CULTURAL EVENTS & JEWISH IDENTITIES:

Young Adult Jews in New York

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NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CULTURE

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Summary: Culture and Identities among Jewish Young Adults

Advocates of Jewish cultural endeavor claim that Jewish cultural participation strengthens Jewish identities among young adults. More broadly, the argument goes, Jewish cultural programming is especially effective for reaching relatively under-engaged Jewish populations, including the intermarried, the unaffiliated, and the non-observant. Culture, they claim, has an appeal that other forms of Jewish involvement lack.

To test these claims, this multi-phase study proceeded along twin tracks. First, we explored the patterns of **Jewish cultural consumption among American Jews** at large based upon data from the 2000-01 National Jewish Population survey. Our focus was on how consumption of Jewish culture – specifically books, movies, and music – varies along several axes of social differentiation among American Jews.

Second, we explored the **cultural participation of young Jewish adults** by examining in detail 13 Jewish cultural events in New York that were held in places other than synagogues, JCCs, and other communal organizations. Based on this field research, we report here on **the events** and on **the people** who engage in these events.

The report concludes with the **policy implications** that emerged from this research.

The **main findings** of each phase are as follows:

1. From the NJPS we learned that Jewish cultural consumption is very widespread, and that, for those less engaged in Jewish life (e.g., the unaffiliated, the intermarried, and those geographically remote from Jewish institutions) cultural consumption constitutes a relatively larger aspect of their Jewish identities, suggesting **the value of Jewish culture as an instrument of reaching the unengaged**.
2. From the observation of events in New York, we learned some of the functions of Jewish cultural engagement were to build community, and to construct and display forms of Jewish engagement that can be **entertaining, playful, ironic, contemporary, and generationally distinctive**.

3. From our interviews with Jewish young adults at these events, we learned how "engaged, but unaffiliated" Jews seek cultural experiences that offer alternatives to an institutional world they see as bland, conformist, conservative, and alien. Instead, they are drawn to events that promise to **cross boundaries** between Jews and non-Jews, Jews and Jews, Jewish space and non-Jewish space, and distinctively Jewish culture with putatively non-Jewish culture, effecting a "cultural hybridity."
4. In our policy implications section, we point to the potential of Jewish cultural events: to strengthen networks, create community, and incubate leadership; to project a view of Jewish engagement that is contemporary and enticing; to serve as a laboratory and model of cultural change for institutional Judaism; and to contribute intrinsically to the construction of Jewish culture in New York and the country.

Outline of the four phases:

1. Cultural consumption among American Jews
2. Jewish cultural events in New York City for Jewish young adults
3. Jewish identities of young adults at the events
4. Policy implications

1. Cultural Consumption among American Jews

Our core concern in this phase of the research was to understand the extent to which Jewish culture attracts the Jewishly under-engaged, be they young adults, or the intermarried, or the institutionally unaffiliated, or, perhaps, Jews living in areas of low Jewish residential density.

The Data: The National Jewish Population Survey contains three questions that pertain directly to the matter of Jewish cultural consumption:

During the past year, did you …

- *Listen to a tape, CD, or record because it had Jewish content?*
- *See a movie or rent a video because it had Jewish content?*
- *Read a book other than the Bible because it had Jewish content?*

The Findings: Just over 45% of adult Jews saw a movie with Jewish content during the past year, and the same number listened to Jewish music. More than half (55%) claimed to have read a book with Jewish content.

For the **highly affiliated**, Jewish cultural engagement is one of many forms of engagement and, perhaps, not very frequent (relative to other things they do). In contrast, for the **unaffiliated**, Jewish cultural consumption may be their only or most prevalent form of Jewish engagement. In contrasting population segments that demonstrate widely varying levels of conventional Jewish engagement, those segments with **lower levels of ritual observance, affiliation, communal involvement, and Jewish social embeddedness score relatively high in Jewish cultural consumption**, which offers them an important alternative.

Jewish cultural engagement plays a greater relative role in reaching Jews in areas of low density than in areas of high Jewish density, in the West rather than the other regions of the country.

In sum, Jewish cultural engagement provides an important link to Jewish life **for the intermarried, the geographically remote, the unmarried, and the unaffiliated.**

2. Jewish Cultural Events in New York for Jewish Young Adults

This phase of the research focuses on Jewish cultural events in New York City that attract Jews largely between the ages of 25 and 35, many of whom are unaffiliated. By directly observing Jewish cultural events and interviewing those who attend them, this phase of the research seeks answers to questions that only qualitative research can provide: How effective are these kinds of cultural experiences in engaging young adult Jews? What are the Jewish messages that these events offer? What characteristics do these events share? What kinds of people attend them?

Our research is based on our observations of 13 Jewish cultural events (including concerts, holiday celebrations, comic presentations) that took place in New York City between December 2004 and June 2005. In addition to participant observation and field notes, our research included approximately 30 interviews with people with whom we met at these events.

Findings:

These events, which were held at venues (clubs, bars, performance spaces, cafes) that are not in themselves considered Jewish, are a leisure activity. They offer **entertainment**, with **music** playing a central role. Above all, these cultural events are **social events**. They create opportunities for individuals to gather, talk and meet new people. There was no expectation that participants would pay attention only to the performance. Socializing was paramount.

Cultural participation creates networks, if not communities. Participants strengthen social bonds among attendees and enable new ones to form. Sharing in these events strengthens informal social networks, whose rules differ from those of formal organizations. These alternative communities are flexible, episodic and erratic, following the logic of diversity and tolerance that their members value.

The events neither look nor sound like any Jewish event that participants have ever attended with their parents. They foster a **sense of generationally based belonging without membership,** creating a loosely defined cultural arena in which attendance and participation are the measures of belonging. Even though Jewish organizations were behind almost all of the events, the venues themselves were not Jewish and the Jewish organizational sponsor did not peddle memberships. Not only are the events hip and current, but they convey the message that **Jewish life can be organized by peers, not parents**.

The events model a **Judaism that is ironic, funny, entertaining, contemporary, playful, and empowering. Ambivalence toward being Jewish creates opportunities for Jewish engagement**. Primarily articulated through irony and irreverence, the ambivalence is not around whether or not to be Jewish, but how to be Jewish.

Cultural hybridity facilitates encountering Jewish culture. The events bring together aspects from Jewish and mainstream culture such that they do not attempt to distance what has Jewish roots from what does not. For a generation raised on youth culture, multiculturalism and globalization, the quest for a verifiably "authentic" Jewishness is not even a viable option. Instead of looking for a core Jewish characteristic or cultural gene, these events celebrate the hybrid and the playful aspects of culture.

3. The Jewish Identities of Young Adults at the Events

Different for sure, but different how?

Young adult American Jews, those now about 25-35 years of age, have evolved different understandings of what being Jewish means: they express their Jewishness and forge ties among one another in their own ways. While as a group, they are far from homogeneous, in the aggregate, they differ from their parents' and grandparents' generations.

A. STRONG JEWISH BACKGROUNDS

Journeys of engagement

Many observers may well think of these Jewish cultural events as appealing to the Jewishly disaffected, under-educated, and under-socialized – those who lack intensive Jewish experiences in their childhood years, and adolescence. In fact, our non-random sample, small as it may be, pointed to a distribution toward the upper end of the Jewish socialization spectrum. Their biographies are sprinkled with references to home observance, day schools, Jewish camps, synagogue youth groups, Israel, Hillel activities, and a host of other parallel experiences. Few reported intermarried parents.

At the same time, all our respondents have taken "Jewish journeys," sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing their levels of Jewish involvement, as they acquire and abandon areas of Jewish interest. And now, during their young adulthood -- a particularly unsettled and transitional stage of their lives -- many informants spoke of entering a period of Jewish wandering, if not alienation from things Jewish. Some spent years quite distant from Jewish concerns.

The journey continues: A time of life transitions and ongoing exploration

They are in a transitional time. They may have recently completed their studies, and have recently moved to New York. Many have seen their old friends move away or get married, and they have developed new friendships.

For the many unmarried, they are conscious that a major event in their life may lie shortly ahead of them. They may, at an unknown moment, meet an as yet unknown individual with whom they will hope to spend the rest of their lives. The uncertain prospect of marriage can foster instability and reluctance

to commit, be it to a permanent home or respectable furniture, let alone to institutions of any sort, Jewish or otherwise.

Most of our informants reported involvement in Jewish religious life. In short, they are **Jewishly engaged, but institutionally unaffiliated**. They participate in a variety of Jewish activities, including (at times) holiday celebrations, synagogue service attendance, initiating their own Jewish networks and communities, and even working professionally in Jewish life. Some seek out synagogue services, although few have found congregations to which they are attached.

B. COMPLAINTS AND CONSTRAINTS

They are **critical** of several features of conventional Jewish life. The unflattering images included: bland, parochial, ethnocentric, politically conservative, conformist, judgmental, and laden with an "agenda" of one sort or another. For some, their progressive political identities and their discomfort with aspects of Israeli policies serve as an additional obstacle to their involvement in conventional Jewish communal life.

Social claustrophobia and cultural parochialism

The young adults we interviewed feel uncomfortable with strong social and cultural boundaries, the sort that are both maintained and advocated by some parents and by most conventional Jewish institutions. Numerous interviewees sprinkled their descriptions of their Jewish lives, both in their past and the present, with such words, as "cultish," "parochial," "stifling," "constricting," and "claustrophobic." Joining a Jewish institution meant intentionally segregating oneself from the larger world.

Progressive politics: A source of alienation

Most interviewees seemed at least sympathetic to liberal or "progressive" causes. They see the organized Jewish community as uncomfortably cautious, if not conservative.

Israel: Attached, but ambivalent

Respondents expressed degrees of alienation from Israel. When they spoke about Israel at all, they spoke of moral complexities and ethical shortcomings. For some, pro-Israel advocacy in the organized Jewish community constitutes an impediment to affiliation. Their concerns about conventional Jewry entail not its support for Israel per se, but specifically endorsement of "right-wing pro-Israel" positions and policies.

Generational identity: Making Judaism my Judaism

Our informants' operative assumption is that the organized Jewish community is too narrow, and constrains expressions of Jewish identity that depart from standard definitions. A major theme in our interviewees' remarks is a search for an accessible and usable Judaism, differentiated from that experienced in their childhood, or that inherited wholesale from their parents.

Resisting an agenda: "No" to events for Jewish singles and other programs

The articulation of norms by institutional leaders constitutes an "agenda" in contemporary parlance, a term connoting a generally unwelcome attempt by those in some sort of position of authority or influence, to control an encounter or others' behavior.

C. MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING

The motivations for participating in Jewish cultural events are multiple and overlapping. They interweave education, entertainment, engagement, and socializing.

Social, recreational life: Bars, music, and movies

They spend their leisure time in bars, performance spaces, and cultural venues, listening to music, and socializing with friends and acquaintances. It is during leisure time, non-working hours, when Jewish life takes place.

Interested in culture, especially music

Participants in these cultural events do not just appreciate music in a general sense; they also attest to a special relationship with Jewish music.

The power of the "scene": To see Jews who are both familiar and new

Our informants sought social experiences that were "comfortable" but not "constricting." This theme came up over and over again in their comments, usually couched in terms like "vibe," "scene," or "crowd," and a sense of what kinds of places were and were not "theirs." More than the content, it is the people, the scene, and the social dimension that make an experience a Jewish experience. Cultural events of the type we observed provide young adults with the chance to spend time with friends, to see familiar faces, and to meet and make new friends.

Complementary to synagogue involvement, but not a substitute

Most of the informants seemed to understand these Jewish cultural events as augmenting, and in no way replacing, synagogue prayer and other forms of religious involvement.

D. SEEKING DIVERSITY AND CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Our informants have grown up in environments that value diversity and boundary crossing. Accordingly, the distinguishing features of these events and of the participants' motivations for attending them may be subsumed largely under the rubric of "crossing boundaries," countering the social claustrophobia and cultural parochialism they see as endemic to Jewish life. The events cross boundaries on several planes: spatial, inter-group (Jew vs. non-Jew), intra-group (Jew vs. Jew), and cultural.

Jewish events in public spaces: Avoiding Jewish turf

Venue is crucial to success. These events favored secular venues that had a cultural cache of their own. Participants favored non-Jewish performance spaces which generally present a mix of cultural events over synagogues, JCCs and other recognizably Jewish locations.

Non-Jews at Jewish events

These younger Jews in 2005 find that their Jewishness actually emerges in the company of non-Jews, and they seek out integrated environments in order to express their Jewishness. They are seeking Jewish lives that put Jewishness in conversation with other cultures, and Jewish individuals in conversation with other people. In fact, in some instances, their Jewishness actually emerged in the interaction with the other.

Crossing Jewish boundaries: Diversity in the Jewish crowd

Just as the events offer the chance for Jews to take their Jewishness public in the company of non-Jews, they also offer the opportunity to meet other kinds of Jews, a heterogeneous mixture who are different from those Jews these young adults usually encounter. These participants value diversity, and they want to see diversity enacted in their Jewish and non-Jewish settings.

Cultural hybridity: Engaging Jewish and contemporary American aesthetics

The Jewish cultural events we observed offer a light, creative approach to being Jewish that is more committed to crossing boundaries than to maintaining them. The young adults we interviewed value the smooth melding of Jewish and non-Jewish cultures. The very ability of Jewish cultural expression to successfully take on a specifically non-Jewish aesthetic signifies the ability of Jewishness to overcome parochial, minority status, and validates the desire of these Jews to be publicly Jewish, and Jewish amidst a non-Jewish public. They appreciate the effortless merger of the Jewishly identifiable with aesthetics from other groups and cultures.

In sum, Jewish cultural events deliver several sought-after experiences, generally seen as unavailable in more established Jewish venues, and perform the following functions:

- They reinforce ties with friends and acquaintances, strengthening **social networks**, particularly among young adult Jews who are engaged with being Jewish, but institutionally unaffiliated.
- They bring their participants into contact with **Jewish crowds** and "scenes," that are appreciated for their style, demographics, and diversity.

- They situate Jewish expression in contexts that are mainstream, serving to lend validity, legitimacy, and **credibility to Jewish life**.
- They allow young adult Jews to express their Jewishness in **ethnically mixed** settings, addressing their interest in affirming their Jewish identity in the presence and company of non-Jews.
- Perhaps most significantly, they often feature **cultural hybridity**, tastefully blending identifiably Jewish cultural elements with contemporary aesthetics.

We expect some adjustment, probably toward more conventional options, when (if?) these adults under 35 marry and have children. But, to a certain extent, these distinct ways of being Jewish are the harbingers of change in Jewish communal life. The tastes, preferences, commitments, and elements of style these young adults display today will inevitably come to influence the Jewish community in the future, if not, already in the current moment.

4. Policy Implications

What do these results mean for those responsible for shaping Jewish communal policy? What lessons do they hold for philanthropic leaders, rabbis, educators, and communal practitioners?

The population of participants: Unaffiliated, but engaged

Certainly, the more Jewishly engaged in general also more widely participate in Jewish cultural activities. At the same time, the less engaged participate far less often than the more engaged in conventional Jewish activities (observance, worship, organized life, etc.), but only somewhat less often in Jewish cultural activities. Thus, for the most marginally engaged Jews, Jewish cultural opportunities figure more prominently in comprising their "basket" of Jewish activities. By inference, the genuinely unaffiliated, though unreached or possibly unreachable by way of Jewish institutions, are both reached and reachable by way of Jewish culture.

In contrast to these patterns, the participants at the events we observed are indeed largely **unaffiliated**, but they are not Jewishly apathetic. Their lack of formal affiliation does not automatically imply lack of Jewish engagement

in other ways. In fact, the participants in Jewish cultural events are quite distinctive in terms of their **moderate-to-high levels of Jewish engagement**.

From the perspective of Jewish communal policy makers, then, there's "good news" and "bad news" in our investigation. The good news is that Jewish cultural events are generally appealing, and are relatively valuable ways for the less engaged to connect with Jews and being Jewish. The bad news is that the so-called truly unaffiliated (those thoroughly unengaged with their Jewish identities) are not those in attendance at the events in New York we observed, events that clearly exercise a specialized appeal.

Consequences for the participants: Social networks, marriages and more

If previous behavior of their recently married counterparts is any guide to their future, a significant **portion of these Jews will marry non-Jews**. Many of them have dated and will date non-Jews. Many display ambivalent feelings about in-marriage; not all are firmly committed to finding and marrying a Jewish spouse. Strong Jewish socialization increases the odds of marrying a Jew, but it does not eliminate the possibility of intermarriage. If they do nothing else, Jewish cultural events in New York strengthen social networks among younger Jews. By virtue of these events, participants come in contact with one another, reinforcing friendships and renewing acquaintances, thereby situating them within a local Jewish social life. Social networks provide job referrals, friends, and, of course, people for dating and eventual marriage.

The people in attendance at these cultural events have the Jewish educational and experiential background to serve as leaders of institutions -- active congregants, committee members, social organizers, etc. The cultural events should stimulate their emergence as Jewish leaders in the many senses of the term.

On another level, these events present genuine alternatives to places like the synagogue and the JCC. They provide avenues for **access to Jewish engagement** of some sort for a segment of a population that does not (yet?) find it in synagogues. Ongoing connection to Jewish networks and Jewish activities, such as provided by Jewish cultural events, can not only raise the levels of eventual affiliation, but it also figures to hasten the time when they re-connect with organized Jewry.

In short, we think it reasonable to assume that these Jewish cultural events serve both to **diminish intermarriage** and to **foster eventual leadership engagement** in Jewish life.

Consequences for individuals beyond the participants

Taken in the aggregate, **the cultural events provide pro-Jewish "advertising,"** broadcasting messages about Jewish possibilities that help make Jewish engagement somewhat more attractive to unknown numbers of young adult Jews. The events contribute to an active cultural vocabulary. Phenomena like Matisyahu and J-Dub records are the subject of conversation, as is *Heeb* and other well-known symbols of what may be a Jewish cultural resurgence in New York and North America.

The Jewish cultural events suggest that a style of Jewish involvement more appealing to Jewish young adults, if not generationally distinctive, is not only possible but actually taking place. It is one marked by porous boundaries, hybrid culture, open engagement, voluntarism, autonomy, and inclusiveness.

Consequences for organized Jewry: Laboratories of change

These events provide **a living laboratory** of the tastes, preferences, and inclinations of these Jews, all of which should inform and at times influence the style, aesthetics, and behavior of established Jewish institutions. They have the potential for spillover effects, helping synagogues and other institutions adjust more rapidly and completely to changing cultural currents of the next generation. As such, they may function as the organized Jewish community's R&D department.

Consequences for the collective life of Jews in New York

These cultural events constitute **a major contribution to Jewish cultural life** in New York. They are part of the overall enterprise of shaping and nurturing an authentic and indigenous non-Orthodox Judaism in New York and in the United States. In a sense, these events are self-justifying, above and beyond whatever impact they may have upon their participants or upon the images of Jewish involvement they may project to others.

Introduction

Jews, as a People, have produced a rich and complex culture, with forms as diverse as literature, architecture, music, art, theater, dance and film. In its most comprehensive definition, Jewish culture embraces all that Jews do with some sort of socially meaningful symbolic significance. Jewish culture provides Jews with a sense of shared history, kinship, values and destiny. Thus, one can hardly speak of Jewish identities, communities, and education without speaking of Jewish culture.

However, despite the importance of Jewish culture and notwithstanding the considerable scientific literature on Jewish identity formation, there has been little systematic study of the relationship between Jewish cultural engagement and Jewish identity. Numerous investigations have explored the identity impact of day schools, supplementary schools, camps, pre-schools, youth groups, and Israel trips, to name just the most commonly investigated phenomena. The same cannot be said for the impact of attending Jewish concerts, reading Jewish books, or watching Jewish movies, to give just a few examples. Whatever we may know, or not know, about how and how much Jewish education shapes Jewish engagement (however measured), we understand next to nothing about the putative impact of Jewish culture on Jewish identity.

This investigation, then, seeks to begin to chart out the as yet undeveloped social scientific field that looks at the nexus between Jewish culture and Jewish identity in the United States.

Toward a definition of Jewish culture

At the heart of this study is the question: What is the relationship between Jewish culture and Jewish identity? Complicating this already complex question is the ambiguity that surrounds the very meaning and boundaries that encompass "Jewish culture." To illustrate: Does "Jewish culture" refer to that part of being Jewish which is not explicitly "religious?" Does it refer only to arts, music, literature and the like, or does it also encompass "organizational culture," "political culture," and "material culture?"

As an analytic category, "culture" has been used in a variety of ways, from the Classical European equation of culture with civilization to the anthropological sense that culture comprises a total way of living. Museums

collect and exhibit "material culture," while American politics are still adjusting to the multicultural movement of the mid-1990s and its politics. American "popular culture" has become both more ubiquitous and more serious than ever, making appearances in Presidential addresses, university classrooms, and of course, in the ever-proliferating channels of media.

The movement of "cultural studies," originating in Birmingham, England in the 1980s, provides a particularly useful framework for understanding culture. It revolves around a few central observations:

1. Cultural meanings are never fixed. Rather, they evolve out of social interactions.
2. Culture is always political, in the sense that it is the product of contestation, conversations and negotiations.
3. One cannot understand cultural artifacts without paying careful attention to the context in which these artifacts circulate.
4. Because it is negotiated, culture is always a hybrid product. There was never any ordinary or essential moment of "pure" culture.
5. There is no strict distinction between "high" and "low" cultures.

These five characteristics make culture both elusive (if meaning is negotiated, is there anything we can point at and say, "that's culture"?) and practically omnipresent (if it is produced socially, is there anything that's not "cultural"?). But, culture is not inherently chaotic or indeterminate; it relies on a set of more-or-less agreed upon definitions of what behaviors are permitted and what certain objects mean. For example, most Jews know what a Torah is, and understand that it occupies a special place in the lives of Jewish communities. How one interacts with a Torah (Kiss it as it processes by? Read it? Keep it in a velvet cover or a wooden box?), and what, ultimately, the Torah might "mean" (the word of God? A man-made historical document?) are less certain and less generally agreed-upon; but, that does not diminish its symbolic and social importance for communities of Jews.

The relationship between communities and their artifacts often requires the creation of special (or sacred) spaces in which the community is empowered to interact with that artifact - the ark, the bimah, the sanctuary, chapel, synagogue, and so on. And each of these spaces has its own behaviors attached to it - one can behave differently in the synagogue foyer than on the

bimah, for example. Thus, the definition of culture extends to the relationships that cohere between a group of people, its objects and its spaces.

All of which brings us to American Jews. Since the late 1990s, we have seen a proliferation of Jewish cultural opportunities that do not take for granted the same symbols and meanings as the experiences that preceded them. These new cultural forms lead us to consider broader questions about what it might mean to be Jewish outside of more established spaces of Jewish life.

Without formally asking these questions (questions of culture are rarely articulated as such), organizations and individuals have been re-shaping Jewish culture on several levels. They are creating and performing Jewish culture in alternative venues like bars and performance spaces. They are taking Yiddish music and mixing it with hip-hop. They are praying in makeshift egalitarian minyanim that transcend denominational boundaries. They are writing and reading poetry that owes as much to the spoken-word movement, a performance-based poetry style, Cas it does to scripture. They are engaging people who attend concerts but not synagogues, and those who prefer clubs to JCCs. On the surface, these cultural expressions clash with the more broadly accepted notions of what and where people conventionally "do Jewish." But just below that surface is a rich, multi-faceted, culturally complex, and highly nuanced conversation about which places, objects, behaviors and people identify as Jewish and what makes them so.

In this context, Jewish culture, created by and for Jews in their 20's and 30's, is a particularly intriguing arena for asking these questions, more so than the mainstream institutions of Jewish life. Bars and coffee houses are more inviting to this demographic than synagogues or Jewish community Federation board rooms. In these spaces, Jews in their 20's and 30's are engaged in activities that are both shaping the broader configurations of Jewish culture as well as struggling against it.

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[1]We will use the phrase "alternative Jewish culture" as a shorthand to address the general cultural style that describes the events observed in this paper. Basically, we are talking about identifiably Jewish events that take place outside the mainstream of formal Jewish organizations (Synagogues, JCCs, museums, etc.) In this way, the "alternative" primarily refers to location and organizing impetus, while it also implies a sense that the aesthetics and ideologies that underpin these events are also pushing the Jewish envelope.

Jewish culture in context: Youth culture and globalization

Of course, Jewish culture does not happen in a vacuum. It is and always has been in conversation with surrounding cultures. Today in New York, as elsewhere throughout Jewish history, Jewishness is deeply informed by forces and phenomena from outside the Jewish community.

With respect to alternative Jewish culture in New York[1], two contexts exert significant influence: American youth culture and globalization. The cultural events at the heart of this study owe as much to the influences of these phenomena as they do to more readily recognizable Jewish sources. These contexts indelibly mark the events themselves, even if the participants are unaware of the specific material evidences of these contexts, and they shape the general worldview of the participants.

To elaborate, youth culture, be it embodied in rock and roll in 1950's America or Zionist youth movements, is based, in large part, on differentiating itself from its generational predecessors. A simple example would have children choosing music their parents disapprove of, while more complex ones might involve attending concerts that reflect subversions or parodies of parental values. Differentiation often bears the taint of rebellion, resulting in American youth becoming targets of well-intentioned "interventions" and "rescues." Teachers, parents, social workers and other "adult" agents often approach differentiation as a problem, while youth are not so simply staking out their own ground in opposition to that of their parents and the authority that they represent.

One of the most significant ways in which youth culture is distinguished from "adult culture," is in its association with consumption. Adults earn money; children spend it. Adults are responsible; children are frivolous. Adults have taste; youth are susceptible to fads. And so on. As an industry and as a widespread phenomenon, youth culture grew up and flourished as a critical element of American consumer culture in the 20th century. It has effectively shaped the ways in which the culture industries -- including museums, film, television, publishing, music, and even the Internet -- approach the production, circulation and promotion of their products. American youth has responded by spending nearly $36 billion each year on CDs, movie tickets, fashion, video games, cell phone ring-tones and the like. Market research has long indicated that teenagers - especially teenage girls - represent the most desirable demographic because of their propensity for buying things. Thus, the production

of American culture more broadly considered has been tied closely to the creation and cultivation of youthful audiences and consumers.

Popular music has been the most dynamic and influential force in American youth culture since the early 20th century. From the seemingly seductive rhythms of ragtime, through the rock and roll riots that surrounded the film *Blackboard Jungle*, through the music of the 1960's counterculture, the funk and punk of the 1970's and the emergence of rap and grunge music in the late 1980's, music is the cultural product with the broadest reach and deepest impact. Leaving MTV aside, any television program and film aimed at a youth market uses popular music to help set the scene (and sell soundtracks, as well), while musicians exert their political and philanthropic influence through benefit concerts and movements like "Rock the Vote."

It would be impossible to imagine a study of youth culture without accounting for music, and it would be difficult to underestimate its presence. Not surprisingly, then, the majority of research on American youth culture has focused on music's pervasive influence on fashion, film, and even literature. Music pervades literature on American youth culture, even when the object of study is not music, per se.

Thus, most events examined in the qualitative portion of this study included a musical component; even if it wasn't "necessary" for the event itself. Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun Leil Shavuot [traditionally, an all-night study session] included musical performances amidst the study sessions. Similarly, the Seder-o-rama, an alternative community Passover Seder held on the holiday's seventh night, used a portable radio to provide background music (disco, not klezmer) while the participants dined on a potluck dinner. In both these events, music was not only "necessary"; it was also a violation of the strictest rules of holiday observance as it is traditionally practiced.

In addition to youth culture, the other context that exerts a significant influence on alternative Jewish culture is globalization. The impact of globalization has been widely recognized, providing a major context in which today's generation of Jews currently in their 20's and 30's has grown up. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the rapid spread of the Internet, NAFTA, the EU, global warming, downsizing, outsourcing and even the recent establishment of call centers in India all run counter to conventional notions of independent and insulated nations, cultures and religious groups. Globalization has made the depth and existence of cross-

cultural influences and borrowings increasingly evident, given that more varieties of cultural products are more easily accessible than ever before. People can download music, rent DVDs, buy t-shirts, see performances, and meet people from countries half-way across the globe without having to leave their own homes. At the same time, transportation technology has made travel a reality for many people whose grandparents could never imagine it. An ironic parallel development appears in the spread of American-style capitalism through McDonalds and other chains, so that one can travel across the world and still have a familiar commercial experience. Cultural critics variously praise and condemn this phenomenon; but, for our purposes, the issue is not the evaluation of globalization itself, but of the ways in which it shapes the use and understanding of Jewish culture.

Globalization has lowered or found ways through the barriers between cultures while simultaneously celebrating the productions that result. For Jewish culture this has meant a valorization of Jewishness as a hybrid phenomenon, whether emphasizing the Arabic roots of some Jewish Sephardic music (bands like Pharaoh's Daughter), or the central European sources of klezmer music (bands like Balkan Beat Box and Golem). Similarly, it means celebrating contemporary trans-cultural products like the Latin-tinged music of the Hip Hop Hoodios, the Yiddish rapping of DJ SoCalled or the Hasidic reggae of Matisyahu. Globalization lowers the barriers between cultures and increases the possibilities for cultural recombination, hybridization, and the opportunity to "sample" (to use a musical term) other cultures while creating new cultural products for this generation.

Certainly, youth culture and globalization are broad and intermingled. It would be hard to imagine globalization without the Internet, and it would be difficult to think of a recent phenomenon with as much impact on youth as the personal computer. Web-based technologies like blogs and myspace.com are venues for people around the world to interact in virtual spaces that are relatively free of geographic and social boundaries, allowing for new forms of interaction, identification and affiliation across borders. On the web, presentations of self are largely cultural: In searching for people of compatible interests, culture is the primary vehicle for identifying one's self and others. And so on the online social center friendster.com, site visitors describe themselves in terms of favorite book, favorite movie, etc. (Incidentally, there are at least a dozen Jewish "groups" on friendster.com, including "Cornell

Jewish Connection" with 74 members; "Jewish NYC" with 52 members; "Combined Jewish Philanthropies: Young Leadership Division" with 17 members; "Jewish Bloggers" with 15 members; "Jewish visual artists" with 17; "Jewish Lesbians" (22); "Jewish scientists" (25); "Jewish Persians" (240); "Jewish" (39); "Judaism" (473); "Temple Israel of New Rochelle" (5); "Queer Jews" with 392 members; and "Zionists of Friendster" with 180 members.)

Youth culture and the cultural impact of globalization receive more thorough treatment elsewhere, and we are not attempting to summarize or replicate the vast literature here. Rather, we want to treat them as broad framing devices without which we would be hard pressed to learn from let alone locate the cultural phenomena we observe here.

However we understand it, Jewish culture cannot replace communal institutions. It will not replace synagogues or charities, and it cannot solve broad social or political problems. That being said, it is a critically important factor in the ways in which many Jews in their 20's and 30's relate to, think about, and live Jewish lives, who notably often identify themselves as "culturally Jewish." Without a sophisticated, systematic analysis of what Jewish culture means and how it is lived, Jewish communities will be lacking the vocabulary critical to speaking with and understanding this demographic. The study that follows is not the definitive study of Jewish culture in America, nor does it intend to be. It is, however, the promising beginning of an important conversation about the present and future of American Jews.

The analysis

This is a study of Jewish culture of New York Jews in their 20's and 30's who participate in Jewish cultural activities in non-communal venues. It provides the first systematic examination of Jewish cultural opportunities geared for this population segment, and offers insight into some of the issues and values around which this vibrant phenomenon has taken shape.

The study is organized into four sections. The first section investigates data from the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey. It explores questions on Jewish books, music, and movies that asked about consumption of Jewish culture.

The second section presents evidence and observations drawn from fieldwork conducted at Jewish cultural events that took place outside the traditional framework of the organized Jewish community - in venues other

than synagogues, JCCs, and other communal organizations. Surveying the events themselves, this section focuses on the ways in which the events are presented and how their participants act and interact in this atmosphere. Using ethnographic and participant observation methods, it offers some insight into the ways in which these events provide cultural opportunities for the people who participate in them.

The third section presents data drawn from interviews with participants of these events in order to construct a fuller picture of the people who engage in Jewish culture in this environment. The interviews yielded valuable information about levels of Jewish knowledge, desire for Jewish engagement, and leisure-time preferences. The interviews also provide some critical information about how members of this age cohort view and understand the organized Jewish community, and how they are struggling with and succeeding in creating their own Jewish experiences outside that framework.

Finally, in the fourth section we outline some policy implications that emerged from this research in order to begin applying the data and the analysis outlined above.

Taken together, the four sections offer initial insights into New York's Jewish cultural scene and enable us to draw conclusions about the role of Jewish culture in the formation of Jewish identities among Jews in their 20's and 30's, many of whom seek and find Jewish fulfillment outside the parameters of the traditionally organized Jewish community.

Section 1

The Consumption of Jewish Culture: Nationwide Evidence from the NJPS 2000-01

Is Jewish cultural programming especially effective with younger adults?

Advocates of Jewish cultural endeavor claim that Jewish cultural participation plays a vital role in strengthening and shaping Jewish identities, especially among young adults. More broadly, the argument goes, Jewish cultural programming is an especially effective vehicle for reaching all sorts of relatively under-engaged Jewish populations, including the intermarried, the unaffiliated, and the non-observant. Culture, they claim, has an appeal that other forms of Jewish involvement lack. If all this were true, then we would expect several patterns to emerge.

First, if Jewish culture is indeed appealing to **many Jews, then many Jews should engage in Jewish cultural activities**. How many Jews, for example, watch movies with a Jewish theme, listen to what they call "Jewish music," or read books with Jewish content?

Second, if Jewish cultural consumption reflects and is intertwined with Jewish identity, then we would anticipate **a moderate relationship between Jewish culture and other dimensions of Jewish identity**. Is participation in Jewish culture something like participation in other forms of Jewish life, yet also somewhat different from, say, ritual observance, or communal affiliation? If Jewish cultural consumption is a piece of Jewish identity, but a somewhat different piece, then the statistical evidence should somehow reflect this duality. Jewish cultural engagement should be both aligned with other conventional measures of Jewish identity, and yet substantially distinctive from these measures.

Third, the claim formulated above also suggests that somehow **Jewish culture holds a special attraction for the Jewishly under-engaged**, be they young adults, or the intermarried, or the institutionally unaffiliated, or, perhaps, Jews living in areas of low Jewish residential density. Do Jews who are thought to be more "marginal" to conventional Jewish life nevertheless engage in Jewish cultural consumption?

Now, one would not expect higher rates of cultural consumption

among such population segments than among their more Jewishly involved counterparts. To illustrate, we would not expect intermarried Jews, who score lower than in-married Jews on all widely used measures of Jewish engagement, to report higher rates of consumption in Jewish cultural activities than the in-married. Rather, we might expect a subtler configuration. We may expect that Jewish culture plays a greater role, relatively, in constituting the range of Jewish behaviors undertaken by the less engaged. This finding would be consistent with the view that, in colloquial terms, "Unengaged Jews, by definition, don't do much that is recognizably Jewish. However, Jewish cultural consumption is one of the few areas in which they do manifest a sense of Jewish connection." We turn to the data of the National Jewish Population Survey to examine these claims.

The NJPS data: Three measures of Jewish cultural consumption

The National Jewish Population Survey, 2000-01, conducted by the United Jewish Communities, interviewed by telephone 4,523 Jewish households nationwide (see www.ujc.org/njps). The survey contains three questions (and only three out of several dozen on Jewish identity) that pertain directly to the matter of Jewish cultural consumption, in the sense that is widely used in Jewish communal circles. The three questions are:

> First, during the past year, did you …
> Listen to a tape, CD, or record because it had Jewish content?
> See a movie or rent a video because it had Jewish content?
> Read a book other than the Bible because it had Jewish content?

Quite clearly, all three questions fall within the realm of what most would consider consumption of "Jewish culture," in the way in which the term is commonly used. However, just as clearly, major forms of Jewish cultural life are not at all covered by these questions. Among them are: attendance at theater, dance, concerts, and other performances, as well as visiting museums, to say nothing of engaging directly in Jewish cultural activities, rather than observing. A much broader complement of questions would have undoubtedly uncovered a more diverse array of cultural consumption and, certainly, raised the overall level of consumption in some form of Jewish cultural life. Owing to the limited data available to study Jews' relationship to culture on a national

level, we are limited in how we, in this research, can speak about Jewish culture. Accordingly, our work only begins to lay out the relationship between Jewish identity and Jewish cultural participation, of which consumption is but a piece. This paper explores a few illustrations of Jewish cultural consumption, but cannot address the intriguing matters of Jewish cultural production, performance, and participation. In other words, we will learn who listens to Jewish music, to take one domain of Jewish culture. But we will not learn about who composes or plays Jewish music.

Furthermore, these questions do not allow us to consider the motivations behind the decision to participate in these forms of Jewish culture. While many may have been drawn to their Jewish content, others may have been attracted by entirely unrelated factors. For instance, the survey does not differentiate between those Jews who saw the film Munich because they were interested in its Jewish angle, and those Jews who saw the film because they like Steven Spielberg. Nonetheless, for Jews, interest in things Jewish play an indeterminate role in motivating their consumption of Jewish culture, even at times without consciousness or intentionality.

At the same time, as will be shown, these survey questions do give us a useful glimpse into the issues at hand, issues which have been largely unexplored in the research literature on American Jews heretofore. The three survey items we analyze should be seen not only as covering the specific domains to which they refer, but also as serving as indicators of the larger concept of Jewish cultural engagement. It stands to reason that many types of Jewish cultural consumption that go beyond the three items available in the NJPS should bear similar relationships with the socio-demographic variables examined below.

Analytic strategy: Comparing measures of Jewish engagement

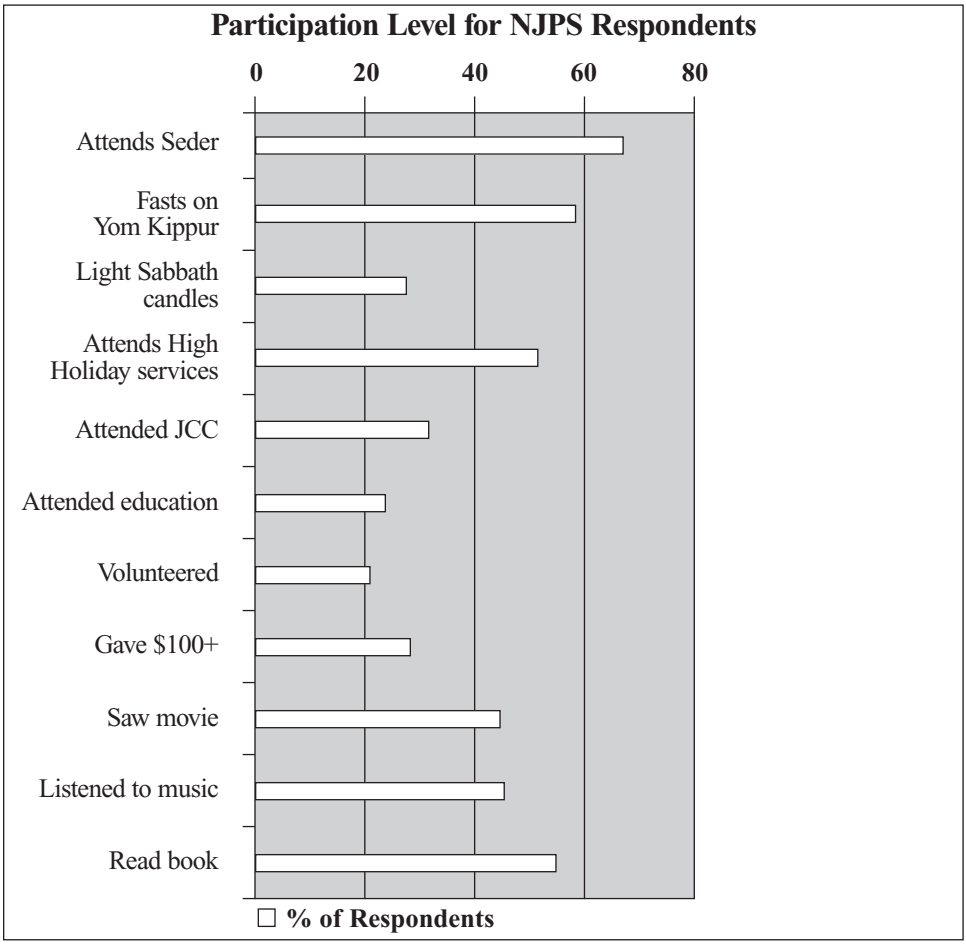
The analysis below compares measures of Jewish cultural consumption with measures of other forms of Jewish engagement, specifically, certain representative ritual observances and illustrative acts of involvement in Jewish activities outside the home. The home-based ritual practices in this list comprise the following (followed by their frequencies in the population in parentheses):

- usually attends Passover Seder (68%);

- fasts on Yom Kippur (59%); and,
- Sabbath candles usually lit in the home (28%).

With respect to discrete acts of Jewish communal engagement outside the home, we have:

- attending High Holiday services (52%);
- attending a JCC program during the past year or paying membership dues (31%);
- attending an adult Jewish education program (24%);
- volunteering under some Jewish sponsorship (21%); and,
- contributing at least $100 to Jewish charities apart from a UJA-Federation campaign (28%).



Levels of Jewish Cultural Consumption: Comparable to High Holiday Attendance

Just over 45% of adult Jews saw a movie with Jewish content during the past year, and the same number listened to Jewish music. More than half (55%) claimed to have read a book with Jewish content in the 12 months prior to the interview. These rates are roughly comparable to that associated with attendance at High Holiday services (52%), and just below the proportion who claim to have fasted all or part of the day on Yom Kippur (59%). Passover Seder attendance is somewhat higher (68%). However, participation in the three Jewish cultural activities substantially exceeds the selected measures of Jewish communal engagement, which range from 21% for volunteering to 31% for JCC participation. Clearly, Jewish cultural consumption - at least with respect to these three measures - engages a fairly significant fraction of the Jewish population, a fraction comparable to some of the most widely undertaken acts of Jewish involvement.

Related to, though distinct from, other dimensions of Jewish involvement

To what extent does Jewish cultural consumption replicate other forms of Jewish involvement, and to what extent does it stand apart from those forms? To answer this question, we examine the correlations between the index of Jewish cultural consumption (which was measured on a scale ranging from zero to three, reflecting the number of Jewish cultural activities in which the respondent participates) and three indices of widely used measures of Jewish involvement:

- ritual observance (consisting of Passover Seder, lighting Hanukah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, practicing Kashrut at home, and usually lighting Sabbath candles);
- Jewish organizational affiliations (memberships in synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations); and,
- a single question relating to the proportion of one's friends who are Jewish (in which categorical answers were replaced with numerical codes, such that, illustratively, "mostly Jewish" was replaced with 0.75).

If, conceptually, Jewish cultural consumption had nothing to do with

Jewish engagement, then we would expect no correlations between consumption and the three other measures. If, on the other hand, Jewish cultural consumption more or less replicated those measures, then we would anticipate high inter-measure correlations, or at least as high as that exhibited among the measures themselves. An intermediate level of correlations would support a third possibility: that Jewish cultural consumption does in fact reflect Jewish interest and involvement, but that it is a distinctive form of such involvement.

Indeed the results are in line with this last-mentioned characterization. The correlations among ritual practice, communal affiliation and Jewish friendship range between .47 and .58. However, correlations between Jewish cultural consumption and the other three measures range between .28 and .39. This pattern suggests that Jewish cultural consumption in some ways resembles and overlaps with other ways of engaging in Jewish life. At the same time, it clearly stands apart from the rest as a very distinctive dimension of Jewish engagement, providing an alternative for those who may not score particularly high with respect to ritual practice, affiliation, and Jewish social embeddedness.

Correlations among cultural consumption* and other indices of Jewish engagement

	Cultural Consumption	Ritual Observance	Organizational affiliations	Jewish Friends
Cultural Consumption		.39	.34	.28
Ritual Observance	.39		.59	.48
Organizational Affiliations	.34	.59		.47
Jewish Friends	.28	.48	.47	

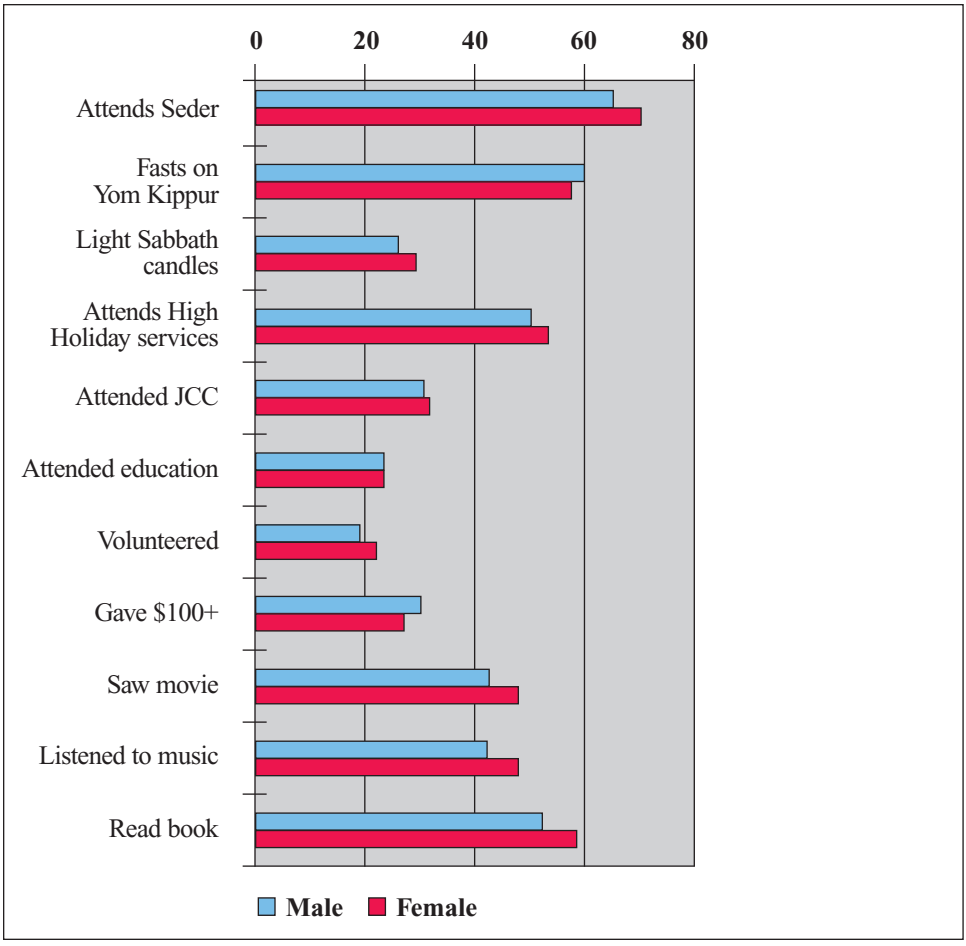
*The cultural consumption index ranges from 0 to 3, reflecting the number of affirmative answers to the questions on watching movies, reading books, and listening to music.

Higher cultural consumption among women

A substantial social scientific literature testifies to the higher rates of religious engagement by women, relative to men, across religious groups. American Jews are no exception. In these findings, as elsewhere, women outscore men on almost all indicators of conventional Jewish engagement. In addition, the literature on cultural consumption in general reports higher involvement by women than men. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that women participate slightly more than men in Jewish cultural activities. The gender gaps in this regard are even more substantial, on the order of 5-7 percentage points, than they are for the measures of ritual observance and Jewish communal activity (generally, 2-4 percentage points).

If these results extend to other areas of cultural engagement, they suggest that we should find somewhat more women than men at Jewish cultural events and performances. Impressionistic observation of Jewish cultural events in New York supports this inference.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by gender



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by gender

	Gender		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Attends Passover Seder usually	65	70	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	60	58	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	26	29	28
Attends High Holiday services	50	53	52
Attended JCC program or member	31	32	31
Attended adult Jewish education	24	24	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	19	22	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	30	27	28
Saw a Jewish movie	43	48	45
Listened to Jewish music	42	48	45
Read a book with Jewish content	52	58	55

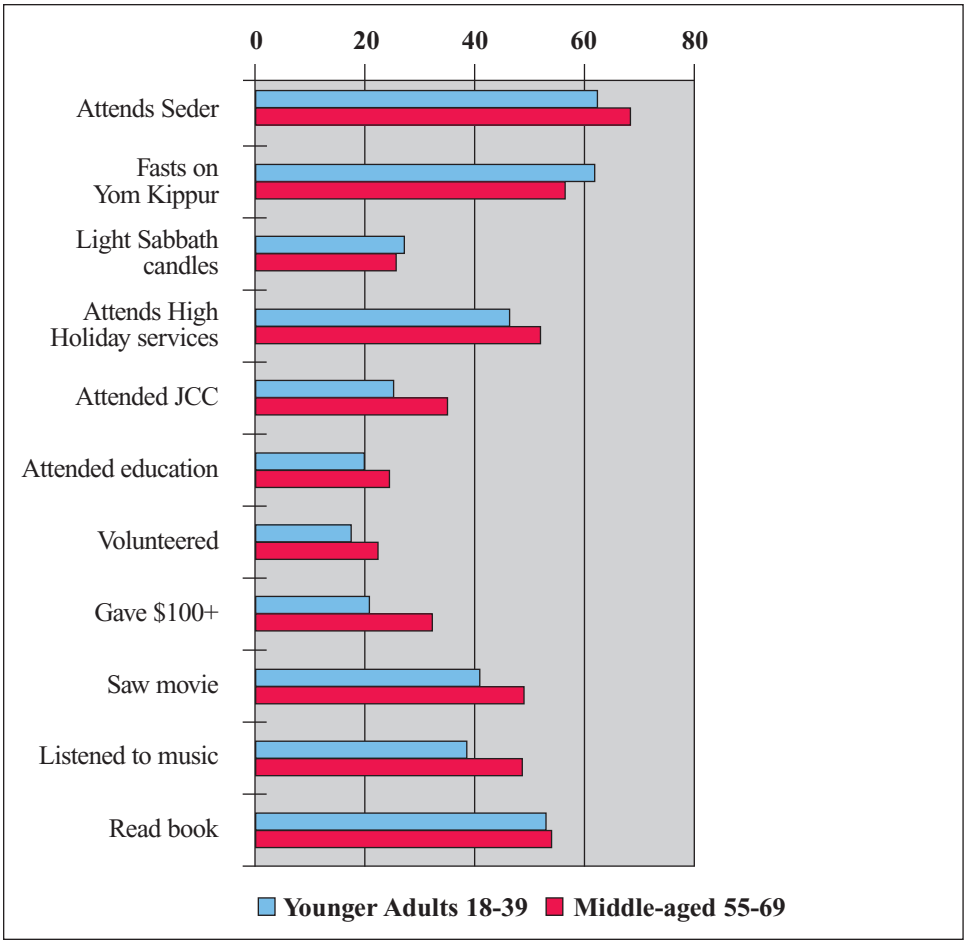
Older versus Younger Jews

The differences in Jewish identity patterns between older and younger Jews are encapsulated in the title of an earlier study (Steven M. Cohen, "Religious Stability, Ethnic Decline," Florence G. Heller / JCCA Research Center 1998). In broad strokes, younger adults seem to approximate the levels of religious engagement of their elders, but they score lower on measures of communal engagement. The results from the NJPS support this generalization.

We may usefully compare the findings for those under 40 ("younger adults") with those 55-69 ("middle-aged"). On three of the four ritual measures, younger adults are less observant than their middle-aged counterparts. In like fashion, the middle-aged consistently outscore the younger cohort on every measure of communal participation, ranging from 5 percentage points for attending adult Jewish education programs to twelve points for contributing $100 or more to Jewish causes. In general, younger Jews are indeed somewhat less Jewishly engaged than their older counterparts.

With respect to cultural consumption, the older outscore the younger as well, with the young-old gaps ranging from a single point difference for Jewish book reading, to 10 points for listening to Jewish music. Overall, then, age-related differences with respect to cultural consumption resemble those for other forms of Jewish engagement.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by age



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by age

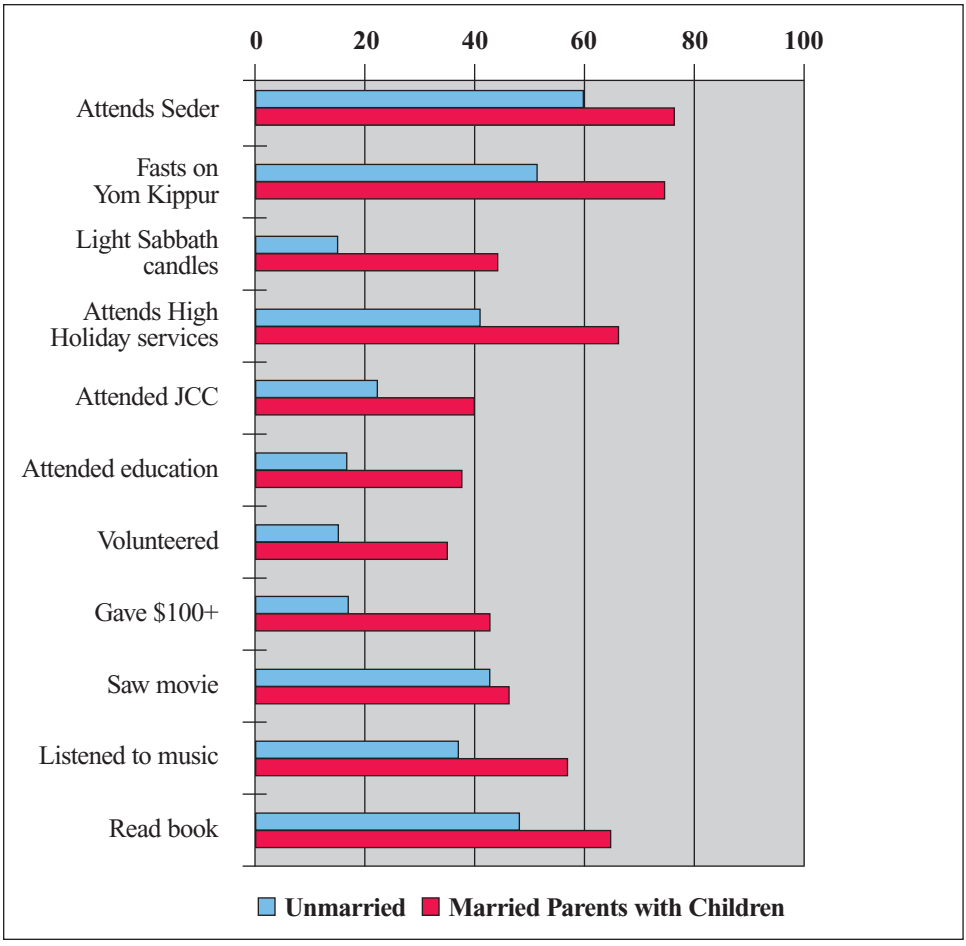
	Age				
	18-39	**40-54**	**55-69**	**70+**	**Total**
Attends Passover Seder usually	63	71	69	69	67
Fasts on Yom Kippur	62	63	57	48	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	27	30	26	26	28
Attends High Holiday services	47	58	52	52	52
Attended JCC program or member	25	32	35	39	31
Attended adult Jewish education	20	29	25	21	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	17	26	23	17	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	21	33	33	32	28
Saw a Jewish movie	41	46	49	47	45
Listened to Jewish music	39	49	49	45	45
Read a book with Jewish content	53	59	54	54	55

Younger, unmarried adults and their engagement in Jewish cultural activities

The practice of Jewish life rises and falls with the life cycle. Generally, the addition of family members provokes greater involvement, and their departure is associated with diminished Jewish activity, both at home and in the community. These trends parallel those found for other religious groups and, indeed, for civic involvement of all sorts. In this context, the relatively low involvement in Jewish life among the unmarried (many of whom live alone or with friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish) is totally understandable. But it also underscores the value from a policy point of view of promoting activities that can appeal to otherwise under-engaged population segments.

Illustrative of the impact of family life cycle upon Jewish engagement is the comparison between younger, unmarried individuals and married parents (some of whom are intermarried) with school-age children. A few definitions are in order here: The "unmarried" are defined as those with no children home, who are not single by way of widowhood, and who either never married or are currently divorced; as a group, these people are younger than married parents. "School-age" is defined as 6-17. Our data indicate that the group of younger, unmarried individuals and the group of married parents constitute, respectively, the low and high points of Jewish involvement. For example, just about half the unmarried fast on Yom Kippur as opposed to three quarters of the parents of school-age youngsters. In general, the gaps in Jewish involvement are rather substantial. In fact, on four measures of communal activity, parents of school-age children report frequencies nearing double that reported by the unmarried. One example is volunteering in a Jewish context, with 35% of the married parents with school-age children versus just 15% of the unmarried. The gaps between these two family segments with respect to cultural consumption are of the same order, ranging from near-equality for seeing a Jewish movie (43% vs. 46%), to the substantial gap for listening to Jewish music (37% vs. 57%).

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by family status



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by family status

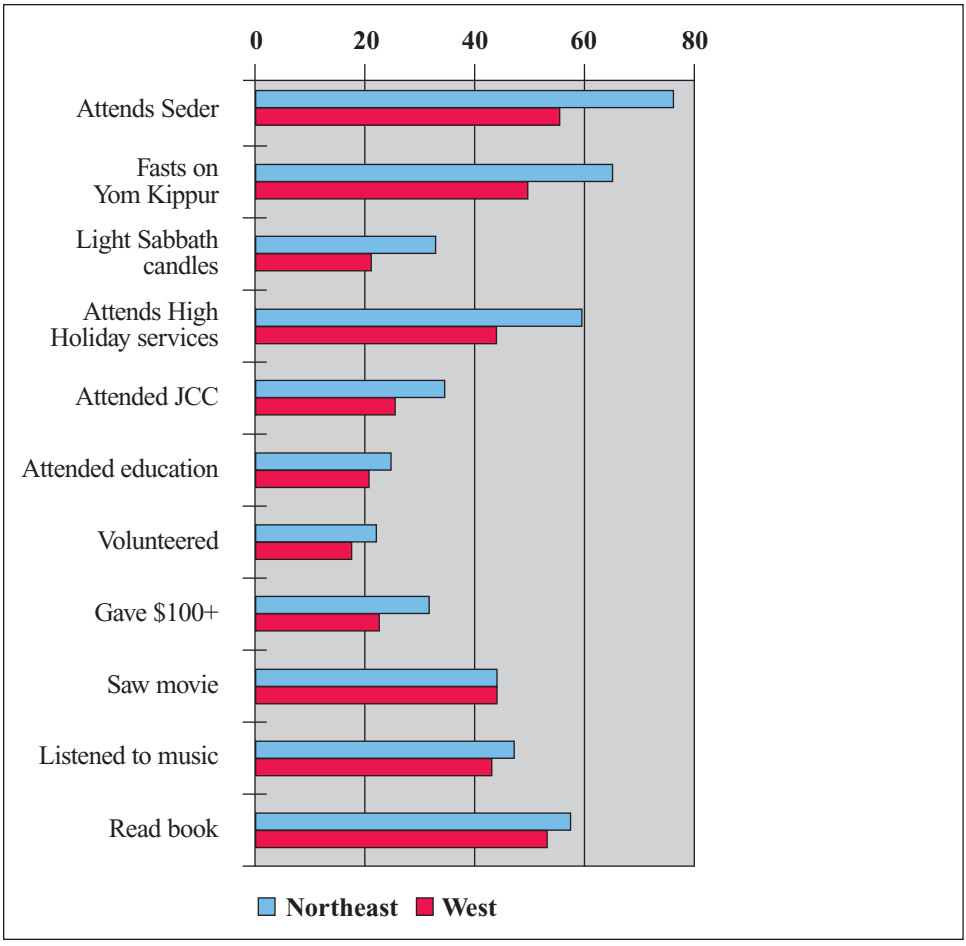
	Family Status							
	Un-Married No Kids	Married No Kids	Single Parent	Tots Parents	School Parents	Empty nester	Widow (er)	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	60	67	71	66	77	72	64	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	52	58	68	66	75	56	52	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	15	28	39	45	44	26	26	28
Attends High Holiday services	41	52	46	54	66	56	51	52
Attended JCC program or member	22	25	34	28	40	36	41	31
Attended adult Jewish education	17	24	21	26	38	24	23	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	15	18	16	19	35	23	15	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	17	20	19	34	43	36	27	28
Saw a Jewish movie	43	41	46	37	46	50	44	45
Listened to Jewish music	37	39	33	53	57	49	47	45
Read a book with Jewish content	48	55	58	59	65	56	52	55

"Winning" the West: Regional variations in Jewish cultural engagement

Jews in the Northeast report the highest levels of Jewish engagement, while those in the West report the lowest. In the more traditional Northeast, 59% attend High Holiday services as contrasted with just 44% in the West, the region with the highest rate of intermarriage. In contrast, the differences in cultural engagement are negligible to small. Jews in both regions are equally likely to have seen a Jewish movie (43%), and the Northeasterners are just four to five percentage points more likely to listen to Jewish music, or to read books with Jewish content, as are their Western counterparts.

Another way we can look at these results is as follows. Jews in the Northeast are more likely to attend High Holiday services than they are to see a Jewish movie, listen to Jewish music or read a Jewish book. In contrast, Jews in the West are just as likely, if not more likely, to engage in these cultural activities as they are to attend High Holiday services. These sorts of comparisons may be extended beyond religious services to other areas, such that it may be said: In relative terms, **Jewish cultural activities occupy a greater fraction of observable Jewish behavior in the West than in the more religious and ethnically engaged Northeast. Figuratively, the total "weight" of Jewish activity may be lighter in the West; but a greater relative fraction of that weight is given over to cultural consumption.**

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by region



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by region

	Census Regions (Based on primary residence zip code)				
	Northeast Region	Midwest Region	South Region	West Region	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	76	67	66	55	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	65	56	58	49	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	33	24	26	21	28
Attends High Holiday services	59	50	48	44	52
Attended JCC program or member	35	30	32	26	31
Attended adult Jewish education	25	30	22	21	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	23	22	20	18	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	32	31	27	23	28
Saw a Jewish movie	44	46	48	44	45
Listened to Jewish music	47	44	45	43	45
Read a book with Jewish content	58	55	53	53	55

Jewish residential density: Culture reaches outlying Jews

Consistent with the regional results, we find intriguing patterns with respect to Jewish residential density; that is, the extent to which Jews are concentrated in one or another area. The analysis divided the sample into three segments based simply upon the number of weighted respondents who happen to have fallen within three-digit zip code areas (for example, Brooklyn is 112xx, and most of Manhattan is 100xx). The measure, albeit crude, allows for classifying respondents according to Jewish residential density.

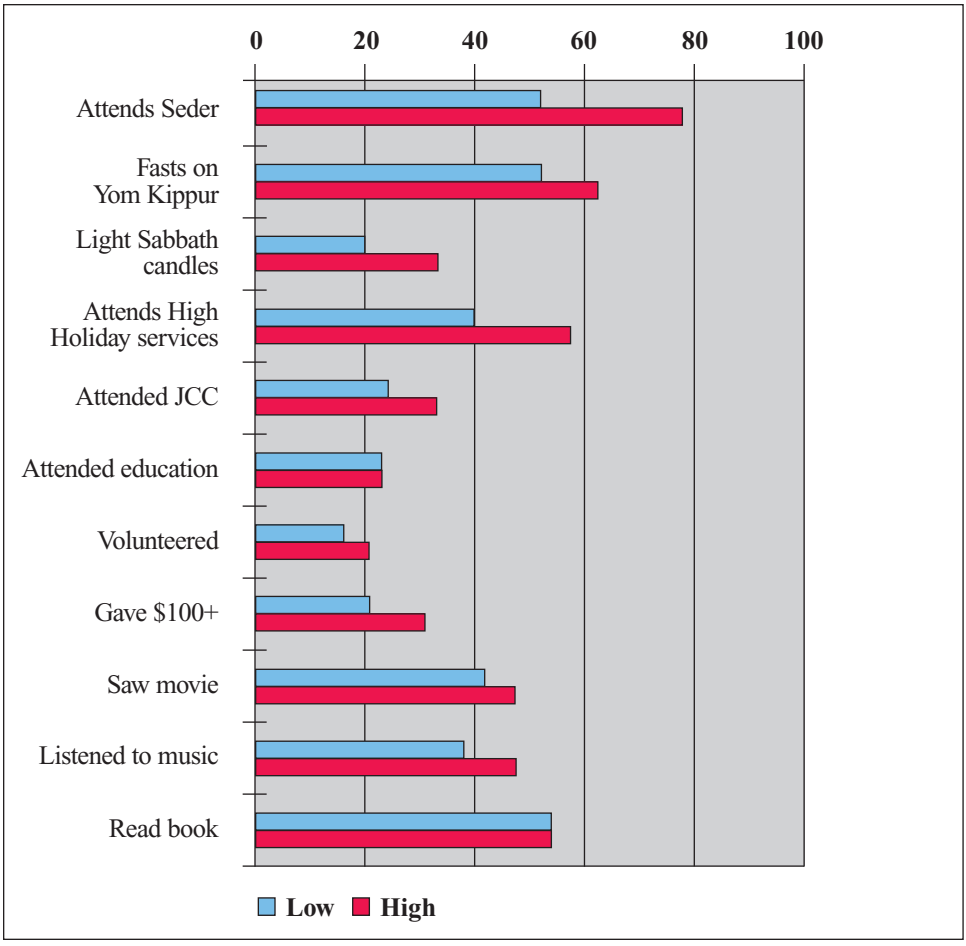
Jews living in areas with many other Jews report more Jewish engagement than those living in areas where Jewish neighbors are sparse and few between. We may contrast Jews in the least densely settled areas with those in the most densely settled areas (with respective percentages in parentheses). Especially striking are the gaps for Passover Seder (52% vs. 77%), lighting Sabbath candles (20% vs. 33%), High Holiday services (40% vs. 57%), and Jewish charitable giving (21% vs. 31%). In almost all respects (the one exception listed is adult Jewish education), Jews in outlying areas substantially trail those in densely settled areas in terms of Jewish engagement.

However, the results for cultural engagement point to far smaller gaps, of just five percentage points for seeing a Jewish movie and nine points for listening to Jewish music. In fact, reading Jewish books occurs just about as often in the sparsely settled as in the densely settled areas.

Another way of looking at these findings is the following set of comparisons. In areas where there are many Jews, they are clearly more likely to have attended High Holiday services last year than they are to have seen a Jewish movie. However, in areas of sparse Jewish settlement, slightly more Jews went to see a Jewish movie at some point in the year than attended services on Yom Kippur.

In any event, in relative terms, **Jewish cultural engagement plays a greater relative role in reaching Jews in areas of low density** (such as Northern Westchester or Suffolk County) than in areas of high Jewish density (such as Flatbush, Rego Park, or Riverdale). (The distribution of Orthodox Jews, who disproportionately reside in areas of high Jewish density, plays only a minor role in shaping these relationships. In separate analyses in which they were excluded for experimental purposes, we arrive at the same substantive conclusion.)

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by density



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by density

	Jewish Residential Density (Based on 3-digit zip codes)			
	Low	**Moderate**	**High**	**Total**
Attends Passover Seder usually	52	71	77	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	52	60	62	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	20	27	33	28
Attends High Holiday services	40	56	57	52
Attended JCC program or member	24	35	33	31
Attended adult Jewish education	23	26	23	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	16	24	21	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	21	31	31	28
Saw a Jewish movie	42	46	47	45
Listened to Jewish music	38	48	47	45
Read a book with Jewish content	54	57	54	55

The socially upscale: More engagement and more culture

With the exception of the more traditional practices (e.g., lighting Sabbath candles) and with the exception of identifying as Orthodox, most measures of Jewish engagement rise with increases in social status. Both education and income, two key measures of social status, are directly associated with most forms of ritual practice and communal affiliation. In parallel, more educated and more affluent Americans in general engage in more community activities, including acts of religious affiliation, and Jews, obviously, replicate those patterns.

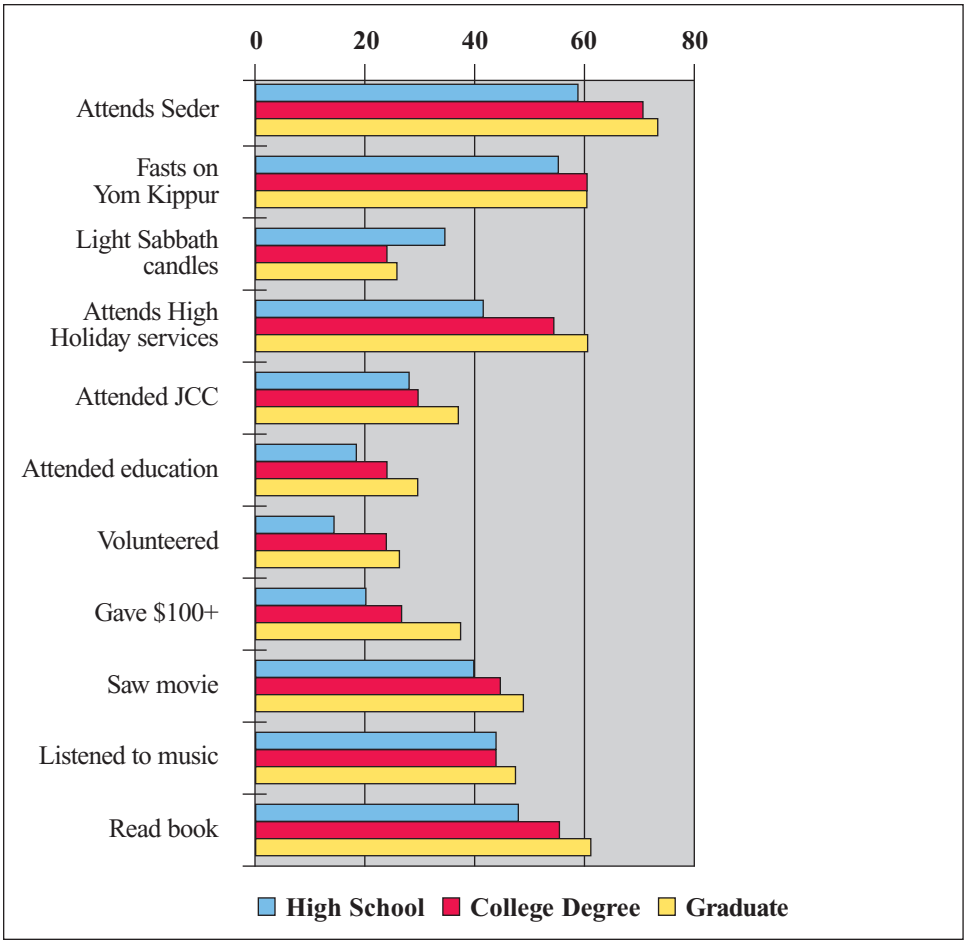
Research on cultural consumption also links such consumption to social status, in that the more highly educated have greater interest in cultural opportunities, and the more affluent have greater ability to consume such programming.

Not surprisingly then, higher education and higher income respondents report higher levels of Jewish cultural consumption. For both education and income, the relationship is more pronounced for reading a Jewish book than for movies or music. In fact, the relationship between income and going to Jewish movies is entirely non-uniform, both rising and falling with rises in education and in income.

The significance of these findings from a policy point of view is that Jewish culture programming is, generally, somewhat more appealing or more accessible to those with higher status. One possible explanation is that Jewish cultural activity competes in this marketplace with cultural offerings that appeal to upscale population groups. Another is that Jewish cultural programming tends to target Jews who, by virtue of their higher educational attainment and greater affluence, are more capable of making a wide range of contributions to the organized Jewish community.

At the same time, the relationship between social status and culture is less pronounced than that between social status and other forms of Jewish engagement. Jews of lower social status tend to engage in cultural activities in greater proportion than they participate in most organized Jewish programming. Consistent with the other patterns demonstrated throughout this paper, the groups that are relatively marginal to conventional Jewish life (in this case, the less well-educated and the less affluent) are not so marginalized with respect to Jewish cultural consumption.

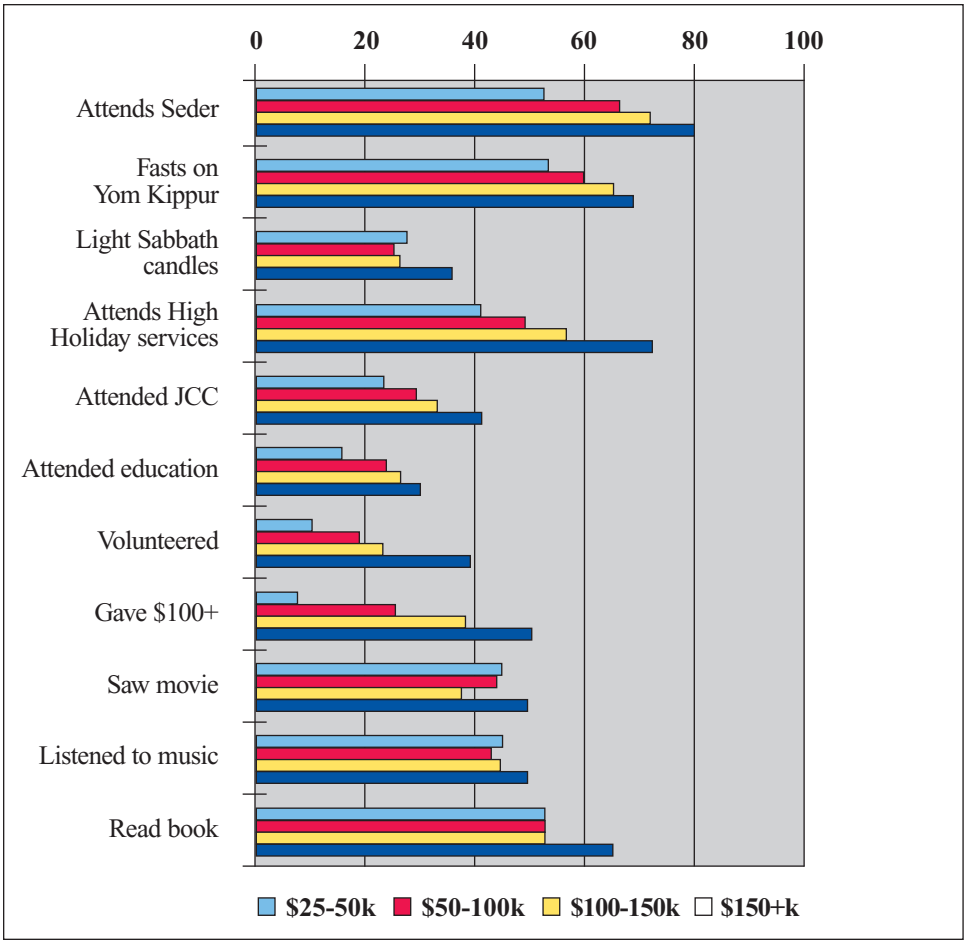
Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by education



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by education

	Education				
	HS or Below	Some College	College Degree	Graduate Degree	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	59	63	71	74	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	56	55	61	61	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	35	28	24	26	28
Attends High Holiday services	42	48	54	61	52
Attended JCC program or member	28	31	30	37	32
Attended adult Jewish education	18	22	24	30	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	14	17	24	26	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	20	28	27	38	29
Saw a Jewish movie	40	45	45	49	45
Listened to Jewish music	44	44	44	48	45
Read a book with Jewish content	48	53	56	62	55

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by income



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by income

	Annual Household Income (thousands)					
	<25	**25-50**	**50-100**	**100-150**	**150+**	**Total**
Attends Passover Seder usually	53	62	66	72	80	65
Fasts on Yom Kippur	54	53	60	65	69	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	28	25	25	26	36	27
Attends High Holiday services	41	46	49	56	72	50
Attended JCC program or member	23	30	29	33	41	30
Attended adult Jewish education	16	22	24	27	30	23
Volunteered in a Jewish context	11	17	19	23	39	20
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	8	22	25	38	50	26
Saw a Jewish movie	45	46	44	37	49	44
Listened to Jewish music	45	45	43	44	49	45
Read a book with Jewish content	53	55	53	53	65	55

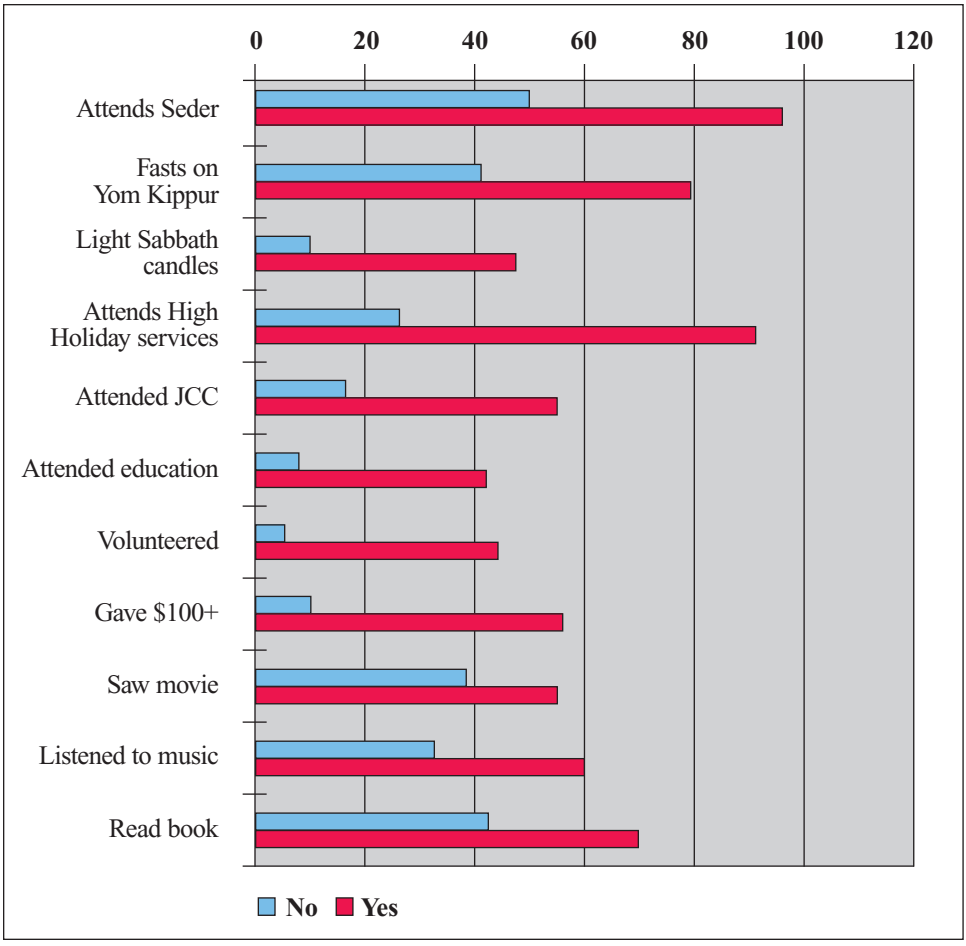
The synagogue affiliated versus the unaffiliated

Synagogue affiliation may constitute the single most useful predictor of a wide range of Jewish engagement activities. Indeed, as we see here, congregationally affiliated Jews report far higher rates of involvement than the unaffiliated. Among the illustrative indicators are the following (affiliated / unaffiliated frequencies in percentages): Sabbath candles (48% / 11%); High Holiday services (91% / 27%); and Jewish adult education (42% / 9%).

The gaps for the culture indicators are uniformly in the same direction, with higher activity among the affiliated. However, consistent with the patterns reported for other measures, they are far smaller in size, as follows: Jewish movie (55% / 39%); music (60% / 33%); and reading a Jewish book (70% / 43%). Instead of a 4:1 ratio, as for many ritual practices, we find gaps of about 2:1 for cultural consumption measures.

From these results we may infer, perhaps fancifully, that a synagogue member is far more likely to read the Passover Hagaddah annually than a Jewish book, but the non-member is almost as likely to read a book as the Hagaddah. The member is much more likely to hear the tunes of Kol Nidre than those of some other form of Jewish music; but the non-member stands a better chance of listening to Jewish music outside the synagogue, than a cantorial rendition inside the sanctuary. The synagogue member is about as likely to make a Jewish charitable donation of $100 or more as to buy a ticket for a Jewish movie; the non-member is far more likely (by a ratio of over three-to-one) to pay for the movie. Among non-members, just over a quarter attended High Holiday services, but almost two thirds reported at least one Jewish cultural activity of the three found on the NJPS questionnaire. The bottom line: **In the Jewish lives of the unaffiliated, cultural engagement plays a greater role than in does in the lives of those affiliated with congregations**.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by synagogue affiliation



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by synagogue affiliation

	Synagogue Member		
	No	**Yes**	**Total**
Attends Passover Seder usually	50	96	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	42	79	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	11	48	28
Attends High Holiday services	27	91	52
Attended JCC program or member	17	55	32
Attended adult Jewish education	9	42	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	6	45	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	11	57	28
Saw a Jewish movie	39	55	45
Listened to Jewish music	33	60	45
Read a book with Jewish content	43	70	55

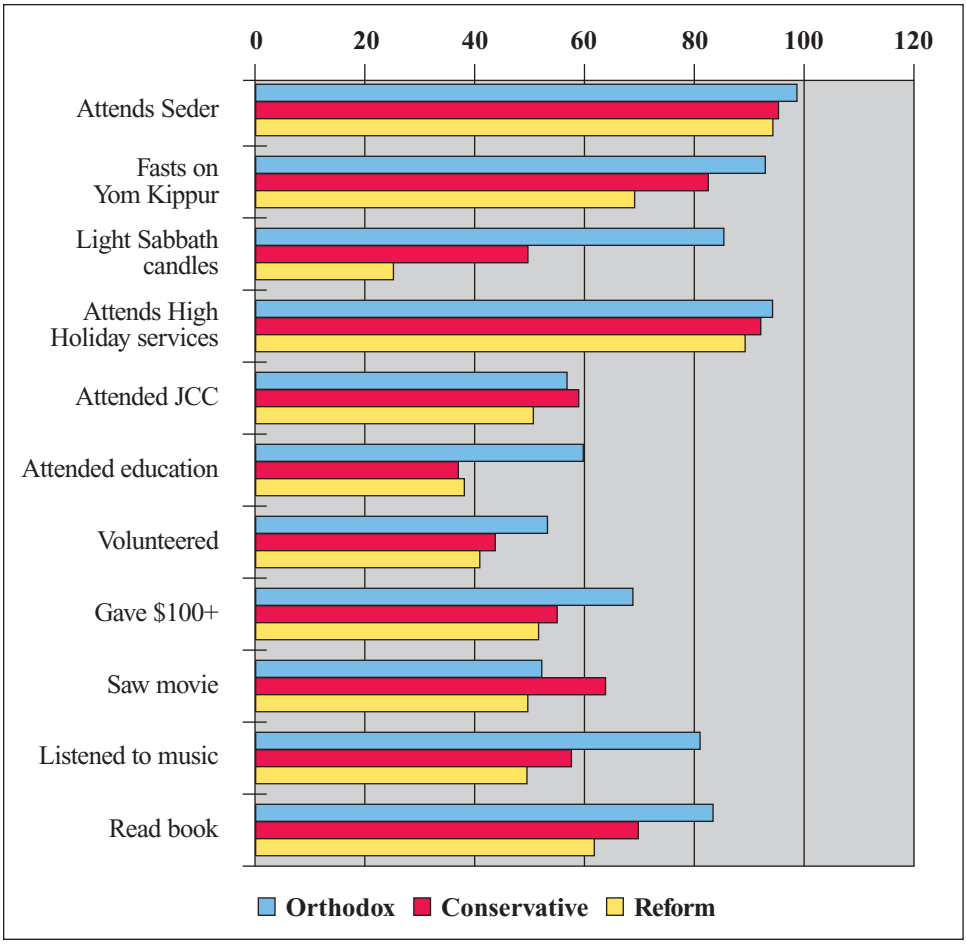
Different cultural strokes for different denominational folks

Most Jewish activities measured on social surveys follow a predictable denominational gradient, with rates highest among the Orthodox, intermediate among the Conservative congregants, and lowest among Reform temple members. However, not all denominational variations are equally pronounced. For example, with respect to frequency of Sabbath candle lighting, major differences divide Orthodox, Conservative and Reform congregational members. In contrast, only small to non-uniform differences are associated with attendance at Passover Seders (although they may attend very different sorts of Seders), attendance at High Holiday services at least once, and participation in JCC programs.

In the cultural domain, the conventional denominational contour also emerges for reading Jewish books and listening to Jewish music, with the Orthodox leading all three denominational groups and the Reform trailing. On the other hand, Jewish movie going peaks among Conservative Jews, as the Orthodox seem relatively less enthusiastic about going to Jewish-themed movies than they do about listening to Jewish music or reading Jewish books. Perhaps (and this suggestion is purely speculative) Orthodox Jews find movie-going in general more culturally problematic and may well refrain from participating in a cultural activity rife with objectionable content.

These varying patterns suggest that Jews with different world-views certainly respond differently to different cultural offerings. More refined research, undoubtedly, would uncover even more detailed and documented differences than could be made visible here with the limited number of crude indicators available.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by synagogue denomination



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by synagogue denomination

	Major Denomination of Synagogue Members			
	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	99	95	94	96
Fasts on Yom Kippur	93	82	70	80
Sabbath candles usually lit	85	50	25	49
Attends High Holiday services	94	92	89	91
Attended JCC program or member	56	59	51	55
Attended adult Jewish education	60	37	38	43
Volunteered in a Jewish context	53	44	41	45
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	69	55	52	57
Saw a Jewish movie	52	64	50	55
Listened to Jewish music	81	58	49	60
Read a book with Jewish content	83	69	62	70

The Unaffiliated: The Relative Prominence of Cultural Consumption

Going beyond synagogue affiliation, we can examine how Jewish activity varies with respect to affiliation more generally. Of course, Jews may affiliate in a variety of ways. To more fully understand the relationship between cultural and other forms of Jewish engagement, we constructed a Jewish affiliation index that incorporates respondents' reports on their memberships in synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations. The index divides the respondents into the unaffiliated (no memberships), those with just one membership, and those with two or three points of affiliation.

The results point to a pattern seen before. Affiliation is strongly correlated with other forms of Jewish activity. The gap between the totally unaffiliated and those with just one membership is, for most measures, quite large, but Jewish activity levels also rise in the transition from those with one membership to those with two or three such memberships.

Especially illustrative and pertinent are the results for adult Jewish education (attending any sort of educational program in the last year), an activity that reaches just 6% of the unaffiliated, 29% of the singly affiliated, and 47% of those with two or three affiliations.

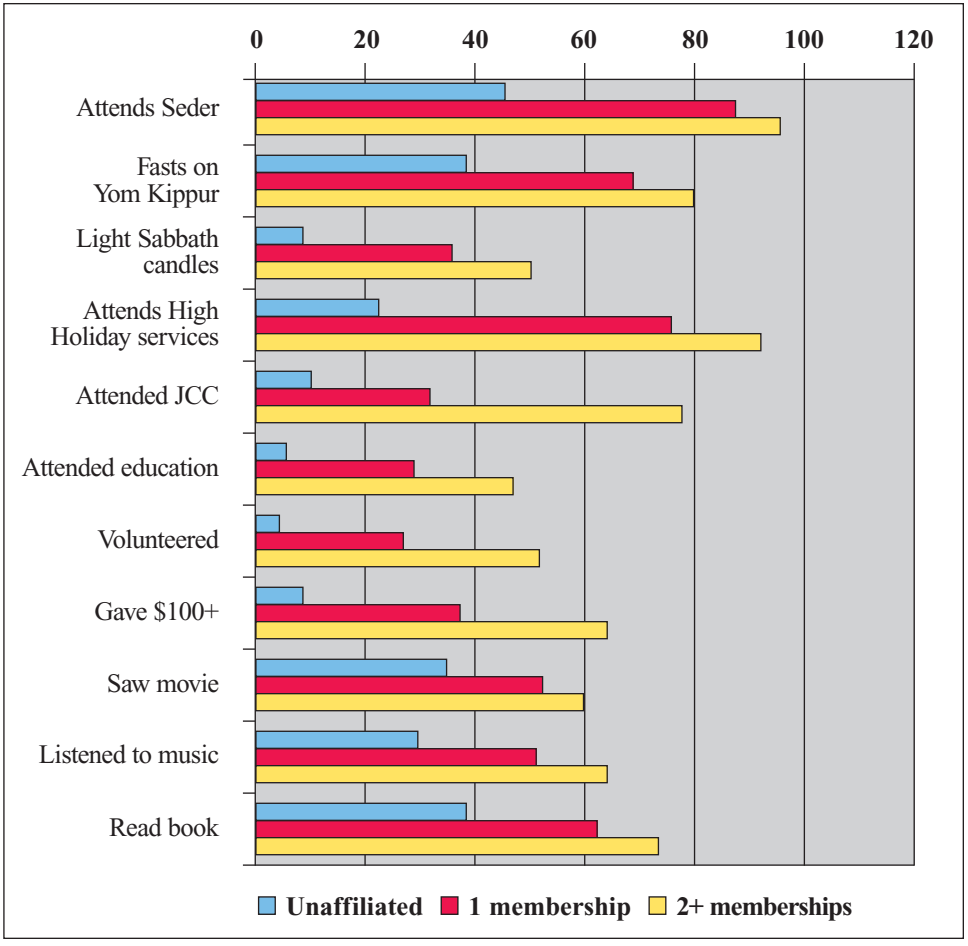
In fact, as might be well expected, the unaffiliated score relatively low on all Jewish measures. Only a minority (46%) of the unaffiliated even attends a Passover Seder, the most widely celebrated Jewish ritual practice. Even fewer, 39%, fast on Yom Kippur, popularly considered the holiest day in the Jewish year, and just 22% make it to any sort of religious services that day.

The indicators of cultural engagement certainly follow a similar pattern, in that their frequencies also rise with increasing affiliation. However, as compared with other indicators of Jewish involvement, the cultural indicators are neither as high for the most highly affiliated, nor as low for the unaffiliated. Thus, we may compare, for example High Holiday service attendance with seeing a Jewish movie. Among the highly affiliated, the former is far more frequent than the latter: 93% vs. 60%. Among the unaffiliated, the reverse obtains: 22% vs. 35%. We may make a similar, though a bit less dramatic, observation with respect to other comparisons of ritual and communal involvement measures with the cultural measures.

Again, comparable to results seen earlier, **cultural consumption occupies a less prominent place in the Jewish identity of the highly affiliated than among the unaffiliated.** For the highly affiliated, Jewish

cultural engagement is one of many forms of engagement and, perhaps, not very frequent (relative to other things they do). In contrast, for the unaffiliated, Jewish cultural consumption cuts a much wider swath, so to speak, than do most other forms of Jewish engagement. For the unaffiliated (though not for the highly affiliated), Jewish cultural consumption of any sort over the previous year is far more widespread than is attending a Seder or observing Yom Kippur in the more customary ways.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by affiliation



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by affiliation

	Jewish Communal Affiliations			
	Unaffiliated	1 membership	2+ memberships	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	46	88	96	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	39	69	80	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	8	36	50	28
Attends High Holiday services	22	76	93	52
Attended JCC program or member	11	32	78	31
Attended adult Jewish education	6	29	47	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	4	27	52	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	8	38	65	28
Saw a Jewish movie	35	53	60	45
Listened to Jewish music	29	52	65	45
Read a book with Jewish content	39	62	74	55

The Intermarried and Their Jewish Cultural Consumption

Intermarried Jews, as a group, remain very distant from Jewish life. When comparing the in-married with the intermarried, the former are about twice as likely to fast on Yom Kippur or attend a Passover Seder, three times as likely to attend High Holiday services and five times as likely to light Sabbath candles. These remarkable differences in ritual observance resemble those found with respect to communal involvement, where the in-married are almost three to more than four times as likely to undertake any of the items listed. These include going to a JCC, attending a Jewish education program even once during the year, volunteering, and contributing to Jewish causes. On many of these measures, those in conversionary marriages (a born-Jew married to a convert), more or less resemble in-married Jews where both were born Jewish, and actually surpass them on more measures than they trail.

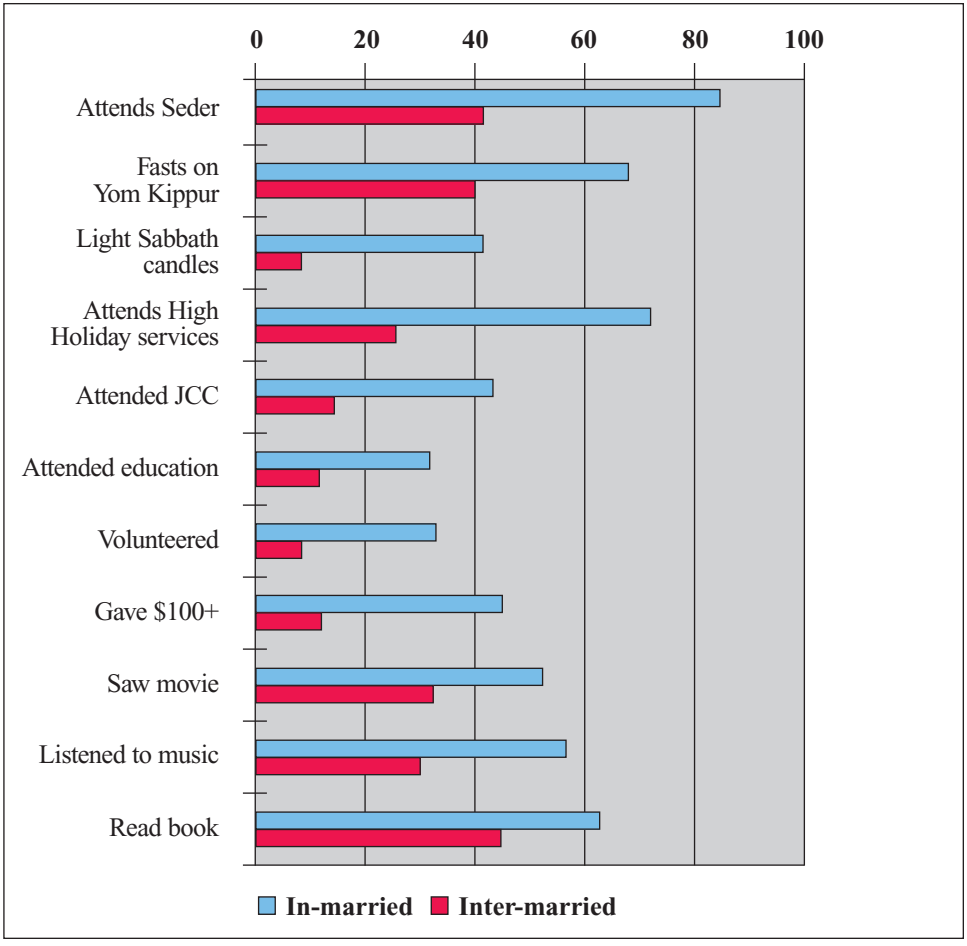
With respect to cultural engagement, the in-married certainly outscore the intermarried. However, proportionally, the gaps between these two very different populations are much less pronounced. In no case does the level of cultural consumption by the in-married reach double that among the intermarried. On average, the frequency with which the in-married undertake the three cultural activities amounts to 57%, as compared a "respectable" 37% for the inter-married. The comparable rate for conversionary marriages of 54% approximates that of the marriages of two born-Jews.

These results may be further illustrated by comparing the patterns of engagement for in-married and inter-married Jews. In-married Jews are marginally more likely to attend High Holiday services than to read at least one Jewish book during the year; it is the reverse for inter-married Jews (72% / 63% vs. 44% / 51%). In-married Jews are much more likely to find themselves at a Seder on Passover than ever watching a Jewish movie (85% / 53%); for intermarried Jews the Passover/movie frequency gap is far smaller (41% / 32%).

In short, we may make similar claims about the inter-married as we have made about other relatively under-engaged Jewish population segments. They are, indeed, less likely to participate in Jewish cultural activities than are their more engaged counterparts, in this case, the in-married. But their status -- in this case, intermarried -- is associated with relatively more depressed rates of ritual observance and communal activity than of cultural consumption. As a result, in relative terms, **Jewish cultural activity may be relatively more**

accessible and appealing to intermarried Jews than other currently available options in Jewish conventional life. Culture will still appeal to the in-married more than the intermarried, but (and this is a reasonable inference from the data) the latter experience relatively fewer other options in ritual practice and communal activity that may engage them. Hence, Jewish cultural programming, in theory, presents itself as a particularly worthy option in efforts to engage the intermarried in Jewish communal life.

Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by intermarriage



Jewish engagement indicators and Jewish cultural consumption, by intermarriage

	Intermarriage Status				
	In-married (2 born Jews)	Conversionary in-married	Inter-married	Not Married/ Spouse not in HH	Total
Attends Passover Seder usually	85	89	41	63	68
Fasts on Yom Kippur	69	88	40	54	59
Sabbath candles usually lit	41	34	8	21	28
Attends High Holiday services	72	72	26	44	52
Attended JCC program or member	43	55	14	28	31
Attended adult Jewish education	32	50	11	19	24
Volunteered in a Jewish context	33	33	8	16	21
Gave $100+ to Jewish charities aside from Federation	45	58	12	20	28
Saw a Jewish movie	53	47	32	44	45
Listened to Jewish music	57	60	30	39	45
Read a book with Jewish content	63	60	45	51	55

Jewish Culture and Reaching the Under-engaged

From a policy point of view, the interest of organized Jewry in Jewish cultural consumption lies in its potential to reach those who are otherwise under-engaged in Jewish life. The principal target audience for such a policy is those who combine two characteristics:

a. They are under-engaged in conventional Jewish life; and
b. They exhibit some elements of Jewish cultural consumption.

The NJPS data allow us to identify and analyze the relevant target group. We operationally defined engagement by using a six point scale drawing upon the following items: participating in a Passover Seder, lighting Hanukah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, attending High Holiday services, having mostly Jewish close friends, and seeing one's Jewishness as very important. Those who reported affirmatively on only three or fewer of these items (41% of the total) were classified as under-engaged.

Those regarded as accessible to Jewish cultural consumption were those who reported at least one of the three forms of cultural consumption. In all, 74% of the total population reported affirmatively for listening to Jewish music, or seeing a Jewish movie, or reading a Jewish book.

Those who satisfied both conditions (under-engaged in Jewish life yet at least minimally active as Jewish cultural consumers) amounted to some 24% of the total. These may be defined as the "Culture Target Group."

Consistent with the pattern of findings presented earlier, we find that this Culture Target Group is more frequent among those particular population groups that are less often engaged in Jewish life. Thus, the relative size of the target population is larger in areas of low Jewish density than in high density (30% vs. 20%). It is more than twice as high among single people as among parents of school-age children (33% vs. 15%), three times as high among the intermarried as among the in-married (39% vs. 14%), and more than five times as frequent among the unaffiliated as among those with two or more communal memberships (39% vs. 6%).

From a policy point of view then, these findings are of some significance. The analysis distinguished the population for whom Jewish culture serves as a nearly exclusive link to Jewish life (at least in the terms available on the survey). These people (those who are culturally connected but

institutionally unaffiliated) are, indeed, more prominent precisely among those populations that are most "at risk," from a Jewish communal point of view. **Jewish cultural engagement is an especially important link to Jewish life for the intermarried, the geographically remote, the unmarried, and the unaffiliated.** Though Jewish organizations, congregations, JCCs and other institutions fail to reach these Jews, many are still engaging in the consumption of Jewish books, movies, music, and presumably other forms of Jewish cultural expression and creativity.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings may be concisely summarized as follows:

1. **Jews indeed participate extensively in Jewish cultural activities**, at least as consumers of Jewish music, movies, and books. Undoubtedly, they engage in other forms of Jewish cultural activity as well.
2. **Jewish cultural consumption is both consistent with and distinctive from other forms of Jewish engagement**. That is, the more Jewishly engaged (in terms of ritual practice, communal life, and other ways) are also more culturally active. However, Jewish cultural consumption is a form of Jewish engagement that stands apart from what may be regarded as the Jewish identity "package," the activities and attitudes that more uniformly tend to be present or absent together. As such, we may surmise that Jewish culture offers a Jewish engagement alternative distinct from that offered by more conventional forms of Jewish engagement.
3. In contrasting population segments that demonstrate widely varying levels of conventional Jewish engagement, **those segments with lower levels of ritual observance and communal involvement score <u>relatively</u> high in Jewish cultural consumption**. As a proportion of their Jewish involvement overall, Jewish cultural consumption plays a relatively greater role in the lives of the intermarried, unmarried, unaffiliated, and those living in areas of sparse Jewish settlement.
4. A certain portion of the population may be regarded as the Jewish Cultural Target Group. They are institutionally unaffiliated, but at least minimally active as consumers of Jewish culture. **This Jewish Cultural Target Group occurs with greater frequency among the population groups (such as the intermarried) with relatively low levels of Jewish engagement.**

Advocates of support for Jewish culture undoubtedly care passionately and deeply for Jewish cultural life in its own terms. Many may well believe that Jewish music, filmmaking, literature, museums, the arts, and other spheres of cultural endeavor are deserving of communal support for "intrinsic" reasons: American Jews deserve a rich cultural life, and a rich cultural life defines American Jews.

This study provides persuasive evidence for advocacy of Jewish culture on another plane, for what may be called, "instrumental" reasons: American Jews, especially those who may be otherwise distant from conventional Jewish life, may be reached (and are being reached) Jewishly by music, films, books, and presumably other areas of Jewish cultural endeavor. **An organized community concerned about retaining and expanding the involvement of young adults in Jewish life, thus, would do well to go beyond the traditional Jewish educational offerings to include the support of Jewish culture - especially those activities with special appeal to young adults.**

Section 2

Jewish Cultural Events and Today's Younger Adults: Entertainment, Aesthetics, Impact and Messages

Jewish culture is booming, or so it appears. From the *New York Times'* reviews of Jewish performers like Golem and Matisyahu to the wide 2003 release of the film, *The Hebrew Hammer* to VH1's "Heavy Metal Passover," a 30-minute quasi-seder featuring Jewish rock musicians, Jewishness may never have occupied such a prominent and accepted place in American popular culture. As Jewish culture is becoming increasingly visible in mainstream arenas, a parallel movement is occurring among younger Jews who are taking advantage of opportunities to explore and express their Jewish identities outside traditional Jewish institutional venues.

A vibrant Jewish cultural scene has emerged in New York and other metropolitan areas that attract large audiences drawn primarily from this demographic. Jews in their 20's and 30's are filling bars, restaurants, and performance spaces as part of a growing number of Jewish cultural events taking place outside of synagogues or JCCs. The popularity of these events suggests the coalescence of a set of concerns around being Jewish that members of this generation share that are: (1) not being met by mainstream Jewish institutions; and (2) finding redress through participation in Jewish culture. While this New York cultural scene comprises a small and upscale segment of the American Jewish population as a whole, it is also representative of that larger population in many important ways. More young Jews live in New York than in any other American city, and their high levels of education, professionalization, income and cultural sophistication make them especially significant for Jewish communal policy makers to understand.

As we explained in the introduction, culture operates like a system of symbols whose meanings are constantly under negotiation. As opposed to synagogues, whose primary function is religious, or JCCs, whose primary function is either educational or social, spaces like concert halls, theaters, and museums are dedicated to the production and consumption of Jewish culture. Although distinctions between religion, education, socialization, and culture are hardly precise, these terms are frequently applied to describe the terrain of Jewish life. Insofar as this research focuses on Jewish culture as it is

experienced by Jews in their 20's and 30's, it pushes examinations of Jewish culture further from the institutional centers of Jewish life and toward its margins - where many of these Jews locate themselves.

This research examines the significance of these events for their participants, and the role they play in their Jewish lives. What is the "value" of Jewish culture for purposes of engaging young adult Jews, we may ask? What are the Jewish messages that these events offer the people who attend them? What characteristics, if any, do these events share? What kinds of people attend them? To what extent do cultural organizations, programs, events, and locations provide meaningful Jewish encounters suitable for people in their 20's and 30's?

Events organized around Jewish culture appear to attract sizeable audiences of younger Jews who are not otherwise involved in organized Jewish life. As our analysis of the 2000 National Jewish Population Study has demonstrated, Jewish culture represents a greater proportion of Jewish activities for those less Jewishly involved. While singles events at synagogues or JCCs manage to attract large numbers of younger Jews, these are, by far, the most universally loathed event by our respondents. Concerts and other cultural events, in contrast, offer a more open-ended, less contrived opportunity for Jews less Jewishly involved to engage in Jewish life in ways consonant with those indicated in the 2000 NJPS. So, between their relative absence at synagogue and their overrepresentation at Jewish cultural events that often take place in alternative spaces, it seems propitious, at this moment, to seek to better understand these events on their own terms. Rather than trying to measure their "success" vis-à-vis more traditional forms of engagement, we concentrate instead on assessing these events as a distinct Jewish subculture in their own right.

Methodology

The only way to gain genuine insight into these events is to attend them, to observe them, and to conduct interviews with participants. Our research, then, is based on our observations of 13 Jewish cultural events that took place in New York City between December 2004 and June 2005. In addition to participant observation and field notes, we conducted approximately 30 interviews with people whom we met at these events. As a

result of our observations and interviews, we were able to begin to understand the shared qualities of these events, the characteristics of people who attend them, and the value of the events in the Jewish lives of their attendees. Focusing as we are on the events and their participants, we recognize that this paper does not address either the artists or the producers of these events. These are important players in this phenomenon and deserve sustained attention in their own right, but they are not our concern here.

Our limited sample stands only for the events we observed. However, based on this sample, we are able to make generalizations particular to broader phenomena of which these selected events are an important part. Our procedure for selecting the events followed a few simple guidelines: First, we were interested primarily in the population of Jews in their 20's and 30's who, in the common parlance of organized American Jewry are referred to as "unaffiliated." This meant that we selected events that that would be more likely to attract this demographic by taking place outside of the mainstream institutions of Jewish life such as synagogues, Jewish museums, and organizations like the 92nd Street Y or the JCC of the Upper West Side.

To be sure, the lines that divide formal Jewish institutions from the more marginal Jewish cultural events that comprise the heart of this study are blurry at best. In fact, most of the events we attended were supported financially (entirely or in part) by at least one Jewish institution or philanthropy. We also included some formal membership organizations such as the JFREJ (Jews For Racial and Economic Justice) and Workmen's Circle Purim Party among our events because they lie on the margin of the organized Jewish community to such a degree that they occupy a symbolic position that is closer to organizations like Mimaamakim or Brooklyn Jews than to Federation or the 92nd Street Y.

Second, the events had to be priced to suit this demographic. Average price of admission for these events was around $10, and many of the events were free. Because theatrical productions tend to be much more expensive, these, too, were excluded from our study. Though we recognize the significance of the Folksbiene Yiddish theater troupe, the successful plays like *Modern Orthodox* and *Jewtopia*, and the various well-known Jewish musicians who toured during the duration of our study, these too, fell outside the scope of our study due to their high ticket prices, which ranged anywhere from $35 to $135. Even the Knitting Factory's annual "Downtown Seder," arguably the

most elaborate and well-known non-institutional Jewish cultural event, priced itself out of the range of most of our target demographic in offering tickets for $100 and up.

Third, the events had to be open to the public and they had to be advertised or promoted widely, or in such a way that anyone who wanted to could find out about them; and there had to be no restrictions or limitations on who could attend. Forms of publicity included published advertisements, postings on web-based entertainment calendars, and articles or announcements in the New York press. Even the Seder-o-rama, the only event not supported by a formal Jewish organization and the one that was the least publicized, received coverage in the *Metro*, one of New York's free daily newspapers, during the week before Passover.

Finally, we excluded events organized principally around religious worship (like Kehilat Hadar in Manhattan or the Park Slope Minyan in Brooklyn) because of the ways in which they mimic more traditional synagogues and appeal necessarily to those committed to worship. Even though most of these new religious communities belong to Jews in their 20's and 30's, their primary focus on religion and worship placed them in a parallel category beyond the scope of this work.

Our primary sources of information were the Internet and the *Village Voice* newspaper, because both are free and are widely used by people in their 20s and 30s. The Internet was particularly helpful, since websites of organizations that host some of these events (like *Heeb* Magazine) often include links to other sites (like www.citysearch.com, or the popular Jewish blogs www.jewschool.com or www.jewlicious.com), which also list upcoming events. These promotional efforts parallel those of other cultural events that cater primarily to this same demographic. By scanning the cultural horizon in a similar manner to that of our informants, we were able to target the same events.

While the Appendix provides a full listing of the events, a flavor for them can be gleaned by these three encapsulated descriptions:

1. **Slivovitz and Soul**. Held at the Slipper Room, a Lower East Side bar, the Thursday night party featured DJ SoCalled and a revolving cast of live musicians playing old and new klezmer music. Occupying the stage at the end of the long room, SoCalled sampled hip-hop beats and cantorial music, snippets of movie dialogue and an array of loops and

riffs that gave him and his accompanists/collaborators ample space to improvise. Rapping in Yiddish, SoCalled entertained a crowd that was alternately bobbing their heads in time, ordering drinks at the bar (including free shots of Slivovitz), and schmoozing. At one point, a hora broke out that enticed the few "hassidic members of the audience to join in.

2. **Golem Gets Married.** A party held at the Knitting Factory in the spirit of an old Catskills tradition of mock weddings. Golem, a popular wedding band and one of the leaders in the new klezmer movement, organized its own mock wedding featuring a cross-dressing bride and groom, a substantial spread of hors d'oeuvres and cold cuts, a wedding cake and shiny white satin yarmulkes imprinted with "Golem Gets Married / June 7, 2005." The evening began with the drunk "rabbi," played by Golem lead singer Aaron Diskin, conducting the nuptials with off-color vows and a sermon delivered in haiku. Following the ceremony, the band played a set of klezmer music which encouraged a sweaty hora, followed by another set of American dance songs including "Brick House," and "Build Me up, Buttercup."
3. **Esther Don't Preach - A Purim kaBLAHBLAH Bash!** Storahtelling's Purim Party took place at the swanky Meatpacking district bar/club, Rare. Storahtelling is a "radical ritual theater" company dedicated to reviving the meaning and practice of Jewish ritual by infusing it with drama, theater, humor, and music. Hosted by the fabulous and fictional Rebbetzin Hadassah Gross, and held on the eve of Purim, the event used the holiday's playful glamour and emphasis on partying to celebrate the holiday itself. Costumed members of the Storahtelling troupe circulated among the crowd offering fake kabbalistic fortunes and readings, as the guests busied themselves with drinks and hamantaschen. The formal portion of the evening began with a few chanted lines from the Book of Esther followed by a half-hearted version of Madonna's "Like a Prayer." But the crowd seemed most engaged by the DJ's, the alcohol and the dancing, which, if it weren't for the few Frieda Kahlos, Mordechais, farmers and other Purim-inspired guests, could have looked like any other night at Rare.

Our participation in these events consisted of making observations, taking field notes and conducting extensive interviews with participants. We carefully recorded our observations of audience behavior, performance, and the social interactions of participants. The field notes became both a source of information and a script for interviews, which we conducted with respondents whom we met at these events. As much as possible, we tried to vary respondents by age, gender and religious observance, at least as far as their dress indicated (long skirts, kippot, tank tops, etc.)

Findings

We have organized our findings into four areas: Entertainment, Aesthetics, Impact and Jewish Messages. The first section on **entertainment** address the ways in which these events successfully compete for the attention of young Jews in New York by following the timing, venue, and character of socializing patterns typical of educationally upscale New Yorkers in their 20's and 30's. Hosted in bars and other casual settings and typically held in the evening, the events adhered to these expectations and suited a broader taste for entertainment and leisure. The section on **aesthetics** demonstrates how these events offer Jewish content within a contemporary matrix. Blending popular styles and Jewish content, these events provide a way for younger Jews to approach Jewish culture in a self-referential way that frees them from feelings of guilt or obligation typically associated with synagogue or JCC attendance. The third section explores the **impact** of these events. Although often organized around performances, the events themselves are social affairs with low barriers to participation. People come as much to see the performers as they do to see friends, both new and old. Open to anyone who might be interested, these events reinforce informal social networks around Jewish culture. Finally, the events convey a set of **messages** about being Jewish in America. None of these events offered prescriptive visions of Jewishness, and most did not care to define what (or who) is and is not Jewish. Yet, they are not without Jewish content; they provide an open-ended, non-judgmental, pluralistic and diverse vision of Jewishness that allows Jewishness to participate in the broader American ethnic landscape. Taken together, the events are subtly instructive of an American Jewishness that is welcoming, open-ended, creative, young, diverse and that appears to be free from the constraints of more enshrined Jewish institutions.

The events as entertainment: Successfully competing for leisure time

For well-educated, unmarried young people in their 20s and 30s, especially in Manhattan, socializing is a way of life. Typically free of serious family responsibilities and lacking disposable income, people in this demographic group spend many evenings with friends at bars, clubs, and performances. They generally live in small apartments, thus making the comparably comfortable dimensions of a local bar or coffee shop even more appealing, especially given that there are few formalities and no dress code. People can come and go as they please without much investment of time, money or effort, and the opportunity to simply get up and leave is ever present. Socializing is a leisure time activity, and given the intensity of professional life in New York, expectations for leisure time are high.

Thus, generally speaking, these events vie with other concerts, parties, movies, and dates for their participants' attention. It follows that Jewish cultural events have to be compelling enough to draw an audience away from the many other opportunities that present themselves on any given night in New York. Cost, location, and entertainment are all strategies used by organizers of these events to stay competitive. In this marketplace of attention, Jewishness becomes another quality to promote; yet to stay competitive with mainstream opportunities, Jewishness often takes on a humorous or ironic "edge." Names like "Slivovitz and Soul" or "Jewltide" are light-hearted ways of simultaneously calling attention to, and distancing from, the events' Jewish identities, clearly signaling their divergence from the conventional community. However, while humor or irony can help sell an event, they cannot guarantee that it will be successful, engaging or rewarding to those who attend. The events have to deliver, as understood within the broad-based calculus of New York nightlife.

Thus, most importantly, **events have to be fun.** Hardworking and underpaid, members of this generation are quite careful about spending their money and their time. Neither guilt nor obligation will bring people through the door because lots of other doors with attractive options are open to them. When organizers promote Jewishness to attract an audience, as in the "Jewltide" example, the use of Jewishness has to be fun and cannot require too much sustained attention. Even the most "serious" of these events, such as the "Seder-o-rama" and Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun Leil Shavuot (Shavuot Eve Study Session), interspersed more serious periods of learning and reflection among

musical entertainment, food, and plenty of time for informal conversation.

Of course, fun is ultimately an utterly subjective distinction, and as our respondents reported, participants have a variety of reasons (which do not always agree) for considering an event "fun.". Thus, it is less important to distinguish what is fun from what is not than it is to recognize how significant a part of these events the "fun" really is.

The corollary rule is that **fun is not necessarily frivolous**. Being Jewish is a leisure time activity, and, in the often-tense relationship between work and leisure, Jewish (or other) activities seen as "not fun" are less desirable than those that are. Outside the realm of religious obligations, these events are a matter of choice; and insofar as participants make informed decisions about how to spend their leisure time, the pursuit of fun is a chief concern. Fun is not a means to an end but is an essential part of the ways in which these events create and define Jewish experiences for their participants. It probably is no coincidence that many of the organizations in this scene hosted Purim parties, but not a single one formally observed Holocaust Memorial Day.

Of course, being Jewish is not always fun. These events did not try to take a traditional element of Jewish life an add fun to it; instead, they tried to transform the definition of Jewishness in such a way that being Jewish could be considered "fun" rather than dreary, obligatory, off-putting, or otherwise burdensome. When our respondents identified an event as "fun," it implied desirability, comfort and engagement. In other words, the event was worth the time and money that participants had to invest.

Fun also functions as the opposite of that which is predictable and boring, so the **events place a premium on play**. Play is an essential element in fun, and both organizers and attendees hold that Jewishness is something to be played with rather than set-up to be revered. Slivovitz and Soul advertised itself as a "new monthly party series," featuring a revolving cast of guest musicians hosted by the "accordion-wielding, Yiddish-rapping, Klezmer-Hip Hop Maestro," DJ SoCalled (the stage name of Josh Dolgin). The JFREJ/ Workman's Circle Purim Party encouraged its audience to consider the political implications of the holiday by staging them as part of a lengthy, multi-media Purim shpiel (play, in Yiddish). Both events re-contextualized elements of Jewish culture, combined them with contemporary aesthetics and presented them as playfully as possible. Mimaamakim's "I-Thou Circus," which

included both a concert and an open-mike session, presented a vision of Jewish culture that valued both play and pluralism in ways that invited members of the audience to join in the fun. Culture in large part often means merchandise; one would be hard-pressed to find a secular concert that did not offer the chance to buy gear associated with the band itself. At these Jewish cultural events, too, the chance to buy a t-shirt, a CD, or pick up a free copy of *Heeb* Magazine is part of the familiar milieu. Yet even the merchandise is playful. Almost every event featured a table selling Jewish-themed t-shirts and CDs. A Brooklyn-based company called "Shoytz," whose slogan is "We put the *oy* in shirts," was present at nearly every event, selling shirts and clothing bearing ironic or self-referential Jewish-related slogans like "Shtetl Fabulous" or images of a bagel flanked by the phrase, "Atkins Schmatkins." The popularity of t-shirts with ironic statements is also a popular trend, and would not necessarily be out of place on the shelves of Urban Outfitters or other stores catering to this age group.

The positive sense of play translates into venues that suit the predominating tastes of audiences and organizers and that are unencumbered by the aura of anything traditionally Jewish. **Venue is crucial to success**. These events favored secular venues that had a cultural cache of their own. Brooklyn Jews and JDub Records co-hosted a party called "Jewltide" at Southpaw, a popular bar/club in Park Slope, Brooklyn that hosts both well-known performers as well as local musicians and entertainers. Little distinguished the bar on this evening from its normal arrangement or ambiance. The room was dimly lit and hiply understated, with a long bar occupying the better part of one wall. A large raised platform took up about half of the floor and featured handful of couches, a pool table, and a number of low tables for drinks and such. Before the live entertainment began, the hit 2004 movie, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* was being projected silently on one wall, while rock music from a stereo filled the room. The only noticeable nod to Chanukah was at the bar, which was covered with colorful plastic dreydls and chocolate "Chanukah gelt." Other venues included the Slipper Room and Eleven, both understated bar/performances spaces on the Lower East Side, the Knitting Factory, SOB's (a well-known world-music club) and the Cornelia Street Cafe. Fairly well known venues in their own right, they lend a kind of "street credibility" to Jewish events, turning their broad-based cultural cache into a critical selling point for an audience that is

culturally comfortable in those establishments and others like them.

Makor, on Manhattan's Upper West Side, hosted one of the events. Although now an affiliate of the 92nd Street Y, this institution is worth mentioning in its own right because it was self-consciously created to house Jewish events for 20-30-somethings, particularly those who are not especially engaged in Jewish life. Makor attracts audiences and performers from the intended demographic group, as well as those with a fairly strong level of Jewish engagement and much older audiences. It should also be noted that Makor now also houses a daytime program for Jewish seniors, representing a distinct shift in the institution and its mission. With that said, most of our interviewees did not identify Makor as an attractive site, as it is not part of their normal circuit of leisure-time socializing. They may occasionally make a special trip to see a particular performer, but, in the words of one of our interviewees, "It would be a harder sell." For some, Makor smacks of inauthenticity; since it was created with the specific intent of attracting Jewish patrons, has no "credibility" at all to lend the events it hosts. In short, it is "too Jewish" to compete for those who prefer the comfort it feels in bars and performance spaces that they already frequent.

The one event we observed at Makor, a concert by the Hip Hop Hoodios, the self-identified "biggest selling Latino-Jewish urban music group of ALL TIME," also seemed the most strained. The sizeable crowd that assembled for the opening band, the Cuban Cowboys, had thinned somewhat by the time the Hoodios took the stage. Despite the significant Latino/a presence in the audience, the Hoodio's performance felt somewhat contrived. After a solid beginning, people began to leave, and the Hoodios spent much of the remainder of the evening practically begging the otherwise disengaged audience to dance. On this occasion, the combination of the Hip Hop Hoodios and Makor did not quite manage enough alternative energy to sustain the audience.

That being said, **music plays a significant role in most of these events**. Lower in cost than other modes of cultural production (like theater, visual arts, film) and lacking their characteristic formality, music emerged as the primary mode of cultural expression for these events. As a prominent fixture in New York nightlife, as well, music carried the cultural gravity necessary to be the centerpiece of an event without overwhelming the informal aspects of the event itself.

Events that don't "need" music, like Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun Leil Shavuot, often include music for entertainment and affective measure, even when attendees do not necessarily pay much attention. Sometimes, as in the case of Jewltide or JFREJ's Purim party, a few big acts share the bill (Frank London's Klezmer All-Stars played at both events). "Slivovitz and Soul" featured DJ SoCalled at its four monthly gatherings, and each month Dolgin brought along a group of guest musicians to join him onstage. Mimaamakim's "I-Thou Circus" featured both amateur and professional musicians and "Golem Gets Married" blended elements of performance and music, as the "wedding" turned into a dance party with music supplied by the wedding band-cum host, Golem. Golem knew its audience and has played enough weddings to have a diverse Jewish and American repertoire, both of which they brought to the event. So, during the "reception" that followed, the band played Yiddish songs like "Rumania, Rumania" along with "Brick House" and other staples of the contemporary American wedding.

As discussed earlier, financial concerns extend to the participants, as well, and **low cost** is crucial. Typically, events cost between $5 and $15 dollars. The most expensive events cost $15, and were held at the Knitting Factory. Some events, like the "Seder-o-rama," held in a church basement in Brooklyn, were free, although most guests were expected to bring either a dish for a kosher pot-luck or a bottle of wine. Brooklyn Jews' Shavuot celebration, held at Soda, a downscale bar in Prospect Heights, was also free. To attract a broad audience, Jewltide kept prices low by featuring $1 beers from Brooklyn, and Slivovitz and Soul promised free shots of Slivovitz, if you knew that you had to ask for them. Mimaamakim's I-Thou Circus included one free drink with the cover charge, a pretty standard arrangement for venues like the Cornelia Street Café, where the Circus took place. Storahtelling's Purim party cost $10 if you came in costume and $15 if you didn't, further contributing to the atmosphere of playful masquerade.

By inviting participants to play along and offering incentives for them to do so, these events maintained their premium on playfulness without sacrificing their ability to compete in New York's broader marketplace of entertainment. These events served an audience seeking Jewish entertainment without asking them to give up either their aesthetic expectations, to travel too far outside their normal social circuits, or to exchange Jewish for fun. Keenly produced with a knowing wink, these events counterposed themselves to the

supposed solemnity of so much of organized Jewish life, offering an opportunity to play at and with being Jewish. The combination of these elements translated into a general aesthetic sensibility in which openness and irony become important vehicles for articulating messages about Jewish identity and community in the 21st century.

Aesthetics: Openness, progressivism, hybridity, ambivalence, irony, and more

Presenting themselves with style and with sensibilities in which their audience is comfortable and conversant, these events present **Jewish culture as open-ended, welcoming and accessible**. The overarching aesthetic qualities of these events support this notion of Jewish life by creating Jewish environments that are fun and playful, and which capitalize on the multiple social worlds in which Jews in their 20s and 30s participate. A demographic with significant numbers of non-Jewish friends, partners, spouses, and parents, participants in these events value Jewish environments that are non-exclusive -- anyone can participate without regard to Jewish background. This preference contributes to the presence of two important aesthetic elements. First, the events favor presentations of Jewish culture that combine aspects of Jewish culture with elements of other cultures. And second, they often present a sense of ambivalence about their connection to Jewishness. Almost paradoxically, these aesthetic elements on display in these particular sites provide points of access to Jewishness.

The commitment to openness is evident in the way the various events address the presence of non-Jews. When DJ SoCalled gave "shout outs" to different segments of the audience ("Brooklyn in the house?" "Warsaw in the house?"), his call for "non-Jews in the house" was met with a respectably loud reply from the audience. The leaders of the Seder-o-rama - which had easily the most racially and generationally diverse crowd of any of the events in this study - asked if anyone present had never been at a Passover Seder before. Those who had not (affectionately called "Seder virgins" in a nod to the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*) were asked to stand up and sing the "Four Questions," a responsibility typically reserved for the youngest member of the Seder. Even the t-shirt vendors offered shirts for non-Jews bearing slogans like "shiksa-riffic." Creating a Jewish space that is **welcoming to non-Jewish friends** and partners is an important element of these events, especially when the formal,

institutional Jewish community expends a tremendous amount of energy on curbing and condemning intermarriage.

Thus, the events build in a kind of **left-leaning liberal tolerance**. While politics are not overtly stated, the unstated political baseline is pro-diversity, Democratic and progressive. Although never articulated as such, these values serve as an important and nearly ever-present subtext of the events themselves, as they provide a venue for Jews to "vote with their feet" through their participation. When *Heeb* held its Christmas Party on December 24, it offered a kind of proud political Jewish alternative to staying at home or going to the movies. On a larger scale, within the context of the rising power of the Christian Right and in a country led by a born-again president, an open-ended, inclusive Jewish space is an inherently political space. The politics of these events do not rely on formal organizational efforts or lobbying; rather, they enable informal expressions of cultural politics, where one's beliefs are practiced by the way one lives and not only by how one votes. In these events, culture takes on an important political dimension as participants weigh in - by showing up - on the kind of Jewish community that they desire.

Cultural politics are carried further in the more formal musical aspects of these events. "Traditional" klezmer music cut with hip hop beats or inflected with punk style not only updates the music itself, but also brings to light the idea that being Jewish is endlessly adaptable. Jewishness is not about sitting bored in Hebrew school or synagogue; it can be fun, playful, interesting and even exciting. It is no coincidence that all of these events featured musical acts that pride themselves on their roots in at least two musical traditions, reinforcing the notion that the boundaries of Jewish culture are broader than people generally believe them to be. Juez, the self-described "klezmer-breakbeat Jazz" outfit, performed at the JFREJ/Workman's Circle Purim Party; Frank London All Stars brought their Brazilian-inflected klezmer to the event as well; and the Nehedar Orchestra played their version of Jewish jam-band rock and roll at the I-Thou Circus. Even Divahn, which provided some of the entertainment at Storahtelling's Purim party, identifies its oeuvre as "middle eastern and Sephardic Jewish music." Conversely, the musical portion of events like "Golem Gets Married" reinforced the notion of a flexible Jewish musical tradition by including "Build Me Up, Buttercup," a 1969 pop hit for the Foundations. Though not a "Jewish" song, practically everyone in attendance had been at a Jewish wedding and heard it there, too. Of course,

not all of these events are about the bandstand. Yet even if the audience is not always paying attention to the music, its influence cannot be understated as it models the importance of **cultural bridging and hybridity**.

Within the overarching cultural context of these events more generally, neither religion nor politics abided by traditional expectations. Thus, they provided **opportunities for intra-Jewish hybridity**, as well. The JFREJ/ Workman's Circle Purim party and the Seder-o-rama, both of which articulated overt progressive political positions, actually followed the most traditional models of holiday celebration. The Purim event revolved around an elaborate Purim *shpiel*, an old tradition that often uses the Purim story to comment on contemporary politics. The JFREJ performers played with gender stereotypes and used multi-media effects and sexual innuendo to tell the story of the holiday while critiquing the current governments of both the United States and Israel. In this way, the Purim *shpiel* was actually quite traditional. Similarly, the Seder-o-rama, which shared its politics (and some of its audience) with the Purim party, faithfully followed the structure of a traditional Seder by placing the requisite seder plates at each table and by building the evening around a home-made haggadah that included revisions of the most popular traditional elements. In keeping with tradition, the Seder-o-rama leaders asked participants around the room to read different parts of the haggadah, to ask any questions that arose, and to engage in the story as it unfolded.. Thus, progressive politics became a way of accessing fairly traditional elements of Jewish religious and cultural practice.

Similarly, Mimaamakim's I-Thou Circus attracted the most traditional crowd and included some of the most overt Jewish content of any event. During the "open-mic" part of the evening, the poetry recited tended to revolve around Jewish themes and often alluded to Biblical stories or liturgical phrases. Pharaoh's Daughter, the evening's headlining musical act, draws heavily on middle-eastern, world-music, and jazz, and frequently features lyrics from Psalms or other traditional sources. The audience, which featured a higher proportion of long skirts and kippot than typically seen at these alternative cultural events, appeared to understand most of the references and allusions, and appeared to appreciate the reframing of traditional elements in more contemporary settings.

Conscious of their audience of Jews (and non-Jews) with highly varied levels of Jewish knowledge, **the events tread lightly on ritual, which is**

offered as part of the evening's entertainment, and cast in language that accesses but does not rely on Jewish cultural literacy. The "Seder-o-rama" took its script from the Passover Hagaddah and updated its narrative to stage conversations about contemporary political issues of oppression, liberation and equality. Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun Leil Shavuot combined a few musical performances (including a tribute to the Barry Sisters) interspersed with study sessions on Talmud, kabbalah and midrash, in addition to free cheesecake and blintzes, the traditional holiday fare. At Storahtelling's Purim party, members of the company chanted read a few lines from the Book of Esther in both Ashkenazi and Persian melodies, before turning the party back over to the DJs, who kept people dancing.

These events treated both ritual and entertainment as performance. The Rebbetzin Hadassah Gross's performance for Storahtelling's Purim Party, Juez's set at the JFREJ Purim Shpiel, Golem Gets Married and the Barry Sisters' tribute at Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun were not enticements to lure people into hearing the Book of Esther or studying Torah. Rather, these more traditional elements were integral parts of the evening. Chanting and studying were part of the entertainment, and there was little expectation that they would either attract or hold more attention than other, more formal performances. By approaching religion and entertainment as performance, the events reinforced their expressions of Jewish culture, which seems less oppressive, obligatory and exclusive than proper religion.

When the events do more formally address or incorporate Jewish elements more closely associated with the religious tradition - as in the Seder-o-rama, Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun Leil Shavuot, or any of the Purim parties, they typically approach their **Jewish content with a light touch**. The Brooklyn Jews' Purim event hardly mentioned Purim at all. Held on a Sunday afternoon (the actual holiday fell on the previous Thursday evening and Friday), there was no reading of the Book of Esther, nor was their any formal retelling of the story. However, the event attracted families with young children, many of whom arrived in costume, and bought the hamantaschen that were for sale. The absence of overt instruction or traditional commemoration of the holiday created an opportunity for younger families to celebrate together in a relaxed atmosphere that seemed to casually celebrate the holiday that had just passed. Jewltide, too, approached religion lightly, with a literal sprinkling of plastic colored *dreydls* and Chanukah *gelt* on the bar and a round of donuts late in the

evening. There were few explicit references to the holiday that was ostensibly the occasion for the event.

Keeping Jewish content "light" is itself a function of deeper questions about Jewish identity in the first place. For a generation with a relatively high tolerance for questions of identity and who make homes out of hyphens, the organizers found in symbols like dreydls, gelt and blintzes a kind of common ground that presented Jewish culture without enforcing it. The apparent "lightness" of their Jewish content, however, does not necessarily belie an absence of curiosity, or the lack of any desire to explore Jewishness more "seriously." At Brooklyn Jews' Tikkun, the blintzes and cheesecake encouraged more than one participant that evening to walk around asking why those particular foods were part of the holiday. The lightness does not preclude deeper investigations, but it also won't exclude those skeptical or wary of things Jewish in the first place.

This lack of overt Jewish content is perhaps the most visible (in its absence) evidence of the intention to **keep barriers to participation low**. This serves two purposes and is a necessary component of the experience itself. First, it helps attract people who might otherwise be turned off or intimidated by a Jewish event. Unlike synagogue attendance, which requires a high degree of familiarity with the worship ritual, the liturgy, and the choreography of the service, these events do not presuppose any knowledge of Jewish tradition on the part of their audience. Second, the low barrier to participation means that anyone can participate, regardless of her level of Jewish literacy. Any English-speaking New Yorker could have enjoyed the social and political satire of the JFREJ/Workmen's Circle Purim *shpiel* without understanding the nuances of the traditional holiday celebration. At Brooklyn Jews' Tikun Leil Shavuot, blintzes and cheesecake needed a bit of explanation, but people enjoyed them even if they did not understand the deeper connections between the foods and the holiday. The donuts at Jewltide were just donuts to some, and were traditional holiday fare for others. The leaders of the Seder-o-rama provided running commentary, instructions and explanations as the Seder progressed. With the doors open and the barriers to participation set low, anyone could participate in the events. To be sure, those who understood the nuances of Yiddish rap or the connection between donuts and Chanukah benefited from an additional level of significance and understanding. Thus, it follows that **Jewish cultural literacy was not**

necessary to participate in these events, but it could certainly enhance the experience.

Most of the events took advantage of this dynamic to create safe opportunities for engagement without dwelling too long on people's personal sense of Jewish illiteracy, unfamiliarity with Jewish tradition, or conflicted feelings about how to connect to Jewishness. Culture cannot erase or alleviate ambivalence, but it can, and in these instances it does provide opportunities for connection that are not often present within traditional Jewish institutions. Thus, **ambivalence is often expressed in irreverence**. For the more serious, agenda-oriented events, this meant taking direct aim at conventions and orthodoxies. As an example, Mimaamakim's I-Thou Circus used music and spoken-word poetry to critique Jewish life, while also creating new expressions of it. Events with less overt agendas use **iconoclasm** to open up Jewish performances. When Frank London took the stage at Jewltide, he explained the addition of a Brazilian drum corps to his band by noting that this year marked the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America, and that the first Jews to settle in America came from Brazil. Acknowledging the inauthenticity of a contemporary drum corps standing in for a fairly abstract notion of Jewish history whose traces can barely be felt in American Jewish life, London addressed the audience by both nodding to the anniversary and taking away its symbolic gravity. "What does 350 years mean?" he asked. He answered his own question by stating, "I don't know," before cuing his band to start.

Another major mode of addressing this ambivalence is through **irony**. The idea of a Yiddish-speaking rapper, or a 70-year-old rabbi's widow who can channel Madonna, certainly places audience members in an unusual relationship to traditional Jewish reference points. Cross-dressing brides, or poetry about an Orthodox woman who hides her bright pink hair beneath traditional wigs and hair coverings, invite the audience to laugh a little at conventions of Jewish life. *Heeb* Magazine is perhaps the most obvious and well-publicized vehicle for this kind of posturing, with its lavish photo spreads that frequently make ironic reference to familiar Jewish icons, from Gold's Horseradish to matzo to yarmulkes. While none of this irreverence is necessarily (or intentionally) mean-spirited, the comic effect takes advantage of a kind of ambivalence about being Jewish that practically defines this generation.

Ambivalence is not an equivocation about being Jewish; the events and

the people who attend them generally feel positive about their being Jewish, as our interviews illustrate. The ambivalence is born out of a deeper search for something meaningful, and a sense that the meaning of one's Jewish identity is not (nor will it ever be) set in stone. Thus, there are more opportunities for irreverence, irony and play. But play is often a serious matter. Geertz calls this phenomenon "deep play," a kind of behavior so closely connected to the core concerns of a given community that it appears irrational. The "deep play" of these events is an honest search for elusive meaning in Jewish life. So, what might begin as an ironic "hora" in front of the stage can turn into a real expression of celebration. What might seem like a post-modern joke (A Yiddish rapper? A klezmer band with a punk ethic? Jewish-Latin hip-hop?) can become a vehicle for honest enjoyment. In these circumstances, irony becomes a kind of fulcrum that opens the door to participation. This is the central contradiction of the use of irony in these events: if guests are only "playing at" dancing the hora, then there's no possibility that they're going to take it too seriously and break the "cool" code. But, "playing at" dancing the hora looks an awful lot like dancing the hora, and it might be just as enjoyable. The distance fostered by ambivalence helps open up ways in which the audience can play at being Jewish without the risk of formal commitment to any particular way of doing so.

Not all events, however, trade in irony. The events organized with a particular political agenda typically did not use irony in this way. Even the JFREJ/Workman's Circle Purim *shpiel*, while quite funny and keenly pointed at the contemporary American politics, did not use irony in the same way as, say, *Heeb* Magazine or DJ SoCalled. Perhaps politics cannot shoulder irony quite as well as culture, or maybe the overt political stakes were simply incongruous with ironic posturing. Yet, the absence of formal irony created a kind of tension that found expression elsewhere. Sometimes, performing the more traditional Jewish rites elicited a kind of reaction among participants who, it seemed, wanted some ironic distance from the ritual. At the Seder-o-rama, traditional songs were shortened or sheepishly sung with slightly uncomfortable comments, giggles, and apologies. Even when irony was not part of the formal makeup of the event, it found its way into the performances through the participants.

Thus, irony and iconoclasm serve a particular purpose. They create a kind of necessary distance between the participants and Jewish culture that

actually enables them to connect to it and enjoy it. At the same time, irony and iconoclasm suspend the definition of what is (and what is not) Jewish. When DJ SoCalled shouts out the lyric, "Baruch ata Adonai, motherfucker," he always gets a loud response from the crowd. Each "Slivovitz and Soul" event even attracted a small number of Hasidic Jews, who find them to be entertaining and safe places to explore mainstream culture within a semi-controlled and obviously Jewish environment. The "deep play" of these events reveals poignant personal deliberations over how to relate to Jewish culture outside traditional institutions. By keeping social boundaries open, these events create opportunities for participants to engage with Jewish culture without giving up their ambivalence or their relationships to their non-Jewish partners, spouses, or friends.

Impact: Building and Reinforcing Jewish Social Networks

There is an old Jewish joke in which a son asks his father, a devout atheist, why he goes to *shul* (synagogue) if he doesn't believe in God. In response, his father asks, "Do you know my friend Cohen?" The son nods. "Cohen goes to *shul* to talk to God. I go to *shul* to talk to Cohen." The joke captures a primary role of these cultural events: at their core, **they are social events**. Music and ritual are important pretexts for people to get together and spend time, and as much as the events are organized around a specific performance, they create opportunities for people to gather, talk and meet new people, strengthening the social bonds among attendees and enabling new ones to form.

Some people come to hear the music, while others come to see one another. The opportunity to meet new people is attractive, but most people attend with the intention of seeing people they already know. Very few people come to these events alone. Most arrive with at least one other person, and turn the concert or performance into a vehicle for a night out with friends. Still, there is a sense that you might run into someone you have not seen in a while, which gives the events a sense of a big class reunion or family event -- minus the social pressures and dread that generally accompany such events, because there is little pressure on attendees to stay if they would rather not. The possibility that you'll see an old classmate or camp friend is as attractive as the chance to meet new people, and this dynamic feeds off the open and casual atmosphere. Absent the pressure to pay full attention to the

performances, one can more freely pay attention to the other people in the room.

The freedom to attend an event and ignore the entertainment means that the main attraction is not necessarily on stage, but in the audience. Audiences are not shy about holding conversations, either. When Andy Bachman tried to give a little mid-party introduction during the Brooklyn Jews Shavuot Party, the noise from active conversations nearly drowned out his amplified voice. Rather than try to silence the crowd, Bachman made a few joking asides, and let the audience go on chatting. This respect for the audience is, in a sense, an important part of the atmosphere and the attraction, as well. People who want to listen closely to the music or dance can do so, while those who prefer the company of friends can enjoy that as well, even as they share the same space. At the Seder-o-rama, probably the most structured of all these events, participants sat at long tables while the leaders, armed with microphones and wearing formal gowns as if they were costumes, directed participants from the front of the room. Seated among friends and family, participants engaged in a steady stream of quiet conversation while the seder went on, and as long as the volume of side conversations did not overtake the person leading the seder at that point, people were free to talk as they ate and drank. Generally, there is no fear of being told to be quiet, sit down, or follow the leader. There were no wagging fingers and no sense that the performers were, by any stretch of the imagination, the main event.

It follows that the extent of **participation in the event itself is up to the individuals, and participation means, in part, socializing with other participants**. In most of the venues, the performance space and the bar were located in the same room, which gave participants the opportunity to sit at the bar, stand by the stage or stay toward the back of the room. There was no expectation that participants would only pay attention to the performance or remain wholly engaged in the performance itself. While the musicians and performers did their thing on stage, the audience members spoke with one another, bought drinks, and used cell phones to make plans for later or to invite other friends to the event. Generally, people stood around in groups of four or more, talking, looking around, and drinking. These are not places for intimate or serious conversations because most of the conversation has to be yelled over the music. Unlike synagogues or formal concerts, which are governed in part by expectations of audience behavior, these events leave participants to do

what they wish, without attendant feelings of strangeness or guilt. While the performers might take umbrage with this behavior -- as in the case of the Hip Hop Hoodios, who were visibly irritated by the lack of audience response -- most seemed to assume that some people in the audience would talk, others would dance, and still others would simply stand or sit still. Among members of a generation for whom getting kicked out of Hebrew School is a claim of some pride, talking in the back of the room has attained the status of a right, if not a Jewish tradition on its own.

These informal and unenforceable rules articulated quite clearly and forcefully another significant characteristic of these events: **they are part of a broad set of endeavors to define Jewish life and community by and for a new generation.** Practically every one of our interviewees found these events attractive in part because they were not part of the "Jewish community" or the "Jewish establishment." In actuality, the organizations and individuals who hosted these events are underwritten in part, at least, by large Jewish organizations. But the impression that these events exist outside of the institutional world of Federation-Israel-Synagogue-JCC resonates powerfully with the participants. While JDub, Storahtelling, *Heeb* and Brooklyn Jews make no attempt to hide the support they receive and often publicly thank their sponsors, the prevailing sensibility is that these events are "not your parents'," and are thus different or innovative. The generally youthful organizers and participants, the iconoclastic content, the contemporary aesthetic, and the unusual venues all foster this impression, which helps the events feel more attractive to younger, unaffiliated Jews.

Furthermore, the events neither look nor sound like any Jewish event that attendees have ever attended with their parents. Unlike typical suburban synagogues, there is no dress code. Depending on the day and time of the event and on one's personal aesthetic sensibilities, people come dressed in everything from t-shirts to business suits to everything in between. People who dressed up for the events did so as they would for any other evening out. The rules governing dress and decorum draw more closely on the norms of leisure time socializing at bars and cafes, and less on those that define behavior in a formal Jewish setting, whatever those might be. Perhaps the most important element is simply showing up and participating in the emergent community of interest.

With their emphasis on socializing within an environment defined by

its informality, the events foster a cohort rooted in **a sense of belonging without membership**. Taken together, these events have created a loosely defined cultural arena in which attendance and participation are the measures of belonging. Even though there were Jewish organizations behind all but one of the events, none used the events to peddle memberships, and only two of the organizations even offered membership as an option. Instead, the contours of these alternative communities more closely resemble fan groups or elective alliances, which rely on performances and products to illustrate their members' sense of belonging - practices that are also not mandatory for membership.

The sense of belonging is itself quite unstable and rather inconsistent, and the events do not take attendance for granted. Organizers understand that just because people are Jewish does not mean that they will, on any given night, choose to attend a Jewish event over a non-sectarian one. Following from that, they also implicitly assume that their events are entertaining enough to attract audiences on their own; that there are enough Jews in New York to go around; and that enough opportunities are available to attract those interested. From a marketing perspective, each organization has its own target audience, but because of the centrality of their respective Jewish appeals, the audiences overlap. From a Jewish communal perspective, there is a kind of symbiosis at work: different events address different needs for different and overlapping segments of this population.

Each event attracted slightly different segments of the target population, suggesting implicit social boundaries among the events themselves. For JDub events, the crowd tended to be primarily people in their mid-to-late 20s, and mostly white and single. While JDub and *Heeb* both attract a fair number of non-Jews and a sprinkling of members of other ethnic groups, the largest population is white and Jewish, although there were few overt markers that would identify them as Jews. Brooklyn Jews' events tend to skew a little older, attracting people in their 30s and early 40s; nearly everyone who attended the Sunday afternoon Purim celebration brought their young children, and took advantage of the activities, babysitters, and musician arranged specifically for them. JFREJ and the Workman's Circle, because they are membership organizations, skewed even older still, and attracted a significant number of people from their 50s and beyond. However, the bulk of participants in these events were still in their early 30s.

The Seder-o-rama brought the most diverse crowd: older married

couples, young gay couples, single people involved in progressive politics, and their friends, relatives and children. This population diversity speaks to the overt politics of the event, even as the Seder itself was fairly traditional. The Hip Hop Hoodios also attracted a fairly ethnically diverse crowd, including a significant Latino/a contingent. The "I-Thou Circus," perhaps because it required the highest level of fluency in Jewish tradition to enjoy the poetry and some of the music, attracted the most socially homogeneous crowd in terms of age and religious orientation, many of whom already seemed to know one another.

Even though each event attracted a slightly different crowd, it would be inaccurate to conclude that all of these organizations get along well or without strife. The summer of 2005 saw the emergence of two very public differences between some of these cultural producers: One between the Hip Hop Hoodios and *Heeb* over what the Hoodios believed to be an irresponsible characterization of Latinos by the magazine; and another between Mimaamakim and *Heeb* over nominees for the Jewish Music Awards that were held as part of September's Jewish Music and Heritage Festival. Whether and how these squabbles will translate into significant differences in the organizations' respective audiences remains, at the time of this writing, to be seen.

Elsewhere, differences between sponsoring organizations did not manifest in significant differences in attendance. On Purim, when JDub and Storahtelling both held elaborate parties, each event had a different feel, and drew a slightly different crowd. JDub's party, held at the popular world music club SOB's, had a slightly more avant-garde, younger, downtown, hipster feel; while Storahtelling's clientele was a little older, more glamorous and upscale. Despite these differences, however, there was some significant overlap, as was the case for a number of people who came to the Storahtelling event only after being shut out of the JDub party. The desire to attend a Purim party was more urgent than the differences between the parties themselves, and this kind of fluidity characterizes the ways in which all of these Jewish events, taken together, operate on the broader cultural landscape of New York.

The kinds of relationships engendered by these events are not a weak version of more formal communities, but rather a strong version of informal communities. The social networks that these events foster are a different kind of community than those created in synagogues. The boundaries and sites of these communities are continually in motion, while the quasi-

ritualized events supply a mechanism for remaining connected. The terms of membership do not require an application, an annual fee or even regular attendance; rather they are built along much more flexible lines that take into account the multi-faceted lives that Jews in their 20s and 30s lead when they are not inclined to join synagogues or other Jewish institutions. Thus, the social organizations that arise and with which these younger Jews identify are not built on the model of the formal organization but rather the informal network. The social bonds reinforced by these events are also quite fluid and illustrate a different approach to community and social relationships than those channeled through more formal institutions of Jewish life.

That these events share this orientation means that not only are the events themselves hip and current, but that **Jewish life can be organized by peers, not parents**. Those characteristics hang palpably in the atmosphere of each of these events, and extend from the venue to the music to the light snacks and hard liquor. There is, between the audience and organizers, a sense of shared ownership over the experience, beyond the (imagined) surveillance of parents, teachers, rabbis, and other members of the "organized Jewish community." Inversely, these events might comprise a kind of "disorganized Jewish community," which is to say that they are episodic gatherings of like-minded people with few discernable patterns and no mandated rules about belonging.

Messages: Being Jewish can be …

The absence of guilt, obligation and an agenda set the stage for the transmission of more subtle Jewish messages during the events. The understated but overwhelming message is one of empowerment. The working assumption for most of the organizers is that Jewishness and Judaism have been hijacked by ossified tradition and bloated institutions, but still contain many enjoyable, relevant and meaningful elements. So, rather than critique or fight against the institutions of Jewish life, the events themselves model a kind of guerilla **Judaism that is ironic, funny, entertaining, contemporary, playful, and empowering.**

As an artifact of this culture, *Heeb* Magazine capitalizes most famously on this attitude. While *Heeb* might overplay this hand, cultural events invite attendees to share in an experience that allows for something more than a shallow ironic posture and still departs from the apparently limited

options of Jewish institutions. Jewish culture does not have to look like a sisterhood gift shop or sound like acoustic-guitar-driven "Kum Ba Ya" summer camp sing-alongs. It can be both funny and meaningful, just like hip hop and South Park are both funny and meaningful. Likewise, Jewish culture can be powerful and political in the ways that rock music and independent movies can be powerful and political. By trading ideas and initiatives with broader trends in popular culture, Jewish culture is enriched as it is represented on a larger stage. The message in these performances is that **more is gained from blurring the boundaries between cultures than from erecting barriers between them**. And that furthermore, Jewish culture deserves to participate in and benefit from these exchanges.

The events bring together aspects from recognizably Jewish and mainstream culture, such that they do not attempt to distance what has Jewish roots from what does not. Everything is fair game. The advertising postcard for Slivovitz and Soul captured this perfectly, advertising itself as a monthly "collision of beatboxers and badchonim," and inviting guests to "bring your balebuste and get farshnickert at an eastern European-laced hip hop shtetl dance party." Just as participants share a number of different social circles in their daily lives, these events play on the creative possibilities that emerge when these circles intersect. This trend is most obvious in the various genres of music at these events, and it traces easily into the environment, the crowd and the atmosphere that they favor. In this context, culture becomes an ideal vehicle and venue for engaging a community that is always changing.

The apparent "disorganization" of this community makes it practically impossible to enforce rules of membership, behavior or belonging. As the cultural borders are thrown open, so, too are the borders of the community itself, creating an atmosphere of inclusivity and diversity rather than exclusivity. By association, these events offer a place for the celebration of Jewish life that is also **diverse and inclusive**. There is no official that is either going to pass judgment on them or on their behavior, and no expectation that one needs a kind of specialized knowledge in order to participate. Jewishness is something that anyone can do and everyone is invited to share in. This, in turn, can empower the attendees to shape their own definition of what Jewish life is.

Inclusivity, diversity, empowerment, and an expanded definition of what Jewish life could be are the Jewish values of these events. While none of the events or their organizers articulated these messages as such, they are

manifest in each event and in the broader culture they represent. The events all take place outside of traditional Jewish venues, and the events themselves offer opportunities for participating in Jewish life that are outside traditional expectations. They occupy this space aggressively, and by providing opportunities for the expression of Jewish culture, they are reinventing Jewish life for their audience.

This is anything but Jewish lite, as some detractors might argue. These events are important nodes in a broader cultural environment that is populated by Jews in their 20s and 30s who are beginning to articulate their visions of Jewish life in America. Instead of being driven by membership organizations, canonical knowledge, exclusive communities, primary commitments and the general assumption that somehow one's Jewish and American identities are forever at odds, these events are creating opportunities and spaces in which none of those hold true. They offer possibilities for a form of American Jewish life that is fluent in American popular culture, playful, engaging, unbound and open to both interpretation and non-Jewish friends and partners.

Taken together, these events offer an outline for a different construction of Jewishness in America that uses culture in all its forms as a powerful organizational principle. By approaching their audience where they live and play, by providing alternative opportunities for Jewish experience and socializing, by creating spaces where younger Jews can find communities that are built on affinity and are not committed to exclusion but inclusion, these events are part of a broader critique of organized, institutional Jewish life and represent an alternative expression of Jewish life in America.

Conclusions

The events that comprise the core of this study illuminate some of the central characteristics of alternative Jewish culture in New York in the lives of primarily unmarried Jews in their 20's and 30's. Far more significant than simple opportunities for entertainment, these events exhibit characteristics that indicate a thoughtful engagement with Jewishness in America that differs from that of the preceding generation.

Three central dynamics are at play in these events that are worth highlighting for the ways in which they structure the events.

1. **Ambivalence toward being Jewish creates opportunities for Jewish engagement**. Primarily articulated through irony and irreverence, the ambivalence is not around whether or not to be Jewish, but how to be Jewish. Faced with countless options and lacking any overt pressure to choose one over another, Jews in their 20's and 30's are hesitant to commit to a primary form of Jewish affiliation. The events reflect an understanding of that ambivalence and employ it to create a space in which people can play at being Jewish, and try out different ways of identifying without actually being asked to do so in any formal way. Instead of creating distance between participants and Jewish culture, ambivalence becomes a critical part of engagement itself.
2. **Cultural hybridity facilitates encountering Jewish culture.** The events bring together aspects from Jewish and mainstream culture such that they do not attempt to distance what has Jewish roots from what does not. For a generation raised on youth culture, multiculturalism and globalization, the quest for a verifiably "authentic" Jewishness is not even a viable option. Instead of looking for a core Jewish characteristic or cultural gene, these events celebrate the hybrid and the playful aspects of culture. They waste no breath on defining what (or who) is Jewish and what (or who) is not. Cultural boundaries are necessarily permeable, and instead of threatening one's culture, this fact can enliven it through conversation, hybridity and engagement.
3. **Cultural participation, fun, and entertainment with porous ethnic boundaries create networks, if not communities.** Sharing in these events - where socializing is a significant part of the event itself - strengthens relationships among participants. These informal social

networks are the conduits of a community that adheres to different rules than those governed by memberships and ideologies. These alternative communities are flexible, episodic and erratic and they also provide an important framework for experiencing Jewish life. Routed through these events, these alternative communities are not weak versions of more formal social arrangements; rather they are vibrant networks of individuals who prefer this version of community over those more readily available in places like synagogues or JCCs. As a kind of echo of the cultural products around which these alternative communities organize, they also benefit from openness and fluidity by following the logic of diversity and tolerance that their members value.

The "value" of Jewish culture, simply put, is that it is the terrain on which this generation is currently staking its claim to Jewish tradition and Jewish life. Outside of formal institutions, irreverently, informally, and seriously, these events are exploring the possibilities for a Jewish life that is congruous with participants' broader, multicultural, American lives. Far from "Jewish life lite," these events thoughtfully engage culture as both a means and an end.

Culture - in this case, the concerts, parties, events and rituals that comprise the core of this study - is not instrumental. It is not a vehicle for bringing people closer to their Jewishness. It is an essential part of the events themselves, creating options and alternatives for Jewish organizing, community and engagement for Jews in their 20's and 30's.

Section 3

Crossing Porous Boundaries: Young Adults' Jewish Identities and Their Experience of Cultural Events

Today's young adult Jews: Different for sure, but different how?

Perpetuating a long-standing process, the latest and youngest generation of adult American Jews, those now about 25-35 years of age, has evolved different understandings of what being Jewish means, and different ways of expressing their Jewishness and forging ties among one another. As a group, they are certainly far from uniform and homogeneous, differing considerably among themselves. But in the aggregate, and in broad strokes, they differ from their elders and predecessors, members of their parents' and grandparents' generations. Their emerging forms of Jewish identity and connection challenge existing patterns of Jewish communal life, even as they also generate new modes and possibilities for Jewish identity and community.

In developing their own distinctive tastes and tendencies in Jewish identity, today's younger adults are both accepting and rejecting their inherited Judaism and institutions, just as they are laying the seeds for new religious, cultural, and communal patterns. Quite understandably, some observers see these trends as mystifying and disturbing, perhaps even Jewishly inauthentic. At the same time, others welcome these changes, seeing them as refreshing, exciting, and genuine.

In observing Jewish cultural events in New York in late 2004 and early 2005, we encountered what may be seen as both a living embodiment of, and a revealing window upon, some of the emerging patterns of Jewish identity, connection, and community. Going to concerts and to other events with a Jewish theme is one way in which younger adults in New York "do Jewish." The character of these events, the appeal they exert, and the feelings they provoke reflect the distinctive ways in which the younger generation of New York area Jews construct their Jewish identities and forge their Jewish connections. If we understand these people, and if we understand the events they attend, we may begin to understand how Jews in New York (if not elsewhere) are departing from their parents in their inclinations for (and against) Jewish engagement.

The cultural events we observed, generally conducted in public performance spaces, certainly differ from the activities that take place in synagogues, schools, JCCs, Federations, and other Jewish organizations. One prevailing image is that these events, insofar as they succeed in attracting audiences (and they do), appeal to different kinds of Jews, with different ways of being Jewish and different motivations for Jewish cultural consumption, as contrasted with conventional Jewish communal participation. To what extent are these assumptions of differences true; and if true, where and how do these differences manifest themselves?

Our qualitative research on the 13 events, provided us with an opportunity not only to examine the events themselves and their meaning to the participants, as important as these issues may be. We also were able to use our research to explore the broader questions of Jewish identity and community among the members of the audience. In the course of observing scores of Jewish young adults at the events, and by way of intensively interviewing 30 of them, then, we began to draw some insights and inferences about their distinctive ways of being Jewish and the ways in which they approached these cultural events, addressing several related questions.

1) Do participants at these types of cultural events emerge from decidedly **different sorts of Jewish upbringing and early development** than do those who go to synagogue, join JCCs, and donate to Jewish Federations? By appealing to the "unaffiliated," are Jewish cultural events also appealing to those with more limited Jewish educational and socializing experiences in their youth? Or do these overtly Jewish events actually attract audiences with strong Jewish educational backgrounds and high levels of Jewish involvement and commitment?
2) Do participants in these events **engage with Judaism differently** than do their parents' generation?
3) Insofar as their Jewish interests and ways of connecting differ from those of their elders, in what ways are they **critical of established ways of being Jewish**? In what ways are they alienated from established Jewish institutional and conventional patterns of Jewish identity and community?
4) What **motivations, tastes and interests** draw participants to Jewish cultural events? After all, they are attending cultural events in which,

generally, music plays a major role. Does this mean that they are especially engaged in culture, drama, and music, or in other kinds of Jewish cultural programs as well?

5) Is there something that the participants are trying to reconnect to by choosing to attend a *Jewish* cultural event? Are they seeking something familiar to what they have gotten out of other Jewish experiences, perhaps in camp or college?
6) Do these events respond to, reflect, or create a **different set of passions and motivations**? Obviously, going to a concert differs from praying in a synagogue. What does the former excite or reflect in the cultural consumer, as opposed to the synagogue worshipper? What are they seeking in a cultural event that they little expect to find at a synagogue or JCC?
7) When compared with their largely middle-aged parents' generation, young adults share two characteristics: They were born later in history, and they occupy a different stage in the family life cycle. Both year of birth and family life cycle influence Jewish engagement. Those born more recently were shaped by a world in which Jews were more readily accepted in American society, and one in which society as a whole moved to a more privatized conception of religious practice and affiliation. These Jews should be special, in part because of when they were born (birth cohort effects, that may well endure over time), and in part because they are young, unmarried, and non-parents (life cycle effects, that will inevitably dissipate with time). We may not be able to assign responsibility to one or the other dimension, but we will be able to anticipate and discern inter-generational differences. In short, we can ask, **which sorts of features are transitory, tied to family life cycle, and which sort are more enduring, connected to birth cohort**?

To encapsulate our main findings, we were able to draw five general conclusions, which provide the skeletal outline for this chapter:

1. Those who attend these events derive from **moderate to strong Jewish backgrounds**, frequently including day schools, Israel experiences, youth groups, and camps.
2. They are Jewishly **engaged, but institutionally unaffiliated**. They

participate in a variety of Jewish activities, including (at times) holiday celebrations, synagogue service attendance, initiating their own Jewish networks and communities, and even working professionally in Jewish life. Some even seek out synagogue services, although few have found congregations or minyanim to which they are attached or attend regularly.

3. They are **critical** of several features of conventional Jewish life. These critical views were expressed by such terms as: culturally parochial, socially claustrophobic, overly institutional, bland, conservative, agenda-oriented, and conformist, much of which can be largely captured by the term, **"highly bounded."**
4. They spend their **leisure time** with friends, and at bars, concerts, and other cultural events. They are **attracted to Jewish cultural events** because of such features as the "scene," the venue (public spaces), the low barriers, and the absence of expectations and demands.
5. In making their Jewish choices, they value: people over ideology, inclusiveness, autonomy, episodic engagement, fluidity of identity, and cultural hybridity. In many ways, they enjoy **crossing porous boundaries**.

While attending musical and other cultural programs may reflect their current needs and interests as largely single young adults, their **preference for Jewish experiences that socially and culturally engage with others** may well represent a more enduring phenomenon as these people age in the years to come.

Methods

In late 2004 and early 2005, we observed 13 Jewish cultural events in New York, all of which were publicly advertised and of special appeal to Jews in their twenties and thirties. In the days and weeks following the events themselves, we conducted over 30 interviews with informants we had met at the events. As participant observers, we would spend part of each event socializing and speaking to people. We would introduce ourselves and the project, and rather than try to conduct interviews on site, we would ask for an email address or a phone number that would allow us to contact our

informants and arrange a more formal interview, either in person or on the phone. Apart from the occasional good-natured comment like, "That's the worst pick-up line I've ever heard," most people were receptive to the idea and willingly gave over their email addresses. Following the event, we would email each of our contacts and subsequently schedule interviews with those who responded. If there was no response after two or three attempts, we would give up to pursue more fruitful options. Some of the interviews were conducted by phone, while others took place in person. Each of the interviews lasted about 40 minutes, and a list of interviewees with their names changed appears in Appendix A. The discussion guide we used appears in Appendix B.

All of our informants were white and identified as Jewish. They were almost evenly divided between women and men (16/14), a gender division that reflects the slightly higher proportion of women who attend Jewish cultural events. They were between 23 and 36 years of age, with most falling near the middle of the age range. Most were college educated, single and professionals, working in fields like law, education, accounting, or information technology. Significantly, some were Jewish communal professionals, working for Jewish agencies. The only informant who was not a college graduate came from a Hasidic background.

Most attended these events with at least one friend, and as often as not, they were part of a larger social group that came together. Although most were single, just one indicated that they attended these events with the intention of meeting a potential partner (he averred to attending the event "keeping my eyes open"). The observations that follow are drawn from the transcribed interviews. Wherever possible we tried to have the informants speak for themselves. Any exercise in qualitative research depends in good measure upon the judgment of the researchers in selecting, assembling, and assorting the evidence. We certainly have been conscious of this responsibility, but we have also sought to present a considerable selection of the original evidence along with our own interpretation of its meaning and import.

Generally, the respondents spoke eloquently and seriously about their Jewish lives and choices. They spoke about their experiences with Jewish institutions and a desire to connect to a kind of Jewish experience that resonated with the various facets of their personalities. They spoke about why Jewish cultural events appeal to them in ways that synagogues and other conventional institutions do not.

I. STRONG JEWISH BACKGROUNDS

Journeys of Engagement

We found that our respondents, all people we located at these New York area Jewish cultural events, were largely products of ongoing Jewish engagement, beginning in their parental homes and their educational experiences, both in childhood and adolescence. All have taken "Jewish journeys," sometimes increasing, sometimes decreasing their levels of Jewish involvement, and both acquiring and abandoning areas of Jewish interest. And now, during their young adulthood -- a particularly unsettled and transitional stage of their lives -- their tales of Jewish journey continue.

Many observers may well think of these Jewish cultural events as appealing to the Jewishly disaffected, under-educated, and under-socialized - those who lack intensive Jewish experiences in their homes, childhood years, and adolescence. In fact, our informants contrasted sharply with this imagery. Our non-random sample, small and statistically unreliable as it may be, pointed to a distribution toward the upper end of the Jewish socialization spectrum. In this respect, the respondents are consistent with a study some years ago of visitors to Makor, a multi-purpose cultural facility on Manhattan's Upper West Side. (Despite the intended aim of its sponsor to attract the Jewishly unconnected, Makor drew Jewish visitors with a significant minority of day school graduates, and a large majority who had spent time in Israel, consistent with an overall portrait of relatively high levels of Jewish socialization and education.)

Many of our informants attended day school, had been to Israel, and participated in Jewish youth groups. Numerous interviewees also spoke of growing up in households that observed Shabbat or kept kosher, or of working in the Jewish community. These tendencies can be illustrated by their own descriptions of their parental homes, and Jewish educational experiences in their childhood and teen years. The child of an intermarriage who went on to study Bible, Talmud, and Midrash remarked:

> My dad isn't Jewish, my mom was raised Reform and we went to a pretty typical boring synagogue growing up. So I did lots of stuff in youth group in high school in BBYO, but I never really - we're not that observant. I knew I cared about it, but I didn't know a whole lot, and that's why I wanted to go to JTS. So that's where I learned how to read the Bible in Hebrew, which was exciting and did some Talmud stuff and some Midrash stuff.

A young woman who is now working selling bagels and is returning to graduate school in the fall, tells a story of a fairly involved Jewish childhood:

> I went to Jewish day school for elementary school. And I spend all my summers at a Habonim Dror Camp. This is the first summer that I'm not going back [there] to work. My dad is a member and on the board of one of the Orthodox synagogues in Vancouver, but me and my mom and my sister are not involved in that.

Some, quite clearly, came from what must be regarded as lives marked by strong connections to Judaism, synagogues, and ritual observance:

> I started tutoring bar and bat mitzvahs and started leading the children's service at our synagogue, and teaching Sunday school and I was in youth choir. So I was very active at synagogue.

> [In my household growing up] we weren't very observant, but I went to a Hebrew Day School up until 6th grade, so I learned all the customs of Orthodox Judaism. So I had a pretty good background, but I didn't grow up in an observant background. We celebrated the holidays, but we didn't keep kosher.

At the same time, in contrast, we also encountered someone with a less Jewishly intensive upbringing. Here, an IT specialist at a large Wall Street firm somewhat humorously summarized his checkered Jewish past:

> I went to public school and Hebrew School until they threw me out.

Still others described their upbringing as variously, "Modern Orthodox," "Conservadox," or in statements like, "I grew up in the Reform movement." But, notwithstanding the inevitable diversity in details, we came away with the sense that the people who attend Jewish cultural events - even far outside mainstream Jewish institutions -- are, in fact, coming from fairly intensive Jewish upbringings, albeit generally outside of Orthodoxy.

Jewish journeys: Fluid identities in a world of multiple options

In spite of the frequent tales of strong Jewish upbringing, many

informants spoke of entering a period of Jewish wandering, if not alienation from things Jewish. Some spent years more distant from Jewish concerns. Some have only recently considered testing a path of return to Jewish interests. We have to believe that low-barrier, low-demand Jewish cultural events, such as those we observed, play a role in easing the way back to Jewish involvement. One woman's journey away from the world of prayer, and presumably from other things Jewish, is illustrative:

> I went to NYU as an undergrad. I graduated from Tisch - the drama program. And I was very involved in Jewish life all throughout growing up, through high school. Ramah every summer. I was on regional board of USY. Super involved. Not day school. Got to college and that fell away completely. I was totally engrossed in acting, and it was always a part of my life that felt vacant - that I had no Jewish connection at NYU. I came once to Shabbat and couldn't connect and then I came for High Holidays and it wasn't a very positive experience - I didn't find connection. Even working at camps, I was the "other." I was the drama girl, and there was really no Jewish content.

At the same time, we certainly heard stories of movement in the opposite direction, of intensification of Jewish interest, involvement, and commitment:

> In high school I was involved in USY and became more observant through my senior year of high school and for about 3 years in college. I swung a bit more to the right in terms of observance, at Columbia because of the Columbia Jewish community.

Their choices are informed at once by their desires to participate in Jewish life and by their desire to share in the rich opportunities of the world at large. These respondents, as others, seem enamored of a world with "options," or with a "palette" of possibilities.

> It's a continual process of finding out what I want and what my niche is. I'm satisfied with the options. The question is whether or not I choose to take advantage of them.

> I kinda like the word I chose before of it being a palette and it's

> kind of a fluid dynamic, evolution in a way and it's I don't know if it's ever going to culminate in one particular thing. Sometimes I'm feeling religious, sometimes I'm feeling secular. Sometimes I'm feeling like I need to listen to music, sometimes I'm feeling like I need to go out and listen to Jewish music. It's not a consistent overwhelming sense of this is who I am and who I need to be in the future. It's constantly fluid. And maybe that's not a good thing or I don't know if it's good or bad or if that even matters, I think that's just the way it is for me. It's about where am I today.

In describing their upbringing, the informants frequently used denominational labels ("I was raised Orthodox," "I went to a Reform summer camp"). However, when describing their current relationship to Jewish life, they stop referring to themselves in terms of movements or even in terms of adherence to Jewish law and tradition, electing a more fluid vocabulary that indicates their personal choices. Less a reflection of ideology than personal desire, their descriptions of their current Jewish practices are often contradictory and complex.

They do not see these apparent contradictions as a problem, but rather a fact of Jewish life, if not reflective of an age that encourages and admires the sampling and assembling of diverse cultural elements and experiences. A young woman who grew up in an Orthodox household and found her way back to Judaism through an interest in Hare Krishna, described her practice in the following terms. "I keep Shabbat, but I don't really go to shul that much." One woman offered the following, seemingly self-contradictory, description of her current Jewish practices, "I do almost nothing religiously. We have Shabbat dinners here maybe once or twice a month with a big group of people." (Note the juxtaposition of "nothing religiously" with "monthly Shabbat dinners.") Another described a minyan that he likes, which meets in the basement of a Reform temple. "[It's mostly] people who do Carlebach style Kabbalat Shabbat and *nusach* for Ma'ariv is Conservative. We use a Reconstructionist siddur."

Jewish involvement over the course of a lifetime takes on many possible gradations and colorations - it can, and does, change both in magnitude and form over the years. These "Jewish journeys" take place not only in the distant or recent past, but can be observed underway at the current moment, especially for people at a particularly transitory stage of their lives.

The journey continues: A time of life transitions and ongoing exploration

As the young adult respondents themselves avow, they are in a transitional time in life. As twenty- and thirty-somethings, it is a time when they may have recently completed their studies, and/or have recently moved to New York. Many have seen their old friends move away or get married, and, responding to the mobility in their own lives and those around them, they have developed new friendships.

For the non-married people, they are conscious, or at least more than dimly aware, that a major event in their life may lie shortly ahead of them: They may, at an unknown moment, meet an as yet unknown individual with whom they will hope to spend the rest of their lives. Their future spouse or partner will affect their family, friends, residence, job prospects, and relationship to Judaism (and so much else) in ways they cannot imagine. The uncertain prospect of marriage can, for many, foster a sense of instability and reluctance to commit, be it to a permanent home or respectable furniture, let alone to institutions of any sort, Jewish or otherwise. Reflecting the impact of the unknown spouse, one person remarked:

> I'm not really sure exactly, it will obviously depend on whom I end up with and all sorts of things. But I would like them to have at least the consistency of some element of doing Shabbat, whether Friday night dinners, or probably more *shul* at some point.

This informant seamlessly joins his musing on marriage with an avowal of declining Jewish involvement in recent years:

> I'm still interested in marrying someone Jewish, but I'm not interested in connecting to my Judaism, not as much as I was 5 years ago, anyway.

At the same time, many are struggling with the early stages of career, if indeed, they have developed a clear professional identity, adding one other element of instability. Notwithstanding the inherently unstable aspects of major parts of their lives, they are both enjoying the freedoms and struggling with the options that such a period affords them. In the Jewish realm, they are making serious, considerate, thoughtful choices, illustrated by the following comment:

> I don't know if the next few steps [in my life] will be [Jewishly informed], but that was important to me to put a lot of effort into that. I wanted to learn a lot so I could figure out what it meant to me. And I ended up learning a lot and I still have to figure out what it means to me.

Divorce, which can be seen as an unplanned return to singlehood, also detaches people from their previously held social and cultural moorings, opening up previously settled options and questions, as this separated man demonstrates:

> For a while I actually became very Orthodox - black hat - I learned in Yeshiva after Kollel. I wrapped that up a long time ago, though. I'm about to become single again, and I'm not a hundred percent sure where I'm going to settle in culturally or socially, so it's sort of like experimenting with different things.

As committed and interested as they may be in being Jewish, their sense of mobility in career, location, and relationships, both real and potential, inevitably serves to impede all manner of institutional affiliation, with obvious implications for joining (or not joining) synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations. America has long been seen as a nation of joiners, and Jews have long conducted their group lives by founding, supporting, and joining institutions, agencies, organizations, and the like. To the extent that these tendencies with formal institutions still characterize Americans generally and Jews specifically, they decidedly do not apply to young adults, especially those who are unmarried and without children.

II. Jewishly Engaged, but Institutionally Unaffiliated

Communal advocates of Jewish cultural events anticipate that these events will reach "unaffiliated" Jews, who are not all that engaged in Jewish life. Our non-random sample suggests that such advocates are half-right: these Jews were indeed institutionally unaffiliated, but they were also, in our view, Jewishly engaged. When speaking of middle-aged, in-married Jewish parents, the expression, "engaged but unaffiliated" may come across as an oxymoron. If one is a parent of Jewish children, how can one be considered Jewishly engaged, yet remain unattached to any Jewish institution, be it a synagogue, school, or JCC? But for young adults, the combination of lack of affiliation

with genuine Jewish engagement is not at not at all uncommon. In point of fact, for them, Jewish institutional affiliation is actually quite uncommon, and its absence is not at all indicative of lack of engagement.

With one exception, the informant who came from an ultra-Orthodox community, the members of our sample belong neither to synagogues nor to JCCs. Few attend religious services with regularity. That being said, each of our informants offered accounts of his or her Jewish identity that illustrated significant, ongoing, thoughtful engagement. Some remarks pointed to a strong expression of interest in one or another aspect of Jewish living. For one young man, with little self-avowed interest in Judaism as a religion, it was a matter of having Jewish friends, almost exclusively, remarking, "All of my closest friends are Jewish, except for one. Some are guys I grew up with."

Another off-handedly spoke in terms of observing "certain *mitzvot*," indicative of an apparently effective Jewish education and socialization in childhood:

> It's hard for me to use categories like "religion" or something like that. But I'm connected to Judaism and I observe certain *mitzvot*. It's hard to categorize myself.

Still others attested to their unshakeable commitment to certain elements of Jewish experience and engagement, be it religious practice, holiday observance, or a more generalized, "things Jewish." As we see below, for some, their focus can be ritual practice, or holiday observance, or Jewish politics or art. But whatever is the focus of their Jewish involvement, all three illustrative respondents below claim a strong need to remain engaged in some particular aspect of Jewish life.

> I don't consider myself religious, but there's a certain amount of practicing that I feel like I need to do myself, and it's pretty minimal but I have to do it.

> On Sukkos, I need to have a meal in a Sukkah. It's like it's sort of the bare essentials of respecting the Jewish calendar. For me, the Jewish calendar is brilliant because it creates these seasonal events and if you miss them, it's not fully satisfying.

> It is important to me to be involved in things Jewish, whether political or art. I really value those opportunities.

In our admittedly non-random sample, we met an unusual number of people employed by the Jewish community. In the two following cases, we see reference to working for a youth group and to participating in a live-in and heavily subsidized Jewish social justice experience, signs of unusual Jewish engagement, to be sure:

> Actually I work for Young Judaea. Okay. So I run a youth group. … I keep Shabbat but I don't really go to shul that much.

> Being involved in a community like Avodah [the Brooklyn-based Jewish service corps] which provides a context for me to think about what I am doing as a Jewish activist more than what am I doing Jewishly regarding ritual elements.

We were impressed with the presence of an inalienable and undeniable Jewish identity in all - and, we emphasize, all - our informants. To take a compelling case, the most stridently anti-religious (and apparently not so culturally engaged) of our informants said, "I don't generally identify with Jewish culture. Of course, my parents are Jewish and I was raised Jewish and I grew up in a Jewish town, [New City in Rockland County] so… I'm not so concerned about the religion, but if anyone is anti-Semitic, I'll be all over them."

Not surprisingly, their high levels of Jewish interest begets a degree of Jewish seeking, innovation, and creativity, amply demonstrated in stories of people undertaking their own initiatives in Jewish communal organizing. Two illustrations appear as follows:

> I'm trying to create this gathering of conscious Jews which is about trying to create a space, a spiritual space and also a talkative space, to process how to be more socially active and, um, also space around a text, which I'm starting to spearhead this. I'm also involved in this minyan, so I spend some time at organizational meetings.

> A lot of the communities were just not what we were looking for. So we decided to organize a Jewish community that could meet once a month and just have a common place where we could enjoy the things that we enjoy. Like a long prayer service. We do a little bit of meditation before the prayer, we do text-based learning after dinner, and we've just been building a really

> nice community. We have about 50 people coming to pray in this tiny little space. We organize a potluck via e-vites and we've started a website.

They may not belong to synagogues or JCCs. But they do belong to, and even tend to run Jewishly active informal social networks that function as Jewish communities, exhibiting traits and inclinations that point to their penchant for Jewish leadership, both in the present moment, and, in all likelihood, in the future as well.

Religion and synagogue for some, sometimes

Though few attend services regularly, these young adults are not all that distant from worship services and synagogues. Most of our informants reported involvement in Jewish religious life, whether through alternative synagogues like Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (CBST, Manhattan's gay synagogue); alternative minyanim like Hadar; or other organizational efforts. For some, the High Holidays offered a critical opportunity to attend synagogue:

> For High Holidays this year, we went to ... Kol Kol, Kol Chayyim. That was great. The cantor there, she is amazing and it really made for a special. I think it was the best Yom Kippur experience I've had in a very, very long time.

> I go to synagogue on High Holidays. I used to go every week growing up. I like going to services, but I haven't been in a while…. [I don't go because] I don't really have a community out there to go

Others seemed somewhat more oriented to synagogue services, albeit with a measure of qualification and tentativeness:

> But I would go to BJ [Congregation B'nai Jeshurun], and I used to go a lot, and I don't really know anybody who goes there. I would just go for the service. I wouldn't hang around and talk. I would totally go [if BJ was in Brooklyn]. I really like the music and the singing and the being-totally-surrounded-by-it feeling.

> It depends on how shul-oriented I feel on a given week. It doesn't always adapt to my schedule.

In part, the qualified involvement derives not so much from a busy life as from lack of enthusiasm for available congregations, as evidenced in the extensive "shul-hopping" that some respondents report. One woman we spoke with tried a number of synagogues but failed to find one that "felt right." She said, "I've tried a bunch of places in New York, and I haven't felt too comfortable at most of the places." Another said, "I like going to services, but I haven't been in a while. [I don't go because] I don't really have a community out there to go to." Another informant offered a slightly simpler approach:

> It's rare to find a shul where I feel particularly that I'd rather be there than sleeping on a Saturday morning. I grew up going to *shul* every week, and I've gone to a million *shuls* in the city. I dunno. It's hard.

In short, the religiously oriented respondents had trouble finding synagogues compatible with their demanding preferences with respect to liturgy, aesthetics, politics, denomination, ideology, congregants, decorum, music, and religious leadership. In this respect, if not others, they do in fact have much in common with the parents, and the Jews of countless jokes. The decision to attend synagogue comes with its own trade offs and sacrifices. One young man described his choice of synagogue in the following way,

> I'm also lucky because CBST is a weird hybrid of being basically conservative egalitarian in the way that its liturgy works and extremely diverse in terms of its population and has the most non-white Jews. A lot of the partners of the queers at CBST are not Jewish or not white, and the inclusiveness of that congregation is really tremendous and really exciting and fascinating. And that is offset by this particularly odd conservative liturgy. It's a very Hebrew service and it's very conservative in its aesthetic, which is how I was raised, so for me, it's the perfect congregation.

Thus, in looking for a traditional service that was politically progressive and demographically diverse, yet liturgically and aesthetically conservative, this informant chose to attend the city's largest gay synagogue.

Another informant signaled the role of political identity in shaping congregational choice. "Sometimes it's difficult because I would rather be in a more Reconstructionist or Conservative *davening* environment, and some of

the places that are more politically where I am are more Reform." The available choices for religious participation fall short of suiting the needs and wants of many informants, so a few, as noted, have actually moved to create their own Jewish environments and experiences. For most of our informants, the decision not to attend synagogue more often, then, evolved out of a lack of appealing choices, not a decided lack of interest in Jewish religious life, as the following informant relates:

> I went to Purim in Philly last week. I went to a congregation that has absolutely nothing to do with my politics or my community. And it was a relatively shallow experience. I did it because it was the holiday and I didn't want to miss it. Whereas the Workmans' Circle event, which wasn't really religious at all, was far deeper and meaningful for me. I wouldn't have not gone to *shul* because I don't like to not hear the *megillah* read. But it wasn't a deep experience. Sort of rote.

To be clear, not all expressed warm and fuzzy feelings toward the religious aspects of being Jewish. Some rejected religion in a rather sweeping way, while others were critical of specific aspects of available Jewish religious possibilities:

> I don't identify with the religion in any way. I feel almost like a weird sort-of solidarity. The Jews are almost like a dying breed, and there's something to the culture that I really value. I never cared about religion or race when I dated, but my preference is still to marry a Jewish female because I'd rather my kids were Jews than not.

They may not feel particularly drawn to a particular congregation or service; but these young adults often express interest in services, even if hardly any have emerged as among the stalwart members of congregations, either of the established variety, or the various endeavors with special appeal to New York area Jews in their twenties and thirties.

III. Complaints and Constraints: Obstacles to Institutional Involvement

One reason that these largely unmarried young adult Jews remain outside Jewish institutions relates to their stage of life: they are largely under

35, single, and without children; the institutionally affiliated are largely over 35, married (and married to Jews), with children. But with that said, they still voiced a variety of concerns and issues that, when taken together, constitute a widely shared critique of the world of synagogues, JCCs, Federations, and Jewish communal organizations. Understanding these concerns is useful on two levels. First, they bear directly upon the readiness of today's young adults to eventually affiliate with prevailing Jewish institutional options. Second, and perhaps more significantly, they offer some insight into their Jewish perceptions, preferences and passions that will in all likelihood influence the ways they approach being Jewish in the years to come, as well as the institutions they currently eschew.

Social claustrophobia and cultural parochialism

The historic separation of Jews from others derived in part from rejection by the larger Christian and Islamic societies in which they dwelled, and in part from the needs and desires of Jews themselves. Traditional Jewish religious and cultural norms and strictures served to establish, maintain, and reinforce the boundaries of the Jewish population and community. In what may be seen as an overarching theme of modern Jewish history since the European Enlightenment and since the Jews' arrival in America, the barriers separating Jews from others have become weaker and more permeable. The younger generation has been raised with history's most widespread social integration of Jews and non-Jews as neighbors, co-workers, friends, and, of course, spouses and family members. In such an environment, boundaries separating Jews from non-Jews, or a distinctively Jewish culture from a contemporary American aesthetic, and even Jews of one camp or ideology from another, all appear less plausible, legitimate, and acceptable to younger adult Jews today.

Even more so than their fully modernized American parents, the young adults we interviewed feel uncomfortable with strong social and cultural boundaries, the sort that are both maintained and advocated by some of their parents and by most conventional Jewish institutions. Perhaps paradoxically, the very strength of their Jewish upbringing, while generating considerable levels of salience in their Jewish identities, also has produced a powerful critical reaction as well. Numerous interviewees sprinkled their descriptions of their Jewish lives, both in their past and the present, with such words, as

"cultish," "parochial," "stifling," "constricting," and "claustrophobic." The exact meaning of these complaints may be ambiguous, but there is no doubt that it is one that goes deep into their experience of growing up as Jews in intensive Jewish educational settings, and conditions their attitudes toward the Jewish community today. As we shall see, it provides one of the lenses through which they view the sorts of cultural events we attended. These remarks illustrate the phenomenon at hand (emphasis added):

> I did youth organizations, NCSY, when I was growing up, but they were **too cultish**… I then went to Jewish summer camps, but that was filled with a bunch of snotty rich kids.

> I went to day school, I went to Jewish camp, I grew up in a modern orthodox home kind of I just feel like the Jewish community here can be **pretty claustrophobic**.

> Even though my parents weren't constricting, my neighborhood was, because it was an Orthodox neighborhood, and I guess by definition it's **constricting**. And that was too much for me, so I had to break out completely and for a while I totally denied my Jewishness. People would ask me if I was Jewish, and I would tell them that I was not Jewish. I became not Jewish at all. And then, slowly I was able to find things that were able to appeal to a Jewish identity for me without that constricting thing.

The concerns with what we may call "social claustrophobia and cultural parochialism," run deep and serve to alienate many young adults from conventional institutions of Jewish life. According to many of our informants, existing Jewish institutions fail to offer viable, vibrant Jewish choices that reflect their cultural sensibilities and their desire for diversity. In their view, too many of these institutions rely almost entirely - or solely - on their Jewish appeal. One interviewee observed that joining a Jewish institution meant intentionally segregating oneself from the larger world.

> There's **something segregating** about it. Like when you make a choice to join the JCC, you are making a choice to *not* go to Equinox [the gym]. There's no reason to separate yourself from your community as being Jewish especially in a city like New York where everyone is Jewish.

The unintended irony in these remarks is that the informant is unconsciously reiterating the Rabbinic maxim, "Don't separate yourself from the community." Of course, the Sages were cautioning against minimizing ties with the Jewish community; our respondent fears separating himself from the larger society, consistent with the theme of rejecting strong boundaries.

In light of their reports of social claustrophobia, they consistently reject forms of Jewish exclusivity, be it in terms of social networks (in the first quote below), or personal identity (in the second and third), or leisure time activities (in the fourth):

> I mean I do have a strong Jewish identity, but that doesn't mean that I'd hang out with only Jews.
>
> It's a confusing relationship between feeling trapped by my religion and it being central part of my identity, but knowing that it's not the only part of me.
>
> Even though Judaism is very important to me, I don't think that it defines who I am.
>
> Working in the Jewish community, I feel like I do a lot of non-Jewish things, too, and that's important to me to have balance. So, every Saturday I play on a women's rugby team which is a pretty non-Jewish thing.

It follows that our informants resented the assumption that they will join Jewish organizations just because they are Jewish, or that Jewishness itself is sufficient to attract them. They saw this attitude as narrow-minded and part of what makes the Jewish community sometimes feel "suffocating." But, as one informant reminded us, "I don't find it too stifling because I can leave. I have my whole other social set of friends that have no idea."

Not too many years ago, second and third generation American Jews regarded Jewish environments as spaces that were exclusively, or almost exclusively, Jewish in composition. It seems that their children and grandchildren - now well into the fifth generation - now regard attractive Jewish environments as those that are mostly Jewish, while viewing exclusive Jewish environments as unduly parochial, and therefore alienating.

Progressive politics: a source of alienation

For many younger Jewish adults today, political identities are not particularly salient. In this respect, they contrast sharply with the worlds of their fathers, mothers, and grandparents. For much of the twentieth century, members of these older generations played out distinctive Jewish political identities by way of unions, civil rights activities, anti-war rallies, and Democratic Party politics, to say nothing of East European socialism.

While the era of extraordinary Jewish political passion may be past, at the same time, most interviewees seemed at least sympathetic to liberal or "progressive" causes. One woman particularly valued her experiences with other like-minded Jews when she commented on her participation in "Operation Bubbe," a get-out-the-vote initiative in Florida during the 2004 Presidential election.

> I really appreciated going to Florida with other Jews, and having that be with a group of Jews. Particularly in an election that had so much religious extremism, it felt really validating to be around progressive Jews who share the politics that I do.

These comments reflect the extent to which politics matter to this informant, and the frequency with which political differences served to distance him from conventional Jewish institutions.

> I've gone to other religious institutions that don't share my politics for practical and or cultural reasons, but, so I've attended other kinds of events with less progressive groups of Jews, but it's more out of necessity.

Clearly, then, political identities on the part of Jewish young adults, especially those on the left, can inhibit their engagement with institutions or communities with a conservative political coloration. For those whose progressive views shade over into a discomfort with Israeli policies, involvement with conventional Jewish life becomes particularly problematic, as these three comments from left-leaning critics of Israeli policies demonstrate:

> I've been very discouraged from going to a lot of Jewish sponsored events or Jewish content events because of the

> politics particularly around Palestine and Israel being so out of whack.
>
> I try to go to synagogue, but it's very difficult. Often I'm very discouraged and I feel there's a limited amount of places I can go to because one side of politics about Israel is preached, explicitly, loudly, incessantly. The politics are requisite for having any connection to religious expression at all. I've found religious communities in New York that are tolerable.
>
> My politics have been pretty defined since college, I'd say. I've attended other kinds of events with less progressive groups of Jews, but it's more out of necessity. Anything on the political right wing of Israeli politics, I would not attend -- except out of curiosity. As I wouldn't attend religious events that were dogmatic or that were non-inclusive to other religious ideas.

So, while political identities may exert somewhat less of a hold upon today's younger Jews than their parents' generation, most young adult Jews see the organized Jewish community as uncomfortably cautious, if not conservative, for their tastes. For some, this perception is a mild turn-off; for those with more salient progressive identities, it's a "deal-breaker," a major obstacle to Jewish communal involvement.

Israel: attached, but ambivalent

We were struck by the extent to which respondents expressed degrees of alienation from Israel, to the point where, for some, pro-Israel advocacy in the organized Jewish community constitutes an impediment to institutional engagement. Whereas once (and for many older people today) Israel served as a source of inspiration, our young adult respondents, when they spoke about Israel at all, spoke of moral complexities and ethical shortcomings, as this comment suggests:

> Israel having connections with South Africa, or other countries, that when looking at them from an American perspective has serious moral issues. What I would question is whether this is an alliance that will help promote an ethical way of existing in the world, in a country that should be the Jewish homeland.

Next, we have someone who once was so engaged with Israel that she

had contemplated *aliyah*. But both her Jewish identity and view of Israel have undergone considerable change in more recent years:

> I guess so, when I was in a more observant time in my life, I was thinking a lot more about making *aliyah*. Now I am conflicted, I think that Israel is an important country and should have a place to exist in the world. But with anything there are serious policy decisions that need to be made, that affect both Israel and the world community.

Their concerns about conventional Jewry entail not its support for Israel per se, but specifically endorsement of "right-wing pro-Israel" positions and policies, as suggested by the comment, "Anything that was right-wing pro-Israel, [and] anything that was extremely left would make me also uncomfortable."

Most of our informants, in fact, chose to avoid anything that addressed Israel because of the fragile and divisive political situation that necessarily surrounds it. Events like the "Salute to Israel Parade" were seen as too right wing. Although they have fairly well-developed opinions and attitudes critical of Israeli policies, they are not only hesitant to air them publicly, they are turned off by any focus upon Israeli policies, be it supportive or critical. Even in our interviews, most informants shied away from voicing their political opinions.

Generational identity: Making Judaism my Judaism

Our informants hardly identify with Jewish institutions, nor do they believe that those institutions have a great deal to offer them as Jews, as young people, or as people in general. Their operative assumption is that the organized Jewish community is too narrow, and does not allow for expressions of Jewish identity that depart from the standard definitions. A major theme in our interviewees' remarks is a search for an accessible and usable Judaism, differentiated from that experienced in their childhood, or that inherited wholesale from their parents:

> One of the things I like is the idea of having a form of Judaism that I specifically see as something I can own, something that wasn't something that was forced on me… You know, I mean, I go to synagogue occasionally but when I'm in synagogue, I don't so much feel like that's my thing. I feel like it's my dad's thing.

It is in this regard that *Heeb* magazine plays such an indicative and important role in this nascent Jewish young adult youth culture in New York, if only in symbolic rather than substantive terms. *Heeb* came up frequently in our interviews and was physically ever-present at the cultural events we attended. In its attempt at humor, irreverence, and iconoclasm, *Heeb* gives voice to the search for a generationally specific and differentiated way of being proudly but independently Jewish. Many of our informants certainly found the magazine entertaining, but often expressed dissatisfaction with its perceived lack of substance, as one commented, "I have read *Heeb*, but I don't read it regularly… It seemed a bit like it was really funny but a little over the top." Or as another remarked, "I love the magazine. I don't completely. It's not totally my scene, but I like it."

However, *Heeb* played other valuable roles that were not about substance per se, but about facilitating interaction in a cultural space that is set apart from the Judaism of the older generation.

> When there are generally heterogeneous communities of people who are allowed to interact freely, that's where dialogues and relationships can form and happen. So to the extent that *Heeb* presents opportunities like that - that synagogues don't.
>
> I'm very pro-*Heeb*. I love what they're doing and I like the people who are doing it.

The popularity of *Heeb* testifies to the search for a Judaism particularly associated with the younger generation. The readers of *Heeb* resonate with its ironic and iconoclastic presentation of key elements in the Jewish life and experience of their parents' generation. In this, the magazine speaks directly to Jewish adults under the age of 35 or so. Apparently, this is one social boundary with which these younger adult Jews feel comfortable.

Resisting an agenda: "No" to events for Jewish singles and other programs

American Jews, like the members of many other cultures and religious groups, have developed a strong sense of independence, to the point where many resent the seeming intent of others, including those in positions of religious authority, to tell, teach, or even suggest to them how to think or

behave. The implicit, let alone the explicit, articulation of norms by institutional leaders constitutes an "agenda" in contemporary parlance, a term connoting a generally unwelcome attempt by those in some sort of position of authority or influence, to control an encounter or others' behavior.

For the unmarried young adults in our study, perhaps the most outstanding example of such an "agenda," centers around marriage - their marriage - to other Jews. They see their parents, Jewish communal leaders, and institutions pushing to get them married, and married to Jews. Jewish singles events are the most explicit example of these aspirations. These young adults, though largely unmarried and interested in marriage, are almost universally offended by the idea of singles events. Comments ranged from the mild, "I'm not particularly interested in the Jewish singles scene," to a wholesale dismissal:

> I wouldn't go to any kind of dating or singles thing. I think the underlying assumption [behind singles events] is strange - but that would go for non-Jewish singles events, too.

Most of our informants found the idea that they need help meeting other people, or that they are only interested in meeting other singles, to be insulting. Interestingly, while most of our informants were single, almost all shared one woman's view that even though she's a "Jewish single" she does not think singles events are a good venue for meeting people in whom she'd be interested. In like fashion, we read these remarks:

> I shy away from exclusively singles events, even though I am a Jewish single. But I don't like exclusively singles events. I don't like events that are anything where I feel is ultimately for the purpose of, that ultimately going to feel like a meat market.

Several informants contrasted the usual stance toward synagogues and synagogue-sponsored events to the more relaxed approach embodied in the cultural events we observed:

> I went to a young persons' "Jewish cultural dance" at a synagogue in Brooklyn. But that wasn't like this. It was much more classical. They had a DJ - you know, Jewish kids in their early-mid 20's, getting together. I always think of those things as "get married and have kids-fest." And that's generally the goal.

> I live on the Upper West Side, so most of the things up here are involving singles meeting each other which is what I like about Mimaamakim or what other groups are going - like Letter Shin, or Gefilte Fish or Selah - which aren't generally all about that, but more about building a community of young Jewish people. It's nice if singles meet each other as well, but there isn't really a place for young single, and happily single, people in the Jewish community sometimes.

These last remarks connect with the larger phenomenon of "agenda," noted above, where programs sponsored by synagogues and other institutions are seen as covertly, if not overtly, advocating one or another normative position, much to the consternation of the young adults. The comment above that singles events are "nauseating and presumptuous" speaks as well to the general resistance to events that appear to have an agenda or a mission. Singles events come freighted with the expectation that Jews both should and need help to marry other Jews. Other events with explicit political or religious aims also faired negatively in the opinions of our informants. "Not anything too outreachy or *kiruv-y*," said one informant, while others responded that they would not go to anything "in a synagogue" or something too far to the political right or left.

These sentiments need to be seen in the general context of the view that informants hold of "organized Jewish community." Many see the organized Jewish community as a politically conservative institution that wants them to get married, have Jewish babies and join synagogues and JCCs. Many we spoke with responded like one informant who considered going to the JCC to be:

> A lame kind of networking. Meet a nice Jewish boy, or meet a nice Jewish girl kind of scenario; and they have made a huge effort to send out great looking invitations. And I'm very impressed with the effort; but, the one or two events that that I have gone to, it's not something that I want to get involved in.

To elaborate a bit, one of the recent major themes in the study of emerging Jewish identity, and indeed that of other American religious groups, is the rejection of fixed norms and "judgmentalism," along with the license to innovate and construct one's own religious identity. In this context, the implicit agenda of many sponsors of many programs apparently aimed at young adults occasions some measure of resistance, as this comment illustrates:

> I haven't really looked that hard, but it seems like the ones that I've gone to, the people seem kind of pushy. I went to Aish HaTorah, and I didn't like the vibe I got there. I felt like there was too much of an agenda to get you to be ultra religious.

In contrast, one feature of the cultural events we observed that was particularly attractive to our respondents is their lack of an overt normative "agenda," that is any intent, even implicit, to change the way the participants behave, or to recruit them to some cause or organization:

> It really shouldn't be about an agenda so much as it's about access to Jewish culture and things like that.

> At these [Jewish cultural] events you sort-of assume that everyone there is Jewish, but there's no religious agenda and you're just there to socialize, and that's really nice.

Generally, respondents were wary of, suspicious of, and annoyed with the objectives of "the organized Jewish community," to get them to marry Jews, support Jewish causes, join Jewish organizations, and support Israel, to name just the most prominent items on the "agenda" of established Jewish leaders and organizations.

IV. Motivations for Participating in Jewish Cultural Events

Jewish cultural events provide a place for younger Jews to participate in Jewish life in arenas outside the home, and, for the most part, in spaces that are not specifically defined as Jewish, such as synagogues and JCCs. Because so many of the events are calibrated to the calendar of Jewish life, they offer a way to celebrate holidays without worship or synagogue. More importantly, however, are the ways in which these events draw upon existing social networks, comport with leisure time patterns, and provide opportunities to experience people and being Jewish in fresh and interesting ways. In point of fact, just as the cultural events operate on different levels, the motivations for participating in them are both multiple and overlapping. They should not be seen as either/or … either they're education (or education-lite), or entertainment, but rather, both/and. They interweave education, entertainment, engagement, and socializing.

Social, recreational life: bars, music, and movies

To understand who these people are as Jews, we also need to understand who they are as people, younger adults and unmarried, educationally upscale New Yorkers. We asked respondents about their leisure habits and learned, not surprisingly, of their interests in bars, music and movies, clearly non-Jewish activities:

> I go to movies and music pretty often. I usually go out to a bar in the neighborhood, or sometimes I'll go hear music or meet up with some friends. It usually centers around some kind of drinking.

But, we were also struck with the effortless merging of Jewish leisure with "regular" leisure, another reflection of the very soft boundaries these people experience between the Jewish world and the larger society:

> I go to bars - like I'll go out to drink or play pool. Not to dance so much. Sliovovitz & Soul was different because even if I don't know everybody, but I'll know someone who knows everybody.

> So, I keep Shabbat so that's a large part of it, and then I might do, I like to go out. I like to dance, and I like to go to bars sometimes and other times I like to do [something] more quiet, and stay home and do nothing sometimes. Or go to a movie, or to a cafe, or a museum.

Leisure time can be Jewish, and Jewish time is almost always leisure time. It is during leisure time, non-working hours, when Jewish life takes place, both for young adults, and their parents. Understanding Jewish engagement as in part a leisure time activity is critical to understanding how best to undertake its teaching, promotion and advocacy.

Interested in culture, especially music

We met these people at Jewish cultural, largely musical, events. Just as we found that they were engaged with their Jewishness, so is it no surprise that they are culturally oriented, with a particular interest in music:

> I like live music. I like blues, funk, you know some of the

> downtown stuff, like the indy rock. I like to dance when I can get out.
>
> I go to a lot of things that are performances that are between music and theater, and it's hard for me to separate them out.

Participants in these cultural events do not just appreciate music in a general sense; they also attest to a special relationship with Jewish music, both as part of their upbringing and currently. They may be avid consumers of Jewish music, or they may simply resonate strongly with music in Jewish contexts:

> Israeli folk music and dance helped shape my perspective. A part of it has to do with how widespread it is across the Jewish community. In terms of singing, you would have the same melodies that are familiar and evoke a common history. In the Avodah programs and retreats, there were songs that were sung that even though they may not have been Jewish (such as gospel, or even Peter Paul and Mary) they fit in with some of the cultural and ethical beliefs that Judaism very much supports. That music resonated with my personal perspective.
>
> In terms of recordings, I try to get pretty much everything I can find. I wish there were more Jewish hip hop or Jewish drum and bass, Jewish reggae, that kind of thing.
>
> At camp I also discovered David Broza. I like Hebrew pop music even though I don't understand the words all the time. Even now, I enjoy Israeli hip hop. I don't really know why. I think I enjoy that I don't know what it means.
>
> I have always associated music with my Jewish experiences. I really like the music of synagogue services and I was in my choir in my Hebrew school. So I associate music with my Judaism on that level.

The power of the "scene": to see Jews who are both familiar and new

Our informants sought social experiences that were "comfortable" but not "constricting." This theme came up over and over again in their comments, usually couched in terms like "vibe," "scene," or "crowd," and a sense of what kinds of places were and were not "theirs." In other words, perhaps more than

the content, it is the people, the scene, and the social dimension that make an experience a Jewish experience, as is evident in the comment, "I mean I went to a Jewish party. To me these are Jewish events. I went to a party that this Jew on the Upper West Side threw and that to me was a Jewish event."

The power and primacy of people, and the attraction of meeting both familiar and unfamiliar Jewish faces at the cultural events, emerge quite clearly in several comments:

> Slivovitz and Soul was a fun scene and it was cool to see people that I knew and to be like, "this is really kinda funny. Kind of like a bar mitzvah party but better."
>
> I don't think I would specifically seek out [Jewish events], I would probably go because people I know are going and I may as well go out of a distinct desire to attend Jewish cultural events. And when they're fun, they're fun, and that's a good thing.
>
> I guess I go to meet new people although its hard in any setting when there's live music... but [despite his words immediately above - SMC & AYK] I do it to tap into the Jewish cultural scene in New York, and to see people I know.
>
> I see connecting to other Jews outside of the space of *davening* as something that is important to me.
>
> There was a variety of people there and there were cool people there, and it was just cool to just see that. Like good -- interesting people... great. It's kind of reassuring, it was fun. Like, okay it was a fun scene like that's what's important. It's great that it happens to be Jewish also.

Taken together, these comments reflect a variety of socially oriented objectives - to see familiar faces ("people I know"), "to meet new people," and to engage in an appealing Jewish experience ("a fun scene," and "connecting to other Jews") that is both familiar and novel simultaneously. In a way, the motivations are not all that unlike those experienced by people attending synagogue, albeit without the element of religiosity and spirituality.

These cultural events provide a place where young adult, largely non-married, Jews gather, congregate, and form community. They may go by the

label, "Jewish cultural events," but their function and the motivations they draw upon are largely social, as these comments demonstrate:

> But the idea of going to an event was interesting, because it was Chanukah and I was interested in being amongst, you know, a large group of Jews celebrating Chanukah and seeing what the scene was like.

The social dimensions and community purposes of synagogues and JCCs are built into and displayed in their very names. The *Beit Knesset* (Hebrew for "house of gathering"), *congregation*, and *Jewish Community Center*, are clearly about Jews getting together, reinforcing and expressing Jewish social ties in a context of Jewish purpose and meaning. For Jewish cultural events, as well, the social dimension is critical, not only from the point of view of the observer, but quite consciously to the participants themselves.

Complementary to synagogue involvement, but not a substitute

Some observers may see Jewish religious and Jewish cultural participation competing for limited "Jewish time" and "Jewish energy." Whatever the merits of such an inference, we frankly found little in our interviews to support such a claim. Most of the informants seemed to understand these Jewish cultural events as augmenting, and in no way replacing, synagogue prayer and other forms of religious involvement. And, for some (most?), the matter is not one of choosing between religious-only or cultural-only alternatives, but of moving between them, as this man makes clear:

> Sometimes I'm feeling religious, sometimes I'm feeling secular. You know, sometimes I'm feeling like I need to listen to music, sometimes I'm feeling like I need to go out and listen to Jewish music. It is not a consistent overwhelming sense of, "this is who I am and who I need to be in the future."

One woman weighed her choices in terms of what kind of experience she was looking for, and found that different places, such as the Hadar minyan, and J-Dub record events, "fill different needs."

> Hadar [a bi-weekly Upper West Side, trans-denominational minyan with a median age of about 30] is a religious and

communal experience. While I've done some social justice stuff with Hadar, that's not its focus. While JDub is more an arts cultural context. And there is overlap in terms of seeing some of the same people.

Similar sentiments emerge in this interchange between interviewer and respondent, who clearly differentiates cultural from religious experiences:

Q. Do you feel like going to stuff like Jewltide or going to stuff like the concert in the park or the panel that you saw at BAM as something to do for the time being, or do you see it as something that's a really great alternative to synagogue life?

A. I don't see them so much as mutually exclusive. I mean, it's different opportunities or experiences one can have, that I can feel. Am I going to a concert the same way I would go to services on a Friday night or Yom Kippur? No. Well actually, maybe there is a similarity there for me, because there is a sense of being a part of the community and wanting to be surrounded by other Jews and feel comfortable in that space. But for me music is its own thing, kind of a personal spiritual outlet in a way. I say spiritual not in a religious way but more in an eternal way of connecting.

Some attendees at these events were genuinely critical of any notion of seeing these cultural involvements as the sum total of Jewish involvement, or even the most important feature of that involvement:

I think it's a good way to get people in, to reach out to other Jews. I just don't think it should be what their Jewish identity *is*. If you can say, it's alright, you are still Jewish if you come to these concerts, then Judaism becomes a bit empty. Then you just have all these Jews who are marrying other Jews who just go to concerts and what are they going to teach their kids - that just if you listen to Jewish music with other Jews than you are Jewish? I just feel like it's not a long term good idea to me. I think it is good as a short term thing, to help them become a part of the community again, but I don't know what the goal is. It might keep them in the door, but then I don't know where it goes from there, I guess.

And some genuinely looked askance at the purported deeper value of

Jewish cultural events, and probably would have no trouble in identifying "real" Jewish activity in more conventional terms:

> These types of Jewish cultural events - it's kind of cute at best, but I don't really find anything that interesting or meaningful about it. It kind of tends to water down both. It waters down the Jewish content and the secular content kind of gets watered down. I don't find that much it really creates something unique or interesting based on a quality of that.

The matter of "Quality" -
How good are the events, and how good must they be?

Whereas the events have to be fun and entertaining, they also need to deliver something more substantive. Participants have little tolerance for events or cultural objects that appear cool or hip, but cannot deliver, with respect to both artistic quality and Jewish content. To some extent, value is judged as the sum of these two dimensions, such that unusual value in one respect can compensate for some limitations in the other.

Successful events and cultural products are, in the words of one, "not only cool for Jews… but … cool for people." The fact that events and cultural products are Jewish, too, is not enough to ensure interest. One Jewish communal professional woman, who works with students at a university in New York City, resented assumptions that accompanied the play *Modern Orthodox*.

> It was slammed [in the press]. I didn't see it, so I can't speak from experience, but I was annoyed that I was solicited on such a fervent basis solely on the fact that I would want to bring students to see this play because it has Jewish content. And that would be the sell. Is it s a good play? Is it good acting? Is it a good script? Is it worth me spending money and students' time going to see this? You can't call the program Shakespeare just because you're putting on Hamlet uptown in a room.

Her comment captured the feelings of many other informants with respect to Jewish culture: Jewishness is necessary for a good Jewish cultural event, but not, in and of itself, sufficient. Jewish cultural productions must also be qualitatively "good." For one informant, Jewish events are almost always of lesser artistic quality than their secular counterparts.

> These Jewish events need Jews more than Jews need them. Because if I go to a Jewish play or something. It's not the caliber. If it was really that good, it would be in the popular culture. There's hardly anything preventing that from taking place. It's not a community with no access or resources to make mainstream events possible. So, I feel like I'm giving something by supporting these Jewish events which always come off as weak and struggling and almost sycophantic in their pursuit of attendees, so I feel like just by showing up, and that's all they want.

He believes that if a Jewish play was "good enough," it would penetrate the mainstream, so that by definition, plays that promote themselves as Jewish are exploiting their ethnicity at the expense of quality. Nevertheless, in delivering a Jewish experience, combining social, cultural, entertainment and educational value, he is willing to accept events whose performance falls a bit short of the standards he uses in other contexts.

For him, as for most, artistic quality in the strict sense does not stand alone as the sole arbiter of decisions to attend or not attend Jewish events. A handful of our informants even said that they did not necessarily like the music, but that they would go to another event. One young man reflected on his experience of Matisyahu concerts.

> I'm not into the types of music he played, but I enjoyed the concert. It was interesting. I'm not into this reggae-style music but I've gone to a number of his concerts.

Still others recalled not enjoying or even remembering the music, but feeling like they would go to another Jewish event if they had the opportunity. Thus, the success or failure of these events cannot be measured by performance quality alone, but by the psychic and social rewards they provide to participants. The events operate on so many levels, of which performances are only one. One woman summed up her reaction to one of the performers in the following way: "He's up there because he's talented. But it's a niche market." Most of our informants come because events are Jewish, but not only because they are Jewish. They make allowance for slightly sub-par artistry, offset by the Jewish value of these events:

> I wouldn't say I thought the music was fantastic, but I thought it

> was really neat. Really interesting. A cool convergence sort of poking fun at classical Jewish culture but in a really fun way. Moving it with something much more current, something a little more urban.

Reacting to the routine: mixed reviews for museums

Across the board, participants were generally disappointed in the quality of one particular cultural institution, the museum. In their comments on museums, respondents gave voice to views that are directly relevant to the potential for museums to serve as vehicles for delivering Jewish cultural experiences to the young adult generation. Their remarks on encountering museums, Jewish or otherwise, also pointed to wider phenomena related to tastes and preferences for Jewish engagement more generally.

In the main, interviewees felt mixed, at best, about attending Jewish museums, and indeed, museums in general. Few seemed to attend any sort of museum, Jewish or otherwise, with any frequency. Those who did, did so on the occasion of friends and family visiting from out of town, and they were generally unimpressed with their experience. For the most part, they were put off by the non-interactive nature of the museum experience. They felt the exhibits failed to speak to them, that they were oriented primarily to the Jewishly uninitiated, uninformed, and unsophisticated, if not non-Jews with little familiarity with Jewish life. Furthermore, the museums seemed to emphasize the received Jewish cultural tradition, rather than the participatory and constructed experience. They present the expected and conventional, rather than the unanticipated and unusual. All these themes emerge in the following illustrative comments:

> I don't really think I enjoyed any Jewish museums. You know, the ones that had a Kiddush cup and then explained what a Kiddush cup is used for. Or like, candlesticks, or like, this is the Jewish life cycle. If there were an exhibit on the Jews of India, that would be fascinating to me, even though I don't have any connection to them. Those [other] museums aren't interesting to me because I guess I know what a Kiddush cup is. Those kinds of museums are good for people that don't know what Judaism is. It's not interesting for me to look at a Kiddush cup from the 1940s and learn what a Kiddush cup is. But if it's on something that I don't know about already, then it's interesting.

The exception, one person with positive reactions to a museum visit, points to some helpful possibilities for Jewish museums, underscoring how the unusual can be intriguing:

> As a Jew who knew a lot about the Holocaust, it was striking to see at the end of the exhibit the focus on the genocide in Bosnia and Croatia. Seeing these two things juxtaposed struck me, both on a personal way (in terms of what the needs are that have to be addressed), and as an activist.

The enthusiasm in these preceding comments reflects several themes: the universalizing of a Jewish experience (the Holocaust) with implications for others; the presentation of the atypical; and the ability to touch the observer in a very personal fashion. Nonetheless, when it comes to attracting young adults, museums pale in comparison to the cultural events we discuss in this paper.

V. Crossing Boundaries: Seeking Diversity in Spaces, People and Cultures

In large measure, the distinguishing features of these events, and the distinguishing features of the participants' motivations for attending them, may be subsumed under the rubric of "crossing boundaries." The events offer Jewish young adults a way of experiencing their Jewishness, countering the social claustrophobia and cultural parochialism they see as endemic to Jewish life as they generally know it. The events cross boundaries on several planes: spatial, inter-group (Jew vs. non-Jew), intra-group (Jew vs. Jew), and cultural. All are key elements in their attraction to the engaged, but not (yet?) affiliated young Jewish adults in the New York area.

Jewish events in public spaces: avoiding Jewish turf

Where the events are held is a significant element in the meaning and motivation associated with these Jewish cultural events. Most of our informants heard about these events from friends. Many of their friends are a step or two removed from someone involved in the organization of the event. Almost all of our informants are on email lists; a few said they heard about the event through email by way of lists that our informants had signed up for. Not a single informant said they came because they had seen a flyer, a poster, or received a postcard in the mail. When looking for leisure time activities, these readers view magazines like *Time Out* and newspapers like the *Village*

Voice as more authoritative and reliable than any Jewish publication like the *Forward* or the *Jewish Week*. A young Jewish professional came because she had a friend visiting from out of town and wanted to show her New York's Jewish culture. A young man we interviewed came at the request of a Polish friend of his who participated regularly in New York's Polish cultural scene, and saw an advertisement for Slivovitz and Soul. Still others came because they heard about the performers or the organizations, and wanted to "check them out," not always sure that the experience would be worth their time or money.

Two factors mitigate the risk of "checking out" a Jewish event: the power of word of mouth (as mentioned above), and the power of the venue. Almost all of our informants said that they had previously been to other, non-Jewish, events at these same venues. The non-Jewish character of these venues increased the likelihood that participants would come for reasons other than to experience a Jewish event:

> Sometimes I would go to Tribeca to the Knitting Factory or to Tonic. What I like about it is that is a Jewish music scene, it's a cultural scene that I could be likely to meet a lot of Jewish people but it wasn't "Jewish is why I'm here." Speaking frankly, the 'geek factor' is a lot higher when 'being Jewish is why I'm here' at this cultural event as opposed to, 'I'm at this cultural event and it happens to have a Jewish attraction to it.' Take the Klezmatics, I'd much rather watch them at the Knitting Factory than at the JCC.

> A young woman described her preferences in the following way:

> It's at a music venue that I would go to otherwise, where I've been to several times for other concerts… the people who are coordinating it are people that I know I share a lot of taste in music so I figured it would be a fun event… regardless of who is in the room.

The intersection of "crowd," venue and word-of-mouth helps to stir and sustain interest in Jewish cultural events, lending them credibility and a certain cache. For one informant, and presumably for others as well, venues and their websites are a key source of information about these events. They

take place in a trusted venue benefiting from the association with a place that is fashionable and attractive precisely because it is not specifically Jewish turf, as this comment amply demonstrates:

> Like the venues that I like that aren't necessarily Jewish oriented. You know like I just moved a block away from Galapagos [a bar/performance space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn] - I've always liked Galapagos and I check their stuff a lot. And Satallah [a middle-eastern/Jazz venue in Midtown Manhattan] - I go there a lot. I'll look at Fez [a bar/performance space in Greenwich Village]. And actually now that I know that after I got the mail from SoCalled, I went to the Sipper Room site.

One reason these events are appealing is that they are contingently Jewish rather than necessarily so. Their being Jewish depends upon context and circumstances, and is not an automatic given. In other words, they are attractive in part because they may become Jewish - or not. The "Jewish" aspect may not even factor into conscious consideration when these respondents decide where to spend an evening.

Jews have long sought acceptance in the larger society as evidence of their validation. In like manner, the enactment of Jewish cultural events in public spaces that are not specifically Jewish in sponsorship, implicitly testifies both to the quality of the events themselves, and to the larger issue of successful Jewish integration into the mainstream. It follows that these young adults find synagogues, JCCs and other "Jewish turf" a drawback, even with respect to identical programs taking place in "non-Jewish turf." Indeed, it is often the refusal to mark something as Jewish that is the source of its "Jewish" appeal. As one reported, "For example, if it was… some sort of thing at a synagogue I might not be inclined to go. Even if it was some sort of like band in a synagogue or a certain kind of crowd that might be there, I hang out with more of a crowd that has an alternative lifestyle." The following echoes these comments:

> I think a Jewish event at a synagogue would turn people away because it's just like anything at a church. Once you have a synagogue, it's not about culture, but it's about religion. Whereas if it's at a club or a bar, it puts it in a casual context - it's something people are more familiar with.

The aversion to Jewish space even extends to Makor: the Upper West Side multi-purpose facility built to appeal to Jewish young adults, now connected with the 92nd Street Y:

> I would go to Makor on my own more. I wish that I had more people in my social world that I would do things like that with. I'd have to sell it. If I was going to go with a friend, they wouldn't know what Makor is and they'd be like, "why would I want to go up there? And who are we seeing?" I don't think that people even know what it is. People know the Slipper Room. "Oh, we had drinks there…." If I said, "my friend is DJ-ing at the Slipper Room and its five bucks, do you want to go?" And they'd go. If there was a good performer at Makor, it would totally depend on the performer.

Or as one woman with whom we spoke remarked, "I've never gone to anything at Makor or JCC. When I get a calendar I just chuck it aside." Their comfort with venues that are not specifically Jewish can be seen in the following remarks, in which by their mere presence as Jews, they could turn a non-Jewish space into a Jewish one by adding a Jewish component to it:

> And if it's not Jewish, you can get together a bunch of Jews and make it Jewish. I did the hora at a Latin dance club. It was fun, we danced, we had a good time, we enjoyed ourselves, but I didn't feel this surge of empowerment or this sense of pride in my culture and my people and in my heritage [like when] I went to one where Pharaoh's Daughter was playing or I went to one where Matisyahu was playing, or I went to one where an Israeli rapper was playing.

Undoubtedly, for this woman's parents, acting so blatantly Jewish in a public space that was specifically non-Jewish (a Latin dance club) bordered on the inconceivable. Having done so, it would be hard to imagine that they could then declare that they could take the space and "make it Jewish." Her actions reflects a recognition of boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, but also a comfort and ease with which she and her friends can transcend them and turn the non-Jewish into the Jewish, if only for a defined period. In fact, they may take pleasure in the very act of transcending boundaries, and displaying their Jewishness to the other. In contrast, the ethnically or religiously bounded

precincts of the synagogue and JCC offer no opportunity to express one's Jewishness in the company of non-Jews in non-Jewish space.

Non-Jews at Jewish events

Historically, Jews felt more comfortable expressing their overt Jewishness in exclusively Jewish social settings. The presence of non-Jews ignited their feelings of minority status, causing some to downplay their ethnic distinctiveness, even if only temporarily. In the 1950's, a good number of Jewish respondents in Marshall Sklare's classic study of suburban "Lakeville" agreed that not speaking Yiddish in public was "essential" or "desirable" to being a "good Jew." In contrast, these younger Jews in 2005 find that their Jewishness actually emerges in the company of non-Jews, and they seek out integrated environments in order to express their Jewishness. Participating in multi-ethnic social and cultural networks actually strengthens their Jewish connection rather than weakening it:

> There aren't a lot of events where I think Jewish culture really puts itself out in a generalized way where it's exposed to people who aren't Jewish. I think a lot of the Jewish community is very insular, and there's not a lot of exposure outside of it. So something where they take a light-hearted approach to it, but still there's an exposure level, I just think that's a good thing.

> It's not that there's a tendency to be insular, but there's not a lot of exposure to people who aren't Jewish. Even in a place like New York, there isn't a lot to the idea of Jewish culture to most people - they don't really know what that's about. There's no familiarity - because nothing really comes out in a general way for people who aren't Jewish.

We were particularly struck by this rare occurrence in which a non-Jewish friend (ironically, of Polish ancestry) convinced our Jewish respondent to attend a Jewish cultural event. The inter-weaving of the Jewish with the non-Jewish in social, cultural, and other ways is so clearly demonstrated:

> I ended up at this event through a work friend who is Polish, and he has frequented a place called Mehnada, which is a Slavic sort-of cultural bar/restaurant thing. They run parties on the weekend, they have a mix of cultural music and dancing and stuff. He's the

> one that's clued into the event where we met. He brought it up and said, "It's this Jewish rap kind of dance thing." And I said, "I have no clue what that's about, but it's gotta be interesting, so I'll definitely show up." So that's how I ended up there.

The extent to which attendees are seeking to cross Jewish/non-Jewish boundaries, both socially and culturally, can be seen in their occasional critique of events that are "too Jewish." One woman recalled an unpleasant experience at a Jewish poetry night.

> It was Jewish. It was like I mean it was like ... *chaval* [Hebrew for: alack, alas]. It was *nebbech* [Yiddish for pitiful, pathetic]. I don't know. It wasn't my thing. It was pretty pathetic a lot of it. Like this one person being like, the chorus of her poetry was like 'when I see you I want to uncover my elbows.' I was like, 'Oh God, go back to Stern [College for Women, part of Yeshiva University].'

She was not necessarily objecting to the Jewish qualities of the event; in a follow up question she affirmed that she wanted to attend another event hosted by the same organization. Rather, she objected to the parochial nature of the performances. For her (and others we interviewed), this event was too narrowly focused on Jews and Jewish themes, and were pitched too narrowly at Jewish audiences.

The very ability of these events to effect a crossing of social and cultural boundaries, to bring the Jewish into the mainstream, and the larger society into the definably Jewish, provides a sense of affirmation and validation for people's sense of being Jewish.

> Yeah, it does give me a sense of pride (that Jewish humor is mainstream).

> I think that when I do see a TV show or a movie that is very mainstream pop culture and features a Jewish person, I feel a little sense of pride and a sense that Jews are in the forefront of pop culture, even if it is not that authentic and even if it's a little stereotypical. As long as it's a positive portrayal of Jews. I grew up with a lot of Jewish people and a strong connection to Jewish family, and when I went to school in the South, I met people that didn't know any Jews or anything about them. And so, that kind

> of thing I think is important, just a little tidbits in mainstream society, even when it's very low levels and even when it's a token Jewish character, I still feel excited.

For these participants' parents and grandparents, stories of how individual Jews had "made it" in the larger society, or contributed as athletes, war heroes, or scientists, validated their presence in the larger world. For these young adult Jews, living in an age when Jewish individual achievements are more commonplace, the entry of Jewish culture into the cultural mainstream may connote many of the same validating effects.

Crossing Jewish boundaries: diversity in the Jewish crowd

The appeal of Jewish cultural events, though, extends beyond meeting other familiar people alone, to those who are novel, varied, and different. Just as the events offer the chance for Jews to take their Jewishness public in the company of non-Jews, they also offer the opportunity to meet other kinds of Jews, a heterogeneous mixture who are different from those Jews these young adults usually encounter.

These participants value diversity, and they want to see diversity enacted in their Jewish and non-Jewish settings. They find the lack of intra-Jewish diversity found in many Jewish institutions to be distinctly unappealing. (Synagogues, for example, are bound by neighborhood, religious ideology, social class, and political world view). The Jewish social homogeneity in such institutions signifies closed-mindedness. In contrast, they seek out environments that are open, socially and culturally, and that cater to diverse audiences embodying diversity along several dimensions. In this way, Jewish cultural events both exhibit and create a diverse form of Jewishness that their participants cannot find elsewhere.

Diversity, alternatives, and creativity - all prized - are seen as complementary, going hand in hand. Uniformity, the mainstream, and the routine are, by inference, frequent characterizations of the established, conventional Jewish "scenes" they prefer to avoid. They seek out other like-minded people who also value diversity, and are actively engaged in looking for Jewish environments that share their beliefs and values. From experience, they sense that most Jewish institutions, at least the ones with which they are familiar, cannot deliver on this, so they seek it elsewhere or create it on their own.

> I think it [a certain cultural event] draws a slightly more alternative crowd, something that's maybe not steeped in Upper West Side Jewish culture. I realize I'm stereotyping completely. There is something about wanting to be with other Jews, but, I guess I'm interested in pieces of the community that are a little bit more open.
>
> What's pretty cool is that you could go to a Jewish event and not feel like it was all the people you went to elementary school with. And Jewish kitsch is more genuine, especially more interesting and creative than it is in Vancouver. Also, all the not-Jewish people in New York are into Jewish stuff more than not-Jewish people in Vancouver, so you have a wider appeal and the chance to be creative in that way.

The intertwining of several attractive features of these sorts of cultural events occurred throughout our interviews. The following comment refers to social heterogeneity, openness, non-conformity, and inclusivity, all set in contrast with a portrait of synagogues as, among other things, a place to hear "some blaring ignorant speech."

> When there are generally heterogeneous communities of people who are allowed to interact freely, that's where dialogues and relationships can form and happen. Synagogues don't because whenever you walk into synagogue on the high holidays or any other time you have to hear some blaring ignorant speech about Israel - that's alienating. To the extent that these communities don't insist on that environment, and create a more open environment, that's positive and welcoming.

In the following remarks, consistent with the notion that Jewish social diversity is attractive, the presence of an Hasidic Jew in a "cool … urban" setting made the event more colorful, interesting, and appealing:

> I wouldn't say I thought the music was fantastic, but I thought it was really neat, really interesting. A cool convergence sort of poking fun at classical Jewish culture but in a really fun way. Moving it with something much more current, something a little more urban. Something that would definitely appeal to a younger crowd. And I found the crowd really interesting. I saw Hasidics there. I've never been to any event in New York. Club,

> anything, and I've never seen anyone who is Hasidic in attendance. So that's really interesting because it spanned a big cultural gap that you really don't often see.

Cultural hybridity: engaging Jewish and contemporary American aesthetics

The Jewish cultural events we observed offer a light, creative approach to being Jewish that is more committed to crossing boundaries than to maintaining them. According to one informant,

> Going for this Yiddish, jazzy stuff, mind you it's not a traditional klezmer band and it mixes a lot of contemporary and progressive music in its music and it's not solely old school. And when I've seen them it's been in a location that because of its context of a hip scene as opposed to a Jewish neighborhood, has made it a fun and exciting and palatable experience for me to move a little closer to Jewish heritage and culture.

Another interviewee recalled having seen klezmer musician Andy Statman play a recent concert where a musical mixture of identifiably Jewish and non-Jewish elements was the most attractive aspect of the performance. "You know he does klezmer and bluegrass and they mix it up." The following informant praises the film on Orthodox gay people "Trembling Before G-d," not so much for its advocacy stance, as for its creativity, its "dialectic":

> And more recently a film that sticks out in my mind is "Trembling Before G-d." I like it because it offers dialectic, a different perspective, gay people trying to deal with the fact of their sexuality within the tradition.

The young adults we interviewed value the smooth melding of Jewish and non-Jewish cultures. The very ability of Jewish cultural expression to successfully take on a specifically non-Jewish aesthetic signifies the ability of Jewishness to overcome parochial, minority status, and validates the desire of these Jews to be publicly Jewish, and Jewish amidst a non-Jewish public:

> It was funny, I like the idea about bridging reggae and Judaism and the fact that Jewish culture and reggae culture don't have to be separate. … I think they liked the comedy of it all, but also

the synthesis of two seemingly disparate worlds, and something that is novel.

I don't know that my friends found any deep Jewish cultural connection, as much as it's just another interesting cultural event. And for New York, you gotta appreciate the eclecticness of the whole thing. If you're living in New York and you're not taking advantage of the eclectic stuff that it offers, it's like you're missing a big point.

Of course, closely related is the desire for the "cool," and the "creative," terms that stand in sharp contrast with the expected, the routine, the bland, and the culturally parochial. The Jewish cultural events we observed combined both crowd and content that the participants viewed as striking alternatives to the familiar and standard Jewish possibilities.

I have a frustration with the fact that so many Jews are not cool. Like the crowd is not what I'm interested in being involved in. It's very bland. It was Hebrew songs and the same old for me. I lived in Jerusalem for years, and it just doesn't do anything for me. Like I got up there and I was like, "Okay guys, we need to wake up. We need to bring a little more gospel into our lives. We need to awaken our souls." I feel there's a real blandness in a lot of Jewish scenes. It goes from the culture through the shuls. At the same time I can't generalize, because I feel like there's the BJ Upper West Side and there's Hadar.

Well, I like Jewish events that are more like alternative Jewish events. Like something chilled out like the Pharaoh's Daughter concert. I'm not a very straight person. I don't fit into the mainstream society - I like alternative things. Like something more mainstream, then I might not be inclined to go. For example, if it was like some sort of thing at a synagogue I might not be inclined to go. Even if it was some sort of band in a synagogue, or a certain kind of crowd that might be there. I hang out with more of a crowd that has an alternative lifestyle. If it's too straight, I would feel uncomfortable.

Dafka I'm not looking for substance. I want creativity. I want to see Jews being creative and interesting and eclectic. What I liked about the JDub thing is that there was a variety of people there and there were cool people there. Like good -- interesting

people. It was a fun scene. It's great that it happens to be Jewish also, that there's also Yiddish music - free styling about Yiddish stuff. It hits a different chord than what I'm used to. And it was also really cool, great music. It was not only cool for Jews -- which is what the Mimaamakim thing was -- but it was cool for people. That's what I think Jewish culture should be. My mission statement!

In sum, Jewish cultural events deliver several sought-after experiences, generally seen as unavailable in more established Jewish venues:

- They reinforce ties with friends and acquaintances, strengthening social networks, particularly among young adult Jews who are engaged with being Jewish, but institutionally unaffiliated.
- They situate Jewish expression in contexts that are mainstream, serving to lend validity, legitimacy, and credibility to Jewish life.
- They allow young adult Jews to express their Jewishness in ethnically mixed settings, addressing their interest in affirming their Jewish identity in the presence and company of non-Jews.
- They bring their participants into contact with Jewish crowds and "scenes," that are appreciated for their style, demographics, and diversity.
- Perhaps most significantly, they often feature cultural hybridity, tastefully blending identifiably Jewish cultural elements with contemporary aesthetics.

Conclusions

The young adults who attend the sorts of Jewish cultural events we observed are notable for their relatively strong Jewish upbringings. Their biographies are sprinkled with references to home observance, traditional experiences, day schools, religious movement camps, synagogue youth groups, Israel, Jewish campus life, and a host of other parallel experiences. Few reported intermarried parents (in contrast with nearly half the American Jewish young adults their age.) With respect to the extent and intensivity of their Jewish educational and socialization experiences, they certainly range over a spectrum, albeit a spectrum that is situated in the more Jewishly educated end of the national distribution. Certainly, for non-Orthodox Jews (and hardly any we met were currently Orthodox), they have had far more contact with Jewish educational institutions and programs than have most others their age.

They currently evince serious interest in things Jewish with varying attachments to synagogue services, holiday celebrations, Jewish friends, Israel (albeit with ambivalence), and Jewish culture, particularly Jewish music. Their relationships with being Jewish have been changing, characterized not only by rises and falls, but by shifts in understandings and emphases. The extent and rapidity of their "Jewish journeys" are provoked, in part, by the transitional stage of life that many are now experiencing, as largely unmarried, upscale, and unsettled Jewish professionals.

Many draw upon their significant Jewish educational backgrounds and a firm sense of their Jewish selves to engage in searching and exploration. As one informant said, "It's a continual process of finding out what I want and what my niche is. I'm satisfied with the options. The question is whether or not I choose to take advantage of them." Some are looking actively for ways to express their Jewish selves, and are finding them in self-organized efforts and cultural events that place a high value on cultural hybridity, and no value at all on standard Jewish ideologies.

Hardly any have any institutional affiliation, and they abjure denominational labels. Percolating throughout our interviews was a variety of critical images of the conventional Jewish community, one that they regard as belonging to their parents, but not to themselves. The less flattering images included: bland, parochial, ethnocentric, politically conservative, conformist, judgmental, and laden with an "agenda" of one sort or another. For some, their

progressive political identities and their discomfort with aspects of Israeli policies serve as an additional obstacle to their involvement in conventional Jewish communal life.

They spend their leisure time in bars, performance spaces, and cultural venues, listening to music, and socializing with friends and acquaintances. They range from mildly attuned to firmly progressive in their political identities, and they value cultural consumption and participation, particularly music. They are exploring, sampling and assembling their shifting Jewish identities. They seek opportunities to express their Jewishness that go beyond the available institutions of Jewish life. They tend to see Jewish cultural events as a way of augmenting their conventional Jewish involvements, and as a way of addressing and redressing the shortcomings they see in those available, more established and conventional options.

Cultural events of the type we observed provide young adults with several benefits, not least of which is the chance to spend time with friends, to see familiar faces, and to meet and make new friends. Intertwined with this social experience is the chance to "do Jewish" with "cool" people in attractive venues.

Our informants have grown up in environments that value diversity and boundary crossing. Accordingly, they seek several sorts of diversity in their Jewish cultural environment. Among the boundaries they seek to cross are those dividing Jews from non-Jews, and Jews of different denominations. They appreciate the effortless merger of the Jewishly identifiable with aesthetics from other groups and cultures. Jewish cultural events provide a way for them to form social bonds and share in a Jewish experience that feels comfortable. These events reflect their audiences' way of being Jewish that downplays both social and cultural boundaries, between Jews and non-Jews, and between Jews of different denominations and ideological camps. Participants value the chance to expose themselves and their Jewish values to other cultures and other people (non-Jews). The very strength of their Jewish identities cultivated their sense that they did not need to participate in solely Jewish activities, or Jewish activities that are totally Jewish either in crowd or in content.

Whether they take their cues from economic trends toward globalization or from the musical style of "sampling" other songs, they are seeking Jewish lives that parallel these trends, and put Jewishness in

conversation with other cultures, and Jewish individuals in conversation with other people. In fact, in some instances, their Jewishness actually emerged in the interaction with the other. They do not feel that they need to be told what is and what is not Jewish; for them the distinctions simply do not matter that much. Rather, they are looking for avenues and opportunities to express their Jewishness in ways that are inclusive and not exclusive, creative and not routine, exciting and not bland.

In part, their efforts reflect their life cycle stage, and are destined to adjust, probably toward more conventional options, when (if?) they marry and have children. But, to a certain extent, their ways of being Jewish are the harbingers of change in Jewish communal life. The tastes, preferences, commitments, and elements of style these young adults display today will inevitably come to influence the Jewish community in the future, if not, already in the current moment. In our view, most prominent among these is the boundary-crossing phenomenon we have identified. It is one expressed in terms of people (Jews and non-Jews, as well as Jews of different backgrounds and commitments), and in terms of culture. They find the maintenance of hard boundaries in these areas as alternately uninteresting, uncomfortable, and even unjustified. How the organized Jewish community contends with these unfavorable feelings toward boundary maintenance will constitute one of the major challenges to Jewish life in the early twenty-first century. Cultural events offer a valuable opportunity to "do Jewish" in ways that transcend boundaries of space, people, and culture. But, as even these participants understand, cultural events constitute only a piece of what it means to be Jewish in New York, and in America today.

Section 4

Policy Implications: Jewish Cultural Events in New York and the Identities of Young Adult Jews

What do these results mean for those responsible for shaping Jewish communal policy or, more broadly, for shaping the future of Jewish life in New York? What lessons do they hold for philanthropic leaders, rabbis, educators, and communal practitioners, as well as to those directly involved in fashioning New York's Jewish cultural enterprise?

Our initial mandate was broad: to consider the relationship between Jewish culture and identity, particularly among younger adult Jews who are "unaffiliated" with organized Jewish life. The focus on the unaffiliated is understandable, as those with no ties to Jewish institutions are at the heart of communal leaders' concerns for "Jewish continuity." For many, those least engaged in Jewish life should be the prime audience for Jewish cultural events benefiting from philanthropic largesse. To many donors, advocates, and supporters, these events are but one of several policy endeavors to "reach out" to unaffiliated young adult Jews and engage them in organized Jewish life.

Accordingly, from the beginning of our inquiry we, as investigators, were asking ourselves the question that many Jewish communal policy-makers ask: What is the rationale, if any, for Jewish philanthropic support of Jewish cultural events oriented to young adult Jews in New York? What is the value of such events in terms of enhancing Jewish identities and enriching Jewish communities?

We entered this project with freshness, openness, and even a degree of skepticism. We had little idea of what we would find, and little basis for believing that we would uncover persuasive evidence pointing to one conclusion or another. In time, based upon both the direct evidence, as well as our informed reasoning, we arrived at several inferences. In our view, these constitute a compelling rationale for support of Jewish cultural events in New York, and, indeed, other metropolitan areas with large concentrations of young adult Jews.

Unaffiliated, but engaged

We begin with some thoughts on **who attends Jewish cultural events**

in New York, or, strictly speaking, the sort of events that we observed. From the analysis of the 2000/01 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) we learned that consumption of the most popular Jewish cultural opportunities (movies, music, books) relates to level of Jewish engagement. The more engaged (more observant, more affiliated), or those with the characteristics of the more engaged (in terms of region, Jewish density, family status, etc.) more widely participate in Jewish cultural activities. At the same time, the less engaged (relative to the more engaged) participate far less often in conventional Jewish activities (observance, worship, organized life, etc.), but only somewhat less often in Jewish cultural activities. Thus, for the most marginally engaged Jews, Jewish cultural opportunities figure more prominently in comprising their "basket" of Jewish activities. By inference, the genuinely unaffiliated, though unreached or possibly unreachable by way of Jewish institutions, are both reached and reachable by way of Jewish culture.

If the patterns of Jewish engagement are somewhat complex with respect to movies, music and books, they are equally complex with respect to the types of Jewish cultural events in New York that we studied. Consistent with the aspirations of many who see Jewish culture as a way of "reaching the unaffiliated," the participants at these events are indeed largely **unaffiliated Jewish young adults**. The vast majority choose not to affiliate with Jewish institutions; few pay membership dues to synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations. In this respect, those who go to events resemble the vast majority of other Jews their age who are non-Orthodox, non-married and non-parents. Post-college Jews who have not become parents have little reason to join and support conventional Jewish institutions. The actual and prospective mobility in so many aspects of their lives - in terms of jobs, friends, apartments, and more - mitigates against institutional affiliation, Jewish or otherwise. Their lack of formal ties comports with the behavior of young adult Americans generally, as well as with reported declines in all sorts of formal affiliations, as more and more Americans are "bowling alone."

These participants are unaffiliated; but they are not Jewishly apathetic - not in the least. Their lack of formal affiliation, then, does not automatically imply lack of Jewish engagement in other ways. In fact, the subset of young adult Jews who now comprise the bulk of participants in Jewish cultural events are quite distinctive in terms of their **moderate-to-high levels of Jewish engagement**. Their experiences with day schools, Jewish summer camps and

Israel experiences reflect their above-average levels of Jewish education and socialization in their past, and they help shape their Jewish interest and activity at present. Moreover, notwithstanding their moderate to strong Jewish backgrounds, in the vast majority of cases, they have been conducting their Jewish lives outside of Orthodoxy, both now and in their past.

Those attending these events demonstrate not only Jewish engagement, but cultural engagement as well. Many display a considerable interest in, and a sophisticated sense of, cultural life in general and in music in particular. The power of music for this group, while obvious upon reflection, is, in our view, generally under-appreciated. At the same time, we note the extent to which music has been playing a central role in driving change and diversity in Reform congregations in America, as well as in the ethos of Jewish camps and youth groups for many years. The power and educational measure of music, Jewish and otherwise, in the consciousness of American Jews has yet to be thoroughly appreciated, explored, or understood.

From the perspective of Jewish communal policy makers, then, there's "good news" and "bad news" in our investigation. The good news is that Jewish cultural events are generally appealing, and that the mass-market Jewish cultural opportunities (movies, music, books, and presumably other modalities) are relatively valuable ways for the less engaged to connect with Jews and being Jewish. Of course, we cannot be certain that these forms of Jewish culture have a significant impact on these less engaged Jews, an impact different from their religiously-unrelated impact on non-Jews. Nonetheless, we think it reasonable to assume that the interaction with material rich in Jewish symbolism serves to reinforce the presence, awareness, and power of those symbols in the hearts and minds of the readers, viewers, or audience.

The bad news is that the so-called truly unaffiliated (those thoroughly unengaged with their Jewish identities) are not those in attendance at the events in New York we observed, events that clearly exercise a specialized appeal. On the other hand, the composition of the audience constitutes a piece of good news in that it testifies to the long-term positive effects of day schools, camps, and Israel experiences in youth and adolescence. The very presence of the former participants in these and other educational experiences is testimony to the effectiveness of these experiences and constitutes another piece of "good news" for the organized Jewish community. Perhaps paradoxically, the very strength of the Jewish educational system produces the Jewishly engaged

market that supports and populates Jewish cultural events in New York, but also provides a set of vulnerabilities, potentialities, and opportunities that have not heretofore been duly appreciated.

Stronger social networks: Jewish friendships, marriages and more

The types of New York young adult Jews who attend Jewish cultural events present both "vulnerabilities and opportunities," or what may be regarded as downside risks and upside potential. The vulnerable side emerges despite their levels of current Jewish engagement, their highly Jewish social networks, and the sheer fact of their residence in New York with its outstanding levels of Jewish demographic and institutional concentration. Notwithstanding all these Jewish assets, if previous behavior of their recently married counterparts is any guide to their future, a significant **portion of these Jews will marry non-Jews**. As we learned in our conversations, many of them have dated and will date non-Jews. Many display ambivalent feelings about endogamy (in-marriage) - a shorthand for saying that not all are firmly committed to finding and marrying a Jewish spouse. In short, strong Jewish socialization (parental observance, day schools, Israel travel, camps, youth groups, etc.) changes the odds of marrying a Jew, but it does not eliminate the possibility of intermarriage. As Jewishly engaged as they may be, we can't take them for granted. Their Jewish lives are in process, or on what have been termed "Jewish journeys."

We are fully aware that not all policymakers and other readers abide deep concerns about the likely impact of intermarriage. But, with all the diversity of views, controversy and uncertainty associated with intermarriage, on one point the research is unambiguous: intermarriage both grows out of diminished involvement in Jewish life and it independently diminishes involvement in Jewish life. In social scientific surveys, most intermarried respondents - be they in the recently conducted New York Jewish Population Study or the National Jewish Population Study of 2000/01 - report they are raising their children as non-Jews. Of the Jewish-raised children of mixed marriages (who constitute no more than a third of the children in such marriage), most themselves marry non-Jews, as do almost all who were not raised as Jews. Nationally, only about 12% of the grandchildren of mixed married Jews are raised as Jews. By inference, when some portion of young single adults today marry non-Jews, they are likely to maintain relatively few

ties with conventional Jewish life for the rest of their lives. Jewish engagement alone is no guarantee of subsequent marriage to a Jew specifically, or, by extension, involvement in Jewish life in the future.

Against this background, we can appreciate one consequence of these New York-based Jewish cultural events. If they do nothing else, Jewish cultural events in New York strengthen social networks among younger, largely more engaged Jews. By virtue of these events, the participants come in contact with one another, reinforcing friendships and renewing acquaintances, thereby giving them a sense of location within a local Jewish social life.

The link between friendship networks and these events is clearly evident both in the word-of-mouth advertising that brings most of these people to the events, as well as in the socializing that is readily observable at the events themselves. The research literature points to the strength of "weak ties" for achieving certain ends, such as those ties that are formed by attendance at a series of cultural events. We believe that finding marriage partners is one objective facilitated by multitudinous weak ties. Social networks provide all manner of benefits, not least of which are sources of job referrals, friends, and, of course, people for dating and eventual marriage. Attendance at these events reinforces social networks in unexpected ways as well. We heard reports of people getting locked out of over-subscribed events meeting people standing in line and going out to socialize afterwards.

At the same time as the events certainly link Jews to one another, they provide a distinctive opportunity to strengthen Jewish networks and display one's Jewish identity. Unlike most other Jewish experiences young adults have had, these events offer unequivocally Jewish experiences that are **not limited to Jews**, and within which, Jewishness can be "shown off" to non-Jewish friends, partners, etc. For their parents' generation (and generations preceding them), the company of non-Jews occasioned the muting of Jewish distinctiveness. In contrast, for this generation, the presence of non-Jews can be an occasion to exhibit their Jewishness.

In addition, the young people in attendance at these cultural events, for all the reasons mentioned above, have the Jewish educational and experiential background to serve as leaders of institutions -- active congregants, committee members, social organizers, etc. The cultural events strengthen their Jewish social capital -- their connections to each other and their connections to things obviously and patently Jewish. All of that should stimulate their emergence as

Jewish leaders in the many senses of the term.

On another level, these events present genuine alternatives to places like the synagogue and the JCC. They provide avenues for **access to Jewish engagement** of some sort for a segment of a population that does not (yet?) find it in synagogues. Affiliation with formal institutions is heavily related to family life cycle, and, in any event, a good number of these young people will find their way in due course to synagogues, JCCs and other such entities. Given the identity patterns we explicated, they may then persist as passive, unhappy, sullen and unenthusiastic members of these entities. Alternatively, if synagogues and JCCs adjust to new patterns, as many have and others will, their members will be happier, more invested, and more enthusiastic. In any case, it stands to reason that ongoing connection to Jewish networks and Jewish activities, such as provided by Jewish cultural events, can not only raise the levels of eventual affiliation, but it also figures to hasten the time when they re-connect with organized Jewry.

In short, we think it reasonable to assume that these Jewish cultural events serve both to **diminish intermarriage** and to **foster eventual leadership engagement** in Jewish life. Both outcomes are likely consequences of stronger Jewish social networks that are created, expanded, and reinforced by bringing large numbers of Jews together in contexts that they see as related to their being Jewish and beyond the grasp of anything they might perceive as belonging to their "parents' Jewishness." Jewish cultural events are such contexts.

Consequences for individuals beyond the participants

Beyond their impact upon the participants themselves, the very existence of these cultural events serves to send some very positive messages about being Jewish even to those who never actually attend them. We noted, for example, that numerous interviewees expressed opinions (generally positive) about *Heeb* magazine, even though few actually seemed to thoroughly read the publication regularly. By extension, we believe that taken in the aggregate, **the cultural events are providing Jewish "advertising,"** broadcasting messages about Jewish possibilities that help make Jewish engagement somewhat more attractive to unknown number of young adult Jews. The events contribute to an active cultural vocabulary. Phenomena like Matisyahu and J-Dub records are the subject of conversation, as is *Heeb* and

other well-known symbols of what may be a Jewish cultural resurgence in New York and North America.

As noted, participants harbor several unattractive images of Jewish engagement opportunities presented by conventional organized Jewry. Among the complaints were that Jewish life is too "claustrophobic," bland, conservative, judgmental, coercive, and demanding. In contrast, the Jewish cultural events suggest that a style of Jewish involvement more appealing to Jewish young adults, if not generationally distinctive, is not only possible but actually taking place. It is one marked by porous boundaries, hybrid culture, open engagement, voluntarism, autonomy, and inclusiveness. These shifts, of course, are not peculiar to Jews alone, but are part of trends and tendencies in the larger society.

Of course, our claims for the "Jewish advertising" impact rest upon speculative reasoning and no more, and constitute our biggest inferential leap. Yet we think the claim is reasonable, albeit difficult to substantiate. As is said about advertising in general, we know that it is effective, we just don't know how it is effective - and in which way, and for whom.

Consequences for Organized Jewry: Laboratories of Change

With all this said about the significance of these events for the individuals who participate in them, their impact and benefit is not limited to the individual level alone, be it for those who are in attendance, or those who hear about them. We suspect that, taken in the aggregate, these events may well come to perform an important function for synagogues, JCCs, other Jewish organizations, and the philanthropic system. The events, their organizers, and their participants dramatically and vividly represent emerging currents and tendencies in Jewish identities among younger adult American Jews. They provide **a living laboratory** of the tastes, preferences, and inclinations of these Jews, all of which should inform and at times influence the style, aesthetics, and behavior of established Jewish institutions. As laboratories of change, they have the potential for spillover effects, helping synagogues and other institutions adjust more rapidly and completely to changing cultural currents of the next generation. As such, they may function as the organized Jewish community's R&D department, as we have found in previous generations' experiments and innovations.

That being said, conventional institutions should be careful about trying to copy or import the characteristics of these events wholesale for their

own use. Along with being Jewishly engaged, our respondents are quite culturally savvy, and they can spot something that smells manufactured a mile away. They value authenticity and transparency, and would regard the appropriation of their generationally distinctive culture by non-members as contrived and manipulative.

As noted, among the key lessons we could tease out from our observations were:

- the educational and community-building value of culture
- the centrality of people (rather than ideology)
- the appeal of informality
- the penchant for fluid involvement and episodic engagement
- the expression of a Jewishness that is contingent and whose boundaries, content, and definition are indeterminate
- the opportunity to cross boundaries in terms of space (venue), people (Jews and non-Jews; Jews of different backgrounds), and culture
- the importance of music

To be sure, all of these tendencies have been characterizing conventional Jewish institutions for the last decade, if not longer. The very existence of a critical mass of Jewish cultural events in New York allows these (and other) tendencies to emerge, develop, and exhibit themselves to Jewish leaders, policymakers, and practitioners. In so doing, they thereby subtly and continually influence their policies and practices, furthering the ongoing cultural adjustment of the institutions they lead to the next generation of American Jews. The history of American Jewry has been one of ongoing adjustment to ever-changing currents in the larger society. Assumedly, the faster and more thoroughly Jewish life (identities, individuals, institutions) makes the appropriate adjustments, the greater the likelihood of engaging and retaining the involvement of younger adult Jews as they mature. Jewish cultural events provide a critical arena where some of the more creative young Jews can develop their distinctive patterns of Jewish expression, and where Jewish institutional leaders can observe and learn of leading-edge tendencies among younger adult Jews. Thus, the organized Jewish community certainly has a strong institutional interest in cultivating their involvement in Jewish social circles and activities. Its concern is not merely to reduce the frequency

of intermarriage, but to also enhance opportunities for high-level engagement in creating and leading a variety of collective Jewish endeavors, be they off-beat (for now) and more conventional (in the future).

Consequences for the collective life of Jews in New York

The objective of Jewish educational and cultural endeavors ought not be conceived as solely operating on the individual level, but on the communal, collective, or even historic level. In the decades to come, when historians will take the measure of New York and American Jewry, they will not only write about the success (or failure) of organized Jewry in increasing the number of knowledgeable, connected, and engaged Jewish individuals. They also will (we hope) write about the collective life of the Jewish community - its culture and its institutions. Communal policy is not (or ought not to be) about individual identities alone, but about the collective product of their endeavors, an admittedly ephemeral goal, but one that is worthy and critical nonetheless.

In this regard, one striking benefit of these cultural events is that, in and of themselves, they constitute **a major contribution to Jewish cultural life** in New York. They are part of the overall enterprise of shaping and nurturing an authentic and indigenous non-Orthodox Judaism in New York and in the United States. In a sense, these events are self-justifying, above and beyond whatever impact they may have upon their participants or upon the images of Jewish involvement they may project to others.

This argument rests upon moving beyond an instrumental view of Jewish cultural events, one that values them only for their impact and influence, and towards a view that values them more for their very essence. An "essentialist" rather than "instrumentalist" view would suggest that Jewish cultural innovation is deserving of support because the Jews of New York (or elsewhere) should be endowed with a rich Jewish culture that continues to evolve. (We may call this, the "culture *l'shma*" argument - that is, culture for its own sake.) No one in communal life seriously questions the inherent value of Jews contributing to *tzedakah*, or engaging in Jewish learning, or performing acts of care for the sick and the infirm. No one suggests that support for these activities should be subject to an instrumental test such as asking how much Jewish commitment they produce in the long run. By similar logic, we are suggesting that engaging in Jewish culture can be seen as an end in itself: an inherent and essential good. Jewish culture may well

produce beneficial effects down the road, but it need not be judged entirely, or even primarily, by those effects.

As a final argument on behalf of supporting Jewish cultural events in New York, we remind readers of **the distinctive character of New York Jewry**. New York is home to an enormous and very densely settled, educationally upscale population of young adult Jews, many of whom are unmarried, or married with no children home. The audience for Jewish cultural events is many times larger than that found in any Jewish community outside of Israel. New York is not just any city. It is a special place that may well retain and attract especially creative, imaginative, and Jewishly educated young people, the very types of people who would be drawn to Jewish cultural events. Like Los Angeles, New York is home to a very large number of people, Jews and non-Jews, engaged in cultural life. The culture industry in New York embraces institutions and people as diverse as museums, book stores, publishers, performance spaces, concert halls, movie houses, galleries, attorneys, accountants, writers, performers, and others, to say nothing of major educational institutions that specialize in culture, or that house cultural units, and, of course the instructors and thousands of students engaged in the teaching and learning of culture and the arts. The presence of a huge, diverse, and far-flung cultural industry in New York implies the presence of thousands of individuals who are expert in, sophisticated about, and attuned to, cultural pursuits. Indeed, we found a large number of such people at the events we observed, and they often complained about the available quantity and quality of Jewish cultural possibilities in the New York area.

Opportunities for enhancing Jewish cultural life for young adults in New York

All these considerations argue for exploration of appropriate ways to support Jewish cultural endeavors in New York. Our expertise and our investigation do not equip us to competently advise on precise policies or programs to achieve this end, but we do note that any cultural event relies upon the interaction of four actors:

- Participant - the audience who enjoy and experience the cultural product.
- Performer - the artist who create the cultural product.

- Producer - the people who bring the product to market.
- Presenter - those who provide the venue where the product is seen and heard.

Our research and this memo focus on the participants. For many Jewish communal policymakers, the participants constitute the ultimate objective of an enriched Jewish cultural life in New York. But any strategy for elevating the quantity and quality of Jewish cultural events will need to attend to the other elements as well. It will need to:

1) Expand the number and possibly the diversity of the participants who attend these events, most likely through advertising and e-mail lists.
2) Nurture the performers and artists, capitalizing on the very large pool of artistically trained talent among young Jewish New Yorkers (and consistent with recent COJIR initiatives in this direction).
3) Strengthen the class of producers with knowledge gleaned from those who have experience in these cultural marketplaces, such as independent record label owners, film producers, and journalists.
4) Support the producers, possibly with small grants and loans, networking, as well as technical assistance (consistent with Joshua Ventures, Reboot, and Bikkurim).
5) Subsidize the presenters, so that a greater number and diversity of options for performance space can be available for an expanded number of Jewish cultural events.

Any or all of these elements may be addressed by philanthropic intervention to support Jewish cultural life in New York may address any or all of these players in the process. The precise forms of intervention are, of course, the province of policy-makers. But, in line with the spirit of the times as well as the specific case at hand, we can advise that any forms of such intervention, to be successful, should be developed in conjunction with culturally expert Jewish young adults.

Assuredly, philanthropic support of Jewish cultural life in New York will require both a tolerance for risk and readiness to experiment. But, in our view, the risk of failing to promote Jewish cultural life in New York is far greater than judiciously engaging in this potentially productive area for philanthropic support.

APPENDIX A: Annotated List of Site Visits

1. Saturday, December 21, 2004
Jewltide
Venue: Southpaw
Sponsoring Organizations: J-Dub Records and Brooklyn Jews
Price: $10 or $12 (at the door). Beer from Brooklyn was $1 a bottle.
The event featured a number of bands, including a short set from DJ SoCalled and two long sets from Frank London's Brazilian All-Stars. The bar was strewn with dreydls and Chanukah gelt, and the crowd eventually did the hora.

2. Friday, December 24, 2004
Hanukkah Party
Venue: Lit (Second Avenue and 5th Street, East Village)
Sponsoring Organization: *Heeb* Magazine
Price: $5 (with RSVP)
Lit is a hip bar in the East Village, and the music and the scene were comparably stylish. Music was provided by well-known performer DJ Lizzie. Less overt Jewish content, but a good time had by all. Several participants commented that it beats Chinese food and a movie. A small and very hip crowd.

3. Thursday, January 13, 2005
Slivovitz and Soul
Venue: The Slipper Room (Corner of Station and Orchard, Lower East Side)
Sponsoring Organization: J-Dub Records
Price: $5 (but free shots of Slivovitz, if you know who to ask)
This event was the first of four monthly parties as part of an experimental residency for DJ SoCalled and his revolving band of musicians. The party was well attended (between 100-150 attendees), and people enjoyed themselves - paying varying degrees of attention to the music on stage. Modeled on other monthly ethnic gatherings, the music was important, but less important than the chance to spend time with other like-minded people.

4. Saturday, January 29, 2005
Hip Hop Hoodios Record Release Party
Venue: Makor (67th street and Amsterdam, Upper West Side)
Price: $10
The Hoodios, a Spanish-English hip hop outfit fought with a rather sleepy and unengaged crowd all night long. The Hoodios, a Spanish-English hip hop outfit fought with a rather sleepy and unengaged crowd all night long. The audience - more generationally diverse than most other events, but dominated by couples in their 30s - seemed at first titillated and then somewhat bored by Jewish references in the band's lyrics. Lots of more visible signs of traditional Jewish identity (kippot, long skirts, etc) than other places.

5. Thursday, February 10, 2005
"I-Thou Circus"
Venue: Cornelia Street Café (Cornelia Street, West Village)
Price: $12, includes one drink
Sponsoring Organization: Mimaamakim
A combination open-mic night and concert by Pharaoh's Daughter. A small, quiet venue with tables - so there was no room to dance or move much. Very contemplative feeling; not quite reverent, but certainly serious. The most religious crowd of any event I attended, but very young and "alternatively" religious (big, multicolored knit kippot, as opposed to small black ones).

6. Thursday, March 23, 2005
"The Esther Show"
Venue: Rare (The Meatpacking District)
Sponsoring Organizations: Storahtelling and *Heeb* Magazine
Price: $15, $10 with costume
A glamorous Madonna/Esther-inspired celebration with a concerted attempt at some full-frontal performance, for a crowd that seemed more interested in talking to one-another. Fortunately, the venue's multi-roomed layout fostered this. The crowd was largely in their 30s and 40s, with smatterings of people on both ends of the age spectrum.

7. Thursday, March 23, 2005
J-Dub's Purim Party
Venue: SOB's (Broadway and Varick, West Village)
A rockin' party that went into the wee hours of the morning. A sold-out event (over 300 people) featuring the music of Balkan Beat-Box, a pretty hip band that specialized in central-European music set to dance beats. A young crowd that happily danced all night. There was a line outside at 12:30 a.m., and the party was still going strong. Nonetheless, it was the only event that J-Dub has ever lost money on.

8. Saturday, March 25, 2005
Purim Party
Venue: The Knitting Factory (Franklin Street, Soho)
Sponsoring Organizations: JFREJ, Workman's Circle, Avoda
A politically conscientious party with the widest range of ages of any event featured a multi-act Purim *shpiel* layered with thick political commentary about America, Israel and Iraq. The bands including Juez, a progressive jazz outfit, as well as Frank London's Brazilian All Stars. The room was packed, and the crowd -- restless but responsive during the "dramatic" scenes -- seemed to enjoy the music a great deal.

9. Sunday, March 26, 2005
Purim Party
Venue: The Lyceum (Atlantic Avenue, Park Slope)
Sponsoring Organization: Brooklyn Jews
Price: $10
The most family-friendly event of the bunch. This one began at 2:00 in the afternoon, and featured food, t-shirts, and drinks for sale, as well as arts and crafts tables and a few booths with opportunities to contribute to tsunami relief or to learn about the situation in Darfur. The opening act was Jonathan Bayor, who entertained the hundred-or-so costumed children. He was followed by Golem, an upbeat klezmer band who had the crowd also break into a large hora at one point. Little to no overt Purim-related content.

10. Thursday, April 21, 2005
Slivovitz and Soul
Venue: The Slipper Room (Stanton and Orchard, Lower East Side)
Sponsoring Organization: J-Dub Records
Price: $5
The last of four events at the Slipper Room for J-Dub. The crowd seemed a bit tired of the music at this point, although everyone still responds to DJ SoCalled's "Shout Outs."

11. Saturday, April 30, 2005
Seder-o-rama
Venue: Church of the Gesthemene (8th Avenue and 11th Street, Brooklyn)
Sponsoring Organizations: None; arranged by an informal network of friends.
Price: Free (but a potluck kosher for Passover dinner)
The most ethnically diverse group of participants in the most "traditional" of settings: a Passover Seder in the basement of a church using a home-made haggadah. The progressive politics are overt (substitutions for the 10 plagues, four children, and much meditation on what it means to be free and what it means to oppress), and the crowd seemed comprised largely of people involved in various progressive Jewish organizations and their friends and families.

12. Sunday, June 12, 2005
Tikkun Leil Shavuot
Venue: Soda (A bar on Prospect Avenue in Brooklyn)
Sponsoring Organization: Brooklyn Jews
Price: Free (including cheesecake and blintzes, but you had to buy your own drinks)
An evening of study, music and schmoozing. The structure of the evening featured two rounds of learning/studying, interspersed with sets of live music by a local singer-songwriter, and another by members of Golem. Soda, a bar, has a large secondary room where most of the attendees milled around, sat on

the couches scattered around, and engaged in lively conversation. Early in the evening a handful of families and children were there, but by about 8:00, they had given way to a large crowd, both married and single.

13. Thursday, June 9, 2005
Golem Gets Married
Venue: The Knitting Factory
Sponsoring Organization: Golem
Price: $10
The Knitting Factory's Tap Room was filled with revelers, drinking at the bar and enjoying a spread of cold cuts well before the "ceremony" began. The mock wedding featured salacious vows, a cross-dressing couple and a sermon delivered in haiku. Following the "ceremony," the band led the crowd in a hora or two (complete with the bride and groom hoisted in the air), before launching into versions of popular cover songs like the Rolling Stones' "Honkey Tonk Woman." Had the Knitting Factory's air conditioning been working, the crowd likely would have danced a bit more, but even the heat could not stop the band, and only a few of the 200 or so "guests" left before the cake cutting.

APPENDIX B: Interview Discussion Guide

Respondents: Young Jewish Adults

Part I: Introductory Matters:
How do you spend your free time?
With whom do you typically socialize?
During the last year … have you been to any museums? Which?
What books or magazines have you read during the last year?
What movies do you remember having seen?
Are there any TV programs you watch fairly often?

Part II: Questions about their personal activities and the creation of meaning
(Participants and Practitioners)

[How does culture matter to young Jewish adults?]

a. Do you ever go to programs or events that have some sort of Jewish connection in your mind? How often? Which kinds?
[PROMPT] What about Israel or Jewish film festivals?
Do you ever listen to Jewish or Israeli music?
What about a Jewish oriented museum?
Have you ever encountered the Holocaust through reading, or a film, or a museum, or some other way?
b. [IF YES, GOES TO JEWISH CULTURAL PROGRAMS] What draws you to these sorts of events or programs?
c. What kinds of Jewish events wouldn't you go to?

[How do younger Jewish adults relate to being Jewish?]

a. If you can, try to give me your quick Jewish biography, touching upon your home, your childhood, and your high school and college years. Include anything you think is relevant.
b. How would you describe your current relationship to being Jewish.
c. What do you like about being Jewish, or about Judaism, or about the Jewish community?
d. And what do you find annoying or even disturbing or disappointing about being Jewish, or Judaism, or the Jewish community?
e. What was one interesting/engaging/powerful Jewish experience in your life, either positive or negative? What made it so?

Part III: Definitions and impact of Jewish art/music/literature (Practitioners)

[What is Jewish art?]

a. What makes something Jewish? Is Adam Sandler's "Hanukkah Song" Jewish?
   What about *The Daily Show*? What about *The Daily Show* without Jon Stewart?
b. How does your Jewish identity come through your art?
c. What disappoints you most about Jewish art?
d. Would you describe yourself as a "Jewish artist?
e. Would you describe your art as "Jewish?"

[What is the impact of Jewish art on identity?]

a. What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?
b. Do you have different hopes for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences?
c. Does your Jewish background filter into your music?