

**Demographic and Jewish Identity Characteristics of JCC Members:  
Comparisons with Affiliated and Unaffiliated Jews in the United States**

Steven M. Cohen

Florence G. Heller / JCCA Research Center

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Which Jews join Jewish Community Centers in the United States? More specifically, how do they differ from other Jews, both from those who are otherwise affiliated with Jewish communal life by way of congregations and other organizations, and from the even larger number who are totally unaffiliated? This is the central question this memorandum seeks to address. Learning of the sorts of American Jews who are more or less likely to join a JCC provides the requisite grounding for considering the policies and practices affecting membership recruitment. Know who the JCCs currently reach can suggest the sort of constituencies that may be most amenable for further membership recruitment efforts. And, knowing who the JCCs fail to attract can provide clues to the sorts of barriers that inhibit Jews from joining Jewish Community Centers.

This statistical analysis is based upon the recently conducted National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), sponsored by the United Jewish Communities. Fielded in 2000-01, the survey consists of over 4,500 Jewish households across the United States. (Canada is not included, and patterns in Canada may well differ from those found in the United States.) To be clear, these data apply only to Jews (defined very broadly). They do not encompass non-Jews, except for those who may be living in households with an adult Jew.

To understand who joins JCCs, we compare the characteristics among three groups:

- 1) Members of JCCs.
- 2) Jews who are otherwise affiliated, by belonging to congregations or other Jewish organizations (such as, most widely, Hadassah and B'nai B'rith).
- 3) Unaffiliated Jews, who report no membership in JCCs, synagogues, or other Jewish organizations.

Respectively, the three groups amount to 17%, 30%, and 53% of American Jewish adults. (Since a few JCCs do not offer formal memberships and operate on a fee-for-service basis, the actual proportion of adult Jews in the United States who are affiliated with JCCs is slightly higher than that reported here.)

The tendency for different sorts of Jews to join JCCs as days-paying members in part reflects the general tendency of Jews to affiliate with any Jewish institution, and in part reflects the special tendency of Jews to affiliate with a JCC. That is, Jews who join JCCs tend to join other Jewish institutions. Accordingly, in examining the findings, we will be alert to detecting both processes in operation, both joining Jewish life in general and joining JCCs in particular. Some groups in the population may over- or under-affiliate with JCCs simply because they tend to over- or under-affiliate with Jewish communal life in general. In addition, certain groups in the population may over- or under-affiliate with JCCs specifically, relative to their general rates of affiliating with Jewish institutions. That is, in certain circumstances we will find that JCCs perform exceedingly well or poorly in penetrating the markets of affiliated Jews.

### **Region: Under-affiliated in the West, More affiliated in the Mid-Atlantic**

Among unaffiliated Jews, a disproportionate number (29%) are found in the West, with 5% of all unaffiliated Jews in the Mountain states and an additional 24% in the Pacific region (largely California). In contrast, among JCC members, just 16% are found in this region, and among otherwise affiliated Jews 17% are in the West. Clearly, Western Jews are under-represented relatively among JCC members, but this under-representation can be totally attributed to the smaller likelihood of Jews in the West to affiliate in any way with Jewish life. If JCCs tend to have weaker membership penetration than elsewhere, this trend is largely a consequence of low rates of Jewish communal affiliation generally in the Western states. By the same logic, we also find that JCC members are relatively over-concentrated in the Middle Atlantic region (consisting in part of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania), also consistent with Jewish communal affiliation patterns generally in this region.

In other words, on a broad regional basis, fluctuations in the penetration of JCCs into the Jewish population generally is closely tied to the tendency of local Jews to affiliate with any sort of Jewish institution.

| Census Divisions * JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                    |                                                 |                     |             |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
|                                                                    |                    | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             | Total  |
|                                                                    |                    | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members |        |
| Census Divisions                                                   | New England        | 6.6%                                            | 7.5%                | 6.6%        | 6.9%   |
|                                                                    | Middle Atlantic    | 28.9%                                           | 39.1%               | 41.4%       | 34.1%  |
|                                                                    | East North Central | 9.0%                                            | 10.0%               | 9.1%        | 9.3%   |
|                                                                    | West North Central | 2.4%                                            | 3.6%                | 2.6%        | 2.8%   |
|                                                                    | South Atlantic     | 19.7%                                           | 17.2%               | 21.3%       | 19.2%  |
|                                                                    | East South Central | 1.2%                                            | .4%                 | 1.8%        | 1.0%   |
|                                                                    | West South Central | 3.1%                                            | 4.8%                | 1.5%        | 3.3%   |
|                                                                    | Mountain           | 5.2%                                            | 2.5%                | 2.5%        | 3.9%   |
|                                                                    | Pacific            | 23.9%                                           | 14.9%               | 13.2%       | 19.4%  |
| Total                                                              |                    | 100.0%                                          | 100.0%              | 100.0%      | 100.0% |

### Age Variation: Underrepresented younger adults, Greater affiliation among seniors

Compared with the Jewish population at large, and even the affiliated population in particular, JCCs manage to attract a relatively small number of Jews under the age of 35. Just 15% of JCC adult Jews fall in this age bracket, as contrasted with 25% of those who are otherwise affiliated, and as many as 33% of the unaffiliated. Thus, younger adults do not join JCCs not only because they are less likely to join any Jewish institution. In addition, they are especially unlikely to affiliate with JCCs as compared with their relatively greater tendency to join congregations and other Jewish organizations.

The patterns among senior adults (those 65 and over) are reversed, demonstrating the relative strength of JCCs in this older age bracket. These Jews are more likely to affiliate in general. However, in addition, JCC members especially consist of those over 65.

| 6 age groups * JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |          |                                                 |                     |             |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
|                                                                |          | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             | Total  |
|                                                                |          | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members |        |
| 6 age groups                                                   | Under 35 | 33.4%                                           | 25.4%               | 15.4%       | 27.9%  |
|                                                                | 35-44    | 16.0%                                           | 14.5%               | 15.8%       | 15.5%  |
|                                                                | 45-54    | 18.8%                                           | 22.9%               | 21.6%       | 20.5%  |
|                                                                | 55-64    | 11.9%                                           | 13.6%               | 11.6%       | 12.3%  |
|                                                                | 65-74    | 10.3%                                           | 11.6%               | 17.4%       | 11.9%  |
|                                                                | 75+      | 9.6%                                            | 12.0%               | 18.2%       | 11.8%  |
| Total                                                          |          | 100.0%                                          | 100.0%              | 100.0%      | 100.0% |

### Family configurations: The under-represented singles

Consistent with the age patterns, we find that JCCs dramatically under-enroll those who are unmarried with no children. Just 11% of JCC Jewish members fall in this category, as contrasted with more than twice as many among otherwise affiliated Jews (where singles comprise 23% of the population), and more than three times as many of the unaffiliated (38%).

On the other hand, JCC membership disproportionately consists of those who are parents of school-age children (24%), empty nesters (39%), and widows (10%). In each case, the JCC proportion is larger than the comparable number among the otherwise affiliated, where the figures are larger, in turn, than those for the unaffiliated.

| Family type * JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                |                                                 |                     |             |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
|                                                               |                | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             | Total  |
|                                                               |                | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members |        |
| Family type                                                   | unmar,nokids   | 38.8%                                           | 23.1%               | 11.4%       | 29.4%  |
|                                                               | married,nokids | 10.1%                                           | 7.5%                | 6.2%        | 8.7%   |
|                                                               | single parent  | 5.8%                                            | 6.5%                | 4.3%        | 5.8%   |
|                                                               | tots parents   | 5.2%                                            | 4.6%                | 5.4%        | 5.0%   |
|                                                               | school parents | 10.3%                                           | 17.9%               | 23.8%       | 14.9%  |
|                                                               | empty nesters  | 23.2%                                           | 32.7%               | 38.9%       | 28.7%  |
|                                                               | widow(er)      | 6.7%                                            | 7.6%                | 10.0%       | 7.5%   |
| Total                                                         |                | 100.0%                                          | 100.0%              | 100.0%      | 100.0% |

### Education and Income: An upscale JCC membership

JCC members disproportionately report holding graduate degrees, and earning \$150,000 or more in family annual income. While education and income are related to Jewish-joining in general, JCCs especially attract a socio-economically upscale constituency. JCC membership patterns reflect the wider tendency of more upscale Americans to affiliate more frequently. However, JCC affiliation patterns are even more decidedly upscale than those characterizing congregations and other Jewish organizations.

| Education * JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                 |                                                 |                     |             |        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
|                                                             |                 | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             | Total  |
|                                                             |                 | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members |        |
| Education                                                   | HS              | 47.4%                                           | 41.4%               | 42.0%       | 44.7%  |
|                                                             | BA              | 31.7%                                           | 30.9%               | 28.3%       | 30.8%  |
|                                                             | Graduate Degree | 20.9%                                           | 27.8%               | 29.7%       | 24.5%  |
| Total                                                       |                 | 100.0%                                          | 100.0%              | 100.0%      | 100.0% |

| Income * JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                   |                                                 |                     |             |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
|                                                          |                   | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             | Total  |
|                                                          |                   | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members |        |
| Income (thousands)                                       | Less than 25      | 23.8%                                           | 15.0%               | 14.6%       | 19.9%  |
|                                                          | 25-50 (49,999)    | 25.0%                                           | 21.6%               | 22.3%       | 23.6%  |
|                                                          | 50-100 (99,999)   | 31.5%                                           | 33.4%               | 28.0%       | 31.5%  |
|                                                          | 100-150 (149,999) | 12.8%                                           | 16.1%               | 16.9%       | 14.4%  |
|                                                          | 150+              | 6.9%                                            | 13.9%               | 18.2%       | 10.7%  |
| Total                                                    |                   | 100.0%                                          | 100.0%              | 100.0%      | 100.0% |

### **Jewish identity patterns: In-married, ethnically connected, and religiously active**

On all measures of Jewish involvement, the JCC population is more engaged along ethnic and religious dimensions. JCC members resemble the otherwise affiliated in their far higher measures of engagement, and even surpass them in almost all available indices of Jewish involvement.

To take a very illustrative set of numbers, we may examine the in-marriage rates (among those who are married). Among the unaffiliated, under half (46%) of those married are married to Jews. In contrast, 87% of the otherwise affiliated are in-married and even more (91%) of JCCs are in-married. Clearly, despite efforts to reach out to the intermarried, JCCs have remained much more attractive to the in-married, and are even more attractive (relatively) to in-married Jews than are other institutions in Jewish life.

Fully 80% of JCC Jewish adult members belong to congregations, and 58% belong to Jewish organizations. Most have been to Israel, and a third contribute at least \$100 to their Federation campaigns (more than the corresponding figure – 22% -- among the otherwise affiliated). Vast majorities of JCC Jewish members (around 90%, plus or minus) engage in such activities as attending High Holiday services, having a Seder, and lighting Chanukah candles. Most JCC members (59%) report that most of their friends are Jewish, as compared with just 15% of the unaffiliated majority.

Clearly, JCC members are Jewishly engaged, both in religious and ethnic terms. The implications for membership policies of this current state of affairs merits serious attention and exploration.

|                                                | JCC Members, Otherwise Affiliated, Unaffiliated |                     |             |         |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------|
|                                                | Unaffiliated                                    | Affiliated, not JCC | JCC members | Total   |
| Inmarried (of all married)                     | 46.2103                                         | 86.9425             | 91.0285     | 69.3869 |
| Most friends Jewish                            | 15.2866                                         | 50.3754             | 58.7359     | 33.1609 |
| synagogue member                               | .0000                                           | 82.8761             | 79.6359     | 38.2994 |
| other jewish organization member               | .0000                                           | 45.1682             | 58.1995     | 23.3653 |
| Attended adult Jewish education                | 5.8408                                          | 37.7247             | 39.6889     | 23.9503 |
| Volunteered in a Jewish context                | 4.1521                                          | 36.9247             | 44.8089     | 20.8353 |
| High Holiday services+                         | 22.3924                                         | 82.7111             | 86.7695     | 51.8638 |
| Attends More than Monthly                      | 2.0291                                          | 27.3000             | 36.1274     | 15.6276 |
| Attends Passover Seder usually                 | 45.9506                                         | 91.3012             | 93.4783     | 67.6058 |
| Chanukah candles usually lit                   | 54.6925                                         | 92.5269             | 91.8022     | 72.3088 |
| Fasts on Yom Kippur                            | 27.0030                                         | 72.9333             | 77.3294     | 49.2410 |
| Sabbath candles usually lit                    | 8.2548                                          | 40.6141             | 48.0548     | 27.7612 |
| Been to Israel                                 | 20.4776                                         | 51.2174             | 55.8006     | 35.4801 |
| Been to Israel twice or more                   | 5.7324                                          | 25.6276             | 29.6178     | 15.6407 |
| Very attached to Israel                        | 17.0037                                         | 37.9283             | 44.5275     | 27.9348 |
| Gave \$100+ to nonJewish charities             | 36.2429                                         | 50.2108             | 50.7859     | 42.8470 |
| Gave \$100+ to Jewish charities aside from Fed | 8.4250                                          | 48.2891             | 56.0976     | 28.4121 |
| Gave \$100+ to Federation campaign             | 2.9790                                          | 22.4599             | 32.8024     | 13.8678 |
| Being Jewish very important                    | 32.4501                                         | 64.3097             | 70.9729     | 51.5610 |
| Religion very important                        | 18.6982                                         | 42.8823             | 47.6005     | 30.8560 |
| Believes in God                                | 68.5548                                         | 84.8053             | 84.5399     | 76.1751 |
| Used Internet for Jewish information           | 30.1637                                         | 48.7206             | 43.1274     | 39.3189 |