

# CRAVING CONNECTION

Researching OneTable's Impact | 2022 Report

**ONETABLE**





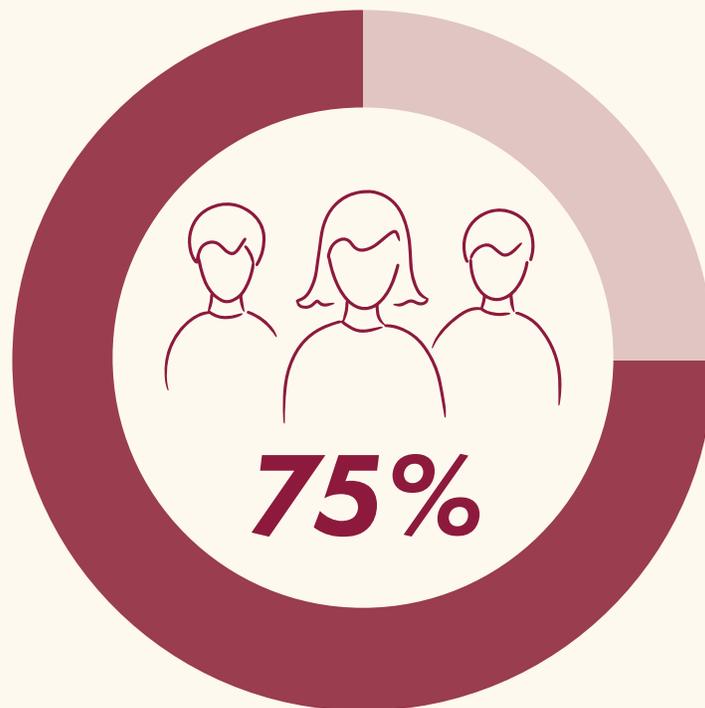
**Community is the human expression of Divine love.**  
It is where I am valued simply for who I am, how I live, and what I give to others. It is the place where they know my name.

*– Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*





An overwhelming majority of participants stated that because of OneTable, they are celebrating Shabbat when they wouldn't have otherwise...



...and that's especially true of participants who did not have a regular Shabbat practice growing up.

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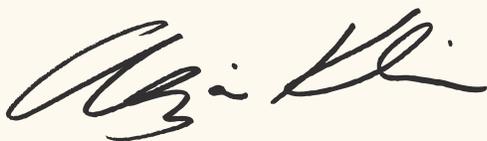
# LETTER FROM THE CEO + PRESIDENT

*We bake research into everything we do. You could say we're obsessed—with data, with our curiosity, with our desire to meet Jewish young adults right where they are, and then invite (and support) them to go deeper.*

*In 2014, we founded OneTable to address two well-documented and alarming trends: Jewish young adults are increasingly dissociating from Judaism, and there is an epidemic of loneliness and disconnection which is plaguing Millennials and Gen Z in ways we still don't understand. Nearly nine years and 75,000 peer-led Shabbat dinners later, we can point to the clear impact this intervention has on Jewish young adults by helping close to 200,000 people cultivate a personal Jewish practice while building community and reducing emotional loneliness.*

*The study was crafted in close consultation with our Research Advisory Board and led by the Benenson Strategy Group (BSG). The full 55-page study can be found here: [onetable.org/research](https://onetable.org/research). What follows is a summary of the findings that we think will be most helpful to the field.*

*I am eager to talk with you about how to apply these findings to your work.*



Aliza Kline

OneTable Co-Founder, CEO + President



# INTRODUCTION

The results of this impact survey show that **young Jews are looking for social connection at Shabbat dinner**; what's emerging from that simple starting point are deeper ties to their community and Jewish identity, and mitigated loneliness through the experience of Shabbat. This research validates the intention and success behind the OneTable model: **merging Jewish experiences with deep and fulfilling social connection**. The powerful social and emotional components of a OneTable dinner are every bit as important as the Jewish experiences – **and to many participants, they are intrinsically tied together**. Social and emotional outcomes directly lead to unlocking particular Jewish behavioral and identity outcomes.

I met new people in my community, **felt accepted and supported** to be who I am. I knew very few people in Dallas, and to share a table in a stranger's home, who then became a friend, is a nice memory and reminder for me.

– *OneTable guest*

We offer this research to share how Shabbat is transforming young adults across the country – a time that’s for slowing down, being in community, and deepening connection to Judaism.

While OneTable participants and the comparison group are similar in many ways, they differ dramatically across social and emotional factors, as well

as Jewish experiences as a result of their OneTable participation. When it comes to feeling lonely, this pattern of feeling less lonely than the comparison group holds across nearly every demographic subgroup, including gender, age, relationship status, and Jewish denomination and background. **Simply put, OneTable participants have the tools to form lasting social connections.**

Showing % of people who feel this way “all the time” or “often.”





# BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

This research is a long time coming. In March 2020, we were preparing a study with Benenson Strategy Group (BSG), a strategic market research firm. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, we pivoted to study how it was impacting Jewish young adults. Following that, we completed two additional, related studies: *“Rhythm, Relationship and Reckoning”* with the Sacred Design Lab, and *“Alone, Less Lonely”* about our rising number of solo Shabbat practitioners.

A year later, in a new, post-vaccine phase of the pandemic, we read Pew’s *“Jewish Americans in 2020”* with interest. We were well on our way to fielding the survey, when in late May 2021, violence erupted between Israelis and Palestinians. We expanded our study to incorporate questions about our participants’ experience with rising antisemitism and the conflict. View this research at [onetable.org/research](https://onetable.org/research)

## **METHODOLOGY:**

**In November and December 2021, we fielded a 20-minute quantitative study focused on attitudes and behaviors with 2,752 respondents:**

- **1,938 responses from OneTable participants**
- **814 Jewish young adults who had not ever participated in OneTable**

**Of the OneTable participants, we recruited three groups: active hosts, active guests, and those who hadn't been to a dinner in over one year.<sup>1</sup> After collection, responses were weighted to match the estimated characteristics of OneTable participants.**

**For the comparison group, BSG recruited a representative mix of Jewish young adults, then weighted to match the characteristics of the Jewish young adult audience based on Pew's "Jewish Americans in 2020."**

### **We learned about OneTable respondents<sup>2</sup>:**

- 61% identify as women, 33% as men, and 6% as non-binary, gender fluid, genderqueer, or two-spirit;
- 56% are single, 29% are married, engaged, or in a domestic partnership;
- **Nearly 1 out of 4 OneTable participants identify as a racial or ethnic background other than white.**



- 80% are Ashkenazi; 8% Sephardi; 6% Mizrahi; 14% "Just Jewish"; 2% other; 1% not sure;
- 34% identify as Reform; 32% as "Just Jewish"; 26% as Conservative; 13% selected multiple denominations; 8% as Orthodox; and another 8% identify with another specific denomination;
- 70% had b'nei mitzvah; 66% went to at least some Hebrew school; 52% went to Jewish summer camp; 50% went on a Birthright Israel trip.



To be sure, OneTable participants are much more in the category of “Jews of Religion,” as defined by Pew, as opposed to “Jews of no religion.” In its most recent study on American Jews in 2020, Pew found that 27% of American Jews identify as “Jews of no religion” – or Jews who describe themselves as agnostic, atheist, or nothing in particular, but who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish, and who still consider themselves Jewish in any way – ethnically, culturally, or because of their family background.



16+ cities are represented in the data

<sup>1</sup> Active hosts (n= 748) could also include a host who has guested, active guests (n = 736) are those who only have guested, and the disengaged group (n = 454) contained both guests and hosts.

<sup>2</sup> A note: some of these may not equal 100% – that is due to multi-select options and some percentages that are smaller.



# FOOD

1. buy it with thought
2. cook it with care
3. use less wheat & m
4. buy local foods
5. serve just enough
6. use what is left

don't waste

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

**OneTable is making Shabbat dinner accessible and meaningful for participants.**

75% of participants stated that because of OneTable, they are celebrating Shabbat when they wouldn't have otherwise – and that's **especially true of participants who did not have a regular Shabbat practice growing up.**

Hosts and guests alike state that because of OneTable, they recognize how easy<sup>3</sup> and important<sup>4</sup> it is to make Shabbat dinner part of their lives. Among hosts and guests, both active and currently inactive, **OneTable participants almost universally report celebrating Shabbat more regularly today<sup>5</sup> compared to before they got involved with OneTable** – that includes celebration



both with, and outside of, OneTable. Importantly, even those who came to OneTable with a Shabbat practice are celebrating Shabbat more frequently because of OneTable.

<sup>3</sup> 85% of hosts and 76% of guests recognized how easy it is to make Shabbat part of their lives because of OneTable.

<sup>4</sup> 81% of hosts and 61% of guests recognized how important it is to make Shabbat part of their lives because of OneTable.

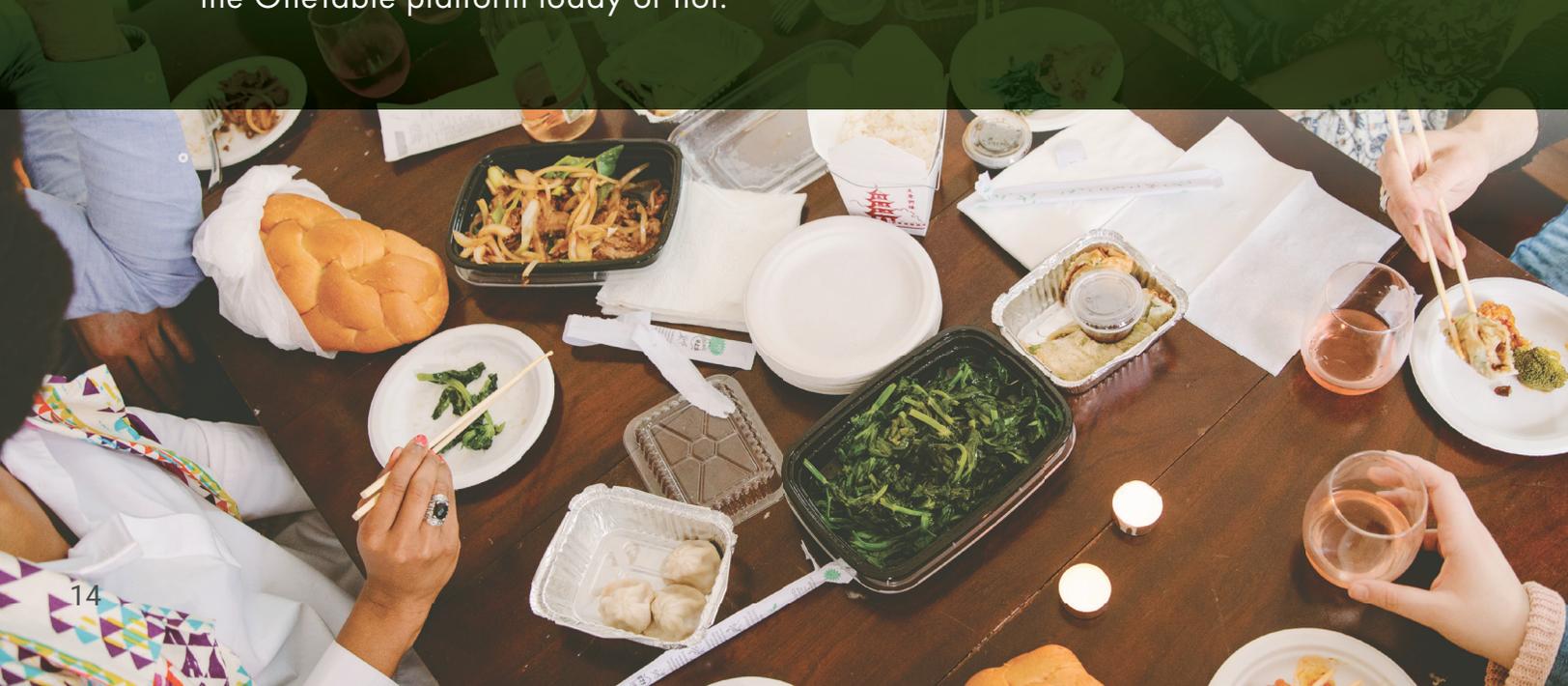
<sup>5</sup> 26% increase for active hosts, 17% increase for active guests, 10% increase for formerly active participants.

# OneTable participants celebrate Shabbat more than other Jewish young adults.

Analysis comparing OneTable participants with the comparison group, at all levels of Shabbat observance growing up, shows that as a result of OneTable, participants are 30% more likely than this comparison group to celebrate Shabbat today.

**For those who did not have a regular Shabbat practice growing up, OneTable has helped them develop one – and today, those OneTable participants are twice as likely to celebrate Shabbat as the comparison group of Jewish young adults who did not celebrate Shabbat regularly growing up.**

For participants who **did** have a regular Shabbat practice growing up, OneTable has helped them maintain and refine it – whether they're still using the OneTable platform today or not.



# OneTable is a powerful gateway to new Jewish rituals and practices.

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OneTable has become *the* destination for young adults to create a meaningful Shabbat dinner practice with their friends.

**But that's not all. By participating in OneTable, participants become more interested and involved in Jewish life beyond Shabbat dinners.**

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## Hearing from formerly active participants

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For this study, we checked in with people we haven't seen in a while, (454 respondents, 23% of survey participants, who hadn't been to a dinner since October 2020), to hear how their practices have evolved, and better understand the impact of OneTable on their lives.

Prior to OneTable, half of the formerly active guests and hosts celebrated Shabbat in some way at least once a month – a similar rate to the comparison

sample. And today, 60% of this group celebrates Shabbat at least once a month – **an increase of 10 percentage points.**

When it comes to disengagement, most formerly active participants described one of two reasons<sup>6</sup>:

1. either challenges related to the pandemic (50%), or
2. because the OneTable mission worked, and they now have a sustainable Shabbat practice (37%).

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<sup>6</sup> 1% didn't enjoy conversations; 4% said Shabbat isn't really for them; 4% didn't connect with people at the dinner they went to (vs. 40% have not returned because they're celebrating Shabbat outside of OneTable).



OneTable has given me the opportunity to explore what Shabbat means to me and has forever created a positive impact by opening my world to endless possibilities of connecting to Shabbat in a spirited, social and religious way.

– OneTable host

**The vast majority (95%) of formerly active participants found OneTable dinners satisfying and meaningful and have strong positive associations with the organization. After their journey with OneTable is complete, formerly active participants continue to integrate a regular Shabbat practice into their lives.**

OneTable participants are overwhelmingly more likely to say that Jewish identity is a major part of their lives:

- 92% of OneTable participants say being Jewish is important to them, compared to 85% of the comparison group.

When you dive deeper into Judaism being important or very important, there is a significant difference between OneTable participants and the comparison group:

- 62% of OneTable participants say being Jewish is **very important**, compared with 47% of the comparison group.

About 1-in-4 participants say that they've adopted new Jewish rituals or practices since their first dinner, and nearly 1-in-3 have sought out new Jewish organizations or communities.

45% of hosts and 32% of guests have **celebrated other Jewish holidays more often since their first OneTable dinner**. We know from social psychology research<sup>7</sup> that it takes a lot to create and sustain new habits – we see our participants not just talking about doing more Jewish things, but changing their

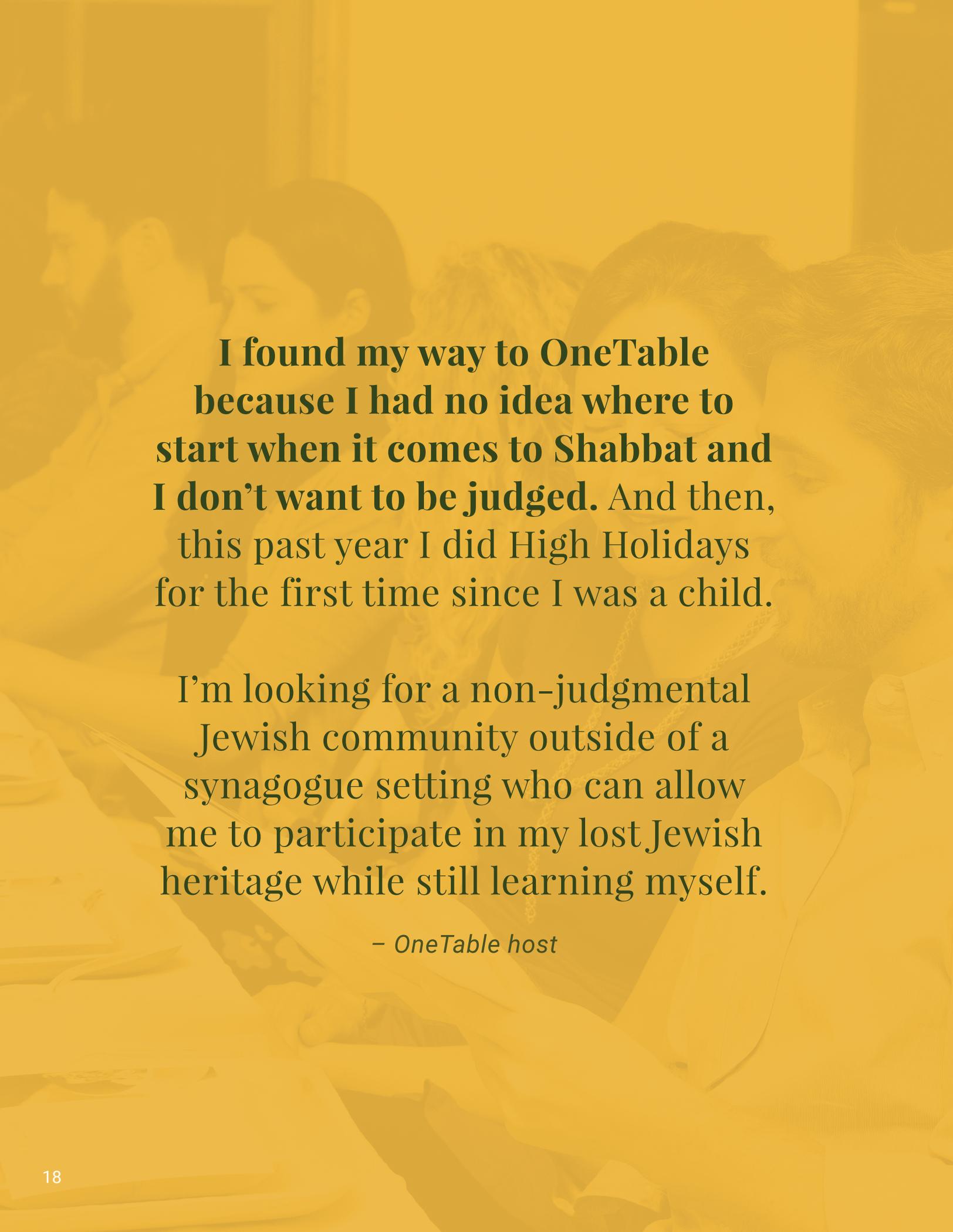
behavior to incorporate new Jewish rituals and practices into their lives. As time goes on, and participants engage with OneTable more frequently, we aim for the number of participants incorporating more Judaism into their lives to increase even more.

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Of note, the rates of “doing more Jewish things” are even higher among participants who did not celebrate Shabbat much growing up, **indicating that OneTable is an especially helpful gateway for those who are exploring Judaism as adults.**

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<sup>7</sup> Lally, Phillippa, et al. “How are habits formed: Modeling habit formation in the real world.”



**I found my way to OneTable because I had no idea where to start when it comes to Shabbat and I don't want to be judged. And then, this past year I did High Holidays for the first time since I was a child.**

I'm looking for a non-judgmental Jewish community outside of a synagogue setting who can allow me to participate in my lost Jewish heritage while still learning myself.

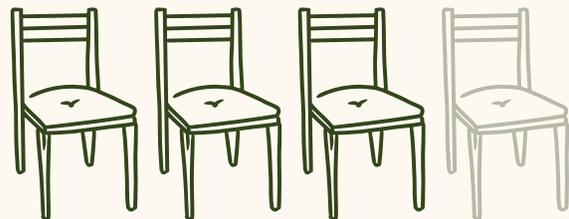
*– OneTable host*

# OneTable participants are craving connection.

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Human-centered design is at the core of OneTable, meaning the intervention we offer is designed with the needs and values of our potential participants in mind. We asked respondents about their lives in general.

**The results showed that OneTable participants derive fulfillment from spending time with family and friends, over anything else.** This makes sense, as we see countless recent studies showing that connections and relationships are vital in helping us live longer<sup>8</sup>, healthier<sup>9</sup> lives.



A clear majority, **three-in-four OneTable participants, including both guests and hosts, get a “great deal” of meaning from spending time with family and friends**, by far the two most common selections. This aligns with the responses of the Jewish young adult comparison sample – but spending time with friends is even more important to OneTable participants.

OneTable dinners help me unwind and celebrate Shabbat. In some ways, that is talking about Jewish political events, and in others it makes me proud to be Jewish and want to do Jewish things.

– *OneTable host*

<sup>8</sup> Holt-Lunstad, Julianne. “Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review.”

<sup>9</sup> Holt-Lunstad, Julianne. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors: The Power of Social Connection in Prevention.”



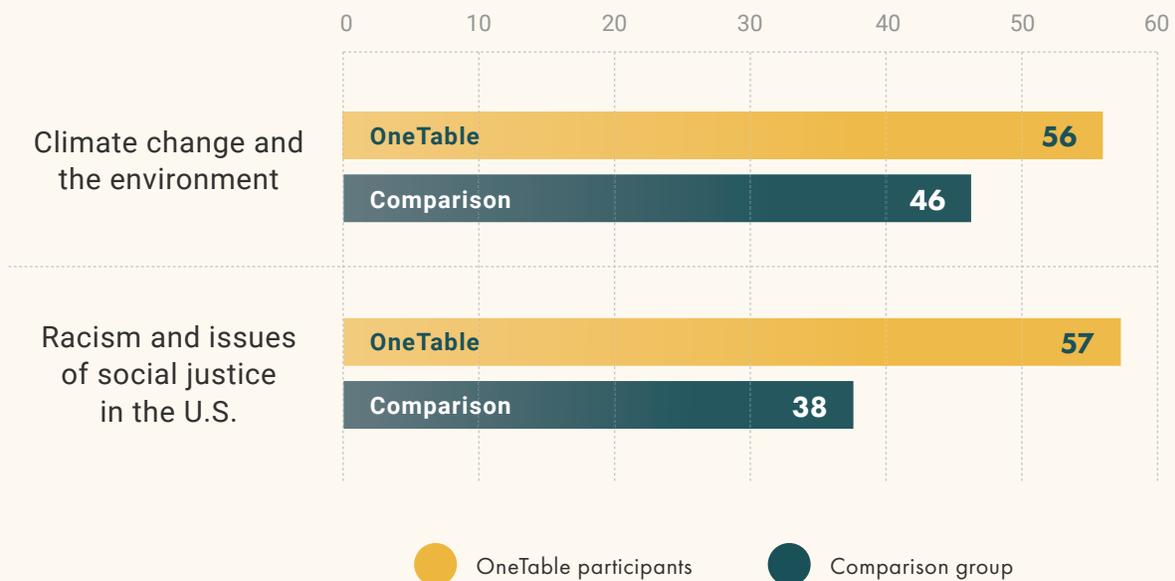
# OneTable participants are more attuned to social issues.

When we measure against the comparison group, we see that OneTable users are more concerned about larger social issues, including climate change, racism, and justice. Not only is this finding statistically significant, but it is mirrored in the results of Deloitte’s 2021 Global Millennial and

Gen Z Survey, which found Millennials and Gen Z believe the world has reached a tipping point on issues like racial justice, inequality, and the environment. These findings help guide OneTable’s work to create space for participants to discuss these topics at the Shabbat dinner table.

## How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following in your life today?

Showing % very concerned.



# They come for the connections, and stay for the intention.

Regardless of background, most first-time participants sign up for OneTable looking for a Jewish experience and the chance to connect with their peers. This means they're looking for those important social connections within Jewish experiences. These findings help guide OneTable's work to create space for participants to discuss these topics at the Shabbat dinner table.

## Why did you decide to attend your first OneTable Dinner?

Showing % of all reasons



Importantly, this is just as true for participants with fewer Jewish experiences growing up, as of those with many. They leave with both purposes fulfilled, and with a newfound appreciation for the depth of Shabbat, too.

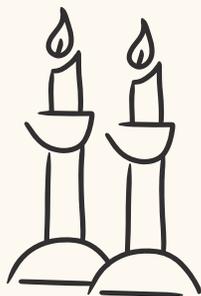
**Shabbat: a space in which to construct our own Jewish identity, a room each of us can fill with our own furniture.**

*– Abigail Pogrebin, My Jewish Year*

## OneTable dinners are venues to experiment with Jewish rituals.

When hosts thoughtfully design their dinner, they feel comfortable and connected to the practice they're creating. When guests are invited to a friend's Shabbat dinner or choose among open dinners to attend, they too take agency over their Friday night experiences.

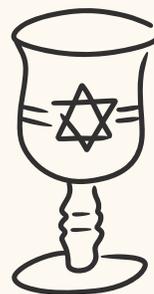
**Found new ways to celebrate Shabbat**



**81%**  
of hosts

**70%**  
of guests

**Learned more about Jewish rituals or traditions**



**27%**  
of participants

While each dinner uniquely reflects the individual host, there are commonalities among most OneTable gatherings. **At the Shabbat dinners, participants incorporate traditional Shabbat dinner rituals: 71% ate challah, 69% said blessings, and 63% lit Shabbat candles.**

The invitation to a OneTable dinner implies that I am wanted in that space, and that alone makes me excited to explore the connection and engage in **a space that feels safe and welcoming to me.**

– *OneTable host*

## Participants are creating connections through OneTable dinners.

More than half of participants say they met somebody new at their dinner and found something in common with another person; **80% of participants became closer with people.**



These positive experiences of connection lead to near-universal levels of satisfaction and meaning from their OneTable experiences.

- **98% of hosts and guests were satisfied with their dinner;**
- **94% of hosts and guests found their dinner meaningful.**

This means that participants are **getting what they came for.** OneTable dinners are accomplishing the social, emotional, and spiritual goals of participants, while empowering them to personalize Jewish ritual. Given this approach, it's not surprising that 88% say OneTable dinners have **"just the right amount of Jewish content."**

**Their initial aspirations for participating in OneTable are being fulfilled.**

Hosts and guests alike initially attended a OneTable dinner to:

1. participate in something Jewish,
2. have a social environment like Shabbat dinner,
3. and meet new people.

# Participants are grateful to have OneTable as a safe place to gather around difficult issues.

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One important component of the research was seeking to understand the impact on OneTable participants of rising antisemitism and the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Given the difficulty these issues can present, it was critical to understand how they play a role in their lives today.

OneTable participants and the comparison group expressed concern over both antisemitism in general and the conflict at similar rates<sup>10</sup>; however, these two critical topics are not considered their most pressing concerns. Issues that did rise to the top were climate change, racism, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as we saw earlier in this report.

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## The concerns about antisemitism and the conflict don't keep people away from OneTable; if anything, they increase their desire to attend a dinner.

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Concern over antisemitism and/or the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians makes no significant difference in most participants' inclination to attend a dinner.<sup>11</sup> In fact, some participants say those concerns make them more inclined to attend a OneTable dinner.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 88% of OneTable participants and 76% of the comparison group are concerned about antisemitism against the Jewish people in general; 84% of OneTable participants and 76% of the comparison group are concerned about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

<sup>11</sup> 67% of participants said antisemitism concerns doesn't make a difference in their participation; 81% of participants said the conflict between Israeli and Palestinians doesn't make a difference in their participation.

<sup>12</sup> Of those concerned about antisemitism, 27% are more inclined to participate in a OneTable dinner; of those concerned with the conflict, 14% are more inclined to participate in a OneTable dinner.

Having a space at a OneTable dinner to discuss the conflict as it comes up, in a safe and dynamic way, can be **really comforting**.

– OneTable host



Among those who said antisemitism made them more inclined to participate in OneTable dinners (27%)<sup>13</sup>, we asked why. The most common responses centered on the community, safety, and freedom of conversation they feel at OneTable dinners.

Importantly, not everybody is looking for a group of like-minded individuals; rather, many are looking for people who will be supportive, respectful, and understanding, even when having difficult discussions.

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**If there's any safe place for difficult, emotional conversations, it's a OneTable Shabbat.**

# OneTable helps alleviate loneliness.

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Most OneTable hosts (83%) and guests (76%) say that **they've become closer with people and they feel less lonely**<sup>14</sup> at their OneTable dinner. Plus, nearly 1-in-3 guests met up again with someone they met at dinner.

As advised by social isolation and loneliness expert Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, we included the De Jong Gierveld loneliness measure. Including a validated measure like this allowed us to increase the validity of what we've learned in this study.

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**We're wired to associate belonging with the sharing of stories, feelings, memories, and concerns. That's why our bodies relax and our spirits lift when we connect in genuine friendship and love.**

**Strong personal relationships not only add joy and meaning to our lives, but they have positive effects on our health, mood, and performance.**

– Dr. Vivek Murthy, United States Surgeon General

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<sup>14</sup> 74% of hosts and 71% of guests say that their experience at a OneTable dinner made them feel less lonely.

Loneliness is a well-established public health issue, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated it. OneTable adviser Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad's research shows that relationships and connections help people live longer and that loneliness is detrimental to physical and mental wellbeing.

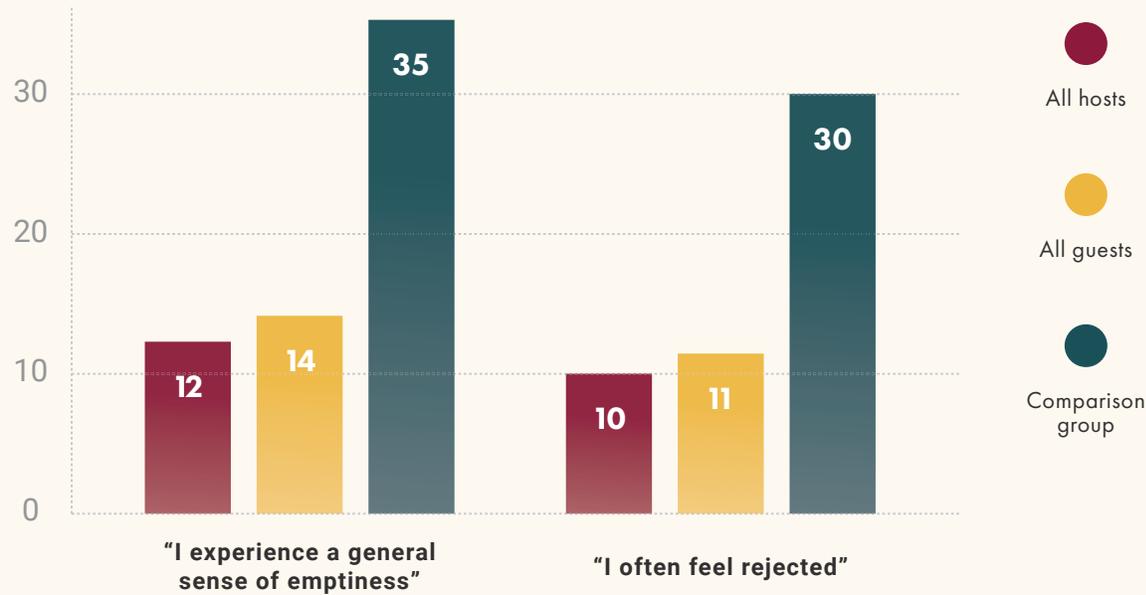
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**There is a bright spot: this research demonstrates that OneTable participants report feeling less lonely than the comparison group of other Jewish young adults.** The study found a profound difference between the two groups: OneTable participants are much less likely to hold feelings and attitudes associated with emotional loneliness than other Jewish young adults.

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**The De Jong Gierveld “Loneliness” Scale: Comparing OneTable users to all Jewish young adults.** Showing % of people who feel this way “all the time” or “often.”



These differences are significant, and cannot be accounted for solely by demographic differences – the pattern holds across nearly every demographic subgroup, including gender, age, relationship status, and Jewish denomination and background.

While the study cannot conclusively indicate whether this difference is due to OneTable alone, it does suggest that OneTable participants have found connection and meaning that some other young Jews are missing.



# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We are only scratching the surface.

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This research endeavor has also been an opportunity to learn about where we have room for growth.

**WE LEARNED...** that both hosting and “guesting” are impactful experiences, but that hosting leads to a more significant impact. This finding holds even after accounting for the fact that hosts generally have more Jewish experience than guests.

This is likely due to the stronger sense of agency hosts have over their Shabbat experiences. **SO...** In addition to encouraging more people to become hosts, we are developing ways to ensure that guests experience a strong sense of agency, too.

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**WE LEARNED...** that our community is large and diverse, and we have an opportunity to serve more people from interfaith backgrounds, engage with more men, and serve even more people who are not otherwise engaged in Jewish life.

**SO...** We are developing outreach strategies to better serve the fullest spectrum of young adult Jews.

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**WE LEARNED...** that while few of the comparison sample had familiarity with OneTable, after reading a brief description, two-in-three young Jews reported interest both in learning more and attending a dinner. We saw especially high interest from potential participants who live in the South and Midwest. More work needs to be done to ensure that young adults in all regions of the U.S. have access to meaningful Jewish community. **SO...** We seek philanthropic investments to build our capacity in smaller cities in these target regions.

**We asked the comparison group: Why might you be interested in attending a Shabbat dinner with OneTable?**

“Living in a new city makes it hard to make good connections with people and OneTable seems like a good way of making those connections. Also, Shabbat was never something my family did and I’m curious.”

Finally, for the 30% of the comparison group who were not interested, we asked why not. They shared similar responses to why our formerly active participants were not currently engaged with OneTable: concerns about the pandemic, being too busy to attend, and not interested in spending time with strangers. This indicates that our strategies to engage new participants and efforts to reconnect with formerly active participants can go hand-in-hand.



# CONCLUSION

While there are many ways to engage with Jewish community, this research confirms the outsized role that Shabbat plays in determining healthy and successful Jewish outcomes. The last decades of social science research have shown us the value of commensality, the intentional sharing of a meal, in determining healthy and successful social outcomes.<sup>15</sup> OneTable brings these two sources of meaning together with curated resources and deep support, and that's what makes OneTable such a successful intervention.

**The OneTable model consists of DIY, human-centered Jewish experiences grounded in joy, elevation, and welcoming. This model can and should be scaled and adopted to serve the larger Jewish community.**

This research validates the intention and success behind the OneTable model: merging Jewish experiences with deep and fulfilling social connection. The powerful social and emotional components of a OneTable dinner are as important as the Jewish experiences – and to many participants, they are intrinsically tied together.

As we have seen for generations, and Ahad Ha'am beautifully summarized, **“More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.”**

We invite you to join us in this work to support and inspire the current generations of Jewish young adults.

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<sup>15</sup> Fulkerson et al. 2006: Family dinner meal frequency and adolescent development: Relationships with developmental assets and high-risk behaviors; Hammons & Fiese, 2011: Is frequency of shared family meals related to the nutritional health of children and adolescents?; Sobal & Hanston, 2001: Family meals and body weight in US adults.

**My mother died when I was younger and I didn't grow up learning about my Jewish side before OneTable.**

**Rising antisemitism made me feel some urgency to connect with that side of myself and finally claim it. OneTable made it easy to do and prompted me to host Shabbat dinners.**

**I always wanted to try doing Shabbat and more Jewish rituals, but never did before I learned about the platform.**

*– OneTable host*

I am **thrilled** to see that OneTable users are three times less likely to experience a sense of emptiness or rejection than the comparison group of young Jews that you fielded alongside your report. Huge props to the whole team!

– *Former Research Advisory Board member, Casper ter Kuile, author of The Power of Ritual*

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**ONETABLE**  
SHABBAT TOGETHER

