

Pursuing *Tzedek*: D.C. Synagogues Building Movements for Social Justice

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Abstract

Throughout American history, Jews have responded to a historical and ethical mandate to pursue social justice. Nevertheless, the specific ways in which synagogue leaders organize for social change remains unclear. This research addresses the following question: How are Jewish institutions in D.C. building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work? Findings derive from analysis of six interviews and two focus groups at three synagogues in Washington, D.C. Whereas some participants preferred to engage in incremental changemaking and hands-on service, others concentrated on building collective power to alter the status quo. In addition, while a consensus existed that responsive, egalitarian relationships prove essential for this work, participants disagreed about how to address issues related to politics, Israel, and race. As this research offers an in-depth understanding of the strengths and challenges among Jewish organizers in D.C., the insights may be used to inform the effective deployment of resources toward the long-standing priority of social justice.

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On 27 October 2018, a gunman opened fire at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. He targeted this Jewish community after the building was included on a list of sites for National Refugee Shabbat (Zezima & Lowery, 2018). After 11 congregants lost their lives on a peaceful Saturday morning, many Jews asked locally and nationally whether synagogues ought to take bold positions on community issues in the face of such existential threats. Across the country, including in Washington, D.C., communities held vigils where thousands of Jews and gentiles mourned, thinking about the costs and bloodshed that accompanied this synagogue's efforts.

Nevertheless, a month later, the synagogue's rabbi wrote the following reflection for his congregation: "To remain a part of the fabric of America and follow the words of the Torah, I must continue to be mindful of those in need." (Myers, 2018). Likewise, congregations throughout the U.S. provided even more support for refugees after the shooting. A synagogue in Falls Church, Virginia, for example, expanded its financial and professional resources for an "adopted" refugee family after the shooting, citing Biblical commandments to protect the stranger. As one congregant explained, "[Anti-Semitic people] can hate us for that if they want...But that is who we are" (Scolovsky, 2018). Although the shooting raised national concerns about Jews fighting on behalf of highly politicized causes, it ultimately clarified that social justice remains an integral aspect of Jewish values and history. The event and its aftermath brought a steadfast commitment to Jewish social justice back into the national spotlight.

Jewish social justice work involves embodying history and religious teachings to improve economic and social conditions. Even in the face of adversity, such as the shooting in Pittsburgh, many Jews resiliently dedicate themselves to a duty noted in Deuteronomy 16:20, "*Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof!* Justice, justice you shall pursue!" However, each generation of Jewish

Americans has responded to this call in distinctive ways. Many leaders strive toward *tikkun olam*, reparation of the world through truly transformational change (Rosenthal, 2005). Since the 1990's, leaders have aimed to achieve such a transformation via congregation based community organizing, but the effects of this shift remain largely unexplored. Among other faiths, such a model ushered unprecedented capacity to demand that laws and leaders reflect collective values (Wood & Warren, 2002).

However, there is a lack of understanding about how Jewish institutions manifest the value of social justice – both in how efforts connect Jews to one another and in how they influence the society at-large. This research seeks to identify highly impactful practices among justice-oriented synagogues, as well as reveal common challenges. Furthermore, it aims to understand how Jews collectively organize for social change through a case study on three synagogues within one community, developing an understanding of how strategic and ideological differences influence an institution's approach and its effect on the surrounding community. The central question framing my research is: How are Jewish institutions in D.C. building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work?

Case Study: Washington, D.C.

Many coinciding developments –social inequality, enthusiasm for social justice, and robust resources in the Jewish community – make looking at this issue now and in Washington D.C. particularly enriching. First, Washington D.C. represents a diverse community with a robust social sector and pressing, complex issues. People of different races and classes interface with numerous institutions – government, non-profit organizations, religious organizations – to secure their well-being. Furthermore, more than any state, the nation's capital faces the greatest level of income inequality with the top 20 percent of Washingtonians possessing 29 times more income

than the bottom 20 percent (Naveed, 2017). Disparities also seem to concentrate along racial lines in the nation's capital as the white median income is three times the black median income. A black family in D.C. is four times more likely to live in poverty (Naveed, 2017). As property values and the cost of living have risen in the District in the last 20 years, these disparities have reaped harm especially onto black and brown communities. Between 2000 and 2013, over 20,000 black Washingtonians experienced displacement, relocating due to rising rents and/or leaving the Washington metro area altogether (Richardson, Mitchell, Franco, 2019). This racialized environment of haves and have-nots offers a unique context to explore how Jewish leaders confront systemic issues

Second, a 2013 survey of American Jews indicated that 56% of them view social justice as the primary way to connect to their religious/cultural identity (Lugo, Cooperman, Smith, & Stencel, 2013, p. 14). More than in the past, it appears that Jews across the U.S. desire to apply their values to the external community. The national response to the Pittsburgh shooting also reflects that Jews still regard social justice as an integral component of their overall Jewishness, suggesting that despite some fear and reservation, synagogues that seek to remain relevant in this political moment and into the Jewish future must direct their attention to such efforts. This study seeks to understand how and in what ways synagogues capture this momentum.

Third, a survey by Brandeis University revealed that D.C. Jews possess substantial capital to invest in restructuring social and economic systems. Over 16% of Jewish households in D.C. earn over \$250,000, and 87% of D.C. Jews gave charitable donations in 2017, including 61% of the population that donated to Jewish organizations (Krasner Aronson, Brookner, Boxer, & Saxe, 2018). Funding organizing efforts or volunteer projects represents a means redistribute resources for the sake of social justice. Conversely, concentrating these resources within the

Jewish community exacerbates the aforementioned inequalities throughout the nation's capital. Thus, affluence, a willingness to give, and marked enthusiasm for social justice present an opportunity for congregations to justifiably ask people to contribute more time, energy, and resources to construct a better world. However, without evidence about how Jewish organizing works, we can only speculate about whether or not a community strategically pools assets to confront systems of oppression. Regarding the proper time to learn about whether Jews use these assets to transform Washington, D.C., we must raise the centuries-old query from Rabbi Hillel in Pirkei Avot 1:14, "If not now, when?"

Literature Review

Jews view doing social justice as a religious and historical mandate. *Tikkun olam* (repair of the world), the pursuit of *tzedek* (justice), and the legacy of the prophets form the religious foundation for this value (Jacobs, 2009). In addition, the Social Gospel Movement and the Progressive Movement encouraged Jewish immigrants to establish a more than century-long tradition of activism within American life (Meyer, 1995). These efforts included prominent roles in the Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement (Weilbacher, 2017; Greenberg, 2012).

During the 20th century, *tikkun olam* emerged as the prominent concept across Jewish social justice efforts. Centuries ago, the phrase originated as a legal term related to divorce, but in Jewish mysticism, it evolved to underscore that God's full presence cannot exist without restorative actions (Rosenthal, 2005). After the Holocaust, Jewish leaders appropriated *tikkun olam* to forge a new conception of transformational social justice. In an interview, a rabbi recently asserted, "If the Holocaust hadn't happened I don't think *tikkun olam* would have been such a well-known term" (Leslie, 2016, p. 301). Conservative Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel implored that reparative acts of justice make the Jews and the world "worthy of redemption"

(Rosenthal, 2005, p. 235). Likewise, Reform Rabbis Emil Fackenheim and Eugene Borowitz believed that a more whole world lent itself less to the conditions that perpetuated the Nazi genocide, so they made a more deliberate effort to emphasize that sweeping efforts of repair the world represent an urgent and ongoing priority for the Jews (p. 235).

After several decades, *tikkun olam* remains an integral, evolving concept for Jewish social justice. Discussing contemporary Reform and Conservative Judaism, Rosenthal (2005) asserted that *tikkun olam* has become “virtually synonymous with their social action agendas” (p. 237). Although this concept seems to still resonate, it signifies several divergent understandings about desired impact. Qualitative interviews with Jewish community leaders in Vancouver reflected different associations with this term, including empowerment to shape the future, justice as catharsis, and spiritual reconciliation between the individual and the collective (Leslie, 2016). It remains unclear how these personal differences altered *tikkun olam* in practice.

Moreover, due to the expansive goals associated with *tikkun olam*, people disagree about whether the term represents a meaningful way to understand changemaking. Historically speaking, pushback to more ambitious visions resulted in disparate attitudes about Jewish activism. Scholars often agree that Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement illustrated the tension between Jewish desires for incremental progress versus revolution (Greenberg 2012; Staub 2004). Notably, Jewish leaders lent critical monetary support and solidarity for the Civil Rights Movement (Greenberg, 2012). Visibility in this movement, though, led to threats and violence against Jews, especially in the South (Staub, 2004, p. 53). When all-out resistance to white supremacy threatened Jews’ fragile stake within American society, Jews moderated their agenda for integration, and even liberals distanced themselves from the cause (Greenberg, 2012, p.462). Ultimately, some historians felt that the absence of more aggressive commitments to

progress deteriorated the Jewish-Black alliance as well as Jewish moral authority (Sobel & Sobel as cited in Greenberg, 2012). Nowadays, skeptics view *tikkun olam* as a panacea to justify any “easy” campaign as opposed to radical reconstruction of the universe (Rosenthal, 2005, p. 238).

This period of discord represented a different time when Jews enacted social justice as individuals outside of their place of worship. Rabbis preached or marched alongside the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., but “there were not a lot of things for members of the congregation to do *as members*” (L. Winkelman, personal communication, October 17, 2018). In response to the success of several decades of collective church organizing, Jewish leaders sought to unite congregations toward a common cause. Community organizing represented a novel approach to aggregate the community’s voice and power.

Alinsky conceptualized congregation based community organizing (CBCO) to mobilize power toward shared values and goals (Wood & Warren, 2002). Based on observation and analysis of efforts at various institutions, Warren and Wood (2002) characterized CBCO as requiring the following components: roots in religious beliefs, a broad base of participants, a focus on multiple local issues, professional staff dedicated to this work, and maintenance of a political yet non-partisan position. The authors assumed that Jews contributed in the same manner as Christian counterparts, despite the small yet “significant” influence of synagogue organizing (p. 17). Consolidating Jewish and Christian organizing overlooks the qualitative differences that arise based on each group’s understanding of social justice, its resources, and its history.

Many studies indicated that adopting an organizing framework benefitted congregants and leaders looking to sustain and maximize impact. For instance, a longitudinal survey of the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) network indicated that a spiritual calling

for this work promoted ongoing involvement (Christens et al., 2010). Likewise, a group of Colorado churchgoers working to expand access to affordable housing shared that identifying with a moral community emboldened them to persevere as they endured difficulties in the public sphere (Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens, 2010). This empirical evidence supports a theory that CBCO establishes a foundational tie between spirituality and power (Posadas, 2008). CBCO provided a more resilient basis to struggle for long-term progress. Compared to Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, these communities endured in their commitment to social justice in spite of adversity. However, the current literature lacks a clear indication about whether CBCO supports a similar outcome for organized Jewish communities that confront setbacks.

Aside from mere sustainability, transitioning to a CBCO model presented opportunities to redistribute power and resources within communities. Ethnographic research at 23 religious institutions suggested a correlation between congregational organizing and greater democratic engagement (Fulton & Wood, 2014). After analyzing these results, Fulton & Wood (2014) proposed that CBCO encouraged congregants to hold public officials accountable to their values (p. 1075). In a different study focused on midwestern urban congregations, Foster (2014) created an inventory of social capital, resources that emerge from norms of reciprocity within a social network. In a study of 120 individuals at two churches, Foster identified congregations as “resource brokers, providing a link between community needs and congregational resources” (p. 310). Organized churchgoers frequently offered assistance with problem-solving skills and personal support skills, such as using a network to secure someone a temporary home or comforting a grieving community member. Meanwhile, they underutilized existing connections to various political and professional networks to broker systemic change.

In other cases, organized congregations played a directive role in policy decisions and agenda-setting. Posadas (2008) theorized that CBCO functions as a powerful model because it distinguishes between social services and “empowering people to fight for justice” (p. 277). Looking beyond the congregation itself, organized religious communities worked toward addressing systemic issues. According to an analysis of survey data and observation over five years, CBCO empowered organized church groups in northern Colorado to achieve four policy changes around affordable housing (Speer et al., 2010). The group pushed the city council to establish a task force, researched policy issues and made recommendations. This research reflects the capacity for religiously involved people to translate their values into long-term change, working at the root of a social issue. This literature asserted that a focus on justice as opposed to charity constitutes a new form of power for organized people of faith. With an intentional approach to reforming and working within systems, congregations consistently transformed the place of worship into a hub for increased social, political, and economic mobility (Posadas 2008). Nevertheless, the regional and religious specificity of these studies limit the ability to generalize about the relationship between CBCO and brokering resources and power. In particular, these studies overlook how mobilizing connections emboldens specifically Jewish congregational networks.

Partnerships with other organizations also enabled religious communities to pursue multi-issue campaigns. Establishing networks of organizations with similar values and goals amplified the efficacy of CBCO. Although Speer et al. (2010) identified how congregations came together to change affordable housing in Colorado, Tesdahl (2014) examined how congregations in Kansas City’s CBCO federation coordinated to pursue a multidimensional agenda. Interviews with clergy, professional staff, and indigenous leaders led to a theme that networking between

congregations empowered the most affected populations to take a leadership role in confronting an issue while others provided support and resources. Coalitions of faith and non-faith organizations also allowed religious people to mobilize in solidarity for multiple issues, exerting greater aggregated influence (Tesdahl, 2014; Foster 2014). Past rabbis implored that post-Holocaust *tikkun olam* must occur even when it is, “fragmentary, precarious and incomplete” (Rosenthal, 2005, p.235). Recent research of CBCO networks highlighted a capacity for mobilization in a more cohesive, intersectional manner.

Nevertheless, while religious organizations regularly bring people together to address social and economic challenges, many faith traditions’ emphasis on catharsis undermined actual changemaking (Delehanty 2016; Baggett, 2002). Without focused efforts to alter social systems, Baggett (2002) imagined that the congregation’s work, “can implode into an ethos of self-care, a minding-our-own-business clan... seeing all religion as a privatized ‘haven in a heartless world’” (p. 453). Delehanty (2016) observed planning sessions and conferences of a supposedly influential CBCO coalition, and he determined that “comfortable church culture” undermined social justice pursuits. For instance, when the group wanted to hang a Black Lives Matter banner, activists clashed with parishioners who viewed the church as a sanctuary rather than a point of resistance (p. 51). These scholars agreed that when a religious institution upholds progressive social justice as a core value, it must strive to go beyond internal peace for the sake of external impact.

Furthermore, in its own regard, inclusion constituted a major obstacle for religious organizations trying to exercise joint power. Participants within the PICO network identified their work as messy, noting that conflict naturally arises when restructuring a society across difference (Christens et al., 2008) For a congregation to organize as many people as possible in

effective ways, it needs to recognize which members exist at the periphery, employing responsive strategies to instill a sense of agency among all members. Analysis of sign-in sheets, hosting of events, and one-on-one conversations from 47 PICO congregations led Tesdahl and Speer (2015) to conclude that unequitable outreach efforts to congregants contributed to disparities in participation. In practice, organizers sought like-minded and/or influential members to advance a cause. After analyzing responses to the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCB), Wuthnow (2003) suggests that religious volunteerism facilitates bridge building across different social identities, but it requires, “proactive steps...to be taken in order to encourage church members to make friendships that overcome status distinction” (p. 439). Deliberate outreach and mediation across social distinctions represent two key focus areas for advancing change together. However, this work is limited by the extent to which a group overcomes biases and convictions to form consensus and advance an agenda.

Past church practices provide diverse strategies for overcoming these challenges. CBCO is not a one-size-fits-all framework, so given their context and needs, organizations employed a variety of strategies to increase inclusion and impact. In the case of the Colorado congregations fighting for affordable housing, organizers engendered success because they delegated clear roles between the congregations and among members (Speer et al., 2010). Tesdahl and Speer (2015) added that direct and equitable outreach from congregational leaders to members of diverse backgrounds and levels of involvement proved effective in increasing organization-wide participation in social justice work. In another case, Braunstein (2012) identified that storytelling allowed congregants to establish rapport, seeing similar values and motivations among one another. It also empowered leaders to assert credibility that proved influential in conveying the necessity for change to stakeholders. In contrast, Delehanty (2016) observed one pastor who

suggested that congregants distinguish between “playing church” and “joining church” to challenge attitudes that were “too comfortable and too privileged to reflect God’s intentions” (p. 48). From his perspective, activists within the organization ought to problematize individualistic culture, compelling people to take action.

As most scholars currently focus on movements within and between churches, they neglect to address the ways that synagogues conduct this work. Filling a gap in the literature, this study examines how Jewish values and CBCO converge at three synagogues in Washington, D.C. This sample provides an opportunity to compare studies from other faiths and locales to contemporary Jewish efforts, identifying trends as well as unique assets and challenges.

Methodology

This research addresses the following question: How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work? This study combined interviews and focus groups to uncover people’s impressions of the synagogue social justice projects in which they participate. Qualitative methods allowed participants to share nuanced descriptions of their work. I employed interviews and focus groups to produce a nuanced narrative, gaining an in-depth account of how this work takes shape from multiple perspectives. These complementary methods enabled participants to express their experiences in their own words, and they permitted me to follow up as needed (Seidman, 2013).

The six interviews in this study focused on clergy and professional staff who steer Jewish social justice projects as part of their job within the synagogue. Through interviews, I obtained “access to the context of people’s behavior...to understand the meaning of behavior” (Seidman, 2013, p. 10). Each leader had the chance to speak at length about how his or her specifically rich

experience and specialized knowledge shapes the vision and structure of the congregation's efforts.

I supplemented those accounts with two focus groups, which allowed for a greater number of lay leaders to share their perceptions of the congregation's organizing.

Defining Variables

Inclusion, equity, and impact framed this study. While not all participants consciously identified these concepts in their efforts, these variables provided language to evaluate how synagogues conduct their work. These focus areas allow for understanding of how leaders attempt to bring the whole congregation into their work to produce consequential change.

Inclusive faith-based organizing requires strategies to constructively work through disagreements and promote participation among a broad group (Christens, Jones, & Speer, 2010). To understand how Jews at synagogues collaborate toward common values and goals, I focused on how leaders form affiliations across difference and instill agency across their membership. I assessed whether leaders collaborate with all members, including sub-minorities within the congregation. Observable aspects of this variable include discussion of strategic recruitment processes, consensus formation, and conflict management.

Assessing equity and impact allowed me to understand the extent to which a congregation's attempts at *tikkun olam* was transformative. Today's challenges in D.C. and elsewhere reflect deeply rooted gaps in opportunity, so to truly alleviate current needs, organizers must adopt a systemic approach. Whereas equality promotes fairness, equity reimagines the social framework so everyone has a genuine chance to thrive (Takeuchi, Dearing, Bartholomew, & McRoy, 2018, p. 14). Likewise, impact reflects how many people are affected by a synagogues' efforts and whether these changes provide short-term or long-term relief.

Incorporating equity and impact into the research question promoted distinction between limited charity projects and comprehensive changemaking. I used this difference to gage how synagogue alter the status quo and identify room for growth.

Data Collection

Between November 2018 and March 2019, I conducted this research at three synagogues in Washington, D.C. Looking at different websites and consulting local clergy, I selected each synagogue based on a commitment to social justice in its mission, values, or vision statements. In addition, I ensured that the synagogues came from different sects and were of different sizes and membership composition. Comparing and contrasting impressions of this work at diverse institutions allowed me to uncover how sectarian beliefs, membership models, and differing assets, interests, and goals influence the formation of social justice work.

Interviews and focus groups occurred on-site for the convenience of participants. In the interview process, I requested to speak with two professional leaders (e.g. rabbis, cantors, directors etc.) from each institution, conducting a total of six interviews. Next, I convened two different focus groups of up to 10 participants. Each interview lasted about one hour, and each focus group lasted no longer 90 minutes.

In both the interviews and focus groups, I covered the following: motivations for doing this work within the congregation, intentionality around including diverse participants, conflict resolution tactics, and perceptions of achieved systemic change. I also inquired about perceived challenges. Asking about these topics in both parts of this research revealed where differences lie between professional and lay leaders.

In interviews, I also wanted to understand how entities outside of the synagogue influence strategies for this work. These factors included the effect of modern anti-Semitism, the

social justice issues around the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the priorities and strategies of other organizations and movements. The flexibility of the interview permitted me to expand on these topics when they were of particular interest to an institutional leader.

Recruitment Process

Eligibility for the study included anybody who self-identifies as Jewish and an “active” member of the synagogue’s social justice work. A qualifying participant was anybody who attended a synagogue’s social justice organizing or programming events multiple times per year. This strategy recruited people who hold existing knowledge and experience regarding the institution’s approach. I also inquired about the extent to which participants make efforts to bring the entire congregation into their projects. Provided that the study aimed to assess how Jews work within institutions, people who were not Jewish were excluded as were Jewish individuals whose social justice efforts were not connected to synagogue-based work.

For interview recruitment, I consulted clergy or staff as well as each synagogue’s website to find institutional leaders who explicitly focus on Jewish social justice within their work. For each interview request, I directly emailed the staff member, detailing the purpose of the study and indicated what participation means, risks and potential benefits, and information about how to contact me to confirm participation.

To convene the focus groups, I used contact information of potential participants that I obtained from interviewees. After we established a convenient time and date for two to ten congregants, individual participants confirmed their participation with me via email. In each recruitment email, the consent form was attached to provide further details about the study’s purpose, procedure, risks, benefits, and the ability to refuse or end participation without penalty at any time. The email also emphasized that anything expressed during the recruitment process

over the Internet was not confidential, and therefore, candidates should be careful if they were thinking about sharing sensitive information.

I gave all participants the choice of whether or not to use a pseudonym. If someone chose to use this option, then I removed any identifying information in the focus group or interview transcript.

15 people participated in this study (see Appendix A). 13 of the participants were female, and 2 were male. The average age of participants was 50 years old, and the average duration of membership/employment at the synagogue was 17 years. All participants identified as straight, and 12 out of 13 participants identified as white.

Data Analysis

The data in this study was coded and analyzed for major themes. First, each focus group session or interview was transcribed verbatim, and each transcript was examined for accuracy. Second, the In Vivo coding method was used to reflect participants' words and determine points of emphasis, concurrence, and disagreement in the data (Saldaña, 2009). Third, these codes were categorized as they related to equity, inclusion, impact, challenges, and other topics. After completing these steps, I identified and defined themes, using them to connect with previous research and discuss the findings of the study.

Limitations

This study presents finite insights from six interviews and two focus groups in the District of Columbia. While this data serves as a guide for research in other locales or nationally, it only directly reflects these participants' impressions of their institutions. Another limitation arose from the convenience sampling conducted in this study. A more ideal sample would interview a representative group of people at these institutions, especially more males, Jews of

color, LGBTQ Jews, and young professionals to accurately reflect the diverse Jewish population of the District of Columbia (Aronson, Brookner, Boxer, and Saxe, 2018). Further studies about Jewish organizing in the District also ought to include other institutions, such as organizations with more fluid, generally younger membership, such as the New Synagogue Project and Sixth and I, as well as Orthodox synagogues. In addition, this study did not cover the work of the organization Jews United for Justice, a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to exploring Jewish values through local advocacy and a potentially key actor in mobilizing Jews in the District. Finally, as only one researcher conducted interviews, transcribed data, and analyzed the findings, there could be limitations or biases in the subjective conclusions of this study.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the data. Whereas some participants preferred to engage in incremental changemaking and hands-on service, others concentrated on building collective power to alter the status quo. In addition, while a consensus existed that responsive, egalitarian relationships prove essential for this work, participants disagreed about how to address issues related to time management, politics, Israel, and race. Analysis of the interviews and focus groups revealed four major themes: 1) religious and historical drivers, 2) debate about proper impact, 3) inclusive synagogue culture, and 4) ongoing challenges.

Religious and Historical Drivers

Participants agreed that Jewish texts and historical oppression drive them to pursue social justice. Across the interviews, clergy quoted scripture or cited legal texts to describe the congregation's responsibility to participate in this sort of work. They described the value of justice as encoded and embedded through a diversity of legal and prophetic texts. Whereas particular verses serve as examples, the responsibility for Jews to do this work pervades the

religious literature. Rabbi Sarah, a Conservative rabbi, described this phenomenon in the following manner:

I think that there are legal prescriptions as broad as pursue justice and as specific as...thou shalt not oppress the stranger and things like that, but I think [social justice] also plays out in much more nuanced ways in Jewish law like how we're supposed to engage in business dealings, how we're supposed to act as witnesses, how we're supposed to fast, and how we're to eat, and how we're supposed to observe holidays. I think in all of those there's an underlying thread of we do these things in order to bring about a more just world.

Likewise, Rabbi Daniel, a colleague at a Reform synagogue, intertwined the idea of being created in the image of God with pleas for shared prosperity in the prophetic literature:

Since everybody has equal worth, you want to organize a system of living where everybody can live, as Isaiah and Micah put it, peacefully under their vine and fig tree...there's a sense of enough for everybody, and you're not cowering in fear of your next-door neighbor or the farmer or person or shepherd across the street.

He went on to describe social justice as Jews' attempt to achieve a political organization where everybody has access to "the good life." In this manner, clergy view Jewish texts not only as symbolic narrative to shape Jewish values but a prescriptive text that just as their ancestors' pursued justice as appropriate in their time and place, Jews today need to carry on this literary tradition in tangible forms. As Rabbi Daniel's colleague, Rabbi Zoey put it, "the prophets will say something like, 'God doesn't want your sacrifices if you are also walking by the poor person on the street and not helping them.'" For participants, it is clear that it is not possible to lead a rich, ethical Jewish life and ignore the legal and prophetic call to create a just world.

Focus group participants echoed these sentiments. Joan, a participant at a Reform synagogue, declared that social justice is "in our bones." When asked about the root of this instinctual zeal for righteousness, her peer, Agnes, said, "I'm not so great with all the texts, but I think it's there. It's probably throughout and just very consistent." While these participants did

not necessarily cite a particular verse, they likewise knew that Jewish literature continuously demands people to act on behalf of their fellow citizens, and they similarly saw it as their responsibility to live according to these texts. Jews in this study agree that living according to Torah requires deeds and actions that increase fairness and abundance. Like past generations, some Jews are making justice work a cornerstone of their religious practice, and the Reform focus on the prophets especially expands upon how their predecessors in the mid-twentieth century orientated themselves as activists (Jacobs, 2009).

Nonetheless, participants cited more than literature when thinking about their activism and organizing. As was the case with the Tree of Life synagogue, the history and resurgence of anti-Semitism appeared not to deter participants' raising their voices in the public square. Rather, it motivated them to take bolder action, such as greeting and accommodating asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border or leading advocacy efforts to relocate a temporary housing facility into their neighborhood. Overall, participants identified that past and, more frequently, current experiences of oppression demand that American Jews align themselves with all peoples—Jew and gentile—facing hardship and hatred. As Rabbi Zoey established:

It will never be enough to say that the prophets said do kindness and mercy and walk humbly...there's this sense that our history as Jews, from being slaves in Egypt and on, will always continue to be why we have to continue to act in the world... And that's how I think of anti-Semitism. It's like even if I am totally free now, even if I am totally safe and secure, I have to think of myself as though I was a slave in Egypt or as though I lived in a different period of Jewish history. And if I even for that one moment am able to imagine myself to put myself in a place that is uncomfortable, that is a different period of history, that is a different experience for our Jewish lives. Then, I am responsible and especially responsible because I know that there are people around me having the experience that I have to imagine myself being in... we cannot go into the place of fear. We have to continue acting from the place of really digging into our values and saying this is who we are and this is what we do and if we really were in Egypt and we really are here now, then this is how we have to act in the world.

Rabbi Aaron, a colleague at a Conservative synagogue, articulated a very similar narrative:

Every time and place has come to mind in which Jews have been seen as other in whatever host culture they are living in. Sometimes, it was better than others, some periods of time, so you know, medieval Spain for a while was better than medieval eastern Europe in certain cases. Certainly, so, in any case in which minorities are being othered and given fewer rights and fewer claims to dignity than others, it is generally a widespread phenomenon. The moment in which one group becomes targeted, every minority group has reason to fear that they will also be targeted and so there's a utilitarian aspect of what it means to be involved in social justice...Minority groups that can somehow come together can help a society understand that the differences that create minorities have nothing to do with one's worth and if society can't see human beings for their absolute unequivocal worth, it does not end well ever for any of them.

Both rabbis agree that Jewish history informs their responsibilities in the present. Recalling the Jewish experience from Egypt to Pittsburgh, they implore that their congregations learn from the past to promote opportunities and rights in solidarity with all people who appear vulnerable in the face of oppression.

Participants across the focus groups echoed the ideas raised by these rabbis. Lisa, in the Conservative focus group, reflected that she feels most called by the Jewish idea of acting as if she were a stranger in the land of Egypt, and she especially felt she needed to live according to this principle after the 2016 election. Citing a connection to this mantra as well as a more general history of Jewish oppression, Lisa expressed that she felt unsatisfied leaving her Judaism "within the walls of the synagogue," and she began to demand that her fellow congregants see themselves as if they were slaves in Egypt and begin to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. Similarly, Joan, the Reform focus group participant who described social justice as being in her bones, added that this responsibility transcends a particular time or place. Sectarian beliefs notwithstanding, the participants expressed that Jews grow up learning about social justice and solidarity as core tenets of their history, and they continue to engage with it throughout the life cycle.

Each of these sentiments advances a narrative that members of D.C. synagogues find it difficult to exist passively with the history of anti-Semitism. Instead of letting it deplete their energy to live Jewishly, they utilize it as a means to recognize the fragility of freedom and opportunity, empathizing with other Jews and the larger community around them. Akin to the contextualization of social justice after the Holocaust (Rosenthal, 2005), participants saw their history as a driving force, demanding that they stand against hate or oppression before it increases to unmanageable proportions. In conjunction with the texts, the collective memory of living in fear colors what participants' view as their responsibility among the Jewish people.

As stated in past literature about the Holocaust and social justice (Leslie, 2015; Jacobs, 2009), multiple participants also contextualized the push to diminish hate in the world through the framework of *tikkun olam*. In particular, Rabbi Susan utilized this concept to articulate her definition of Jewish social justice, explaining:

As I learned in Jewish mysticism courses], there were these vessels of light, and they were, uh, they were broken and shattered, and the work of *tikkun olam* is putting the pieces back together... I bring that into pretty much any setting where I'm teaching or speaking and certainly in life cycle events.

The impact of Rabbi Susan's emphasis on *tikkun olam* was clear when the concept emerged among her congregants at a focus group. Without providing the mystical details, one participant defined social justice as, "*tikkun olam* – recognizing and looking for opportunities to alleviate social injustice." Nevertheless, the concept still appears very broad in each of these sentiments.

As the next theme make clear, such an elastic framework produces vastly different understandings of what it means to respond to Jewish texts and history.

Debating Impact

Overall, participants asserted that synagogues ought to reframe power and redirect resources within communities. However, clergy and members of various institutions differed about how to prioritize aspects of changemaking.

Participants described distinctive ways that their synagogues act upon the duty to pursue justice. Every synagogue in this study employed the knowledge and skills of their congregants to reshape the community. In the last year, all three synagogues “adopted” a refugee family in partnership with the Lutheran Family Services. Congregants pooled sufficient funds to relocate the family to the Washington area and provide a fully furnished apartment. Participants also channeled the expertise of their congregants to provide professional and personal advice to the family as they accommodated to American life.

Furthermore, participants at one Reform synagogue created a mentorship program between well-educated congregants and first-generation college students in the area. As Stan described:

We have a doctor. We have a vet. We have a graphic artist. We have a game designer. We got a a social worker. We got a nurse. Just everybody we asked said yes. We have a wide variety of expertise who are willing to take your emails or your phones and are willing to come out in the middle of a cold night on a Wednesday or in January and give their time to kids.

When congregants felt their skills were utilized for the sake of justice, they readily volunteered, representing a similar exchange of social capital seen in CBCO at churches (Foster 2014; Wuthnow 2003). As in previous studies, the effort to redistribute resources via the mentorship program and refugee work represent sustainable efforts to redirect power within a community (Christens et al., 2010). While these efforts do not constitute a tangible change in the policy realm, they reflect congregants’ desire to impact contemporary issues beyond hands-on service.

Meanwhile, clergy and congregants at the two Reform synagogues highlighted their direct service work as a major contribution to Jewish social justice. Members of these institutions did not necessarily value one-time acts of service, but they referred to several ongoing projects and drives that meet the needs of community partners, particularly the neighborhood shelter Friendship Place. The larger of the two synagogues also organizes multiple days of service including Mitzvah Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Interfaith Day of Service annually. Participants felt emphatic that these acts, though small when counted individually, repair the world when considered in the aggregate. As Eve in the Reform focus group explains:

If you've affected one person's life, you've helped...if you think about it on a global level, the issues that we have to deal with could be overwhelming. It could make you not want to get out of bed in the morning, but if you give somebody a pair of boots so they can throw out their ripped boots, or a blanket or a meal or help them with their education, it's transformative to that person. As far as I'm concerned, that's transformative enough.

Her peer, Agnes, added that bearing witness to poverty and injustice through direct service and education also “makes people more aware, which might not plug a hole right away, but it leads to better understanding.” The participants agreed that doing social justice work taught congregants how to treat other people with dignity, transforming the congregation and thereby the larger community in which the synagogue resides. In this manner, they asserted that their education and direct service concretely addresses pressing needs in the neighborhood and build the long-term capacity for people to grow into more informed, engaged citizens and Jews.

Participants from the Reform congregations also shared an assortment of advocacy efforts in which some members of their congregation participate, such as youth lobby days on Capitol Hill with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and robust support for a transitional shelter being moved to the neighborhood after Mayor Muriel Bowser closed D.C. General. These efforts, though, appeared less commonplace under the congregations' general

justice work. As Beth explained in the Reform focus group, “There’s some social justice problems that are more easily addressed with hands-on action... Advocacy is a long-term project, and it requires a lot of effort to educate people how to advocate.” Meanwhile, their counterparts in the Conservative focus group discussed how they try to make change one person at a time, but they also directly talked about leveraging their efforts and connections to alter the policy realm. Lisa, in the Conservative focus group, mentioned that due to the synagogue’s location in Washington, D.C., congregants may influence a Senate staffer or a key figure in the Jewish federation, and their educational and systems-oriented work contributes to larger policy decisions. Although the Reform congregations do not appear hostile to engaging with systemic issues, the majority of efforts focus more on collaborating with other institutions to attend to immediate and/or interpersonal needs.

The clergy further disagreed about whether their institutions should redirect power to tackle a single issue or whether Jewish social justice thrives when congregants explore the manifold issues, balancing activism, direct service, and education. Three participants – Naomi Rabbi Aaron, and Rabbi Daniel – especially highlighted the contrasting approaches. Speaking as the coordinator of social justice programs at a Reform synagogue, Naomi shared:

I love the combination of hands-on service, education, and advocacy work...because there are people who are hungry today, and they need to be fed today...it’s really important to understand the social services that are provided or not provided and ways in which they support or do not support the communities in need. It’s really important for us to march ourselves up to the Hill to make change, nationally or even locally. But the bottom line is unless we’re feeding people who are hungry today, we’re not really addressing the problem, you know, like we need to be doing all of those things...[if we don’t do a combination of these things,] it’s a missed opportunity because we have such a large community who has the expertise and the interests in doing the pieces of that. Answering the same question about how his synagogue strives for transformational impact,

Rabbi Aaron articulated:

If I had my sort of ideal for what it would look like here, there would be one campaign that the synagogue was involved in at any given time and not more...we're actually able to form leadership teams in a number of different areas, it just means that we will always fall short of as much power as we could have.

Rabbi Daniel, perhaps, provides a justification for why his synagogue focuses on incremental change and awareness and understanding. He laid out a very different case from Rabbi Aaron:

The long-term goal may be transformational, but...there's a great debate in antiquity in rabbinic literature *mah hu c'lal gdol b'Torah* – what is the greatest text in the Torah...The third text that's offered is *keves ha'ehad t'aseh b'boker v'keves ha'shanee t'asim ben ha'erevaim* – bring the morning lamb in the morning and bring the afternoon lamb in the afternoon to the offering, which means do what is doable, do the achievable, one good deed done at a time at the end of a lifetime will bring a whole stitch fabric of work done. So, I think, we measure transformation over the long haul and I wouldn't think that our temple in a finite period is able to do anything transformational.

Of note, Rabbi Daniel uses rabbinic text to articulate an entirely different notion of what it means to pursue justice compared to Rabbi Aaron. The contrast among these rabbis attests to the reality that three synagogues less than two miles apart understand the construct of *tzedek* quite differently. While the motivations for pursuing social justice seem consistent throughout Washington, D.C. and the desired impact to redistribute power emerges in each congregation, the balance between social action, advocacy, and education varies quite a bit.

From these results, it appears that some congregations appear more willing to boldly demand equity and make impact through laws and institutions. Granted, Rabbi Daniel joined the rabbinate before CBCO (as opposed to service provision) was mainstream in synagogues, and Rabbi Aaron received organizing training from the PICO Network throughout his career. Perhaps, as a result, Rabbi Aaron mentioned plans to organize his pulpit to aggressively tackle D.C.'s affordable housing and displacement crisis with a coalition of other organizations, reaching for the sort of impact that churches in other locales have achieved quite successfully

(Speer et al. 2010; Posadas, 2008). Other congregations seem more ambivalent about what satisfies the duties associated with *tzedek* and *tikkun olam*. This dynamic reflects a trend identified in the literature to employ the mystical concept as a cover to balance efforts that tackle the systemic and symptomatic issues of the day (Rosenthal, 2005). Whereas some participants called for “alleviating” injustice, other Jews in the community perceive Jewish social justice work as a mandate to eliminate root causes altogether.

Inclusive synagogue culture

Many participants found their organizing efforts to be inclusive simply because of their synagogue’s institutional culture. Clergy emphasized the need to design social justice initiatives that reflect the needs of different identity groups as well as the importance of intentionally selecting a diverse cohort of leaders to bring manifold voices into decision-making.

Some of the participants seemed to express that their synagogue naturally functions as an inclusive place to organize for social justice. They felt that their projects, particularly hands-on service, was easy enough for anyone to participate, regardless of identity. Joan in the Reform focus group described the synagogue’s Hunger Project in the following way:

People come in, and they do their packing of meals, and they get to talk, and they see what’s going on. We have little kids and big kids and grown-ups and oxygenarians all doing the same toward the same end. So, it fosters families. It’s easy, it’s organized, and people can do good at the same time. So it seems to encourage a lot of people to come.

Participants elaborated that since the synagogue’s commitment to social justice was just so pervasive and matter of fact, it seemed obvious that everyone and anyone participates in service and/or organizing. Similar to acts of service elsewhere, then, synagogues’ social justice work organically bridged social divides between congregants, bonding them based upon their shared mission, objectives, and values (Tesdaahl, 2014).

The clergy, on the contrary, expressed that a lot of work happens behind organizing efforts to create this atmosphere of inclusivity. Rabbi Zoey articulated that her synagogue functions as an inclusive place as a result of its entire history. From its founding, the Reform synagogue fostered a particular model for Jewish institutional life, and the inclusive dynamics observed today directly stem from this early and ongoing intention. She explains:

The congregation was founded by hippies in the sixties who were out in the streets protesting. Even though, we've grown and changed a lot since then, there's still those roots that you see something that's wrong in the world and you just do something about it...and when we see a need, we just are responsive to it.

The senior rabbi, Rabbi Daniel, describes this responsiveness to the ideas and needs of any congregant as a “participatory, hands-on, anybody come and get messily involved” model. At the Conservative synagogue, Rabbi Sarah adopted a very similar approach of listening and building upon her congregants’ interests. She defined community organizing as “asking what keeps you up at night...when you hear common threads, you help them find one another, and then you follow their lead on how they’re going to act on it.” In this way, the clergy embrace established tenets of community organizing, recognizing that the process of establishing inclusive justice movements is often fragmentary or messy (Rosenthal, 2005; Christens et al. 2010). As architects of this organized chaos, leaders seem very cognizant that they need to embrace and validate all of their congregants’ interests, seizing onto any and all passions and ideas to manifest the value of social justice.

In addition to creating responsive albeit disorderly movements for social change, clergy and staff also try to proactively design synagogue efforts that account for the abilities of a diverse congregation. As Naomi plans the annual days of service in which hundreds of people participate, she spends a lot of time thinking about how every volunteer can feel like they added value to their community. In the interview, she described:

It's important for us to recognize and to think about all of those different cohorts and to make sure that there is something for everyone to do so that they can all participate. Because what often happens is, you know, a family will come in or they'll call me and say, "You know, I have a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old. Is this something that's appropriate for me?" [I respond,] "Yeah, let me tell you about the projects that are appropriate for that age, for the smallest hands." Or I have someone who is elderly who says, "I'd love to come and help, but I can't feel my feet. Do you have anything where I'm sitting?" [I tell them,] "Yeah, absolutely, let me tell you about what those are. It's important for us to make sure that everybody has a place here."

Naomi additionally mentioned strategizing how to incorporate activities for people of various neurocognitive abilities. These actions indicate that this congregation does not simply want its rhetoric to talk about pitching a big tent for Jews to feel comfortable to practice their religion and culture. In its commitment to social justice, Naomi strives to take concrete steps toward building an inclusive institution, accounting for the worthy contributions of people of all different ages and abilities.

Beyond hands-on service, the interviewees demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusion in the higher-level thinking of their social justice work. Rabbi Zoey started fairly recently at her institution, and she discussed how she publicly offered an "open invitation" to anyone who wanted to meet with her about the synagogue's direction. In addition, she expressed that although some new clergy may immediately meet with each board member, she preemptively met with some of the institution's "squeaky wheels," wanting to embrace people on the periphery and bring them into the center of the synagogue's work. Rabbi Susan similarly plans ahead of time about how to conduct purposeful outreach. She expressed a desire, "to make sure that the organizing committee for those [events or campaigns] is representative for our entire population, so that's along, you know, gender lines and sexual identity and interfaith families and thinking about do we have seniors represented...do we have high school students, etcetera." If past CBCO efforts inform the work of D.C. synagogues, then this extended outreach

beyond established leaders to reach every subsector of the congregation will maximize participation (Tesdahl & Speer, 2015). These tactics not only uphold the aforementioned Jewish value of treating everyone as if they were created with equal worth but also augment the congregation's overall numbers and impact.

Although money represents a sensitive subject matter in any community, multiple participants also talked about steps they take to make Jews of any social class feel welcomed in their community. Three clergy members and one focus group participant focused on the idea that income bracket ought not to matter if someone wants to participate in a synagogue's struggle for justice. When asked about how to leverage the different privileges and advantages that Jews possess today, Rabbi Sarah articulated a careful balance struck within her synagogue:

[This synagogue] in and of itself is able to model what it's like for those who have more to support those who have less because we have a sliding scale of dues and there are lots of people who don't pay the full dues and some who don't pay any. [Likewise,] there's some people who have a lot, have an abundance of time, and for other people, time is a scarce resource and people who have an abundance show up and keep the place running for those who have scarcity. And the same with skills, we have people who volunteer to give Torah every week and people who could never read Torah. So in all these ways the Torah serves as a model to give when you're abundant and, um, be given to in your places of scarcity.

Eve from the Reform focus group echoed this sentiment:

People who don't or aren't capable of getting out there themselves for whatever reason are able to donate towards us. I think there's also people who are able and also want to and are able to give their time and energy as well as financial help, so we're very lucky in that sense and then people who can't give their money give their time.

Both of these responses recognize that there's no one correct way to show support to Jewish movements for social justice. Rather, they embrace an attitude where everyone participates toward a shared value and purpose in a way that accommodates their assets and expertise. Just as the mentoring program externally redistributed resources in pursuit of *tzedek*, this process

appears to rearrange capital within the synagogue, amplifying the impact of each individual's talents, time, and resources.

Finally, participants stressed that interfaith cooperation played a major role in their social justice work. Every interviewee mentioned strength in interfaith relationships, and it emerged as a point of emphasis during the Reform focus group. For example, Rabbi Aaron, Naomi, and Rabbi Susan noted their congregations' membership in the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), and they discussed how working across religious traditions generated the moral authority to persuade the city to move a temporary housing shelter into upper northwest. Rabbi Aaron especially expressed that interfaith relationships build the power necessary to sustain city-level change:

[In WIN], there are clergy relationships that I have developed, but in terms of like people to people relationships there have been some very deep relationships in the past three and a half years that have developed between northwest and southeast [DC]... what's on the horizon now is sort of a city-wide, WIN-focused, affordable housing, public housing campaign. That's going to be the campaign. Like that's it. It's just in its infant stages, but we're going to try to build a lot of momentum around this.

Rabbi Aaron's excitement about transitioning from ward-level organizing to a city-wide effort remains hypothetical at this time. This attitude reflects an ambition for his synagogue to build upon the ways that congregations elsewhere formed networks to pursue a bold agenda that cut across lines of race and class and reshaped policy (Tesdaahl, 2014; Speer et al., 2010). History attests to alliances between Jews and Christians, especially Black church leaders, producing momentous social change (Greenberg 2012). At each of these institutions, the community seeks to revive this dynamic within Washington, D.C., taking steps toward building norms of acceptance and reciprocity internally and externally. As Eve expressed in the Reform focus group, "[Social justice] is bringing the community together, not just our temple community...but also the Washington regional community interfaith, intra-faith, and that is also an appealing part

of doing social justice work in the congregation.” Regardless of institution, participants expressed much enthusiasm about fostering inclusive dialogue and action throughout the city, seeing it as a repository for boundless hope and an opportunity to produce tangible change.

Ongoing challenges

Most participants identified three challenges in social justice work: 1) time constraints, 2) unification around an agenda, and 3) the relationship between Jewish social justice and Israel. In contrast, at one congregation, participants identified racial justice as a challenge that they must explicitly address.

To begin, eight participants acknowledged the reality that people in Washington, D.C. quite simply lead very busy lives. As Stan bluntly stated, “Each of us must choose how much time we have to offer to do these various things, and we have to decide how we prioritize our time.” Granted, Jews in any locale juggle many different roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the participants felt that in D.C., where there are so many outlets to raise one’s voice, they struggle to consistently organize the various government workers, lobbyists, and activists who attend their congregation, not to mention the busy children, young adults, and parents navigating daily activities. Rabbi Daniel indicated uncertainty about how to hold the attention of a congregation where Jewish social justice represents just one of “many different commitments and allegiances.” Rabbi Susan mentioned tactics to coordinate carpools and other connections between congregants, employing a relational approach, but no participant seemed to know the catch-all solution to effectively accommodate changemaking into a Washingtonian’s schedule.

Beyond this logistical hurdle, the unique location of these synagogues in Washington, D.C. raised a lot of concerns about the politics of Jewish social justice work. Participants seemed well-versed in the fact that the federal government bars places of worship from participating in

partisan politics. Many people talked about wanting to act upon their values without endorsing specific politicians, parties, or legislation. To evade this problem, Rabbi Daniel says that he roots his criticisms of the current issues in Jewish values, avoiding a social justice fad that follows a particular political tide. At length, he described:

[We are] a Jewish, religious synagogue. We're not a political action committee...I kind of keep that in mind about what we're doing is part of the larger whole fabric of what we're about, of living out our lives religiously, Jewishly in this case through a venue of doing social justice...I've been accused in the last couple years of being very politically active. I don't think I've been politically active on issues. I think my activity has been directed towards what I call preserving American democracy, and the norms of what America is about. So, for me, one of those norms is that America is a nation of immigrants. That happens to be, maybe there's no hotter issue, going on right now, but for me that is a fundamental American value and it is a fundamental Jewish value...The fact that it [pursuing social justice] is rooted in the 2,000 or 3,000-year Jewish history and tradition of what our values are gives it strength and durability.

Again, Rabbi Daniel relies on history and text as the driver of his social justice work, and whenever he veers into a political lane, he anchors himself in Jewish tradition to make sure he is offering a time-tested, values-based argument. Nonetheless, the very notion that he has been “accused” of partisanship in the past few years attests to the disagreement within the Jewish community about how political to make the pulpit. Despite Rabbi Daniel citing Jewish tradition in his work, this congregation appears in disarray about how to posture its social justice work. While participants identified these efforts as essential to a rich Jewish life in abstract terms, bringing it into the tangible realities of our politics seems tenuous at best.

Lisa from the Conservative focus group added that not all members of her congregation want social justice work in their place of worship, preferring to see it as a sanctuary from the cut-throat environment of American politics. She explains:

There are some people who feel that a synagogue should not be...“political.” They want to come, and they want to pray...Some of us feel that certain things fall into the category of moral. Others say, “No that's political.” So, it's just a challenge...to make sure that

this [social justice] is available for people to really live their Judaism...on the other hand, some people don't want to see it all the time.

Lisa identifies that her synagogue, which sees *tzedeck* as a core pillar, straddles a careful balance between consistently and visibly building movements for justice and inclusion and ensuring that people who want to avoid talking about contentious issues feel like a welcomed constituency within the synagogue. Lisa, like Rabbi Daniel, appears to feel that social justice constitutes a cornerstone of her Jewish practice, but she remains aware that Judaism represents a multi-faceted entity, preferring not to impose her Jewish ideals, be they moral or political, onto others.

Likewise, Naomi expressed that her congregation focuses on hands-on service to avoid the tumultuous battleground about the role of Judaism in public life. Building upon the idea that government workers are especially sensitive to these issues, Naomi identified that while social justice represents a main pillar of the congregation's values, it exists in balance with the other functions of the synagogue. Describing this delicate equilibrium, Naomi conveyed:

One of the challenges that I think we face is really kind of the transition from hands-on service to advocacy...our senior rabbi often has said, "Well...how do you talk about Israel when you may have the Executive Director of AIPAC in the pew three rows behind the Executive Director of JStreet." So, when you have a congregation that is as big as ours in a city like D.C. where so many people work in some kind of political space...it can tricky because this is not our only mission here. It is important for us to recognize that our faith demands that we speak out and act upon social justice issues. However, this is a space where people go when they are healing and people go when their babies are born and their children are growing up and getting a Jewish education and being Bar and Bat Mitzvahed and, you know, there's a lot of different ways in which a congregation supports a congregant.

Naomi blatantly states how ambiguity about politically or emotionally-charged stances deters the congregation from the advocacy realm. One of the lay leaders at her congregation also recognized this limitation, asking, "I'm wondering if there's an absence of certain projects or issues because they are contentious. I wonder if we pick issues that are easier for everyone to come around, you know?" Agnes' description of the congregation playing it safe in its selection

of efforts resonates with the discomfort that some churchgoers felt about “comfortable” culture in the pews (Delehanty, 2016). In those cases, activists eventually confronted a certain complicity with the status quo they detected in their congregation, and it ruptured the community’s consensus about whether or not they were living out their values. While those divides do not appear as drastic at the D.C. synagogues, vacillating attitudes about the proper balance of piety and politics forebode ongoing tension, decreasing impact especially at the systemic level.

Naomi’s off-the-cuff example of the AIPAC-JStreet divide at her synagogue alludes to a major political consideration for each of these synagogues as they build movements for social justice. Between and within congregations, participants lacked a consensus about the proper role of Israeli sociopolitical issues in their social justice work. Rabbi Susan even expressed multiple opinions within one response to a question about the role of Israel in this work. She offers:

There are certainly things related to social justice that relate directly to Israel, but I think, well, this 3 Weddings [an Israeli marriage equality initiative] is an outgrowth of that...and we do a lot of work with Women of the Wall and working to support our Reform colleagues in Israel and share in their struggle for equality and to even be paid in the state of Israel... Israel holds a very special [role], and I would say it has its own pillar, and when it connects, then that’s great.

This statement seems to identify that certain domestic issues – LGBTQ rights, women’s equality, etc. –are fair game for advocacy and engagement. Broaching these topics will not disturb the general decorum of the largely progressive synagogue, yet she does not identify ways where issues of national security and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “connect.” At least for the time being, these matters seem too contentious to bring under the umbrella of pursuing justice vis a vis showing support for the Jewish state in a separate context.

Generally speaking, the clerical approaches to Israeli social justice concerns exist all along a vast continuum. Rabbi Aaron offered a more rigid distinction for his Conservative congregation:

We did a little bit of advocacy around African asylum seekers in Israel. We did that through our social justice work and our Israel committee. It was light organizing, really light...we're going to doing a wedding for Israelis who can't get married in Israel. We're doing that through our Israel committee, not our social justice committee, and we want our social justice committee to stay focused and local, a little bit national but really, local.

In total contrast, Rabbi Zoey said that she thinks her congregation was in a better position to speak consistently about their Jewish values because they refuse to circumvent the contentious dialogue around Israeli social justice. In fact, she indicated that alignment between the American Jewish left and the Israeli left represents a major learning opportunity. Given the current American political climate, she shared, "they could teach us a bit right now about what it means to exist in a system where you have your allies, but you're not in power."

Across the three synagogues, clergy presented several different takes on this question of Israel's role in their work. However, their ability to articulate why and how certain Israeli issues require their attention and others seem untouchable presents an ongoing challenge for building ideologically consistent Jewish movements. In the past, opponents to Jewish social justice campaigns exploited divisions about Israel and Zionism to undermine social change (Staub, 2004). History has shown that when ambiguity about a Jewish movement's values and orientation toward these issues manifests, the moral integrity of the entire Jewish progressive front appears all the more tenuous. Thus, as long as these concerns remain an open question, these synagogues risk encountering the same destructive forces.

Finally, only one congregation established racial justice as an ongoing challenge that they tackle head-on. Even though, other participants touted that they actively recruit diverse people to

serve on their organizing committees, Rabbi Aaron described the dynamics of race in social justice work as something that requires deep and consistent reflection and dialogue. The following statement captures his initial description of the difficulty of talking about race in this work and his response regarding no other clergy explicitly naming this challenge:

Race makes this very difficult. It's very hard to do social justice work today without a very sophisticated conversation about how race functions within this country both within the Jewish community and outside the Jewish community, and the Jewish community as a whole is still unwilling to have this conversation in an honest and transparent way, which will always make it different, difficult for us to be a part of the movements that are the most powerful forces for change...[The other clergy ignoring this issue] That's what I'm talking about. That is very sad...That's really disappointing.

Later in the interview, he explained how he started a racial justice working group that discussed Ta Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* as well as the documentary *Thirteenth*. Unlike at other synagogues, the group meets monthly Rabbi Aaron's efforts appear to respond to the fact that his synagogue exists in a city where many social issues are defined by the confluence of racial and income inequality (Naveen, 2017). He also recognizes that not all Jews come from Caucasian backgrounds, and in striving to build the most welcoming community possible, he wants the majority within his synagogue to educate themselves about what it means to live in a multiracial, multicultural Jewish community and city at-large.

Rabbi Aaron was not the only one at his congregation to identify this challenge. In the Conservative focus group, participants agreed that the congregation needed to take strategic steps toward including Jews of color and dismantling implicit biases about Jews and race. Emily, who participates in the racial justice working group, explained:

There's the big thing that you're always hearing about the history of Jews who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, but they're always seen as a separate group. [People think] there's Jews and then there's Blacks and Hispanics and Asians who are not Jews, and that's not true. So that's a mindset that we're constantly having to grapple with, and I think people are slowly coming around with it...[it's changing] at least in some of the stuff that we were doing in even changing some of the posters in the classrooms so

that it's not all white Jews and it's not all the same types of families...it's definitely a challenge, a culture shift...it's about making people aware of something they haven't been thinking about before.

Strikingly, she directly connects this issue to Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, and she appears cognizant of the reality that Jews, while a social minority, possess the ability to oppress other people, particularly Jews of color and people of color more broadly. Rabbi Sarah who works alongside Rabbi Aaron also offered an anecdote about how the ongoing nature of the racial justice working group shaped the synagogue's response to the Pittsburgh shooting. She noted that organizers at the synagogue were very vocal about the potential for increased security to adversely impact congregants of color, and the rabbis held a series of discussions to focus on racial bias and policing rather than evade the topic. As Jews of color co-led those conversations, she felt the synagogue truly formed a consensus to expand their police presence as well as increase racial sensitivity training for all security personnel. Participants referred to some concrete ways that seeing racial justice issues as an ongoing challenge transformed discourse and organizing at the synagogue. By increasing awareness about the sensitivity of Jews and race, these leaders developed a greater capacity to see shortcomings and blindspots within their institution and work toward creating a more just, inclusive movement.

While participants at other synagogues mentioned the need to engage with racism or recognized that Jews of color exist in their community, they neither explicitly named racial justice as a challenge in this work nor laid out such a tactical way to discuss this sensitive subject matter. Like Israel-Palestine issues, race represents another commonplace source of division in the progressive movement. As mentioned in the literature review, many scholars feel that the Jewish role in the Civil Rights movement and a very powerful political alliance deteriorated because Jews failed to proactively comprehend racism's systemic effects (Greenberg, 2012). For

some, the rise of Jewish CBCO presents the same hope and potential as Heschel and King linking arms to fight for justice, but if the present mimics the past, the absence of a continuing talk on race and the underlying tensions that boil beneath this silence will wreak havoc on any momentum for Jewish social justice.

Discussion

In Washington, D.C., Jewish social justice work takes many forms. Although all three congregations in this study draw from both text and history to justify their actions, they interpret their responsibilities in vastly different ways. There is no one way *how* Jews are building movements for social justice. The development of these movements depends largely on the vision of the clergy and lay leaders, particularly their attitudes about what it means for Jews to achieve transformational change.

Inclusive changemaking allows Jews to feel part of the community and exchange social capital. Like their counterparts at churches, participants acknowledged that congregational social justice efforts redistribute many forms of capital in communities (Foster, 2014; Wood & Warren, 2002). They downplay financial differences in their work, requesting that people contribute whatever assets they have, be they monetary, time-based, or skill-based to advance the community's shared mission. They also critically think about outreach when putting together a given effort, differing from past efforts where favoritism enabled a congregational in-crowd yet deterred the overall efficacy of their work (Tesdaahl & Speer, 2015). Building an institutional culture responsive to everybody's role in changemaking empowers D.C. synagogues to maximize participation and impact on a given project.

However, time constraints and disagreement about taking bold positions limit how these institutions address root causes of issues, driving them instead toward direct service and raising

awareness. Each synagogue showed a capacity to work toward policy issues to some extent, but only one expressed a commitment to use its joint power to redefine the paradigm of a given issue. At all three institutions, contentious topics, including partisan politics, race, and Israel presented areas of discord between and within institutions. These debates, particularly as it relates to confronting the Zionist question and racial justice issues, represent similar tensions to the faults of Jewish activism during the Civil Rights era (Greenberg, 2012; Staub, 2004). Each synagogue showed a robust potential to make change in their neighborhood, from making over a million of meals for the hungry to relocating a homeless shelter into northwest D.C., but they equivocate in the exact ways that they tactically explore and pursue social justice in relationship to controversial issues or values.

Recommendations

Congregations would be well-served to clarify their theory of change, explicitly identifying how and if they tackle systemic problems and address contentious issues. Ideally, such a theory of change would identify whether the synagogue aimed to focus on one issue at a time or took a multi-faceted approach. In addition, it would provide further context and clarity to the intersection of a synagogue's charitable work and its commitment to long-term transformation and social justice. Perhaps, these synagogues ought to outline the apportionment of time and resources to various kinds of social justice work. One useful framework to discuss the different types of service and civic engagement is the Stanford University Pathways Model (Schnaubelt, n.d.), which enumerates and describes six distinct ways of pursuing social change. Outlining the extent to which a synagogue pursues change along each of these pathways may enable clergy and lay leaders to approach this work in a more targeted, organized manner.

Moreover, a theory of change would articulate the boundaries around how the congregation incorporates Israel and the question of politics into its work. By hosting listening sessions and facilitating constructive dialogue, synagogues may reach an institutional consensus about where these issues fit within their work. Without this ambiguity, leaders may more effectively navigate these topics in ways that accommodate their community's values and comfort levels, avoiding the hot-tempered divides that derailed past movements.

Finally, these synagogues can expand their current efforts to build an inclusive culture by consistently and directly talking about race. Issues to breach may include the effects of racism on Jews during the Civil Rights Era, the current treatment of Jews of color, ties between racial and economic inequality in Washington, D.C., or the overall history of racism in America. Perhaps, the racial working group started by Rabbi Aaron presents a model that the other synagogues may adopt to begin this ongoing conversation.

Conclusion

This study reports how three D.C. synagogues engage the potential for Jews to organize as a community and act upon the value of *tzedek*. In this exploration, I found that Jews lack a uniform approach to this tradition of changemaking, but as was seen in Pittsburgh, participants demonstrated a determination to actively and collectively liberate the society that surrounds them. This study compares their approach to one another, identifying areas of contrast, ambivalence, or difficulty as expressed by participants and as reflected in the existing literature.

For participating institutions, these findings present the opportunity to reflect on the current quality of social justice efforts. This chance to articulate intentional choices, strengths, and weaknesses of this work allows for ongoing conversations about future developments, and these findings may serve as a springboard for strategic planning within these synagogues. In

collecting this data, I offer a snapshot of how three synagogues in the nation's capital attempt to live out their Jewish values. Perhaps, as one of the first studies to exclusively look at Jewish CBCO, the conclusions may prove useful as clergy and congregational leaders throughout the U.S. seek to better understand and develop their synagogue's pursuit of *tzedek*.

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Appendix A
Participant Information
List of Participants

Name for Study	Which synagogue?	Interview or Focus Group
Rabbi Zoey	Reform Synagogue A	Interview
Rabbi Daniel	Reform Synagogue B	Interview
Rabbi Susan	Reform Synagogue B	Interview
Naomi (social justice coordinator, full-time staff)	Reform Synagogue B	Interview
Rabbi Aaron	Conservative Synagogue A	Interview
Rabbi Sarah	Conservative Synagogue A	Interview
Agnes	Reform Synagogue B	Focus Group
Eve	Reform Synagogue B	Focus Group
Beth	Reform Synagogue B	Focus Group
Stan	Reform Synagogue B	Focus Group
Joan	Reform Synagogue B	Focus Group
Lisa	Conservative Synagogue A	Focus Group
Emily	Conservative Synagogue A	Focus Group

Sample Demographics versus Jewish Population in Washington Metropolitan Area

Category	Sample Demographics	D.C. Metro Area Demographics
Mean Age	50	47
Denomination	73% Reform; 27% Conservative	29% Reform; 21% Conservative; 5% Orthodox; 3% Reconstructionist; 3% Other; 39% None
Gender	87% female; 13% male;	51% female; 49% male
Race	8% identify as Jews of color or being of Latino/Hispanic descent	7% identify as Jews of color or being of Latino/Hispanic descent
Sexual Orientation	0% identify as LGBTQ	7% identify as LGBTQ
Educational Attainment	Mother's highest level of educational attainment*: 50% graduate/professional degree; 25% some graduate education; 12.5% undergraduate degree; 12.5% some undergraduate degree	Respondents' own highest educational attainment: 23% PhD/JD/Law/Medical degree; 37% graduate degree; 32% undergraduate degree; 8% less than undergraduate degree; 1% other

* Mother's highest level of education attainment was used in the background survey as an indicator of social class.

Source: Krasner Aronson, J., Brookner, M.A., Boxer, M., Saxe, L. (2018) *2017 Greater Washington Jewish Community Demographic Study*. Retrieved from Brandeis University: <http://www.brandeis.edu/ssri/pdfs/communitystudies/DCJewishCommunityStudy.pdf>

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Adam Graubart, and I am a senior studying Human Services/Social Justice and Judaic Studies at George Washington University. I appreciate you taking the time to provide your insight for my senior thesis. I seek to answer the following question: How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for social justice? My objective for our interview today is to understand the approaches and strategies you or others you know adopt to engage social justice work in the congregation. Before we start, I want to draw your attention to a few items on the consent form:

- Informed Consent: This form outlines the purpose of the study and associated risks and benefits of participation, as well as provides contact information for you to follow up if you have any questions or change your mind about participating in the study.
- I want to remind you that you can stop or pause this interview at any time without penalty. You are not obligated to answer any questions, and you also can ask for clarification on any questions you don't understand.
- I will be recording this interview so I don't miss out on any of the valuable information you provide. After I've transcribed the interview and completed data analysis, the recording will be deleted. At the end of the interview, I will ask whether you feel comfortable using your real name and synagogue or whether you would like to use a pseudonym. Please know that if you want to keep your identity anonymous, I will remove any identifying information in your transcript. I will assign you a pseudonym, and I will use it if I quote you in my final thesis or presentation. I hope this choice and level of protection allow you to be as forthright and honest with me as possible.

What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, I will begin audio-recording the interview at this time. This is Adam Graubart interviewing _____.

1. How do you define social justice?
 - a. What from Judaism drives you to do social justice work?
 - b. What led you to want to organize communities within the congregation as opposed to connecting individuals to activist causes?
2. What frameworks do you incorporate from entities outside of the Jewish tradition when you do this work?

3. What do you identify as major challenges related to social justice work within your congregation?
4. How do you create social justice efforts that are inclusive for congregants of different social identities?
5. What strategies do you employ to work through conflicts that arise due to differences in social identity?
 - a. Please provide an example of when you used these strategies.
6. Judaism teaches about *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) as a key component of Jewish social justice work. How does your synagogue's social justice efforts produce a more whole world?
7. Jews in the United States today approach this work with various degrees of social and economic privilege – advantages that some people have and others lack. How are the resources of congregants leveraged to restructure and repair the world?
8. The Anti-Defamation League marked a 57% rise in anti-Semitic incidents between 2016 and 2017 (Anti-Defamation League, 2018). How does the ongoing force of anti-Semitism affect your approach to Jewish social justice?
9. Where does organizing the Jewish community on global social issues play into your social justice efforts?
 - a. In particular, how do you view the congregation's work that focuses on the state of Israel as related to social justice?
10. Now, I'd like to discuss the extent to which your congregation works with different kinds of partners in the community. As I name different kinds of organizing communities, please describe how your synagogue collaborates with them in social justice projects:
 - a. Other religious congregations
 - b. local, DC-focused Jewish organizations
 - c. national Jewish organizations
 - d. local, DC-focused organizations outside of the Jewish community
 - e. national organizations outside of the Jewish community
 - f. non-Jewish specific non-profit organizations/NGOs
11. Is there anything else you would like to add before the conclusion of this interview?

Thank you for answering these questions for my research and meeting with me today. I will now turn off the recording.

Finally, I would like to collect some demographic information for this interview. The purpose of this information is to understand how the composition of participants in this study compares to the Jewish population in DC. You are not obligated to complete or share the demographic information with me. Just mark the option "prefer not to respond." However, I do need to know whether you consent to your name or pseudonym being used. If you do not indicate whether or not to use your real name, I will assume that you want me to use your pseudonym.

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

Hello, my name is Adam Graubart, and I am a senior studying Human Services/Social Justice and Judaic Studies at George Washington University. I appreciate you taking the time to provide your insight for my senior thesis. I seek to answer the following question: How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for social justice work? My objective for our conversation today is to understand the perceptions of your congregation's efforts to actualize the Jewish value of social justice and perceived challenges associated with that work. Before we start, I want to draw your attention to a few items on the consent form:

- **Informed Consent:** This form outlines the purpose of the study and associated risks and benefits of participation, as well as provides contact information for you to follow up if you have any questions or change your mind about participating in the study.
- I want to remind you that you can stop or pause this interview at any time without penalty. You are not obligated to answer any questions, and you also can ask for clarification on any questions you don't understand. I will also make myself available to discuss any questions about the study at the conclusion of the focus group.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything shared should remain confidential and not be discussed after our the focus group is completed. While this is the commitment I am asking us all to make to one another, there is no way to ensure that everyone will honor this commitment. Hence, I will note that participation risks someone sharing information outside of the group and that if there is something very personal, I ask that you refrain from sharing this in the group. If you desire to share additional, more intimate information with me, you may share it with me at the end of the focus group. From my end, I will remove/replace your name with a pseudonym in data analysis, interpretation, and representation in my written thesis and any oral presentations unless you wish that I use your real name.
- **Recording:** I will be recording this focus group so I don't miss out on any of the valuable information you provide. After I've transcribed the focus group and completed data analysis, the recording will be deleted. At the end of the focus group, I will ask whether you feel comfortable using your real name and synagogue or whether you would like to use a pseudonym. Please know that if you want to keep your identity anonymous, I will remove any identifying information in your transcript. I will assign you a pseudonym, and I will use it if I quote you in my final thesis or presentation. I hope this choice and level of protection allow you to be as forthright and honest with me as possible.
- Before we begin, I also want to remind everyone that my goal in convening this group is to encompass diverse voices and opinions from across the congregation. For this reason, I expect that participants communicate respectfully with one another, even in disagreement. Please try to refrain from interrupting or raising your voice toward one another.
- Finally, I encourage a plurality of voices to come into our conversation, avoiding one or two participants dominating the discussion.

Now, we are going to go around so that everybody may choose a pseudonym.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, I will start audio-recording the focus group at this time. This is Adam Graubart conducting a focus group with the _____ group(s) at _____.

1. How do you define social justice?
 - a. What from Judaism drives you to pursue this work?
 - b. For this particular project, what led you to want to organize communities within the congregation as opposed to connecting individuals to external activist causes?

2. What do you identify as the major challenges related to social justice work within your congregation?

3. What is the focus of your group's social justice project or efforts?
 - a. Please describe the short-term goals of your group in terms of actualizing the Jewish value of social justice.
 - b. What steps have been taken to achieve those short-term goals?

4. Judaism teaches about *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) as a key component of Jewish social justice work. How does your synagogue's social justice efforts produce a more whole world?

5. What does it mean to create an inclusive social justice project?
 - a. How do you create social justice efforts that are inclusive?
 - b. What strategies do you employ to work through conflicts that arise due to differences in those backgrounds?
 - i. Please provide an example of when you used these strategies.

6. Jews in the United States today approach this work with various degrees of social and economic privilege – advantages that some people have and others lack. How are the resources of congregants collectively leveraged to restructure and repair the world?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add before the conclusion of this focus group?

Thank you for answering these questions for my research and meeting with me today. I will now turn off the recording.

Before you leave, I would like to collect some demographic information for this focus group. The purpose of this information is to understand how the composition of participants in this study compares to the Jewish population in DC. This survey will also ask if you prefer that I use your pseudonym or your actual name in the study. You are not obligated to share this information with me and have the option to mark "prefer not to respond." If you do not indicate whether or not to use your real name, I will assume that you want me to use your pseudonym.

Appendix D

Demographic Survey

Research Study: Pursuing *Tzedek*: Building Movements for Jewish Social Justice by DC Synagogues : Adam Graubart, supervised by Dr. Emily Morrison

Thank you for your participation in this study. As this study focuses on inclusion as a key element of Jewish social justice, I would like to collect information about how my sample of social justice leaders compares to demographics of the Jewish population in DC. However, know that you may choose to stop participation at any time, and have the option to contact us after data-collection to have your demographic information removed from the study if you so choose. You may contact us at agraubart@gwu.edu or emily_m@gwu.edu.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Background Information

What is your age: _____

How many years have you been a member/attended this synagogue: _____

How many years, as a member of this synagogue have you been actively involved in this or other social justice initiatives at this synagogue: _____

Please describe your race/ethnic identity (if you identify as multi-racial, check as many as apply)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian-American/Pacific Islander
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to respond

Please describe your gender identity

- Male
- Female
- Transgender/Nonbinary
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to respond

Please select your sexual orientation

- Straight
- Gay/Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Questioning or Queer
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to respond

Please identify your mother's highest completed level of education:

- Some high school and/or GED
- High school diploma
- Some undergraduate
- Undergraduate degree
- Some graduate degree
- Master's or Professional Degree (including medical or law degrees)
- Post-graduate/Doctoral Degree

Please Select One of the Following Options For How You Are Represented in the Discussion of this Research:

- I want to *continue using my pseudonym and remove personal identifiers* (e.g my congregation, my rabbi etc.) *in reporting this data.*
- I want the researcher to *use my pseudonym and remove most personal identifiers*, but *my congregation's name can be mentioned if I am quoted.*
- I am okay with the researcher *using my real name and congregation in the research.* (Please write real name and congregation here:
_____).

Appendix E

Sample Recruitment Email for Interview

Recruitment Email that Goes Directly to Clergy/Staff:

Dear _____,

I hope you are doing well today.

I wanted to contact you about my senior honors thesis in Human Services and Social Justice at GW. _____ (name of synagogue) has agreed to participate in an IRB-approved research study that will help me answer the following question, How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work?

I want to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups at three synagogues across Washington, DC. To answer this question, I would like to request an interview with you.

According to your synagogue's website and after consulting clergy and staff, I identified you as a social justice leader. Participation in the study will take no more than 60 minutes of your time, and will involve your engagement in an interview answering questions about your vision, strategies, and challenges related to organizing for Jewish social justice.

I had the following date and time in mind: _____. For your convenience, I will meet you at your congregation, and I am flexible in terms of working with your schedule. To maintain confidentiality, you will have the option to select a pseudonym that I would use for the data analysis and final report.

Please review the consent form attached to this email, which further details the purpose and associated risks and benefits of the study. Then, I request that you reply to this email to confirm the date and time for your interview. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email me at agraubart@gwu.edu

I look forward to collaborating as I try to uncover how community organizing takes shape in synagogues.

Thank you for your considerations.

Appendix F

Sample Recruitment Email for Focus Group

Recruitment Email to Focus Group Leaders:

Dear _____,

I hope you are doing well today.

I wanted to contact you about my senior honors thesis in Human Services/Social Justice at GW. _____ (name of synagogue) has agreed to participate in an IRB-approved research study that will help me answer the following question, How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work?

To answer this question, I want to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups at three synagogues across Washington, DC. I consulted clergy and staff, and they identified you as the leader of a project that is relevant to the purpose of this study. If you are willing, I need your help to coordinate a focus group with members of the social justice project that you oversee.

The focus group will last for up to 90 minutes, and I would ideally want 10 people from your working group to participate. The questions will ask you to speak about your vision, strategies, and challenges for organizing for social justice within the synagogue. To maintain confidentiality, you will have the option to use a pseudonym that I use for the data analysis and discussion of the final results.

For your convenience, I will meet you at your congregation, and I am flexible in terms of working with your schedule. I'd be willing to conduct the focus group before, during, or after your regularly scheduled meeting time.

Therefore, would you be willing to send me 2-3 dates and times that work for your working group during the next few weeks?

Once we determine a date and time, would you be willing to forward the email text below to members of your working group? If you would prefer to offer me a list of the members with whom you work so we may contact them about participation in the study directly, please forward their names and email addresses. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email me at agraubart@gwu.edu

I look forward to collaborating as I try to uncover how community organizing takes shape in synagogues.

Thank you for your considerations.

PLEASE FORWARD THE INFORMATION BELOW:

Dear _____ members,

My name is Adam Graubart, and I am working with _____ to conduct research on how members of synagogues organize for social justice. I am writing to request your participation in my study as part of my senior honors thesis for Human Services and Social Justice at The George Washington University.

I welcome anyone who self-identifies as an active member of this project. Specifically, we are seeking individuals who attend social justice organizing/programming at this synagogue multiple times per year.

Participation in the study will take no more than 90 minutes of your time, and will involve your engagement in a focus group answering questions about your vision, strategies, and challenges related to organizing for Jewish social justice. There will be few other individuals in the focus group. This is an IRB approved study, and you will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Please review the consent form attached to this email, which further details the purpose and associated risks and benefits of the study. To participate, please email agraubart@gwu.edu The focus group will occur on _____ at _____. We will meet on-site at your congregation for your convenience.

If you have any questions or need clarification, please email me at agraubart@gwu.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix G

Informed Consents for Participation in a Research Study

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

Page 1 of 4

Title of Research Study: Pursuing Tzedek: Building Movements for Jewish Social Justice in DC Synagogues

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study? We invite you to take part in a research study because your congregation identifies social justice as a core institutional value and works to advance social justice projects. You were identified as a leader or volunteer who holds existing knowledge and experience regarding the congregation's social justice work and can reflect upon it in detail.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you. You may ask all the questions you want before you decide whether to participate.
- Participation is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision not to take part or to stop your participation will not be held against you.
- You may take this document home to read or to discuss with your family members or doctor before deciding to take part in this research study

Who can I talk to if I have questions? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at emily_m@gwu.edu. This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). You may talk to them at 202-994-2715 or via email at ohrirb@gwu.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team or if you wish to talk to someone independent of the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study*Page 2 of 4*

Why is this research being done? Starting in the 1990's, some synagogues began to incorporate community organizing and advocacy into their work, viewing these efforts as direct expressions of Jewish values. However, contemporary research regarding social justice projects in synagogues does not thoroughly examine how this work takes form, particularly in light of the elevated economic and social status of Jewish Americans that evolved over the last sixty years. Thus, this study addresses the following question: How are Jewish institutions in DC building movements for inclusive, equitable, and impactful social justice work?

This question involves defining inclusion, equity, and impact. I define inclusion as the degree to which synagogue social justice movements intentionally recruit and reflect the demographic diversity of the contemporary Jewish population and how organizers constructively navigate conflict across different social identities. I will then examine equity and impact according to how synagogues adopt a systemic approach to social justice, as opposed to a symptomatic one. An equitable lens reimagines the social framework in pursuit of a societal transformation in which everyone possesses access to opportunities to live and thrive. As a result of this study, Jewish leaders may gain insight about various strategies, assets, and challenges facing Jewish communities that intend to mobilize and confront the social and economic inequalities facing American society.

How long will I be in the study? We expect that you will be in this research study for 60-90 minutes.

How many people will take part in this research study? We expect up to 75 people will take part in the entire study.

What happens if I agree to be in this research? You will take place in a one-time interview or focus group. The interview should last approximately 60 minutes, and the focus group will last approximately 90 minutes. During that time, we will discuss questions related to the following subjects: motivations for doing this work within the congregation, strategies for inclusive organizing, conflict resolution tactics, and perceptions of achieved longstanding transformation. I also want to inquire about perceived challenges about this type of ongoing work within the synagogue. Finally, in the interviews, I want to understand how entities outside of the synagogue influence or complicate strategies for this work. This research will be done with Adam Graubart, an undergraduate research from George Washington University. The interview or focus group will occur at **Insert Synagogue Name** on **Insert Date** at **Insert time**.

To retain the maximum amount of valuable information, this discussion will be recorded. In transcribing this interview, the researcher will assign you a pseudonym and remove any information that reveals your personal identity when transcribing the interview/focus group. Unless you're your real identity to be used, this pseudonym would be what is used during transcription and the case that a direct quote from this conversation is pulled for the final research report or presentation. However, original data and the key between pseudonyms and real names will be contained on a password-protected file in the possession of the Dr. Emily Morrison.

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study*Page 3 of 4*

What happens if I agree to be in research, but later change my mind? You may refuse to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

If you decide to leave the research, please means not answering a specific question in an interview or focus group or leaving the focus group to relocate to a designated location in the building where no further questions will be asked. Upon completion of the interview or focus group, the researcher will be available to debrief the study for all participants at this designated location.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? In focus groups and interviews, participants may discuss topics that are uncomfortable or provoke strong emotions or passions. In discussing social injustice, participants may additionally be reminded of personal connections to various issue areas. There is also a risk of loss of confidentiality.

The risks and discomforts associated with participation in this study are not expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance or routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

What happens if I believe I am injured because I took part in this study? You should promptly notify the research team in the event of any injury as a result of being in the study. If you believe that you have been injured from taking part in this study, you should seek medical treatment from GWU Hospital and/or the GWU MFA or through your physician or treatment center of choice. Care for such injuries will be billed in the ordinary manner to you or your insurance company.

You will not receive any financial payments from GWU, GWU Hospital and/or the GWU MFA for any injuries or illnesses. You do not waive any liability rights for personal injury by signing this form.

Will being in this study help me in any way? We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include the opportunity to reflect on the quality of your synagogue's social justice efforts. This chance to articulate intentional choices, strengths, and weaknesses of this work allows for ongoing conversations about future developments, and these conversations may serve as a springboard for strategic planning within the synagogue.

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study *Page 4 of 4*

What happens to my information collected for the research? To the extent allowed by law, we limit your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information

. The privilege of confidentiality does not extend to information about sexual or physical abuse of a child. If any member of the research team has or is given such information, he or she is required to report it to the appropriate authority or agency, such as child protective services, a law enforcement agency, or your State's toll-free child abuse reporting hotline. The obligation to report includes past and current alleged or reasonably suspected abuse as well as past or current known abuse. Examples of such abuse include physically harming your child or having inappropriate sexual contact with your child.

De-identified transcripts of the data will be available for future research upon permission of the Investigator. Original data, transcripts, and code and identifier keys will be stored on a password-protected file belonging to the Investigator.

Are there any costs for participating in this research? There are no costs associated with participation in this research.

Will I be paid for my participation in this research? If you agree to take part in this research study, you will not be paid for participation.

By signing below, you agree that the above information has been explained to you and you have had the opportunity to ask questions. You understand that you may ask questions about any aspect of this research during the course of the study and in the future. Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Printed name of subject: _____

Signature of subject: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H Sample Transcript

Interview with Rabbi Zoey
November 6, 2018

AG: Testing. Okay we're good. Uh this is Adam Graubart interviewing Rabbi Zoey at XXXX.

RZ: Fabulous.

AG: Um so, to start, how do you define social justice?

RZ: Um, I think that social justice for the way that I understand it is, um, is the way that which we manifest the world as we want it to be as opposed to the world that it is, um, and so social justice is the way in which we live in and act within the world as it is in order to bring about the world as we want it to be.

AG: So like a restructuring of the world to make it align with our ideals?

RZ: Yeah, I mean I think, like, that it is not just a restructuring because social justice is also about awareness and understanding, um, and it can be really easy to only live in the world as we want it to be and hope it to be and social justice is also about sitting and saying like what are all of the ways that we're not living in the world that we want and we are living in the world as it is, and that it is as important a part of social justice as, um, actually doing the work or else we're doing things in a vacuum or we're doing social action or we're, like, doing *tikkun olam* in kind of a very, um, parve sense without being rooted in questions of oppression and societal injustices. Um, that like we do not know the core of it and we are not facing ourselves, so I think social justice is as much as about also acting toward others but also doing inner work and understanding like how you are a part of something, or, you know, what you, um or what you can do for who you are as opposed to like, you know, as opposed to like just doing what feels good to you or what feels right.

AG: So making the world how it should be versus settling for what is okay?

RZ: It's more aspirational than that. It's the act of working towards –

AG: Yeah?

RZ: It's like working towards working towards the world as it should.

AG: The like laborial process of getting toward the world as it should be?

RZ: Yes. That's social justice.

AG: Okay, um, and you had mentioned *tikkun olam*, I was wondering if there were specific elements of Judaism that pull you into or ground your definition of social justice?

RZ: Um, I spend a lot of time studying the prophets, and that's actually, I'd say, um, a lot of my thinking comes from how the prophets talk about, um, their relationship with their ritual practices. Um, you know, I think the problem with *tikkun olam* is how we talk about now. Is that that's what we talk now instead of trying to understand that it should be both and it is both. It's about like the prophets will say something like, "God doesn't want your sacrifices if you are also walking by the poor person on the street and not helping them" or if you, you know, or if you are unjust and taking advantage of those most vulnerable in your society. But it is not just what the prophets said, but we also have to do everything else. I think about, I think about that a lot. It's not just a social justice only Judaism, but actually that social justice is part of a rich Jewish life, um, because it's what our prophets demanded of us, um, but I also think that it is understanding that Jews have always, the way that Rabbi XXXX says it I think is something like, have always been on the advanced course, like the Torah is the advanced course of ethics for the ancient Near East, and um, we have a responsibility to always be on the advanced course for ethics and um, in our kind of unique place, especially now, thinking about where the Jewish community is situated, it is like our responsibility to continue to be on the advanced course for ethics and that's sort why—

AG: So a combination of, like, a prophetic legacy that compels us to live a rich Jewish life and a historical legacy of being at the forefront of, uh, living an ethical life, as well?

RZ: Yeah, I think to some extent, it's just, um, like I guess a way that I, you know, I read a lot of texts both Torah and like the Halachic texts as what are the aspirations that are encoded in them. And so, maybe an example, I spoke at an interfaith kind of vigil surrounding the family separation and essentially, what I spoke about was kind of a reading of the Hagar and Ishmael narrative of like and a representative of God, a messenger of God interceding when it looked like there was going to be family separation there as kind of a proof text and sort of a way to say, like, in the way that I read text God doesn't want there to be family separated. No where in the Torah does it say God wants families to be together, um, but that like that's finding the kind of aspirational message embedded in our texts. Um, many of them are about the way the world should be and kind of trying to read it as that way. Um, somehow I just think that's just what it means, that's just what it means to be a Jew. Like it's a little basic, but I think that it's that there are certainly principles that we can pull out, but to be a Jew, to be a good person, to be a good Jew means to be a good person, and to be a good person means to be aware of how you're acting in the world and what your impact is.

AG: Mhm, okay, um, thank you. And going off of that a little bit further, what about this, your idea of Jewish social justice, has pulled you towards a congregation where the organizing for social justice happens within the congregation and is a collective project within that congregation?

RZ: I think one of the things that drew me to XXXX always has been the fact that it does not just talk about social justice and having certain values but really has figured out how to live those values in a real way. It's not just talking about racial justice, but it's also having a congregation that appears diverse when you look at it, which is just an indicator that, you know, that we are doing the work ourselves also and taking looks at ourselves and how we can be more welcoming, and um, more aware of racial identity and not just saying, oh let's, like, help toward the causes of

racial injustice, and I think that is pretty representative on all the areas that XXXX has chosen to work. Like with the example of our recovery home, saying we have the ability to do something, so let's do it, right? I think very much because the congregation was founded by hippies in the sixties who were out in the streets protesting, um, even though we've grown and changed a lot since then, there's still those roots that you see something that's wrong in the world and you just do something about it, and I think that's the attitude that I really like about XXXX. Years ago, I remember reading something that Rabbi XXXX had written about getting rid of mitzvah day that's worth checking out. Um, like, that we should not be training our young people, that you, um, like, you do social justice or social action on one day of the year and it's however many peanut butter and jelly sandwiches you can make that day, um, or like however many bags of, you know, toiletries you can put together, but that social justice is something we have to be doing all the time, and when we see a need, we just are responsive to it.

AG: So you're pulled to a congregation that walks the walk each and every day?

RZ: Yeah

AG: And does that work internally in addition to externally?

RZ: I think so, yeah. And I think, um, I think, we, because it's a very lay driven congregation also

there's an ability to say that when people are moved, people will act, and we'll support them in however we can. So with XXXX, sponsoring a refugee family, was really born out of our parent group sitting and saying after the election, saying we have to do something, what can we do? And that's what they decided to do, but it was really their own group on their own. And the same with our gun violence prevention group which I have now taken over from Rabbi XXXX as the rabbinic liaison, but really, it was a congregational-driven effort saying we care, we want our Jewish community to care, what can we do? Um, and in a lot of ways, that kind of openness to people saying they want to do something and galvanizing around a particular effort, um, versus having a social action committee which I don't we have that many synagogues have, it just means that we are kind of reflexive and responsive as to when things come up.

AG: Yeah, um, and are, do you see XXXX using any frameworks or do you incorporate any frameworks that exist outside of Jewish traditions when you look at social justice and synagogue organizing?

RZ: Um, so I have training in organizing, um, which I use when I need, when I need it. I think in some ways organizing really works for synagogues, um, in some ways, um, it, it, how do I put this? I use a lot of tools I learned through organizing about having one-on-ones, about trying to understand what's driving people instead of just asking people about them, um, as a way to help people figure out what they care about. I think, um, you know, and I think that, we, synagogues can use those both for social justice issues and also just what do people care about in your community and how can we move them towards things? Um, I think, if done right, organizing can be a method of pastoral care. Um, like, what more could you give someone than the ability, um, the ability or, like, empower them to be able to act for themselves and for the things that they care about to change their reality? And so um, I think that is some ways that I think about it,

but you have to be very careful because often, organizing if not done right, can see very, um, manipulative or inorganic. Like, if you know the ask is going to be made at the end of the conversation, like, it can, it has come across to me in different organizing settings I've been to, like, you don't really want to get to know me, you wanted to make me feel as though I was opening up to you so that you can then make my ask, so we have to really careful. I also think that organizing is slow, painfully slow, um, and, because you really have to get everyone on board, and in some ways, um, that's where the organizing model as it is kind of falls apart, and we could actually use, uh, some sort of hybrid model that's really for synagogues. But I know where an organizing campaign has really worked for XXXX, we did a listening campaign, maybe six or seven years ago, and uh, that was not necessarily social justice based, and I think what came out of it was that people were looking for more small groups and more community. Now, what is our entire aging program is a like the people, the older people in the congregation were feeling like there was nothing for them. Now we have, basically every day, there is a program for like the 65 and up set, that's here. And it all came out of that. I think there were also a few other initiatives that have fizzled a little bit, but all that was run by Rabbi XXXX, who has since left but does organizing work for the Union for Reform Judaism.

AG: Alright, um, you had said you had some prior experience with organizing. Could you specify where or from what sources?

RZ: Um, there's a class for clergy in training that's run by JOIN. The JOIN Organizing Institute Network or something.

AG: In Boston?

RZ: Yeah, well they come down to New York and do a class and it's once a week, I think for five months, six months.

AG: And did that tie into, like, a specific campaign or was it more learning about how clergy can organize in theory?

RZ: You can do either one. They don't require a project. A lot of people do a project, but I was also writing my thesis while I was taking the class, so I chose not to do a project. Um, but certain people do.

AG: I can understand that time commitment.

RZ: Yes.

AG: Um, alright, I was just curious what you meant by organizing experience.

RZ: Um, I've also, like, done different, I was a part of the early stages of the listening campaign that was done here.

AG: Okay

RZ: Um, participated in, um, other people's organizing things, um, and, um, kind of at different stages. Um, like I have been interested in community organizing. I did some work in Connecticut with the synagogue I was interning at in Connecticut, I like to go to their organizing; they have a great organizing model that's interfaith in that area of Connecticut that's called Connect. Um, that's good, really good, and so I did some work with them. I just haven't, um, I have found more that I take the tools of organizing, and I apply them to my work more than I have taken the entire structure of organizing and considered myself, um, like, an organizing rabbi and there are certainly those, um, who are really like rabbis who organize and that's how they understand themselves.

AG: Yeah. Do you know any specific tools that you refer to or identify with something you do at XXXX?

RZ: Um, well I said, like the training to do on one-on-ones, um, power analysis, like, um, trying to figure out, um when you look at a congregation. One, trying to reframe power in different ways so that it's not a negative but looking at congregation and mapping where the power is and who you need to talk to in, um, in different ways. Um, through the course, I think my understanding of organizing as pastoral care is something that, um, really helped me. Some of the, um, the work that I entered into with the organizing group is actually really interesting because, um, from my understanding, they're toward the end of an organizing cycle and trying to figure out where I fit in as a new person in that and trying to let them process on their own. And I mean like, the thing is and this is the same thing with the instructors of the organizing course, who are both professional organizers, who said a lot of organizing, um, especially in the synagogue or the faith world, is common sense; it just has a name to it. Yes, you should talk to people. Yes, you should find out what people care about and get them to move about the things they care about instead of the things you care about. Like that's, I mean I guess it's not common sense to everyone or else someone wouldn't need to say it, but that has always made sense to me. So those kinds, how you have those kinds of conversations, there's probably the piece of paper over here, I was just teaching someone about like um (looking for paper), whatever. How you have one-on-ones with them, which is something after a lot of my one-on-ones, you like have a stick figure (drawing stick figure and pointing to different parts of body) and you, it's like what's on your mind, what do they care about, what are they doing, where do want to go like feet, what's in their gut, what's in their heart, um, which is a really good way of understanding conversations with people, um, and being able to take it from oh that was a nice conversation I had with someone to like I'm sitting and listening, thinking about, like, what keeps you up at night, what, you know, um. I learned some great questions in organizing training, like um, if you had three extra hours in every day what would spend them doing and things like that and then kind of trying to map them on a person, which is just a helpful way, uh, of having information, and keeping good notes. A lot of it, I would say, is probably too early for me to do, but I have spent, maybe without my organizing training, I wouldn't have spent what I've spent since I started in July doing, which is having, like, coffee with anyone who wants them.

AG: Yeah, kind of like focus on building relationships so that you can exercise the pastoral care element of organizing that you were –

RZ: Yes, it's like, it is a very removed sense of pastoral care. It's sort of like that's how I became okay with organizing by saying oh, it's actually helping people take care of themselves in a sort

of way but really the relationships so that when I want to do actions in the community, so that when I start creating my own things, I have people on my team, which is very much an organizing sort of thing, like develop your relationships first and then see what happens. Figure out who are the leaders in the community, how you want to work with them, um, who are the kind of people that are, um, who attract energy and get them involved, things like that.

AG: Um, going off of what you had mentioned about understanding power in the congregation, um, what strategies do you employ to attempt to make your organizing efforts in the synagogue as inclusive as possible?

RZ: With the caveat that I haven't done any formal organizing yet, I mean part of it is right now I have an open invitation to anyone who wants to meet with me. That's probably the number one thing, and I'm not refusing any meetings, so, which means I have met with people who are sometimes maybe the squeaky wheels, like people want to avoid, like you give them a little bit of face time, but really taking the time to sit down and have a one-on-one, like an hour long meeting with them and doing that and then making sure I'm reaching out to certain people who probably wouldn't necessarily, um, be – I didn't, I guess, I started with that and not sitting down with every board member. Like that's what I've been focusing my attention on, and the, uh, because I know that the relationships with people on the board or the people involved on all of the committees that will, either they'll already meet with me because those are the kind of people who, you know want to do that, or I will reach out to them and get to know them inevitably but really spending my time on more peripheral people,

AG: I see. Um, and in the groups that you have been working with on gun violence prevention or refugee issues, when differences between people of different social identities arise, what strategies do you employ to navigate conflict resolution there?

RZ: Um, I have yet to encounter that.

AG: Okay.

RZ: There has been with the High Holy Days and me starting, I have been to one gun violence prevention meeting and refugee resettlement is just gearing up for round two so not a whole lot.

AG: Is there anything from the organizing training that you went to that in theory you think you would employ?

RZ: Um, here is actually where I think, a kind of rabbinic figure or clergy figure is helpful in organizing as to say, um, noticing what people's needs are and why they are acting in the way that they are. So often, the loudest person or the angriest person is really hurting, uh, so my inclination would be to try to sit down with that person, um, and work through their pain in order that, like, they are not approaching you know, that space with so much pain which then manifests as anger or, um, frustration. Um, there's some mediation things that I've learned and would probably employ also. But I think, um, I think that it's about realizing that everybody who's coming to that kind of space, everyone who, um, generally, everyone who is there wants to be there because they feel there is a need in the world or a need in themselves that they're filling

and it's just about trying to recognize that and how the others recognize that people are there for the right reasons.

AG: Like a common, basic interest that the group shares.

RZ: Yeah, or like a basic goal. Like um, you know, and that's hard because there's always going to be the person who's the loudest person in the room or the strongest personalities, which is one of the nice things about organizing also because you get to, in some sort of ways, you get to choose the people you want to be most involved. Like, the organizer gets to make the asks. So, you just don't, you know, you ask the right people.

AG: Does that contradict, like, in some ways asking the people along the peripheries?

RZ: Yes, which is one of the reasons I struggle with organizing as a complete model to be put on top of a synagogue because I think sometimes it does contradict our values. The world as it is and the world as it should be is actually an organizing framework, um, and I think one of my struggles with organizing in general is you have to spending a lot of time in the world as it is, meaning you have to deal with politics and deal with the messiness and deal with making decisions about who should be involved that if you were living in your ideal world as it should be, everyone gets to be involved, everyone is loved and worthy and that. But then there's a day where you have to get stuff done and like, I don't, we don't have time to like make sure everyone's heard, we don't have time to deal with this person who is probably acting in the way that they are because they're experiencing all of this pain in their life and they need to be cared for also but, you know, this like, the water is dirty and we need to work to get it not, you know, we need to get clean water for this place. Sometimes you need to live in this world and not in that world in order to get done what you need to get done. It's also like how they talk about allegiances like organizing comes with; there are no permanent alliances and no, um, permanent enemies as like an organizing phrase. So like, you partner with the Catholic Church on one thing, even if you very much disagree with them on very strong values within your community about choice or um, other things. So that also, is living in the world as it instead of the world as it should be. Like it would be nice to only be with our friends, like with only people who we thought had the same values as us.

AG: Agreeing with us 100% of the time.

RZ: Yes

AG: Alright, thank you for elaborating on that, um, dissonance between, um, two different ideas. Um, going back to the old phrase of *tikkun olam* as a key component of Jewish social justice work, how do you view XXXX's efforts as contributing to producing a more whole world?

RZ: Um, well, I should first say we try to avoid to use that phrase here Mostly because it's become, it's been taken out of its original context, which is this mystical context, and it is so used that it means very little. Like I was talking about before, *tikkun olam* Judaism is like a watered down version of Judaism. Like it's just doing the stuff that makes you feel good and not everything else. But, like, with that being said, it's a very hard question to answer because in some ways XXXX just does, right? Like, some of that is driven by the people who are here, you

know, we just our hearts are moved in a certain way, um, I think we teach our kids to be good people or at least I think that's the goal of the education program is to be happy and safe and to act from places of love. Um, I think that we very much, you know, heed the call, the different calls of Micah, the prophet Micah, as XXXX that the goal is to have everyone sit under their own vine and a fig tree, um, so that no one is afraid. That's a quote from Micah. That's some of the idea behind our recovery home. I believe that the quote that inspired the synagogue becoming called XXXX was about beating swords into plowshares. That's a constant goal. Um.

AG: I thought that was in Isaiah.

RZ: It's also in Micah.

AG: Okay.

RZ: Yeah.

AG: Um. But -

RZ: Nation shall not, yes, one of the parts is in Micah, is also in Micah.

AG: I see.

RZ: Yeah, they said some of the same things. Um.

AG: Overall, you think that the phrase *tikkun olam* doesn't resonate at XXXX but that it's almost implicitly built into what XXXX does.

RZ: Yes, even down to making sandwiches for Friendship Place, which was started by a group of parents that realized they want their children to be, um, to learn how to do social justice from an early and realized there's very little that you can bring a second grader to, a first grader to, but they wanted to kind of imbue a sense of volunteerism and, um, sense of a larger world. And so, even though, normally, we're not a peanut butter and jelly making, sandwich making kind of social justice organization, that's a thing that's happening once a month because that's a thing that parents really wanted to be started for at a really young age for young people, for kids. And I think that to me was a powerful message, like when I first, no I don't want to take over this thing from the old rabbi who, you know, who started, like I'm not really interested in making sandwiches, I know that helps a little, um, and I did a lot with the soup kitchen, with the HUC soup kitchen in New York. It's not like I don't think feeding people is important, but it's like the easy social action project, but once I heard the stories of how and why people are doing it, you know, I was like, that's really quite powerful that you want your first grader to know that there are hungry people in the world and there's something we can do about it. And again, that was a project started by XXXX congregants and not by XXXX clergy.

AG: It was about hearing what was coming from those relationships, from those one-on-ones and putting it into action or allowing the synagogue to be a space where members can put it into action for themselves.

RZ: Yeah. So that was a project that Rabbi XXXX kind of helped get started, but again, it was just somebody coming in. As well as the underwear drive was like finding out that the thing, you know 20 or 30 years ago or something, finding out that the thing that the homeless shelters needed more than anything else was underwear because no one donated underwear because you don't donate used underwear and so, like, we became the underwear congregation. We are the only congregation that on High Holy Days has a blessing for underwear, like, which is pretty amazing that, like, um, that we're just - we kind of just do things. And you know, there are certainly ways we can continue to think about how we're continuing to fulfill needs in different ways so I'd really like to see the underwear drive turn into, like, I've yet to come up with a good name for it but like the lower half supplies drive. So like underwear and, uh, feminine hygiene supplies and diapers and you know all things like that because those are actually like, the needs have changed a bit.

AG: Mhm, being responsive to that change in needs.

RZ: Yeah, I guess. But we're not a static congregation, and that's one of the things that helps with social justice, but I think what keeps people coming back is the combination of social justice and a rich Jewish life. Like I think, especially now, especially in areas like DC, people can do social justice wherever, there are plenty of places they can act and be in the world. Um, and so there's something deeper and richer that is keeping people here that's not, like it's amazing that this is the home of their social justice work and also they're getting other things when they're here.

AG: I see.

RZ: Which I think is really important, um, and is maybe a more eloquent way of what I was trying to say about the prophets, that is has to be part of everything else, you cannot do social justice and not do everything but you also can't like not do social justice. And like that's what the prophets are saying, it's like, you can't make sacrifices to God and think that you're living a meaningful religious life and ignore the people who need help. Um but we have so much leaned to that side, like okay I'm going to be Jewish only by helping the orphan, the widow, and the stranger without doing all of the other things. And I think, what I hope and think keeps people coming back here and what makes our membership robust and active is that they get both. But that's like six months of observation.

AG: I see. I'm curious to see how that continues to develop over time. Um, I think you had alluded to this earlier, but um, Jews in the United States approach this work today with various degrees of social and economic privilege, changed position I think was the phrased that you used, um, and some of those advantages that some people have and others lack, how are the resources of congregants at XXXX leveraged to advance goals of social justice?

RZ: I don't know that I yet have an answer to that question, I think it's really interesting, you know, I think it's a very generous congregation from my very short kind of knowledge right now. I find it refreshing and nice when it doesn't really matter how much money someone makes, like they're coming and doing the same kind of work as people of different

socioeconomic status, you know, I think XXXX prides itself on being a place is not pretentious. So even though a lot of people are probably wealthy or probably have very, very high up jobs, they're not coming here to be that persona. They're coming to be the person that they are. Um, and they've chosen to be in a place where they can be active members of a synagogue versus feeling like they should belong to a synagogue and check the box. Like um, for a lot of our people, membership is not perfunctory, which I think, um, I'm not entirely sure how it plays into the social justice question, but I think that it does. I think they're coming here to be active Jews and that means all of the things that I've talked about. Um, I do think that we could actually think more about, I do think we could actually think more about, I've been thinking a lot about and this is one of the tools that I think came from organizing was understanding people as resources like financial resources are one thing but also people are resources. And we have amazing people, smart, brilliant people who, uh, garner respect and uh people pay attention to, and um there are probably ways we could leverage that a little bit more.

AG: Alright

RZ: Maybe. But maybe they don't want that because they come here to not be that. So yeah.

AG: Yeah, it's about understanding where they're coming to XXXX.

RZ: And you've probably noticed nothing here is named. Maybe you didn't noticed, but if you walk around the building –

AG: Oh, the rooms

RZ: Nothing, No prayer books has a name like, maybe the prayer books now are named, um, are like donated by certain people.

AG: There's no XXXX wing.

RZ: There's no XXXX wing. There's no like "Now, we're going to celebrate for a joyous Shabbat Kiddush in the you know Bernbanger social hall." That like everyone's contributions whether they be financial or you know volunteering or whatever should be valued in the same way and um that's just not who we are to slap somebody's name on something um.

AG: Um this next question is related to a report from 2018 from earlier this year about 2017 related to, um, the Anti-Defamation League, um, measured a 57% rise in acts of anti-Semitism last year. And I was wondering if you could elaborate on your views of how anti-Semitism contributes to Jewish social justice projects.

RZ: It's such a double-edged sword, right? I kind of wish that it didn't at all and I'm thankful that it does. Like because it moves people, you know, it is, we have to be able, we'll always have to know where we came from as a reason to act. It will never be enough to say, like, well the prophets said do kindness and mercy and walk humbly but also there's this sense that our history as Jews, from being slaves in Egypt and on, will always continue to be why we have to continue to act in the world. Um it would be, no it wouldn't be nice, it's not like, it's not who we are as Jews to just do things only because we are commanded to do justice, it's part of but it's like

we're commanded to do justice and just in case you were going to forget that you are demanded to do justice, remember, like, you must see yourself as though you were slaves in Egypt. And that's how I think of anti-Semitism. It's like even if I am totally free now, even if I am totally safe and secure, I have to think of myself as though I was a slave in Egypt or as though I lived in a different period of Jewish history. And if I even for that one moment am able to imagine myself, um, to put myself in a place that is uncomfortable, that is a different period of history, that is a different experience for our Jewish lives, then, um, I am responsible and especially responsible because I know that there are people around me having the experience that I have to imagine myself being in. And so the rise of anti-Semitism makes it a little closer. I think it makes it like yes, we have to realize that 57% of all hate crimes or whatever are against Jews and also we're all mostly safe. I still say even after Pittsburgh, the police still ran into the synagogue instead of standing by, which a hundred years ago in Europe would not have been the case. Um and so, at the same time that I am feeling the same kind of anxieties that the Jewish community I think is facing, I think we cannot go into the place of fear, we have to continue acting from the place of really digging into our values and saying this is who we are and this is what we do and if we really were in Egypt and we really are here now, then this is how we have to act in the world.

AG: What you're saying, what I'm hearing from you is that anti-Semitism and its history creates a narrative that continues to compel social justice and then also fosters a sense of empathy across time and place that allows this work to be deeper and richer.

RZ: Absolutely and we have to, um do that, not out of, like I understand and acknowledge the fear that is present, and I think we cannot continue. It's way more exhausting and less effective to lead from a place of fear.

AG: Leading from this place of empathy as opposed to like doing social justice work because of an existential threat.

RZ: Yes.

AG: Yeah, um.

RZ: I don't know how idealized that is. I don't know if what is actually behind everything is saying like, the way that the voting camp, like the way that the liberal Jewish groups are pushing voting, is so obvious like a Democratic push from the liberal kind of side, saying like I don't know that like they would give the same message to a group of Republicans, please vote, please vote. Um, it is coming from a fear that we have to make sure that the country looks like what we want it to look like and that is from a place of fear, I think. Like vote because it is your civic duty and your religious obligation in a sort of way but also we're doing it to really save our own asses. Like, who knows what will happen if we keep on going on this same way? So that's an interesting –

AG: Um, a few more questions.

RZ: Sure

AG: Um, would you be able to talk about how you see Jewish organizing on global social issues?

RZ: I think that organizing in general is less effective the further away it gets is the easy answer. I think, I think everything that I've seen in terms of the people I've seen do successful organizing cycles and campaigns, um, are able to do so because they have found issues that profoundly impact the people in their communities um and so there are other ways to galvanize support for global Jewish issues, global social justice issues, I'm just not sure if organizing is the way to do it.

AG: Alright and I was just curious if you could talk about, if you XXXX's relationship to Israel-Palestine as connected to its social justice work.

RZ: Um absolutely I think like we are congregation um believes in and advocates for and aligns ourself with um organizations that work to make Israel um the kind of place that we would be proud to be in a relationship with.

AG: Alright

RZ: That sounded much more like an answer someone gave me written down, but like that is actually our – when we got a lot of flack and protest for having Naomi Chazan from the New Israel Fund come and speak and different sort of things, we double downed and said no. An email was sent out to the congregation that said: Um, they're saying they're going to protest, so let's say it will be standing room only here. You know, and let's, this is an organization we believe in. We believe that Israel should be liberal, not liberal, but should be democratic and should have social justice and should have good education and that's what NIF does, so, we believe in that. And I actually think, both for XXXX and for the place where we're at in our country right now, there's a lot that we can learn from Jewish social justice organizations or Israeli social justice organizations um that are in Israel that have been operating sort of against the government like and, um, still doing their work, I think that they could teach us a bit right now about what it means to exist in a system that you, um where you have your allies, but you're not in power. I think for a long time, we've had a little bit more power than we have right now.

AG: And so that work is connected to say like refugee resettlement *or* providing food for Friendship Place, or the serenity house?

RZ: That's a really good question. I don't know that I have a sense of the larger organism enough yet to say like in the ways that it's connected except that we just, in this kind of like, these are just the things we do.

AG: I guess I'm trying to understand if these priorities of a relationship to Israel and a relationship to social justice converge or exist in different –

RZ: Okay, I think that they do converge. I think there is less cognitive dissonance here than I've seen in other congregations and other communities and other Jewish spaces where like we have all these super liberal values and then Israel. I think there is actually a directed effort to have them converge.

AG: Alright.

RZ: I don't know, I have no idea what that impact has on like the younger, in religious school. I don't know how Israel is talked about at religious school.

AG: You're welcome to visit my class.

RZ: Are you guys talking about Israel?

AG: Towards the end of the year. I'm pretty sure it's the last gate. Um and I wanted to talk about that congregational organizing can exist in networks with other organizations, um, so there's a few different kinds of organizations that I wanted to ask you about as someone who leads social justice efforts at XXXX how do you view the actual or potential ways that XXXX works with these organizations. So the first is other religious organizations, um congregations.

RZ: I don't know. The problem is the projects that I myself do haven't done so much. I know our refugee working group has been a little bit in connection with the other churches who have adopted refugee families and um there is a certain kind of conversation that happens there, that might be a direction that they're thinking about going in for what happens next because really you have your refugee family for a year and then you don't sever the ties, but you cut the financial ties. You continue your relationship with them, but they're like figuring out what to do a year later because we just had the one year anniversary of adopting or settling the family, um, and gun violence, I don't know if they do, they like have worked with some of the larger organizations. Um there was like a big gun violence prevention concert fundraiser thing, we co-sponsored and did some other things. So like, um, no one is opposed to partnering, I think it has to be the right partnership. XXXX tends not to put its name on things just for the sake of partnering and co-sponsoring just because it makes us feel good or makes us look good. Um, so I think when opportunities for meaningful partnership arise, people are down to figure out what they can be.

AG: Um, the next group is with DC-based Jewish organizations that work on local issues, such as Jews United for Justice.

RZ: I don't really know. Um, probably if you asked me in a couple of months, I'd have a better answer.

AG: Okay. Um, the next group is more of the national Jewish organizations, such as the RAC.

RZ: I know we do some stuff like our rabbis will, I'm going to a RAC training thing for clergy and we do some sort of things like that, and we send out resources as they come out. Um, other than that I don't really know. Probably Rabbi XXXX or XXXX would know better.

AG: And then, moving away from Jewish organizations, local, DC focused organizations that exist outside of the Jewish communities.

RZ: I certainly know that we have a very strong relationship with Friendship Place, which is where we donate the underwear and XXXX sandwiches and such, and our recovery home, which has its own kind of allies and relationships within the recovery world that they are working with. Uh, do, do you know what our recovery home is? [AG nods] Okay great. And um, I'm sure, again some of this comes up as like an ad hoc basis like who do we know and how can we be connected to different people when we need it. But because there isn't, like I said, there isn't standing kind of um social justice or social action committee that has these allies like when things come up, we find the relationships would be what I would answer. But again, there may be people who know more than I do.

AG: Okay. Um, and the final group would be uh more of the national-minded, non-Jewish organizations, such as the ACLU, or uh NAACP.

RZ: Um, I'm really not sure.

AG: Okay.

RZ: Yeah.

AG: Um, and is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude the interview?

RZ: I don't think so, I'm happy to answer any follow up questions as they might come up.

AG: Okay.

RZ: Yeah

AG: Okay. I'm going to shut off the recording now, but thank you for your time.

RZ: Great, bye.