although most of the events are executed at the houses, none of the four program types are required to be held at a house.

I also attended two preparation meetings. These meetings were held a couple of hours in advance of the event in order to gather materials, cook, clean, arrange furniture, and discuss any last minute event changes, and complete any other activities necessary for the success of the event.

Interviews.

I interviewed nine residents and six participants (see Appendix for interview guide). During the events, I would informally poll and interview participants for about ten to twenty minutes. Here, I would find out about their respective backgrounds as a Jew, as a Los Angelino and as a resident of areas outside of Los Angeles. Outside of the events, I conducted formal interviews with residents. I was able to interview approximately 75% of all of the residents from both houses. In addition, I was privileged to interview a former resident of one of the 3 Los Angeles houses as well as a Regional Director. For the sake of anonymity, the specific house and region will remain undisclosed.

It was absolutely vital to interview the residents of the respective houses in order to gain the appropriate understanding of the program planning process, the in-house relationships, the philosophies and perspectives of each resident as well as those of the entire house, the backgrounds of each resident, etc.

The interviews varied from individual to group interviews, as well as one phone interview. The interview locations included both houses[1] and a coffee shop. It should be noted that certain difficulties might affect the results of the analysis. Ideally I would have liked to interview all of the residents of all of the houses in order to avoid the possibility of obtaining any inaccurate or conflicting information, but it was challenging to schedule the interviews. This might not make my analysis as robust as it could have been. But this was accounted for in my careful research outside of the interviews themselves. Nevertheless, all of the observations and interviews were extremely helpful and this was, in part, due to the friendly, confident, and open residents and participants.

[1] Observations and interviews actually took place at 3 houses since the West Los Angeles house moved to a new location during the research.

Findings

Introduction

The interviews, observations, and other research on the Moishe House organization yielded both expected and unexpected results. Consistent with my research questions, I have divided the findings chapter into several sections and subsections. These sections cover house centric dynamics, which looks at internal aspects of the houses such as the interactions and interpersonal relationships among the residents and participants. Other sections address the engagement model, programming, as well as the characteristics of the houses that set them apart from other houses and other organizations.

Residents

It seems that an unassuming Shabbat dinner was actually the impetus for the creation of the Moishe House organization. In an interview with David Cygielman, he explained that in 2006 he visited a few friends he had met as a chaperone on a trip to Israel. They decided to organize a Shabbat dinner and accordingly they invited some friends. Instead, however, 73 people ended up attending. All things considered, the Shabbat dinner was a great success. Cygielman realized his friends were at a point where, although they enjoyed living together and being Jewish together, it simply was not enough. These mid-twenty something Jews lived together, but all of them were looking for something more. They desired to connect with other Jews and with their Jewish community. What's more, they wanted to connect with Jews that were of similar age and life stage. This is how Moishe House began.

I asked the various residents of the San Fernando Valley House and the West Los Angeles House why they chose to live in a Moishe House. For the most part, I received expected responses. Prior to living in a house, most of the residents were involved to some extent in their

respective Jewish communities. Such activities included Chabad, Hillel, Jewish summer camp, and Israel trips both academic and otherwise. A few of the residents explained further that they were involved in these programs and activities in an attempt to discover more of themselves as Jews. They were in the formative stages of their Jewish identity; and for many of the residents and participants, they are still in this formative stage. Moishe House has allowed them to continue to form and reform their identities.

Residents are able to live in and operate a Jewish home. I asked them what it meant to say that they have a Jewish home. Some explained that it was simply living in a house with other Jews. Others explained that it was being able to plan and host their own events with other Jews, and by virtue of this they were able to "discover" Judaism in their own way. I received many different answers and I realized that the mere fact that I did not get any uniform, standard response, in and of itself was indicative of the way they were able to live "Jewishly." That is, it was up to them. This is what I found to be an incredibly unique and fundamental feature of the Moishe House model. Many of the residents explained that a distinctive aspect of living in a Moishe House was enjoying the ability to learn about any part of Judaism they desired. Moreover, that desire to learn was embraced by the other residents. They were able to choose what they wanted to do and how they wanted to celebrate their Judaism.

A prime example occurred when the residents described their experience with a simple yet powerful conversation. None of them clearly understood what a "havruta" was nor had participated in one before. Furthermore, the residents expressed that they had never felt comfortable enough in synagogue or anywhere else to ask about a "havruta" or talk about a "parsha." As a result they decided to invite a friend who was a rabbinical student to the house to help conduct a havruta while they studied a parsha together. This was an open event for anyone

to come and learn. More importantly, it was a "stress free, judgment free zone where everyone could ask anything."

A resident explained, "We are twenty-something year old Jews, we do not live with our parents anymore. We made the decision…it was our decision to live with other Jews and to build the Jewish community in our area. [We are] actively being a part of the Jewish community, and we have the opportunity to get others involved too. It is super beautiful and important and I believe in it." This is the passion of the residents. And this passion helps ignite participants' desire to find who they are as young adults and as Jews, and do so at Moishe House.

Although there is passion, there is a three and a half year maximum residency limit for a Moishe House resident. Moreover, according to most of the residents interviewed, there seems to about a two-year average for most residents. I had many questions regarding this policy and the turnover. I thought it was peculiar that, with the amount of excitement and interest the residents displayed as Jewish leaders and community builders, they would want to stay as long as possible.

Turnover.

What I discovered was that most residents simply find the need to take their lives to the next step. Most that move out do not "move on." They are all still greatly passionate about Moishe House's mission and vision and desire to stay involved. However, they move out because of school, professional opportunities, they grow out of the age range, etc. As much as residents love what they do, they are leading lives that may take them out of the physical Moishe House itself. To cater to these Moishe House alumni, a program was created called Moishe House Without Walls. I will refer to this later, but for brevity and simplicity, it is a program that allows alumni to host events outside of a standard Moishe House.

The turnover that occurs in the Moishe House can be viewed as both positive and negative. One resident explains, "Having a three and a half year cap is good because it gives the opportunity for others to join the house. For our house, the average is one year. But one year is probably too short. It is not good for the house to bring in new people that often. Transitions may be difficult, because it affects how you plan and execute events." How good or bad the turnover is perceived to be depends on a few critical factors. It depends on the turnover frequency, the relationship dynamics between the incumbent and incoming residents, and the makeup of the community, namely, the participants.

The frequency of the turnover plays a significant role. Some residents have lived with as many as six different people, but not all at the same time. This is due to the frequent turnover within a short period of time. The relationships between new and remaining residents can greatly affect the planning, execution, and environment of events. Depending on the particular house and community, both incumbent and new residents may find it difficult to mesh and transition. Each new resident brings her or his own flavor, i.e., identity. As a result, with new residents, the identity and culture of the house may slightly change. This is simply the nature of the Moishe House model and is an intentional element.

The fact that new people bring their own element and flare is considered a good thing because it adds dimension. The freshness that a new resident brings is a vital part of the lifeblood of Moishe House. A fundamental feature of Moishe House's model is that it is a home-based community engagement model. It is familiar, comfortable, and carefree. Moishe House thrives on the community. Both residents and participants alike bring their friends to events because they enjoy hanging out with them. Every resident has a community of people, a circle of friends that he or she will bring to the house.

It is helpful and important to have new perspectives. With new people, different perspectives are brought to old ideas. Some residents, though, have expressed that they have trouble meshing with new residents. Some residents either explicitly stated this or implicitly conveyed this. They believe that their way of planning events, and "doing things" should not change. They tend to welcome new residents only to help with program execution. An effect of this is that new ideas can be stifled. This has resulted in internal conflict among the residents. Each house is significantly autonomous. That is, the residents of each house have complete responsibility and authority to plan, program, and run their house and events as they see fit. This also includes the selection of new residents. However, even with this autonomy, the incumbent residents may conflict with the new housemates. Most of the residents have experience with some form of conflict while living in a house. This seems inevitable when in a communal living space.

Turnover is a delicate balance. It is valid to conclude, however, that the *frequent* turnover seems to cause much disruption in the house. Too much turnover may make Moishe House somewhat transient in nature. It takes time to lay down the foundations of a house with regard to its culture, traditions, and "ways of doing things." All of which participants seem to find comfort. All things considered, it appears that some turnover is better than no turnover. All of the residents, no matter how long they may have lived in a house, have expressed their love for it.

Resident passion.

"I am proud to say that I live here." Residents wanted to build a Jewish community by bringing people to their open, Jewish home. Prior to living in a Moishe House, residents lived their lives similarly in that they would they would invite other Jewish friends over, host Shabbat

dinners, try to build their Jewish community. The difference now living in the Moishe House is they are able to do it more often and on a consistent basis because they are subsidized by Moishe House (which in turn is funded by several foundations) to do what they already loved to do. The residents are able to host many events, celebrate their Judaism inexpensively and do so with others Jews.

The residents especially enjoyed celebrating communal Shabbats. In fact, the "Shabbat dinner" is the most successful program. This was not surprising since, it was not only the seed that inspired Moishe House, but Shabbat is, according to participants, also the most welcoming, and nonthreatening "Jewish thing to do." It is perceived as fun, familiar, casual, comfortable, and easy to plan for the residents and participants. It is also the best "entry level event" for new participants. Shabbat is a core program of Moishe House.

Training and leadership.

Programming is clearly a central and vital element to the Moishe House model. Accordingly, programmatic training is provided. However, some residents have expressed the desire to have other types of training provided by Moishe House management. That is, training that will help the residents' ability to live with others for significant periods of time in a communal space. An example would be training in conflict resolution and mediation. On the other hand, other residents claim that any fighting and tension within the house will "bring you closer together." In addition, it is important for the residents to learn how to live in this environment on their own. Clearly, there seemed to be some tensions and concerns from some of the residents. I asked, given the current situation, who might be the best person to help mitigate these concerns. A majority of the residents expressed the opinion that the West Coast Regional Director should have a role in this area.

Throughout the interviews with residents, it became clear that the role of the Regional Director was not defined accurately. First, the residents do not prefer to have the Regional Director based in San Francisco. The full title of the director is West Coast Regional Director, which covers the area ranging from San Diego all the way north of California. Initially, the West Coast Regional Director was placed in San Francisco because, at the time, within the director's coverage area, this was where the majority of Moishe Houses were located.

The residents of these two Los Angeles houses felt neglected and disconnected from the Regional Director. They felt that the Director was not sufficiently familiar with Los Angeles, which is what should be the case for this role. According to one resident, "Los Angeles has so much for you to do, yet there is not as much guidance from the Director in this respect, to help us become the best we can for our community." It seems that for a long time, the Director simply played a sustainability role. That is, the Director would check in every month and make sure the events were being planned, that there was enough funding, etc. Basically, some residents felt that the Director did not have adequate accountability over these houses that were approximately 400 miles away.

Participants

I found that there were three main categories of participants. First, there were Los Angeles natives. This type of participant was born in Los Angeles or at least grew up there for the better part of her life and formative years. Second, there were transplants. These individuals moved to Los Angeles and rooted themselves here for work or similar reasons. Third, there were people in transition. These are people who temporarily moved here for reasons such as attending school in Los Angeles. One Regional Director recognized these categories: "There are those that

are in transition [and therefore] they may not stay. Additionally, there are people that may not be from here, and so need a home. They need a surrogate family."

Additionally, people in each of these categories fell into two other groups. A portion of the participants did not have or grow up in a Jewish home (or at least not a strong Jewish home) and stated that Moishe House enabled them to connect to their Judaism. The other type of participant was one who had a Jewish home but still desired to be involved with Moishe House in order to re-connect to their Judaism in a different way. Some participants described it as a "revival." Moishe House is able to provide the opportunities to make these connections, facilitated by the experiences at events that the participants and residents share. A portion of the participants claimed that Moishe House was where they first felt any "real" connection to Judaism and felt they could begin to have a Jewish identity.

Initially I thought that Moishe House would only be useful for those who are in transition and transplants because they may not have had an adequate Jewish home to go to. However, even for native Angelinos, this place was a safe haven. Although there are different groups of participant types, the fundamental reasons they are coming to a Moishe House are the same, namely, to find a connection.

The Moishe House acts as a home base. The keyword here is *home.* This home provides a sense of comfort, consistency, support, and warmth. As a result, participants found it easier to visit the Moishe House than it was to visit a synagogue or other institution that attempted to engage Millennials. This place is like a second home. Participants do not feel pressure to be here. They feel relaxed. Moishe House facilitates an environment that does not feel forced. Many of the residents explained that Moishe House does not have an "agenda." That is, it does not "feel like a meet and greet." Although some participants were happy to admit that they had

started to date someone they had met at an event, they qualified this with the statement that it was made possible because it is *not* set up as a 'meet and greet' for singles. Moishe House provides a comfortable home for Millennial Jews to be themselves and to be Jewish.

For the transplants and those in transition, going to someone's home, rather than a foreign institution is "infinitely more encouraging" when in a new city. They may not know everyone at a Moishe House event, but they know it is a warm, inviting home. And they know they will meet other Jews. One resident explained the unique and beneficial aspects of Moishe House, "We show participants that there is a great Jewish community out there...[Moishe House] is home-based, so [the events are] not large scale. We are able to officially host an event with a minimum of three people other than the residents. But we hope for around 15 to 20 people. It is better to do an event like this and be able to really connect to people."

Many participants love Shabbat dinners, in part, because they get home-cooked meals, and get to spend time with peers in a carefree environment. "On Shabbat, everyone is coming from different backgrounds and may have something unique to share. There is a social aspect as well. It is a home away from home." It is a central Jewish home at which people can be together and find themselves. The social atmosphere and the delicious home cooking are just a couple of examples of what attracts participants to Moishe House.

Engagement of Jewish Millennials.

Because of the various types of people within this generation and differences from previous generations, different methods are needed to attract and engage them. According to one Regional Director, this "really special demographic requires a unique type of engagement." The information given by this Regional Director is nearly identical to that provided by David Cygielman and most of the residents. This shows the consistent understanding threaded

throughout the Moishe House organization. Regarding types of engagement, the Regional Director went on to say that, for a target market such as the Millennial Generation there is a significant difference between a conference room, a community center, and a home. There are unique features of Moishe House that separate it from other organizations. There are "three to five residents that conduct in depth, 'boots on the ground' engagement work to yield a huge impact rather than just one paid staff person that is probably 10 to 15 years older than everyone else."

"[The] house is a character in this play." The residents and participants enjoy the home-based engagement model. Several residents explained they love to see participants crowd around various nooks and corners in the house during events. The participants would make themselves at home. Some of the residents explained that a portion of the participants stated that part of the reason they attend events is for the house itself. The participants know the house and love spending time in it. Through further questioning I discovered that some participants from other communities travel farther to a particular Moishe House because they have found an environment in which they can thrive and grow. For example, people who live on the Westside, in Century City, and Hollywood, etc. travel to the San Fernando Valley house. And people will travel from the Valley to the West Los Angeles house. Although the Moishe House management and leadership staff are thoughtful and meticulous when scouting out new locations for Moishe Houses, it is not uncommon for participants to travel to Houses in other communities. In fact, it is indicative of the magnetic environment that is cultivated at each house. Just as participants look for a way to connect to Judaism and form their Jewish identity, a house will "find" participants that fit with its own identity.

Some residents explained that their participants comment on the house. "They love the colors, the photos, the weird stuff, and the fireplace." The Moishe House is a symbol of comfort. It is a safe space. One resident stated that, "[This is a] home to go to if you have no home in LA. But even if you do have a home here, you will still come."

In another way, Moishe House can be described not just as a second home, but as a "third place." That is, Moishe House is neither a place of work nor a home. This is where young adult Jews find comfort. Here they find community (Bennett, et al., 2006, p. 3).

The participants love the atmosphere, they love the people they meet, and they love the house. But what exactly is Moishe House's "X-factor"? During my research, I postulated that the unique feature of the Moishe House engagement model was primarily due to the fact that the residents are of similar age and life-stage as the participants. They work, and go to school, just like the participants. However, I soon realized that the participants and the residents are more alike than I initially thought. One of the interesting connections I made was that both the residents and the participants are looking for something similar. They are all looking to connect to their Judaism or for a sense of community. They want to find or redefine their Jewish identity. Moishe House is effective in its engagement for two primary reasons: The residents are of the same demographic as the participants and as a result they are all able to find similar connections in this home-based community.

The fact that residents are of the same generation as the participants is one of the competitive advantages for Moishe House since it seems to greatly diminish the need to predict what the target market demands. However, I wonder how much of the residents' programming is a response to the community's desires and needs rather than simply providing programming

desired by them. The answers to these questions would be brought by the specific characteristics of engagement and programming of the two houses.

Programming.

Los Angeles is a huge city. For young adult Jews, there are countless options such as Synagogue Young Adult Groups, Birthright, Hillel, YALA, etc. However, in contrast to these organizations Moishe House does not hire a staff person that may be 10 to 15 years older than the target demographic. Moreover, Moishe House does not have "staff" per se. The residents are the volunteers. They do get subsidized housing as well as an event budget, but they are not paid for their services nor are they considered full-time staff. I found that the participants react differently when approached by an older staff person than when approached by a peer. Furthermore, potential participants are usually approached by a friend or hear about Moishe House events by word of mouth. This method of advertising and creating awareness has proven to be much more effective than the traditional model.

The home-based model is important for the programming. The house is located ***in*** the community. The programming is unique to the community and is shaped by the culture of the house. For the most part, residents plan events that take place at the house. But the residents host events out in the community as well in order to more firmly root the house within that community and make the neighborhood in which the house exists part of the "Jewish home."

Some residents expressed concerns about living in this type of house. For them, the Moishe House is technically a workplace as well as their home. They essentially live at their job and with their coworkers (even as they maintain other jobs outside the house). This model is substantially different than other event-planning jobs. Some residents explained to me that they love to host Shabbat dinners. But some days, they do not prefer participants to hang out till 1am

or 2am on a Friday, especially after a long work or school week. Most residents do not feel it is appropriate to ask participants to leave, but at the same time, they may be tired and simply want to bring the event to a close. The residents explained that although Moishe House is a community place, it is still their home. At what point should a resident be able to ask participants to leave at the end of the night, if at all? When does the 'community house' revert to someone's home? This intertwined issue of home and community is, in some ways, the nature of the model. It requires that residents and recurrent participants develop an etiquette and sensitivity within an environment, which for many of them, is unique. The particular culture that evolves at a particular house will dictate the norms of the house and of the events.

Earlier in the thesis, I stated that there are four different types of required programming per month: repair the world, social, Jewish learning, and Jewish culture and holidays. As you can see, not all of the types are "Jewish" events, strictly speaking. Although some residents try to integrate a Jewish element into social programs for instance, it is not required. In fact, some residents assert over the course of a month, it should not be the case that all of the events have a Jewish theme. Some have stated, "If there were more Jewish content...it would change the community. We who live here, we know what the community wants." This statement takes the perspective that the programming is not so much a response to the community as it is derived from the residents themselves. But the argument could be made that the residents may have such a good understanding of their respective participants, that the programming is in fact a response to the community.

West Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley houses.

For both houses, I interviewed residents as well as participants. I asked the participants a unique yet valuable question. It was a type of word association. I would say, "West LA Moishe

House" and the participant would simply reply with one-word answers. Through further questioning, some participants also revealed that these were the reasons they enjoyed attending events at the respective house. For the West Los Angeles house I received the words:

- Sophisticated
- Russian
- Fun
- Social
- Older

At the San Fernando Valley house I asked the same question. Some of the responses were:

- Campy
- Younger crowd
- Welcoming
- Warm
- Close Community
- Basketball

I conducted the same questioning for the residents. For the West Los Angeles house:

- Jewish
- Laughing
- Friends
- And although this is not a word, one resident explained that he saw an image of the front of the Moishe House where there was the Moishe House mezuzah and doormat.

For the San Fernando Valley house:

- Laughter
- Investment
- Fulfilling
- Exhausting
- Fun
- Jive

Any other participant or resident might look at these descriptive lists and agree or disagree. This is ok. It not only exhibits ownership over a particular house, which is further evidence of the relationships that exist, but it also expresses the unique culture of each house.

The San Fernando Moishe House is a young, energetic house. A majority of its participants and residents come from the "Jewish camp world." By virtue of this, a unique characteristic of the SFVMH is that many of the participants already know each other and therefore the relationships already exist. This actually challenges the residents to do two things. One: to build deeper and more meaningful relationships with those "campy" participants. And two: to ensure that any other participants are brought into the community and made to feel included. This a key difference between the houses. Additionally, on average, the SFVMH participants tend to be younger than the WLAMH participants.

As stated earlier, the West Los Angeles house is a high-capacity house, which means that it has a large region to cover as well as a larger population to engage. As a result, an increased number of events are planned. This house has developed impressive and efficient methods of programming and engagement. For instance, to incentivize participants in becoming more actively involved, there is a "member of the month" program. This title is bestowed on the most active participant of the month. This is unique to the West Los Angeles location and seems to be

a result the regional characteristics of the community. That is, the WLAMH residents were insightful enough to realize what their participants and community would be most responsive to. Further, the residents have put some serious thought into their individual method of engagement. Facebook is a popular channel for most of the Moishe Houses to advertise their respective events. Different from how many of the houses simply blast everyone they know on Facebook or everyone that likes their page, they strategically select whom to invite to specific events. This allows them to optimize their invite list and more effectively predict the "yes" RSVPs, which permits the residents to plan the best events and programs for the respective audience. This process highlights the thoughtfulness and care taken to provide the best experience. Moreover, in order for this system to function accurately, the residents must build relationships with participants. As someone who has received invites for particular events at the WLAMH, I personally appreciate the consideration they have put into their method of engagement.

Another interesting event was the "1000 Shabbats" that the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles sponsored. The Federation set a goal of having 1000 different homes celebrating Shabbat at the same time on a particular date. The Moishe Houses participated by hosting their popular Shabbat dinners. However, the residents of the West Los Angeles House engaged in the Federation's effort by uniquely restructuring their program. They did not host a Shabbat at their house. Instead, they all separated and attended Shabbats at the homes of participants. They did this for a few reasons. One, the residents knew that if they hosted a Shabbat at their house, many participants would come to their location which would decrease the number of different homes celebrating Shabbat. By separating, they increased number of the Shabbat dinners and encourage participants to create their own Jewish home where they lived. Apparently this

decision was met with rave reviews from the participants. In fact, it helped increase attendance at some of the following Moishe House events.

Both houses enjoy the home-based events because it allows the residents to more intimately engage the participants. They really get to know people that come to their home, and close relationships are formed. However, a criticism by some of the residents is that the limitation on the number of participants per event hinders community building. This may be true. In the future the residents may need to broaden their scope. As an alternative multiple houses may be needed within the same communities.

The San Fernando Valley house has developed unique and insightful programming as well that caters to their participants. An example is the "Brewer's Club." The San Fernando Valley house has begun brewing its own beer. The residents have turned their beer-making hobby into an event where they invite participants over to help with the brewing process and taste the beer. This is a purely social event with no overt Jewish component.

However, one resident made an interesting point regarding events that lack any explicit Jewish content, "We can still be and do Jewish together with or without 'Jewish' events. Simply by virtue of all of us being together and being Jewish, we have a Jewish event." For many participants, looking for some sort of "Jewish connection", which they may have never experienced, may be difficult and daunting. The events without an explicit "Jewish component" are what these types of participants may require. To simply be around other young adult Jews in a carefree and agenda-free environment may, initially, be more comfortable. My research reveals that, just as there are different types of participants who require various forms of engagement, so too different types of residents require their own methods of connecting. As a result, these residents will also favor certain types of engagement events.

The residents of both houses agree they live in a Jewish home. These people need and want to get in touch with their "Jewish side" and therefore they attend events at their respective Moishe House in order to do so. This is, in part, due to the fact that most of the participants are "not Jewish in the rest of their lives" in the traditional sense. They may not be celebrating holidays on their own, they may not be attending Shabbat services at a synagogue, and they may not have a family back home with whom to enjoy "Jewish life." Moishe House is the surrogate that provides these experiences for them.

Contrary to one of my assumptions prior to my research, it is *not* the case that every event is supposed to appeal to every participant. Moishe House does not attempt to be everything to everyone. I initially made this assumption, in part, because Moishe House describes itself as a pluralistic organization. It simply is too difficult to be everything to everyone. It tends to be too costly, and will ultimately produce a mediocre product or service. Although Moishe House strives to engage young adult Jews in an effort to provide them with an opportunity for connecting to Judaism in any way they see fit, it escapes the "everything model" by virtue of its unique autonomous network of houses. Each house creates a unique culture within its niche community. The fact that Moishe House does have infinite flexibility in programming due to its model of allowing the unique culture of each house to determine the structure of its events, should not be confused with 'being everything for everyone'. Even so, this flexibility remains a key difference from other organizations. The residents agreed that other places such as synagogues and Jewish Community Centers have a limited variety of events in their quiver, even as they partner with them.

Partnerships.

Not to my surprise, these passionate, young, resilient, clever residents created unique cultures at each house that they have begun to leverage to build relationships with other organizations.

The residents explained that partnerships, through co-hosted and co-sponsored events, are important to the longevity of the house within their respective communities and are simply the "right thing to do." That is, collaborating with other organizations is built into the Moishe House model; "The…residents…support existing community resources by partnering with local Jewish organizations such as JCCs, synagogues, federations, and other institutional providers" (Moishe House, The Moishe House Model, para. 4). The types of partnership activities include representatives from other organizations simply attending Moishe House events and co-hosting speakers and other events at other locations. For example, in partnership with Jewish World Watch, the West Los Angeles Moishe House had a Nobel Peace Prize Nominee visit the house to offer a discussion to raise awareness around what is happening in the Congo. Although Moishe House hosted this event, it was definitely a partnership.

The residents proudly explained that these types of events help bring more people into their community, both participants and those from other organizations. "It is about inclusion." I asked the residents from one of the houses his thoughts on other organizations with which they intend to plan and execute events: "Other organizations? Synagogues are envious. They cannot seem to figure out how to engage the same demographic." The residents explained that this comment is not meant to insult or demean synagogues, but states a fact as perceived by them. They clarified that, "Organizations such as synagogues cannot seem to go out of the box." Such organizations have a great deal of difficulty breaking away from traditional engagement methods that do not effectively attract young adult Jews. To some extent, it is not necessarily their fault.

The residents claim that these synagogues have the "Badge" of a temple and simply by virtue of this fact, participants are not inclined to attend events held there. The idea conveyed by the residents was that Jewish Millennials do not want to go to a synagogue "for fun."

The flipside is that synagogues do in fact want to engage this demographic. However, due to the current situation and image of synagogues, the effort necessary to attract sufficient attendance and interest by Millennials may not be worth what they get in return. In business speak, this is known as a low return on investment (ROI). In some cases there might even be a negative ROI. One reason this might be the case was pointed out by a resident, "It costs more to be one member at a synagogue for one year, then to have two season tickets for one year for LA Kings." These organizations want to do what Moishe House is doing. Fortunately, Moishe House is open to partnering.

The partnering organization can benefit because, by virtue of the co-hosted event, Moishe House participants usually become more comfortable with the respective institution. In a way it becomes a "feeder system" through which the other organization can begin to engage the target market. For instance, with regard to a synagogue, some participants may have questions about anything ranging from "what bar mitzvahs entail, to the secrets of the Gemara." Both institutions and the target group of young adult Jews benefit since they are creating closer ties by collaborating and engaging a wider segment of the community. The residents explained that Moishe House has worked hard to integrate. By partnering, they create a more inclusive Jewish community.

Some organizations are eager to hop on the Moishe House bandwagon. Its unique model has allowed itself to stay flexible in order to continually innovate and engage. Moishe House has positioned itself as a leader in the young adult Jewish community.

In one of my last interviews, I had the pleasure of questioning someone who had great insight from multiple perspectives: from that of a resident, a former resident, and a participant. I played my word association game and received these responses regarding what Moishe House represents:

- Identity
- Future
- Creative.

Areas for improvement

Jewish Millennials have proven to be a unique subset of the Jewish community. Historically, Judaism has championed youth. It understands the importance of instilling fervor and an awareness for customs and traditions that have been maintained for thousands of years. Currently, Jewish Millennials represent the young generation of our time and it is the responsibility of all Jews to help ensure that they achieve a meaningfully interconnected Jewish community.

My research highlights Moishe House's innovative engagement model. At its inception in 2006, it was a pioneer, an innovator. Since then Moishe House has caught the attention of many organizations as well as the Jewish community as a whole. Moishe House focuses on relationships, with the goal of developing relational Jews, individuals who view their Judaism as permeating all aspects of their life. In this case it is through their social life with the intent of it being a gateway (Wolfson, 2013, p. 27). This is why it has been able to grow at such an incredible rate. As of now, Moishe House has over 50 houses globally. However, my research also brings to light some important issues that Moishe House must address if it intends to continue to be at the forefront of young adult Jewish engagement and community building.

One of the distinctive aspects that the residents praised was that Moishe House does not have an "agenda" at its events. This is derivative of Moishe House's pluralistic orientation. Although a pluralistic orientation is important and a necessary feature of the model, careful attention should be exercised as having "no agenda" may make it difficult for some participants and residents to fully grasp the purpose of Moishe House. Although many may agree that the purpose is to bring young adult Jews together to be Jewish in any way they see fit, what does this mean exactly? How does one process this information in order to fully understand how this

"purpose" is manifested? There is a danger that residents may not know how to program with this in mind. Participants may not know what to expect. These expectations are crucial to participant engagement. For example, some residents said that there were a noticeable proportion of new participants who were nervous about attending their first event and as a result, they actually waited outside the house. Some of the residents speculated that this might also be due to the intimate nature of the events. In any case, it seems that there may be something lacking. This gap needs to be filled with a strategic engagement tool, something that the residents can actively or passively employ in order to effectively engage new participants. An active mechanism may be to have a resident in front of the house to greet guests in order to welcome them and make them feel comfortable. A passive mechanism may be to have a returning attendee accompany the new participant to the event. The key here is relationship building.

Once the participants enter into the Moishe House, they also enter into a home. This can be a drawback for a home-based model because people are frequently in the residents' personal space. By the nature of Moishe House, this is unavoidable. A home-based community engagement model will inevitably result in people being in the home. Some residents tolerate this. However, reasonably, other residents are not so content with people consistently in their space. As I questioned residents about this issue, most admitted that it was their choice to live in a Moishe House and they do not regret it. They love living in a house such as this, but they are simply having trouble managing their feelings. Generally Moishe House management should place more importance and focus on the wellbeing of its residents in this regard. The availability of professional counselors may help. If this model of home engagement is to flourish, then more than programmatic training needs to be provided.

Some seasoned residents reflected on their earlier days living in the house. They explained that they wished they had the skills and know-how they do now. These skills should and could have been provided by Moishe House. The organization is actually already changing to do this. After my research I heard that more training is being provided to residents in order to help empower participants. Moishe House refers to this as "community led programs." Residents are now being given the tools to help participants be a part of the programming. Participants now can be "promoted" to volunteers. This is an invaluable source of competitive advantage. Moishe House provides training for Jewish Millennials that live in subsidized housing in order to help other Jewish Millennials "be Jewish." This grassroots approach will most likely prove to be one of the most effective methods of engagement.

Some residents believe that in a long-run idealistic view, "Moishe House can truly thrive without any of the residents filling a primary role." That is, the participants and the community will take over without Moishe House. This is a more controversial point of view. However, the underlying belief is that the participants have great power and a desire to be involved and that it is a matter of gaining access to this power in order to bring community building to the next level.

The analogy of a coffee maker is useful. Participants are like the beans. They come along and brew the type of Judaism they love, and Moishe House simply provides the space to do so. In contrast, it seems that more traditional organizations that attempt to engage the same demographic brew their own blend of coffee hoping and believing it to be what people want. They then push it out onto others to drink. This is an obsolete model of engagement. This younger generation likes to be involved. The constituents of this generation may not know exactly how they may want to define their Jewish identity, but they insist on having the

opportunity to be part of its creation- to brew their own coffee, or at least order it the way they like.

Both Moishe Houses I visited are dynamic places. But even in the short time I conducted my research, I saw a significant amount of turnover and internal shiftings. Turnover is important because with new residents, new circles of friends follow. New people need time to become immersed in the culture and mix in their flavor. However, this does take time and it is difficult to settle in when turnover tends to be high. This is where appropriate training would be the most effective. It would ensure that the residents, the houses, and the programming maintain their productivity and effectiveness.

One of the most significant issues is the role of the Regional Director. Based on the research, most of the residents seem to indicate that they would prefer a more actively involved Director, or at least one that has a bit more accountability. Some residents would like more input from the Regional Director. Currently, the Director merely plays a sustainability role, checking-in from time to time to make sure that the status quo is maintained. However, residents believe the Regional Director should be a bit more like a manager than an overseer.

The future of the Regional Director may be unknown and it may be a far cry to expect this sort of change. One solution is to enlist the services of a willing population of experienced community builders, namely, Moishe House alumni. Most of the alumni with whom I spoke have expressed a desire to continue hosting similar events as they did while living in a house. These alumni moved on for various reasons, but not because their desire to be involved in the Jewish community faded away. Moishe House realized this and responded.

Moishe House created Without Walls:

> [This program] was developed to fill a need. The global network of Moishe House alumni includes hundreds of young leaders with valuable skills, training, and passion whose ability to continue building community in post-Moishe House life has been stifled by limited access to resources and support. We...wanted to create a platform that would empower every young Jewish adult to be a leader in his or her community (Without Walls, About Us, para. 3).

Moishe House Without Walls demonstrates the alumni demand for engagement. Many alumni want to stay involved. Additionally, there is a resident demand for a leader that provides more guidance than what the Regional Director has historically provided. Alumni can fill this need.

These alumni could serve as mentors. Alumni have much more flexibility than the Regional Director. While there is one Director to cover an expansive region, there are countless alumni in Los Angeles that are eager to put their Jewish leadership skills to work. The mentor would be able to provide incredible insight. I mentioned this potential program to some of the residents I interviewed and the response was positive. Moreover, residents may feel more comfortable interacting with alumni living in their community than a Director living elsewhere. The alumni may help to provide a useful, powerful network. Furthermore, this may help maintain the autonomous nature of the house, which has proven to be a successful aspect of the engagement model.

Conclusion

The Millennial generation of Jews has required a dramatically different form of engagement than previous generations. Moishe House has been able to fill these engagement requirements and needs. The Moishe House model can be seen as being similar to the changing method of effective fundraising. The traditional view that donors simply throw money at an organization is fading away. Currently, donors (especially younger ones) want to play a more active role in the donation. They want to have more decision making power. They want to voice their opinions. As a result, organizations have begun to adapt in order to effectively engage their target market of donors. Moishe House has done just this. It employs more of a pull method of engagement rather than a push. Traditional organizations tend to push out their agenda, similar to serving the same blend of coffee to all customers. Moishe House, on the other hand, creates a space and value proposition to which Jewish Millennials are attracted. Moishe House meets these community members where they live, work, and play. It has paid off.

The Jewish community has always found a way to survive and thrive through adversity and hardship. For hundreds of years, American Jews have overcome challenges that were both internal and external. American Jews have achieved this by necessarily transforming how they connected with their Judaism and more simply, how they defined themselves as Jews. This redefinition and transformation has allowed American Judaism to become more meaningfully relevant and American Jews to more easily find a connection. By using a home-based, relational approach, Moishe House is playing an important role in this transformation.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. How long have you lived here?
2. What motivated you to live in a Moishe House?
3. How would you describe the culture in your house?
4. What types of programming do you offer?
5. What programs or types of programs have been most successful and not so successful?
    a. What are the reasons for this?
6. Can you describe the response from the participants of your programs?
7. What have been the most effective methods of promoting your events and programs?
8. How important is participant retention to you and your housemates?
9. How would you characterize Moishe House's Home-based community model of engagement?
    a. What are the benefits? Drawbacks?
10. As a result of living here and meeting participants, do you feel more connected or engaged to your Jewish community?
    a. And if so, how?
11. The Moishe House's mission statement:

    To provide meaningful Jewish experiences for young adults around the world by supporting leaders in their twenties as they create vibrant home-based Jewish communities.

   a. What thought do you have when I read this? More specifically regarding the fact that it says "meaningful Jewish experiences for young adults" rather than for young Jewish adults?

12. How would you describe your community's perception of your house and/or the Moishe organization?
13. You have hosted joint-house events, what are the benefits to this partnership?
   a. Are there any negative effects?
14. Could you describe any differences you have experienced between your house and either of the other two houses?
15. Word association: When I say "Moishe House", what three words pop into your head?