

Counting Inconsistencies

An Analysis of American Jewish Population
Studies,
with a Focus on Jews of Color

Methodological Appendix

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Introduction

Counting Inconsistencies is the product of a close analysis of American Jewish population and demographic studies from the past 20 years. For the purposes of this study, we approached all collateral associated with a population study, responses, and survey instruments as data that we would subject to analysis.

We accessed most of the data included in this report through the Berman Jewish DataBank, including SPSS files of survey responses.

2

Sampling and Selection of Data

We studied 25 different data sources that can be divided into three separate categories.

1. Community Population Studies. These are studies of specific communities, typically commissioned by local Jewish Federations, often in partnership with other local Jewish organizations or philanthropists. Each study was intended to reveal population patterns that might influence community-level planning, and thus each study was conceived and commissioned independently. These studies were not selected as a comprehensive sample of all community studies, but to capture studies that cover the largest Jewish population centers in the United States.
2. National Population Studies. Since 1970, there have been four comprehensive demographic studies of the American Jewish community. The National Jewish Population

Studies of 1970, 1990, and 2000 were all commissioned by Jewish communal organizations. The Pew Research Center study of Jewish Americans (2013) was conceived and conducted by an independent research organization, in consultation with some leading scholars of American Jewry.

3. Population Specific Studies. Often, organizations gather data on populations of interest to them, whether through more generic surveys or through evaluation efforts. These data sources reveal certain characteristics of more limited populations, and we included studies that focused on younger American Jews, as they represent the future of American Jewry.

Methodology

After selecting our data sources, we systematically examined survey instruments, technical reports, published material, and any other collateral we could locate or identify. Where no such material was available, we reached out to the researchers responsible for conducting the studies, so they could provide insight and context. We identified every question that asked about racial or ethnic identity, and we located every reference to Jews of Color in publicly available reports, presentation slide decks, and elsewhere. We compiled a database of all these resources, including information about sampling, screening, and weighting strategies.

Once we gathered all of this information, we undertook a systematic analysis of all of the data and its sources. We began

by conducting close readings of reports, questionnaires, and technical appendices. Specifically, we looked for insights into how racial and ethnic identities were and were not reported.

Where appropriate, we undertook new analyses of survey responses, utilizing SPSS files from the Berman Jewish Databank.

We also examined reference surveys in order to better understand how researchers arrived at their population estimates, and so that we could faithfully reproduce their findings.

We examined and experimented with weighting methodologies that allowed us to reconstruct each study's original findings, supplementing information where necessary. For example, a handful of studies were missing information on the racial or ethnic identities of their respondents, so we created analyses that could account for the missing data. Where the data allowed, we ran further analyses on relevant questions. We built measures of responses to questions about racial and ethnic identity and we explored many options of how to best bring those questions in line with one another.

We identified population studies that presented the most well-developed picture of Jews of Color, and from those three we were able to estimate a likely range for the percentage of Jews of Color in the US. We did so by establishing a lower limit, based on a more restrictive definition operationalized by the AJPP. We estimated an upper limit that extrapolated from some of the conclusions of the San Francisco (2017) study and the New York (2011) study,

which resulted in a final estimated range of 12% - 15% of the American Jewish population.

Where possible, we ran additional analyses that we thought might highlight demographic trends among Jews of Color, such as population growth, fertility, and the changing ways in which racial and ethnic categories are operationalized in demography.

Conclusion

Given the variance between sampling and weighting strategies, among formulations of questions about racial and ethnic identity, and among specific questions and response options provided for survey respondents, it became clear to us that it would be impossible to synthesize a single, reliable data source that would enable us to answer the question we initially set out to answer.

As a result, we turned our focus to documenting the ways in which available demographic and population studies have insufficiently framed questions of racial and ethnic identity among American Jews. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses allowed us to both recreate findings from existing data sources and identify key insights into inconsistencies and shortcomings across the field of American Jewish population studies.

What emerged is a portrait of the state of the field of American Jewish population studies, in which Jews of Color have likely been inconsistently accounted for in portraits of the American Jewish community.