



Exploring Jewish Identity

Learning Objectives

When you have finished the learning module, you should be able to:

1. Identify several different ways in which Jewish identity can be expressed.
2. Read data that comes from community surveys and the National Jewish Population Survey to reach conclusions about Jewish identity.
3. Explain some of the ways in which expressions of Jewish identity vary by age, gender, and education.
4. Explain some of the differences between Jews with different denominational preferences (or none at all).
5. Explain some of the differences in Jewish identity between Jews married to other Jews or married to non-Jews.
6. Compare findings in one Jewish community to another.
7. Understand the difference between a National Jewish Population Survey and a Jewish Community Study.
8. Know how to use the compendium of comparisons between surveys that is available at the Berman Jewish DataBank.

Preliminary Expectations about Jewish Identity

Before you begin this module, let's think a little about Jewish Identity:

1. What kinds of behaviors and attitudes do you think express Jewish identity?
2. Jews do not all express their Jewish identity in the same way. Jewish identity may vary by age, level of education, gender, denominational preference, whether or not they are married to someone of a different faith, and many other ways. What do you think are the main variables that explain how Jewish identity varies?
3. How do you think older and younger Jews differ in terms of their Jewish identity?
4. Jews are affiliated with different denominations of Judaism: the main ones are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. Some are not affiliated with any. How do you think Jewish identity differs between these groups?
5. How do you think Jewish men and women differ in the ways they express Jewish identity, if at all?
6. What about Jews with different levels of education, do you think they differ?
7. Do you think expressions of Jewish identity vary by the type of Jewish community Jews live in? How so?

Instructions

Answer the preliminary expectations on your own.

Brief Introduction

Jewish identity is a multi-dimensional concept, expressed as a feeling of belonging to the Jewish people as well as practicing the Jewish religion. It may be expressed in public behavior, such as going to synagogue, as well as private behaviors, such as keeping the kosher dietary rules in the home. Some Jews keep abreast of Jewish media (books, newspapers, films, internet), while others get involved in the Jewish community (volunteer for Jewish organizations, contribute money to Jewish causes) or have Jewish friends. Some express their identity in all of these ways, others in only a few. Some expressions of Jewish identity are more common in some communities than others.

In this learning module, you will use survey data from the National Jewish Population Survey and some community studies to explore different aspects of individual Jewish identity. The National Jewish Population Survey was conducted in 2000-1 on a representative national sample of American Jews. The community studies are collected in single geographical areas.

If you find yourself lost at any point, look to the instructions on the right.

Let's take a look at some different aspects of Jewish identity by exploring the [QuickAnalysis](#) section of the module.

You'll notice that there are several different categories provided to you. For example, some of the variables (i.e., questions) reflect religious Jewish identity while others measure ethnic Jewish identity. You can also access a community study by its name.

Take a look at some of the different ways to measure a person's religious Jewish identity. Let's begin by looking at religious *behaviors*.

1. What percent of people surveyed in the Atlanta Community Study say they always light Friday night candles (for the Sabbath)?

Click on the "Tables" tab.

Instructions

Click [here](#) to get to the Quick Analysis page. If it asks for a login, select "guest account" and continue.

Click on "Religious Jewish identity"

Under "Light Friday Night Candles" find the Atlanta Community Survey and click on it. Look at the pie chart to answer question 1.

Jews differ by what denomination they identify with, or whether they identify with a denomination at all. Let's explore how lighting Friday night candles is related to the denomination the individual identifies with.

2. What percent of people identifying as Orthodox always light Friday night candles?
3. What percent of people identifying as "Just Jewish" (without any specific denominational affiliation) always light Friday night candles?
4. How does the percent never light Friday night candles vary by denominational preference?

Go back to the Religious Identity page, or scroll the variables on the top of the page, and find the **keep kosher in home** measure.

5. What percent of people say they keep kosher in their home?

Click on the "Tables" tab.

6. How does keeping kosher vary by age of the respondent?

Let's look at keeping kosher in another community. Click the right arrow next to the "Community" button until you get to the Detroit community.

7. What percent of people in the Detroit area say they keep kosher? Is that more or less than the percent keeping kosher in Atlanta? How would you explain this comparison?

Instructions

For question 2, click on the Tables Tab of "Light Friday Night Candles" and then scroll down to the table of Fcan*denom. Find the percentage of Orthodox who always light Friday night candles. Then find the percentage of "Just Jewish" who always light Friday night candles.

Find the row of "Never" lights Friday night candles and compare the percentages across denominational group for question 3.

For question 5, Click the right arrow next to "Variable" until you reach "Kosher in Home." For question 6, click on the Tables tab and scroll to the "kosher*age" table.

For question 7, click on the right arrow next to Community to get to the Detroit Community Study. Use the pie chart to answer question 7, and compare it to your answer in question 5.

Now go back to the Main menu and click on “Ethnic Jewish Identity.” Find the measure of being a member of a JCC. Click on the National Jewish Population Study of 2000-01.

8. What percentage of respondents belonged to a JCC in 2000-01?
9. Read the notes to the Table. Who do the respondents in the National Jewish Population Survey represent?

Click on the “Tables” tab.

10. Does membership in a JCC vary by region of the United States? In which region of the U.S. is the percent of people belonging to a JCC highest? Lowest?

Pick another measure of ethnic Jewish identity that interests you.

11. What question did you choose?
12. Describe what the data shows about this measure. What percent of people fall in a particular category? Does it differ by denomination, region, gender, or some other factor?

Now let’s look at some more of the community studies to see what they can tell us about Jewish identity. Ira Sheskin has put together a summary of 65 of the most recent community surveys, called “2013 Comparisons of Jewish Communities: A Compendium of Tables and Bar Charts.” Let’s take a look at a few of the tables in the *Compendium* that relate to Jewish identity.

Go to the home page of the Berman Jewish DataBank (jewishdatabank.org). Click on DataBank Resources. In the pull-down menu, click on Comparisons of U.S. Local Jewish Communities. Go to the second file listed, the *Compendium*.

Now click on Section 11: Religious Practices and Synagogue Attendance (in the right menu). Go to Table 9 on p. 32 of the report.

Instructions

Find the Main menu link above the tables and pie charts and click on it. Click on Ethnic Jewish Identity on the home page. Find “Member of JCC” and scroll down to the National Jewish Population Study 2000-1, and click on it. Use the pie chart to answer question 8. Read the note below the pie chart to answer question 9.

Click on the Tables tab and scroll down to the JCCmem*zipcen4 table to answer question 9.

Scroll through the “Variables” by right or left clicking to find another ethnic Jewish identity indicator that interests you. For question 12, use the pie chart and tables to answer the question.

13. In which community is there the highest attendance at religious services once a month or more? The lowest attendance?

Let's look at the differences in some of these communities in our [QuickAnalysis](#) charts and tables.

On the homepage of [QuickAnalysis](#), find the Community Studies and click on it to go to the Community Studies page. We don't have the community with the highest attendance rate, but let's look at New York (2002), which is almost as high.

Go to the community survey of New York. Look at the socio-demographic characteristics.

14. What percent of the community is Orthodox? Just Jewish?

15. What percent of the community has a college or graduate degree?

16. What percent of the community is 75 or older?

17. Which of these do you think is most related to synagogue attendance?

Now go to the latest community survey of the Las Vegas. Click on the Socio-demographic characteristics.

18. What percent of the community is Orthodox? Just Jewish?

19. What percent of the community has a B.A. or higher education?

20. What percent of the community is 75 or older?

Compare the results in 18-19-20 to the results of 14-15-16. Which seems the best explanation for the difference in synagogue attendance in these two communities? Explain.

Instructions

The answer to question 13 is in Table 9 of Section 11 of the Compendium.

From [here](#) to get to the homepage of QuickAnalysis, then click on the Community Studies link on the left side. Scroll to the New York (2002) study. Click on Socio-demographic characteristics. Click on denomination for Q14, education for Q15, age for Q16.

Scroll through the community studies by clicking right or left arrows above the tables and charts. Find Las Vegas and then follow the instructions above, like you did for New York.

Now let's see if there are similar differences in ethnic identity. Let's look at volunteering for a Jewish organization as it varies over communities.

Go to the home page of the Berman Jewish DataBank (jewishdatabank.org). Click on DataBank Resources, and Comparison of U.S. Local Jewish Communities in the pull-down menu, to get to the Compendium again. Now click on Section 32: Volunteerism. Go to Table 1 on p. 3 of that section.

21. In which community is there the highest percent of the population volunteering for Jewish organizations? The lowest percent?
22. Now look at the percent volunteering for Jewish AND non-Jewish organizations. Which community has the highest percent? The lowest percent? Are they the same as the answers to question 22? What does that tell you about the communities?
23. On your own: See what you can learn about the communities that might explain the differences between them, and discuss that here.

Go back to the home page of the Jewish DataBank, under Studies, Surveys & Data click on U.S. Local Communities, and find the latest community study for the community with the highest percent volunteering. Click on it, and read the description of the community.

24. How many Jews live in that community? What percentage of Jews in that area have lived in that area for at least twenty years?

Now go back to the community archive and find the study for the community with the lowest percent volunteering. Read the description of the key findings.

25. According to the key findings, in what ways is this community different from other Jewish communities in the United States? How would this be related to the lower percent volunteering for Jewish organizations?

You can learn more about these 2 communities by clicking on [QuickAnalysis](#).

Now let's say you're interested in another topic about an individual's Jewish identity. You can see if it's listed on the home page of [QuickAnalysis](#).

Let's say you're interested in how many people use the internet for Jewish topics. Go ahead and search for "internet use" and find the variable that asks about it.

Find a question from the Detroit community study named jnet that asks about internet use for Jewish content. Is it listed under Religious Jewish Identity or Ethnic Jewish Identity? Click on the page for that kind of Jewish identity on the left side of the page. Scroll to the Detroit community study.

26. What percent of respondents in Detroit said "Never" to this question?

Click on the "Tables" tab.

At the top of the page you will see the same overall responses. If you scroll down you will see several tables comparing responses across denomination, gender, age and education.

27. How do responses to this question differ across age categories? Describe.

28. Do you think this is a result of a trend toward greater internet usage among younger people? How do you think this will change Jewish identity in the future?

You now know how to find different questions about expressions of individuals' Jewish identity, and to understand the data from the 2000-1 National Jewish Population Survey, the community surveys, and the Compendium of community surveys.

Instructions

Click [here](#) to go to the homepage for QuickAnalysis, then find the list of Religious Jewish identity and Ethnic Jewish identity.

Open Ethnic Jewish identity, find Use Internet for Jewish content, and click on the Detroit community study listed under it. The answer to question 26 comes from the pie chart. The answer to question 27 comes from the Tables.

Reaction to the Learning Module

1. What did you learn about Jewish identity in this module? Were any of your expectations supported? Were any refuted?
2. What else would you like to know about Jewish identity?
3. How confident do you feel that you could use the data on the Berman Jewish DataBank to explore this topic?
4. Do you have any suggestions about improving the learning module or developing other learning modules or any other comments? Email them to Harriet Hartman at Hartman@rowan.edu.