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**Young Jewish Leaders in Los Angeles:
Strengthening the Jewish People in Conventional and Unconventional Ways¹**

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Abstract

Jewish leaders talk about “mainstream” or “establishment” organizations like Federation and American Jewish Committee in contrast with “innovative” or “non-establishment” ones like Progressive Jewish Alliance and JDub Records. This chapter investigates how this distinction is constructed in the discourse of the young Jews in Los Angeles who take on professional and volunteer leadership positions in these and other organizations. Leaders of cultural and left-wing political groups contrast themselves with “mainstream” and “establishment” organizations, while leaders of centrist and right-wing philanthropic and Israel groups, even if they are recently founded, tend not to.

In addition, this chapter shows how different groups attract different types of participants and leaders. Jews involved with establishment groups tend to be in for-profit professions (law, finance, business) and have an upper-class orientation, while those involved with non-establishment groups tend to be in nonprofit professions (education, arts, government, NGOs) and have an unconventional orientation. These differences demonstrate the close connection among social networks, social capital, and Jewish communal engagement. Also, those involved with establishment groups tend to feel a sense of responsibility toward Jews, sometimes from a survivalist vantage point, while those involved with non-establishment groups tend to feel responsibility toward the most vulnerable and reject the survivalist narrative of continuity. These differences can be seen not only in the biographies and outlooks of the groups’ leaders but also in the content and aesthetics of their promotional materials and events. In short, what has been seen merely as a generation gap is also a gap in social class and political orientation.

At the same time, there is a great deal of overlap between what has been called the “innovation ecosystem” (Jumpstart 2009) and the Jewish communal establishment. Many leaders are involved in both spheres, and organizations learn from and collaborate with each other. In short, this chapter sheds light on communal leaders’ rhetoric surrounding the two spheres, as well as similarities and differences between their organizations and the Jews in their 20s and 30s who lead them.

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Introduction

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in 2009, I took the 405 Freeway to the Skirball museum and followed the signs for “PJA 10 Live: Advocacy for a New Era,” the Progressive Jewish Alliance annual dinner. As I parked my Prius in the parking lot, I noticed several other Priuses, some with Obama or Jewish social justice bumper stickers. I went up the stairs to the cocktail area and found a crowd that was diverse in age but included many people under 40. Most attendees were white, but there were a number of other ethnic backgrounds. A lesbian couple walked in hand-in-hand. I noticed a few knit yarmulkes, mostly on non-Orthodox rabbis I know, including one woman. Most men wore suits; women wore suits or dresses.

I chatted with some of my faculty colleagues from Hebrew Union College, as well as several friends of mine from the Shtibl Minyan and IKAR who are Jewish professionals and other nonprofit workers, artists, filmmakers, and lawyers. I talked to a young man who had completed PJA’s Jeremiah Fellowship and works for a Jewish cultural organization. And I met a young woman who was not involved in Jewish life until she did the Jeremiah Fellowship.

I walked past the DJ, who was spinning some funky beats, and snacked on chips and dips at the hors d’oeuvres table. I talked to the volunteers manning the table with information on PJA’s action campaigns, and I signed petitions to legalize same-sex marriage and legislate affordable housing. I browsed through decorated sneakers and basketballs at an exhibit of fair-trade sports goods.

We were ushered into the dining area and found the dozens of tables (almost 500 guests attended) decorated with centerpieces highlighting social justice heroes, including Betty Friedan and Harriet Tubman. Signs on the wall invoked Martin Luther King, Jr., (“What would MLK do? Stand up for health care.”) and Gandhi, as well as the Babylonian Talmud and the prophet Jeremiah. As the guests found their tables, the hip hop music started, and a troupe of young African American performers danced in a style they told us was called “krump,” including a dance to a recording of MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

The dinner chairs, two young PJA lay leaders, came to the stage and pumped up the crowd: “Let’s get some *ruach* in this room!” Thus began a series of speeches clearly geared toward a mostly young, Jewishly knowledgeable, left-wing crowd. A young female rabbi and an older male pastor gave a joint invocation. The rabbi said, “Hold up your hands: these are hands that do the work of justice. Now touch someone: these are your partners in this work.” She said *hamotzi* in Hebrew and English.

A short-haired black politician spoke next. She asked how many people were at Obama’s inauguration, and several hands went up. She revved up the crowd with passionate talk of justice and support for local progressive politicians and propositions; for a few minutes I felt like I was at a Democratic pep rally.

A PJA professional leader recognized the staff and talked about PJA’s accomplishments, focusing on the “next generation of Jewish leaders.” She asked us to raise our glasses and say “a *l’chaim* to 10 years [of PJA] and over 120 more.” In a video presentation, a Jewish history professor talked about the Jewish historical mandate for justice. He talked about immigration and sweatshops and quoted the Prophets: “Justice, justice shall you pursue.”

Another PJA professional mentioned PJA's allies, including Jewish Funds for Justice, American Jewish World Service, Avodah, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council. She talked about various groups of people who are suffering injustice and said after each one, "We are you and you are us." She declared, "There is no us vs. them, there is we – *si, se puede*, together we can." She talked about Tookie Williams, death row inmate who "sought to practice *tshuva*" [repentance]. She teared up when she mentioned the recently passed Proposition 8, which made same-sex marriage illegal. To mark the special moment of this annual dinner, she sang "*Shehechyanu*," and many of the attendees sang along.

Dinner was served. It was standard gala fare – rolls, salad, chicken and roasted vegetables – with a trendy, international flair, including seaweed and sesame oil in the salad and cucumber-infused water with lemon. During dinner, the screen on the stage featured profiles of people involved with PJA, mostly under 40, including the founder-rabbi of IKAR, the founder-CEO of JDub Records, and a Muslim man involved in the NewGround Muslim-Jewish dialogue group. A brief slide show, set to Classical music, honored an older couple who funded some PJA programs.

I flipped through the tribute journal, a narrow, 91-page booklet with an edgy, graffiti-esque cover and filled with ads from individuals, organizations, and politicians congratulating PJA and the evening's honorees. There were many "*mazel tovs*" and "*yasher koachs*." A staff member wrote about "Abraham Joshua Heschel's exhortation to 'pray with our feet.'" And one of the honorees expressed an aspiration: "In ten years, Jews will be to justice and service what Quakers are to peace."

The main event of the evening began: a discussion forum, moderated by the editor of the local Jewish newspaper, with the two honorees: the 40-year-old past executive director of PJA and a middle-aged lawyer and law school dean who has worked for civil liberties. One was introduced as "working to return social justice to its rightful place at the forefront of the Jewish agenda," and the other as "author, agitator, *mensch*." The honorees talked about their past, present, and future work for social justice and its relation to Jews, and they answered the moderator's questions about justice, fundraising, and Obama.

After the forum, a PJA professional publicly thanked the kitchen staff in English and Spanish, and she asked attendees to consider joining one of PJA's several working groups, "the way we get our *tachlis* [practical work] done." She then invited guests into the lobby for dessert and coffee, and a Korean percussion ensemble began its performance of loud, rhythmic drumming.

A few weeks later, on a beautiful Monday afternoon, I got into my Prius and drove down Avenue of the Stars to the Century Plaza Hotel. I passed a line of Lexuses, BMWs, and Audis inching up to the valet at the main entrance, and I drove around back and parked in the lot next to a Mercedes. I followed signs for "Gala of the Legends," The Jewish Federation Real Estate and Construction Division Annual Dinner. On the way up to the hotel, I chatted with a middle-aged non-Jewish woman who said she attends this event every year and sits with some of her clients at a table purchased by her financial firm. I entered the cocktail area and said hi to several Federation staff members and lay leaders whom I knew either because they were my former students at Hebrew Union College or because I had interviewed them for this research project.

The lobby was filled with hundreds of people of all ages, mostly white but also some of Middle Eastern, African-American, Latino, and Asian origin. Men wore suits; women wore suits or cocktail dresses. I saw a number of men in yarmulkes, including a few black velvet ones. Cocktails in hand, attendees chatted and exchanged business cards. I met a young woman who designs the interiors of office buildings. She said she is not involved with Federation but attends this and several “other industry events” every year. I talked to a young man who I knew was a Real Estate and Construction (REC) Division leader because of the ribbons on his name tag. He said he goes to many fundraising dinners like this: “It’s an L.A. thing, you know, the red carpet, being seen.” He loves the Federation because it is a “very efficient philanthropy” with “little overhead,” and he has really enjoyed serving on a committee and making friends. He hopes to build relationships for his career in investment banking and meet a woman who is “young and successful.”

A large widescreen TV featured a slide show of Federation beneficiary agencies (“Thanks to you, 35,000 medical visits were subsidized...”), interspersed with thank yous to the event sponsors. Tuxedoed servers circulated plates of beef skewers with peanut sauce and other hors d’oeuvres, and a huge banner congratulating the evening’s honorees hung overhead.

We were ushered into the elegant ballroom through security scanners. There were several dozen tables (over 1000 guests attended). Upfront were the major donors and other VIPs, then the tables purchased by individuals and companies, then the members of the Young Leadership Development Institute (a minimum gift fellowship program started in L.A. and replicated by Federations around the country), and then the rest of the attendees, including a few more tables of young people in the back. The tables looked elegant; centerpieces were decorated baskets of kosher food to be donated to SOVA, a Federation-beneficiary food bank.

I was seated in the back at a table with other young people, mostly real estate professionals. Three young men were leafing through the stack of business cards they had just collected. One pointed out a young woman at the next table with a large diamond ring. “Her husband must be making 7 figures,” he whispered. He suspected based on her mannerisms that she did not grow up wealthy.

The official events opened with a lay leader introducing the cantorial soloist from Beit T’shuva (a Federation-supported addiction recovery organization), who stood between the Israeli and American flags and sang the two national anthems. The middle-aged lay leader dinner chair welcomed “distinguished guests,” including several Jewish and non-Jewish politicians. He congratulated dinner attendees on raising over \$640,000, an impressive amount in any year and especially during the economic downturn. He thanked REC donors for their gifts over the past year, which totaled \$9.1 million: “You generous people raised 18%, or *chai*, of all the money raised by Federation.” He recalled how he reluctantly agreed to chair the dinner: “You just want a poor *shmuck*, I’m not *meshugene*.” He promised he would “keep the speeches short and the networking long” and invited another lay leader to say *hamotzi* over a *challah* so large that someone suggested it could make it into the Guinness Book.

Dinner was typical for a gala: a salad of mixed greens with candied pecans and sweet vinaigrette, an entrée of chicken with potatoes and vegetables. During dinner, I chatted with some of the young men at my table. One of them asked me about my

research, and I told him I am interviewing leaders of several Jewish organizations. He had not heard of PJA, so I explained that they work for social justice. He said with a smile, “That’s better than us – we’re just in it for the networking.” He explained: “Young people do it for the networking; older people don’t need the networking – they do it to be good. When young people do it to be good, that’s when the deals come.”

During a lull in the conversation, I skimmed the heavy, glossy tribute book. It featured pictures from REC’s social service events, such as the “Senior Prom” at a JCC, the “Festival of Lights Toy Drive,” and the mission to Cuba (including a sampling of local cigars). And it offered information about the Federation: “Just because we’re almost 100 doesn’t mean we don’t think about the future. In fact, we think about it all the time, which is why The Jewish Federation has so many ways for young people to get involved throughout Los Angeles and the Valley.” The majority of the 224-page book was filled with tribute ads, divided according to amount of donation. Ads mentioned the four honorees’ success as real estate developers, their generosity to the Jewish community, or both. There were many “*mazel tovs*” and “*yasher koachs*.” Another section listed REC Division donors divided by ranges of contribution to the Federation’s annual campaign.

The MC returned to the stage and introduced a young woman wearing a striking red dress – the first woman, he said, to give the appeal at the annual REC dinner. She started by talking about her negative childhood experiences with Judaism. After going on a Birthright Israel trip, she came back “connected to the State of Israel” and got involved with Federation. She talked about the work of Federation: feeding the poor, offering a safety net, fulfilling the “mandate of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.” She said that by giving to the Federation we can honor our ancestors who died in the Holocaust, and we can ensure continuity. After a rousing round of applause, attendees were asked to fill out the pledge cards at their table, and Federation staff members circulated to collect them.

The main event of the evening was the ceremony inducting the honorees, four octogenarian real estate giants who have been major Federation donors, into the REC Hall of Fame. They were acknowledged with video presentations featuring relatives and friends praising them for their professional and philanthropic accomplishments, interspersed with pictures of walls of the Federation office and other Jewish communal buildings with their names on them. One video tribute said, “*Biz hundert tsvantsik* [(may you live) until 120]. May you feel like 20.” Each inductee came to the stage to accept a plaque and pose for photographers.

The official portion of the event ended when the dinner chair said, “We’re going to have dessert, drinks, and transactional activity in the lounge.” He exhorted guests: “If you guys get a deal tonight... [make a] supplemental donation to Federation.” I checked the program’s order of events, and, indeed, it ended with “Dessert, drinks, & deals in the California Lounge.”

Two annual dinners of Jewish nonprofit organizations. Both were intended to motivate members and supporters, honor leaders, and raise much-needed funds. Both attracted hundreds of Jews, including many in their 20s and 30s. And both included a good deal of Jewish content, as well as English peppered with Hebrew and Yiddish. But it is clear from the thematic emphases and aesthetic orientations of these events that the Federation and the Progressive Jewish Alliance attract and cater to very different crowds. The Federation is geared toward conventional Jews who are wealthy or striving to be

wealthy, especially those with a desire to contribute to Jewish causes, and PJA is geared toward young, progressive Jews with a desire to work toward justice for all. The Federation attracts Jews who are also involved with other organizations that support Israel and local Jewish causes, especially through philanthropic engagement, and PJA attracts Jews who are also involved with IKAR and independent *minyanim*, as well as Jewish cultural organizations.

As I found in my research, the differences between these Federation and PJA events are not limited to these two organizations but typify what leaders call “mainstream” or “establishment” Jewish organizations on the one hand and “innovative” or “non-establishment” Jewish “start-ups” on the other hand. This chapter examines these organizational spheres by analyzing discourse about them and the views of their young leaders. I found that for some leaders, especially those of social justice and cultural groups, the dichotomy between “establishment” and “innovative” organizations is salient and serves as a driving force behind their work. And I found that the spheres differ in several ways, but that there is also a good deal of overlap in participation, leadership, and collaboration.

We know from previous work that there is great diversity among Jews in their 20s and 30s. Although this age cohort is less engaged in organizational life than their parents and grandparents, and many young Jews prefer episodic engagement over formal membership and leadership roles (Cohen and Kelman 2005), some Jews in their 20s and 30s are strongly committed to Jewish organizations. Ukeles, Miller, and Beck (2006) found a hierarchy of engagement: Orthodox Jews are most strongly connected, then non-Orthodox in-married Jews with children, then non-Orthodox singles and in-married couples without children, and then intermarried couples. Even so, as I found in my research, some members of all of these groups are participating in the leadership of Jewish organizations.

From January to September 2009, I conducted ethnographic research in Los Angeles to study these diverse leaders. I began my research with three questions: How do young Jewish leaders get involved with Jewish organizations? How do leaders of establishment and non-establishment organizations differ? And how is that distinction constructed rhetorically? To answer these questions, I carried out a three-tiered approach, looking at 17 organizations in the cultural, political, social, and philanthropic spheres that are attracting many young Jews to leadership roles (see Appendix):

1. Interviews with 40 Jews, mostly in their 20s and 30s, who are professional or volunteer leaders of at least one organization, including presidents, board members, and founders of young adult divisions.²

² Some might question the notion of including lay and professional leaders in the same study. After all, professionals are just doing their job; lay leaders are giving voluntarily of their time and often money. While I did encounter some professionals who see their work as a job rather than a passion, the vast majority of interviewees are ideologically committed to their work. A few Federation employees, especially those who started their involvement as lay leaders, joked about “drinking the [Federation] Kool Aid” and told me proudly that their largest charitable gift is to the Federation. Another rationale for including lay and professional leaders in the same study is that the boundary between the two is permeable. A number of professionals, including at PJA and Federation, started their involvement as lay leaders. A professional leader of JQ International began his involvement as a lay leader. And a lay leader with a few organizations said he can see himself dropping out of the corporate world and becoming a Jewish professional in the future. In addition, some of the professional leaders I interviewed are lay leaders at other organizations. For

2. Observation of over a dozen meetings and events
3. Analysis of websites and other promotional materials

The young leaders I interviewed are extremely diverse. They range from secular to observant and from liberal to conservative. In this non-random sample, about half are single, and half are married or partnered. While most are Ashkenazim, several are Sephardi/Mizrahi (including a few Persian and Israeli Jews) or of mixed heritage. The sample includes immigrants and children of immigrants, gay and lesbian Jews, Jews of color, and Jews originally from other parts of the country. Interviews lasted an average of 66 minutes (range: 33 minutes to 1 hour 54 minutes) and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Los Angeles as a case study

In this type of study, it is fruitful to focus on one locale: to observe and analyze the local dynamics among organizations, leaders, participants, funders and the local industrial, cultural, and political landscape. Los Angeles was an obvious choice because I live here. But it is also appropriate for other reasons. People talk about L.A. as prefiguring the future of Jewish and general trends (e.g., Phillips 2007; see also Dear and Flusty 2002). There is a great deal of innovation in L.A. – both in longstanding and new organizations – that is later replicated in other cities. Examples include the social justice-based spiritual community IKAR, the action-based social justice group PJA, the grassroots unity-oriented social/educational/cultural/religious group JConnect, and Federation’s Real Estate and Construction Division’s Young Leadership Development Institute. L.A. is also a hub for umbrella organizations and institutes that study and encourage innovation, including Hebrew Union College’s School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, the Professional Leaders Project, and Jumpstart – a “thinkubator for sustainable Jewish innovation.”³ As the new CEO of the L.A. Federation said at his first public speaking engagement in 2009, “what Jews do in Los Angeles will have an impact around the world.”

L.A. is clearly an important player in the American Jewish community. At the same time, it is unique in a number of ways. First, L.A. is second only to New York in community size; current estimates range from 519,151 to 668,000 Jews (Herman 1998, DellaPergola 2007:599).⁴ Like New York, parts of L.A. are densely Jewish. On the Westside, Jews comprise 22-26% of the population, and in parts of the San Fernando Valley, that percentage is as high as 48% (Phillips 2007).

Second, as part of an international city, the L.A. Jewish community includes several streams of recent immigrants, including Jews from Iran, Israel, the Former Soviet Union, Latin America, South Africa, and, more recently, France. Jews from these groups

example, one woman who has worked at three Jewish organizations is currently a board member of two others. Organizers of the now-defunct Professional Leaders Project recognized the permeable boundaries between lay and professional leadership and included both categories in their programs (Landres 2009). Whether they are Jewish professionals, volunteers, or both, the young leaders I interviewed will likely have an impact on the Jewish world in years to come.

³ <http://jewishjumpstart.org/>, accessed 3/10.

⁴ The lower number is likely an underestimate, and the higher number includes outlying areas (p.c., Bruce Phillips and Sergio DellaPergola, 12/09).

are represented to varying extents in organizational life,⁵ but the most prominent group is Iranian/Persian Jews. Immigrants from Iran and their children tend to be wealthy, pro-Israel, and politically conservative. Many are involved in mainstream organizations like the Federation, Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces (FIDF), Hadassah, and American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and young Iranian Jews have created their own groups, including young adult divisions of Iranian-American organizations and three new groups: 30 Years After (refers to the date of the Iranian revolution that sparked Jews' emigration), the Lev Foundation (founded in memory of a young man named Daniel Levian), and Ledorvador ('from generation to generation').

Entertainment industry, red carpet phenomenon

Like in other cities, Jews in Los Angeles are overrepresented in legal, medical, and business professions.⁶ In addition, many local Jews are involved in the entertainment industry. I have met Jews who are writers, producers, directors, actors, agents, casting professionals, post-production editors, camera men, financiers, and film critics. Some Jewish organizations reach out to Jews in this profession, and those that do not inevitably find that some of their participants are "in the industry."

Partly due to influence from the entertainment industry, the "red carpet" phenomenon is ubiquitous in Los Angeles Jewish life: perhaps even more than in other wealthy communities, "being seen" is central to social life. At a few of the Jewish events I attended, there was an actual red carpet, as well as a photography area near the entrance.

In the driving culture of L.A., much attention is given to cars. In wealthy circles, Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, and Audi are popular, and every once in a while one sees a Bentley or an Italian sports car. In Orthodox circles, because of the norm of large families, minivans are the norm; and in left-wing activist circles, Priuses, Smart Cars, and other environmentally friendly cars are common. In other cities, cars are certainly important indicators of identity, but in L.A. they are especially salient.

City of transplants

In contrast to some cities like Detroit and Chicago, Los Angeles is home to many Jews who grew up elsewhere, a trend that goes back to the post-war influx of Jews from the Northeast and Midwest (Moore 1994). While the 40 leaders I interviewed by no means represent a random sample, it is interesting that the vast majority of professionals did not grow up in Los Angeles but the vast majority of lay leaders did. Perhaps young Jews are more attuned to local lay leadership opportunities if their parents and long-time friends are involved.

Certainly the lack of familial continuity in Los Angeles has ramifications for Jewish engagement. One Federation professional says that many young Jews here "don't have family, they don't have friends, they don't have people to go to Temple with . . . so they kind of just lose their Jewish life." Some young transplants seek out organizations or types of organizations they are familiar with from other cities, including Federation, AIPAC, denominational synagogues, or independent *minyanim*. Gesher City, the "bridge

⁵ See Chichowolski de Jenik and Jenik 2005 on Latin American Jews, Golshan 2005 on Iranian Jews, and Schwarz 2009 on Israeli Jews.

⁶ But see Chiswick (2008:14) on Jews' decreasing representations in some of these professions.

to the local Jewish scene,” caters partly to transplants: “Whether you’re a native Angelino or new in town, GesherCity L.A. is going to help get you connected.”⁷

Fragmented city

The Los Angeles Jewish community is very spread out. Jews live and run institutions in the Valley, the West Side, Mid City, the East Side, the South Bay, Orange County, and several other regions (see Phillips 2007 for a regional mapping). Because of traffic and perceived cultural differences and geographic barriers, Jews in some areas rarely visit others. While there is a downtown area that serves as a hub for some cultural events (theater, orchestral music, etc.), there is no central area that serves as a hub for Jewish life. One lay leader who has also lived in Washington D.C. and Chicago says that the L.A. Jewish community is comparatively dispersed. She feels that people in L.A. are more oriented toward their own lives than communal engagement: “In D.C. and Chicago, ... more people are on the pulse of what’s going on, versus L.A., it’s like ‘I’m at the beach.’” Similarly, an Orthodox professional originally from New York sees gaps between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews in Los Angeles. He says, “I think people here aren’t even exposed [to other groups]. It’s so cut off, you never really see people. In Manhattan, you’re in daily contact with people.” The fragmented nature of Los Angeles Jewish life likely stems from several factors, including the large size of the Jewish community, the reliance on cars for transportation, and the culture of individualism.⁸

Federation not as central

In some locales, including Chicago and smaller cities, one Jewish philanthropic body (the Federation, UJA, CJP) is the “central Jewish address” and the main or only show in town for Jews in their 20s and 30s. In Los Angeles, the Federation has struggled to maintain a position of centrality. Perhaps because of the factors discussed above, the independent mindset characteristic of California, and the dizzying array of organizations and engagement opportunities, the Federation is not necessarily the first place Jews turn when looking to get involved. Even so, as I explain below, it is still an important source of Jewish activity for some Jews in their 20s and 30s, and leaders of many groups talk about the Federation as emblematic of the Jewish establishment.

Discourse surrounding establishment vs. non-establishment organizations

National Jewish discourse

The discourse surrounding establishment and non-establishment Jewish organizations permeates the Jewish communal landscape. In national and local periodicals and research reports, new and niche organizations are often discussed in contrast to “mainstream” Jewish groups. Independent *minyanim* and new spiritual communities are contrasted with “mainstream” congregations⁹; the Jewish blogosphere and new Jewish media like *Heeb Magazine* and *Guilt and Pleasure* are contrasted with

⁷ <http://www.geshercity.org/web/la>, accessed 3/10.

⁸ See Moore (1994) on the historical basis for this fragmentation and individualism.

⁹ e.g., Rebecca Spence, “Leaders of Indie Prayer Groups Get Grants, Become Mainstream Darlings,” October 08, 2008, *Forward*, <http://www.forward.com/articles/14356/>.

the “mainstream Jewish media”¹⁰; left-wing Israel groups like Americans for Peace Now and J Street and social justice groups like American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ) are contrasted with “mainstream Jewish organizations,” especially AIPAC, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and the American Jewish Committee (AJC)¹¹; congregations serving mostly Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Jews are contrasted with mainstream synagogues¹²; and Black, Latino and Asian Jews are contrasted with the “mainstream” (i.e., White) Jewish community.¹³ We see this rhetoric in news stories, as well as in opinion pieces from leaders of both “establishment” and “non-establishment” groups. Jumpstart COO Joshua Avedon writes in a *Forward* op-ed, “If the mainstream Jewish community doesn’t get hip to what is driving the new start-ups soon, a whole parallel universe of Jewish communal life might just rise up and make the old structures irrelevant.” Using a tongue-in-cheek Darwinian metaphor, he goes on the contrast two species, “*Synagogus Mainstreamus*” and “*Synagogus Emergentus*” and argues that “they can (and should) interbreed.”¹⁴

The term “organized Jewish community” is also common on both sides of the aisle. In the introduction to Cohen and Kelman’s (2007) study of new Jewish organizations, Jeffrey Solomon and Roger Bennett of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies write (I underline group/sphere descriptors):

At first, most of us in the organized Jewish community wrote this “New Jewish Identity” off as a fad, lacking in depth that, like any trend, would prove to be a temporary phenomenon. This organizing, even if it was “an explosion,” was taking place outside of the walls of the organizations and institutions we had dedicated our lives to building. (Cohen and Kelman 2007:4)

They go on to explain that they have embraced these “new forms of Jewish organizing.”

From the other side, a report about Jewish social justice groups shows how their leaders see themselves in various relationships with the “organized Jewish community”:

Some Jewish social justice leaders take the position that, to build the field, it is crucial to develop relationships with the organized Jewish community. They view the organized Jewish community (OJC) as the source of money, power, and people that can be engaged in this work. Others see the OJC as increasingly irrelevant, and argue that these relationships should occupy low priority on the Jewish social justice agenda. (Bronznick and Goldenhar 2008:50)

¹⁰ e.g., Claire Levenson, “Leading Blogger Joins Jewish Mainstream,” August 15, 2007, *Forward*, <http://www.forward.com/articles/11404/>.

¹¹ e.g., James D. Besser, “Jewish Groups Seek Distance From Peace Summit,” October 25, 2007, *The Jewish Week*, http://www.thejewishweek.com/viewArticle/c40_a714/News/Israel.html; Amy Klein, “New Coalition Aims to Make Social Justice a Community Priority,” October 25, 2009, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, <http://jta.org/news/article/2009/10/25/1008711/new-coalition-aims-to-make-social-justice-a-community-priority>.

¹² e.g., Marilyn H. Karfeld, “Chevrei Tikva to close, join Anshe Chesed,” June 2, 2005, *Cleveland Jewish News*, <http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/articles/2005/06/02/news/local/bcover0603.txt>.

¹³ e.g., Rebecca Spence, “Think Tank Aims To Infuse Jewish Mainstream With Dashes of Color,” May 8, 2008, *Forward*, <http://www.forward.com/articles/13345/>.

¹⁴ Joshua Avedon, “Where Would Darwin Daven?” December 4, 2008, *The Forward*, <http://www.forward.com/articles/14665/>.

Bronznick and Goldenhar conclude that “The Jewish social justice community and the organized Jewish community have an unprecedented opportunity, to move from *shared interests* to a more profound appreciation of *shared values*” (ibid. 15). Similarly, AJWS head Ruth Messinger argues that service organizations should “be recognized as essential players in the organized Jewish community.”¹⁵ While there are multiple views as to how much new organizations are or should be part of the establishment, it is clear that many leaders and observers recognize two contrasting spheres of Jewish communal life.

Other descriptors are also common. In a July 2009 op-ed in the *Forward*, J Street’s Isaac Luria contrasts “traditional,” “establishment” and “old-style top-down institutions” with “an emerging new Judaism of independent minyanim, social justice and alternative Jewish culture.”¹⁶ A recent report on the Jewish “innovation ecosystem” discusses “startups and established institutions” (Jumpstart et al. 2009:2). As its authors characterize it, “In and beyond the Jewish community, a new generation of organic, decentralized, and flexible structures is replacing the twentieth century’s mechanical, centralized, and top-down organizations” (ibid.:1).

From this brief survey of discourse around the country, it is clear that journalists, researchers, and diverse Jewish leaders classify some Jewish organizations as “mainstream” or “establishment” and others as “innovative” or “start-ups.” The establishment sphere includes longstanding groups like Federations and other philanthropies that benefit mostly Jews, as well as Jewish defense and centrist or right-wing Israel advocacy groups. New spiritual communities, cultural initiatives, and social justice and left-wing Israel groups (both longstanding and new) are seen as comprising a separate sphere, an “innovation ecosystem,” even as they are seen as making inroads into the “organized Jewish community.”

Discourse among young Jewish leaders in Los Angeles

The distinction between establishment and non-establishment organizations certainly came up in many of the interviews I conducted in Los Angeles. Leaders of both types of organizations contrasted them using a number of terms, referring primarily to three dimensions: how old they are (“long-standing,” “established,” “existing” organizations vs. “new,” “young” “startups”), how conventional they are (“mainstream,” “conventional,” “traditional” groups vs. “innovative,” “unconventional,” “independent,” “edgy” ones) and their size and structure (“large,” “corporate,” “bureaucratic,” “hierarchical,” and “institutionalized” vs. “small,” “grassroots,” and “organic”). Interviewees applied these labels to the organizations, their events and programs, and the people who participate in and lead them.

I heard this discourse of contrast many times in the interviews, but only from leaders of certain organizations: Leaders of PJA, JDub Records, Yiddishkayt L.A., Reboot, JQ International, and JConnect contrasted their groups with mainstream ones. Leaders of Federation, especially professionals, discussed these new groups in contrast to the Federation and other establishment groups. But leaders of new philanthropic and centrist/right-wing Israel groups (e.g., FIDF, Guardians of the Jewish Home for the

¹⁵ Ruth Messinger, “Making Service Fundamental to Jewish Life,” September, 2003, *Jewish Currents*, <http://www.jewishcurrents.org/2003-sept-messinger.htm>.

¹⁶ <http://www.forward.com/articles/109563/>

Aging, and Stand With Us) did not participate in this discourse of contrast. This is not surprising, considering that some of them are also involved in Federation, AIPAC, and similar groups and have little knowledge of some of the new organizations.

I found many examples of the discourse of contrast: A leader of Yiddishkayt L.A. says that the Jews involved with his organization “are not always people being reached by the mainstream Jewish community.” This sentiment echoes the organization’s promotional materials for a pilot group of its fellowship for young adults:

For Jews with Yiddish heritage, understanding the riches and history of Yiddish culture leads to a deep and strong Jewish identity based in the achievements of a thousand years of Jewish civilization. Once ubiquitous, this pathway to Jewish identity is now revolutionary, an alternative to the narrative provided by the present-day mainstream Jewish community.

A professional who sees herself as a bridge between different types of organizations said, “Look at what all these Jewish innovative organizations are doing that’s different from the institutions and the bigger organizations.” One Federation professional said, “Certainly federations are the more corporate of the Jewish engagement opportunities.” Along the same lines, another Federation professional said:

There are certain people that just don’t want to be part of the mainstream, and Federation is mainstream to a large extent. So, I think there are some people that just would rather be with something smaller and maybe more niche-focused ... that kind of personality that just doesn’t want to do what everyone else is doing. They want to do something different.

A leader of JConnect, in explaining how his group makes it “cool to be Jewish,” said that JConnect creates an environment with “a little bit of an edge.” He used a number of contrastive terms:

We don’t do stuff in ... an institutional setting. For all the reasons that the indie minyans are working and all the reasons the grassroots groups are working are all the things we carry with us. Even though at times we do partner with the establishment, we still carry with us sort of like this anti-establishment, independent, be who— you know, it’s like, we’re in the YouTube generation, we’re in the MySpace generation. We’re in the generation of people who ... want to express themselves as an individual. ... They may not all want something pre-packaged.

There is sometimes debate over whether or not a particular group is part of the organized Jewish community. A leader of the Progressive Jewish Alliance contrasts “the organized Jewish community and the progressive left community.” She says that PJA “represents a very particular perspective and ... builds alliances that moves the mainstream Jewish community.” But in the same interview she says:

We're part of the mainstream Jewish community; we're an organization that people see as just one of the ... Jewish communal representatives, and part of what we do is we work with our other organized Jewish community institutions to move them in that [progressive] direction.

She sums up PJA's situation by saying that PJA has "one foot in the organized Jewish community and one foot out."

When I asked another PJA leader if she considers PJA to be part of the organized Jewish community, she responded, "That's a big question. I don't know. I mean, I think to some extent it is, and we sit at the table with them, and to another extent, we're so much smaller." Even as she posits that PJA is part of the organized Jewish community, she uses "us" vs. "them" language, indicating PJA's ambiguous status with respect to other organizations. Similarly, a third PJA leader said, "We'd love to have a more symbiotic relationship with the mainstream Jewish community. We are mainstream. Being progressive is at the center of Jewish life." Within one utterance, this leader portrays her organization as being both outside and inside the mainstream. This seeming contradiction points to mixed feelings and multiple stances within PJA concerning how this organization should position itself with respect to the mainstream, as well as various views within the Federation and other establishment organizations concerning how to relate to PJA.

We find a similar tension in cultural organizations. Leaders of one new cultural organization talk about it in contrast to the mainstream Jewish community and its "reactive" Judaism based on discourses of anti-Semitism. But one of the people I talked to who has been involved both with this organization and with longstanding organizations says the dichotomy is overstated: "The truth is when you have an organization whose funders are all Jewish, who are investing in you to reach the community, you therefore become part of the community."

We see a different rhetoric among leaders of Jewish organizations that are new but have missions regarding Israel advocacy or social engagement, rather than social justice or culture. One professional who was instrumental in bringing Geshar City, an initiative of the Jewish Community Center Association, to Los Angeles said he thinks that Geshar City "wants to be" part of the organized Jewish community. "I don't know whether the organized Jewish community wants Geshar City to be a part of it." He went on to say that he goes to every meeting about young Jewish adults in Los Angeles and embraces any opportunity to collaborate, because he thinks that Geshar City "really is a great tool that the Jewish community could use. And needs." Although this leader does not (yet) see his organization as part of the mainstream, he does not use the same language of contrast as the social justice and culture leaders above.

A young lay leader who founded a young adult chapter of the pro-Israel group Stand With Us conveyed a similar sentiment. She expressed concern that many people involved in other Jewish organizations do not know about Stand With Us, but she made it clear that she does not see her organization in contrast to a "mainstream." Similarly, while I heard critiques of the Federation from leaders of the young divisions of Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces (FIDF) and the Guardians of the Jewish Home for the Aging (Guardians), I did not hear the discourse of contrast between different types of organizations. It seems that the "us" vs. "them" language is limited to new organizations

whose missions and constituencies are different from those of longstanding institutions, especially those that deal with Jewish culture, social justice, and GLBT Jews.

This rhetorical difference can be seen in the way leaders of justice and culture groups talk about innovation and transformation. Several of them talked about establishment organizations “do[ing] what they’ve been doing for years,” while start-ups focus on “R&D” (research and development), “challenge the norm,” and offer a “groundbreaking” approach to Jewish life. One non-establishment leader said that she feels that “edgy” organizations are “constantly asking questions” like “What should the Jewish community do? What should be the focus?” while she feels that mainstream organizations do not. Of course every well-run organization engages in periodic strategic planning and implements changes intended to strengthen the organization and achieve its goals. But many of the leaders of organizations in the non-establishment sphere see establishment groups as continuing business as usual, while they see themselves – and often young Jews in general – as creating something new.¹⁷

Some establishment leaders reject the rhetoric of innovation. One Federation professional is uncomfortable with the notion of “innovation” as the distinguishing factor between longstanding and new organizations, as articulated in the Jumpstart report on the “Innovation Ecosystem” and elsewhere. “It makes it seem as though innovation only happens in new/smaller organizations,” he wrote in an e-mail to me. In fact, several Federation leaders emphasized the innovative work they are doing in the spheres of programming, fundraising, marketing, and leadership training. One Federation professional believes that some young people prefer “newer organizations” because they think that mainstream organizations are run by “leaders in their 60s and 70s who are too established in their ways” to allow for innovative ideas. She agrees that this may have been the case in the past but argues that it has changed in recent years. I did, in fact, find this attitude among some of the non-establishment leaders I interviewed. One young man who is involved with a number of non-establishment organizations said that he only wants to be involved with new and constantly changing organizations and that he sees the Federation as too set in its ways to recreate itself for the changing times. “I enjoy building things; I don’t enjoy sustaining things. I don’t believe in perpetuating organizations for the sake of perpetuating organizations.”

Finally, there is a sense that some mainstream organizations are large and bureaucratic. Leaders of a few non-establishment organizations told me about their difficulties navigating the bureaucracy of one organization, the Jewish Federation. One non-establishment organization leader said, “It’s been pretty challenging to get the Federation to send out anything through their list for us, even the stuff that they co-sponsor.” Leaders of two different non-establishment organizations said that they have had several great conversations with Federation professionals about collaboration, funding, and leadership development but that nothing ever comes to fruition because of what one calls the “unbelievable bureaucracy.” One of these leaders pointed out that while his small organization can make decisions quickly over email, Federation is a “much heavier organization” and it takes them longer to do things. Even one Federation lay leader mentioned that some people avoid the Federation because they see it as “a big bureaucracy.” Some young Jews, especially, perhaps, those who work in the corporate world, do not mind the large and complex structure of the Federation. But others,

¹⁷ For more examples of this rhetoric, see Jumpstart et al. (2009).

including many who take a more independent and counter-cultural approach to life, consider it a turn-off and find opportunities for Jewish communal involvement elsewhere.

Among young Jewish leaders, the discourse is not limited to contrasting old and new organizations. It also extends to which Jews these groups attract. In discussing this issue, several leaders lumped certain organizations together in contrast to others. They described participants in Federation, AJC, ADL, denominational synagogues, and Israel groups as conventional and centrist, while they characterized participants in PJA, IKAR, and cultural organizations as unconventional and liberal.

One leader who is involved with several Jewish organizations said:

If you're a PJA person, your realm is sort of IKAR (and I mean, I don't want to characterize), but it's like IKAR and then certain Jewish cultural things, certain Jewish political things. Whereas let's say you're an Orthodox person at Beth Jacob, you're going to be involved with, let's say, AIPAC, and you'll be involved with this religious entity and this Jewish school...

He feels that there is not enough interaction among these different types of Jews, and he sees himself as a bridge between Jewish communal spheres.

A woman who works at Federation characterizes people involved with IKAR and PJA as "hippy-ish." She said that her understanding of a hippy is epitomized by some people she met from the Rainbow Coalition, a progressive organization. But she also used the term "hippy" to describe rabbinical students she meets in L.A., as well as the college students who were involved in her university's Hillel. This characterization stems from their practice of waving their arms and dancing during services at Hillel or IKAR. Also, she said she uses the term "hippy" "because they try and do things alternatively I guess. They try and create new things that aren't already done... I think people strongly believe that the traditional is not cutting it anymore." She does see a bit of "hippy" in herself, but she contrasts herself with the people involved with those organizations. In this mainstream leader's discourse, the Rainbow Coalition, Hillel, rabbinical schools, IKAR, and PJA all attract people who have an unconventional orientation. In the same interview, she said that young Jews who attend Federation events also attend events of the Guardians of the Jewish Home for the Aging, Hadassah, FIDF, (Conservative) Sinai Temple's young adult group "Atid," and other organizations that have been characterized as mainstream.

Similarly, a man who works at Federation talked about "mainstream institutional folks" who attend events at the Federation's Young Leadership Divisions, the ADL, the AJC, W Group (Reform temple Stephen S. Wise's young adult group), and Sinai Atid. A similar discourse was reported in a previous study of young Jewish adults in Los Angeles. Tobin Belzer's research found that "JDub staff characterize their audience as 'artsy, creative types' in contrast to the more 'conventional' types who are drawn to [Sinai Temple's] Friday Night Live" (Chertok et al. 2009).

Through the discourse of Jewish leaders, there emerge distinct spheres of Jewish organizational life. Organizations committed to raising and distributing funds for Jewish education and social services, combating anti-Semitism, or helping Israel from a centrist or right-wing perspective are seen as the establishment, while groups committed to social

justice, Jewish culture, GLBT Jews, and left-wing Israel work¹⁸ are seen as outside of the establishment. Although I did not analyze the religious domain, interviewees made clear that denominational synagogues are seen as mainstream, while independent *minyanim* and the IKAR community are seen as innovative. Of course not all groups are considered part of one sphere or the other, as the Appendix below indicates.

It is interesting to note that, of the groups I studied in Los Angeles, the majority of the non-establishment groups – and none of the establishment groups – are featured in “Slingshot,” the “guide to some of today’s most inspiring and innovative organizations, projects, leaders and visionaries in the North American Jewish community,” published by 21/64, a division of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. An independent foundation is contributing to the formation of an “innovative” sphere of Jewish communal life (see Kelner, this volume), both rhetorically and financially.

How separate are the spheres?

How distinct and separate are the establishment and non-establishment spheres that emerge from the discourse of young Jewish leaders? In Kelman’s mapping of online networks (this volume), he found that non-establishment organizations (both on the national level and in San Francisco and Los Angeles) tend to cluster with each other but also connect with mainstream groups. Similarly, when we examine co-sponsorship, participation, and leadership of Jewish organizations in Los Angeles, we find both differences and overlap.

Groups considered part of the non-establishment sphere often co-sponsor events together, and groups considered mainstream often do the same. Even so, the most co-sponsorship I noticed was between spheres, because some establishment groups offer much-needed funding and some new groups offer innovative ideas and a broader pool of potential participants.

Events of cultural and social justice organizations are often co-sponsored by the Federation or Jewish Community Foundation¹⁹ and sometimes Birthright Israel Next or Geshet City. For example, an evening with American Jewish World Service’s Ruth Messinger was co-sponsored by PJA, Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, the New Leaders Project (of the Federation), and the Federation. A pre-Passover arts *seder* was

¹⁸ Although they are not included in my research, left-wing Israel organizations, like New Israel Fund, J Street, Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, and Americans for Peace Now, are discussed as part of the innovative sphere. During my fieldwork, these groups did not have young adult divisions and did not attract many young Jews in Los Angeles. In fact, the one event I observed that was co-sponsored by a number of left-wing Israel groups was led and attended mostly by older Jews. I noticed only about 8 of the 50 people there who were under 45, and most of them were active in IKAR, PJA, Shtibl, and/or other innovative organizations. The age of the crowd was explicitly referenced a few times. For example, when one of the speakers was discussing the new J Street U college group, he said ironically: “I’m assuming you all just graduated from college ... OK, maybe you have a grandchild in college.” In fact, one leader involved with the Los Angeles chapter of J Street, which was launched a year after my research, said, “I think that J Street was founded just as much to get out from under generationally-stratified progressivism as to counter the right wing.” In contrast, a few of the right-wing Israel groups have substantial young leadership divisions, including FIDF and Stand With Us. Others, including the Zionist Organization of America, co-sponsor events with young groups like JConnect.

¹⁹ In some cases, co-sponsorship merely indicates that the organizing group received a grant from the co-sponsoring group. Foundation grant recipients are required to include the Foundation’s logo on promotional materials.

co-sponsored by Yiddishkayt, PJA, Jewish Artists Initiative, Gesher City, the Westside Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Community Foundation, and some non-Jewish arts organizations. And a JDub event was co-sponsored by Nextbook/Tablet and the Jewish Community Foundation. PJA has co-sponsored events or collaborated in some way with most Jewish social justice organizations, including AJWS, JFSJ, and Jews United for Justice, as well as most other non-establishment Jewish organizations, including IKAR, JDub, Yiddishkayt, and Reboot. But PJA has also collaborated with Federation, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, ADL, and other establishment organizations. One PJA professional emphasizes that PJA often offers free co-sponsorship to organizations in both spheres “to create greater collaboration with other groups.” In fact, according to my research, every non-establishment organization has “partnered” with establishment organizations in some way or another, a strong indication of the overlap between the two spheres.

In the domain of participation, the norm is also for people to attend events mostly in the establishment or non-establishment sphere. Even so, there is also overlap. I saw a few of the same people at events run by both establishment and non-establishment groups: Yiddishkayt’s arts *seder* and a Federation mixer or JConnect’s Purimpalooza and IKAR’s Purim justice carnival. At the PJA dinner described above I met people who had attended classes at Aish HaTorah and events at Sinai Atid. At a JDub concert, co-sponsored by Limmud and the Jewish Community Foundation, I met several people who are involved with PJA, IKAR, and alternative *minyanim*. And at a JDub bar night, co-sponsored by Nextbook/Tablet and the Jewish Community Foundation, attendees ranged from casually dressed “hipsters” with mohawks to financial consultants in suits. I met people there who had attended events with Birthright Next, Aish Hatorah, AIPAC, JConnect, Chai Center, and Federation. JDub, like a number of other organizations, seems to be succeeding in engaging diverse crowds. As one JDub leader said, the perception is that “JDub appeals to a certain type of person, the ‘hipster’ Jew. I think that JDub does appeal to the hipster Jew, but I think that JDub also appeals to the pretty mainstream, engaged Jew.”

One PJA leader talked about a few of her friends who she would not expect to go to Federation events: “Some of them have tattoo sleeves and mohawks. It just doesn’t seem like that would fly at Federation.” On the other hand, she pointed out that one does not see many tattoos and mohawks at PJA either. And she said that she could see some of her unconventional friends getting involved with some Federation programs or agencies, like the New Leaders Project or Jewish Family Service. In short, different organizations are seen as attracting different types of Jews, and there is some perceived overlap.

When it comes to leaders, we see a similar pattern. A number of young leaders are involved with more than one of the non-establishment organizations (e.g., PJA and Shtibl Minyan; PJA, Yiddishkayt, Reboot, and IKAR). And a number of people are involved in more than one of the establishment organizations (e.g., Federation and a Conservative synagogue; FIDF and Guardians; FIDF and AIPAC; Stand With Us and an Orthodox synagogue). Several leaders in mainstream organizations were not familiar with some of the social justice and culture groups, and some of the social justice and culture group leaders were not familiar with smaller philanthropic groups like Guardians and FIDF.

Even so, there is also a good deal of overlap. A few leaders have participated both in PJA’s Jeremiah Fellowship and in the Federation’s New Leaders Project (NLP), which

is not surprising given the civic orientation of both programs. One professional leader has worked for politically progressive groups and mainstream Israel groups. One lay leader is active in PJA, AIPAC, and the Federation, beyond the fellowship programs he participated in. He considers himself “progressive on domestic issues” but says he has an “AIPAC point of view on foreign policy.” In addition, a number of young lay leaders at AJC, which is often seen as part of the Jewish establishment, are also involved with mainstream or new organizations or both, including Federation, Jewish Free Loan Association, JDub, IKAR, and PJA.

Another area of overlap is that different types of organizations learn from each other. For example, PJA’s Jeremiah fellowship took elements of the Federation’s NLP in planning its programming (and, according to one PJA leader, they also looked at elements of the NLP as “what not to do”). More recently, the NLP has sought advice from Jeremiah staff members in order to implement some of PJA’s innovative programs, such as bus tours. Another example is Federation’s new online newsletter, called “The Wire.” It has used hip-hop music, edgy art (including the graffiti-esque lettering characteristic of JDub and PJA’s promotional materials), engaging and edgy writing, and impressive applications of online tools, such as embedded videos, entertaining surveys, and blog discussions. For a while the Wire even listed several organizations as “Friends of The Wire,” none of which would be called mainstream: JDub Records, Jewcy, Jewlicious, Jewish TV Network, Reboot, Tablet Magazine, The Righteous Persons Foundation, and Yiddishkayt. This was clearly an attempt on the part of the Federation to appeal to a younger, less mainstream constituency.

A number of Jewish organizations and programs serve as bridges and unifiers, including LOYaL (Leaders of Young Leaders) and the Federation’s NextGen Engagement Initiative. In addition, People who work for Birthright Israel Next said that they refer Birthright alumni to all different types of organizations, including AIPAC, AJC, PJA, Aish Hatorah, Chabad, FIDF, Geshet City, and various synagogues. Similarly, JConnect and Federation partner with many different types of organizations. In fact, a JConnect leader said:

We’re happy, it’s a success for us if they come to our event and then they get connected, and then they go to the Federation, a *shul*, a *kiruv* organization, an indie *minyán*, or some other kind of a thing, because from our point of view, our role is to get them connected... We’re able to help build the whole community of L.A. because we don’t need to zealously guard our people and keep them away from other organizations, which is a self-preservation thing that many other organizations feel that they have to do.

JConnect has co-sponsored events with many organizations, including The Happy Minyan, Orthodox outreach groups (Aish Hatorah and Chai Center), Zionist groups (Zionist Organization of America and Stand With Us), Persian groups (Ledorvador), social groups (JDate), and umbrella groups (Federation). They even co-sponsored L.A.’s first Jewish “Tweet-Up” with the innovative Jumpstart, among other groups. Aside from JConnect’s partnerships, it is uncommon for Orthodox-run groups to partner with non-Orthodox organizations. Similarly, right-wing Israel groups rarely co-sponsor with social

justice and culture groups. This is partly due to the different ethos of the organizations, but also to the lack of overlap in the social networks of the people who are involved.

Another organization that has served as a bridge between spheres is Jumpstart. According to its website, “Jumpstart envisions a Jewish community that is a multi-generational partnership, committed to continuous and intentional self-renewal.” Its mission is “to develop, strengthen, and learn from emerging nonprofit organizations that build community at the nexus of community, spirituality, learning, social activism, and culture.”²⁰ Although Jumpstart positions itself as an advocate for the non-establishment sphere, it has worked closely with the Los Angeles Federation and has even held several of its Jumpstart Innovation Forums – meetings with several non-establishment organizations – in the Federation building.

The most “bridging” event I found was a conference organized by the young Iranian-American group 30 Years After in 2008. Co-sponsors spanned the spectrum of Jewish life, including Aish HaTorah, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Federation, Zionist Organization of America, Republican Jewish Coalition, and Progressive Jewish Alliance. This unlikely list of co-sponsorship is due in large part to the bridging work of one young man who is a leader of 30 Years After, Federation, PJA, and other organizations. Bridging actions like these are rare, but they bring some much-needed interaction to a fragmented community.

Based on this cursory analysis of event sponsorship, participation, leadership, and bridging actions, it is clear that there is a distinction between establishment and non-establishment organizations but that there is also a good deal of overlap. A Jumpstart report about Jewish innovation says:

As with any ecosystem, the leaders and participants in the Jewish innovation sector are part of an interconnected web. New organizations feed each other ideas, people, and attention. At its best, the interaction of multiple organizations, each pursuing its own interests, supports the entire ecosystem. The network effect, in turn, strengthens each organization within it. (Jumpstart et al. 2009:7)

Although this quote refers to the “innovation ecosystem” of “new organizations,” I would argue that it also holds true for the “Jewish ecosystem” as a whole.²¹

The establishment and non-establishment spheres are somewhat distinct with a good deal of overlap. How do leaders of these spheres differ? While there is not a one-to-one correspondence, I found that they tend to differ in several ways, including their approach to conventionality, their views about Jewish issues, and their occupational/socioeconomic orientation. Establishment organizations tend to attract Jews who are part of or striving toward the upper class, those in for-profit networking-oriented occupations, those with a conventional orientation, and/or those with a survivalist approach to Jewish issues. Non-establishment organizations tend to attract progressive Jews with an unconventional orientation and a more universalist approach to Jewish issues, especially people who work in the nonprofit world and are not striving toward the

²⁰ <http://jewishjumpstart.org/about>, accessed 3/10

²¹ As Moskowitz argues, “Applying the metaphor of an ecosystem to Jewish life offers a rich picture of the complexity of the dynamics between individual community members, between the multiplicity of institutions, and the integrated elements of Jewish life” (Moskowitz 2007:3).

upper class (even if they come from wealthy families). In the sections below, I examine these three dimensions.

Conventionality and political orientation

As we might expect, organizations seen as outside of the establishment tend to attract leaders who take an unconventional or anti-establishment approach to some aspects of their lives. Many leaders of PJA, JQ International, and other non-establishment organizations would prefer to patronize a local independently owned and operated coffee shop or book store over a Starbucks or a Borders (indeed, I met a few of the non-establishment leaders at independent cafés and a few of the establishment leaders at major chains). They might attend a world music concert over Britney Spears or Beyoncé or even a local, not-yet-famous hip hop artist over Snoop Dogg or Kanye West. And when choosing which movie to see, they might first check the listings at the Laemmle – a family-owned chain of artsy movie theaters in L.A. – and then consider seeing the summer blockbuster at the AMC or Pacific. These preferences may stem from individual differences in aesthetics and progressive or liberal values but also from a desire to distinguish themselves from the mainstream and align themselves with others in their peer networks.

This anti-establishment orientation extends to attitudes toward Jewish organizations. While groups like FIDF and Guardians attract leaders who were active in their college fraternities (especially AEPi), organizations like Reboot and Yiddishkayt attract leaders who would never step into a fraternity house. Some non-establishment leaders see the Federation and other establishment groups as similar to the Greek life they disparaged in college. One man who is involved with a few start-ups said of the Federation, “I can’t speak for anyone else in my generation, but there is almost nothing of that structure or organization that is appealing to me. In fact, it repulses me.” A woman involved with a few non-establishment groups gave a few reasons why she does not give money to Federation, including Federation’s “narrow,” “institutionalized” nature: “It’s just not how I’m Jewish. I’m Jewish in a much more fluid, elastic, creative way.”

One Federation professional said he knows the L.A. mindset and does not believe that people here have a “‘hate-the-man’ view of the Federation or ‘hate-the-institution’ view. I think it’s more, ‘I’m just going to do what I’m going to do’; ‘if the Federation’s relevant to me or not’ is the question.” While a few of my interviewees did express an anti-establishment attitude toward Federation, this professional’s statement is for the most part supported by the stances I observed in my research.

This professional said that Federation takes a centrist approach to Israel and other political issues and, therefore, attracts centrist-leaning Jews like himself and might not appeal to some people farther to the right and left:

If you are a “Stand With Us” type advocate for Israel, the Federation might be less right [wing] than you want it to be, ... less of a hard-core advocacy organization, ... too *parve* for them. And on the other hand if you’re a PJA liberal, there may be things you would want us to do that we may be too centrist, too right for them.

While I did not meet people who feel the Federation is too left wing when it comes to Israel, I did meet a few Orthodox leaders who feel that the Federation does not concentrate enough on the Jewish community, as evidenced by its outreach to Latinos and programs like Koreh L.A., a literacy program that benefits mostly non-Jews. I also met several progressive Jews who feel that the Federation is too right wing. One PJA leader says that she and some of her group's participants feel that Federation does not portray itself as open to multiple views on Israel. She acknowledges that the Federation "may not have an official statement," but "it's the unofficial things that they do that make it clear what their position is," like the language used in fundraising pitches and rallies. While she does feel it is important for Federation to focus on Israel and anti-Semitism, she also feels the Federation should focus more on economic issues: "If you're the central address for Jewish communal concern, then you take into consideration that the number one thing that Jews care about according to the American Jewish Committee survey two years ago is the economy."

Certainly, political orientation plays a role in individuals' decisions of which organizations to devote their time and money to. However, it cannot be the only factor. While the right-wing leaders I talked to are involved with organizations that are seen as part of the establishment, there are a number of establishment leaders who are centrist or liberal. A number of Federation leaders are active in the Democratic Party. In fact, Steven Cohen's survey (this volume, Wertheimer 2010) found that 83% of non-establishment leaders under 40 identify their political orientation as "liberal," compared to 56% of establishment leaders under 40. In addition, some leaders of establishment groups are liberal on domestic issues and centrist or right-wing on international issues, especially Israel. Clearly there are other factors besides conventionality and political orientation that influence young Jews' organizational engagement decisions.

Approaches to Jewish issues

Research has found that young Jews tend to have weaker commitments than their parents to the Jewish people and the State of Israel (e.g., Cohen and Wertheimer 2006). As we might expect from young Jews who take on leadership positions in the Jewish community, the vast majority of leaders I interviewed expressed strong commitments to both the Jewish people and the State of Israel. However, I did find a continuum of positions on a cluster of issues related to the notion of "Jewish peoplehood," from leaders who are focused solely on Jewish concerns and take a survivalist approach to Jewish life to leaders who eschew survivalism and work toward a combination of bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2001). The majority of interviewees fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum, and a number expressed mixed or conflicted views. The issue of Jewish peoplehood is multifaceted and complex, and to understand it adequately, we must examine several dimensions: pressing issues facing American Jewry, responsibility to Jews and others, intermarriage, and Israel.

Pressing issues

I asked interviewees what they see as the most pressing issues facing American Jewry. A number of issues were mentioned by both establishment and non-establishment leaders, including Jewish literacy, the financial crisis and the costs of Jewish living, the alienation of young Jews from Jewish life, and the lack of pluralistic thinking or the need

to connect the “silos” of Jewish life. But a number of other issues came up almost solely in one sphere or the other. A few leaders of establishment organizations mentioned issues that have traditionally been part of the American Jewish communal agenda, including Israel, intermarriage, “continuity,” and – for one young leader – anti-Semitism. In contrast, one non-establishment leader expressed the view of many when he said that he finds the “conservative narrative” of Jewish continuity “both alienating and offensive.” Another said, “Maybe the most pressing issue for American Jews is to stop worrying about a decline and to embrace building something new.” Some non-establishment leaders demonstrated the tension between universalism and particularism when they mentioned issues like “the need to reconcile, ‘If I am not for myself’ and ‘if I am only for myself.’” Two leaders who are involved solely in non-establishment organizations topped their list with “public school education,” a pressing concern in Los Angeles, but one that most mainstream Jewish leaders would not consider a “Jewish issue.”

Responsibility to Jews and others

In my interviews I asked the leaders about their personal charitable giving. Interviewees varied widely on whether the organizations they give to benefit mostly Jews or mostly non-Jews. Some – especially those involved with non-establishment organizations and a few Federation professionals – are devotees of the American Jewish World Service and other Jewish organizations that benefit mostly non-Jews. A number of leaders of Israel and Orthodox organizations had never heard of AJWS and give mostly or solely to organizations that benefit Jews, including some in Israel.

A number of interviewees expressed a tension between helping Jews and helping those in need, whether or not they are Jewish. One woman who works at a non-establishment organization said, “If Jews don’t feel responsibility for the Jewish community, then no one’s going to.” But she also feels a responsibility toward the most needy, and her charitable giving reflects this tension. She gives to several local non-Jewish organizations (including Homeboy Industries and Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy) and Jewish organizations that benefit mostly non-Jews (American Jewish World Service, Jewish Funds for Justice). She emphasizes that she gives to these groups because they work to strengthen Jewish identity and ensure continuity, in addition to their social justice and relief work. She also gives to the Solomon Schechter Jewish Day School she attended, as well as IKAR, and she gives to a few left-wing Israel groups (New Israel Fund, Just Vision). But during the recent Gaza war, she gave money to Islamic Relief. She explained:

I felt really bad for people in Sderot, like totally horrible, it was a lot of people living in terror, and like 13 people who had actually experienced the terror... It was hundreds of Gazans. I personally feel responsibility for it... In my mind I had like, “What if someone saw that I was giving my money to Islamic Relief and not to the Federation?” But, I felt like that argument was really clear.

Many Jewish leaders, especially in the establishment sphere, would feel uncomfortable with this line of thinking. One Federation professional said, “As a fundraiser, one of the things that I talk about a lot is that only Jews are going to help Jews.” Indeed, most establishment leaders I spoke to direct their charitable giving to

Jewish organizations like the Federation and the other groups they lead, in addition to some universities and cancer-related funds. The most extreme particularist position I observed was the charitable giving of an Aish Hatorah professional. He gives to Aish Hatorah, two local Orthodox-run social service organizations (Tomchei Shabbos and Global Kindness), and a number of social service organizations in Israel, including Yad Eliezer and Efrat. When I asked another Orthodox outreach professional how he would divvy up a large sum of money, he said “I’d give all the money to Jews,” who he described as “my blood.” It bothers him that the Federation directs so much of its limited resources toward “helping Latinos.” He says, “I do believe in *tikkun olam*, but we’re in crisis mode. We only have a certain amount of money...If we don’t invest in ourselves, we can’t invest in *tikkun olam*. We can’t put all our marbles outside the basket.” For him, the bonding social capital that flows from the work of Jewish-focused organizations is more important than the bridging social capital that derives from Jews helping non-Jews.

The desire to give charity to non-Jews can stem from either a general concern for humanity or an effort to improve the Jewish lot. One woman involved in a cultural organization said, “I feel like I’m responsible to leave the world in a better place than when I got into it, but I don’t feel like I necessarily have to prioritize a Jew [above] everybody else.” And a woman involved in a social justice organization said, “I feel like helping people who are poor or disenfranchised or whatever, it’s just about helping your community, your human community.” If she had a large sum of money to divvy up, she would give it to those who were most in need, whether or not they were Jewish. Similarly, when I asked a man who is involved in American Jewish Committee and a few non-establishment organizations whether Jews should help Jews or everyone, he responded, “I don’t think Jews need that much help.” These views are in line with Sylvia Barack Fishman’s findings about many young Jews’ rejections of the notion of “us” vs. “them.”

In contrast, a lay leader involved with Federation and AIPAC said, “I think it’s in Jews’ best interest to build alliances and to make friends outside of their own community, because ... it improves your culture to learn from other cultures, but also in times of need it’s good to have friends.” Similarly, a professional who works in Jewish community relations at the Federation said, “It takes a village, and you can’t survive in this world as an insular community. Our health depends on the health of other communities; we thrive when they thrive. So, I want to see everybody be successful.” These leaders want to help non-Jews because they believe that bridging social capital benefits the Jewish community. Even among those leaders whose work and charitable contributions benefit non-Jews, there are a variety of motivations – from the more universalist (mostly non-establishment groups) to the more survivalist (mostly establishment groups).

Intermarriage

Interviewees also expressed diverse views and mixed feelings on intermarriage. But unlike the issues above, views on intermarriage did not correlate as strongly with Jewish communal sphere. Many leaders in both the establishment and the non-establishment sphere said that intermarriage is a personal choice. A number of interviewees who are single struggle with the issue for themselves, but they have no problem with Jewish relatives and friends who marry non-Jews. Some said that as long as they find someone who is willing to raise Jewish children, they are OK with marrying a

non-Jew. A few interviewees are married to people who converted to Judaism before the wedding, one is married to a Christian man who did not convert but participates in Jewish life, and two are dating non-Jews. One single woman in her early 40s has given up on dating only Jews. She says she is looking for a man who is “Jew / Jew-friendly,” meaning Jewish or willing to have a Jewish household. I observed these nontraditional stances on intermarriage from young leaders in both establishment and non-establishment groups.

On the other hand, a number of the establishment organization leaders are opposed to intermarriage for various reasons. A common concern was the “numbers issue,” the “continuity of the Jewish people.” One Federation leader says, “I still think in terms of continuity, that it’s always better for a Jew to marry another Jew.” (The fact that she used the word “still” indicates her understanding that many of her peers do not share her view.) In contrast, an Orthodox outreach professional calls intermarriage “self-destruction” and “personal annihilation,” an approach that was certainly anomalous among my interviewees. Although views on intermarriage do differ in the establishment and non-establishment spheres, this issue is not as bifurcating as others. This finding reflects changing views about intermarriage, especially in the younger generations.

Israel

The young Jewish leaders I interviewed expressed a vast range of opinions about Israel, as well as a vast range of knowledge. One leader of PJA is also involved with a number of left-wing Israel groups, including Jewish Voice for Peace, and another spent time working in the West Bank for a human rights organization. At the other end of the spectrum is a leader of Stand With Us who calls Israel “the most important thing ever.” She says her views on politics in the United States revolve completely around Israel. “You’ve got my vote if you’ve got a good view on Israel, and if you don’t, then I have no interest. ... [even] if it means that I’m going to have to- whether it’s pay more taxes, suffer in some way... but [if] that politician has really great views on Israel or plans, then that’s fine.”

While most interviewees in both spheres expressed a special concern about Israel, a few leaders of non-establishment organizations told me that they do not follow the news about Israel any more than other countries. Even a few establishment leaders who are involved in Israel organizations said that they do not read any Israeli newspapers. One, who is a passionate supporter of Israel, said, “I know almost nothing about the political parties in Israel” and demonstrated this point by mentioning the main parties of several years ago: Likud and Labor. On the other hand, some leaders, especially those who are involved with AJC, follow the news closely and have very sophisticated knowledge of the conflict and political situation.

The vast majority of interviewees have concerns about the settlements, and most of them – even some who are involved with Israel organizations – advocate for stopping them. However, a few who are involved in Israel or Orthodox organizations support the settlements. The most extreme view I heard was expressed by an Orthodox outreach professional, who said, “I don’t think that they’re settlements. I think that they are owned by the Jewish people because the right of conquest is a right recognized by international law.” Like the other issues in this section, leaders expressed internal conflicts surrounding the topic of Israel. Those in both establishment and non-establishment organizations have mixed feelings about the settlements, religious-secular tensions,

American involvement in the peace process, and other issues. Even so, those with far-left views on Israel are leaders of non-establishment groups, and those with far-right views are leaders of Orthodox or Israel groups.

Factors

While I did not conduct quantitative analysis, my research suggests that the most important factors in individuals’ approaches to Jewish peoplehood are whether they are Orthodox and how many generations their family has been in the U.S. Almost all of the leaders who are involved in mainstream organizations and have a survivalist view about Israel, anti-Semitism, and assimilation are immigrants or children of immigrants from Iran, Israel, South Africa, and England. One leader who immigrated from Iran with his parents when he was a child comments that he is kept up at night worrying about “whether or not my grandkids will be Jewish.” His “biggest fear is the security of Israel and the strength and vitality of the Jewish community in Los Angeles.” Another leader whose parents are from Israel is concerned about the security of the Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere. About the Holocaust, he says, “We can’t just think that it won’t ever happen again.”

The other type of leader who tended to have a more survivalist orientation is Orthodox Jews. My non-random sample of interviewees included only four Jews who consider themselves Orthodox. The two Modern Orthodox Jews I talked to are involved with Israel organizations and are concerned about intermarriage, but one takes a more universalist approach to Jewish life, evidenced by her involvement with social justice issues. The two interviewees who would be seen as to the right of Modern Orthodoxy, both of whom work as Orthodox outreach professionals, have a strongly survivalist outlook. Aside from Orthodox Jews and Jews close to the generation of immigration, the young Jews I spoke to, even several who are involved in Federation, tend to be less concerned about survivalism and more universalist in orientation.

These qualitative findings were confirmed by the quantitative study conducted by Steven Cohen (this volume, Wertheimer 2010). The survey of professional and volunteer Jewish leaders found that compared to young leaders in establishment organizations, young leaders in non-establishment organizations were much more likely to contribute to non-Jewish causes and much less likely to express concern about intermarriage, anti-Semitism, and threats to Israel (see Table 1).

Table 1: Differences between young leaders (under 40) in establishment and non-establishment organizations (Wertheimer 2010)

	Non-Establishment Leaders	Establishment Leaders
Average percent of individuals’ charitable contributions directed toward Jews	30	54
Agree “It is important to encourage Jews to marry Jews”	18	41
Concerned about fighting anti-Semitism	23	49
Concerned about threats to Israel’s security	23	43

Clearly young Jewish leaders in establishment and non-establishment groups tend to differ in their approaches to issues surrounding Jewish peoplehood.

Socioeconomics and occupation

As the event descriptions at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, young Jews involved with establishment and non-establishment organizations tend to cluster in different occupations.²² Through social and professional networks, individuals are targeted for particular organizations because of their occupation, and their participation in those organizations help them to accrue social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and advance in pursuit of their professional goals. The aesthetic differences between organizations relate to the socioeconomic and occupational concentrations of the leaders and participants. These differences are not surprising, given correlations between socioeconomic status/occupation and cultural practices/ideology found in previous research (e.g., Bourdieu 1984). In short, social and cultural capital are crucial to young Jews' communal engagements and the perpetuation of establishment and non-establishment spheres.

Most of the lay leaders I met who are involved in establishment organizations are in the for-profit fields of law, business, and finance. This is the case for the leaders I met from Stand With Us, FIDF, Guardians, and several Federation lay leaders. In contrast, most of the lay leaders I met who are involved in non-establishment organizations are public interest lawyers, educators, artists, professionals in other Jewish organizations, and other nonprofit workers. A former PJA professional described the lay leaders there as people who were involved in civil rights movements, including “a lot of lawyers and a lot of professors.” The Reboot website describes its participants as “an eclectic and creative mix of people from the literature, entertainment, media, technology, politics, social action and academic realms.”²³ Entertainment is a bridge field, as it includes people in business, the arts, and both. I met lay leaders in both establishment and non-establishment organizations who work in the entertainment industry.

Related to the occupational split, I observed a discourse about mainstream organizations attracting Jews who are part of or striving toward the upper class. When I asked one leader of FIDF to describe the target group for his events, he said, “They like going out to night clubs, to restaurants and socializing. They are also either very successful in business or very upwardly mobile.” Similarly, a lay leader of the Guardians described his group as “very Hillcrest, very Brentwood Country Club,” naming two prestigious and heavily Jewish country clubs in West Los Angeles. He said, “We see a lot of the old money. A lot of people get involved because their parents were involved.” Even so, he says, many of the most active leaders are not from “old money” but are “upwardly mobile ... young Jewish professionals.”

Mainstream organizations plan events with such a crowd in mind, finding a “Malibu mansion,” “private Bel Air residence,” or “trendy club” as the venue, serving the highest-quality cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and, of course, offering valet parking. I learned about the importance of up-scale events from leaders or promotional materials of the Guardians, FIDF, Stand With Us, AJC, Federation, 30 Years After, and JConnect. For

²² When we talk about occupation, we must focus on lay leaders, as professional leaders necessarily work in the Jewish nonprofit field.

²³ http://www.rebooters.net/index.php?site=reboot&page=rbt_summits, accessed 3/10.

example, the Federation's Real Estate and Construction Division had events like the "Summer Soirée Young Leadership Cocktail Party at the Gilmore Adobe" and "See and Be Scene Young Leadership Cocktail Party at MODAA [a gallery]." An AJC professional said that some young participants are attracted to "the upper-class nature of the receptions" at "the lovely Beverly Hills home of so-and-so." Some people, she said, "want to be in the room with... elegant and important people and drink champagne."

In contrast, I rarely heard about up-scale cocktail parties or trendy club events from non-establishment organizations.²⁴ When their leaders talk about the aesthetics of their events, words like "edgy" and "provocative" come up more than "sophisticated" and "glamorous." Researchers have described PJA as an organization that "combines a social justice orientation with a hip, contemporary aesthetic" (Chertok et al. 2009), a characterization in line with the annual dinner description above. A leader of Yiddishkayt says, "If your idea of being Jewish is going to the big... club events that are put on by the Federation and the Israeli Consulate, you know, somewhere in Pico Robertson with like a crazy Israeli DJ and that sort of thing, that's not necessarily who we're reaching. We're reaching a very different crowd."

The contrasts between establishment and non-establishment organizations extend beyond the events. One non-establishment leader contrasts the newsletters of Federation and her organization: "Their magazine is basically pictures of all their functions with all the wealthy people that give to them and real estate developers who they want to honor... Ours is about the work that people are doing." This was the case, to some extent, until recently, when Federation started its online newsletter, "The Wire" (discussed above), and even that still features profiles of Lions of Judah and other high-end donors.

Similarly, Kerri Steinberg (2002) examines fundraising materials for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the New Israel Fund and finds a comparable difference in emphasis and aesthetics. In the JDC report, the photos included several donors and board members, and the beneficiaries were depicted in an anonymous way. The NIF report highlighted the activists who lead the beneficiary organizations. In addition, the NIF photos were "more cutting-edge, conveying an artistic sensibility," in contrast to the JDC's "more conservative, journalistic approach" (Steinberg 2002:274-5). The aesthetic differences that I found between establishment and non-establishment organizations are not limited to Los Angeles but can be seen in Jewish organizations at the national and international levels.

In line with the socioeconomic differences, some of the people I interviewed see establishment lay leaders as too materialistic or entitled. One public interest lawyer said he attended a few events with the young division of a support group for the Jewish Home for the Aging (similar to the Guardians), but decided not to continue his involvement because he thought the people he met there were "spoiled brats." For the professionals who work at fundraising organizations, socioeconomic differences are often crystal clear. One Federation professional said she sometimes feels a disconnect from her lay leaders, such as when someone in real estate tells her, "You guys should buy a house; it's a great time to get into the market." Even in the down economy, she and her nonprofit-working husband could afford to buy a house in their neighborhood only "if it was half the price."

²⁴ An exception is Bet Tzedek's annual "Justice Ball," an impressive club event that brings in thousands of young Jews.

The survey that was part of the larger study offers quantitative evidence for the occupational and socioeconomic split: vast differences in personal income. Among respondents under 40, only 29% of lay leaders in non-establishment organizations report earning \$60,000 or more, compared to 53% of lay leaders in establishment organizations. Median income for non-establishment lay leaders was about \$43,000, compared to \$64,000 among establishment lay leaders. 7% of establishment lay leaders report income of \$300,000 and up, compared to less than 1% of non-establishment lay leaders.²⁵

Factors

There are several factors perpetuating the socioeconomic and occupational differences I found in establishment and non-establishment groups. First, several establishment organizations, including Federation, FIDF, and Guardians, exist primarily to raise and distribute funds, and they do so partly by enabling social and professional networking. To meet their fundraising goals, these groups encourage participants with great financial capacity to take on leadership roles. This includes people in profit-oriented professions who have very high income, people who have inherited great wealth, and those who are hubs of social networks that include such people (especially in the older generations, the latter is often stay-at-home wives of wealthy lawyers, bankers, etc.). Among younger participants, this includes people who are currently working their way up the corporate ladder in business, real estate, finance, and law and may have great financial capacity in the future.

In non-establishment organizations, fundraising is important but mostly to help them meet their primary goals, which are to enable activism, cultural production and consumption, or religious, educational, or social engagement. While their boards do include wealthy and potentially wealthy people, these organizations encourage participation and leadership activity not just from the upper socioeconomic echelons. This difference in organizational goals leads to occupational clustering.

An outlier in the establishment/non-establishment mapping is the American Jewish Committee, an organization that of course needs funding to operate but whose primary mission involves behind-the-scenes diplomacy. The AJC lay leaders I interviewed are very diverse in terms of profession and other Jewish involvements. Some are financial analysts and for-profit lawyers, and others are nonprofit lawyers and educators. Some are also involved with PJA, and others are also involved with Federation. They come together over their shared interest in foreign policy.

Another reason that people in different professions are attracted to different organizations relates to larger occupation-based differences and their relationship to social networks. We can assume that people with similar views, values, and cultural practices tend to go into similar professional fields. People with a desire to become rich are more likely to go into professions that will help them attain that goal (or marry into them), and people dedicated to social justice and helping others are more likely to go into helping professions. Similarly, people with a right-wing political orientation tend to steer clear of social work, education, the arts, and nonprofit management, while people with a left-wing orientation often avoid corporate jobs. In addition, social networks play an important role in individuals' career choices. People tend to go into professions that their friends are in, and they often find jobs through friends or friends of friends.

²⁵ Thank you to Steven Cohen for providing these data.

The values-occupation relationship also goes the other way. We can assume that people in similar occupations tend to make similar decisions on how to spend their leisure time, how to vote, where to live, where to send their children to school, etc. These decisions are based partly on what people are able to afford and how they think these decisions will affect their personal and professional well being. But social networks also play an important role in these decisions. People spend time with their colleagues in and out of the workplace, and they make social and cultural decisions partly based on what their colleagues are doing.

These sociological trends play out in Jewish communal engagement. People in similar professions tend to get involved with similar Jewish organizations. These decisions are based partly on social networks – people hear about Jewish events and leadership opportunities from their friends, many of whom are also their colleagues. Individuals’ decisions are also based partly on their interests and political leanings, which are related to their chosen professions. People in finance and business tend to be more conservative politically and would be less likely to be involved with the progressive work of PJA. And leaders of PJA and Yiddishkayt would be less likely to have an interest in soirées and mansions – they might even be offended that the precious dollars of their organizations were being spent on what they see as frills.

Finally, and crucially, Jewish communal involvements help individuals advance in their professions – both in the establishment and non-establishment spheres. People in many fields thrive professionally because of their social capital. Realtors, mortgage brokers, and real estate lawyers rely on each other to connect them to clients. Entertainment financiers, producers, directors, and casting agents succeed when they know and are known by many people in their field. Financial analysts and hedge fund managers need lawyers and doctors to be their clients, doctors need lawyers and businessmen to be their patients, and lawyers need large networks to recommend them when friends need legal help. It is no secret that the Federation system taps into the professional need to network (e.g., Cohen 1978, Dashefsky and Lazerwitz 2009). In Los Angeles the three most prominent occupation-based divisions of the Federation are Legal, Entertainment, and Real Estate and Construction. People meet each other at the events, and their stature in their field grows as they take on Federation leadership roles, make large publicly acknowledged gifts, and earn accolades, all of which are interconnected.

The networking nature of many Federation events leads to profit-oriented professions being strongly represented in Federation leadership and participants. The same holds true for other philanthropic organizations, like FIDF and the Guardians. JConnect and Aish Hatorah have tapped into this phenomenon by offering business networking events. An Aish Hatorah professional even started an organization for business and law students in L.A. area universities, called the Jewish Graduate Student Initiative. Individuals’ involvement in these organizations helps them expand their professional networks, make deals, land jobs, and advance professionally.

Clearly, the social capital that comes with involvement in mainstream organizations has potential benefits for professional networking and advancement. I also found similar benefits to involvement with non-establishment organizations. For example, artists involved in the Jewish Artists Initiative may meet artists and art industry professionals and find more opportunities to exhibit their art. Musicians’ involvement with JDub may help them meet collaborators and, if they are lucky, get signed to the

JDub label. Reboot has led to several new collaborations and cultural products, helping their producers advance in their careers. Jewish Funds for Justice's Selah fellowship has helped many Jews in the social justice world to expand their professional networks (and to hone job-related skills). PJA has helped its lay leaders advance professionally through networking opportunities, not only through its Jeremiah Fellowship but also through its events and working groups. For example, one nonprofit worker said the skills she obtained and the people she met through the Jeremiah fellowship will help her do her job more effectively and may even help her when she applies for graduate school or looks for other jobs. When individuals take on leadership roles in an organization, they are likely to strengthen their ties with other leaders – some of whom might be in similar occupations – and accrue the social capital that is so important for professional advancement.

Sociologists have devoted some attention to the relationship among social networks, professional activity, and voluntary involvement (see McPherson 1981, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Galaskiewicz (1985) surveyed corporate contributions officers in Minnesota and their evaluations of prospective nonprofit organizations. He found that they were more likely to hold similar views as colleagues who are more closely connected to them in professional networks. Similarly, Beggs & Hurlbert (1997) found that participation in voluntary organizations that attract both men and women helped job seekers foster social ties that enabled them to find higher status jobs. Active involvement in voluntary organizations was important because it allowed individuals to gain access to expert advice, financing, and other resources, as Davis and Aldrich (2000) found.

The benefits of Jewish communal engagement are not limited to making deals or finding jobs. They extend to one's personal position within various social networks and power structures (see, e.g., Cohen 1978, Odendahl 1990, Chiswick 1991, Ostrower 1995, Dashefsky and Lazerwitz 2009). As Ostrower found in her study of elite philanthropy in New York (including many Jews), "Philanthropy comes to function as a mark of class status that is connected to elite identity" (Ostrower 1995:25), much like the musical and artistic preferences Bourdieu (1984) found in his study of class in France.

In an interview with one young Federation lay leader, he asked about my preliminary findings. One of the findings I mentioned was that many people involved in the Federation seem to be striving toward the upper class. He agreed but said he would use different wording: "people involved in the power structure of the community." In fact, he told me that the aspiration for power in the upper echelons of the Los Angeles Jewish community was one of the major factors in his decision to take on leadership roles in Federation. He attended a few events, but he did not become hooked until he went on an Israel mission with some Federation board members and campaign chairs. Still in his mid 20s, he was the youngest participant by several decades. But he enjoyed the company of his trip companions and was especially taken by stories one woman told him about her father-in-law, who was a major Jewish philanthropist. He liked the fact that this man wielded influence over his fellow country club members' philanthropic decisions. He said:

And, the way that she told that story, it sounded like, "Wow. That's how I would like to be." And, then seeing the women that were on the trip, I thought, "You

know what? This is, this is the kind of wife that I would want to have, and this is the kind of life I would want to have.”

He tried out some other Jewish organizations, including the Guardians, but the Federation appealed to him most because of its centrality in Jewish organizational life. He relayed his thought process to me: “Here’s the main mountain. If I get to the top of it, then I’m someone.” Even in his early 30s, he has become “someone.” He has made large gifts to Federation, organized innovative programs that expand the Jewish learning component of leadership training, married a woman who is also a Federation leader, attained leadership positions, and won several awards, including some that he displays prominently in his office. His position in the Federation power structure has also helped him in his business, commercial real estate.

Studies of Jewish communal involvement tend to underestimate the importance of occupation, while they often highlight income. In Dashefsky and Lazerwitz’s (2009) multivariate analysis of charitable giving using data from NJPS 1990, they found that occupation does not have an independent effect on whether or not individuals gave to the United Jewish Appeal. However, in their analysis of 1980s interview data, they found major differences based on whether heads of household were self-employed. They also speculate about differences between doctors and lawyers on the one hand, who have practices tied to their ethnic community, and academicians and scientists on the other hand, who do not (2009:62). Even so, in their qualitative analysis, they profile a few Jewish couples who are not affiliated with many Jewish organizations and do not donate to Federation (2009:76-81). They attribute their desire not to donate primarily to their lack of childhood Jewish socialization experiences. While this factor certainly may play a role, I would point out that, according to the couples’ profiles, they are all in education, research, and the arts, and some of them are involved with progressive political causes (Amnesty International, the “ban the bomb movement”) and non-establishment Jewish life (a *havurah*, Yiddish culture) or have a counter-cultural stance in general. While it might be impossible to operationalize these occupational and attitudinal dimensions for quantitative analysis, qualitative evidence points to their importance.

Another study of Jewish philanthropy highlights trends according to occupation. In Boston, Cohen (1978) found that big business people and lawyers tended to give more to Federation, while physicians tended to give much less than would be expected based on their income. Cohen’s explanation is that business people find great professional benefit from responding positively to their colleagues’ solicitations and being seen as major donors, while physicians do not benefit from the same professional networking opportunities. He expresses concern that Jews’ diminishing participation in business could lead to trouble for the organized Jewish community’s fundraising numbers. Some might argue that this fear has already been realized. As a counter, I would point out that the Federation’s professional divisions include high involvement from young leaders, the parties of the young divisions of the FIDF and the Guardians’ are among the most popular events for many wealthy young Jews in L.A., and all of these young divisions raise many thousands of dollars for their organizations.

In addition, the increasing presence of Jews in the nonprofit and arts fields leads to more person power for new Jewish organizations, a cause for optimism within certain circles. These organizations need committed members who have financial capacity and

can sustain the organizations when the grant monies dry up. But since the non-establishment groups focus on culture and social justice and not primarily on fundraising, they do not need to worry as much as mainstream organizations about the financial capacity of their participants. Clearly the relationship among occupation, social capital, and Jewish organizational engagement is alive and well, and I would argue that it is contributing to the diversity and vitality of the Jewish ecosystem.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Based on this analysis of several Jewish organizations in Los Angeles and their young leaders, it is clear that there are two distinct but overlapping spheres of Jewish communal life: the mainstream or establishment sphere, focusing on philanthropy, social service, and Israel, and the unconventional or non-establishment sphere, focusing on culture, social justice, and alternative engagement. These spheres are important in how young Jewish leaders – especially in non-establishment groups – think about their work, and they fill important niches in the community. Different organizations attract Jews of different occupations, social and political orientations, and views about Jewish issues.

As this study found, social class plays an important role in the contemporary Jewish communal structure. Historically, Jews' synagogue and institutional affiliations were an important marker and constituter of socioeconomic status and advancement (e.g., Kramer and Leventman 1961, Epstein 1978, Diner 2004, Sarna 2004). Today, too, Jews continue to participate in Jewish organizations based partly on their occupation and social class. In line with recent work that has brought attention to the economics of American Jewish life (e.g., Chiswick 2008), this study suggests that further research on socioeconomic dynamics could increase our understanding of Jews' social networks and institutional engagement. This study also increases our understanding of American Jews in their 20s and 30s. Much of the literature on young Jewish adults focuses on their negative attitudes toward Jewish communal organizations. Greenberg's (2006) study of Gen-Y Jews emphasizes their lack of knowledge or negative experiences with mainstream groups. Cohen and Kelman (2005) highlight young Jews who prefer attending cultural events over becoming members of Hadassah, ADL, and other longstanding institutions. In advocating for startups, Jumpstart et al. (2009) even discuss mainstream organizations in the past tense:

The Jewish communal infrastructure of the last century was built to unify, centralize, and coordinate the fragmented landscape of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish organizational life in America. Federations, defense organizations, and the denominational movements all were highly effective responses to this need for unity. These hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations drove the Jewish communal agenda and served as the primary addresses for involvement in American Jewish life throughout the last century. (4)

As I found in my research, these organizations are still serving as the primary addresses for involvement for many American Jews in their 20s and 30s (see also Wertheimer, this volume). For some of these young leaders, the Jewish communal agenda of the 20th century is also the Jewish communal agenda of the early 21st century.

Some, especially immigrants and their children, Orthodox Jews, and those in for-profit, networking-oriented professions, are the current and future leaders of the Jewish communal infrastructure founded in a previous era.

On the other hand, many young Jews are not interested in this agenda or these organizations and are founding and leading new organizations, comprising the non-establishment sphere. These new groups share leaders and participants and co-sponsor events together, but there is also some overlap with establishment groups. This diversity in the population of young Jewish leaders suggests that what has been seen merely as a generation gap is also a gap in social class and political orientation.

Some might argue that there is a glut of organizations that cater to the young adult population, especially those with an emphasis on socializing and networking. At a Federation meeting geared toward leaders of new organizations, one of the speakers asked the audience why they were not part of existing Jewish organizations. He joked: because it's not cool; "Your Purim party is so much cooler than the other" (the force behind the alternative Purim party laughed goodheartedly at that). "You've got to leave your ego at the table. It doesn't always have to be new, and it doesn't necessitate a new organization." My research suggests that sometimes it does. While there may be some redundancy within the establishment sphere (some young Jews see each other at multiple fundraising dinners each week), many groups are filling a niche, offering Jews opportunities to spend time and engage in common activities with other Jews like them. Niche groups are serving populations of recent immigrants, queer Jews, and Jews who hold left-wing views about Israel. Even if these Jews do not feel marginalized by establishment Jewish organizations (and some certainly do), they derive great pleasure and social capital from interacting with other Jews like them in an institutional setting.

One non-establishment leader highlighted the importance of niche groups: "If there are a group of Jews who are interested in bocce ball, then as a Jewish community, we should think about bocce ball." Inspired by a Jumpstart report, this leader offered a metaphor from business. He said that in the 21st century, both business and Jewish life "will look like a forest, but a forest of bonsai trees, not a forest of Redwoods... There will be many small trees that all are separate identities serving separate populations with very small ecosystems that support them." Nachama Skolnick Moskowitz echoes these sentiments and the ecological metaphor: "The more diverse the Jewish community, the better we can adapt to different environmental conditions. Helping Jews develop diverse ways of connecting to Judaism is key to our ecosystem's survival" (Moskowitz 2007:3).

In the 1980s and 1990s there was a good deal of talk about inter-denominational strife and its negative effects on Jewish communal life (e.g., Wertheimer 1997). While there are certainly remnants of this friction today, especially between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, we see an emerging tension between establishment and non-establishment organizations. In addition to competition for funding and for dates on the calendar, we see negative views based on lack of knowledge or stereotypes about participants. Through research like the current study, groups can gain a better understanding of each other's values, motivations, and goals. And communal leaders can recognize that both establishment and non-establishment groups are serving important niches, ultimately working to strengthen the Jewish people and the Jewish future.

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Appendix: Organizations included in this study

Groups seen as establishment / mainstream / conventional:

1. American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC): A national organization that fosters relationships with U.S. elected officials in order to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship. AIPAC has branches on many college campuses, and several of my interviewees attended AIPAC national conferences as college students. Graduates can continue involvement through local events and programs.
2. American Jewish Committee (AJC): AJC works behind the scenes through research, education, and diplomacy to help safeguard Jews in the U.S., Israel, and elsewhere. AJC's ACCESS group allows young people not only to participate in their own group but also to access seasoned AJC leaders and the high-level officials they build relationships with.
3. Birthright Israel Next: Under the auspices of local Federations, this group offers Birthright Israel alumni opportunities for Jewish engagement in the cities where they live. The local chapter is run by two professionals who organize a variety of programs and guide alumni to Jewish events, synagogues, and classes throughout the city.
4. Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces (FIDF): A national philanthropic organization that raises money for social and recreational programs for soldiers in the IDF and assistance to families of fallen soldiers. The L.A. chapter, one of the largest in the country, has an active young leadership division that runs up-scale social events and an annual mission to Israel.
5. Geshar City: An online portal for Jewish involvement for young adults that includes local resources, a calendar of events, and participant-generated "cluster groups" for hiking, social action, etc. Geshar City is run by the Jewish Community Center Association and has been lauded for its success in Boston and elsewhere. The L.A. chapter remains small, due mostly to limited resources.
6. Jewish Federation: A "convener" for Jewish life in Los Angeles, the Federation raises and distributes funds locally and abroad. As part of a major restructuring effort led by board chairman Stanley Gold, Federation has focused new attention on its young leadership divisions and has reached out to young people to participate on the greatly shrunken board.
7. Jewish Free Loan Association: A century-old micro-lending organization supported partly by Genesis, a group of young professionals that organize social and educational events.
8. Guardians of the Jewish Home for the Aging: A century-old Los Angeles Jewish institution, the Jewish Home is supported by a number of fundraising groups, including the Guardians (West Side) and the Executives (Valley). The young leadership divisions organize social and fundraising events like mixers, comedy nights, the men's division's golf tournaments, and the women's division's "Shopping for a Cause."

9. Stand With Us: Founded in 2001, this group provides speakers and educational materials to ensure “that Israel’s side of the story is told in communities, campuses, libraries, the media and churches.”²⁶ The local L.A. branch recently started a young leadership division, which has social events to raise awareness about the organization and its cause.

Groups seen as outside of the establishment / unconventional / innovative:

10. JDub Records: “Dedicated to innovative Jewish music, community, and cross cultural dialogue,” JDub produces new Jewish music and organizes concerts and parties geared toward young adults. Although JDub is based in New York, they have a growing presence in Los Angeles, including a staff member and local advisory council.
11. JQ International: A “safe space” for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) Jews in their 20s and 30s “to reconnect to Judaism on their terms.”²⁷ JQ offers social networking programs, events surrounding most Jewish holidays, GLBT identity education, and consultation/training for Jewish organizations.
12. Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA): From its founding in 1999, PJA was led by a relatively young group of professional and volunteer leaders. PJA’s Los Angeles regional council includes many Jews in their 20s and 30s, and two of its flagship programs are fellowships for those age groups: the Jeremiah Fellowship and New Ground: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change.
13. Reboot: Founded by leaders of cutting-edge philanthropies, Reboot brings together young, influential Jews to talk about Jewishness at summits and salons. Because of the secretive way prospective participants are tapped, one Rebooter dubbed it “Jewish hipster skull and bones.” A number of cultural products have emerged from Reboot networks, including several films, a quarterly magazine, and a record label.
14. Yiddishkayt L.A.: This group organizes festivals, concerts, “*kugl kuhk*-offs,” and educational programming to bring Yiddish culture to the next generation. They recently started the “Yiddishkayt Folks-Grupe,” a three-month fellowship for young adults to learn about Yiddish culture.

Groups seen as neither establishment nor non-establishment:

15. 30 Years After: A group of young Iranian-American Jews founded this group to encourage civic participation among Iranian Jews in the U.S., especially surrounding the issue of Israel. They organize conferences, voter registration drives, letter writing campaigns, and social events. Their upscale parties attract hundreds of Jews in their 20s and 30s, the vast majority Iranian.
16. Aish Hatorah: An Orthodox-run *kiruv* (outreach) organization that offers non-Orthodox Jews social and networking events, classes, religious services, Shabbat meals, and trips. The Los Angeles chapter has sections for young professionals (18-33), college students, young couples, and, through its quasi-independent subsidiary, Jewish Graduate Student Initiative, law and business students on several L.A. area campuses.
17. JConnectLA: A new organization started as a friendship group in its Orthodox founder’s home, JConnect now has a mailing list of several thousand young Jews in L.A.. They fulfill their mission, “to promote and inspire Jewish connectivity, community and identity” through diverse programs ranging from High Holiday services and meals to business networking events, from bibli-yoga and hikes to “sushi and sake.”

This list is by no means exhaustive. By design, I did not include organizations that are primarily in the religious and educational spheres, as several have been analyzed in previous work (e.g., Cohen and Kelman 2007, Belzer and Miller 2007, Cohen et al. 2007). If I had included the religious/educational sphere, I would have looked at the all-volunteer educational group Limmud L.A.; new spiritual communities like IKAR; independent *minyanim* like Pico Egal, Shtibl, and Maley Shirah; several Orthodox congregations that attract large numbers of young adults, especially Modern Orthodox B’nai David Judea and Beth Jacob; and longstanding Conservative and Reform synagogues that have vibrant young adult groups or Shabbat services, including Sinai Temple’s Atid and Friday Night Live and Stephen S. Wise’s W Group. Several of these religious groups, especially IKAR and Sinai Atid, came up repeatedly in the research because of their centrality in the establishment and non-establishment spheres.

Even within the social, cultural, political, and philanthropic realms, there are several other organizations geared toward Jews in their 20s and 30s that are not analyzed in depth in this study, due to time constraints. These include Jumpstart, Professional Leaders Project, Moishe House²⁸, JCafeLA, Nextbook/Tablet, Jewish Artists Initiative,

²⁶ <http://www.standwithus.com/ABOUT/>, accessed 3/10.

²⁷ <http://www.jqinternational.org/programs-social.php>, accessed 3/10.

²⁸ During the time of my fieldwork, there was no Moishe House in Los Angeles. But according to the remnant web presence, the people who ran the L.A. Moishe House before my fieldwork had relatively conventional fraternity-like social activities (parties, poker nights). The group of people who are running the new L.A. Moishe House after my fieldwork would be seen as unconventional: they include a black Jew, a lesbian Jew, and Jews of various levels of religious observance, some of whom are engaged in social justice and cultural activities with “unconventional” groups like IKAR and JQ International

L.A. Jewish Film Festival, the Shalom Institute, Aaron's Tent, the Lev Foundation, Ledorvador, Sababa Parties, STAR (Sephardic Tradition and Recreation), Israel 21C, several Orthodox outreach organizations (Chabad, Yachad Outreach Center, Isralight, Jewish Learning Exchange, Jewish Awareness Movement), young adult divisions/programs of ADL, JDC, HIAS, ZOA, WIZO, ORT, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, New Israel Fund, Magbit; Orthodox social service groups like Etta Israel, Tomchei Shabbos, Bikur Cholim, and Global Kindness; "Friends of" various institutions in Israel; and educational institutions like Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and American Jewish University. Even during the time of the research a number of new organizations were started, including an L.A. chapter of Dor Chadash and Young Leaders of the American Friends of the Citizens' Empowerment Center in Israel. In fact, in 2009, Julie Childers (2009) estimated that there were at least 75 groups and organizations in Los Angeles that reach Jews in their 20s and 30s. The young adult scene in Los Angeles is huge, multifaceted, and ever-changing, and it would be impossible to analyze every group in depth.

(http://www.jewishjournal.com/community/article/moishe_houses_creative_communal_living_20090909/). The first iteration of Moishe House L.A. would likely be classified as conventional and the second, as unconventional.