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### Creating the Experience: Engaging Millennials in Museums with a Focus on Jewish Millennials and Museums

Sarah G. Drozda

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College,  
drozdasg01@mail.buffalostate.edu

#### Advisor

Dr. Cynthia Conides

#### First Reader

Dr. Cynthia Conides

#### Second Reader

Dr. Chana Kotzin

#### Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.

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State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of History and Social Studies Education

Creating the Experience: Engaging Millennials in Museums with a Focus  
on Jewish Millennials and Museums

By  
Sarah G. Drozda

An Abstract of a Thesis  
in  
Museum Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
December 2021

SUNY Buffalo State  
Department of History and Social Studies Education  
Museum Studies Program

## Abstract of Thesis

### Creating the Experience: Engaging Millennials in Museums with a Focus on Jewish Millennials and Museums

In this research, I explore two main ideas: The relationship that millennials have with museums and what programming excites them into coming back to the museum. To do this, I did a background review of the motivations and passions of the millennial generation, as well as various programming that have engaged millennials in museums. As someone who is a millennial and passionate about Jewish museums and Jewish engagement, I focused my research on how museums can help to bring Jewish millennials closer to their heritage, culture, and Jewish identity. A good segment of Jewish millennials is not drawn to traditional Jewish structures anymore, such as the synagogue, and look to find their connections elsewhere. Jewish museums provide an opportunity to do what is both beneficial to the museum and the visitor. My research provides recommendations for Jewish museums in creating programming that is engaging, full of connection, and allows visitors to explore and connect with Judaism and Jewish culture on their own terms.

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of History and Social Studies Education

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on Jewish Millennials and Museums

A Thesis in Museum Studies

by  
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of the Requirements  
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Master of Arts  
December 2021

Approved by:

Cynthia A. Conides, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor Emerita and Founding Director of Museum Studies

Andrew Nicholls, Ph.D.  
Chair and Professor of History & Social Studies Education

Kevin J. Miller, Ed.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Each year, there are approximately 850 million museum visits in the United States alone, according to the American Alliance of Museums, which is more than attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined.<sup>1</sup> Museum visitors come from all walks of life, and museums must do their best to cater to all of them, and sometimes they fall short of doing that. One key demographic that museums need to engage is millennials, right now the largest generational group in terms of population in the United States. Millennials vary from their predecessors in various forms, from the way they approach their work lives to the way in which they view the world and society around them. In this research, I look to delve deeper into exploring who millennials are, and what they need from museums to make them lifelong members. The world is busy, and millennials have options in terms of entertainment and education, especially when information is readily available at the touch of a button. Without understanding millennials, museums might lose a core audience that they will need in years to come.

However, my research is not going to end there, and the best way to explain why I became interested in this topic is to explain a bit about who I am. First things first, I am a millennial, according to the Pew Research Center. There may be some disagreement in this as my brother, a few years older than me, uses a different definition where I would be considered Generation Z – though I have never aligned myself nor felt connected to Generation Z. Pew Research Center labels anyone born between 1981 and 1996 a Millennial, and anyone born after,

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<sup>1</sup> “Museum Facts & Data.” n.d. American Alliance of Museums. Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/>.

Generation Z.<sup>2</sup>The second, and probably the biggest part of my identity, is that I am proudly Jewish. Almost everyone who I come across, whether it be by noticing the large gold Star of David necklace I wear around my neck, or the fact that I never stop talking about Jewish things, will learn this about me quickly. If there's one thing I am passionate about above all else, it is engaging Jewish young adults to dive deeper into their definition of Judaism and explore their own Jewishness. I feel that Jewish museums have a special duty of engaging young Jewish adults. For example, the National Museum of American Jewish History includes in their mission statement that, "Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire."<sup>3</sup>

Jewish museums are quite diverse in their offerings, with some focusing on presenting Jewish history (including Holocaust museums), others attached to showcasing aspects of Jewish identity, while others specialize in Judaica and Jewish art. Museums that reside in synagogues should also not be forgotten. Despite their distinctions every museum has the capability of being active agents in helping the Jewish community connect with their heritage. Young Jewish adults who are moving away from the traditional Jewish institutions such as synagogues and looking to explore their identity elsewhere are prime candidates for this type of engagement.

This research focuses on the millennial population, exploring how programming and engagement tailored towards them has worked in museums of all kinds. Following will be a brief study on Jewish millennials, Jewish museums, and their role in engaging millennials.

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<sup>2</sup> Dimock, Michael. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins." Pew Research Center. January 17, 2019. Accessed October 4, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins>.

<sup>3</sup> "About Us." n.d. National Museum of American Jewish History. Accessed October 20, 2020. <https://www.nmajh.org/about-us/>.

It was my original intention to be able to visit some of these museums and get my own firsthand experience in their programming and include that in my research, but due to COVID-19 and museum closures, plans have necessarily shifted. Museum catalogues are a valuable resource, but unfortunately were difficult to acquire as they tend to be quite expensive. Libraries that hold museum catalogues were hard to access due to closures because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. My research is now heavily tailored towards previous case studies that have been published by museums, or research done by other scholars.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

I wanted this work to focus primarily on programming Jewish museums have specifically done for young adults, by reaching out to museums, hearing directly from them what their museums were doing to engage young adults, and the feedback and results they received from these programs that they presented. Contacting museum professionals proved to be difficult, which is understandable considering the pressure museums were going through to keep their organizations going during a global pandemic. For this reason, much of my research relied heavily on books, museum reports, and statistics pulled from research done by organizations such as Jewish federations.

In her work *Museums and Millennials: Engaging the Coveted Patron Generation*, Jaclyn Spainhour, the director of the Hunter House Victorian Museum, takes the discussion of millennial engagement in museums to a higher level. She has done extensive research on how museums can reach out to millennials, as well as analyzing museums that have tried to reach out to millennials, showcasing what worked and what did not work in their engagement. As a millennial herself, she has first-hand knowledge of what millennials are searching for and takes it a step further to acknowledge the trends that fit into the generation. Spainhour recognizes that millennials do not have the best reputation, particularly to those in other generations, and tries to present a better more positive side to the generation. Although this work is aimed towards small to mid-sized museums, employees from museums of all sizes can learn something from Spainhour – especially when it comes to museum programming.

Spainhour calls for museums to look at their “A.U.R.A,” which stands for affordability, uniqueness, relevance, and accessibility. In her section about affordability, she looks at the

incomes of millennials and how they are deciding to spend their money. It is no surprise that almost all museums are faced with the question of whether or not they will charge admission, and if they do, how much should it cost? Another important thing that she addresses is how millennials acknowledge the relationship between value and cost – and what museums need to do to provide that value to their patrons.

In her section about uniqueness, Spainhour considers what programs will attract millennials. She recognizes that millennials want a unique and innovative experience, and how museum professionals can create those experiences. She goes into depth about what has worked for museums and what did not go so well. In the section on relevance, she speaks about how museums need to stay relevant to their mission, and without that, they cannot create programming that is going to attract visitors, as well as information on what interests millennials. In order to do this, she looks at the millennial values and their diversity and how museums can work off of this to engage them in their programming. She also does a breakdown of differing subgroups of millennials – such as those who are single, those who have families and children, etc. In the chapter about accessibility, she defines what accessibility means to millennials and provides examples of programs that museums have done that were accessible to various subgroups of millennials. Everything she presented that relates to A.U.R.A. is important for the present research, and helpful for employees of museums that care to focus on engaging millennials.

The work *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course of the American Jewish Future* compiled by Rabbi Sidney Schwarz and the collaborators provide insight into the future of American-Jewry and extends a hand to the institutions that work to engage younger Jews, especially the ones who aren't actively participating in the Jewish community. Although this

work was not written for museums, much of the expertise and ideas here can be applied in Jewish museums. Schwarz offers four propositions on engaging the younger Jewish crowd and creating a Jewish renaissance, and in my view, Jewish museums should take these four ideas and create conversation and programming around them: Wisdom/Chochmah (engaging in the wisdom of sacred texts and relating that to world religions and contemporary culture); Social Justice/Tzedek (advancing social justice through the framework of Judaism); Community/Kehillah (a place where people can find support, celebration, and friendships); Lives of Sacred Purpose/Kedushah (must offer “experiences that provide holiness, transcendent meaning, and a sense of purpose.)”<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Schwarz’s approach has much to offer museum professionals as they consider their programming goals, and I incorporate his framework into my own recommendations.

*Jewish Millennials: The Beliefs and Behaviors Shaping Young Jews in America* conducted by Barna Group proved to be an important piece of research for this study. The first part of the work aims to define the question, “*Who is considered a Jew?*” The study decided to include people who considered themselves Jewish, but only if they were not a convert, as those who are only Jewish by religion were not included. Those with at least one Jewish parent were also included, only if one parent was 100 percent Jewish, or both parents were no less than half Jewish. Those who conducted the report reasoned that, “exclusions are not intended to be an ultimate reflection on the Jewishness of these particular groups or their right to identify as

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<sup>4</sup> Schwarz, Rabbi Sidney. 2013. "Charting the Course of the American Jewish Future". In *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course Of the American Jewish Future*, xiii. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, p. 19-31.

Jewish, but rather to allow Barna to focus closely on the faith expressions and experiences of those who report Jewish parentage and claim Jewish heritage.”<sup>5</sup>

The Barna Study, with their requirements of who they deem Jewish in their study, is leaving out a significant number of people who identify as Jewish or express their Jewishness in ways that might not traditionally be deemed religious. Jewish identity is complex and highly ambiguous. Rachel Gross, in her study *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice* argues that religious practice is not static and does not have to take place within the walls of a synagogue, Jewish Community Center, or Jewish Federation. In her introduction, Gross argues, “But many American Jews today understand themselves and their families through emotional and narrative frameworks provided by ostensibly non-religious institutions that – as this book argues – perform religious functions.”<sup>6</sup> Gross affirms that activities such as sitting down to eat a pastrami sandwich, visiting a Jewish historic site, doing genealogical research, engaging with and reminiscing about Eastern European Jewry immigration, remembering the Holocaust, and learning about Zionism, are experiences that serve as a religion function for those who are Jewish.

Another work that greatly helped my study was *Where Justice Dwells: A Hands-On Guide to Doing Social Justice in Your Jewish Community* by Rabbi Jill Jacobs. From my research, I have learned that millennials of all backgrounds, and Jewish millennials both value social justice work and feeling as if they made a difference. While this work focused more on religious institutions and why their organizations should take on social justice work, with advice

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<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Millennials: the Beliefs and Behaviors Shaping Young Jews in America*. 2017. Ventura, CA: Barna., p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Gross, Rachel B. 2021. *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice*. New York: NYU Press, p. 9.

on how to engage in the work, following through, and taking action to complete this work. Rabbi Jacobs provides context as to why social justice has been a major part of Jewish tradition, reflecting on the Jewish historical experience and familial ties. Part two of this work investigated the “core principles and essential practices for creating communities of justice,” by looking at ideas such as storytelling, merging social justice with communal life and execution by institutions, and by using Jewish texts to aid in social justice work. Part three focuses on the various ways that organizations can act, analyzing the pros and cons of each path.

The book *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, aims to address the lack of focus on religion in museums. This study outlines the importance of looking at religion in museums, promoting the claim of, “Because religious life and practice continues to play a global role, there is a strong need for mutual understanding across, and even within, religious lines, investigations that are critical to global cooperation and progress.”<sup>7</sup> This work is organized into six parts: Museum Buildings; Objects, Museums, Religions; Responses to Objects, Museums, and Religion; Museum Collecting and Research; Museum Interpretation of Religion and Religious Objects; Presenting Religion in a Variety of Museums. This book starts to address one of the main problems that has arisen in the research of religion in museums: that researchers have found ways to connect their visitors to sacred objects of the past, but they fail to find a way to present religion in the twenty-first century, to make it something that is lived today and not something of the past.

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<sup>7</sup> Buggeln, Gretchen, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, eds. 2017. *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, p. 1.

## Chapter Three

### Millennials: Demographics and Beliefs

#### Who are millennials?

For museums to function, they need to cater to different types of people. One group that they need to consider in exhibits and programming is millennials. It is imperative to take time to understand who exactly millennials are and their belief system. In April of 2020, the Pew Research Center released data indicating that millennials are the largest generation in the country according to population estimates and have now surpassed the baby boomer generation.<sup>8</sup> As of 2019, there were 72.1 million millennials aged from 23 to 38, with an expected peak in 2033, an

Baby Boomers	Born between 1946 to 1964
Generation X	Born between 1965 and 1980
Millennial	Born between 1981 and 1996
Generation Z	Born after 1996

estimated 74.9 million millennials.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to clearly define the birth year of millennials since the answer varies depending on who is asked and what study is conducted. To give a clear synopsis for the purpose of this study, I will be following the Pew guidelines that everyone born from 1981 to 1996 are considered millennials and everyone born from 1997 onwards are

considered part of the next generation. Pew Research Center uses this as a cutoff date because in 2018, it became clear to them that it was time to distinguish millennials from the next

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<sup>8</sup> Fry, Richard. "Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation." Pew Research Center. April 28, 2020. Accessed April 4, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

generation. At this time, the oldest millennials were nearing forty years old and entered adulthood before most of the next generation was even born.<sup>10</sup>

One important aspect about millennials is that they make up a quarter of the world's population. They are the most diverse generation to date in terms of race and ethnicity. According to studies conducted by William H. Frey, a senior fellow for the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program in 2018, millennials are almost 56 percent white, while almost 30 percent are considered "new minorities," which are Hispanic, Asian, and individuals who identify with more than one race. This is a huge shift from when baby boomers (the generation born from 1946 to 1964) were young adults, with their population being 78 percent white.<sup>11</sup> As of recent statistics, Black millennials make up almost fourteen percent of the population today, which is a four percent rise from when baby boomers were the largest population.<sup>12</sup>

Even though millennials are often stereotyped as a lazy generation, the data regarding education suggests differently. When measuring them against generations before them, millennials have the highest level of education yet. In another study conducted by the Pew Research Center, it is shown that forty percent of employed millennials from the ages of 25 to 29 had a college degree.<sup>13</sup> The reasoning behind this may be because many millennials feel as if college, despite how expensive it is, is imperative and necessary in order to make it in today's

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<sup>10</sup> Dimock, Michael. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins." Pew Research Center. January 17, 2019. Accessed October 4, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins>.

<sup>11</sup> Frey, William H. *The Millennial Generation: A Demographic Bridge to America's Diverse Future*. Report. Brookings Institution. January 2018. Accessed April 05, 2021. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-jan\\_brookings-metro\\_millennials-a-demographic-bridge-to-americas-diverse-future.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-jan_brookings-metro_millennials-a-demographic-bridge-to-americas-diverse-future.pdf), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Graf, Nikki. "Today's Young Workers are More Likely than Ever to Have a Bachelor's Degree." Pew Research Center. May 16, 2017. Accessed June 07, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/16/todays-young-workers-are-more-likely-than-ever-to-have-a-bachelors-degree/>.

workforce. If millennials hope to acquire higher pay than others, higher education helps them get there. A study found that full-time working millennials with a college degree make around \$17,500 more than those who only have a high school diploma.<sup>14</sup>

### **What do millennials care about?**

For museums to understand millennials and how to get them through the door, museum professionals need a clear grasp on what is important to millennials, what are some key characteristics, and what they prioritize. Without mastery on these three concepts, it is going to be difficult for museums to get millennials to walk through their doors. While previous generations are aging out and retiring from their current working positions, it is left to the younger generations to take these positions. As the generation most likely to leave their jobs if they are not content, however, museums have a lot of work to do to ensure that millennials are going to stay at their organization. In Joan Baldwin's *Report to the Field: The Status of Succession Planning in New York State Museums*, as quoted by Adrienne Barnett in her thesis, it was reported that millennials often left their positions because of "no ladder, no promotion, no growth, coupled with a dearth of mentors."<sup>15</sup> To be able to use millennial opinions on engagement from the inside of the organization, museums need to create a space where millennials feel comfortable in their positions and will not seek out other employment, especially in a field where the pay is low, if and when millennials can manage to land a permanent position.

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<sup>14</sup> "Education: The Rising Cost of Not Going to College." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. February 11, 2014. Accessed May 30, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/>.

<sup>15</sup> Barnett, Adrienne. "Catch them if you can: Building career pathways for millennials in science centers/museums." (*Unpublished MA/MBA thesis*). John F. Kennedy University, Berkeley, CA (2011), p. 21.

What is important to millennials? One of the most important features about millennials was pointed out in *The Millennial Impact Report* (MIR). This was a study conducted by Achieve, over a ten-year period that studied over 150,000 millennials. What they found is that millennials are interested not only in issues that pertain to themselves, but also to those who are unable to use their own voices, including those who do have completely different backgrounds. Millennials care deeply about problems that affect other groups of people – they do not need to be of the same race, share a common language, or have the same educational background.<sup>16</sup> It is not unusual to see millennials canvassing or protesting for a cause they care about, such as Black Lives Matter, women’s rights, immigrant rights, or environmental issues (among many others). It is not important for millennials to stay faithful to organizations because they are more focused on changing the world for the better, and 86 percent of millennials believe that they have the power to do that.<sup>17</sup>

While there are some millennials who put their trust and time into one organization, almost 90 percent of them donate to five nonprofits in a given year, and around the same number of them said they were motivated to give because of a cause, not because of the organization.<sup>18</sup> This directly impacts museums, because if millennials do not feel as if a museum is doing enough to stand up for a cause and their mission does not reflect held values, then they will not spend their money to benefit the museum. They are going to look elsewhere to donate their money. It is imperative for museums to stay transparent and keep a level of trust between

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<sup>16</sup> *The Millennial Impact Report: 10 Years Looking Back*. Report. 2019. Accessed June 06, 2020. <https://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/images/2018/MIR-10-Years-Looking-Back.pdf>, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 9

themselves and millennials, since more than 90 percent of millennials would stop donating to an organization if they stopped trusting it.<sup>19</sup>

Another aspect of millennials that should be no surprise is that millennials love their technology. The majority of millennials grew up on technology, so they simply know no other way. Statistics show that there are only a few hours in a day that millennials *aren't* using technology, with millennials engaging with a colossal 17.8 hours of media a day.<sup>20</sup> That means that there are only 6.2 hours in a day that millennials are not engaging with technology, and when you consider that an average person needs around seven to eight hours a night of sleep, the statistics have so much more of an impact. While there will be more regarding millennials and technology later in the chapter, it is noted that museums should look towards using technology to keep this age group engaged, as it has become such an essential part of their lives. Millennials do not want to stand and stare into a glass case, they want to be engaged with the stories around them.

Millennials also are looking at their careers differently from past generations, which has been summarized in a report prepared by Gallup. They are the generation that is breaking down the traditional organizational structures and policies and forcing companies to reexamine the environment that they create in the workplace.<sup>21</sup> Feeling engaged in their jobs is important to millennials, both behaviorally and emotionally.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, they are more likely than any other generation to leave their jobs if they are not content.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>20</sup> Bello, John, and Sarah Matchette. "Shifting Perspectives: The Millennial Influence on Museum Engagement." *Theory and Practice* 1 (June 11, 2018). Accessed June 07, 2020. [https://articles.themuseumsscholar.org/2018/06/11/tp\\_vol1bellomatchette/](https://articles.themuseumsscholar.org/2018/06/11/tp_vol1bellomatchette/).

<sup>21</sup> *How Millennials Want to Work and Live*. Report. 2016. Accessed June 05, 2020.

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238073/millennials-work-live.aspx>, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 7.

## Why do museums need to market to millennials?

So, what makes millennials so important? Why should museums look to this generation when considering programming and exhibits? As Jaclyn Spainhour points out, “Millennials are the largest population group at this point in history and they are also the largest museum patron group, though they are often underserved and therefore not as loyal to those facilities as they could be.”<sup>23</sup> Millennials are not going anywhere, and when using the Pew Research end date of millennials as 1996, the youngest millennials are around twenty-four years old. It is important for museums to build a relationship with millennials because they are going to be engaging with the institutions for years to come. Being able to connect with them now will make them more likely to keep them coming back in the future, and hopefully get them on the path to become members. An inadequate or boring experience may not create distaste towards the museum, but it likely won’t get them invested in the organization.

Colleen Dilenschneider points out that millennials are potentially the most valuable visitors to a cultural organization. Thirty one percent of millennials are more likely than baby boomers to revisit an organization within one year – as well as being the most likely generation to recommend an organization to a friend.<sup>24</sup> A good number of museums and cultural organizations are beginning to see the advantage of millennial engagement. An example of this is Museum Hack, an organization that hosts small grouped tours of museums around the world for those who hate museums, and for visitors that are “millennial minded.”<sup>25</sup> Museum Hack allows those who are older to attend their tours, as long as they are okay with swearing, and “naughty

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<sup>23</sup> Jaclyn Spainhour. 2019. *Museums and Millennials: Engaging The Coveted Patron Generation*. Ebook. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> YouTube. February 02, 2016. Accessed June 8, 2020.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKcptfgpSPs&t=5s>.

<sup>25</sup> “About our Company.” *Museum Hack*. Accessed November 13, 2021. <https://museumhack.com/about/>

bits.”<sup>26</sup> Musuem Hack is a great example of piquing millennial attention, and the next chapter will go into more depth about the relationship between millennials and museums, and techniques museums are using to strengthen that relationship.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### How Museums are Attempting to Connect with Millennials

A question that needs to be addressed regarding millennials and museums, and one that museums who are seeking to bring in millennials needs to ask is: Where are museums lacking in terms of millennial engagement? What is the current relationship that millennials hold with museums? In a world so full of options, what will lure millennials to spending their afternoon in a museum, rather than another source of entertainment? Are there certain elements to museums that could turn millennials off from stepping inside the doors? And of course, and what I will approach later in this chapter, is what type of programming, or what changes can museums make to attract this crowd?

Karen Hughes and Gianna Moscardo both set out to answer the question of whether young adults felt museums in Western countries were for them, with studies focused on both Australian and Chinese young adults. The authors found that while respondents from the various countries had different responses, they were both in agreement that they did not view museums as a place for young adults.<sup>27</sup> In their research, they found that the ways in which museums can combat this belief is by creating places that are “more engaging, relevant, welcoming, and offered opportunities for social interaction with peers.”<sup>28</sup> One of the reasons for this in western museums was that young adults associated museums with school field trips and previous negative experiences during these trips hindered them from visiting again.<sup>29</sup> Young adults widely

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<sup>27</sup> Karen Hughes & Gianna Moscardo (2019) For Me or Not for Me? Exploring Young Adults' Museum Representations, *Leisure Sciences*, 41:6, 516-534, DOI: 10.1080/01490400.2018.1550455

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 519.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

hold the belief that museums do not fit inside their “comfort zone,” and that museums do not usually position themselves within these young adults “personal and social identity.”<sup>30</sup>

In Hughes and Moscardo’s data, they found that between both Australian and Chinese respondents from the ages of eighteen to thirty, the number one reason that these young adults felt museums existed was for education about history, with fifty-six percent. Following that was about education in general with forty-nine percent between all respondents. Only twelve percent believed that the display of artifacts was the reason museums existed, and only five percent viewed museums as entertainment or recreation. Four percent claimed that they felt museums existed to build national identity.<sup>31</sup>

When turning to the question of what museums have that cannot be found elsewhere, authentic objects took the top spot with sixty-three percent, followed with twenty-two percent claiming museums hold information/facts. Displays and exhibits trailed with fifteen percent, atmosphere with nine percent, and the truth/true stories with six percent.<sup>32</sup> The data showcases that while museums may have objects that cannot be found elsewhere, they are not the only place where one can find displays and exhibitions, and they severely lack in creating a one-of-a-kind environment. If only nearly ten percent felt that a museum created a space that they could not experience elsewhere, then museums are failing to create unique experiences that will get visitors through their doors. Why would people make a trip to a museum if they feel they can get a more unique encounter elsewhere?

The highest recommendation that all respondents of their study suggested was to use technology to make exhibits more “engaging,” with fifty-four percent of respondents suggesting

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 519.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 529.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

this.<sup>33</sup> Following that, thirty-nine percent of respondents advised on creating more content that is age relevant for younger people. Twenty percent hoped for special events that allowed room for social interaction and fifteen percent desired spaces that were more modern and welcoming.<sup>34</sup> From their data, we can see that nearly forty percent of respondents felt that museums could do more in creating engaging content for those in their age group, with some events allowing room for socialization. The absence of this programming, aligned with a high number of those who had a sour taste from the museum experience they lived when they were in school does nothing to invite these young adults back into a museum.

How do museums connect with millennials? The answer to this question can be found in the values that Jaclyn Spainhour presents. She explains that millennials hold some great qualities, such as: “they do not want to be labeled, are open to change, value diversity and inclusion, come from varied families (many of which are non-traditional), want to make the world a better place, incorporate technology into daily life, have a heart for charitable causes, are well-educated, and value experiences more than things.”<sup>35</sup>

These values are important in trying to get a millennial through the museum door, but the one that museums should arguably focus on the most is the last part: that millennials value experiences more than things. It is true that for most millennials, they do not want to walk into a museum and stare at a glass case stocked full of objects. There is a great possibility that this would bore the average millennials, who may leave the museum with a not-so-great experience. Also, odds are that the visitor wouldn’t even take the time to engage with every object.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Spainhour, *Museums and Millennials*, 4.

The shift from moving from a traditional object-based museum to one full of experiences is not a new debate in the museum world – and it does not relate only to millennials, so this idea would be beneficial for the museum to consider on a larger scale as well. It is important for museum professionals to understand that they are competing with every other experience-based business close by. Millennials are easily situated around escape rooms, theme parks, theatre, and other forms of entertainment that will leave a lasting impression on them. Without programming that will grasp their interest, museums are going to lose their millennial audience which is imperative to museums. By considering programming and exhibits that will leave a lasting impression, museums are one step closer to building a strong relationship with the millennial generation. So that leaves the question, how does a museum create an experience that is going to peak millennial attention and keep them coming back?

A few guidelines that may help when considering how to create a full experience were laid out by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, founders of Strategic Horizons, a consulting firm that aids companies in finding ways to engage and make their business more valuable. They have outlined five principles to creating experiences: theme the experience, harmonize impressions with positive cues, eliminate negative cues, mix in memorabilia, and engage the five senses. These guidelines can be applied towards museums of any size, and examples are provided relating to a handful of these guidelines.

**Theme the Experience:** A theme that is well thought out will help set the tone – visitors want to know what they should expect. As the authors describe, a theme should carry a story that allows a guest to participate in – and without them, it will feel defective. This extends from programming to exhibits.

**Harmonize Impressions with Positive Cues:** According to the authors, “the experience must be rendered with indelible impressions. Impressions are the “takeaways” of the experience; the congruent integration of a number of impressions affect the individual and thereby fulfill the theme.... To create the desired impressions, companies must introduce cues that together affirm the nature of the desired experience to the guest.”<sup>36</sup>

**Eliminate Negative Cues:** The museum should assure that every part of the experience is consistent – no visitor wants to feel confused. Every cue should be concise so that confusion does not ruin the experience. A visitor does not want to be thrown in a million directions, leaving them confused and unsure what they should be taking away from the experience. Spainhour notes that in an interview with millennial and museum goer Joshua Weinstein, he found himself in an uncomfortable situation at a museum in Philadelphia. Joshua was visiting the museum and went to the front desk to pay his admission fees. After he was finished paying, Joshua found himself looking at two different doors that he could enter through, one that was close to him, and another that was on the other side of the room. He decided to go through the door that was closest to him – and no one said a word to him until after he started to focus on the exhibit. An attendant came up to him and told him that he had come through the wrong door, and he needed to go back to the other doorway to see the exhibit. Although the exhibit was in no particular order, the attendant was adamant that he go back to the other door. Joshua found himself

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<sup>36</sup> Pine II, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore. "The Experience Economy." In *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, edited by Gail Anderson. Second ed. AltaMira Press, p. 167.

ignoring the attendant, speeding through the exhibit, and left “feeling unwelcome and angry.” Ever since this experience, Joshua has not returned to the museum.<sup>37</sup>

A situation like this could have been easily fixed with more planning. As Spainhour points out, a lack of signage and communication led to the unpleasant experience that Joshua had faced. A sign that pointed to the correct door would have easily remedied this situation, and the front desk associate should have pointed Joshua in the correct direction.

**Mix in Memorabilia:** The museum should sell objects that remind the visitor of the experience – if the visitor has a positive experience, they will be more likely to purchase memorabilia. If the museum has planned a major event, then considering tee shirts to commemorate the experience is a logical choice. People love showing off that they were at an exciting event! At the very least, ensuring that the gift shop is up to date and fits within the mission of the museum and their events is imperative. If a museum patron enjoys their time at the museum, then they are more likely to go and purchase gifts at the gift shop.

**Engage the Five Senses:** The organization should try and create a sensory experience that aligns with the theme of the experience.<sup>38</sup> One of the easiest ways to engage the five senses in museum programming is by looking to food and drink to assist with the experience. There are countless ways that a museum may incorporate food and drink into programming.

The Tenement Museum in New York City, which documents America’s urban immigrant history is one example of how to incorporate food into museum education. The Museum hopes

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<sup>37</sup> Spainhour, *Museums and Millennials*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Pine II, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore. "The Experience Economy." In *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, edited by Gail Anderson. Second ed. AltaMira Press, p. 163

“to tell stories about the immigrant families that once lived on the Lower East Side, so as to raise consciousness about immigrants and their roles in American life yesterday and today.”<sup>39</sup> In the museum’s Orchard Street tenement building dating from 1863, the museum aims to do just this, with re-created homes from former residents of the tenement. Small groups move their way through the building, learning about the family history of previous residents while looking into their own family history.<sup>40</sup>

However, as Adam Steinberg points out, there is something missing from the building that would be found in the tenement back in 1863: food.<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact that the museum cannot have food during the building tours due to the possibility of damage if something were to go wrong, they recognized the importance that food has in telling the history of the tenants, especially since food has the ability to connect to the storytelling that the museum is trying to convey.

To allow food into the museum’s education repertoire, museum staff helped to create a food walking tour that takes place over the course of two hours. The museum came up with two conclusions: the first was that the food should be authentic, and the second is that every person who experiences the tour is going to come to their own memories and feelings about the dishes that they consume. This tour allowed the museum to open dialogue regarding the idea of food, immigration, and history.<sup>42</sup> A program such like this would go over well with the millennial population as they are pushing to engage in dialogue and learn about groups that are different from them. It also brings in relevant conversations pertaining to the current political climate.

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<sup>39</sup> Adam Steinberg, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Food: Using Food to Teach History at the Tenement Museum." *The Public Historian* 34, no. 2 (2012): 79-89. Accessed February 9, 2021. doi:10.1525/tph.2012.34.2.79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Another way to use food is by introducing alcohol to the museum. The Campbell House Museum in St. Louis, Missouri created an event titled “Drink Up, Tweet Up,” where they called people to, “Join the Campbell House Museum and Distilled History for an evening of music, food, and potent potables. Explore St. Louis’ history through the lens of beer and spirits in and around the walls of one of America’s most accurately restored 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings.”<sup>43</sup> This event was free to those who wanted to attend, provided that they were 21 years of age or older, with an average attendance of around 150 people.<sup>44</sup> As Jaclyn Spainhour points out, this event works because it is an affordable experience that doesn’t stray from the mission of the museum, and it is an event that they are able to attend with friends.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to note that millennials have the option of going elsewhere to enjoy a drink with friends, and it is an option that they are likely to take up. In a 2017 survey completed by Bankrate, they found that 42 percent of all millennials between the ages of 21-26 typically go to the bar at least one time a week.<sup>46</sup> By creating programming like this, the museum is now placing themselves in competition with bars and other nightlife venues – especially when they can offer alcohol for free. There does need to be safety precautions taken to ensure the protection of visitors, museum staff, and the collections. After all, visitors are attending an event at a museum, and not a nightclub. The typical behavior associated in a bar or nightclub won’t work in a museum. There is no way to completely eradicate the risk of something going wrong and damage being done, but there are steps that museums can take to minimize the risk.

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<sup>43</sup> Spainhour, *Museums and Millennials*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Bankrate. "Millennials Struggle with Financial Vices." News release, June 26, 2017. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.bankrate.com/pdfs/pr/20170626-Financial-Vices.pdf>.

Museums must stick to their mission when serving alcohol. Creating programming that includes alcoholic beverages but strays from their mission should be avoided, and when institutions look to serve alcohol without a clear purpose, liability risk increases. A history museum in New York City might look to include beer in their programming when speaking about German immigrants in the nineteenth century. A science museum could explore the science behind mixology, or even use their planetariums to talk about the clouds of alcohol that float in space – while serving alcohol!

## **AFTER HOURS**

Another way for museums to engage millennials is by considering the idea of hosting after hours programming. Many museums across the country are open during hours that make it hard for young adults – especially if they are working a full-time job or have schoolwork to attend. The traditional 9 am to 5 pm isn't going to work for most millennials, especially not during a weeknight. Not only can opening the museum later hours expand visitor number turnout, but it also opens the door to unique programming away from the traditional museum experience that will peak engagement and get people wanting to come back to the institution.

It can be argued that after hours programming isn't necessary when the weekends provide an opportunity for people to visit during hours that they may normally be at work. However, when looking to engage with millennials, museums should absolutely consider after hours programming, and there are a few reasons for this.

A major reason of looking to expand hours is the sole idea that adults like to be able to explore the museum without any children. The National Museum of Scotland used after hour programming to enhance visitor engagement and attract a higher number of people to come to

their institution. Some of the events that they put on included things such as showcasing their interactive exhibits with adult only hours, sometimes with live music or silent discos, face painting, expert talks, object handling, and drinks and snacks.<sup>47</sup> When looking at the motivation for people to attend after hours events, being able to attend an adult only event at the museum was the second highest reasoning for attendance, with 79 agreeing with an attendees sentiment of, “Something that’s special for grown-ups to be able to come and enjoy all aspects of the museum, without either their children or other people’s children in the space.”<sup>48</sup> The only motivation that came higher than visiting the museum without children is to be able to connect with music or entertainment in an atypical environment.<sup>49</sup> The museum found that 64 percent had reconnected with the museum since participating in an after-hours event, upping their visitation to the museum.<sup>50</sup>

One museum that attempted after hours programming and saw results is the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. In 2011, they released a case study on how they increased young adult engagement in their institution. The museum recognized that they could not just open the museum for extra hours and expect the young adults to come running in: they needed to impress the museum’s target audience, while challenging that same demographic’s perceptions of museums at the same time.<sup>51</sup> Museums cannot wave a magic wand

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<sup>47</sup> Hilary Easson & Anna Leask (2020) After-hours events at the National Museum of Scotland: a product for attracting, engaging and retaining new museum audiences?, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23:11, 1343-1356, DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2019.1625875, p. 1346.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1351.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 1352.

<sup>51</sup> Harlow, Bob, Thomas Alfieri, Aaron Dalton, and Anne Field. *More Than Just a Party: How the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Boosted Participation by Young Adults*. Publication. 2011. Accessed April 03, 2021. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/More-Than-Just-a-Party.pdf>, p. 10.

and expect young adults to come running at the mention of extended hours at the museum; if they are considering extending their hours in hopes of attracting more people to their institution then they need to put the work in to create attractive programming.

To accomplish this, the museum allowed a group of people in the same age range as their target to take control. This is an aspect that all museums hoping to engage millennials should do – and if they do not have people on their staff then they should look to create a committee, or a board that they can engage for advice. No one knows the millennial generation better than millennials, and it helps with word-of-mouth marketing. If someone on the committee enjoys and is excited about a project, then they are more likely to get their friends involved and encourage them to check out the museum for themselves.

Julie Crites, who was the museum’s twenty-something director of program planning at the time, pushed for alcohol to be served (beer and wine), despite the concerns from CFO Peter Bryant.<sup>52</sup> In the end, her argument prevailed on the condition that alcohol be served in a designated area away from the collection, where security guards could ensure that no damage could occur.

Engaging a young adult audience is a challenge that the Denver Art Museum approached around a decade ago with a three-year grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which allowed the museum to focus on the core audience of young adults between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five. One of the programs that was born through this initiative was a program titled “Untitled,” the first event premiering in February of 2007. On the last Friday of every month, museum visitors could pay regular admission and engage in a unique museum experience, consisting of live music, snacks, a cash bar, and various events that attendees can

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

choose from.<sup>53</sup> With the launch of this program, the museum saw an increase in the number of young adults in attendance: up ten percent for attendees between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, and an increase of fifteen percent in those aged twenty-four to thirty-four.<sup>54</sup>

A creative way that the museum allowed the young adults to see their collections in a new light is by offering a space for experts in fields other than art to participate. The museum decided to host “Grounded” as a theme for Untitled one night and provided a space for a variety of specialists to engage with the museum guests. Grounded came to life based on the museum’s own collections, following an exhibition titled *Marvelous Mud*, which showcased ceramics from across cultures and time periods.<sup>55</sup>

Museum guests had the option of attending several events that evening. On the outside of the museum, a *raku* master fired tiles. A local geologist conducted a tour of *Dirty Pictures*, an exhibit which displayed numerous methods of how photographers have approached mud in their pictures. The museum took the word “grounded” a step further by also allowing it to represent the grounding of yourself, creating a space for visitors to meditate in their India gallery. Another way that the museum approached the word grounded was by relating it to a child getting grounded for doing something their parents wouldn’t approve of. For this, they allowed a comedy troupe to provide an inappropriate voyage, one that might get the visitor “grounded” from the museum. The museum points out that, “although the guys joked about objects, they focused on specific details, which got folks laughing and looking more closely.”<sup>56</sup> Another

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<sup>53</sup> *Creativity, Community, and A Dash of the Unexpected*. Publication. Accessed March 03, 2021. [https://www.mediafire.com/file/codxvncdgux9jk6/Creativity,\\_Community,\\_and\\_a\\_Dash\\_of\\_the\\_Unexpected.pdf/file](https://www.mediafire.com/file/codxvncdgux9jk6/Creativity,_Community,_and_a_Dash_of_the_Unexpected.pdf/file).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

professional they hired was a local artist who was writing a book about coffee that spoke to attendees about coffee grounds.<sup>57</sup>

Hiring professionals to collaborate in museum events can get costly for the museum, especially for smaller museums that do not have the funds to gamble with programming. The cost of a ticket should be reasonable for the experience provided and high enough that the museum does not end up eating the cost of the program. The Franklin Institute hosted a special *Science After Hours: Fright @ Night* event with a forty-dollar price point for tickets purchased in advance, five dollars more when purchased at the door, and thirty-five dollars for members.<sup>58</sup> Included in the price of admission was live entertainment with a DJ, pop-up drag performances (where as the website states, drag meets science), a Theremin performance from a world-renowned thereminist, views from their rooftop observatory, and a planetarium lounge, among other offerings. The museum also held a cash bar with themed drinks and food. As research has proven, millennials look for one-of-a-kind experiences that they are unable to get elsewhere, and do not mind paying the cash to encounter them. The price of admission to this event was fair, aligned with their mission, and created an experience for the visitors they would not find anywhere else – offsetting the price of hiring professionals.

Millennials look to museums to provide notable experiences that are distinct from other options in their city. Museums can do this by creating programming that centers around their mission and allows the visitors to engage with the institutions in ways that are unlike the traditional museum experience. Programming that attracts this generation are key to keeping museum doors open into the future and holding their relevancy in society. The museum should

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 16-17.

<sup>58</sup> “Science After Hours: Fright @ Night, Oct 21, 2021.” Accessed October 23, 2021. *The Franklin Institute*, <https://www.fi.edu/event/2021-10-21/science-after-hours-fright-night>.

strive to give the visitor something to rave about to their friends. The next chapter switches focus from museums to provide background information on the disconnect between millennials and traditional Jewish organizations, such as the synagogue.

## Chapter Five

### **Jewish Millennials: Contemporary Views Disconnects from Traditional Jewish Structures**

Jewish organizations and millennials alike bear a lot of responsibility for the continuity of Judaism. Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion, and Jews have been practicing it for nearly 4000 years. However, Jewish culture and the Jewish religion of Judaism cannot survive unless members of the religion engage with it; it must stay a priority to Jewish organizations and younger Jews. Jewish millennials and younger are so distinct from previous generations, that the old ways of approaching Judaism and Jewish culture do not work for a good number of American Jewish millennials, especially those who do not identify as Orthodox. There is a prominent need for Jewish organizations – and I am including Jewish museums as an organization because if a museum bears the word Jewish then it holds responsibility to the Jewish community – to find ways to engage millennials.

If organizations can find a way to adequately do this, then it will serve to strengthen the future of American Jewry. The question of how to engage Jewish millennials is not one that is new to Jewish organizations and the Jewish community at large. Jewish educators are constantly faced with the question of how to engage young Jewish adults. While some organizations have done great work in engagement, it is safe to say that engaging young Jewish adults has been a struggle for Jewish educators, rabbis, and organizations.

Organizations such as Hillel, which is the most widely known organization that focuses on college students, must embrace this question to stay relevant. If millennials do not see anything for them, then they are less likely to get involved in the programs that are sponsored by the various organizations. Jewish millennials share many of the same values as their non-Jewish

counterparts, so many experiences and ideas noted in the first chapter will please them. Yet there are elements of their identity that set them apart from non-Jewish millennials.

What makes millennial Jews (and younger) different from their predecessors? Before answering the question, it is imperative to note that most of this study is aimed at non-Orthodox Jews. It would be irresponsible to disregard the growing number of young Jews who are moving towards Orthodoxy. As noted by Stuart E. Eizenstat, younger Jews are straying away from traditionalism, moving away from traditional organizations such as synagogues, and looking for other ways to strengthen their Jewish identity.<sup>59</sup> As a Jewish millennial myself who actively attends services, I always notice that the other attendees are often far older than me. From personal experience, it does not look as if other Jews my age are attending religious services. To note, I attend Reform services. In a study done by Barna in March 2016, forty-eight percent of Jewish millennials said that their Jewish identity was very important to them, with thirty-eight percent of somewhat important trailing behind. Only eleven percent answered that it was not really important to them – and only two percent answered that their Jewish identity was not at all important.<sup>60</sup> The lack of millennial presence in traditional religious settings does not mean that they do not care about their faith and identity.

A report done by the Jewish Federations of North America outlined an overview of millennials and their distinct characteristics. There were four attributes to Jewish millennials that are imperative to their Jewish identity:

“1. Celebrate an integrated identity, leading them to push against barriers; they don’t feel a strong or inherent loyalty to the Jewish community or that they are part of the collective.

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<sup>59</sup> Eizenstat, Stuart E. 2013. "Foreward". In *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course Of the American Jewish Future*, xiii. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, p. xiii

<sup>60</sup> Barna Group. 2017. "Jewish Millennials: The Beliefs And Behaviors Shaping Young Jews In America". Barna, p. 23

2. Are included in broader society, even as Jews, and have little daily or personal experience of anti-Semitism.

3. Are unattached to the late-twentieth-century Jewish collective and iconic memories such as liberating the Western Wall or the rescue of Soviet Jewry.

4. Have trouble with the Jewish communal narrative. For example, as the “Start-Up Nation,” why does Israel need North American Jewish philanthropic dollars?”<sup>61</sup>

When analyzing these aspects of Jewish millennial identity, it is clear to see a disconnect between millennials and the communal life that is key to the previous Jewish generations. While their Jewish identity may be of great importance to them, belonging to society as a whole is just as significant. Previous generations were more strongly dealing with the effects of general trauma, while millennial Jews today are arguably dealing with less anti-Jewish viewpoints – though they are still not free from anti-Semitism. Statistics show that anti-Semitism is rising. In fact, two years after this report was released in 2018, the deadliest attack on American Jewry occurred during a shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, where eleven people were killed. In 2019, the Anti-Defamation League reported that anti-Semitic incidents were at an all-time high since the organization officially began their mission in 1913, with over 2,100 incidents, and a 56 percent increase in assaults.<sup>62</sup>

Atlantic 57’s report on unlocking the future of Jewish engagement went into depth about what is important to Jewish millennials. Their study included everyone from the ages of 22 to 40 both on the phone and online with only one requirement: that they consider themselves Jewish.

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<sup>61</sup> Jewish Federations of North America. 2016. "Adults Emerging: New Paradigms For Millennial Engagement". Jewish Federations of North America. [http://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-42/2/JFNA\\_Adults%2520Emerging\\_New%2520Paradigms%2520for%2520Millennial%2520Engagement%2520Final.pdf](http://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-42/2/JFNA_Adults%2520Emerging_New%2520Paradigms%2520for%2520Millennial%2520Engagement%2520Final.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> "Antisemitic Incidents Hit All-Time High In 2019". 2020. Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/antisemitic-incidents-hit-all-time-high-in-2019>.

There were some limitations, however, as they excluded those with children, Traditional Orthodox Jews, and those who identify as a Messianic Jew.<sup>63</sup> Of those surveyed, 51 percent stated that Jewish was their present religion, with 19 percent reporting that their religion was very important to them – fairly important followed with 28 percent, not too important with 32 percent, and 22 percent said that religion was not at all important to them. During the study, when asked what being Jewish meant to them, many participants noted the distinction of being culturally versus religiously Jewish. One focus group participant also noted that, “It’s one of the few religions that you can just ‘be.’ You can be Jewish and not be religious.”<sup>64</sup>

Young Jewish adults care greatly about helping others, the report noted that almost 9 out of 10 young adults participated in civic engagement, and that those who believe that being Jewish guide their worldview engage more than those who do not.<sup>65</sup> How do they engage? Most participants claimed to sign petitions, volunteering, or making a financial contribution to an organization or cause.<sup>66</sup>

Looking at traits that Jewish young adults associate themselves with, there is a lot that museums will be able to work with. For one, 60 percent of respondents believed themselves to be intellectually curious, with 53 percent noting that they view themselves as a lifelong learner.<sup>67</sup> By creating programs that stimulate Jewish millennials minds, Jewish museums will stay relevant to this age group while hopefully increasing their turnout.

Before tackling the question of how museums can enhance millennial Jewish engagement, first we need to look into how traditional Jewish structures, such as synagogues, are

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<sup>63</sup> *Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement*. Report. March 2020. Accessed April 17, 2021. [https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/Unlocking\\_the\\_Future\\_-\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/Unlocking_the_Future_-_Full_Report.pdf), p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

missing the mark. When analyzing Jewish start-ups, Jack Wertheimer, the Joseph and Martha Professor of American Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary, notes three major critiques of the synagogue.

The first is that the governing body of the synagogue does not sit well with the younger Jewish crowd. Control in synagogues often is held by the clergy and an elect few, while a more democratic approach would be preferred.<sup>68</sup> This isn't the only problem that stems from the structure of the synagogue, as frustration with the cost of dues can keep this age group away.<sup>69</sup> The second critique that Wertheimer poses is that “synagogues are simply bad at what they do.”<sup>70</sup> Most do not create content that the younger Jewish crowd will want to sit through – they are uninspiring and do almost nothing for them. No one wants to waste time attending services that feel more like a chore than a spiritual experience. Wertheimer explains that, “For services to be meaningful they should appeal to the heart and mind: they ought to relate Jewish texts to what is relevant to the lives of worshippers and offer them genuine community, a highly participative service, and opportunities to act upon their social and political ideals.”<sup>71</sup> While I do not think that museums should become a holy place per say, I will visit some of these motions later on in this chapter.

The last critique mentioned that has been touched upon already is that synagogues are simply unappealing for this crowd, especially for those who do not have children or families of their own.<sup>72</sup> Despite this disconnect with synagogues, data has shown that millennials still long to connect with their Judaism and heritage and will look for innovative ways to do so. In a panel

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<sup>68</sup> Wertheimer, Jack. *The New American Judaism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691184142>, p. 235, kindle ebook.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 236.

focusing on how to attract the millennial generation to synagogues, all three of the millennial generational representatives claimed a strong connect with their Jewish identity, yet none of them were members of a congregation.<sup>73</sup> Some common themes of what did work for them consisted of “authentic” events such as small get-togethers with friends without having to pay for it, food and meals, creating welcoming spaces that are “safe and accepting”, constructing community, and hosting their own Shabbats, to name a few.<sup>74</sup>

There are also other barriers that keep millennials from joining synagogues, and a lot of that stems from the fact that synagogues tend to be less inclusive than other Jewish spaces. Nylah Burton described a few of these barriers in an article written for *Hey Alma*. The hefty price tag to join a synagogue keeps a lot of millennials away, especially those who face financial hardships or do not have a steady income. Some synagogues may have programs or sliding scales that make becoming a member more affordable, yet these incentives may not be widely known, and it still may be out of reach for some.

Queer Jews also struggle to find a home in the synagogue due to the fees and inclusive barriers. One bisexual woman noted that she struggled to become a member due to the high fees at Reform synagogues, and while Chabad is an option, she does not feel she can be her “full self in shul.”<sup>75</sup> Finding a synagogue that is inclusive also proves difficult for Jews of color. A black Orthodox mother had a hard time finding a synagogue where she knew that her children would be accepted, wanting to find a place where she knew that the rabbis would “have her back” when

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<sup>73</sup> Cohen, Abra. "Panel Sheds Light On Why Millennials Avoid Synagogue". February 28, 2014. Accessed July 15, 2021. *J. The Jewish News Of Northern California*. <https://www.jweekly.com/2014/02/28/panel-sheds-light-on-why-millennials-avoid-synagogue>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Burton, Nylah. "For Young Jews Joining A Synagogue, Many Barriers Exist". November 2, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2021. *Alma*. <https://www.heyalma.com/for-young-jews-joining-a-synagogue-many-barriers-exist/>

racist incidents took place.<sup>76</sup> When she began to visit synagogues, there were some where no one would speak to her, creating a place where she felt unwelcome, as an “invisible entity.”<sup>77</sup>

Another woman believed that the way for synagogues to increase millennial engagement was by creating a space that was more welcoming, supportive and was there for marginalized groups.<sup>78</sup>

Max Weisman offers another perspective as to why millennials are feeling a disconnect with synagogues. Firstly, Weisman considers himself to be a proud-Jew, fulfilling his Bar Mitzvah obligation, an attender of Jewish sleep-away camp, an inhabitant of Israel for a year, a board member of his college Hillel. He grew up attending synagogue with his family and was heavily involved in Jewish youth programming.<sup>79</sup> He explains that as an adult, he does not attend a synagogue.

His explanation is, “This isn’t a rejection of my “parent’s Judaism” but my generations longing to create and customize. We see the popularity of a startup economy and subscription box businesses just as we see the decline of big-box stores and department-style outlets. While older generations feel comfortable in the wheelhouse of tradition, my generation wants to reinvent it.”<sup>80</sup> Weisman then goes deeper into explaining that his parents and friends appreciate that if they decide to attend another synagogue, then the words and prayers that they hear are similar to their own synagogue. He feels that “the commonality feels confining,” and despite feeling proud of his Jewish heritage since he was younger and hearing the words that may comfort his parents, for him, he wants to “feel ownership over this heritage.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Weisman, Max. 2019. "Opinion | Why Millennials Are Opting Out Of Synagogue". *Jewish Exponent*. <https://www.jewishexponent.com/2019/08/08/opinion-why-millennials-are-opting-out-of-synagogue/>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

The topic of Jewish engagement and whether it is declining is not new – scholars, educators, researchers, and the Jewish community have all weighed in with their opinions. Personally, I believe that we are faced with an exciting opportunity of looking for innovative ways to engage young Jewish adults. Museums should absolutely be a part of this shift in engagement. Melissa Martens Yaverbaum, the Executive Director of the Council for American Jewish Museums rationalized, “Museums can no longer simply be the collectors and keepers of our heritage; they must also be dynamic environments and centers for cultural exploration.”<sup>82</sup> She is right on target here. Before diving into museums specifically, let us look at programming tailored towards millennials that are already proving to work.

## **CURRENT PROGRAMMING**

One of the most known programming for Jews in their twenties specifically is Moishe House. Moishe House is a non-profit organization that works by utilizing homes and opening them up to the young adult Jewish community for events and programming. On their website, Moishe House describes themselves as, “Moishe House is what being Jewish in your twenties is all about. We provide space for over 70,000 young adults around the world to create meaningful, welcoming Jewish communities for themselves and their peers. Connect with your community and discover why so many of us call Moishe House home.”<sup>83</sup> Moishe House consists of residents who open their homes and allow others to come in to experience Jewish activities. These residents work alongside Moishe House to create monthly programs for the surrounding community.

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<sup>82</sup> "As Jewish Museums, How Do We Transcend Boundaries?". 2017. *Medium*. <https://stories.thejewishmuseum.org/as-jewish-museums-how-do-we-transcend-boundaries-1d2f95975bf>.

<sup>83</sup> "Inspiring Jewish Homes," *Moishe House*. Accessed April 9, 2021. <https://www.moishehouse.org/>

Just a quick glance on their website showcases the type of programming that Moishe House offers. As a resident in Northeast Philadelphia, I narrowed my search to programming near me and found two to three houses that would be practical for me to attend. In just one Philadelphia house in just one month, there is programming revolved around film discussions, Shabbat picnics, an event that focused on figuring out the best cheesecake, a kickball game, and a beer garden happy hour.<sup>84</sup> Another house in Philadelphia is the Russian Speaking Jewish Moishe House. Out of curiosity, I decided to look at another Moishe House at random to see the variations of events – a house in Chicago – Hyde Park. In their month of programming, they offer racial justice learning partnered with Hillel, a tax evening with a resident tax expert to assist, Shavuot programming, a birthday gathering, and Shabbat dinner.<sup>85</sup>

From just a quick glance at the programming that Moishe House has to offer, one can see that there is a wide array of programming, from events that focus on Jewish holidays and tradition, to birthday celebrations, and sports games. There seems to be no limit on what a Moishe House will do. Their programming touches upon many ideals that Jewish millennials are looking for, from social justice to a sense of community.

Moishe House explains that there are five key “ingredients” that they find imperative in young adult engagement: Peer-to-peer engagement, frequency of attendance, depth of content and variety of Jewish programming, specific age range, and vetted leaders.<sup>86</sup> In peer-to-peer engagement, Moishe House allows the young adults to take over and create programming that

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<sup>84</sup> "Philadelphia". 2021. *Moishehouse.Org*. Accessed April 9, 2021. <https://www.moishehouse.org/find-a-house/philadelphia/>

<sup>85</sup> "Chicago Hyde Park." 2021. *Moishehouse.Org*. Accessed April 9, 2021. <https://www.moishehouse.org/find-a-house/chicago-hyde-park/>

<sup>86</sup> Cygielman, David. 2017. "Five Key Ingredients For Maximizing Impact In Young Adult Engagement". *Ejewish Philanthropy*. <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/five-key-ingredients-for-maximizing-impact-in-young-adult-engagement/>.

they are excited for, and that will attract their friends as well. Moishe House notes that this works because those involved can take both a participatory and leadership role, it creates new and innovative ideas, it allows the residents hosting the programs to feel ownership, and it provides transparency between Moishe House and participants.<sup>87</sup>

When analyzing the frequency of attendance, Moishe House explains that programs should have an impact on participants and make them want to come back. Moishe House points out that having one or two huge events during the year will boost numbers, but unfortunately data has proven that they probably won't do much to gauge long time interest. They urge to move away from looking at total attendance, as the numbers are only beneficial if they can lead to long term engagement.<sup>88</sup> The frequency of attendance is one way to build the safe and welcoming community that so many Jewish millennials yearn for. Events tailored towards the Moishe House model may work best for smaller museums that have an easier time creating a community amongst their visitors. It may be harder for a museum in a big city that receives hundreds of thousands of visitors a year to replicate the Moishe House model.

The depth of content and variety of Jewish programming should be a major element for Jewish museums to consider, which I will go more into depth about later in this research. Moishe House promotes that "one size does not fit all for community programming.... If the goal is to engage both those with a strong Jewish upbringing as well as those who are totally unengaged, we must provide a diverse array of compelling experiences and opportunities. Jewish young adults consistently look for value-added experiences, as well as opportunities to enjoy being with their peers."<sup>89</sup> Programming like this has worked for Moishe House because they hit the mark on

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

what Jewish millennials are looking for: Jewish content, diversity in programming, wanting to examine old and new rituals, and that “great Jewish experiences happen when the idea of being “more or less” Jewish does not exist.”<sup>90</sup>

Museums do not have the freedom that Moishe House residents do to create programming on literally anything that they desire. There are more obstacles that they must face in terms of pleasing board members and inclusivity. However, there are some similarities that prove that the Moishe House approach may work in the museum setting. Firstly, they both operate with budget and schedule constraints. Those who reside in Moishe Houses are expected to create programming all while attending graduate school or working full time. Not only this, but both museums and Moishe House’s operate on a tight budget. On the Moishe House website, they offer a budget 300 to 400 dollars per month for programming, yet they find cost effective ways to host their programming. Programs such as going to the park to play a baseball game probably won’t work for a museum of any size, yet the previously mentioned five key ingredients that work for Moishe House should be what museums look to accomplish in their programming, by tailoring it towards their own mission: Peer-to-peer engagement, frequency of attendance, depth of content and variety of Jewish programming, specific age range, and vetted leaders.<sup>91</sup>

Moishe House’s focus is geared towards those in early adulthood, specifically in the 22 to 32 age range. Those in this age range are likely finishing up college degrees, in both undergraduate and graduate school, and finding their footing as they begin their professional careers. The oldest millennial is around forty years old, yet this age group probably isn’t the best

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Cygielman, David. 2017. "Five Key Ingredients For Maximizing Impact In Young Adult Engagement". *Ejewish Philanthropy*. <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/five-key-ingredients-for-maximizing-impact-in-young-adult-engagement/>.

place for them. In fact, leaders of Moishe Houses have been transparent that those out of the age range attending events makes other participants uncomfortable.<sup>92</sup> While this works for an organization such as Moishe House, museums cater to a greater number of people, from all ages and stages of life. To create successful programming, museums may want to ask themselves if they would rather create programming that is tailored towards the younger millennial group or tweak their programming to include those older on the spectrum. If resources allow there is also the option of creating two sets of programming: one for younger millennials, and those in a later life stage.

The last criteria that Moishe House offers is vetted leaders, which is allowing for the young Jewish community to take on leadership roles themselves. They understand that not everyone is cut out to be a leader, and there needs to be an application process for those who are interested while still supporting those who would rather stay in a participant role.<sup>93</sup> Museums opening the door to collaboration with young adults will be explored more in the next part.

Moishe House's mission and programming seems to be working. In 2018, their most recent external evaluation was concluded, and the stats are impressive. While total participation numbers should not be a focal point of programming, Moishe House reaches over 200,000 participants every year, and 50,000 of them are engaged.<sup>94</sup> The young Jewish adults that they reach come from all walks of life – from those who were brought up with a strong and active Jewish background, to those who are just starting to explore their Jewish heritage. In a survey conducted, 45 percent of respondents said that before they joined Moishe House they had a place

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<sup>92</sup> “You Asked, We Answered...” *Moishe House*. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://www.moishehouse.org/blog/you-asked-we-answered/>

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Moishe House 2018 Evaluation Findings*. Report. May 2018. Accessed June 14, 2021. [https://issuu.com/rachel23elizabeth/docs/moishe\\_house\\_executive\\_summary\\_5.16](https://issuu.com/rachel23elizabeth/docs/moishe_house_executive_summary_5.16).

to go for Jewish community, but after joining the statistics raised to 86 percent. In terms of engagement, when asked to respond to “I live an active Jewish adult life (as I define it),” the number increased 23 percent – from 51 percent to 74 percent.<sup>95</sup> These statistics clearly show that the Moishe House model is working, and museums that are looking to boost engagement should draw inspiration from their model and programming.

Another program that is working for younger Jewish adults is having a program like one created by Sara Bamberger, called Kevah. Often, millennials want to engage in Torah study, but the idea of traditional study doesn’t grab their attention, or it may even make them feel uncomfortable. They need a safe space that does not operate as normal Torah study within a synagogue would and allows them for the originality that they seek in their everyday lives and Jewish identity.

In Kevah, a group of eight to sixteen participants come together and have conversation around a biblical chapter or commentary that was selected by a rabbi. The members age ranges from late twenties to early thirties, and accompanying the texts are chips and salsa for them to snack on while they dive into Torah study. This way of learning is less like a class, and more of a conversation.<sup>96</sup> As noted in the article, people aged from 18 to 34 can only account for 8 percent of Conservative and Reform congregations in the United States – which are two of the largest denominations in Judaism in the country. For every 10 young adults, there are 30 adults aged 65 and above.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Shimron, Yonat. "Kevah Offers a DIY Approach to Jewish Millennials." *Faith & Leadership*. April 21, 2015. Accessed May 05, 2021. <https://faithandleadership.com/kevah-offers-diy-approach-jewish-millennials>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

The rising interest in programs such as Kevah show that although young adults are stepping away from synagogue life, they still want to participate in Jewish life and education. Rabbi David Kasher mentions that programs like this helps younger Jews (and millennials) find the meaning that they are searching for, with saying, “The text serves as that object of reflection. It provokes questions and stimulates the learner to add her own answers. Somewhere in the interaction between the learner, the text and the group, energy is created that is generative of meaning. And that is why we believe that, though there are many ways to experience God or find meaning in the world, Torah study is an actively uniquely capable of meaning making.”<sup>98</sup>

## **BRINGING IT TOGETHER FOR MUSUEM SETTINGS**

There are questions to consider for organizations looking to engage with young Jewish adults, which Jewish museums should embrace when thinking about programs.

- “ 1. Kevah combines a DIY approach with the guidance of a trained teacher. How can your organization appeal to young adults’ flexible sensibilities without losing depth and rigor?
2. Kevah borrows from a Christian Evangelical model and applies it to a Jewish context. What unexpected places might you look for new ideas? Are you familiar enough with other traditions to borrow from them?
3. Small groups are a way to bring traditional Jewish study to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context. How do you find ways to adapt traditional practices to modern contexts?
4. Although it was designed with young, unaffiliated adults in mind, Kevah’s approach has been embraced by some mainstream institutions. Would people in your organization be willing to seek

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

out partners whose mission might seem at odds with your own? How would you go about finding such partners?

5. Is Rabbi Jessica Zimmerman Graf correct when she says that people today won't commit to be a part of something for 40 to 50 years? If she's right, what does your organization need to do to engage those people?"<sup>99</sup>

To best understand millennials needs from Jewish museums, the research of Rabbi Sidney Schwarz is a great place to start. In his book *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course of the American Jewish Future*, these new American Jews are younger Jews who look at their Jewish identity differently than generations before them. As Schwarz outlines, "They do not respond emotionally to appeals based on the Holocaust or the State of Israel; They do not derive their sense of place from their Jewish connections; and while aware of historical anti-Semitism and ongoing anti-Israel animus in the world, they do not share the persecution phobias of earlier Jewish generations."<sup>100</sup>

As the Rabbi notes from his personal story, earlier generations such as his parents were greatly affected by the Holocaust. His father's family had relatives who perished in the camps, and the founding of Israel meant much to them, as did creating a new life for themselves in the United States.<sup>101</sup> As time goes on, these factors are less likely to affect younger Jews who did not grow up directly affected as previous generations.

The Barna study supports this statement in their research. When it comes to the most important aspect of Jewish identity to millennials, "family and upbringing" took the number one

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Schwarz, Rabbi Sidney. 2013. "Charting the Course of the American Jewish Future". In *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course Of the American Jewish Future*, xiii. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, p. 10

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

spot, with thirty-eight percent. There is still a high percentage that claim, “remembering the Holocaust,” as high importance, coming in with thirty percent. However, only fourteen percent declared “affinity for Israel,” as important to their Jewish identity.<sup>102</sup>

It is evident that young Jewish adults are looking for something deeper and more engaging than traditional Jewish structures may be able to offer them. While many feel connected to their heritage and Jewish identity, sitting in a synagogue service might feel stale to them, so they go out searching for other experiences. As organizations that are committed to showcasing and presenting Jewish history, experiences, and traditions in its entirety, they should look to explore programs that allows visitors to engage with that on a deeper level than simply looking at a wall of Judaica. The next chapter looks at recommendations for museums in doing this.

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<sup>102</sup> Barna Group, *Jewish Millennials*, p. 23-24.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Recommendations for Jewish Museums Desiring to Connect with Millennials**

As a millennial looking to join the cultural workforce, particularly in young adult Jewish engagement, I have had my fair share of interviews. One notion that seems to repeat in interviews is that Jewish professionals agree that the Jewish community, rabbis especially, have no idea how to connect with the millennial generation. This extends to Jewish museums, which have started to take steps to engage the young Jewish population, but there is still work to be done.

This chapter proposes recommendations for Jewish organizations in creating programming that will keep their millennial and young adult members content and interested in the organization. I keep an open mind that not all programming will work for every museum, as there are plenty of barriers that may get in the way. I understand that barriers such as budget, an absence of funding, and a lack of space (among many others) may hinder a museum from being able to present these events, especially for smaller museums. It is my goal that museums, even if they may not be able to replicate an event, will take the main ideas from the recommendations and tweak them to work for their organizations.

First, it is imperative to set a foundation and guidelines on what museums should attempt to do when thinking about millennial programming. Rabbi Sidney Schwarz is a rabbi who has extensive experience engaging younger Jews, especially through programs such as PANIM that he founded himself. This program works with Jewish teens to inspire them and educate them on

advocacy, through four principles that he believes, “hold the key to a renaissance of Jewish life.”<sup>103</sup>

The first of his four propositions align with Wisdom/Chochmah, which Rabbi Schwarz claims, “In an age of globalization, Jewish institutions need to offer multiple avenues to explore *chochmah*, the wisdom of our sacred texts put into the context of the world’s religions and in the language of contemporary culture.”<sup>104</sup> In this section, he points to a few important details that are important for museum professionals to consider. The first is that Jewish educators need to not focus on just instilling knowledge in young Jewish adults, but by urging wisdom instead.<sup>105</sup> Sacred Jewish texts should be taught in a way that allows students and visitors to understand through the world of Jewish text. How can rabbinic tradition and arguments such as those in the Talmud relate to the twenty-first century? Wisdom allows for original thought and engagement and a deeper connection to the sources which has kept Judaism alive for years. Facts alone are not enough to keep traditional sources alive.

They also need to understand that young Jewish adults are not looking to learn Judaism in a way that is parochial, they want to learn about and understand Judaism and how it relates and differs from other beliefs. One thing that Rabbi Schwarz has noted in his time working with young Jews, is that those who are heavily interested in Judaism are also very interested in how they compare with Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions.<sup>106</sup> He also relays the need for authenticity for this crowd, often being attracted to places such as Chabad Houses (ultra-

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<sup>103</sup> Jewish Megatrends, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Jewish Megatrends, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 21.

Orthodox), even though many who attend are not interested in taking on these obligations themselves.<sup>107</sup>

In the previous chapter, it was spoken about how millennials are creating ways to approach their Judaism that differs greatly from how previous generations have approached Judaism, stepping away from the synagogue and looking to create their own experiences. Rabbi Schwarz explains that “do-it yourself” Judaism is rising, yearning to create their own Passover Haggadah’s instead of using ones already made, incorporating their own ideals into Jewish tradition.<sup>108</sup> The idea of “do-it-yourself” Judaism is not a new concept, as it was embraced even back in the 1970’s. This can be seen by Richard Siegel’s catalogs, the first one being released in 1973, which are seen as a kit on how approaching Judaism on your own terms. The movement, which started back in the 1970’s is one of the best ways to allow Jews of all ages to connect to Judaism, especially the millennial population.

The next proposition that he offers is “Social Justice/Tzedek,” which he presents as, “At a time when our political culture seems so dysfunctional and the social and environmental threats to the planet grow exponentially each year, the Jewish community needs to provide ever more ways to advance tzedek in the world.”<sup>109</sup> In this, he recognizes he organizations that have been created that work to promote social justice in the world through Judaism, which are big in number and not hard to find. *Tikkun olam* programs, which mean “repairing the world,” are all over the place.<sup>110</sup> Later in the chapter, I will delve deeper into the Jewish commitment for social justice.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 25.

The third proposition that he sets forth is Community/Kehillah, explained by, “At a time when technology has made meaningful social intercourse much harder to come by, the Jewish community must offer places where people can find support in times of need, communal celebration in times of joy, and friendships to make life fulfilling.”<sup>111</sup> Much of this aligns with the previous chapter, that Jews are moving away from mainstream Jewish organizations and looking for ways to connect themselves. He notes that Jews are not just gathering for prayer, but they’re gathering to meet on a topic of interest, or a focus, such as a book club.<sup>112</sup> Jewish federations also work to create these groups, for example, I have been involved in groups of young Jewish professionals in my age range, as well as wellness groups for women. Odds are, if you can think about a topic, then there’s a group for it. And if they are not meeting in person, then they are meeting over Zoom, Facebook, and other social media platforms. These show that there are various ways for Jews to connect and engage with their Jewish identity and provide opportunities both Jews and non-Jews to explore their own Jewish identity, or learn more about Judaism, in a way that isn’t technically religious, but provides joy and meaning to them.

The last and final proposition that Rabbi Schwarz feels is key to young Jewish engagement, and on the path to a Jewish renaissance, is Lives of Sacred Purpose/Kedushah, which he refers to as, “In an age when we better understand the shortcomings of capitalism and the culture of consumerism, the Jewish community must offer a glimpse of *kedushah*, experiences that provide holiness, transcendent meaning, and a sense of purpose.”<sup>113</sup> In this section, he explains that some things, such as intermarriage, have been tried to be solved by channeling millions of dollars into programs. In doing so, this often backfires, with losing both

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 31.

the Jewish adult and their partner. No one wants to be involved somewhere where they feel like they don't belong, only pulling Jews further away from their identity. Now, interfaith programming, at least in the more liberal sects of Judaism is rising. He emphasizes that Jewish philanthropists have been used to heavily subsidize the cost of programs for Jewish schools, elder care, JCCs, and synagogues, but we are moving to a time that when these people pass, they are not being replaced.<sup>114</sup> He claimed that in interviews with young Jewish adults, “few recalled being engaged in discussions about God, life’s purpose, or the possibility that Jewish worship, ritual, and study might give them the sense of the sacred.”<sup>115</sup> In order to keep Jews engaged and interesting in exploring their Judaism further, then space needs to be created so that they can explore the deep questions, and their purpose for why they are here.

Museum professionals should consider the four propositions set forth by Rabbi Sidney Schwarz if they are looking to expand on their young adult engagement. While it would be difficult to touch upon every proposition with a single program, taking one of these propositions and making it a major element of event planning will aid in creating something that is meaningful, engaging, allows for the visitor to connect with Judaism, and will keep them interested in the museum. The programming that I suggest in the rest of this chapter will in some way connect back to these four propositions.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Social justice work is not a new phenomenon. People have been protesting and advocating for change for years and will continue to do so well into the future. There are multiple definitions of social justice, but in the end they all are pointing to the same thing: to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 35.

work towards a fair and just society for everyone. The commitment to social justice is an imperative for the Jewish community. While every denomination of Judaism has their attentiveness to social justice, Reform Judaism has placed advocacy as a central tenet of their belief system. Their website states, “Central to Reform Jewish beliefs is the idea that all human beings are created *b’tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, and that we are God’s partners in improving the world. *Tikkun olam*, the repair of our world, is a hallmark of Reform Judaism as we strive to bring about a world of justice, wholeness, and compassion.”<sup>116</sup> On the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s website, they lay out advocacy issues that Reform Judaism has focused on: Antisemitism and Hate Crimes; Civil Liberties; Criminal Justice Reform; Disability Rights; Economic Justice; Environment and Climate Change; Gun Violence Prevention; Health Care; Immigration; International Issues; LGBTQ Equality; Racial Justice; Reparations; Reproductive Health and Rights; Separation of Church and State; Voting and Civil Rights; and Women’s Rights.<sup>117</sup>

The Rabbinical Assembly’s (the international association of Conservative Rabbis) Social Justice Commission explained that in their mission, “to articulate to the Jewish and the general community that for Conservative Jews acts of social justice are *mitzvot*, commanded by Jewish law and tradition as doing God’s will.”<sup>118</sup> While I do not wish to go into more depth about how social justice relates to the various forms of Jewish denominations and nor is social justice work limited to Reform and Conservative Jewry, these definitions showcase the importance of social justice work to American Jewish life. The social justice aspect does not just relate to religious

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<sup>116</sup> "What Is Reform Judaism?" Accessed May 19, 2021. <https://reformjudaism.org/what-reform-judaism>.

<sup>117</sup> "Advocacy Issues." Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Accessed May 19, 2021. <https://rac.org/advocacy-issues>.

<sup>118</sup> "Social Justice Commission." Social Justice Commission. January 10, 2012. Accessed June 5, 2021. <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/tzedek-justice/social-justice-commission>.

Jews – in fact, there are people whose social justice work is a big factor in their Jewish identity. In the 2020 Pew Research statistics on Jewish Americans, they found that almost seventy-two percent believe that leading an ethical and moral life is essential when posed with the question on what being Jewish means to them, and fifty-nine percent responded that working for justice and equality is “essential to being Jewish.”<sup>119</sup> Taking these statistics into consideration along with the sole fact that millennials, both Jewish and non-Jewish, care about social issues is a sure sign that knowing they are making a difference will want them to associate themselves with a museum that is doing the work as well.

Of course, the question arises of why should Jewish museums be involved in social justice work? Does this align with their mission? Are they required to be active agents of change? To answer these questions, it is imperative to look at some of the mission statements of Jewish museums in the United States. The mission statement of the National Museum of American Jewish History is, “The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore, and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans inspire.”<sup>120</sup>

While the Jewish Museum in New York City does not explicitly label their mission statement, their *About Me* page on their website mimics a mission statement. Their website explains, “As an art museum representing the diversity of Jewish culture and identity, the Jewish Museum believes in free expression and an open society. We embrace multiple viewpoints

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<sup>119</sup> "Jewish Identity and Belief in the U.S." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. May 11, 2021. Accessed May 4, 2021. <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-identity-and-belief/>.

<sup>120</sup> “About Us.” n.d. National Museum of American Jewish History. Accessed October 20, 2020. <https://www.nmajh.org/about-us/>.

regardless of race, gender, national origin, or religion, and we oppose discrimination in all its forms. Our exhibits and public programs provide platforms for cross-cultural dialogue, fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and respect.”<sup>121</sup> The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco holds a similar mission statement of “The CJM makes the diversity of the Jewish experience relevant for a twenty-first century audience. We accomplish this through innovative exhibitions and programs that educate, challenge, and inspire... Dynamic and welcoming, it’s a place to experience art, music, film, literature, debate, and – most importantly – people.”<sup>122</sup> At the CAJM (Council of American Jewish Museums) 2021 virtual conference, Heidi Rabben, the senior curator of the Contemporary Jewish Museum mentions how future shows at the museum will focus on community needs by working with local artist, such as healing from the COVID-19 pandemics, and “all the other plagues that are in our society that we have been facing.”<sup>123</sup>

The last mission statement that I am going to include will be that of the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, in Beachwood, Ohio. They claim their mission to be: “The Mission of the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage is to introduce the visitors to the beauty and diversity of that heritage in the context of the American experience. It promotes an understanding of Jewish history, religion, and culture and builds bridges of tolerance and understanding with those of other religions, races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, serving as an educational resource for Northeast Ohio’s diverse communities.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "Welcome to the Jewish Museum." The Jewish Museum - About. Accessed April 17, 2021. <https://thejewishmuseum.org/about#jewish-museum-history>.

<sup>122</sup> “About Us.” The Contemporary Jewish Museum. Accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Council of American Jewish Museums. “CAJM ’21 Curatorial Practice. Youtube video. May 9, 2021. Accessed November 22, 2021.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh5EB6m39fM&ab\\_channel=CouncilofAmericanJewishMuseums](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh5EB6m39fM&ab_channel=CouncilofAmericanJewishMuseums)

<sup>124</sup> "Mission Statement." Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. Accessed April 17, 2021. <https://www.maltzmuseum.org/about/mission-statement/>.

From what can be seen from these three mission statements is that each of the museums takes on the obligation of educating their visitors about Jewish history, identity, and/or culture. Statistics and research have proven that social justice is a crucial part of Jewish-American's identity, whether individuals focus on religion culture, or both. That being the case, a strong argument can be made that social justice should not only inspire museum programs, but that the museum should also take on the role of social justice work itself. When museum visitors see that museums are putting the work in to make the world a more just and better place, then their perception of museums being an old unapproachable building will likely change.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, who is the executive director of T'ruah, the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, has guided organizations and individuals through pursuing social justice work. She has laid out four sources that outline the obligation of social justice work, which are, "the historical experience, the legal imperative, a vision of the world to come, and practical considerations about the place of Jews in a diverse society."<sup>125</sup> While I will not go into depth about all of these, I will point out a few of them that more directly relate to a Jewish museum's obligation to do social justice work.

The historical aspect relates to the Jewish experience as a whole – from being slaves in the land of Egypt, to the Holocaust, to immigrant experiences, and major events that Jews have participated in, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the feminist movement, and LGBTQ rights.<sup>126</sup> As Rabbi Jacobs pointed out, Jews who find themselves aligned with social justice often do so because this work can be linked back to their own family histories.<sup>127</sup> Rabbi Jacobs goes beyond to explain that today, American Jews find themselves somewhere between the

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<sup>125</sup> Jacobs, Rabbi Jill. *Where Justice Dwells: A Hands-On Guide to Doing Social Justice in Your Jewish Community*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011., p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

commandment of *lirot et atzmo* [to see ourselves] and *l'harot et atzmo* [to show ourselves], two slightly different versions of the same commandment that can be seen in Passover Haggadahs, the second one following the Sephardic tradition.<sup>128</sup>

Rabbi Jacobs explained it best that, “The commandment *lirot et atzmo*, “to see ourselves” as liberated slaves, compels us to remember the suffering that has characterized much of Jewish history and to take pride in the role that Jews played in the early civil rights and labor struggles. But telling stories about the past does not suffice. The obligation *l'harot et atzmo*, “to show ourselves,” demands action, not just introspection. *Showing* ourselves as having experienced poverty, discrimination, and inequality means continuously working to alleviate the suffering of others. And the cycle continues: the more we *show* ourselves to be people who respond to oppression, the more we and our children will see ourselves as such. And so on.”<sup>129</sup>

In Rabbi Jacob’s guide to doing social justice work, she noted that there are some Jews who believe that since Jews are underrepresented in social justice organizations and movements, that they should not take on the role of doing it in their organizations. Unfortunately, there are no statistics to back this up, but it is likely that there are museum professionals in Jewish museums who might take this stance. Museums are places for public education and a great amount of people who visit Jewish museums are not Jewish themselves. Jewish museums must cater to their diverse audience while continuing to engage with their Jewish visitors.

There are a handful of Jewish Museums that are already committed to social justice activism. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is one of them. The USHMM holds the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, which aims to provide the resources to ensure that genocidal events such as the Holocaust do not happen again. To do this, the center

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

focuses on three approaches: prevention tools and practices, crisis response, and justice and accountability.<sup>130</sup> The museum provides a list of countries that where historical cases of genocide took place, or still may be taking place. Every place included on their list has an abundance of resources online where people can get more information about each genocide, including warning signs, witness accounts of what happened, prevention information, and heavily detailed research.<sup>131</sup> The museum also creates reports based on research conducted to prevent these horrific events from occurring. Those who can visit the museum in person can explore the Burma's Path to Genocide, an exhibit that has been up since 2006 that focuses on how the Rohingya became the targets of genocide.<sup>132</sup>

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee has already taken steps to make their museum active agents of social justice work. Due to COVID-19, they were unable to do in person events for a while, but that did not stop them from hosting programs tailored towards social justice. They used their social media platforms such as Facebook live to engage with the public. Their "Museum Moments" that aired two times a week focused on the museum staff engaging with archival collections and exhibits. One event hosted by their curator Molly Dubin focused on a previous exhibit titled, "Allied in the Fight: Jews, Blacks, and the Struggle for Civil Rights," which looked at the relationship between Jews and Blacks during the Civil Rights Movement. During the program, Dubin presented images highlighted in the exhibit and educated the viewers on the history of Black-Jewish relations during the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>133</sup> According to their

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<sup>130</sup> "Our Approach." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed September 19, 2021. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/approach>.

<sup>131</sup> "Country Case Studies." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed September 19, 2021. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/>

<sup>132</sup> "Burma's Path to Genocide." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed September 19, 2021. <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/museum-exhibitions/burmas-path-to-genocide>.

<sup>133</sup> Dubin, Molly. Museum Moments: Moments of Advocacy. June 25, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=299937761045848&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=299937761045848&ref=watch_permalink).

website, these Museum Moments tended over 20,000 views, with 500 people on average on Facebook.<sup>134</sup>

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee also hosted a “Conversation Starters,” virtual program that allowed them to collaborate with authors, activists, artists, and leaders. One of their highlights was the conversation titled, “Fierce Urgency of Now: Jewish Commitment to End Racism,” in which the museum’s education director, Ellie Gettinger, joined Shahanna McKinley-Baldon, who is a Jewish diversity advocate and director of The Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity Collaborative and Special Assistant for Diversity and Inclusion at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at University of Wisconsin-Madison joined together for a discussion. Part of their discussion looked at the Jewish commitment to racial justice, in which McKinley-Baldon noted, “The fierce urgency of now cannot depend on God forbid, another black person getting killed by police or some other horrible tragedy that kind of gets our attention. The fierce urgency of now needs to be about establishing a commitment to working proactively to double down over and over again on our Jewish commitment to racial justice. It aligns so closely with our Jewish values.”<sup>135</sup> Their conversational programs were said to engage almost nine thousand people, with five hundred and fifty average viewership.<sup>136</sup>

Jewish museums should not be afraid to open the door to having important and difficult conversations, which are conversations that millennials are open to engaging in. Especially in a religion and culture so engrained in social justice, Jewish millennials want to learn and create understanding so that they can better their own social justice work. As research has noted, Jewish

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<sup>134</sup> "Exploring Social Justice." Jewish Museum Milwaukee. Accessed April 7, 2021. <https://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/support/donate/exploring-social-justice/>.

<sup>135</sup> Conversation Starters: The Fierce Urgency of Now. June 24, 2020. Accessed May 7, 2021. [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=287524762438820&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=287524762438820&ref=watch_permalink).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

engagement in social issues does not just extend to issues that directly affect them, they are vocal and want to make a difference in helping their friends, neighbors, and other marginalized groups. Ari M. Gordon, who is the AJC (American Jewish Committee) director of Jewish-Muslim relations, explained that it is, “imperative to engage in difficult conversations,” which is based on the idea that change is possible.<sup>137</sup> He noted that change and growth are two notions that are weaved into the Jewish holiday cycle, and the Torah.<sup>138</sup> I would argue that engaging in these difficult conversations, even on a topic that is not explicitly Jewish but rooted in social justice, will help these young Jewish adults feel more connected to their Jewish identity, regardless of if they are a religious or cultural Jew.

The Levine Museum of the New South (which is a museum located in North Carolina that focuses on North Carolina life after the American Civil War) created a program in 2016 which, “aimed at engaging and training a diverse group of millennials in dialogue.”<sup>139</sup> In 2015, the museum premiered an exhibit titled *¡Nuevolution! Latinos and the New South*, the main element of the exhibit a 3500-sq foot bilingual exhibit which travelled through Charlotte, Birmingham, Atlanta, and continued. This program was said to have an array of benefits for their millennials visitors, such as developing, “Knowledge of self, of others, and knowledge/information from the exhibit; Appreciation of different cultures, perspectives, and experiences; Acceptance of different cultures, of demographic change; Skills – learning how to be a part of and how to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue within their spheres of influence.”<sup>140</sup> This

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<sup>137</sup> Gordon, Ari M. "Difficult Conversation & Global Jewish Advocacy: Lessons Of The Past Century." December 09, 2020. Accessed June 1, 2021. <https://www.ajc.org/news/difficult-conversation-global-jewish-advocacy-lessons-of-the-past-century>.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Johanna Claire Schuch, Susan B. Harden, Kamille Bostick & Heather A. Smith (2018) Museums engaging diverse Millennials in community dialogue, *Museums & Social Issues*, 13:2, 58-77, DOI: 10.1080/15596893.2018.1610648.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

program was met with positive reviews, and both visitors and staff felt that they walked away learning something. It promoted a deeper understanding among attendees.

As a millennial, one experience that I will never forget is a visit to the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum, which opened on September 17, 2019. While the whole visit was an incredible experience, I want to focus on the Pivot to America Wing of the museum – which has so many elements that will attract millennials. The first is that there are interactive kiosks located throughout the middle of the exhibit where visitors can learn about a range of groups that are a part of American history: African Americans' Rights, American Indians' Rights, Asian American's Rights, Children's Rights, Criminal Justice, Disability Rights, Hispanic Rights, Immigrant Rights, LGBTQ Rights, Slavery and Human Trafficking, Religious Rights, and Women's Rights. The visitor can flip through the screens to learn about the history of each group. This was an incredible way to fit information about multiple minority groups into one segment and show the story from where they began to where they are now in the United States.

On one wall of the exhibit, there is the Texas Upstander Wall – which showcases various upstanders from Texas (which the museum defines as people who: stands up for other people and their rights; combats injustice, inequality or unfairness; sees something wrong and makes it right) with photos of the upstanders and their stories, along with a speaker that the visitor can pick up and listen to. On the other side of the room is a replica of the Piccadilly Cafeteria, where visitors can sit and experience a sit in like one during the Civil Rights Movement, and other moments during the movement. Located on the tables are handheld speakers where the visitor can listen to testimonies and speeches. The visitor can sit at the table and listen to what it would have sounded like if they were there on the day of the sit in. Considering the visitors that come through the museum, this gives most visitors an experience that they did not personally live through, but it

allows them to connect with the moment more than they would by looking at an object that related to the sit ins.

In this exhibit, there also is an interactive theatre that the visitor can go in with a group – sometimes with people they know or with people they have never met before and answer some questions on a screen relating to questions about their own unconscious biases and how they can learn to work through those biases. Once the visitor leaves the theatre and heads towards the exit of the room, there are “Call-to-Action kiosks” where the visitor can look through causes that are important to them, either locally or nationally, and enter their email to receive more information on how they can get involved. This is a powerful way to end an exhibit, because not only did the museum teach the visitor how they can make a difference and inspire them by showing them upstanders who changed history, but they are also actively helping the visitors make a difference.

The exhibit is tied together by a memorial reflection room at the end, where the visitors can memorialize the family members of Dallas residents who unfortunately lost their lives during the Holocaust, as well as just take a moment to reflect on what the visitor saw. This exhibit hits on various aspects that will attract and entertain millennials. The first is that they used technology to their advantage – creating a story and educating on a variety of topics. The technology was used to engage the visitor and they do it adequately. The second is that they fed into what millennials want – to feel as if they are making a difference and working towards a cause. They will leave the museum feeling as if they are on the right path to make a difference, and that caters directly to what is important to a millennial.

As the renovated museum is still quite new, and the museum being closed for a considerable amount of time due to COVID-19. I could not find any data or feedback surrounding the Call-to-Action kiosks, so the only information I can provide here is my own

experience with the kiosks. Personally, these kiosks allowed me to feel closer to my Jewish identity as social justice is important to me both as a Jewish value (especially being a Reform Jew, in a denomination that puts so much emphasis on social justice), and as a personal one. By scrolling through the various organizations that I could get involved with in the kiosk, I learned more about what values I hold dear to me and felt closer to my Jewish identity. It also was a reminder to myself to not stay silent during times of injustice and to do my duty in leaving the world a better place tomorrow than it was today.

The Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum had the advantage of being able to rebrand itself as a large museum, with the resources to create engaging interactive displays. Smaller museums, or those who may not have the funding to start over, still can connect millennials to social justice work. Museums of any size can launch social justice programming, whether it is by creating a space to have difficult conversations, either by bringing in speakers and activists and allowing their guests to learn and explore a topic they may not know about or want to connect with, or by hosting Shabbat dinner and prompting questions regarding social justice. There are multiple ways for museums to educate the public on the Jewish involvement in social justice, both in history and today, without the need for impressive displays. Online programming and events, especially at a time where a lot of museum doors are still closed to the public is one way to do this. For example, a museum could host either an online event speaking about the Jewish involvement in a cause such as feminism, or even create an online exhibit on their website that people can explore on their own time. Another way for museums to get involved is by hosting their own events, such as a community clean up event, food drives, and being an active agent of change in their community.

## SHABBAT

Another way that Jewish museums can join with millennials to create meaningful experiences is by opening their doors on Shabbat. Shabbat is the Jewish Day of Rest and is considered a holy day, which begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. To the most observant Jews, activities such as work, business transactions, driving, shopping, using electricity, and cooking are refrained from on Shabbat. Everything needed for Shabbat is typically prepared in advance. The less observant may follow some of these restrictions, or even none of them, and simply use Shabbat as a day where they just simply take a break from the craziness of life. Typically, for those who are *shomer shabbat* (Shabbat observant), the day is spent at the synagogue, studying Torah, and spending meals with family and loved ones.

A common saying in the Jewish community that Ahad Ha'am originated, "More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." They do not need to do this every Shabbat, in fact, that would probably be counterproductive because millennials like one-of-a-kind experiences that they cannot get every week. If they know that this program is going to happen every week, then they may decide not to attend because, why go now when the program will be there next week and so on? The key to doing Shabbat at a museum is by first, creating a space that is inclusive to everyone. Jews and non-Jews of all backgrounds should feel that they have a place at the museum's Shabbat. The second is that the museum should work with their community to create Shabbat experiences that are meaningful and right for the community which surrounds them.

As Beth Cousens, the Chief Impact Officer of the Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund, and consultant to Jewish educational organizations explains, engagement is about connecting with those, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in public spaces that drop the

expectations of conventional observation.<sup>141</sup> Other examples Cousens presents are holding a Jewish story hour in a bookstore, Shabbat in the park, and a seder in the bar. These would allow for, “Jewish activity to become normalized and those who are reluctant to walk into Jewish spaces can still access Jewish exploration.”<sup>142</sup> A Shabbat in a welcoming museum, if done correctly, will feel more inclusive and less daunting to those who have never observed Shabbat before.

Cousens, who has done research for college student-based organizations such as Hillel, outlines one distinct principal that should be a focus for those creating Jewish experiences, including Shabbat. This principle is that “Judaism has power, meaning, and value. Its value is located in meaningful Jewish experiences for their own sake, and not only in its continuity.”<sup>143</sup> To do this, Cousens emphasizes the need for a Jewish education that provides an, “ongoing and authentic immersion into the Jewish narrative.”<sup>144</sup> How can museums use this groundwork to produce a meaningful Shabbat experience? One way is by centering the Shabbat experience in a way that allows attendees to learn more about themselves and their place in the world and support them in their growth as human beings. Cousens explains that Shabbat dinner is “a worthwhile product, but is also a worthwhile process.”<sup>145</sup> Museums who are interested in holding Shabbat may hope to create ongoing themed experiences about the human experience. Examples of this include educational and conversational programming, around both Jewish questions and

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<sup>141</sup> Cousens, Beth. “Ideas in Jewish Education and Engagement,” *Jewish Federations of North America*. January 16, 2020. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://jewishfederations.org/education-and-engagement/ideas-in-jewish-education-and-engagement/six-ideas-about-the-future-of-jewish-education-engagement>

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Cousens, Beth. “Hillel’s Journey: Distinctively Jewish, Universally Human.” *Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life*. January 1, 2007. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/4537>. p. 41.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 42.

non-Jewish questions. Even simple conversation starters such as, “If you had a million dollars to donate, which kind of organization might you give the money to?” allow the guest to learn more about themselves and their values. Conversations can start with easy topics and once people find their footing and begin to feel comfortable, museums can look to more difficult conversations, such as “What does it mean to be a good Jew?” or “What is your relationship to Israel?” Any conversation that allows an attendee to learn more about themselves, whether lighthearted or heavy, is a conversation to have at a Shabbat table. The conversation does not even need to be centered on Jewish topics, since attendees are already immersing themselves into Jewish tradition and community.

A fellow for NuRoots, which stems from the LA Jewish federation, helps young adults find community in the Los Angeles area, found that in a conversation with another woman who had just attended their first Shabbat that many feel like they might not be Jewish enough to be at a Shabbat table. The participant spoke that she had a Jewish father, and she guessed that it did not make her Jewish herself because she needed to have a Jewish mother to be considered Jewish.<sup>146</sup> These types of sentiments can keep young Jewish adults from engaging in Judaism, either by them not feeling that they are Jewish enough, or that they do not know enough. They form a sort of imposter syndrome around their Judaism and heritage, and it keeps them from attending Jewish themed events. For example, someone who may have Jewish grandparents but weren't raised Jewish by their parents might feel like Jewish spaces are not for them. Those who were not born into any Jewish connection but are interested in learning more about Judaism for whatever reason, may also feel too intimidated to attend a Shabbat dinner hosted by a synagogue, Rabbi, or the like. It is intimidating going to Shabbat for the first time. Museums could create a

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<sup>146</sup> Jewish Federations of North America. 2016. "Adults Emerging: New Paradigms For Millennial Engagement". Accessed September 5, 2020. Jewish Federations of North America, p. 56.

welcoming Shabbat experience for people of all backgrounds, whether it is their first Shabbat experience, or whether they have been observing Shabbat since they were little.

One of the best opportunities that Shabbat presents for museums is that it opens the door to allow visitors to engage with the museum in a unique way. At the end of the day, museums have their mission, and they need to stick to it. Their programming should not move them away from that mission. Many museums hold an impressive collection of Judaica which contain Shabbat necessities. While no one expects for a museum to pull out their most expensive, fragile, and eldest item in the collection for everyone to handle, museums should look to incorporate their collections in their Shabbat experience, whether that is during the actual meal itself, or by allowing visitors to explore the collections and exhibits after they eat. If safe to do so, and I understand the arguments against this, museums can light Shabbat candlesticks from their own collection, allowing their collection to be an active agent in a Shabbat experience, rather than in storage and never to be used again. Judaica is meant to be used in Jewish ritual, to be experienced. If a museum does not feel comfortable doing this, then they can consider purchasing a set of candlesticks that they are okay with lighting on Shabbat and creating conversations around the candlesticks in their collection. For example, before or after lighting the candlesticks, the museum can speak about the provenance of an item in their collection, and any information on who used it. If they do not have that information but have an approximate date, speak a little about Jewish history and the Shabbat experience of that time.

Jewish museums can capitalize off “do-it-yourself” Judaism. By recognizing the potential in these programs and applying it to museums, not only can museums engage interest, but they

also can create long lasting relationships with their patrons. About 30 percent of Kevah groups have been meeting for more than two years.<sup>147</sup>

A program such as Kevah is plausible in any sized museum – and if done correctly, it is an economical way to get Jewish millennials involved with Torah and the museum. To create a Kevah group, all the museum needs to do is gain interest (social media posts and word of mouth are a great place to start), provide snacks, and find Jewish educators (whether it be a rabbi or someone familiar with Jewish text and tradition), and the group is ready to go. Organizations should also not rule out millennials who are familiar with text and tradition. For example, queer Torah study groups led by those without a traditional rabbinical or educational background have been successful, with the right leader. While traditional Kevah groups find themselves meeting in the living rooms of the participants, museums can easily host these groups virtually as well. The most important aspect of a museum Kevah type group is that it is accessible for everyone – regardless of their spiritual beliefs.

By providing opportunities to explore and connect with Judaism outside of the traditional structure, Jewish museums open the door for visitors to connect with not only their spiritual side, but also with the museum. Millennials are looking for experiences that will move them and allow them to feel a deeper connection, especially with those of similar age, and by creating these programs, museums can offer that to them. By creating a space where millennials can connect with the museum collections, Jewish ideas and traditions, and people, visitor numbers will likely increase with a higher number of return visits.

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<sup>147</sup> Shimron, Yonat. "Kevah Offers a DIY Approach to Jewish Millennials." Faith & Leadership. April 21, 2015. Accessed May 05, 2021. <https://faithandleadership.com/kevah-offers-diy-approach-jewish-millennials>.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusions**

In this thesis I explored who millennials are and their relationship with museums, as well as how museums can be used to allow young Jewish adults (though non-Jewish millennials are included and should not be excluded by museums) to explore and connect with their faith, heritage, and culture away from traditional institutions such as synagogues and Hebrew school. As various mission statements at Jewish museums claim in their own words, their job is to connect people to and showcase Jewish history and culture. Engagement cannot simply end with presenting Judaica and a timeline of Jewish history. Museums need to go further with their engagement and find ways that allow people to live Jewish history, culture, and explore their spiritual side. A case full of impressive Judaica may be beautiful, but museums need to go beyond simply presenting facts and allow visitors to explore all Jewish history, culture, Jewish texts, and the Jewish faith.

The values and beliefs that millennials hold bleed into everything that they do. From how they live their lives, to how long they stay at a job (especially if they are not content with it), to where their money goes, and how they spend their time. If they do not see a diverse and inclusive space at a museum, they are less likely to spend their time there than somewhere else. Along with inclusion, millennials are looking for experiences that they are not going to forget, especially ones that make an impact and allow them to connect with other people. When speaking about engaging millennials, it is important to note that we are not just talking about millennials. We are talking about everyone. I agree with Colleen Dilenschneider, who argues that “the trends impacting ongoing engagement of this generation are not unique to millennials. Talking about millennials does not mean ignoring other generations. In fact, ‘Millennial talk’ is

often ‘everyone talk.’”<sup>148</sup> The focus on millennials is simply because museums and cultural organizations need to do better in engaging them – it does not mean that these ideas will not work for other generations.

When presented with opportunities that are not normally offered at a museum, such as live music, eating, and handling objects, these programs receive rave reviews and often lead to a higher number of return visitors, many of which recommend these programs to their friends. Without creating experiences, it will be hard for museums to stay relevant to the younger generations, which is only going to harm them as these generations grow up and hold outdated beliefs about cultural institutions.

The question of how to engage young Jewish adults, from millennials to younger is not a new question presented to the Jewish community, and it’s been one that Jewish educators, rabbis, and Jewish professionals have grappled with. As millennials distance themselves further away from the synagogue, Hebrew school, and even Jewish Community Centers, Jewish educators are faced with a challenge that they cannot do on their own, which should be seen as both an opportunity and an obligation for Jewish museums. Jewish museums have the job of presenting Jewish history, culture, and beliefs and it should not end there, as they can be active agents in engagement and the continuation of Jewish identity. By creating programs that allow for socialization with other Jewish people or those interested in Jewish culture and Judaism, connection with holidays and rituals, and living the history themselves, they can have a positive impact in the future of American Jewry. This also brings in a group referred to as “Minhag Millennials,” a term that was created by Fern Chertok of Brandeis University. Minhag

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<sup>148</sup> Dilenschneider, Colleen. “The Three Keys to Ongoing Millennial Engagement for Cultural Organizations. *Know Your Own Bone*. July 7, 2018. Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.colleendilen.com/2018/07/11/three-keys-ongoing-millennial-engagement-cultural-organizations/>

Millennials refers to those who “identify as being Jewish, but don’t necessarily have the typical Jewish education or background.”<sup>149</sup> It also includes Jews who belong in interfaith families, as well as non-Jewish members of those families.<sup>150</sup>

It is up to museums to look at their programming and their collections and see how they can incorporate meaningful engagement into their events, provided they stay loyal to the mission of their institution. This research also proposes wider implications and demands for museums to be places of intangible heritage. Owning an impressive collection of artifacts is not the only way that museums should be looking to connect those with their heritage. Museums should be using their institutions as places that pass on intangible heritage, which is a concept that has been explored in the museum field, but not so much in terms of Jewish heritage. More research needs to be done on Jewish museums, especially small museums, and their role in passing on Jewish heritage, traditions, and beliefs, rather than being a static institution that keeps these traditions viewed as something from the past.

However, this does not only extend to Jewish museums, but any museum also that focuses on an any specific ethnic, religious, or racial group should play an active role in keeping the traditions and history of the group alive, while also creating room for showcasing the evolution of Jewish culture through the years. Collaboration must be made with members from that group. After all, museum should not take it into their hands to create programming that centers around a group without the knowledge and background needed to do so, and collaboration with the community can help solve any issues that arise. Plus, this allows for the community to connect with the museum on a deeper level. More research on best practices in

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<sup>149</sup> "As Jewish Museums, How Do We Transcend Boundaries?". 2017. *Medium*. Accessed April 4, 2021. <https://stories.thejewishmuseum.org/as-jewish-museums-how-do-we-transcend-boundaries-1d2f95975bf>.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

collaboration, and research on presenting intangible heritage are a must as museums move further into the twenty-first century. While museums should not be quick to throw away their prized collections, it should be remembered that millennials are looking for a one-of-a-kind experience, and objects in glass cases are not enough to get them through the doors. Creating experiences around objects, or letting objects complement programming is a valuable tool in engagement. For example, if the museum is hosting Shabbat, they may consider bringing Shabbat candlesticks from the collection, or host Shabbat amongst Jewish art. Millennials will connect with objects when they are used in a meaningful way.

A question that Jewish museums might consider going forward is collaboration with rabbis, cantors, and rabbinical and cantorial students. The rabbinate is no longer tied to congregations, with clergy members shifting career paths to work on college campuses, Jewish community centers, activism, social service agencies, and various other positions. Museums and clergy members could work together to create a strong and unique way to engage these young Jewish adults.

Museums that decide to implement programming based on these recommendations should decide success based on two things: feedback from participants and return number of attendances. It should not be expected that people are going to flock to these events the moment that they are advertised. Most of these programs recommended probably will not bring in as many people as a live music event would. However, if the museum can see that they have a good number of people who keep coming back to their programs, and positive feedback from those in attendance, then something is working. There is a reason these members are coming back: because they are connecting with the program in a way that is meaningful to them. It is more

important to create a deep bond with a handful of visitors than to have a hundred people show up to an event but never return.

I cannot finish this thesis without acknowledging the challenge that museums face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I first began planning this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic was at the beginning stage, and no one knew how disastrous it would become. I understand that much of the work presented here works best for those who can open their doors and safely continue programming, when and if the time comes for their organization. I cannot pretend to be an expert on virtual programming, and I did not set out to explore that in this thesis. I also cannot anticipate how museums will financially recover from the impact of the pandemic. However, I hope that museums that must, or prefer to stick to online programming, can still find ideas on how to make their virtual programming within this study. Museums, if the resources allow, can use Zoom to host talks and dialogues surrounding issues that align with their mission. One of the benefits of Zoom is that museums have easier access to speakers from all around the world, rather than focusing specifically on those who are local, or those who may not be able to travel to their institution. If the museum is looking to connect locally, they can create programming and only send the invites to those who reside in their area. The numbers that Zoom events, and those streamed on Facebook have pulled prove that people want to connect with museums.

Unfortunately, I do not have data on how many of those in attendance were millennials.

Millennials are an important generation in ensuring that museums stay relevant in the twenty-first century: the youngest millennials are currently around twenty-five years old, and the oldest are rounding the corner to forty years old. They are currently the largest generation group and will be visitors of museums for years to come. As a group passionate about learning, especially about those who are different from them, and social justice, museums have an

important role to fill. By creating programs that tailor towards millennials and their interests, museums will create a lifelong relationship with this generation.

As the Jewish-American scenery changes and more young Jewish adults are stepping away from the synagogue, it is important that institutions such as Jewish museums aid in creating a bridge for these millennials, and non-Jews who are interested in Jewish culture, to explore Jewish culture and engage in non-traditional ways. Doing this aligns with their missions of presenting and connecting with Jewish history and heritage. It is time to stop relying on glass display cases and make unique programming that gets Jewish, and non-Jewish millennials, interested in Judaism and returning to the museum.

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