

When What You *Do* Is Who You *Are*

The Intersection of
Jewish Organizational Culture
and Identity

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Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Foreward | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Key Findings | 7 |
| Why They Stay | 8 |
| Jewish Organizational Culture | 16 |
| Managing the Challenges | 26 |
| Concluding Thoughts | 28 |
| Appendix: Methodology | 30 |
| Appendix: List of Respondents | 31 |
| Acknowledgments | 32 |
| Endnotes | 33 |

Foreword

Since its inception 25 years ago, the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) has explored the ways that religions manifest in public, whether by looking at the role of religion and religious nonprofit organizations in healing Los Angeles after the 1992 civil unrest or supporting the work of faith community organizations related to disaster response and preparedness. Imagining religion as a driver of groups acting beyond the walls of congregational life has been a core subject of inquiry and a cornerstone of our effort to bridge the academy and faith communities, to their mutual benefit.

This study is a rich example of research in this vein. Tobin Belzer came to CRCC as a post-doc in 2003. Her dissertation, focusing on Jewish work and identity through the lens of young adults employed in the faith nonprofit world, provided an exciting opportunity for CRCC to deepen our understanding of how identity, community, work and faith all interact. Fifteen years after Belzer's initial research, the idea of a follow-up longitudinal study was intriguing, as it would help us to understand how the issues highlighted in her original dissertation were playing out over time.

Research initiatives such as Belzer's matter now because religious institutions represent a powerful place where individuals' traditions, values and identities intersect as they work to make change in the world. While this particular study draws on examples in Jewish nonprofit organizations, Belzer's initial research and her follow-up analysis offer insights into how these factors impact faith organizations beyond the Jewish community.

If faith communities and the organizations that represent their interests are going to continue to thrive and be vibrant actors in addressing social issues, this new study helps lend a critical eye to the particular appeal and assets they possess in retaining their workforce. It also highlights the challenges of doing community and identity work in an era of religious flux and disaffiliation. With this timeliness in mind, we believe this study may be of particular interest to foundations, academics and faith-community professionals as they look to creatively reimagine organizations that seek to do good in the world.

Many commentators see the trend of disaffiliation as a herald of religion's demise. Taking a longer view, we see the current state of religious life as yet another example of how religion is continuously being reimagined in the American context. This study, along with the broad spectrum of work that CRCC produces, highlights the ways that religions change, and make change, in the world today.

Brie Loskota, Executive Director
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Introduction

“By the time Shabbat comes around, I don’t want to see another Jew or think about anything Jewish.”

I HAVE HEARD VARIATIONS on that statement countless times over the years that I have worked as a sociologist of American Jewry. More than 15 years ago, that common refrain animated my dissertation research about how working in Jewish organizations affected the Jewish identities of young professionals. I wanted to understand what happens when what you do is who you are—when your career is an expression of a fundamental aspect of your identity. So, in 2002, I conducted in-depth interviews with 48 Jewish young adults (ages 22 to 38) who were employed at Jewish organizations in Boston, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.¹ The study focused on understanding how their personal histories and experiences in Jewish organizations informed their perceptions of Jewish community and influenced their sense of self as Jews.

Many of the Jewish professionals I interviewed described how working in the Jewish communal sector enabled them to live integrated and authentic lives. They thought of their work as an expression of their Jewish identities. Their exposure to a multiplicity of Jewish organizations and ideas increased their sense of connection to Jewish tradition, culture and community. Having dense and overlapping social and professional networks was a point of pride and a source of fulfillment.

I also heard stories about how working in Jewish organizations negatively affected their sense of self as Jews. Most of the young adults I interviewed said they did not see themselves in the Jewish communal sector over the long term, and few felt proud to identify as Jewish communal professionals. Instead, they

conceded that they were simply “Jews who have Jewish jobs.” The findings illustrated how their exposure to organizational culture shaped their perspectives about the larger Jewish communal sector and contributed to their reluctance to identify as Jewish communal professionals.²

This research project builds on the findings of the original study and offers insights gathered 15 years later from 25—roughly half—of the original research subjects, who are all currently employed by Jewish organizations.³ In circling back to members of the original sample, I wanted to understand why they chose to stay in the Jewish communal sector, when so few believed they would. Specifically, I hoped that examining their experiences over time would provide insights to address concerns about recruitment and retention that have persisted in the Jewish communal sector since the 1950s.⁴ I also wanted to understand how these tensions at the intersection of individual identity and Jewish organizational culture add complexity to the proposition that “what you do is who you are.”

Toward both of those ends, this study illustrates how Jewish professionals co-create Jewish organizational culture with their peers and colleagues and provides ethnographic detail about the benefits and challenges of working in the sector.⁵ It details the ways respondents experience organizational structures that are often steeply hierarchical and plutocratic, and gives voice to their reflections about how they have learned to navigate challenging power dynamics. The findings illustrate the primary strategies that respondents use to manage those relationships—including silencing themselves and turning to their peers for support—which ultimately contribute to the dysfunctions in their organizations. Their perspectives also shed light on the primacy of

relationships in shaping their positive experiences at work. Of fundamental importance are their long-lasting connections with those they consider both friends and colleagues. Finally, this study illustrates how respondents' experiences at work influence how they choose to engage with Jewish ritual and tradition, the extent of their communal involvement, and their sense of belonging to their actual and conceptual Jewish communities.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, there has been a resurgence of attention to recruitment and retention challenges in the Jewish communal sector. As with the broader nonprofit sector in the United States, the imminent retirement of large numbers of Baby Boomers means that the majority of Jewish nonprofits must find new executive leadership in the coming years.⁶ The urgency of these efforts has increased with the growing awareness of the impending "leadership gap," which is projected to result as current leaders retire and fewer young adults choose to enter the nonprofit sector.⁷

Many studies have sought to better understand the nature and extent of the challenges facing the sector by examining the connection between Jewish organizational culture and issues of recruitment and retention.⁸ Several themes reverberate through the research. Scholars describe challenges related to supervision and identify the need for more effective mentoring and professional development opportunities. Studies point to the lack of professional standards and the need for greater professionalism and accountability. High turnover rates, burnout and employees' intention to leave their jobs and the field have also been highlighted. The lack of advancement opportunities, gender inequity, and the struggle to

maintain work/life balance all affect organizational culture, which is "a critical contributor to, and inhibitor of, talent cultivation" within the Jewish nonprofit community.⁹

The current study complements previous research by exploring the social construction of Jewish organizational culture. Using longitudinal analysis, this work uncovers the relational dynamics that shape Jewish organizations.¹⁰ It adds vital insight into how Jewish organizational culture develops over time, which is critical to understanding how it can be improved.

At the heart of this study is a tension that is alive in most nonprofit organizations. Dynamics in organizations that seek to contribute to human flourishing can enhance or diminish the possibilities for flourishing among their employees.¹¹ In identity-based organizations, such dynamics can be even more consequential. Identity-based work can result in both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes for individuals, organizations and the communities they serve.¹²

For Jewish professionals, like others who engage in work that intersects with identity, their experiences at work help shape their individual and collective identities.¹³ There are also implications for Jewish organizations, since professionals' attitudes toward their work environments affect their performance, which is key to organizational success.¹⁴ For this reason, attending to Jewish organizational culture provides an opportunity to strengthen the Jewish community from the inside out.¹⁵ Creating a flourishing Jewish organizational culture is essential to nurturing a thriving American Jewish community.

The Sample Then and Now

The original sample included 48 young adults who were located through a referral sampling approach, a technique in which the sample is constructed through word of mouth. Respondents lived in Boston, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco and worked in organizations and institutions that are representative of the scope of the Jewish communal landscape. They worked in secular and religious, national and local Jewish organizations, including foundations, federations, synagogues, periodicals, community centers, start-up nonprofits and political advocacy organizations. About a third had positions working with youth (as youth directors and advisors, educators and education directors), and half were program directors and assistant directors, development officers, consultants, writers and administrators. Ten respondents already held leadership positions as executive directors, presidents and rabbis. Almost half of participants (21), expected to eventually pursue jobs outside of the Jewish communal sector.

The current project includes 25 of the original 48 professionals, many of whom are now in high-level leadership positions. Their work in organizations across the Jewish communal sector touches thousands of lives locally, nationally and internationally. (See Appendix for a list of respondents.) Among the respondents are 13 people who identify as women and 12 who identify as men. They range in age from 41 to 49. Many no longer live in one of the four cities where they were first interviewed. They now live in 11 different states, including California (7), New York (7), Colorado (2), Massachusetts (2) and one each in Florida, Illinois, Oregon, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina and Washington, DC. The sample includes 10 executive directors and CEOs, seven clergy and nine who are managers,

directors, program officers and vice presidents. Of the 25 respondents, 18 initially said they did not see themselves in a Jewish job long-term, and another three were unsure. Two of the four respondents who expected to spend their careers in the Jewish communal sector worked outside of the sector for several years and have since returned. Most (21) have worked in the Jewish communal sector in some capacity continuously since they were first interviewed.

Key Findings



Why They Stay

Respondents described both beneficial and challenging aspects of their experiences working in the field. Yet the benefits of this work ultimately outweighed the challenges: Every respondent remains employed by Jewish organizations, and some have now worked in the sector for two decades.

The ability to integrate their personal and professional lives is tremendously valuable to many respondents. Their positive experiences are inextricably linked to the formative relationships they have cultivated with colleagues, which they have developed into local, national, international and virtual communities and social networks over time.

Integration of Life and Work

Some of the young adult respondents were initially motivated to pursue work in the Jewish communal sector because they sought to integrate their work and personal lives. Fifteen years later, many respondents continued to appreciate this aspect of their work. With their professional choices, respondents found opportunities to express their self-concepts and substantiate their goals through their work roles.¹⁶ In this way, they purposefully blurred and even removed the boundaries between their personal and professional identities.¹⁷ “I’m here because it’s a Jewish job,” a respondent explained. “I love that I’m living a Jewish calendar.” “Everything about my Judaism and the rest of my life should be integrated.... That’s the point of working in this world!” another respondent said emphatically.

Scholars in the field of nonprofit studies have found that mission alignment—the perceived fit between individual values and organizational values—positively influences employee retention.¹⁸ Leading Edge, which cultivates talent pipelines and promotes organizational resilience in the Jewish communal sector, similarly identified “common purpose” as one of several characteristics that contribute to positive organizational culture, which they define as: “clear vision and core values that are regularly communicated, both internally to staff and externally to the communities they serve.”¹⁹ The alignment of personal and organizational values was cited by several respondents as key to their professional satisfaction.

One respondent asserted:

I feel like I’m living an authentic life.
I’ve gone where my values are. I believe passionately that my work is necessary. I couldn’t work for [an organization] I didn’t believe in. ... I feel honored to do the work I do.

Another explained:

My goal from the beginning for working in Jewish jobs is to take tikkun olam [repair of the world] into the work I do. That’s my passion. When I first started in this position, I wasn’t passionate about [the organization], but this place is doing good work and supporting good people. The one thing I keep in mind is the love of the Jewish people.

Still another said:

I appreciate that work is closed when I want to be celebrating [Jewish holidays]. One of my favorite things is ending emails with: Shabbat shalom. I love that in my professional capacity I get to express something that’s very personal.

Respondents talked about their jobs as part of their Jewish involvement: “Locally, I’m very involved. I’m a shul-goer. I’m a volunteer in the community. I do great learning. We’re involved as volunteers. And I run [an organization]. I feel very connected.” Another respondent explained: “I’m a joiner. We’ve affiliated with a synagogue, we’re part of the community. I’m both employed by and part of the community.”

Still another said: “I’m married to another Jewish professional, so that’s a common thread in our conversations. I don’t have separate existences. My friends are all connected to Jewish organizations, too.”

Their work experiences positively influenced some respondents’ personal Jewish practice, participation and sense of belonging. They described how the extent of their religious observance was affected by their organizational culture:

Twenty years ago, I was not the same kind of Jew. When I first started, we had all these days off and I didn’t celebrate any of them. Over the years, I realized that if all those holidays are important enough to be on the calendar, I should try to do it. So now I fast on the fast days, even if I don’t know what it’s about. Being kosher means something to me. It’s very important.

Another explained how their new position—in an organization with different cultural expectations around observance than in their previous job—has affected their Jewish self-expression. “I was shomer Shabbat [Sabbath observant] for a while and kosher. ... I was wrapped up in the culture of the place,” they explained, continuing:

One of the things I like about my current situation is that we celebrate and respect all ways of practicing (or not). The leadership is reflective of that, and it’s so important to me. That’s why I feel like I can be myself.

A few respondents evoked the language of family to describe the emotional intimacy they experienced at their workplaces. “It’s a very warm, inviting, kind, collegial environment,” a respondent explained. “You experience people’s life cycles, and that’s a really wonderful thing, because at the end of the day, you’re family.” Another described how their colleagues and supervisor were “entirely supportive” when they were experiencing a family crisis. “I couldn’t have asked for anything better,” they asserted. Still another described how the death of their parent was a turning point in their relationships with people at work:

My dad died suddenly two years ago. His death was a turning point in how I understand myself in relation to the community I serve. I was grieving in a community where so many people had experienced parental loss. ... I got such amazing support. Something happened where I am on a new level with them. I felt seen and connected.

Respondents appreciated the ability to bring their full selves to their work. Yet the intersection of Jewish identity and career contributes to unique relational dynamics that are rife with both assets and liabilities. Similar descriptions of the familial aspects of organizational culture were also characterized as a challenge. As discussed later in this report, some respondents referred to “overly familial” dynamics that emerged as a consequence of the lack of distinction between their personal and professional lives.

Relationships: Negotiating the Personal, Professional and Spiritual

Since respondents have spent large portions of their adult lives pursuing their careers, their workplaces are important sites for the construction of their identities as professionals and as Jews.²⁰ They actively engage in the ongoing processes of creating and recreating their sense of self in the context of social dynamics in and across organizations.²¹ Their social networks are particularly influential in the context of increasingly boundaryless careers.²² Today, it is rare to expect career stability and predictability.²⁴ Instead, boundaryless careers are more often oriented toward flexibility, knowledge acquisition and network development. As such, the development of inter-, intra- and extra-organizational relationships has become an important aspect of career development.²⁵ Respondents' social networks contribute to their attitudes, social cohesion, knowledge transfer and job performance.²⁶ Their decision-making processes are also heavily influenced by their web of social relations.²⁷

The considerable overlap between their professional and personal relationships was mostly characterized by respondents in positive terms. As they moved through organizations across the Jewish communal sector, they forged relationships with people who have remained colleagues, mentors and friends over time. Positive working relationships are mutually reinforcing. When individuals perceive a climate of trust and respect, they tend to engage in behaviors that promote and sustain their own thriving at work.²⁸ These experiences can also provide fertile ground for the growth of their sense of selves as Jews.

The cultivation of such social networks has remained important to respondents, both then and now. As young adults, they expressed a great deal of pride in their ability to network successfully. One said: "I think I know more Jews than the majority of Jews who live in [this area]." Another boasted: "People say they find people who know me everywhere, no matter where they go."

A young adult articulated the key to being successful in the Jewish communal sector in these words:

You have to be a schmoozer and you have to have tacit knowledge about the Jewish community: the language that people use and mannerisms and style, and know how to play Jewish geography, and know the cultural and institutional situation. Because it's a small world, and if you don't know major things that people take for granted, you're totally out of the loop and you're not going to succeed.

As they recounted their career paths, respondents emphasized the significance of their relationships with both colleagues and informal mentors. Respondents described their peers as central to their experiences at work. One explained:

There's a category of people who have supported me: my peers much more than mentors. There are really thoughtful, sharing, reflective peers in my field that I've had enormous benefit from. I get to share challenges with bright, smart, menschy people. We have great conversations in groups and one-on-one, which really helps, since this is hard work.

Notably, formal mentoring relationships were not mentioned as a significant influence by respondents. Traditional, formal mentoring is defined as “a facilitated relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger less experienced protégé for the purposes of developing and helping their career.” This is congruent with research that has concluded that the value of mentoring has been undermined “in an age where experience of past and accumulated knowledge no longer guarantee relevance in the future.”²⁹ While there is little empirical evidence of a causal relationship between mentoring and outcomes related to individual performance,³⁰ research has shown that informal mentoring relationships, like those described by respondents, are generally more effective than formal mentoring relationships.³¹

Most respondents mentioned the positive impact of their relationships with informal mentors. These types of relationships are particularly relevant to processes of recruitment and retention. According to sociologist Shaul Kelner, relationships with “mentors, role models and programs for youth and young adults can play a role attracting people into certain types of Jewish sector work.”³² This was the case for several respondents, who initially reported being recruited into their jobs through Jewish informal educational experiences or by charismatic supervisors and peers.

The authors of “Are Jewish Organizations Great Places to Work?” note that “effective leaders can motivate employees to stay, even when other factors are not being met.”³³ Several respondents expressed gratitude for trusted advisors whose encouragement influenced their career paths. One described their experience in these words:

One woman changed the trajectory of my life. She was the first person who sat down with me and said: “You have what it takes.” I knew I wanted to get out of a certain position and I didn’t know how to make the case for it. I was just complaining. She told me: “You’re good, but the more you complain, the more your stock goes down.” She helped me find direction.

Another said:

I’ve had people who have recognized that I have a lot to offer and made space for me and gave me a good stretch job. They recognized that I brought something new and different that they didn’t have, and they stepped back because they saw something in me.

Still another explained: “The people in leadership reflected that they saw a lot of potential in me and we could grow together.... It’s more than a decade later, and that has really been true.”

Several mentioned rabbinic mentors. “[A rabbi] was my teacher, which informed how I think about spirituality, and [another rabbi] helped me think about living social justice from a Jewish perspective and how to build community,” a respondent said. Another asserted: “I’ve had amazing rabbinic mentors and feminist colleagues who have supported me.”

In some cases, relationships that started in childhood (e.g., at Hebrew school, youth group or camp) have since developed into professional relationships. These relationships reached across organizations and have grown over time. With pride, they mentioned watching their friends and colleagues take on highly visible leadership positions in organizations throughout the sector. They described how their relationships have anchored them to Jewish life. “We grew up together in the Jewish world,” a respondent said of a colleague and close friend.

Most respondents have participated in cohort-based experiences through some type of fellowship or formal professional development opportunity. They collectively took part in more than a dozen leadership training fellowship programs, including: Wexner Graduate Fellowship, Bend the Arc’s Selah Leadership Program, the Schusterman Fellowship, Avi Chai Fellowship, New Israel Fund Social Change Fellowship, Melton Center for Jewish Education Senior Educators Fellowship, Brandeis University Institute for Informal Jewish Education Fellowship, Shalom Hartman Institute’s Rabbinic Leadership Initiative and the Joshua Venture Fellowship for Young Jewish Social Entrepreneurs.

Respondents highlighted the personal and professional significance of the relationships they developed in the context of cohort experiences. “Those are still my critical colleagues,” a respondent explained. “They are peers who have been on this path with me and now we’re running things.” Another respondent described how their fellowship experience gave them access to “high quality teachers and a tremendous group of peers who are on the journey with me.” Another explained:

[My fellowship experience] was really key in so many ways. Most of all, it was everyone in my cohort, and the larger network that it connected me to. It made me feel like I’m working in a vital community and I don’t have to figure things out on my own.

“I found my people,” still another a respondent asserted, continuing emphatically:

[The people in my cohort] are bright and menschy and lefty and interested in creative Jewish expression.... They are seekers who wanted to integrate who they are and what they want to do in the world. My best friends in the world are in the program and they live all over. Because of the intensity of the program, it’s been such a source of sustenance. I’m so grateful.

In “Cohorts: How They Learn, Lead and Influence,” Shifra Bronznick and Didi Goldenhar noted that cohort experiences, like those the respondents described, have the potential to “deepen the understanding and practice of personal leadership, and that this benefits the individual’s relationship with his or her own community and sphere of influence.”³⁴

Such cohorts serve as developmental support networks, which organizational behaviorists Monica Higgins and Kathy Kram characterize as a set of people, both in and outside of one's workplace, who take an active interest in, and action toward, advancing one's career by providing developmental assistance.³⁵ This type of support is critical in the context of the boundaryless career environment.³⁶ Career support (such as career-related sponsorship, coaching and protection) from developmental networks tends to be positively associated with work satisfaction, intentions to remain in positions and high levels of career-related self-efficacy.³⁷

The quality of respondents' support networks positively affected job retention.³⁸ A respondent described how their positive relationships with their colleagues motivated them to stay in a position for an extended period of time. They explained:

I know I should have left 55 times before I did. I stayed so long because I loved my team. We were a fearsome threesome. We worked together for more than a decade. Then one moved to Israel, and the other was ready to move on. Without them, my perspective changed. I knew there was no room for advancement and I wanted to leave the area. I was done.

Another described how they recruited a colleague to work in their organization, in part because of the potential support the relationship offered:

When we were looking [to fill a position], she was the first person I called. She's the best work partner ever. She's really smart and has a huge heart. She's intellectually and emotionally intelligent, with a deep knowledge of the Jewish community. I trust her and respect her. I feel so happy about the people I spend my time with at work.

Still another commented:

I don't know what it would be like to leave the sector. I have wonderful colleagues. And I strongly believe that who you work with is more important than what you do. So that will be a major factor in deciding about my next steps.

Several respondents said they were motivated to stay in positions because of their relationships with their colleagues.³⁹ Attachment to people contributed to positive organizational culture, provided a sense of "job embeddedness" and increased retention.⁴⁰

Several respondents described how they drew upon their extensive Jewish personal and professional support networks in times of job transition. When explaining how they came to their current position, a respondent explained: "When I moved [to a different city], I was looking for nonprofit jobs, and I started with what I know: the Jewish world... A friend told me about this job, and the rest is history."

Another similarly said: “I went to my brother’s bar mitzvah and I heard about the job and applied, and got it and I’ve been here ever since.” A respondent who had left the Jewish communal sector for several years described how they drew upon their network throughout the process of returning to the field:

I have a huge network in the Jewish world.... That’s how [the recruiting firm] found me. I did an informational interview with [a Jewish leader], and I talked to him when I was thinking about taking this job. Now that I have it, I made a date with [another Jewish leader] to help me think about my staffing structure.

Many respondents similarly drew upon their support networks to learn about opportunities, gain access to information and develop professionally.⁴¹

Of course, collegial relationships have the capacity to influence work experiences in both adaptive and maladaptive ways.⁴² Frequent interpersonal contact across organizational boundaries has been shown to negatively affect employees’ work-related attitudes. This was the case for some, who described how hearing about their colleagues’ challenges at work influenced their perspectives about the sector. As young adults, the connection between respondents’ abstract ideas about Jewish organizational culture and their actual experiences were particularly tenuous. Their own positive experiences proved to be less salient in shaping their perspectives than their colleagues’ negative experiences. Even those who had largely favorable personal experiences maintained their critical perspectives about the field. Respondents who had favorable experiences tended to describe their situations as non-normative and unique. Their negative impressions were amplified, distorting their perspectives of organizational culture.⁴⁴

These sentiments emerged when respondents were asked (as young adults) if they expect to remain in the Jewish communal sector. “Some part of me hopes not,” a respondent explained, “I’d like to continue to grow beyond it.” Another responded: “I don’t know.... I wonder. Probably? It’s the only thing I’ve ever done.”

For some, their social networks proved constraining, resulting in reluctant retention. Respondents described their desire to find work outside of the Jewish communal sector, but were limited by the insularity of their connections. “I was really tired of working in the Jewish world, but that’s where my network is, so that’s why I stayed,” one explained. Another said: “I made efforts to seek other jobs, but the connections that I have in the Jewish community are so deep.... It’s hard to imagine that my next job would not be a Jewish job.” Still another said: “I was looking for nonprofit jobs, but I have a really Jewy resume, which people didn’t understand, so I ended up staying.”

For better and for worse, relationships that individuals formed while working together acted as one of “the ties that bind.”⁴⁵ Though some respondents left particular positions, they did not leave the sector. Instead, they purposefully sought out more satisfying and satisfactory opportunities. The depth of their relationships kept them anchored in the Jewish communal sector.



Jewish Organizational Culture

Still Not “Jewish Professionals”

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lthough they have spent most of their professional lives in the Jewish communal sector, many respondents still do not identify as Jewish communal professionals. In part, this has to do with the complexity of professional identity, which, as organizational scholars have shown, is formulated in “nested” levels.⁴⁶ Individuals can identify with colleagues, teams, organizations and sectors, and the extent of identification at each level may differ.⁴⁷ Some respondents identified strongly with their particular organizations. A respondent explained: “I love the job I have now.... I’ll be here until they kick me out.... But that’s this job. I don’t know if I’ll stay [in the sector] beyond this.” Another said: “I couldn’t imagine another job I would do in the Jewish world.... I’m not interested in other things.”

Other respondents chose to identify with broader sectorial categories: They called themselves “nonprofit professionals” or “educators.” In explanation, one respondent said: “I don’t think I would define myself now in the Jewish communal sector.... I work in the broader field.” Another said: “If I’m with non-Jews, I wouldn’t lead with ‘I work for the Jews.’ With the Jews, I’d say that tongue-in-cheek.” Still another said:

I feel I’m a professional communal leader. But when people on the outside ask you about what you do, I would never say “Jewish communal professional.” I say, “I’m a Jewish educator.” Or I say, “A nonprofit manager working with the Jewish community.” But I wouldn’t lead with that.

Jane Dutton, et al., characterized this coping strategy for mediating dissonance among competing identities as “disidentification,” the act of “denying or discarding a lower-status identity and embracing a higher-status identity.”⁴⁸

Another reason that respondents may not identify as Jewish communal professionals is because of their perception of such jobs as low-status. Respondents were highly critical of the Jewish communal sector, even while choosing to stay. In both the initial and follow-up research, respondents used strongly negative language to describe the Jewish organizational landscape. As young adults, some of the respondents referred to Jewish organizational culture as “fucked up” and “a self-sustaining monster.” In the initial research, another respondent described their reluctant entry into the sector in these words:

I never wanted a Jewish job because the Jewish organizations that I knew were sort of parochial and only compared themselves to other Jewish organizations for benchmarking. And I just didn’t feel like the quality was high enough, the vision was big enough or the leadership was egalitarian enough. And there were certainly men running the show and women sort of being their support system, everywhere I looked.

Still another young adult respondent evoked a war metaphor as she described how she and a colleague “came through the trenches together.”

In 2004, Gary Tobin, a social scientist who founded an influential think-tank focusing on Jewish communal life, noted that the Jewish communal sector does not attract “their share of the best and the brightest.”⁴⁹ This stigmatized reputation has persisted. A current respondent echoed this attitude using that exact language, explaining: “There’s an old-school mentality that people [who work in the sector] aren’t the best and the brightest.”

Respondents in the follow-up study, who are among the most well-respected leaders in the field, nonetheless expressed awareness of the stigma of working in the Jewish communal sector through their disidentification, even while choosing this profession for almost twenty years. One explained:

I’ve never thought of myself as a Jewish communal professional. I guess I am and I’m not. I wouldn’t go to a meeting of Jewish communal workers. [My organization] is not part of the Jewish mainstream.

During the follow-up interview, a respondent (who has never identified as a Jewish communal professional despite their continuous employment in the field) described their current perceptions of Jewish communal professionals in these words:

I’m sure the role has changed, but I think being a Jewish communal professional still has a specific connotation, and it was never the role I was looking to play. I didn’t want to be in the rank-and-file of large institutions that don’t keep up.... I know there’s an expansion of what being a Jewish professional looks like, but the term is too narrow: I exist and work in a broader world.

At the same time, a couple of the respondents mentioned how some Jewish organizations specifically seek to hire candidates from outside the sector. This practice reinforced their perceptions of limited opportunities for upward advancement and heightened their desire to disidentify.⁵⁰ One explained:

We don't value our own.... It's about contempt for ourselves. Being successful in the outside world is seen as more legit.... Someone else has validated you. I think it's internalized anti-Semitism.

Another asserted:

I've put a lot of effort and time into the community. When I hear that we need to go outside of the Jewish world because there's no talent pool to pull from, I think: Fuck you!

As individuals progress through career stages, their professional identities and self-conceptions as employees, professionals and/or members of a field can develop and change over time.⁵¹ Yet, most respondents' determination to disidentify as Jewish professionals remained constant. In reaction to their experiences of organizational dysfunction and their perceptions of the profession as low status, respondents disassociated from their identity as Jewish professionals, even while choosing to remain in the sector.

As a result, one prominent aspect of Jewish organizational culture is the ambivalent attitude that prevails among many members of its workforce.

Power Dynamics

When describing Jewish organizational culture, respondents identified problematic power dynamics they personally experienced, witnessed or heard about second- or third-hand. The most frequently mentioned power dynamic was with regard to funders. Respondents also described fraught relationships with supervisors.

Several respondents described experiences that corroborate the Leading Edge finding that strained lay/professional relationships leave some leaders feeling undervalued and unsupported by their boards.⁵² A respondent in a leadership position described their experience:

I don't think the board had a negative impression of me.... They just didn't love what I was trying to do. It wasn't their vision at all. My staff loved the vision, but it wasn't what the board wanted, so it didn't happen.

Another reflected:

I think many board members weren't interested in following me as a leader. They were never able to see me transition into a more senior position.... I took a mini sabbatical where I did some learning and came back with new ideas. I shared the new ideas, and the board rejected everything.

Some respondents reported being implicitly and explicitly required to sublimate their own voices in order to please their funders. As the most powerful actors in the Jewish communal sector, funders have culturally prescribed authority that legitimates their capacity “to create, alter or invoke structure in a manner that reifies hierarchy.”⁵³ While the leaders I interviewed do exercise power, they viewed the playing field as uneven.

A respondent saw the dynamics this way:

Managing funders is the biggest challenge. The bigger the funder, the more involved they are. It’s difficult to be nimble because of how they micromanage. The whole mindset of funders is immensely challenging. Funders want to fund things for a few years. If they fund something, they are the expert, and there is an expectation of instant results. The whole dysfunctional climate has been really challenging.

Another frankly said of funders: “Every relationship is fraught with delicacy because of the power and money dynamics. You have to keep the people happy. You can’t upset anybody.”

Respondents also described how funder-grantee power imbalances create a sense of instability and a climate of scarcity in the sector. A respondent asserted:

The community has always been fickle, and the issues I’m passionate about always seem to fall between the cracks. Funders are all about the flavor of the month. All of our organizations are hugely reliant on philanthropy. We rely on philanthropy too much. It’s a flawed business model. We’re living in a very challenging world that is dependent on the wealthy.

Another said:

I’ve become more jaded about how stuff gets done. Instead of: “What can we do to make this community better?” it’s: “What can we get funded?” There’s a lot of competition for the same resources, and if the biggest donors in the community don’t care, it’s over.

Respondents who described their values as being aligned with their funders were still aware of this aspect of Jewish organizational culture. They expressed gratitude for their ability to avoid this dynamic. “[Our funders] are liberal, progressive and accepting, and there is always permission to question.... I really value that,” one explained. Another described the congenial environment of their current workplace in stark contrast to their previous experience at an organization with a more restrictive culture:

The political baggage of [my former work-place] was overwhelming. I was always thinking, ‘Can I get away with saying this in public?’ There wasn’t space for my voice. I had to enact someone else’s plan. I wasn’t high up on the pecking order. And the funders were right-wing. [In my new position] I don’t have those boundaries. I can express my opinion freely, and I’m encouraged to say what I want to say. They value me.

One respondent described engaging with a funder who does not share their politics as a positive experience:

Mostly, I really enjoy our relationships with funders. There are, of course, tensions and conflicts and challenges. But we have deep and honest relationships. [Our funders] know that [our organization] includes people who have politics they don't like, and they know I believe there should be room in the community for everybody. I've told them their take is damaging for the community.

The power dynamics that respondents described are not unique to the Jewish communal sector: they exist in every funder-grantee relationship across a range of identity-based communal organizations.⁵⁴ Recently, organizations supporting the philanthropic sector (e.g. Grant Craft: A Service of Foundation Center, the Center for Effective Philanthropy and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy) have created resources for understanding and assessing power dynamics.⁵⁵ In 2016, the Stanford Social Innovation Review, in partnership with Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, developed an in-depth series of articles about the importance of cultivating trust and openness between funders and grantees in the interest of developing more effective programming.⁵⁶

Jewish philanthropists have also begun to reflect on how to manage the counterproductive effects of the funding structure. Under the auspices of the Jewish Funders Network, a group of funders developed a set of guiding principles for philanthropists' conduct with their grantees, other funders, their staffs and their broader communities. This resource aims to support funders to "align Jewish philanthropy to Jewish values in the service of a vibrant and respectful Jewish community." Originally launched in 2016, "Funders and Power: Principles for Honorable Conduct in Philanthropy" was recently updated in response to the #MeToo movement. Increased transparency and ongoing communication about power dynamics among stakeholders across the Jewish communal sector is necessary to influence this aspect of Jewish organizational culture.

(Not) Talking about Israel

In the initial research project, some young professionals perceived a need to sublimate their political opinions about Israel at work. One said: "In terms of Israel, I feel like I can't talk about how I feel." Another explained that she did not mention her attendance at political rallies to her colleagues, since her views "don't follow the party line." Several young adults expressed frustration with the "conservative views about Israel" that are officially espoused by their organizations and personally held by their colleagues. They were concerned that expressing their more liberal views would hinder their success. A respondent emphasized: "Not having left-of-center Israeli politics will help you get ahead.... Toeing the party line will help you get ahead, big time."⁵⁷

The stakes are now higher for the respondents, many of whom are in leadership positions. In some cases, they are reliant on funders who do not share their political views. Respondents described how they internally negotiate a balance between their desire for intellectual honesty and the need to appease funders. “We have to think carefully about what we can say and do that will have integrity and not piss off the donors,” a respondent asserted. To avoid putting their organizations’ financial situations in peril, they most often mentioned choosing not to share their opinions or sharing them selectively. A respondent summarized the experiences of several others with these words:

I have to be judicious with my board. They know I have political opinions. It’s about the relationships. If I have coffee with a board member and we know each other, we can schmooze about politics, but I wouldn’t spout political views at a board meeting.... I’m not going to lie, but I’m not publicizing my opinions to funders or about funders.

Some struggled to navigate this dynamic more than others:

It’s really hard in the Jewish community to have a dialogue about ideas about Israel. It makes it hard for professional Jews to exercise thought leadership safely. That is damaging to the Jewish community.

Another said:

Our funders are on the different side of the political spectrum. They know who I am and how I feel. I have to hold in more, but they know I’m holding it in. I suck at not being transparent. I need to get better at that. I’m very transparent, so when I disagree, it’s obvious, but I have to suck it up.

Still another said: “I have to be more apolitical than I want to be.... Everything is coded and careful about Israel.”

The differences in political orientation between many funders and Jewish professionals impeded respondents’ ability to bring their full selves to their work. Many felt the need to sublimate their own feelings so as not to cause conflict with donors. Some were also wary of speaking their minds freely among colleagues. While workplace tension around hot-button political issues is not unique to the Jewish world, the relationship between Israel and U.S. politics affects the Jewish communal sector in ways that are especially fraught with the potential for conflict.

Discrimination and Harassment

Jewish organizations have a benevolent mission, and they are also products of the histories and cultures in which they were formed.⁵⁸ As with most organizations or institutions, there is a degree to which official policies and articulated values are disconnected from actual practice.⁵⁹ Several studies have documented the ways in which gender inequity manifests in the Jewish communal sector. Researchers have pointed to the ways in which Jewish organizations tolerate and perpetuate gender discrimination in several manifestations, including a gender gap in mentoring, compensation and opportunities for advancement.⁶⁰

In the initial research, the young professionals described their experiences with each of these issues. Among both women and men interviewed, there was the perception that, as one person put it, “men get pushed on the fast track to the top faster than women.” Many of the young women interviewed expressed resentment about the apparent ease with which male colleagues seemed to advance within the profession. “To succeed in a Jewish organization,” a young woman said, “it helps to be a man. If you’re a woman, act like a man.... It helps to be straight and married and have kids.”

Another young woman said plainly: “I think when a woman walks in the door, she’s offered a different salary than a man.” Yet another explained: “The Jewish community is about 30 years behind about women’s roles.... You have to be willing to climb uphill, knowing that you may not reach the top.” A young man felt that his women colleagues may resent him because he was aware that his gender made him a more desirable candidate. Another estimated that, in his large organization, women make up approximately 90 percent of the administrative workforce. “I think the low pay is definitely why it’s stereotypically women’s work,” he reasoned.⁶¹

Women respondents both then and now attributed instances of gender discrimination to what they described as the “overly familial” aspect of Jewish organizational culture. The lack of personal and professional boundaries was characterized as both a benefit and a liability of working in Jewish organizations. One young woman in the initial study said: “People get in your business, asking: ‘Who are you dating and when are you going to get married?’” Another woman recounted her perception of this dynamic:

I think there is an expectation that people will tolerate stuff because it’s for the community.... I do sort of feel as though the family thing and the whole community thing does get used to keep people in line. There is the horrible pay, the ridiculous hours that get sprung on you at weird moments, the total lack of boundaries in some cases. It doesn’t feel so much as a family as a cult where they want you to think that they are your family.

Women respondents in the follow-up research similarly described this aspect of Jewish organizational culture in their recent work life, illustrating a significant and persistent disadvantage of the familial culture in their workplaces. In her previous job, a respondent explained:

There were certain things that were expected that I wouldn't accept in a non-Jewish job. In the middle of a meeting, some stranger asking me if I were married. ... The lack of boundaries was difficult.

Another said:

Saying hello and goodbye with male donors is complicated. I don't want to kiss them on the cheek. That's what they do. They are fatherly toward me. The whole hugging vs. not.... I would be happy never to hug them.

Others described instances of subtle and not-so-subtle sexual harassment that they have encountered or witnessed. "One of my staff members was hit on by [a funder]," a respondent noted. "I've seen board members be inappropriate with young staff," another said. "We dealt with it.... We've dealt with rampant sexism, racism, tribalism—all of it."

Several others described similar experiences, which mirror the broader culture of abuse illuminated by the ongoing #MeToo movement. One said:

I've seen weird things at [convenings with funders]. Men get drunk, and I've had to physically remove myself from the sexual advances. It's not something I see with men in our generation. There's a generational thing.

Another asserted:

I've seen lay leaders and donors being inappropriate. It happened to me once. I told our CEO and director of development, and I felt supported. I've cut back my interactions with that person, and he apologized. I thought about raising a broader conversation. I was riled up for a while, but I don't have the time for that, and it wasn't such a hot issue at the time.

A few respondents also mentioned instances of racism that they witnessed. "I hear stupid shit—tribalism, us/them stuff and racism coming out of peoples' mouths all the time," a respondent complained. Another said: "I've witnessed stuff like older men sitting around talking about shvartzas" [a derogatory term for Black people]. Still another mentioned that they have seen Jews of color being asked inappropriate questions by people who "are doubting their Jewishness."

When describing these instances of discrimination and harassment, the respondents' tone was uniformly one of indignation and resignation. This was a departure from respondents' tone in the initial research, which tended to be cynical, but optimistic. As young professionals, they saw the interview as a platform to voice their concerns and thought the research might make their experiences more visible.

A young adult said: “I’m very pleased you’re interviewing me as part of this research.... I’m unhappy with the discourse in the community... So, I’m delighted to be a voice in the midst of this particular research.” Several expressed hope that the research might “make a difference.” Fifteen years later, respondents’ descriptions of harassment and discrimination have been corroborated by the recent revelations of egregious behavior on the part of several Jewish men in senior leadership positions throughout the Jewish communal sector (i.e., philanthropists, researchers, rabbis and educators). Since the initial data were collected, the rise of the #MeToo movement has provoked a growing intolerance for this formerly unchallenged aspect of Jewish organizational culture. Giving voice to these previously unspoken dynamics has initiated a promising communal conversation that could productively influence organizational policies and practices.

Supervision and Training

A key factor determining job satisfaction, which in turn influences retention, is employees’ perceptions of their supervisory relationships.⁶² In this regard, the current research corroborates findings from “The Jewish Sector’s Workforce.” Shaul Kelner, et al., note that, while respondents were generally positive about their coworkers, their experiences with organizational superiors more often fell short.⁶³ For three years in a row, Leading Edge’s survey of Jewish communal professionals showed that management practices are weak in Jewish organizations compared to a US benchmark.⁶⁴

The contours of these dynamics were illuminated as respondents in the current research described problematic experiences with supervisors over the course of their careers in the sector. “Never take a job when you don’t know who your boss would be,” a respondent warned, continuing:

At [my former organization], I had a boss who was the wrong fit. He wouldn’t have hired me. He wanted “his” people and didn’t think I was “his” person. He wasn’t supporting me or advocating for me. I didn’t feel valued or like part of a team.

Another used similar language to characterize their experience:

My supervisor at [my former organization] was not a good boss for me. He wanted me to read his mind. It was not a good fit. For some of the bosses, they had no role models.

One respondent described how they inadvertently benefited from the experience of having a series of under-trained supervisors: “I had a new supervisor every year for more than a decade.... When they got fired, I got promoted.” Another had a very different experience and drew a connection between ineffective supervision and lack of potential for growth in the organization: “They could have spent a little more time helping me understand my growth path...but that wasn’t a priority, so I felt like there was no growth potential.” These findings are significant in light of research that shows how negative intra-organizational relationships create social liabilities that reduce employee performance and encourage turnover.⁶⁵

A few respondents described constructive experiences with their current supervisors, in contrast with their previous supervisory relationships. “I have a good boss now, after all these years,” a respondent commented. “My current boss has a background in education and understands how to give feedback productively.” Another said:

I’m learning a lot from [my current boss]. It’s the feeling of getting mentored on a different level. I’m getting invited to do things. It’s the first time I’ve had good supervision in my entire career, and I’m 42!

Another respondent suggested that management training could have a salutary impact:

My current boss is the best one I’ve had. She comes from outside the Jewish world. The corporate world trains people. If your team doesn’t do the work, you don’t succeed.

A few respondents, who are themselves now in top leadership positions in their organizations, mentioned how they are purposefully attending to the development of productive supervisory dynamics. They are working to apply what they learned from their participation in leadership development opportunities both within and outside of the Jewish community. With awareness of the need for more professional training throughout the sector, several Jewish organizations have launched career development opportunities in recent years. Founded in 2014 as a consortium of 15 Jewish foundations and federations, Leading Edge: Alliance for Excellence in Jewish Leadership works to maintain the leadership pipeline for Jewish communal sector. Both the Schusterman Fellowship and the Wexner Field Fellowship, launched in 2015, provide leadership development for Jewish leaders. Since 2015, Hillel International has invested more than \$38

million in initiatives aimed at strengthening the Jewish communal leadership pipeline. In 2018, the Mandel Institute for Nonprofit Leadership welcomed the inaugural cohort of its Executive Leadership Program, which is designed to expand the leadership pipeline and improve the leadership capacity of rising professionals. Incremental improvements in supervision and management occurring throughout the sector are likely connected to the increased availability of such opportunities for executive training, along with concerted efforts to improve professional standards.⁶⁶

Managing the Challenges

Despite the challenging dynamics they articulated in the follow-up research, every respondent (representing 50 percent of the cohort in the original study) has chosen to continue their careers in the Jewish communal sector. To contend with the systemic challenges they described, respondents developed and honed several strategies that enable them to survive and even thrive in their professional lives. Since their first interviews, they managed their self-presentation and developed supportive relationships with colleagues. Some maintain boundaries by segmenting their personal and professional identities, while others choose to integrate these aspects of themselves. Each of these strategies has unique benefits and liabilities.

Emotional Labor

Respondents in both the initial and follow-up studies described their use of emotional labor to manage the power dynamics they encountered.⁶⁷ Sociologist Arlie Hochschild defines emotional labor as “the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.”⁶⁸ In both the initial and follow-up research, respondents described an implicit requirement to perform their Jewish identities to conform to their particular organizational cultures. Several mentioned their awareness of their colleagues’ attentiveness to the extent of their religious observance. Almost half of the young professionals in the initial research who did not practice Jewish rituals outside of work described managing their presentation of self by “performing Jewishly.” Some felt obliged to observe Jewish practices they would not otherwise, while others hid their non-observance. Several described how their job performance felt conflated with their commitment to their organizations and to the Jewish people.

For some, the obligation to conform to implicit and explicit workplace expectations around Jewish practice affected their personal Jewish experience. In the follow-up research the feeling of being monitored provoked a strong response from one respondent, who explained: “After my experience at [an organization], I didn’t even want to be Jewish. I didn’t even want to go to shul [synagogue]. I don’t want to lie about my practice to be acceptable.” The potent consequence of emotional labor articulated here illustrates how identity-based work environments can have personal impact.⁶⁹

Self-censoring

The use of self-censoring emerged as the most common way respondents managed power dynamics. One respondent explained how this form of suppression manifests in interactions with funders:

When it comes to the funding world, no one is critical publicly about things funders fund. Millions of dollars are spent in a way that people judge. No one talks about it to [funders]. There is a fear of consequences. Everyone is relying on the good will of funders. I have many examples of things people say in private about programs that are funded, but we'll never say it publicly.

Others explicitly used the language of “muzzling” to describe their self-censorship. For example, one said: “I’m much more concerned about not pissing off the funders from an organizational context.... There’s a huge amount of muzzling about Israel.”

Another asserted:

I don’t have to say anything I don’t believe. I just muzzle myself when I want to share my thoughts. It’s hard. I posted something on Facebook that I edited extensively, and still some people said: “How dare you post a statement like that?”

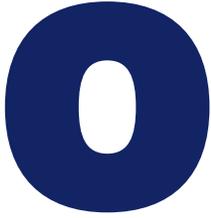
The efficacy of this coping strategy is likely to decrease over time for respondents, since efforts to hide or cover up feelings lead to emotional exhaustion, which is a key dimension of burnout.⁷⁰

Reciprocal Emotional Management

Respondents also described how they manage their emotions by turning to their peers for support. Sociologist Kathryn Lively identified this coping strategy as “reciprocal emotional management,” when similar status co-workers engage in acts of horizontal and sometimes simultaneous management of emotion to alleviate stress.⁷¹ Both then and now, respondents relied on one another for emotional support. They shared horror stories, expressed anger and alleviated tension with sarcasm and wry humor. They passionately complained to one another about the Jewish community in general, and about their jobs in particular. Expressing themselves to one another likely served to alleviate the emotional exhaustion caused by sublimating their perspectives.⁷²

The use of reciprocal emotional management signifies respondents’ sense of disempowerment within the hierarchical structure of the field. In the follow-up research, respondents described turning to their colleagues to discuss issues they could not raise at work. One respondent mentioned spending significant time talking with trusted colleagues about “how our personal values, organizational values and funders’ values are at odds.” By sharing their potentially disruptive perspectives exclusively with their trusted colleagues, this coping strategy ultimately serves as a key mechanism through which dysfunctional aspects of organizational culture are perpetuated.⁷³ In other words, while commiserating with peers may serve to alleviate the discomfort of otherwise silencing themselves, this type of horizontal self-expression ultimately serves to maintain the very status quo it critiques. However, relying on their support networks also enabled employees to adapt to challenges, remain in the sector and even to obtain positions of influence.

Concluding Thoughts



rganizational change begins by envisioning the kind of culture we want and articulating how the existing circumstance deviates from that ideal. This research has identified some of the ways in which Jewish organizational culture is thriving and has added to our understanding of the challenges. Moving forward productively will require attending to the difficult issues that respondents articulated. It will involve naming power imbalances, creating clear channels of communication to deepen conversations, and establishing new norms free from sexual harassment and gender inequity. This will necessitate more proactively respecting personal and professional boundaries and acknowledging implicit behavioral expectations. Since developmental support networks are of primary importance, growing and strengthening authentic relationship-building throughout and between organizations must be a priority. Finally, since everyone contributes to creating organizational culture, professionals at all levels must be aware of how their coping strategies could be counterproductive. The potency of identity-based work can then be activated to effect positive individual, organizational and communal outcomes.

Looking at their lives over the horizon, most of the young Jews I interviewed 15 years ago did not expect to spend their careers in the Jewish communal sector. Yet, they have done just that. It is my hope that their experiences and perspectives will contribute to efforts to improve Jewish organizational cultures, which will, in turn, provide a stronger foundation to support Jewish flourishing. Perhaps then, the next generation of Jews who work in Jewish jobs will more readily and proudly identify as Jewish communal professionals and choose to work in the field because of, rather than in spite of, Jewish organizational culture.

Appendix: Methodology

This longitudinal study was conducted by gathering data through in-depth interviews on two separate occasions, 15 years apart (2002 and 2017). Returning to interviewees after more than a decade enabled the exploration of changes over time and uncovered the meaning that interview subjects gave to these changes.⁷⁴ Findings derived in this way were critical for examining and understanding individuals' subjective interpretations of their career changes.⁷⁵ This type of study has become increasingly important to the literature on work attitudes and behaviors.⁷⁶ The overall body of empirical work on careers (including research focused on the Jewish communal sector) has been primarily attentive to identifying conditions, and has been less focused on uncovering the processes, that create those conditions.⁷⁷

A growing number of scholars have used a social-constructionist analysis to argue that work is rooted in relationships and culture.⁷⁸ This approach has also been used in studies exploring the social processes that generate Jewish identity.⁷⁹ In "The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century," Kelman et al. elucidate the ways in which individuals construct their Jewish identities relationally: through narratives of connection, comparison and conflict.⁸⁰ My 2004 research sought to examine the intersection of Jewish identity and work in an effort to understand how working in Jewish organizations affected respondents' experience of themselves as Jews, their sense of connection to Jewish community and their career orientations. The current research attends to the fundamentally relational constitution of both Jewish identities and work experiences.

In both the initial and follow-up research, I analyzed respondents' conceptions of Jewish identity, community and career through the theoretical lens of symbolic interaction, which posits that identity emerges from communication-based interactions among individuals within a social matrix⁸¹ in specific socio-historical contexts.⁸² This perspective assumes that identity is a relational process⁸³ that is constructed over time,⁸⁴ takes shape within the context of our social networks,⁸⁵ and is embedded in power relations.⁸⁶ My perspective is also informed by feminist scholarship, which emphasizes the centrality of relationships⁸⁷ and acknowledges multiple viewpoints.⁸⁸

With both the initial research and with the longitudinal follow-up, I analyzed the data using grounded theory. This approach involves the systematic grouping and coding of narrative based on the emergence of reoccurring themes.⁸⁹ Data are examined at macro- and micro-levels: within the context of both structural conditions and as interactional processes.⁹⁰ Findings were derived from themes that surface inductively, which were then contextualized within the relevant literatures.

Appendix: List of Respondents*

1. Dr. Caryn Aviv, Rabbinic Candidate and Associate Director, Judaism Your Way, Denver, CO
2. Matt Davidson, Executive Director, Kehillat Israel Reconstructionist Congregation, Los Angeles, CA
3. Ami Eden, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Editor, 70 Faces Media, New York, NY
4. Jonathan Emanuel, Director of Youth Education and Family Engagement, Congregation Kol Shofar, Tiburon, CA
5. Hazzan Shulamit Wise Fairman, Music Director, Kehilla Community Synagogue, Piedmont, CA
6. Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin, Israel Center of Conservative Judaism, Flushing, NY
7. Ari Gauss, Executive Director, North Carolina Hillel, Chapel Hill, NC
8. Sharna Goldseker, Executive Director, 21/64, New York, NY
9. Rabbi Sherre Hirsch, Senior Rabbinic Scholar for Hillel International, Consultant, Speaker and Author, Los Angeles, CA
10. Simon Klarfeld, Executive Director, Young Judea, New York, NY
11. Idit Klein, Executive Director, Keshet, Boston, MA
12. Aliza Kline, Founding Executive Director, OneTable, New York, NY
13. Shira Kline, Founding Ritual Leader, Director of Worship and Family Education Director at Lab/Shul, Performer and Jewish music educator, New York, NY
14. Saul Korin, Development Manager, Mittleman Jewish Community Center/Portland Jewish Academy, Portland, OR
15. Michelle Provorny-Cash, Director of Marketing and Communications, Gateways: Access to Jewish Education, Boston, MA
16. David Ross, Owner/Teacher, David Ross Piano Studio, cantorial soloist/song leader for Temple Micah, Denver, CO
17. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, Rabbi-in-Residence Avodah, Evanston, IL
18. Susan Sherr-Seitz, Chief Program Officer, Jewish Community of Greater Baltimore, MD
19. Steven Singer, Campaign Director, UJA-Federation of New York, NY
20. Daniel Sokatch, Chief Executive Officer, New Israel Fund, San Francisco, CA
21. Bradley Solmsen, Executive Director, Surprise Lake Camp, New York, NY
22. Amy Tobin, Chief Executive Officer, Jewish Community Center of the East Bay, Berkeley, CA
23. Rabbi Mike Werbow, Temple Beth Sholom, Sarasota, FL
24. Paul Zakrewski, Director of Communications and Programs, Congregation B'nai B'rith, Santa Barbara, CA
25. Jennifer Zwilling, Vice President for Strategy and Measurement, Hillel International, Washington, DC

* Respondents granted their permission to include their names. Their job titles and affiliations may have changed since the research was conducted.

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I am so grateful to the members of the sample, who generously trusted me with their stories and, in doing so, contributed to my professional growth. Thank you to the extraordinary group of individuals who generously advised and encouraged me along the way: Harlene Appelman, Joni Blinderman, Gali Cooks, Ari Kelman, Lisa Lepson, Or Mars, Toby Rubin, Jeffrey Solomon, Ruthie Warshenbrot and Mark Young. I am indebted to my colleagues at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture for their support of this project: Brie Loskota, Richard Flory and Nick Street. Finally, I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends and family. This accomplishment would not have been possible without their encouragement.

About the Author

Tobin Belzer, Ph.D., is an applied sociologist whose research and program evaluations have focused on young adults and teens, experiential education, leadership training, organizational culture, congregational studies, Jewish identity, character development, gender, inclusion, media and technology, arts and culture, and education.

Belzer has been a visiting scholar at the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University and a research associate at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC). She came to USC as a post-doctoral fellow jointly appointed at the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life and at CRCC. Belzer earned her Ph.D. in sociology and master's degree in women's studies from Brandeis University.

Endnotes

- 1 Tobin Belzer, "Jewish Identity at Work: GenXers in Jewish Jobs," Unpublished doctoral dissertation (Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, 2004).
- 2 Belzer, "Jewish Identity at Work," 145-149.
- 3 Through online and offline social networks, I located 42 of the original 48 research subjects. I contacted them via email and sent a brief survey to inquire about their current jobs, location and willingness to participate in the follow-up study. All 39 people who responded were willing to participate. Of those, 31 currently work in or connected to Jewish organizations. The nine others are business consultants, lawyers, artists, researchers, full-time parents, small business owners and consultants. Just one said they left the Jewish communal sector for reasons related to the working conditions. Data collection was undertaken to the point of saturation. The 25 respondents were included in the study because they work in Jewish organizations and responded before saturation was achieved.
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- 9 Susan Wolf Ditkoff and Libbie Landles-Cobb, "Cultivating the Next Generation of Leaders for Jewish Nonprofits: Findings from Interviews and Research: Leadership Pipeline Initiative," (The Bridgespan Group 2014), 24.
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- 11 Suzanne Chan-Serafin, Arthur P. Brief and Jennifer M. George, "How Does Religion Matter and Why? Religion and the Organizational Sciences," *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1586.
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