Survey of "Why the Unaffiliated Remain Unaffiliated"
F.T.A. Thesis by Robyn Galbraith
Temple Emanu-El, Tucson, Arizona

I. Introduction

I have found the works of Dr. Gary A. Tobin, director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, to be fascinating and thought-provoking. In choosing a topic for my F.T.A. thesis, I thought it would be interesting to test some of his hypotheses in the Jewish community of Tucson, Arizona.

It has always been a concern of mine why more people do not affiliate with any congregation. So, I decided to conduct a survey of why the unaffiliated Jewish members of the community chose to remain unaffiliated. I am trying to determine what would make joining a congregation more attractive. I will refer to Dr. Tobin’s research later in the paper.

Tucson is an interesting community. Almost no one in the congregation or the Jewish community as a whole was born here. They come from a cross-section of the country, with a variety of practices and customs. There are approximately 20,000-25,000 Jewish people living in Tucson, with approximately 7,000-8,000 or 32% affiliating. According to Gary Tobin, "affiliation rates in the West are generally below 30% in Jewish communities of 20,000 and above".¹

Many of our now senior (in age and importance) members of the congregation came in the 1940’s and 1950’s primarily for health reasons and some for business opportunities. (The congregation has been incorporated since 1910). They are the members of the congregation who were once very active. Tucson also has become a major retirement community, and we therefore have a disproportionate number of older people living here.

Because there has not been much industrial growth in the area, the younger and middle age groups are not as well represented, although this is starting to change.

With these circumstances in mind, I choose to test two major premises:

1. People are not affiliating because they feel they derive no benefit from joining a congregation; and
2. Most people only affiliate when they have children of religious school age.

I was going to test the premise that people are not affiliating now because they are burnt-out from previous activities in a congregation. But it was not financially feasible to survey the affiliated Jewish people in Tucson in order to test this hypothesis.
II. Methodology

The Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona was most cooperative in sharing a list of people they had listed as unaffiliated with any congregation in southern Arizona. (For purposes of this study, Tucson will be defined as metropolitan Tucson including the small communities of Green Valley and Nogales; but not Sierra Vista, Bisbee and Tombstone because there is a small reform congregation in Sierra Vista).

I then contacted the following congregations: Congregation Anshei Israel, Congregation Chaverim, Bet Shalom and Eschel Avraham and asked for a list of their membership. They were most cooperative in providing me with this information.

Of the 3,568 names on the Federation’s list, we were able to eliminate 485 names who were affiliated with one of the above congregations.

Using a random numbers table, I selected 800 names that would comprise the sample. The survey, which is included as Appendix A, was sent out in a temple envelope with a temple return address stamped envelope. People were asked to return the survey within four weeks. Only 182 surveys were returned. This is a 22% return, which is higher than the national average for direct mail campaigns. Of the 182, sixteen were disqualified: nine respondents are affiliated; six are not Jewish; and one did not complete the survey. This left 166 surveys to be examined for the purpose of this study.

If I were to conduct a survey again, I would send it in a non-temple envelope and have it returned to my home. I had the distinct impression most people felt this was a solicitation for temple membership, despite the opening paragraph of the survey stating this was a paper being written for a professional certification.

III. Reasoning

It is my feeling that most people do not see the benefit of belonging to a congregation. For the most part, they can obtain lifecycle services from a temple or synagogue as a non-member. They do not appear to feel a connection to the worship service, or the emotional and financial support of a temple or synagogue. It is also my belief that most people who join congregations do so because they want their children to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and this can not usually be accomplished if you do not affiliate.

I developed questions that would hopefully shed light on these points. (If I were to develop the survey again, I would word it slightly differently). I tried to probe whether the respondent had children, whether they had ever affiliated in their previous community, had they ever used the services of a temple or synagogue, and would they affiliate if certain programs were available.
IV. Results

Forty-two percent of the sample have lived in Tucson from 1-10 years; with another 19% living here from 11-15 years. There was even one family who has lived here for 49 years! (See Appendix B for a list of how many people lived in Tucson and did not affiliate). One hundred and twelve or 67% of the respondents did not belong to a congregation in their last community.

There seems to be no correlation between where people resided previously and whether they affiliate presently. (See Appendix C for this chart).

Only 33% or 55 of the respondents belonged to a congregation in their previous community, yet they chose not to affiliate when they moved here.

Of the 109 people surveyed who said they did not belong to a congregation in their last community, five stated it was too far to travel, 24 said it was monetary, three did not like the rabbi, sixteen did not find the activities they were looking for, and 22 did not have children in the religious school. (See Appendix D for some of the other reasons for not affiliating in their previous community). What I thought would be common reasons for not affiliating were not substantiated by the survey.

Eighteen respondents had religious school age children currently living in their home; one child attends a church religious school and one attends the Hebrew day school. Two families, only one of the above, has plans for the child to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah; thirteen had no plans for a bar or bat mitzvah and three were undecided.

Of those sampled, 147 stated they did not have children of religious school age living at home. It is coincidental that 53 people responded their children attended religious school in their previous community and 53 respondents stated their children did not attend religious school in their previous community.

Of the 55 respondents who had affiliated in their previous community, 27 children or 49% attended religious school, while twelve or 21% did not; the remainder did not respond.

It appears to me that if you did not affiliate with a congregation in a previous community, you could still obtain the services of a temple or synagogue for lifecycle events and attend religious services. Except for High Holy Day Services, most respondents said they never used the services of a temple or synagogue. (See Appendix E for further detail).

Only 36 respondents stated they were asked to contribute a non-member fee for the service provided in their previous community, while 31 respondents stated they were not asked for a non-member fee.
Of the families who did affiliate with a previous congregation, the majority of them had joined one of the temple or synagogue's auxiliaries. Eight of the respondents who had belonged to a previous congregation had been a member of their Board and 24 had been a member of a committee.

Of the families who did affiliate previously, the majority of them attended Shabbat Services erratically, but almost always attended High Holy Day Services and to some extent Festival Services.

I asked the respondents if they would affiliate with a congregation if the congregation had certain programs available. Temple Emanu-El had all but two of these services, yet they remain unaffiliated. (See Appendix F for further information).

Thirty-three of the respondents asked for information about Temple Emanu-El, of which I will be delighted to send them! (See Appendix G for a brief profile).

V. Discussion

I could not help but wonder if people answered honestly as to why they did not affiliated with a congregation. The survey indicates that there were monetary reasons for not affiliating. Could this just be an excuse? Almost every congregation makes allowances for congregants who can not afford the dues contributions. Most temples and synagogues take pride in not turning away those who are less affluent.

It could be that people find it easier to make excuses, than to be honest about not being interested in joining a temple or synagogue.

For the most part, the survey shows that people do not see a benefit to affiliating with a temple or synagogue. Nineteen respondents specifically expressed no interest in belonging to a congregation. In Tobin's work, Synagogue Affiliation Among Reform Jews, he states that the most often-cited reason people gave for not belonging to a temple or synagogue was that it was not very important to them, with monetary reasons listed second, and to a lesser degree, the fact they were "dissatisfied with the synagogue experience".

It may not be what temple or synagogue professionals want to hear, but maybe it is more honest than the people who make excuses? This is not to say we should not be creative in our programming or fee structures, but we should keep in mind that no matter what or how much we do, it will never satisfy all of the people.

The survey also seems to indicate that most people only affiliate with a temple or synagogue when they have children of religious school age. Twenty percent of the respondents stated they did not affiliate because they did not have children in the
religious school and 88% of the sample stated they did not have children of religious school age currently living in their home. This could be because of the age of the sample and the community, or as Tobin suggests, couples are having children later and are therefore joining a congregation later.\textsuperscript{4} If I were to design the survey again, I would ask the age of the respondents to help determine if they had school-age children, if they were college students or to see if their children were now adults. I would also ask if they raised children.

Tobin also states that "it is well known that synagogue affiliation is the highest among parents of school-age children who want them to have a Jewish education";\textsuperscript{5} to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Tobin also suggests that people who come from someplace else and whose children are grown may not affiliate if there is little need for most of the temple or synagogue’s benefits.\textsuperscript{6}

The survey also indicates people may not affiliate because they can obtain lifecycle services, excluding a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, as a non-member. Gary Tobin makes the point that contemporary Jewish people have become consumers and purchasers of particular services they need.\textsuperscript{7} Tobin goes so far as stating that Jews think of themselves as consumers, rather than members, and therefore do not see a need to join a congregation.\textsuperscript{8} It is Tobin’s belief that if temples and synagogues do not provide the programs and activities that contemporary people are looking for, the Jewish community will not feel a need to affiliate.

VI. A Look To The Future

The major lessons to be learned from the works of Gary Tobin are temple and synagogue leaders and professionals must change their view of what the purpose of the institution is and how services are provided to the congregation and community at-large. Tobin suggests if we continue to view the temple or synagogue as we have traditionally, we will continue to lose membership.

The following ideas are based on Tobin’s research and my professional experience. These ideas may be a way of looking at some of today’s dilemmas in a new light.

A dues structure could be developed that includes "traditional" temple or synagogue activities: worship services, high holiday seats, lifecycle events, receiving of yahrtzeit notices, receiving a bulletin, and the notion of ownership of the temple or synagogue.

Different levels of giving could be developed, such as a contributor, who would not be a full-fledged member, but would receive the same services except for high holiday seats. Another level of giving could be a friend, where only bulletins were sent. Another level of giving could be a guest, where High Holy Day seats are purchased. Other activities or programs could be paid for as they occurred: adult education, seder, dinners, lectures, etc.
Another suggestion would be to broaden the specter of non-member fees. The temple or synagogue could be supported through families paying higher fees for the desired programs or services without the "burden" of membership (such as dues and bills). Temple Emanu-El has a successful program of allowing non-members to send their children who are under the age of nine to our religious school for one year, at a higher fee, before they have to become members. This has given them a taste of Judaism while they are exploring their commitment to the temple. More than half of the families have then become members.

Different levels of giving assume a financial risk to the congregation. Will enough monies be collected to pay the basic expenses of salaries, utilities and upkeep? What if it does not succeed? Tobin suggests that if we do not do something, temples and synagogues will not survive.

A bold step would be for two or more organizations to take responsibility for a particular program, and for their members to get special consideration in terms of fees and availability of space. Such programs could include a temple or synagogue and a community center sharing a pre-school; or a temple or synagogue and the federation co-sponsoring adult education programs and lectures (which is successfully being done in Tucson).

Another change would be the composition of the professional staff. Rabbis, cantors, administrators and educators will always be needed to meet the needs and expectations of the congregation. But in today's ever-changing society, there are other services and programs that could enhance a congregation if there were additional staff members. Such positions would include a social worker and a program coordinator. This is not to say the "traditional" staff person could not provide these services, but it could be more beneficial to the congregation if time could be solely focused on other programs. The unaffiliated may also see their needs and concerns then being met.

The service of providing a Jewish-oriented pre-school would attract young families to a temple or congregation. They would become familiar with the temple or synagogue and then may decide to affiliate before their children attend religious school.

I honestly do not know if different types of programming would necessarily bring in the unaffiliated members of the community. But I do advocate trying to reach out to groups of people who have been considered not in the mainstream of temple life.

The hoped for goal of these ideas is to have individuals become partners in a temple or synagogue. By providing activities and programs that meet their needs, they in turn will want to invest in the future of the congregation. This is what we are calling affiliation.

It is up to the leaders, staff and boards to make the necessary changes to make our congregations stronger and more viable to its current members and the community at-large.
Footnotes


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Bruce S. Beyer, President of Temple Emanu-El and Richard S. Lamden, former chairperson of the Personnel Committee for encouraging me to achieve my F.T.A.

Thank you to my supportive co-workers, Iris Boyan, Ronna Golper, Lois Kimminau and Melissa Winkle for all of their assistance.

Thank you to Rabbi Joseph S. Weizenbaum, Rabbi Thomas A. Louchheim and Mitchell C. Dorson, Director of Education for their valuable suggestions.

Thank you to the many volunteers, but especially to Leona Leeds, Ruth Weinstein and Evelyn Schimmel who help me in countless ways.

Thank you to my husband, Paul for his continuous support and ideas.
APPENDIX A

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEMPLE ADMINISTRATORS
SURVEY OF NON-AFFILIATED SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS IN TUCSON, ARIZONA
November 1990

I am the Administrator of Temple Emanu-El. I am conducting a
survey of unaffiliated Jewish people in Tucson in order to meet the
thesis requirement for receiving my F.T.A. (Fellow in Temple
Administration.) This certification program is sponsored by the
National Association of Temple Administrators and the Union of
American Hebrew Congregations (of the reform Jewish movement).
This is not a solicitation for membership.
I would be most appreciative if you could answer these questions
and return the survey to me by December 15, 1990.

1. How long have you lived in Tucson? __________________________
2. Where did you last reside? _________________________________

3. Did you belong to a congregation in your last community?
Yes_____ No_____

If you answered no, why not?
   a. Too far to travel, Yes_____ No_____
   b. Monetary, Yes_____ No_____
   c. Did not like the rabbi, Yes_____ No_____
   d. Did not have activities I/we was/were looking for
      Yes_____ No_____
   e. Did not have children in the religious school,
      Yes_____ No_____
   f. Other, __________________________________________

4. Do children of religious school age (Kindergarten through 8th
   grade) live in your home currently? Yes_____ No_____

   If your answer to question 4 is yes, please answer question 5
   and 6. If not, please go to question 7.

5. Do your child(ren) currently attend religious school?
   Yes_____ No_____
   If yes, where? ________________________________

6. Do you plan for your child(ren) to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?
   Yes_____ No_____

7. Did your child(ren) attend religious school in your previous
   community? Yes_____ No_____

8. If you did not affiliate with a congregation in a previous
   community, did you ever use the services of a temple or
   synagogue for a:
   a. Bris, Yes_____ No_____
   b. Babynaming, Yes_____ No_____
   c. Wedding, Yes_____ No_____
   d. Funeral, Yes_____ No_____
   e. High Holy Day Services, Yes_____ No_____
   f. Other holiday services and activities Yes_____ No_____

9
If your answer to question 8 is yes, please answer question 9. If not, please go to question 10.

9. Were you asked to contribute a non-member fee for this/these services? Yes_____ No_____ 

10. If you did affiliate with a previous congregation, did you join the:
    a. Sisterhood, Yes_____ No_____ 
    b. Brotherhood, Yes_____ No_____ 
    c. Youth Group, Yes_____ No_____ 
    d. Senior Auxiliary, Yes_____ No_____ 

11. If you did affiliate with a previous congregation, were you member of the Board of Directors? Yes_____ No_____ 

12. If you did affiliate with a previous congregation, were you a member of a committee? Yes_____ No_____ 
   If Yes, which one? ____________________________ 

13. If you did affiliate with a previous congregation, did you attend services? Yes_____ No_____ 
   If so, how often? 
   Once a week, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Once a month, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Twice a month, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Festival Holidays, Yes_____ No_____ 
   High Holy Days, Yes_____ No_____ 

14. Would you affiliate with a congregation if the congregation had the following? 
   Pre-School, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Religious School, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Sisterhood, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Brotherhood, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Youth Group, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Chavurot, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Study Groups, Yes_____ No_____ 
   Singles Group, Yes_____ No_____ 

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. I am most appreciative.

If you are interested in receiving information about Temple Emanu-El, please give us the following information:

Name__________________________________________

Address________________________________________

__________________________________________
How long have you lived in Tucson?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Years Living in Tucson</th>
<th># of People</th>
<th># of People not Affiliating in last Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>162*</td>
<td>112**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 4 respondents did not answer the question
** 2 respondents did not answer the question
APPENDIX C

Where did you last reside? Did not affiliate in last community:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Country</th>
<th></th>
<th>State or Country</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>no answer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no answer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

Some Of The Other Reasons For Not Belonging To A Congregation In Their Last Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Interested</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Meet Spiritual Needs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered Themselves a Secular Jew</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered Themselves an Ethical Jew</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to Intermarriage</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were Members When Children Lived at Home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were Members With Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Military</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In College</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in Israel, Surrounded by Jewish Tradition And Did Not Need Synagogue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>