

WHY JOIN?

**WHY JOIN?:
AN EXAMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP IN NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH
WOMEN/LOS ANGELES AND HADASSAH SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

LAUREN M. TREXLER

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
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SCHOOL OF JEWISH NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

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WOMEN/LOS ANGELES AND HADASSAH SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Approved By:

Advisor(s)

Director, SJNM

WHY JOIN?

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
History.....	8
Methodologies.....	14
Literature Review.....	21
Findings.....	32
Recommendations.....	59
Conclusion.....	65
References.....	68

WHY JOIN?

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WHY JOIN?

Abstract

This thesis examines reasons why women join membership organizations like National Council of Jewish Women/Los Angeles (NCJW/LA) and Hadassah Southern California (HSC). Some of the questions examined include: What is the role of women's Jewish membership organizations in the Jewish community? How is involvement and membership in these organizations reflective of the individual's commitment to their Judaism and the larger Jewish community? What is the changing role of membership in Jewish women's organizations? What are the benefits of membership in these organizations to the organization and to the individual?

To understand members' attraction to these organizations, 17 interviews were conducted with professional staff and lay leaders. Observational data was also collected at events sponsored by NCJW/LA and HSC. The ages of the lay leaders interviewed ranged from women in their mid-30s to mid-80s. The interviews highlighted the importance of community service in these women's lives. Finding a Jewish community was implicit in their reasons for joining NCJW/LA and HSC. Most of these women have found a niche in the organizations for them to contribute their time and talents. Everyone interviewed finds it to be a challenge to entice and garner membership to those in their 20s and 30s.

The information gathered for this thesis shows the need for a large-scale quantitative study by both organizations to understand how to gain membership of those in their 20s and 30s. A quantitative study could lead to strategic plans for rethinking how professional staff can cultivate and engage potential members.

WHY JOIN?

Introduction

After serving as an intern at National Council of Jewish Women/Los Angeles (NCJW/LA) during my first year in the School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, I became very interested in the sociological and historical reasons people join Jewish women's organizations. The primary lay leaders represented a diverse group of women. Some were young, stay-at-home mothers; others were working Baby Boomers; others held lifetime memberships since the 1970s and 1980s, and others have held leadership positions throughout the decades. Some of these members are highly involved in synagogue life or other social service organizations.

Having limited experience with Jewish social service organizations, I began to wonder and ask questions like: Why do Jewish women join a Jewish women's organization? Are these women attracted to the sense of community that is formed through social events? Do they seek Jews who advocate for issues that mean the most to them, for example: women's health, literacy, and human trafficking? Do these organizations ground their members in a Jewish identity? Are these organizations able to instill a sense of *tikkun olam* or repairing the world in their members? Or are these members seeking an organization that brings women together, an almost sacred place where women can make the rules, have a voice, and advocate for issues that are often ignored by mainstream society? These were the macro, amorphous questions that I had when I began to examine the value of membership in Jewish women's social service organizations.

My focused questions turned into: What is the role of women's Jewish membership organizations in the Jewish community? Why do women choose to become a member of Jewish women's organizations? How is involvement and membership in these organizations reflective of the individual's commitment to their Judaism and the larger Jewish community? How is this reflective of historical and contemporary trends? How is it reflective of generational and feminist

WHY JOIN?

identity? What is the changing role of membership in Jewish women's organizations? What are the benefits of membership in these organizations to the organization and to the individual?

I have chosen to examine the Los Angeles chapters of National Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah, two prominent Jewish women's organizations. NCJW is over a hundred years old, and Hadassah is celebrating its centennial year in 2012. They are established organizations that garner national and international respect because of the social issues they advocate for. These are also two of the most prominent women's organizations in the Los Angeles area. As well, NCJW and Hadassah have reputations that are often the brunt of jokes by younger generations of American Jews. Many people in my generation joke about "Hadassah arms" and think that both organizations are full of "*alter kockers*" who only get together to *kibitz*. After being involved in NCJW, I quickly realized that the reality is the opposite of these jokes. NCJW and Hadassah strive to appeal to a wide range of women with different interests. While there are purely social subgroups in each organization, they also strive to stay on mission by providing critical services to their contingencies and, more importantly, to those in the most need.

WHY JOIN?

History

NJCW began because the founder, Hannah G. Soloman, recognized that women needed a place to find their voice and help those less fortunate. Likewise the mission has always included helping women, families, and children in need. NCJW's mission is based on Jewish values, but open to helping anyone, regardless of social background.

Alternatively, Hadassah's mission is a bit more focused. Henrietta Szold founded Hadassah to help control disease and hunger in Israel. Hadassah promotes stability and continuity for Jews around the world, as well as a partnership between American and Israeli Jews. Hadassah's main purpose is to raise money for their hospitals in Israel.

National Council of Jewish Women

In 1893 Hannah G. Soloman was asked to create a Jewish presence at the Chicago World's Fair. The group of active and eager women she pulled together soon realized that their duties to create a Jewish presence consisted of only playing hostess and serving coffee. They wanted to do more, and by the end of the fair, she had established a delegation of women that would eventually become the National Council of Jewish Women.

In the early days of NCJW, immigration was the organization's primary concern, especially helping women that were arriving alone at Ellis Island. By the early 1900s, there were NCJW representatives in 250 cities helping to ease the transition of the immigrants. Part of the early initiatives of NCJW also included providing job skills training for immigrant women. This included comprehensive services for the blind, campaigns to create social legislation for low-income housing, child labor, public health, food and drug regulations, and civil rights. NCJW was invited by the President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 to participate in the first White House Conference on Child Welfare. Hannah Solomon worked with Susan B. Anthony and other

WHY JOIN?

suffragettes to help fight for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. During the World Wars, NCJW helped displaced persons, opened group homes for single Jewish women who had survived the Holocaust, as well as established programs in social work and education to train professionals to work with Holocaust survivors. Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, NCJW continued to advocate for the most pressing issues of the times, including reproductive rights of women, domestic rights issues, and voting equality for all.

Currently, on the national level, NCJW is involved in five specific initiatives: BenchMark: NCJW's Judicial Nominations Campaign; Plan A: NCJW's Campaign for Contraceptive Access; Higher Ground: NCJW's Domestic Violence Campaign; Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote that helps to advocate for those on the margins to have equal voting rights; and Voices for Reproductive Choices: NCJW's Emergency Initiative created in March of 2011 that "responds to the series of three extreme anti-choice bills that are currently making their way through Congress. These attacks include the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (HR 3), the Protect Life Act (HR 358), and the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act (HR 217)...[all of these] legislative measures would impose funding or coverage restrictions on critical health services, endanger women's health, limit women's rights as moral decision-makers, and erode religious liberty by imposing one view of abortion."¹

On the local level, National Council of Jewish Women/Los Angeles advocates for these issues too, but works mostly to meet the needs of the community. NCJW/LA has arts, literacy, and tutoring programs in low income Title I schools. These programs are part of the Women Helping Children department at NCJW/LA. These programs only exist because of the volunteers that NCJW provides to go into these schools to supplement the curriculum. NCJW/LA also

¹ www.ncjw.org

WHY JOIN?

staffs licensed social workers who provide inexpensive counseling to women, children, and families. NCJW/LA also provides a talkline staffed by trained paraprofessional volunteer counselors. People can call for a comforting voice and counseling. This program is part of the Women Helping Women department and also offers referrals for other counseling or legal services. Each year NCJW/LA has a clothing, book, and toy giveaway before the winter holidays; those in need can come to the NCJW/LA headquarters and receive free goods. NCJW/LA is perhaps best known for its nine thrift stores throughout Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley which are consistently named some of the best thrift stores in the area because of the high quality donations they receive.

In the 1950s, NCJW established an office and programs in Israel which “directly mirrors the organization’s efforts to create progressive social change in the US. NCJW’s pioneering Israel programs foster and support education, promote the empowerment of women, and bridge the gaps in society for Israel’s vulnerable women, children, and families.”²

Hadassah

While NCJW mainly focuses on domestic issues and has since its inception, Hadassah was formed because of Zionist ideals. Henrietta Szold visited Israel in its pre-state existence and witnessed how disease was affecting the people there. At first Szold sent two nurses to provide pasteurized milk to infants and to help cure trachoma, a curable eye disease that was making thousands blind. Within a few years Szold was able to send entire medical units there. Keeping in line with the current world needs, Szold and Hadassah helped save children from the anti-Semitic tyranny in Europe and brought them to Palestine.

² www.ncjw.org

WHY JOIN?

Hadassah is one of the largest women's volunteer organizations with 300,000 members. Keeping with Hadassah's mission, the organization continues to advocate for First Amendment issues, public health, immigration and voting rights, as well supporting Israel.

Part of Hadassah's mission and the work the organization partakes in "is committed to strengthening the unity of the Jewish people. In Israel, [Hadassah] accomplishes this through progressive healthcare, education, youth institutions, volunteerism, and land reclamation. In the U.S. [Hadassah reaches their] goals through Jewish and Zionist education programs, Zionist Youth programs, and health awareness programs, as well as by advocating for issues of importance to women and to the American Jewish community."³ Hadassah does this through four conduits: Health & Medicine, Education, Children & The Future, and Community Programs. Hadassah Medical Organizations has two medical centers in Israel that include Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center at Ein Kerem and the Hadassah University Hospital at Mount Scopus. Currently Hadassah is building the Sarah Westman Davidson Tower in Jerusalem. It is scheduled to be dedicated in 2012.

Most of everything that Hadassah fundraises for and advocates for goes back to creating quality healthcare for those in Israel. Through its educational components, Hadassah offers programs for mothers and toddlers, Young Judea youth programs, camps, and Israel trips, as well as programs to empower young girls and adolescents. Some of these programs also fall into the category of Children & The Future. This category also includes the Youth Aliyah program that has evolved from rescuing children in Nazi Europe to now aiding and resettling children from Russia and Ethiopia to Israel. Community Programs include advocacy as well as education, kids

³ www.hadassah.org

WHY JOIN?

and family programs, and health awareness. Additionally, this category includes local membership and programs.

On the local levels, Hadassah advocates and educates its members on general health issues as part of Hadassah's mission and goals. In each local chapter Hadassah promotes these issues, as well as emphasizing social and local volunteer opportunities for its members. In Southern California, there are a wide variety of groups with specific agendas and interests. For instance, there is a group for Persian women, for the 30/40-year-old set, and for young mothers. These groups are self-reliant and member driven. The groups mostly provide social opportunities for women who want to build relationships with other Jewish women, however they also based on geography. Hadassah Southern California's presence spreads throughout Los Angeles proper, the San Fernando Valley, down to San Diego, east to Palm Springs, and reaches north all the way to the Santa Clarita Valleys including San Luis Obispo.

Hadassah and NCJW have similar interests when it comes to advocacy issues, though Hadassah is essentially focused on Zionism and issues dealing with Israel. On the local level it seems this is how it gets members in the door, but it keeps members in the "house" by helping to provide meaningful social and volunteer opportunities. NCJW is more focused on the local level. The primary issues NCJW deals with in local sections are those that most effect the community they reside in, or at least this is how the Los Angeles section function. Advocacy events and education take place throughout the year, but what seems to attract women to the organization are the programs that affect their community's most vulnerable populations – women who have encountered domestic abuse, and children who attend schools with little arts and literature programs, as well as families who struggle through economic uncertainty.

WHY JOIN?

Because of the issues that the organizations deal with, the presence of NCJW/LA is more obvious – especially with the social enterprise of their thrift stores, but also because NCJW/LA has volunteers working in schools almost every day of the school week. Hadassah may be a better-known organization nationally and have a different legacy because of its work in Israel, but in Southern California it seems to struggle to develop a strong programmatic presence, perhaps partly due its focus on creating social networks for Jewish women.

With the mission of these organizations at the forefront, I began to interview members, lay leaders, and professional staff of NCJW/LA and Hadassah Southern California. I wanted to answer the following, specific questions:

- Why do people choose to become a member of Jewish women's organizations?
- How is involvement and membership in these organizations reflective of the individual's commitment to their Judaism and the larger Jewish community? How is this reflective of historical and current sociological trends? How is it reflective of generational or feminist identity?
- How has the nature of membership in Jewish women's organizations changed? What is the value of membership to these organizations? What are the perceived benefits of membership to the individuals?

I had five hypotheses related to my research questions:

1. Women join NCJW/LA and Hadassah Southern California because of feminist ideals.
2. Women join because they want to do *tikkun olam*.
3. Women join because they want to be affiliated some way with a Jewish organization.
4. Women join because they are seeking an outlet for social network and a community of like-minded peers.
5. Women are gifted a lifetime membership to the organization by a relative who has been involved for a long period of time. I also thought that women would be members because their family members have been members and it is part of their family legacy to be involved in Jewish communal life in this way.

WHY JOIN?

Methodologies

This thesis could have been researched using longitudinal, quantitative methods utilizing a survey sent to members of Hadassah and NCJW on the national and local levels to cull why they were attracted to these Jewish women's organizations. In preparation for beginning to research my topic and brainstorming questions to ask on a survey, I realized the questions I wanted to answer would be much more effective if I did personal interviews with a variety of professional and lay leaders of the local offices of Hadassah of Southern California and NCJW/Los Angeles. I would be able to ask follow-up questions and see if patterns emerged about why joining a Jewish women's service organization was important to these women's personal, civic, and Jewish lives. Additionally I was concerned that if I sent out an electronic survey, I would not obtain enough results. Many of the members of Hadassah and NCJW are older women who infrequently use email or the Internet and who find it an uncomfortable way to communicate. Conducting interviews would alleviate any frustration in not getting results back in a timely manner – or at all. Interviews would help enable a greater understanding of the passion of each member and how connected they are to these organizations. Through these relatively short interviews I was also able to form personal connections with the interviewees so that they felt comfortable telling me their story.

Originally, six months before the intense research started, when I still thought that a qualitative survey would be the best way to gain results, I compiled a list of questions to include on a survey and distributed it to my Research Methods class. This course was comprised of five other classmates in the School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, as well as myself. After distributing my draft survey and getting feedback from my very small sample pool about the content and purpose of the questions, I realized that I would not get the intended results by using

WHY JOIN?

a survey. Instead I adapted the questions from the survey and created an interview guide that would be helpful for both members of Hadassah and NCJW.

I did one “pre-interview” with the executive director of Hadassah of Southern California in the Spring of 2011 as an assignment for the Research Methods class. I asked questions that would give me a more in-depth background on Hadassah Southern California, how it functions in Los Angeles in particular, how people find out about the organization, and how they become involved. I only knew a minimal amount about Hadassah in general and Hadassah Southern California in particular. I also asked questions about how the executive director defines a member and what being a member means to this professional who is ultimately responsible for how the organization is represented in and to the community. I also wanted to find out if the professional sensed that micro-communities are being formed among members of the organization. I wanted to know how, as an executive director and the public voice of the organization, the mission is promoted and relayed to potential members. As well, I wanted to know how the mission is advanced to current members about what is important and relevant to the organization.

My original goal was to interview the following professional staff of each organization:

- Executive Director
- Membership Director
- Outreach Director
- Development Director
- Program Director
- Possibly CEO/Executive Director and/or President of the national office of NJCW and Hadassah

Just like every person working in a non-profit is responsible for development and fundraising, each professional is also asked to make outreach efforts at events or programs, even those programs not specifically targeted at membership recruitment. I was curious about how the

WHY JOIN?

professional staff viewed their specific job descriptions in regards to membership recruitment. I wondered if they were going to give me the standard, “politically correct” answer or would see their role as staff person in a broader sense to the well-being of the organization. My goal was to interview lay leaders with a variety of involvement levels, including the:

- Board President
- VP of Membership
- Someone actively involved who has been a member for 10 years or more
- A nominally involved member who has been a member for 10 years or more
- A lifetime member, involved (attends events often, every month or two)
- Lifetime members, marginally involved (attends events, but may not be involved on specific committees)
- Volunteer (who may not be a member) with one of the programs
- Two members who are committee chairs
- Young Adult Leadership

If I had tried to interview all of these people, it would have been too large of a task for a project like this. I think I would have also started to get more repetitive answers from people, which already starting to happen with those who I did interview.

Since I had contacts with the professional leadership at NCJW/LA, it was easy to email each person I knew to set-up interview times. I had begun to establish a relationship with the Hadassah Southern California, so contacting the executive director and asking her to help me contact others on the professional staff was fairly easy.

Making contact with the lay leaders, however, was a challenge. I had formed a few personal relationships with lay leaders while interning at NCJW/LA, so I figured I would email or call them, explain my project, and we would set up a time for the interview. I knew that I needed more interviewees than the two or three people I felt comfortable contacting, so I asked for recommendations from the NCJW membership and outreach director about whom to contact. It was stipulated to me that this staff person would contact the people, ask if it was okay for me to contact them, and then I could contact them to set-up interviews. This was helpful because the

WHY JOIN?

people knew to expect to hear from me, but a bit burdensome to have to go through what felt like a complicated process to make contact with potential interviewees. While initially it was frustrating that NCJW did not want me to call members directly because I had an idea in my mind of who would be interesting to speak with, in the end it did relieve some of the stress of “cold calling” members to ask for interviews.

Contacting Hadassah members to interview was challenging for similar and various other reasons. I had asked the executive director from Hadassah for names of members who would be helpful for me to interview, and she was more than willing to share names. I contacted these people on my own either via email or by phone call. They were responsive, and often times they were very excited to be able to talk about their experiences in Hadassah.

When I contacted the people, I framed the structure of the interview for them. I said that it would be ideal for us to set aside an hour and a half for the interview, but it would take anywhere from an hour to an hour and half to complete the interview. I also said I would prefer to speak in person and that if it was easier I would meet them at their home or office or the NCJW or Hadassah offices. Most of the interviews were conducted at members’ homes or at a restaurant; one interview happened in the garden of a public library. All of the interviews with professional staff that I interviewed took place at their offices.

All of the interviews had a positive energy, as I make interpersonal connections easily, even with people I have just met. There were some challenges when interviewing people at home. Two of the people who I interviewed have small children who needed a lot of attention, so it was a bit distracting and truncated some of the interview.

When I began the interview, I would explain (or re-explain) that I was writing my thesis on the value of membership in Jewish women’s organizations focused on NCJW and Hadassah. I

WHY JOIN?

described that I was looking at the trends from a historical and sociological perspective, that I was conducting interviews to gain a personal perspective and motivations for joining such organizations, and that I would be recording the interview, as well as taking notes. I assured them that what was said would remain anonymous; I was using the recording for clarification purposes.

I recorded the interview using a smart phone. This method of recording was the easiest for me since I always have my phone with me, and I did not have to carry any extra equipment with me. However, this was intimidating for some of the older people I interviewed because of the new and unfamiliar technology. Many of the interviewees, even some of the younger people I interviewed, who have smart phones, were worried about having their opinions and stories recorded. There were a couple of instances when I was asked to stop recording so things said were definitely “off the record.” With the couple of over-the-phone interviews I conducted, I tried to record on my phone at the same time as I was speaking on the phone; that technology did not work. The over-the-phone interviews proved to be frustrating compared to the in-person interviews because I was unable to tell if interviewees were giving their full attention to the conversation, and it seems there is less desire to have an in-depth conversation over the phone than in person.

I do not consider myself a “phone person.” I become uncomfortable, and it is more difficult to establish a rapport when I cannot see the person. The distractions when conducting an interview on the phone are abundant for the interviewee and interviewer – checking email, doing light housework, other phone calls or text messages coming in. Having the interviewee pay attention to the questions and answer in a meaningful way became challenging. Also it felt that once one is on the phone, they want to find ways to get off the phone, so what I expected to

WHY JOIN?

be a minimum of an hour conversation ended up being only one half an hour. With one of the people I interviewed over the phone, I didn't know very well which produced a more stilted interview, though I was able to obtain basic information.

There were disadvantages to interviewing the professional staff in their offices, as well. The professional staff who I interviewed were very accommodating of my schedule and took time from their busy days for an hour or more interview. However, even though they set aside time for the interview, they still received phone calls and emails and questions from co-workers, and they were often distracted during the interview. On one occasion, the interview completely stopped for a few minutes so the interviewee could take care of business, which ruined some momentum in the interview. I often concluded the interview by asking them that if I needed any clarification or more information whether I could I would email with questions.

Not only did I want to interview a variety of people who were involved in NCJW and Hadassah to varying degrees, but I also wanted a range of ages represented and years involved in the organization. A little more than half of the people, professional staff and lay leaders, that I interviewed were in their 50s and 60s. Only five out of the seventeen people I interviewed are in their 30s or 40s. Two of these women were in their early 30s, while the others were in their late 30s or early 40s. This is not a wide demographic, but that is part of the issue – there simply are not 20-somethings involved in these organizations, except as marginal members or only members because a grandmother or mother bought them a membership. According to my own anecdotal research, this occurs more in Hadassah than in NCJW. The professional staff were unable to recommend marginal members for me to interview since they basically only exist on paper, are only sent periodic mailings and rarely attend events.

WHY JOIN?

In my Findings section I summarize most of my interviews with the members I spoke with. I do not go into full detail about the interviews with professional staff, although the information they provided me informs my suggestions listed in the Recommendations section.

Since I was unable to tap into the category of marginal members, I decided to conduct informal interviews with a member of NCJW and a member of Hadassah outside of Los Angeles. The Hadassah member I interviewed is from a small suburb of Portland, Oregon. The NCJW member I interviewed is from a medium sized southern town with no metropolitan city surrounding it. I was curious to see if their motivations for joining a women's Jewish organization were the same as those in Los Angeles, the second largest Jewish city in America. These were easy interviews. The Hadassah member I interviewed was a member of the synagogue I formerly worked at and is like a member of my second family. She was very candid and thorough in her answers. The NCJW member I interviewed was through an email questionnaire. I asked her to fill it out and send it back to me through email. I know her story well, but thought that her answering a questionnaire would be helpful, especially for her deep-seeded reason for joining NCJW.

Although I interviewed a small sample of members of NCJW/LA and HSC, I still felt like I was able to gain a fairly realistic cross-section of types, ages, and motivations. Based on my findings I suggest that these organizations should conduct a large-scale quantitative study to assess why women *are joining* these organizations and to find out why women are *not joining* these organizations. I also suggest that these organizations should also create a strategic plan to engage potential members in their 20s and 30s.

Additionally, I suggest that the organizations undergo a rebranding that emphasizes their advocacy platforms, especially the issues that resonate most with the Millennial generation.

WHY JOIN?

Literature Review

General reflections

Much has been written about the state of Jewish communal life in the last few years. In particular there has been a lot of research about current trends in organizational life – the habits and motivations of people who do and don't affiliate with Jewish institutions.

Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, has explored the idea of social capital to understand why Americans are joining – or not joining groups. In examining religious participation in the United States since the 1950s, Putnam states:

...the classic institutions of American civic life, both religious and secular, have been “hallowed out.” Seen from without, the institutional edifice appears virtually intact – little decline in professions of faith, formal membership down just a bit, and so on. When examined more closely, however, it seems clear that decay has consumed the load-bearing beams of our civic infrastructure. The decline in religious participation, like many of the changes in political and community involvement, is attributable largely to generational differences. Any given cohort of Americans seems not to have reduced religious observance over the years, but more recent generations are less observant than their parents. (p. 72)

There is a correlation between a lack of institutional religious involvement and civic engagement (Putnam, 2000, p. 69). This is also reflective of how people socialize. There is less formality now than there used to be. Putnam describes the differences in the way we interact with two Yiddish descriptions; there are the *machers* and the *schmoozers*. A *macher* is one who spends a lot of time working in the community to make sure things get done. The *schmoozer* has extensive and informal conversations with others; the *schmoozer* is “spontaneous and flexible” (Putnam, 2000, p. 92-3). Putnam is careful to point out that “major-league *machers* are often world-class *schmoozers*, and vice versa” (p. 94). The differences between these two prototypes are in social status, education, and income levels. *Schmoozers* are often single because they have the gift of

WHY JOIN?

energy and time to be with people in social settings just for fun – outside of family commitments. *Machers* are more stationary while *schmoozers* move around more often (p. 94). Putnam asserts that informal connections do not necessarily build civil engagement, but one cannot discount the importance of social networks. Special consideration should be paid to those who are *schmoozers*, or at least have *schmoozer* tendencies (p. 95). In Putnam's study it was found that in the last 50 years, informal socialization had declined among many different segments of society. This is counter-intuitive to other trends such as people settling down and starting families (p. 108). The less we informally socialize and get together with friends “just because” or have casual conversations with our neighbors leads us to be less engaged in many civic activities.

It is also relevant to examine how society has changed in the last half century and how work-life dynamics have shifted. People feel busier now than people felt a generation ago; Putnam suspects that both men and women are being overworked (p. 189). There are three facts he posits:

1. “...”free time” has come in forms that are not easily convertible to civic engagement,” schedules today are necessarily similar to one another, and often there are not large chunks of time for people to devote to activities
2. “...less educated Americans have gained free time, whereas their college-educated counterparts, for the most part, have lost it.”
3. “dual –career families are more common and are spending more time at work than they used to” (p. 190-91)

There seems to be a redistribution of free time and, instead of investing this free time into civic engagement, people “consume it privately (Putnam, 2000, p.191).” In addition to Putnam's research on social phenomenon, there is also considerable literature published by Jewish communal professionals reflecting on people's organizational involvement and how organizations are able to welcome and retain members.

WHY JOIN?

Organizational Engagement

In a 2002 article titled *The Self-Renewing Organization: How Ideas from the Field of Organizational Development Can Revitalize Jewish Institutions* by Isa Aron, she examines how Jewish organizations are able to stay relevant. Her examination focuses mostly on trends in schools, though the essay contains information that is transferrable to all other areas of Jewish communal life. Through her research, she found that the organizations hold four capacities that either hinder or advance their agendas. Successful organizations use these capacities to be “self-renewing,” because they “[emphasize] the reflexive and cyclical nature of this activity.” The four capacities are:

- Thinking back and thinking ahead: Being both reflective and proactive.
- Enabling leaders to follow and followers to lead: Practicing collaborative leadership.
- Seeing both the trees and the forest: Celebrating the diversity of the membership while maintaining a vision of a holistic community.
- Honoring the past while anticipating the future: Balancing tradition and change (p. 9-10).

These capacities enable collaboration, reflection, and visioning which allows the “leaders both the impetus and the courage to be proactive” (Aron, 2002, p. 13-14). This helps “shift [the] viewpoint... (which) involves moving from seeing the individual as the seat of leadership toward a view that the source of leadership lies in meaning-making in which all members of the community participate to some degree or another” and allows members to take ownership and leadership over projects (Aron, 2002, p.16). Aron recognizes that organizations need to:

- share a common purpose
- value their membership as an end in itself, not just as a means to other ends
- have multiple, enduring, and significant personal contacts with other members
- accept the fact that there will be differences between them
- evolve procedures for managing the conflicts that inevitably arise (p. 16)

These are ways that Aron found that lead to successful collaboration and strong institutional

WHY JOIN?

infrastructure. Her recommendations could be used as guidelines for how to generate ideas, plan events more efficiently, and show the lay-leadership that their role is important and vital to the organization's mission. It also helps divide tasks and decisions in a way where everyone feels like they are contributing and where everyone's particular expertise is valued. Sociologist Riv- Ellen Prell adds a response at the conclusion of Isa Aron's article examining the patterns of the large group of Jewish Baby Boomers:

The members of the Baby Boom generation, for the most part, abandoned Judaism during their college years. But that same generation also produced Jewish activists who were particularly critical of synagogues for their lack of a more fully realized ideology. They wanted Judaism to critique the dominant culture rather than embrace it. They created alternative institutions and sought new ways to organize communities and to challenge professionalization of leadership (p. 33).

Members of organizations have to feel a commitment to their organizations. They have to feel like their beliefs align with the culture and mission of the organization, as well as with the ideas of the professional staff they are working with.

Researcher Gary A. Tobin along with colleague Gabriel Berger write about the unique ways that American Jewish life has unfolded. They argue that Jewish institutional infrastructure needs to be strong so that strong communities among Jews are created. They observe:

... participation in Jewish organizations is assumed to be a critical factor in ensuring continuity of the community. The assumption is that Jewish organizations not only facilitate social contacts but also generate further ties and networks among Jews, in addition to socializing and educating them in various aspects of Jewish life. It follows that the vitality and quality of the American Jewish community depend to a large extent on the capacity of its institutions to generate loyalty and participation; and the actual level of participation can serve as a measure of the community's general state of health (Tobin, 1992, p. 118).

They go on to describe how in the 1980s, affiliation and traditional religious observance was becoming lower as many Jews were now fourth and fifth generation Americans and assimilation was becoming more prevalent. This kind of apathy also affected ties to organizational life.

WHY JOIN?

These are still problems facing Jewish agencies today. The dilemmas Tobin and Berger described in 1992 are still relevant 20 years later. It echoes what Isa Aron argues in her paper:

... voluntary organizations [give] their members widespread opportunities for decision-making and influence. When members feel able to affect organizational policy decisions, they are likely to exhibit higher levels of commitment. Lack of involvement and active participation in Jewish organizations is partly due to the competition from secular society but also may be based on members' perceptions that they do not have a major stake in the life of those organizations. Hence, the critical questions become: (1) What kind of incentives do Jewish organizations offer in order to motivate participation and commitment? (2) What are regarded by the organizations themselves as acceptable levels of involvement, participation and commitment? (3) How do Jewish organizations make their expectations and incentives known? (4) How is the efficacy of Jewish organizations assessed by the community members? (5) What are the obstacles to increased levels of involvement among the underinvolved? (Tobin, 1992, p. 129-130).

Especially in non-synagogue organizations, there has to be an incentive to the member to remain a member, and especially to become an *involved* member.

The above research examines patterns mainly of those in the Baby Boomer generation. The Millennial generation currently has leaders in a quandary. The “establishment organizations,” (like Hadassah and NCJW) seem to have trouble pinpointing motivations of this generation, but they are beginning to ask the questions.

An article by Abigail Pickus titled *The Next Generation: What Jewish Organizations are Doing to Cultivate 20-and-30-Somethings*, examines what established organizations are doing to keep their pulse on current trends. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) sent a 20-something to meet with other 20-somethings to ask them what they want and what is missing for them in the Jewish communal sphere. The AJC found that young people are missing from these organizations not because they do not care and not because they have a negative perception of their Jewish identity, rather:

...they just never had anyone [from the Jewish world] talk to them about it, especially after the age of 13. In many cases, they just didn't see the Jewish

WHY JOIN?

community as a safe or welcoming place or one where they could talk about the contemporary issues that concerned them (Pickus, 2012).

The results of this study were released in 2008 from a cross-section of respondents – teens and the 20/30 set reported that all they really wanted was somebody to talk to them. They wanted to feel like they were being engaged in a conversation about their concerns and desires. On the other hand, however, rather than sign on to the pre-determined options put out by the established Jewish organizations, these young folks want a kind of “concierge-like service” where they, especially participants returning from Birthright trips, can have a personalized Jewish experience that meets all their altruistic needs, especially social activism. Younger Jews have interests in issues that impact a global society, not necessarily Jewish, and they are usually more educated on the non-Jewish issue than the Jewish issue. They also participate in trips and experiences that expose them to these issues; whether in Africa or in New Orleans, they are put in situations to aide people who are not Jewish, and their participation is based on their personal, Jewish values. Pickus’ article also points out that young people are more comfortable in peer-led settings. As part of this study that Pickus describes in her article, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee found that:

...all of [their] programs, be they service or educational, [are there] to build in leadership, which means that they can’t be solely staff driven...[which] means on the ground [what is an] educational event, staff will never get up and speak. Everything – from the leading, planning, chairing to offering “expert” advice – comes from the young volunteers themselves...[the] educational model is that if [a] young person serve[s] in a community for a year then they are the expert and they can then educate their peers (Pickus, 2012).

The research consistently shows the need for leaders to feel in control and feel they are counted for something other than a numbers boast for an organization’s bottom line. This two-part article also explored how the youth are contributing monetarily. The JDC responded by saying: How do

WHY JOIN?

you put a dollar value on 50,000 hours of service? This is huge. We can't shrug off what those hours of volunteer service mean (Pickus, 2012).

They want to know exactly what their money is going towards. They do not want their money to go to an umbrella organization that distributes it, as the organization decides, to different programs. The amount of time that is given by young people is at a premium and difficult to qualitatively measure, but cannot be overstated. In one case, the Schusterman Foundation has teamed with Teach for America -- a program that allows college graduates to donate two years of their life serving in low-income schools around the country as teachers and mentors. They found that the commitment cannot be measured by the financial benefits.

Ultimately, the leaders who are actively seeking and engaging the youth emphasize:

... [the youth are] not saying, 'You have to join a synagogue to be Jewish,' [recounts the Associate National Director of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation,] "We are giving them the connection, bit by bit, to building Jewish lives grounded in purpose, meaning and relevancy in their own image (Pickus, 2012).

More Jewish organizations need to recognize the importance of time that young, single people are able to donate, and that it may not be in the form of traditional memberships in synagogues or social service organizations. Young people want to be able to find connections on their own terms, on their own timeline; this may eventually led to membership in organizations, but it may not.

In 2006 a report was published based on research conducted by Reboot, an organization committed to engaging "Jewishly-unconnected cultural creatives, innovators and thought-leaders who, through their candid and introspective conversations and creativity, generate projects that impact both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds." *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No*

WHY JOIN?

*Foam... Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices*⁴ explored the identities, motivations, affiliations, and knowledge of 35 18 to 25 year-olds. Reboot found that, while very assimilated into the mainstream culture, the Millennial generation are self-confident in their Jewish identity and have positive associations with their Judaism, though many feel their knowledge on ritual, liturgy, and texts is lacking. Some of the respondents are from inter-faith households and have fears of not “being Jewish enough” and not knowing enough. Many of the participants in the study – whether or not both parents are Jewish – feel that institutional Jewish life is not for them. While they are intrigued by Jewish non-profits’ missions, they do not necessarily want to associate with the people who are part of these organizations. Also, non-profits whose only function seems to be fundraising are also a turn-off for these young people. These young Jews have more cultural and “familial” ties to Judaism than ritual or institutional (Bennett, Potts, Levin & Abramson, 2006).

The question was also asked if respondents knew what the letters stood for of organizations like AIPAC, UJC, and AJC. They did not know what the letters stood for much less know what the organizations’ missions were. Their American and Jewish values are indistinguishable. Many respondents said that they would volunteer with a Jewish organization, but the goals of the agency would need to fit in with their personal ethos and would need to be more universal in nature rather than particularistic. The report concluded that going forward in engaging the Millennial generation, the following has to be at the forefront:

- The emergence of a self-confident Jewish identity;
- The sense of connection to a global Jewish people;
- A continuing emphasis on informal practice, celebration and ritual, despite the lack of interest in the formal and institutional;
- An articulation of a need to give something back and to help others, which alludes to the potential of social justice;

⁴ This is how Reboot describes their mission found on their website: <http://www.rebooters.net>.

WHY JOIN?

- The remarkable (and relatively untapped, and vastly under-funded) power of culture as a conveyor of meaning, informer of values, catalyst for conversation, and convener of an episodic community (Bennett, p. 33).

It is also important to note what this generation thinks about Israel. The report points out that “this generation of young people does not have the same ideological loyalty to Israel as the post-war generation of American Jews. Many cannot identify AIPAC or understand the precise contours of the conflict in the Middle East. Still, many have personal connections and extended family that tie them to the country... Israel represents at least one potential bridge to connect them (or reconnect them) with their Jewish identities.” (Bennett, 2006, p. 20) Israel does not factor into these people’s lives like it did a generation or two ago.

Understanding the viewpoints, history, and interests of the potential volunteers and members is crucial for Jewish organizations as they try to cultivate relationships among the Millennial generation before they start getting married and having children.

Trends in Giving

As briefly mentioned in the above section, time is valued over money when considering the impact a volunteer is making to an organization’s mission, especially in regard to the younger generation. There is also starting to be more research on general philanthropic trends among women. In *Modern Jewish Women Donors: A New Paradigm*, Robert Evans and Avrum Lapin find that:

...women are increasingly influential and drive decisions relating to charitable giving, and that they routinely give better and more passionately than do men. [Today’s donors are] all types and ages, we see ways that (Jewish) women address philanthropy today and see why (Jewish) women are such good donors (Evans & Lapin, 2012).

This article interviewed four high-level women philanthropists around the country. The questions were based on results of the survey, *2011 Study of High Net Worth Women’s Philanthropy*,

WHY JOIN?

conducted by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University and sponsored by Bank of America Merrill Lynch. The key findings suggest that women's giving sets them apart from men's giving. Women are more optimistic about how their gifts are used than men. They feel as though their contributions will make a difference, as well as set a good example to those in younger generations. Women are also "more educated and informed about philanthropic choices, and more trusting of non- profits than men... [Women] have a greater awareness of the needs in the community and are likely to express more confidence in the ability of non-profits and individuals to solve societal and global problems... [this arises] from the value that women generally place on having personal engagement with the organizations they support" (Evans & Lapin, 2012).

An article in 2011 written by Lisa Eisen, the national director of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, laid out six significant trends in Jewish philanthropy: Increasing Democratization of Philanthropy, Shift to Catalytic Philanthropy, Rise of the Networked Mindset, Spend Downs, Generational Wealth Transfer, Ascendancy of Women. When describing how women are giving, she notes that soon it will become the rule rather than the exception that there are high level donors like Lynn Schusterman making contributions to Jewish agencies. Women as a segment of the population are constantly being ignored which is counterproductive especially when they sometimes give twice as much as men. Eisen also proposed ways that agencies can strengthen donor relationships, which have echoes to the ways it has been suggested to engage volunteers in membership organizations:

- Adaptive, resilient leadership;
- Nimble, entrepreneurial approaches to the issues they are working on;
- An increased emphasis on collaboration, leverage, and cross-sectoral networking;
- A laser-like focus on performance and measureable impact; and
- The ability to harness the power of more sophisticated, engaged donors (Eisen, 2011).

WHY JOIN?

Studies completed in the last few years have all shown that Jewish women are giving more and more consistently to Jewish organizations than to secular organizations. Correlations have been made to denomination affiliation and education levels, as well as the relationship status of women. If women are married, a difference occurs if their spouse is Jewish or non-Jewish. More research needs to be conducted to assess the patterns and impetus of women's philanthropic giving (Mesch, Moore & Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2010).

To summarize, for membership organizations to succeed in attracting and engaging their full potential of members and resources, there needs to be emphasis placed on cultivating personal relationships. First, organizations should bring together *machers*, to help increase visibility and knowledge of the organization, with *schmoozers* who can highlight the communal and social aspects of the organization. Next, organizations need to be sure that everyone on all levels of leadership has buy-in to the mission and the work that needs to be done. Volunteers, as well as all levels of professional staff, should feel like their voice is being heard when brainstorming and making decisions. Third, the Millennial generation wants to be involved in Jewish life, but they need to be asked and given responsibility in shaping how to be involved. There needs to be discussions happening among potential leaders of the Millennial generation and professional staff, especially staff who are part of "the establishment," about how to involve this age group. Finally, examining patterns in women's philanthropic giving is important to strengthening fundraising efforts of organizations and a way to enable more women to be involved in organizational life on both the financial and working levels.

WHY JOIN?

Findings

My strongest hypotheses for why people join women's organizations had to do with feminism, *tikkun olam*, and community. My other hypotheses included: wanting to be affiliated with a Jewish organization, having opportunities to network, and fulfilling a family legacy through service to the organization. The profiles of the women I describe met each of these hypotheses to one extent or another.

The following profiles are primarily of the lay leaders I interviewed. Overall the professional staff that I interviewed had similar answers to questions about how they think the community perceives their organization and what they imagine the future will look like. Each of the professional staff people I spoke with, however, made sure they “stayed on mission.” They each portray their commitment with enthusiasm. Social service organizations rely heavily on the resources that lay leaders are able to bring to the table, while the professional staff are vital to insuring that the mission is carried out and that the lay leaders are properly educated on the mission and functions of the organization.

Volunteer Attraction

The inception of both NCJW and Hadassah place them in a particular time and place in history. The women that I interviewed for this project also had stories that show the continued relevance of these organizations in the 21st century. Their stories also reflect current group and social dynamics.

Everyone wants to feel good about the activities they are involved in and the people they associate with. The women that I spoke with were either all seeking a group of like-minded individuals they could participate in activities with or an organization or group of people they could socialize with. Some wanted to find a way to become involved in community service

WHY JOIN?

activities. Surprisingly, for most of these women the fact that these were *Jewish women* organizations was a happenstance.

All of the people I interviewed feel strongly about helping people, participating in some kind of community service, or strengthening Jewish communal infrastructure, and they are passionate about their organizational memberships. For the most part, they speak intelligently and ardently about the mission of their particular membership organization. My sample size was small, and because of this I have categorized the findings into three different categories: the Hyper-Volunteer, the Haimish, and the Board Member.⁵

I have kept the names of respondents anonymous.⁶ This made those that I interviewed more comfortable, and in turn the respondents offered more candid answers to my questions.

Their Stories

Hyper-Volunteer

Anna is almost a dream composite of what a membership organization seeks when looking to recruit new members. She has a flexible schedule because she doesn't have a husband or children; her personality is that of a "doer;" without being asked she will volunteer and will figure out what needs to be done; she has a large network of friends and colleagues who she can educate about HSC and recruit them to join. When she was still in her 30s, this self-defined "joiner" and "hyper volunteer" was looking for a way to meet a more diverse set of women. Anna was only meeting Jews on JDate which proved to be futile for meaningful relationships.

⁵ Haimish is a Yiddish word that is often defined as: home-like, friendly, folksy. It is used to describe a place or event that makes one feel comfortable; that things are down-to-earth. I describe this category of members and volunteers as Haimish because these members are usually part of the groups or sections of their organizations that are smaller, in the suburban areas of town. The women sometimes described the "governing" entity as big and almost out-of-reach because of geography or inconvenience. This is not to say that activities that happen among the Hyper Volunteers or Board member categories are not haimish, but the focus is different.

⁶ I use the real names of two respondents, Lanie and Teri. They are part of communities far away from Los Angeles and anonymity was not necessary for them to be able to speak candidly to me about their experiences in NCJW and Hadassah, respectively.

WHY JOIN?

She happened upon an article in the Los Angeles *Jewish Journal* about new groups that Hadassah was forming. She liked that these were small groups, but also had opportunities to be involved in the larger HSC organization. She went to an afternoon tea and realized she had found her niche. She joined Hadassah Southern California that day, right after the event. She had been looking for a *havurah*, but as a single woman with no children who was not interested in a synagogue membership (in her research it seemed that most *havurot* were housed in synagogues and targeted towards families), the closest she found were the HSC groups.⁷ HSC offered leadership classes for which one had to be nominated in order to participate, and she was nominated for one called Machon Leadership Academy. The topics ranged from Israel to the Jewish family, and because of her fortitude and eagerness, she was asked to start a group targeted at women aged 30 to 50.⁸ Almost immediately she was asked to take on other leadership positions that would benefit the larger organization and would utilize her skills in professional marketing and recruitment. She often worked in the HSC office one day a week assisting with managerial duties. Currently, with the financial and staff cutbacks that HSC has had to make, Anna provides pro bono services to the agency in marketing materials. During her eight years of membership she has been unemployed during certain times because of the economy, so she has had more time to volunteer, but she has not necessarily had the financial resources to be involved as a monetary contributor. One of the times she was unemployed, another member donated a scholarship in her name to become a life member; after she was employed again, she “paid it forward” and donated a life membership to another involved member. She understands the power of members to promote an organization’s mission, meeting people where they are, and the power of encouragement to get people involved and have them stay involved.

⁷ Hadassah Southern California calls the different sub-categories of interest groups simply “groups.” These groups can be based on age, interest, or cultural affiliation.

⁸ HSC no longer offers the Machon Leadership Academy.

WHY JOIN?

When I began the conversation with Anna, I figured that, based on all the social organizations Anna was part of – Jewish and non-Jewish – and her leadership role, she would have known about Hadassah from an early age and saw it fitting into her interests as an adult. She recounted, however, that she knew little of Hadassah; her mother had not been involved; and despite growing up in the Los Angeles area, she was not highly involved in Jewish life nor did she have a plethora of Jewish friends. Her mother had been involved in NCJW and never had much interest in Hadassah; she had found her niche and her community and felt comfortable there. Anna realizes that wherever you start out and wherever you become comfortable is where you will probably stay as a volunteer and member. There probably will not be much crossover in organizational involvement.

As a Hyper-Volunteer, Anna is known by many people in the larger organization, and especially by those who she refers to as “the ancients.”⁹ Even in her relatively short eight years of involvement in HSC, she has found successful modes of recruitment and retention of members. She has found that being in someone’s home makes a difference because she feels like she gets to know them better and connects with the people in the organization on a more intimate level. The events where holiday rituals are surrounded with food like Chanukah and Passover are the most successful events. These are more interesting for many people than meeting monthly for a book club. Anna also notices that members who were made life members by their mothers or grandmothers at a young age are often only members on paper; they do not attend events or participate in the leadership. The mothers and grandmothers who have paid for membership for their relatives often ask Anna to reach out to them; she tries to explain that they will become involved when they are ready; membership cannot be pushed.

⁹ Anna jokingly refers to members who are in their 70s and 80s and who have been involved for decades as “the ancients.” She realizes this may be an unfair description of this demographic, since they have the most in-depth institutional knowledge.

WHY JOIN?

Because Anna is so entrenched in HSC and is part of a group that attracts younger people, she also interacts with a significant number of young mothers who want to be involved in something. These women look at Hadassah as a social opportunity with a purpose; it is “Hadassah approved.” They do not seem to feel guilty about going to events or meetings for Hadassah because it is an organization that is doing good work and making positive contributions to society. It is also time to themselves, particularly if they do not have to worry about paying for a babysitter because their husbands are watching the children, even if the activities they attend are more social than volunteer based.¹⁰ Whenever anyone attends an event or volunteer opportunity she is hosting or attending, she makes it her duty to help them feel welcome. She greets them, engages them in conversation, and tries to forge connections with them. Anna recognizes that everyone has a busy schedule and many commitments, but she assures the women that as often as they are able to attend, they will be welcome, with the hope that one day they will be able to reach a higher involvement level within a specific group or the larger organization.

As much as she is involved in HSC and commits much of her free time to the cause, she worries that in the next five to fifteen years the organization will “revert” to a smaller, less sustainable organization. Anna did not feel like she could say that with full authority, as she has only been involved for a short amount of time. Ever since the Madoff Ponzi scheme, many changes that were supposed to occur, like HSC becoming a “fundraising hub” for Hadassah nationally, have been put on hold and will probably have to be scrapped all together. Because of the financial crisis, the professional staff was cut significantly. There is no longer an Executive

¹⁰ Two women from NCJW who have young children mentioned the dilemma about paying for a babysitter to volunteer. It seems silly to them and almost contradicts the purpose of volunteering. This is part of a larger problem that will be explained later in the Findings section about recruiting young mothers to these organizations and how the organization can find ways to accommodate for childcare during meetings and events.

WHY JOIN?

Director, but rather a Director. This shift means that the membership cannot be nourished in the same ways, and the remaining staff are required to take on more responsibilities outside of their initial job descriptions. Everyone is being spread thin. The dependence on volunteers is increasing, but only if they take initiative and are able to do the work. Anna fears that volunteers will not be able to take on the administrative responsibilities. Hadassah's main fundraising project is for the hospital in Jerusalem; money was lost on that because of the Madoff scandal and the decreasing value of the US dollar, so the financial downfall is affecting all aspects of the organization.

Two other women I interviewed also exemplify the characteristics of a Hyper-Volunteer. One is a woman in her late 50s or early 60s, Shira. She has been a volunteer for thirteen years with NCJW/LA. Like Anna, she found information about the organization through an advertisement in a newspaper. Shira is a former teacher and thought that volunteering in one of the arts or literacy programs would be a good opportunity for her to use her professional skills. She is fortunate that she does not have to work and is able to donate large amounts of time to community service. Shira's profile differs from Anna's in that she is married with children, though her children are now grown and out of the house. She started volunteering through one of the afterschool programs sponsored by Women Helping Children (WHC), and her membership coincided with her start as a volunteer.¹¹

I asked each respondent if the "J" or the "W" in the name (and the implied "J" and "W" in Hadassah's name) contributed to their wanting to join the organization. The "J" did matter for Shira. She is a member of her synagogue and joined when her children were younger. She is even more involved now that she is an "empty nester," though she is not involved with the

¹¹ Currently one does not have to be a member of NCJW/LA to volunteer in any of their school programs or work at the Talk Line.

WHY JOIN?

Sisterhood at her synagogue, signifying that the “W” is not as important to her desire to be part of organizational life. Shira does not feel like she needs any more friends, and she does not want to “hang out.” When she was looking for volunteer opportunities, she was eager for the chance to “get her hands dirty.” She estimates that her hours volunteering outweigh the amount of money she donates; although she does give outside of the required yearly dues and expected donations of the board. She is still an active volunteer in programs through WHC, as well as a past-president of NCJW/LA which requires her to still attend board meetings; additionally Shira sits on at least four or five committees at a time. Shira also regularly attends advocacy events. She has also been a commissioner and a mentor for other NCJW members, on the national level.¹²

Shira knew about Hadassah before joining NCJW/LA but had little interest since she feels the focus on the organization is too narrow. She identifies more closely with the issues that NCJW promotes and advocates for. Because she volunteers in many of the programs that NCJW/LA sponsors, she feels like she is part of two communities. The first group is comprised of other NCJW/LA members like herself who are involved in many leadership capacities. The other group is made up of the other volunteers with whom she works in the various school programs. Shira did not mention this, but these two groups occupy different demographics. Often the volunteers in the school or arts programs are not Jewish, and they are usually prompted by their passion for working with children. They may not be trained professionally in education or youth development. The board (a constituency I explore in-depth later) is mostly middle to upper middle class women who have abundant amounts of time and resources to support the

¹² A commissioner as described on ncjw.org is: “an important link between NCJW and its sections. They provide a fundamental stream of communications and inform section leaders on all NCJW activities – from updates on national events to upcoming campaigns and the latest news on NCJW in Israel. Commissioners also collect data from section leaders on what is happening in NCJW sections throughout the country. NCJW uses this information collected by commissioners to help build the organizational capacity of sections, to identify trends within sections, and, ultimately, to build a better and more unified organization. Commissioners also participate in training events, advise sections on specific projects, mentor section leaders, and serve on NCJW committees.”

WHY JOIN?

organization. Because Shira is active in both parts of NCJW/LA, she truly has her pulse on the current needs and wants of the people involved in the organization. Shira answered quickly that she does not know what the future of NCJW/LA will look like. She knows for certain that its priority will be advocacy, as NCJW has always been an advocacy agency. The revamping of the advocacy programs on the national levels will help strengthen the advocacy platforms on the local level. Everything must stay relevant, Shira said; the sections are aging so rather than creating new sections, they should combine the sections.¹³ Shira made the acute observations that the younger generations are not “joiners” and, along with a shaky economy and the lack of “psychological stability” that a fragile economy creates, organizations are not doing as well as they once were.¹⁴ Organizations have to figure out how to deal with this instability and still be able to attract members and help them feel positive about the things they are involved in. Though Shira praises NCJW/LA’s ability to “adapt to change within the community; and hear the needs of the time, it is up to [the leadership] to go with the flow, listen.” She thinks because NCJW/LA recently has shifted some of its focus towards domestic violence and human trafficking issues, they are staying relevant and on point. She also recognizes that the NCJW/LA staff ensures that the organization keeps going. The staff infrastructure is crucial; if the organization was run by lay leadership, there would be more concerns about the future of the organization. Shira is not as worried because of the strong staff that NCJW/LA employs.

¹³ This has happened in the LA area. In 2010 a section was dying out so it closed. NCJW/LA is always trying to find different parts of town to create Women Making a Difference groups. It is understandable that an organization wants to have a vast a presence especially in a sprawling city like Los Angeles, but Shira as an involved member may also have a valid position especially in regards to personnel and financial resources to support new sections.

¹⁴ Shira’s observations are similar to findings in the Reboot study, as well as in Putnam’s research. Shira’s worry over membership in the younger generations, along with what researchers have studied, suggests that executive directors, membership and program directors or organizations need to pay careful attention to trends of the Gen-Xers and Millennials so that organizations are creating a space where these people feel comfortable, and more importantly *want* to be part of something.

WHY JOIN?

Anna and Shira joined HSC and NCJW/LA, respectively, for different reasons but stay involved because there is a connection either to the other people or the cause. Shira, though, more than any of the people who I interviewed, gave one unique insight into the reason why being part of a Jewish organization was important. The majority of clients that NCJW/LA serve are non-Jewish. If NCJW/LA was not present in the schools or afterschool programs, the women, children, and families served would probably never have any interactions with Jews. Shira thinks this is a good thing for volunteers like her to be able to expose the clients to traditions surrounding Chanukah and Rosh Hashanah and then they become “little ambassadors” on Judaism and on diversity. Shira realizes that not everyone has the same perspective as she does.

The last member in this category, Lori, also believes that education is the way to involve people into the organization. Educating people about the beneficiaries of the organization and the mission of the organization helps create a hook. Lori has only been a member of HSC for four years. She retired to Southern California from Florida and heard about HSC from a neighbor of hers – a non-Jewish neighbor. Lori’s neighbor had benefitted from the stem cell research conducted by Hadassah. Her neighbor kept telling Lori how she would enjoy the organization and how she would probably feel connected to the mission. Lori was hesitant to attend any HSC event because she thought of Hadassah as an organization full of older, Jewish women who may have characteristics of the classic “Jappy,” entitled woman. Her aunt had been involved in Hadassah, which helped create the perception that Hadassah was an organization full of older women. Even with her aunt’s involvement, she did not know what the organization did or what the organization stood for. But after attending one event, Lori decided to join HSC. It took her a couple of months to join as a lifetime member. I interviewed Lori over the phone; I had never met her before. Her excitement and passion for Hadassah was palpable; I could *feel* her

WHY JOIN?

enthusiasm over the phone. She was eager to tell me all that she was involved with in HSC while also giving me a pitch about why I may want to join Hadassah.

Lori describes herself as a “support person,” a leader. She regards supporting people like being a personal assistant. She said that if she had been the personal assistant of Michael Jackson, he would still be alive today; that is how seriously she takes her role as part of the administrative team of Hadassah. She describes herself as professional volunteer and gave a litany of reasons why Hadassah is a good match for her interests and skills:

...I love to work in the office, I love to organize and am really good at it...I support the groups, and I do what they need me to do for them, or I show them how to do it (tasks that usually involve paperwork). I love telling my story. I love telling people about Multiple Sclerosis and the stem cell research that Hadassah pursues to combat this disease. Hadassah is there [in Israel] harboring peace through medicine, it is not political. Hadassah helps anyone in need. Israelis don't realize the extent of what Hadassah does in Israel. Knowledge is power.

Not only does she work in the Los Angeles office, but she is also part of a group in Newport Beach geared towards those who are in their 60s. They hold events, give teachings, focus on education issues, attend seminars, as well as publically support issues such as pro-choice ballot measures and legislation about firearms. She enjoys her work with Hadassah because being retired after 40 years of working, she can now do something she really enjoys.

It is important to Lori that Hadassah is a women's organization because she thinks “women should rule the world.” She grew up a tomboy and had more male friends than girlfriends. When considering Hadassah she had to make sure that it was an organization that was full of smart women; they did not have to be Jewish, but she wanted to be challenged by opinions and have stimulating conversations. She appreciates that Hadassah is full of *smart Jewish women*. HSC has given her an opportunity to become part of a “powerbase of women; we

WHY JOIN?

can call and commiserate. I feel like I belong, there is a sense of belonging and not feeling alone.”

She realizes that being part of an organization just because it is a women’s organization is not enough. Women have to know about the organization and understand the mission; this is partly why she has not made her daughter, daughter-in-law, or granddaughter life members. Lori feels like they need to come to understand Hadassah on their own terms. They need to figure out what fuels their passions and then join of their own volition. Lori has made it her goal to educate people about Hadassah, so that others will understand the importance of the mission, especially with the research in the health field. Lori cares fiercely about Hadassah. She hopes that in the next five to fifteen years some of the traumatic effects of the reorganization of Hadassah due to the Madoff Ponzi scheme will have subsided. She hopes that lessons were learned about putting “eggs all in one basket and that [the leadership] learned priorities and what needs to be done.”

Lori adds:

[Hadassah has] to get back to its roots and fundraise for Hadassah hospitals and youth hospitals and [Hebrew University] in Jerusalem. We have assets, and we have to pay for them and have to streamline to fundraise. It is a social organization, but we have to fundraise to pay for doctors and nurses and hospitals ... [we have to] raise more awareness about what Hadassah does for the world.

These three profiles illustrate the importance of the mission in attracting women to organizational life and the kinship that forms among members. It is the kinship that they have with other members that keep them active. The women in this category exemplify how to internalize an organization’s mission and express a passion to help recruit others to the organization.

WHY JOIN?

Haimish

This group may be the most crucial group in examining membership trends. The women who I describe as Haimish are seeking a worthwhile hobby. These women want to be able find a project that benefits their personal and Jewish values. They do not necessarily seek prominent leadership positions or are even top tier donors. They are primarily looking for a community to be part of, not necessarily a group of friends, but rather others like them – volunteers who want to organize projects, find others to participate, and actually *do* the work. The women in this category truly like to see the results of their efforts. These women usually are part of one of the smaller groups or sections of the larger organization. Being part of one of the smaller interest groups usually means that there is little association with the home office of HSC or NCJW/LA in Los Angeles proper, except for paying dues and ensuring that projects and associations are kept within the parameters of the organizations’ regulations.

A recently retired teacher, Sherry wanted a volunteer opportunity where she could have a hands-on experience. She explored the possibility of Hadassah, but realized that it may be an expensive endeavor to join since much of the activities center around fundraising, and there are many luncheons and raffles that also charge fees. Sherry eventually decided to join NCJW/LA. She is not a member any more of a synagogue mostly because of the financial commitments that are required to be a synagogue member, though she and her husband were members of a synagogue when their children were studying to become Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Sherry “strongly identifies” as being Jewish, but “not in a religious way,” though her son now identifies as Modern Orthodox and is *shomer Shabbos*. She was also clear that as a woman in her early 60s, she grew up on the cusp of the women’s liberation movement and is aware of the issues that

WHY JOIN?

women were fighting for. But she would not consider herself a “women’s libber,” although she does think those issues are important.

This eager volunteer really wanted to help people. She had talents in organizing people from her thirty years as a teacher. While she was exploring what to do with her extra time, she also looked into non-Jewish volunteer opportunities. During her search, she realized that a lot of retired people wanted to volunteer, but that there is not necessarily enough work for all the volunteers. When she first contacted NCJW/LA, the staff told her about opportunities available at the schools in the City. Sherry is comfortable with her life in the Valley. The idea of spending time to drive into the City was not appealing, and she realized she could start a Women Making a Difference/Mitzvah and Merlot group in the Agora Hills/Calabasas area.¹⁵ Just in the first six months since its inception, the group has grown tremendously. She realized that:

...If you tell most people that “if you can come at this time [to volunteer] and this day” they’ll say “yes.” People are bringing people to my events, the biggest challenge is finding organizations who need stuff and deciding what the project will be for the evening. I’m trying to find organizations in the Valley. Some organizations just want the money, but I want to find organizations that want the hands-on volunteer opportunities. I wish the staff would give me a list of places that need help, and then I could contact them [to figure out what projects would work.] I’m the liaison of the West Valley/Canejo Valley and membership. Sometimes I wonder if [this part of the Valley] needs Council for our projects. We don’t need someone telling us when we can meet and such. We, as a group of women, can do whatever we want.

Sherry has relished the work that she has accomplished. It has given her moments of awe:

It is a tremendous experience of ‘Look what I did!’ It is very gratifying and very humbling that I could get people to do this because I’m not a forceful kind of person. I’m a 1st grade teacher, I’m nurturing and a mother person.

¹⁵ Women Making a Difference (WMD)/Mitzvah and Merlot are part of Women Helping Children. There are small groups of women who do not necessarily join NCJW/LA but want to get together to do a one-time service project and socialize. There are several WMD throughout the Los Angeles area, including in the City.

WHY JOIN?

While she commented that she does not know if it is necessary to have the smaller, satellite groups be under the auspices of NCJW/LA, she also made it clear that she does not want to be involved in city-centric activities. She is not looking for power or a position on the board. She really enjoys bringing people together and having the opportunity to do community service. When asked about her assessment for the future of NCJW/LA, she did not feel like she could answer that with a lot of knowledge since she has only been a member for six months. But she does think that NCJW/LA seems very aware of what the needs are and where the organization needs to go, and she does not think that those in high leadership positions are too judgmental, though her main interactions are only within WMD in the Valley.

Sherry exemplifies the value that agencies like NCJW/LA and Hadassah provide to those looking to make a difference in their communities, but her case raises the issue about who the agency wants to reach out to for membership. The conundrum that these small groups raise is: What is the purpose of these groups within the greater context of the organization? Having Hadassah groups or small Women Making A Difference sections of NCJW/LA in the Valley is beneficial because it helps to expand the mission of the organization across greater Los Angeles and increases the membership numbers. Having high numbers are essential for fees that are paid to the national and international branches of the organizations. As well, it is crucial to have the numbers to boast about, especially when advocating for certain issues and bills on Capitol Hill. To some members, this may feel disingenuous – wanting to increase membership just for numbers. The less cynical side of this is wanting to increase numbers so that there are more outlets to provide services for women to participate in community service. More importantly, offering services over an expansive geographic area will ultimately provide benefits to the underserved and ignored populations in those areas. NCJW, more than Hadassah in some ways,

WHY JOIN?

strives to fill in the blanks of crucial human services that the government or state are overlooking. This may be why there were a few less negative stereotypes about NCJW than Hadassah among those that I interviewed. Hadassah has the undeserved reputation of being for “ladies who lunch.” There is a perception that these women are part of something just to be part of something, to feel good donating money and time, but really using the organization as a way to socialize. As with Sherry and Joan, the next member I profiled, the social aspects and the community service aspects have to be equally compelling for them to be part of an organization.

Joan is a long time member of NCJW, and is involved exclusively in the Valley Vista section of NCJW/LA. She has been president of the Valley Vista section; she never really was involved with “Fairfax,” how she referred to the main office of NCJW/LA, which is located on Fairfax Avenue in West Hollywood. Joan used to attend advocacy events, but now does not want to drive to those away from the Valley. She has been a lifetime member of NCJW for the past fifteen years. She first joined Council in the late 1950s when she lived in San Diego; her children were still young and it was her social outlet. The San Diego section did a lot of volunteer work, she recalled. From this first encounter with NCJW in San Diego, she always had an affinity for the work they did. The San Diego chapter of NCJW had a strong presence in the mental rehabilitation centers in the area and was recognized by the governor for the work they did to help socialize the patients. Joan is in her mid-80s. She took a hiatus from NCJW, moved to the Los Angeles area and then rejoined 19 years ago. Joan knew about Hadassah but like Sherry, Hadassah “isn’t her thing.” Raising money for Israel seemed to her to be the sum total of their activities, and she wanted more than that. She has a strong identification with her Judaism and a passion for Jewish organizations. In a bit of self-deprecation she said that even though she’s “just” involved in the Valley, she still considers it NCJW. She thinks that the Valley sections

WHY JOIN?

have just as much of an effect as the programs and groups in the City. Joan recognizes that they function in very different ways, and although she is not involved with the activities or events in the City, she will attend special events.

Joan takes part in WMD each week, attends bible study and a study group on current events, as well as the social events that are offered. Unlike Sherry, Joan is still involved in synagogue life, despite having grown children. She is not part of the leadership of the Sisterhood, but is a member at her synagogue. At one point she was president of her synagogue, and she and her husband were part of a *havurah*, but she made it clear that her “allegiance has always been with Council.” In her retirement, she has decided to only be involved in “fun things,” and she knows that she does not need to be busy all the time at her age. Beyond NCJW/LA, Joan is not involved in many other social service or recreational groups.

The Jewish aspect of NCJW does hold relevance for Joan, as she has built her social and volunteer life around it. She also answered that the “‘W’ probably did matter” because that is where her inclinations laid. She was in a sorority in college and feels comfortable in settings with women.

When I broached the question about continuity of NCJW generally and the LA chapter specifically, she said she was:

...very concerned about attracting younger people because the people who [NCJW/LA] is attracting are within 10 years of my age. We have a hard time attracting younger people. I can remember when I was in my 30s and not wanting to be with people in their 60s. [When you] look around and see all these gray heads and say [to yourself: ‘this] isn’t what I want!’ I do have deep concerns about continuing at [the current] level [NCJW is] in the Valley. But LA will continue at its current level or more because they seem to be reaching out. Bev West didn’t dissolve because of any other reason than they were getting older. Also having to rent space is a problem; I don’t know if having a central place is a deterrent. I don’t have good feelings about where they are headed.¹⁶

¹⁶ The Beverly West section was becoming too small because of the age of the members and deaths, so in 2010 it was decided to dissolve the section.

WHY JOIN?

Joan repeated this sentiment several times during our conversation. She has heard that other organizations are facing similar problems -- women with young children are going to work instead of staying at home, which is very different from her generation when women stayed at home caring for their children until they were well into school, and then they went back to work. She noted that her synagogue in the Valley has been able to attract many young families, but she thinks that is because of the rabbi's charismatic personality. Joan realizes that synagogues are more attractive or practical organizations to join because parents want to make sure their children are educated Jewishly. Joan realizes that the synagogue model and the social service model for attracting members are different, and maybe the ways they attract people are not comparable to one another.

Because of Joan's longevity in NCJW/LA, she is able to stay on mission and articulate the impact that NCJW/LA has on the community. She thinks the impact on the Los Angeles community is becoming greater because more people are aware of the organization, especially with the prominence of the thrift stores. Joan feels that within the past few years the thrift stores have created more of a presence throughout LA and that has helped to educate people on the services that NCJW/LA provides. She does not think NCJW/LA has a direct impact on the Jewish community, however, because so many of the programs are helping non-Jews, especially the library and school programs. Joan seemed very proud to note that NCJW is helping everyone, not just Jews.

To corroborate the evidence of the impact of the small sections of NCJW and Hadassah, I spoke with two women outside of the Los Angeles Jewish community. One is a member of Hadassah. She lives in Vancouver, Washington, a bedroom community of Portland, Oregon. The other is a member of NCJW in a medium sized town in the south. In both of these places, the

WHY JOIN?

options for Jewish life are basically confined to being involved in a synagogue and whatever social or volunteer opportunities that the synagogue has to offer. This could be with the Sisterhood, or on the board, or in the religious school. Even with limited options to be involved in Jewish social services, their knowledge of the organization and their reasons for wanting to join were similar to those living in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

Teri, a Hadassah member, began her journey in Hadassah while living in Spokane, Washington, a more secluded area than where she lives now. In Spokane there was only one synagogue, and all the women belonged to the synagogue's sisterhood, as well as Hadassah. In Spokane everyone joined the synagogue because that is how one was able to support Jewish life. Teri said that it was the "center of Jewish life at the time, [we] did everything [we] could at that time to be part of the community in a strong way. It was just something we did. With Hadassah you joined for the friendship and stayed for the cause." She joined Hadassah in 1978 and became a lifetime member in 2002, after she moved to Vancouver. This was in conjunction with the Hadassah chapter there becoming chartered. Her daughter is highly involved in her chapter in the Seattle area, and she also has made her oldest granddaughter a lifetime member. It was very important to Teri that she become involved in a women's organization; she observed that:

As women we can help facilitate a lot of changes. The longer I'm part of Hadassah the more I believe in the work. We were the first responders after the Haiti earthquake. Women function at a higher level. It's important to have camaraderie with other women, and that doesn't necessarily happen in settings with [both] men and women.

She is much more involved with Hadassah on a working level than a monetary level. Her lower level of monetary support is the direct result of the unstable economy effecting sales in her business. She has served in many leadership roles during her involvement with Hadassah. Teri is also involved with her synagogue; because of the size of Vancouver, Hadassah is incorporated

WHY JOIN?

into activities at her synagogue. Many women are members of both the synagogue and Hadassah, though she feels that the synagogue sometimes sees Hadassah as a threat because the two organizations are drawing from the same membership pool. Teri feels that one can be involved in multiple Jewish organizations because it makes the Jewish community stronger. While her story diverges a bit from Sherry and Joan's stories, Teri is in some ways using the platforms of an organization that she connects with on an ideological level to cultivate other projects that are meaningful to her personal and Jewish values. These are things she thinks are important to promote in the Jewish community.

Lanie, the NCJW member from the South, has defined how to use an organization that resonates with personal beliefs to help promote a project that she is passionate about.¹⁷ Lanie explains:

[NCJW] was a way for me to connect with Jewish women who shared similar concerns [as me]. I was a member in the mid-seventies and early eighties. I liked the advocacy work and political action components of NCJW. I rejoined last year so that I could bring the PJ Library Program to this area. I needed to find a sponsoring organization for this program. The goals/purpose of the PJ Library Program "fit" with the mission of NCJW. I was unaware of the fact that the NCJW Tallahassee Section was still in existence and in need of reorganizing and revitalization.

Lanie added she:

...always had positive perceptions of NCJW. The mission fits in with all of my values and concerns. Of the organizations for Jewish women, NCJW is the one that I have always taken the most interest in: the only one that I choose to spend my time volunteering for.

Lanie, like Teri, feels it is important to be an active member of the local synagogue, and she is also involved in the Sisterhood. Both Teri and Lanie are in their 60s; Lanie is retired and Teri owns a small business that allows her flexibility to be involved in interest groups. They shared some of the same sentiments that Joan and Sherry had about wanting to only be involved

¹⁷ For transparency purposes, it is important to note that Lanie is my mother.

WHY JOIN?

in organizations that meant the most to them. They all find their respective organizations fulfilling the goals they set out to meet when they were looking to become involved with a Jewish social service agency. While Joan is a member and fairly active in her synagogue, and Sherry found synagogue membership unfulfilling, both of these women had many more options to become involved in Jewish life since they live in a large Jewish community. They have chosen a social service organization to dedicate most of their time. Teri and Lanie do not have the same kind of options, but like Joan and Sherry are using the platforms of NCJW and Hadassah and tweaking them to fit into their own personal projects.

Board Members

I interviewed three executive board members: the co-president of NCJW/LA, the president of Hadassah Southern California, and a board member who either chairs or sits on several other committees of NCJW/LA. These three women reflect what these organizations are seeking: a woman who has an abundance of time, has a diverse network of friends and acquaintances, and has financial means to commit to a lifetime membership level.¹⁸ Additionally, they are able to contribute annually to different fundraising campaigns and able to attend other social events, perhaps even inviting others with them or sponsoring tables.

The first profile is the governing cabinet chair (or president) of Hadassah Southern California.¹⁹ Sally, who is in her early to mid-60s and a life-long resident of Los Angeles, has been a member for 25 years and a life member for 20 years. However, even though her membership spans a quarter of a century, she still considers herself a newcomer to the

¹⁸ To be a lifetime member one must pay a one-time membership fee of \$350. When one pays for this membership no more membership fees are due.

¹⁹ Because of the way HSC's bylaws were written, those in leadership positions with HSC have different titles than other sections. These titles do not come from the national entity. HSC is looking to change this. This is an example of the lack of cohesion within the national and international branches of Hadassah.

WHY JOIN?

organization. She joined because a friend told her she should join Hadassah. All she knew about Hadassah was that it was a philanthropic organization. As she was introducing herself to me, Sally quickly assured me that Hadassah is “really trying to change its ‘my grandmother’s organization’,” image and that they have a lot of young women who are members. The first event that she attended was a membership lunch. She filled out the paperwork for membership that day; as Sally recalls, she joined that day in particular because there was a reduced price for membership, as an incentive to join. With her high involvement in HSC, Sally has also made her daughter, daughter-in-law and her four granddaughters life members. One of her daughters is an observant, Orthodox Jew; Sally believes that in Hadassah there are not many opportunities for Orthodox women. She feels that the Orthodox community is already a close-knit community, and the philanthropic focus is geared toward *yeshivot* and other needs that directly affect their *kehilah*, unlike Hadassah whose main focus are causes that directly impact Israel.

Sally immediately joined a group and quickly took on leadership positions. Only a couple of months after her joining HSC, she was asked to join the executive board as corresponding secretary, and she eventually rotated through nearly all of the vice-president positions, finally ending up as president. Sally was “roped” in because she was upset about an incident that happened at that first luncheon she attended; she expressed her frustrations and “of course” the next year she was co-chair of the same event. She recognizes that it is difficult to get people to do certain jobs, so Sally is still involved as much as she can be in her interest group, though her duties lie mainly with the administrative duties that are required in her position as president.

Sally has also been a member of a synagogue for 35 years, and has also served on the board of the synagogue; if it were not for Hadassah she would have probably been more involved in her synagogue. She has also taught an Adult Education series sponsored through the BJE, and

WHY JOIN?

she used to be a member of NCJW. She has also been a volunteer docent for 16 years at the Skirball Cultural Center. Sally is a person I would consider a strongly involved member in Hadassah, as well as in the Jewish community. She says that being part of an organization that is female centric is important to her. She feels more comfortable with women; she thinks that boys often intimidate girls, and she felt intimidated while growing up. She has noticed, through many of her experiences in different organizations, that women do not speak up as often when men are attending the same meetings. Sally was explicit that being part of a Jewish organization is important to her.

She did not grow up attending a synagogue, or religious school, or even participating in family seders every year. Sally did not fully come into her Judaism until she was an adult. Sally grew up in an almost complete secular household. Her parents were divorced and her maternal grandmother lived with the family. The only thing that took place that was remotely Jewish was when her grandmother baked “little rolls” each Friday. Because she grew up in a single family home and because her family was on a tight budget, she was only able to attend religious school for one year. On Christmas Eve the family would exchange small gifts with each other. On Passover they would have a big dinner, but Sally made it clear that it was not a seder. She did not attend a seder until she was an adult. Despite the limited exposure to Judaism, Sally still closely identified as a Jew while growing up.

Sally’s Hadassah biography reads as a success story for membership, the story that membership or outreach professionals strive to cultivate in new members. Sally was marginally involved in her Judaism in her early life; she eventually found her niche and then became highly involved in a cause that is meaningful to her. Sally is involved in all levels of Hadassah, including being a member of the “society of major donors” that includes donors who contribute

WHY JOIN?

yearly at the \$100,000 level or more. It is not a requirement of members of the executive committee to be at that level. Sally realizes that many would like to be at a high level of giving, but not all can afford it, though she encourages members on the executive committee to give to help set an example to others about the need and importance of giving.

Sally has made HSC one of her main interests; it is not only what she does as a community service project, and the other members are also some of her closest friends. These are the people she sees the most often. When asked what the future of Hadassah and HSC will be, Sally stayed on mission when she answered:

The public doesn't really know we're around, but we do think we make a huge impact. We have to keep making people aware that we are here. Hadassah gives to the world; research, finding a huge amount of answers for health research, and then others take their research and publish it in other places. [Hadassah also raises money for] Young Judea summer camps in the United States. We're hoping that on a larger scale the financial problems will abate. On the national level, a lot of employees have had to be let go because of finances. We're still dedicated to Israel and have a commitment to hospital and medical research, and will continue to get large donations from people; hopefully the economy will continue to recover.

She continued by saying:

In LA we need to continue to bring in younger members. The older generation is dying out, and they don't have funds because they have to use extra money for medical needs. We need to strive to get dollars that fund the national programs. Hadassah is going more nationalized and that will save money. LA is lucky, though, because we still have staff rather than volunteers. People are staying in Hadassah for social reasons, which is good because they become committed to the cause. I don't think it will go by the waysides in my generation, but we really need to get young people in.

Sally is perhaps the stereotypical leader in a women's organizations, especially from the perspective of those who are unfamiliar with these organizations. She is highly involved, part of the Baby Boomer generation, and has made Hadassah a priority in her life. This motherly, older

WHY JOIN?

image of a leader is not what is appealing to the 20 and 30 year-old set when looking for people to socialize with or to participate in community service activities with.

Recently NCJW/LA tried to change this perception by having co-presidents, one who is in her 80s and one who is in her 30s. This was not only to bridge the generation gap, but also to help attract the coveted 20 and 30 year-old set. Abby wanted to volunteer. At the time that she began volunteering with NCJW/LA, it was also a requirement to be a member. She knew that Hadassah existed, but was not at all familiar with NCJW. She was in a transitional period in her life and was trying to find ways to become involved in the community. She found out about a volunteer opportunity with NCJW, and she joked that she fit the requirements of the “J” and the “W,” so she thought the organization must be a good fit. Before being nominated as co-president, she volunteered with several programs including the Alexandria House afterschool program and the Light up the Library literacy program. Abby, like Sally, is now one of the top givers of the organization and also feels she needs to give at a certain level to set an example for other members. Abby and Sally fit into a similar profile because both identify as Jewish, but were not raised in observant households. The values of NCJW mesh with Abby’s personal values, and she stays involved with NCJW/LA because it keeps her interested. She is not currently working outside the home, and seeks out intellectual stimulation. She goes through patterns of being involved in something and finding the value in it, and then wanting to continue to stay involved – NCJW/LA has been that outlet for her. She also is part of several social networks and organizations. With each new organization she becomes involved in, she tries to find potential new members for NCJW/LA. Abby attends as many advocacy events, committee meetings, and social events as possible to keep abreast of all the activities and to make sure she stays representative of the organization. Perhaps because Abby is part of Generation X, she realizes

WHY JOIN?

that young people who identify with the values that are encompassed by NJCW are not the same potential members that are going to be able to substantially donate funds to support programs.

Abby feels like a “change is a comin’,” but cannot pinpoint what the change is or what it will look like. She laments:

I don’t get the reluctance to become a member since it’s only a \$60 membership. My mother was a member of [social service] organizations, so it’s a familial, [it’s kind of part of my ethics and my family tradition], so I don’t get the stumbling block. We have to figure out [the] paradigm shift. We are an advocacy organization and have political components. Marriage equality and reproductive rights are [the topics that are important right now; how to get young people involved in that is the challenge. The challenge is to redefine it...changing the definition of members, supporters, and donors. [They] have to count as important parts of the organization, not just a card-carrying member. Giving annual dues is good, but we need people to do the work, need people on the ground fighting the good fight. I wouldn’t turn down money, of course, but giving of time is a great value.

This observation that Abby makes is curious because she not only gives on a financially high level, but she also donates much of her time to the organization. She also finds it challenging with a young child to be able to attend events, to bring her active daughter to committee meetings; there is a dilemma to find childcare so one can volunteer. Abby is also starting to become involved on the national level of NCJW. She is able to network with others in similar positions as her around the country

Another NCJW/LA member, Rebecca, also sits on the executive committee, is in her mid-30s, and has a young child. She joined NCJW/LA because she was new to the Los Angeles area and wanted to socialize with people her age who were also like-minded. Like Abby, she started volunteering in one of the after school programs. She is a life member and has even made her two-year old son a life member. She is also a life member of Hadassah, but only because her mother gifted her the membership. Rebecca is not involved with Hadassah. Although she is willing to learn about their mission and the work that they do, she has chosen to devote her time

WHY JOIN?

to NCJW/LA. The advocacy issues that NCJW promotes are meaningful to her, especially their stances on women's health and abortion issues. She was looking for female friends so the "W" held some significance, but what ultimately led her to become an involved member was the congruence of beliefs.

The women's issues were much more of a draw than the Jewish aspects. This is even noticed in the kind of spirituality she has carved out for herself. Rebecca is part of a women's Shabbat group called Lev Elisha that meets periodically throughout the month. There are no required financial membership obligations like in a synagogue, but Rebecca does make donations to the group and hosts Oneg Shabbats for the group. She brings her son who is one of the only children who attends services. For Rebecca, this group is in place of being a member of a synagogue, though Rebecca recognizes that she will probably have to join a congregation once her son becomes older. She does not seem in a rush to join or see a need for synagogue membership in her life right now. She was eager to join Lev Elisha when she was pregnant, so that her son would be exposed, even in utero to Jewish culture.

Rebecca grew up in a moderately observant house, at an observance level that many would quantify as Reform or Conservative. The holidays were celebrated and Shabbat recognized most Friday nights. Now that she has a child, being involved in Jewish social service organizations is important:

Now it is more important that [my son] see me being involved in this organization. I want to set an example [to show how] important it is to give back to the community. When he connects Judaism and being a Jew and the concept of *tikkun olam* -- obligation, service -- it is one of the most important things that I can teach him when I teach him about Judaism. I want him to feel part of community and have a values system.

This is one reason Rebecca does not mind bringing him to NCJW meetings, though as he grows into toddlerhood, his mobility is becoming a challenge. This is a challenge that Rebecca

WHY JOIN?

thinks needs to be strategically discussed among lay and professional leadership. She would like to see a babysitting service provided to mothers like herself so some of the guilt will be abated from having to choose to be fully present at meetings or having to scramble to find and pay for babysitting while being part of a volunteer organization. She thinks NCJW/LA is still cycling through an evolution and must change to appeal to mothers and Millennials. Rebecca's mission as part of her involvement in NCJW/LA is to bring young women into the organization. She is often sponsoring tables at events and inviting friends who may be interested and just have been hesitant because of cost to join, or do not know about NCJW. She finds that her connections and networks are the strength she brings to the board, though as much as she promotes the mission of NCJW to friends, last year she ended up finding a new board member who is one of the oldest members of the executive board. Rebecca also finds herself staying involved and trying to stay current on strategic ways to gain membership by attending national conferences and leadership forums. The "J" is very important to Rebecca. She feels it is vital NCJW does not lose that part the organization's identity.

All of the women profiled here either have time or set aside time to volunteer. They also have motivation to make their organizations better; the mission means so much to them. This begs the question as to how organizations can find ways for women to do *meaningful* service work and be highly involved -- even if they are busier than most or do not necessarily have a high level of financial resources.

WHY JOIN?

Recommendations

The women who I interviewed for this thesis are passionate and dedicated members of Hadassah Southern California and NCJW/Los Angeles. Based on the interviews I conducted, the members want to be involved in social organizations that match their personal and cultural beliefs. The following are recommendations culled from the interviews.

Geography needs to be given serious consideration:

Each woman I spoke with determines much of what she gets involved in based on where she lives. In an area as spread-out as LA, geography matters. The closer an activity is to home and the less driving necessary to get there, the more likely the women are to participate.

HSC and NCJW/LA need to continue to establish and strengthen groups and sections in the outlying areas of Los Angeles. The women I interviewed who lived outside of Los Angeles proper all commented how much they enjoy the work they are able to engage in by being a member of HSC or NCJW/LA and are pleased that there are the smaller groups close to their homes. Driving into Los Angeles (this applies mainly to the NCJW/LA members I spoke with) is not an option for them nor is it appealing to have to drive long distances and sit in traffic to participate in a volunteer activity.

Los Angeles is geographically expansive, so it is important to have a presence throughout the area. Both organizations have the experience and models to initiate and maintain small geographically based groups. The small groups that currently exist are self-sufficient and the time that the professional staff must devote to these groups is minimal once the lay leaders have been trained and understand what their role is in managing the group. The professional staff is there to help generate ideas, give moral support, and to periodically check-in on projects and events. HSC and NCJW/LA members are self-starters and are eager to be involved in meaningful

WHY JOIN?

volunteer service. These women are participating in many of the direct service projects sponsored by HSC and NCJW/LA. It is important to note that all these women are donating more hours to the direct services of HSC and NCJW/LA than to dues or donations to specific funds.

Creating and cultivating strategically located groups and sections will lead to more programs in needed areas as well as strengthening the overall numbers of the organization.²⁰ The organizations also need to consider where certain events take place. While NCJW/LA, in particular, is fortunate to have a building where large-scale events are able to take place, the women I spoke with who live in the Valley do not generally attend because the events are held at times that make driving into Los Angeles aggravating.

Hiring engagement professionals is critical to small group success:

The Hyper-Volunteers and Board Members I spoke with, in particular, contribute a lot of time to HSC or NCJW/LA. As evidenced in their anecdotes, they work very closely with the professional staff and take their leadership roles as seriously as if they were being paid for a job. These leaders are aware of how much time everyone puts in to operate the organization, and they function as quasi-staff. The Haimish category of members, however, commented that their association with HSC or NCJW/LA is almost unnecessary because most of what they do; they could do what they are currently doing without being affiliated with HSC or NCJW/LA. If they wanted, they could just be a group of women who enjoy participating in social service activities on their own, regardless of the organizational sponsorship. While they have the support of the professional staff and are in communication with them, the staff is there primarily to give guidelines and to regulate what is happening under their auspices.

²⁰ Having a large number of members is crucial for advocacy campaigns and lobbying lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Hadassah and NCJW are able to say they have 330,000 and 90,000 members, respectively. The support of these women in their organizations strengthens their arguments to politicians.

WHY JOIN?

HSC and NCJW/LA have been able to expand their presence throughout Los Angeles. Many of their smaller groups and sections are successful because there is no need to make a financial commitment. The small groups part of NCJW/LA and HSC are also good for providing a niche community for women. Their success could be increased with a more sustainable model. It could be highly beneficial for both organizations to assign a dedicated staff person to cultivate new groups and sections. This staff person could identify and engage leaders to strengthen the individual needs of the groups/sections. It is important that this professional leader be completely separate from the already established membership or program departments. The current professional leaders are already spread thin with their duties; having an extra person to manage the small groups and sections would alleviate extra responsibilities. While there may be an existing staff member who could be re-assigned this position, it would be ideal to hire someone outside of the organization who has fresh eyes and limited biases towards the organizations. This professional staff person could dedicate time to brainstorming ideas on how to incorporate the remote groups/sections into the larger organization so that it does not feel like fragmented groups, but rather one cohesive organization. While many of the interviewees mentioned wanting to be with women with common interests – including age – it is important to have members who are able to take turns in leadership positions, recruit new members, and create programs that are easy to be sustained when new leadership arises. This would be a position that has less to do with membership and more to do with engagement.²¹

²¹ This is a model that Hillel uses on college campuses. In the last few years they have taken on the model of engagement with a dedicated engagement professional whose responsibility it is to build relationships with students who have shown potential as strong leaders. The engagement professional helps to cultivate the student's passions. In Abigail Pickus' article (2012) she also describes research where young people were eager and excited when professionals (also around their age) simply asked what they wanted, what they liked – listened to try and gain ideas rather than having the professional tell them what they thought would be a good idea.

WHY JOIN?

More work needs to be done to attract a younger membership base:

The younger generations have a desire to be in a group/section with others who are in the same age and who have similar interests. The Gen-Xers and Millennials need to be able to express to the lay and professional leadership what they want out of a membership organization and have the lay and professional leadership work with them to create that community. This may be creating groups/sections that are exclusively for the younger generations. These groups/sections would function the same way as other established groups/sections but with a specific agenda. This agenda may include more political engagement and instead of meeting at someone's home to put together care packages these groups/sections may meet at a brewery to discuss advocacy events and to increase the presence of the organization. If these younger generations become highly committed early on in adulthood they will likely stay involved and will help to create sustainability in the organization.²²

There is a need for a large quantitative survey:

This thesis is based on a qualitative survey with a relatively small sample size. While the findings are highly suggestive, the organizations would benefit from a large quantitative survey to test and refine the findings. It would be helpful at the local level in the Los Angeles area (because the HSC and NCJW/LA sections are two of the biggest sections of Hadassah and NCJW nationally) to send out a survey to all current members, lifetime members, and, particularly, potential members. This survey would gauge what they like about being a member of the organization, what is missing in the organization if they are not involved on a high level,

²² Again, Abigail Pickus (2012) gives many suggestions for cultivating relationships with the 20/30 set. She quotes Lisa Farber Miller of the Rose Community Foundation, who says: "...we know that 20-and 30-year-olds don't have the same sense of obligatory giving to the Jewish world and we wanted to acknowledge that but not require it...but we had confidence that if they have meaningful experiences, their actions will be followed by philanthropy." Meaningful experiences happen after one has joined an organization because of a positive relationship. After these steps, one is more willing to commit and stay active.

WHY JOIN?

and what ideas are appealing to the younger generations. Further, this survey would gauge attitudes about the organization's different age and geographic appeal. It would identify why those involved became or stayed involved. The survey would also determine what would appeal to different age groups particularly the Gen-Xers and the Millennials. This part of the survey would also answer why these generations are hesitant to make a monetary commitment.

Currently both Hadassah and NCJW offer memberships that are low cost, especially compared to a synagogue dues structure, yet people still do not want to join. These agencies need to ask why making a monetary commitment to a social service organization is prohibitive or unappealing to being involved in Hadassah or NCJW.

The results of a survey like this would be beneficial for designing programs, marketing, membership recruitment and retention, as well as how to effectively allocate organizational resources. A quantitative survey on the national level would also be beneficial for similar reasons, especially for Hadassah since it is undergoing many changes including relinquishing programs.

Both organizations would benefit from a strategic planning process:

Using the comprehensive results that will hopefully come from the quantitative survey, a strategic plan needs to be put in place. This plan should include a diversified program mix to appeal to the different motivations of prospective members, a rebranding effort to highlight the particular strengths of each organization, and a new membership model and campaign to appeal to younger generations.

By having a diverse program mix, there will be interest from the Gen-Xers and Millennials as well as the Baby Boomer generation. The diversity needs to range from social programming to volunteering opportunities to advocacy events. There needs to be religious and cultural

WHY JOIN?

programming. Events need reflect what people are doing in other Jewish realms of their life as well as the non-Jewish, secular aspects of their life.

A rebranding effort of the organizations to highlight the relevancy of the agencies is also needed. Both Hadassah and NCJW are involved in politics and advocate on behalf of women, families, and children especially in the areas of education and health care reform. These are issues that are relevant to young people; issues part of the social discourse. All of the respondents mentioned that after learning about the particular missions and advocacy platforms of Hadassah and NCJW, they realized these missions aligned with their own personal beliefs. No matter how the future unfolds for these organizations, advocacy will always be part of the agenda. Both organizations stay up-to-date on important issues affecting marginal groups; not emphasizing the advocacy issues that Hadassah and NCJW promote to potential members is a missed opportunity to recruit new and young members.

Rethinking what a “membership” should look like as part of the strategic plan will mold more high-level members. Is a membership a yearly or monthly dues payment? Are there incentives to the membership? What is the member required to do to sustain the membership? What perks or incentives are included in a membership? How can a membership create and sustain active members?

WHY JOIN?

Conclusions

Based on the interviews I conducted, there still seems to be relevancy for Jewish women's organizations in the 21st century. However, all the women were unsure how membership numbers and involvement will be affected as the members in their 80s begin to pass away and the Millennial generation, with its apparent aversion to organizational life, becomes more demographically prominent. While these agencies' missions will remain important because they are committed to giving a voice to disenfranchised individuals and their issues in our society, it is not clear that they will be able to attract the same level of support as they have in the past.

This thesis is based on small sample of people. While I was hoping for a more varied age range of people to interview, especially those in their mid to late 20s and early 30s, the difficulty in finding individuals in this demographic to interview is symptomatic of what everyone's biggest worry was when I asked: what path do you see your organization going down in the future? There was considerable worry about finding young members who can give time or money, or both. They are worried because they do not know what will motivate the Millennials to join their organizations, even with minimal membership fees.

It is crucial that Hadassah and NCJW carry out a large, quantitative survey so they can continue to find ways to stay relevant and appealing to the younger generations. The formal and informal interviews I conducted throughout this project showed that more people are attracted to NCJW because they feel NCJW deals with general social issues, rather than mainly concentrating on a specific topic like Hadassah does with Israel. Israel and Zionism seem to be too much of a pigeonhole for younger people and even for some of the Baby Boomers I interviewed. They are not motivated by the same ideals as the previous generations. Further

WHY JOIN?

those who choose associations with NCJW over Hadassah did so in part because they felt it was more important to help a large collective based on Jewish ideals than to be part of an organization whose primary focus is fundraising.

Advocacy issues like health care, women's health care rights, marriage equality laws are interesting to younger women, but this does not seem to be enough to grow membership. NCJW in Los Angeles is mostly known for its thrift stores, many people donate and buy goods from them who know nothing about the work NCJW/LA does. Hadassah is primarily a fundraising organization, but also raises money and awareness to help combat fatal diseases. Few people seem to know the amount of money Hadassah puts towards medical research. The members I interviewed recognized that education was the key to recruiting and retaining members; not enough education is being targeted towards potential members.

In the Fall of 2011, the Jewish Women's Conference was held in Los Angeles, led primarily by NCJW/LA and co-sponsored with HSC, as well as other Jewish women's organization in the region. It was a sold-out event and highly successful. Because of its success NCJW/LA hired a full-time program director to plan the conference for 2012. The 2011 conference had break-out sessions led by energetic, young women who work at progressive, grassroots non-profits around Los Angeles. The keynote speaker was actress, author, and academic Mayim Balik. She was a draw for Generation-Xers and Millennials who remember her from the sitcoms *Blossom* and *The Big Bang Theory*. As Balik shared stories about memories of her immigrant grandparents, she was a reminder to the "Greatest Generation" and the Baby Boomers that Judaism is thriving in a post-Holocaust society. A few of the young women I talked to or observed while attending the conference seemed inspired and interested in finding a way they could find their niche in one of the organizations that was represented at the

WHY JOIN?

conference, though their interests lay more with trying to figure out ways to strengthen the Jewish community on a whole, rather than focusing on a particular organization. These young women at the conference seemed to have already found their Jewish social and activist life. This is in contrast to the women interviewed who eventually found their Jewish social and activist life in either HSC or NCJW/LA. For the respondents of my research, Jewish life is largely encompassed in these organizations; it is not the same for the Millennial generation.

In summary, to ensure continued relevancy, these organizations need to: 1) conduct more comprehensive research to cull reasons for joining membership organizations 2) prepare a strategic plan to assess increasing human resources and to find ways to engage new and potential members, and 3) rethink the membership model to understand if this is hindering women from joining or if it is an obsolete model for organizations. Both of these organizations are doing good work and enjoy strong support from their current memberships. Their challenge is to find ways to translate their missions to appeal to the younger generations who will continue their work and societal impact.

WHY JOIN?

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