

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP BY AMERICAN JEWS: NJPS DATA

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Most surveys studying participation in voluntary associations have shown that in "the land of the joiners" the Jews of the United States belong to associations more than any other ethno-religious group; see, for example, Wright and Hyman (1958:287-8), Hausknecht (1962:62-3), Payne *et al.* (1972:225). The reasons given are varied and various. Some see the phenomenon as an effect of the high socio-economic status of American Jews, for the correlation between voluntary association participation and high status is well rooted in the literature. Minority status has been shown to be correlated with associational participation (although other forms of behaviour, including isolationism, are not unknown) and some writers have seen American Jews coming together in their own associations and joining general associations in order to acculturate and assimilate into American society. Levitats (1959:333-7) has shown the deep-rooted historical origin of the voluntary association among the Jews, and some writers have seen associational participation as a complement to religious activity and others as an alternative, but both groups agree that associationalism is part of Jewish life. Finally, Sklare and Greenblum (1967:253-6) have explained associational behaviour in terms of family-life cycle and have attributed part of it to the "child orientation" of the American Jew.

Which every theory we choose, the data upon which they are based are of two kinds: either they are national samples or large, general samples of various localities, in which the number of Jews is frequently too small for statistical analysis, or they are community studies, the generalizability of which is unclear. This paper is an attempt, therefore, to present national data on a large sample of American Jews. Using the data of the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), of 1970-71, the paper will examine which associations American Jews join and will analyse the membership of the major associations, particularly from a demographic perspective.

In a recent analysis of trends in Jewish philanthropy, Cohen (1980) has examined Bostonian Jews and their contributions to Jewish philanthropy in the years 1965 and 1975. His prognosis was generally pessimistic and his data tended to support his hypotheses: Jewish philanthropy is declining and should continue to decline as a new generation of American Jews grows up and takes the place of its parents and grandparents. This paper will consider the relevance of Cohen's findings to associational membership; using a national sample of American Jews about halfway between the two surveys that Cohen used, does a similar picture emerge of declining membership in voluntary associations among the young?

The NJPS is sufficiently well-known to need little introduction. (2) The sample yielded 5,790 household interviews at a 79% response rate. (2)

Findings

Before examining specific associations or types of associations, the percentages of membership in Jewish and general associations will be brought in Tables 1 and 2.

It should be noted that even among the leading joiners in a nation noted for joining, the majority of adults in each table do not belong to any association. However, when membership of *all* types of voluntary association is considered together, only 33% of Jewish adults belong to no association at all.

The remainder of this paper will consider the characteristics of the members of the four Jewish and the four general organizations to which at least seven per cent of the sample belonged. (3)

Table 3 clearly shows that two of the Jewish associations - B'nei Brith and Jewish Community Centres - and two of the general associations - professional associations and fraternal associations - are mainly for men, while the other four organizations are dominated by women.

Table 4 shows that the young (the first two categories) are underrepresented in all the Jewish associations and three of the four general association. Young parents (the next two categories) are noticeable in synagogue clubs and Jewish community centres on the one hand and in professional organizations and PTAs on the other. The fifth and sixth categories, middle-aged parents, are overrepresented in B'nei Brith and fraternal associations, and one parent families are underrepresented in all types of association except the Jewish community centres (though their numbers are too small to allow for any confident conclusions). The middle-aged, married or unmarried, without children at home (if they ever had any) are members of Hadassah and fraternal organizations and are noticeably underrepresented in service organizations and PTAs. The old, married or unmarried, are members particularly of three of the four Jewish organizations and of general service associations, and indeed with the obvious exception of PTAs they are found in all Jewish and general associations.

The socio-economic status of the members of the various organizations can be assessed by their education, occupation and income. Without bringing detailed data we may say in summary that members of all four Jewish organizations and three of the four general associations fall largely into the middle class of *the American Jewish sample*, that is the middle category of all three variables. Only the members of professional associations tend to be in the highest category by occupation, income and education. In summary, therefore, there is little difference between the two groups or within the groups themselves.

Table 1. Membership of Specific Types of Jewish Organizations NJPS, 1971, (a) Percentages

<u>Total synagogue based organizations</u>	20
Synagogue adult clubs	17
Other synagogue organizations	3
<u>Total educational and cultural organizations</u>	17
B'nei Brith (BB)	12
Other educational and cultural organizations	5
<u>Total Zionist organizations</u>	15
Hadassah	10
Other Zionist organizations	5
<u>Total health and welfare organizations</u>	12
ORT	4
National Council of Jewish Women	3
Other health and welfare organizations	5
<u>Total other Jewish organizations</u>	23
Fraternal and mutual benefit associations	5
Community relations organizations	2
Jewish Community Centres (JCC)	7
Jewish War Veterans	2
Miscellaneous Jewish associations	7
<u>Non-membership of any Jewish organization</u>	57

(a) The data are compiled from up to five answers to the question, "To which Jewish organizations do you belong?" (The respondents were shown a card with many organizations and types of organizations listed.) Because of multiple membership the percentages exceed 100%, although each is of N=5790.

Table 2. Membership of Types of General Organizations, NJPS, 1971, (a)
 Percentages.

Professional or trade associations	16
Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)	10
Fraternal organizations	9
Service associations (health, welfare, etc.)	7
Civic associations	6
Trade unions	5
College organizations	5
Political and community change associations	4
City and country clubs	4
Cultural associations	4
Sports and recreational organizations	3
Youth organizations	2
Social clubs	1
Veterans organizations	1
Non-Jewish community centres or YMCA	1
Other general associations	1
Non-membership of any general association	62

(a) The data are compiled from up to five answers to the question: "To which general (i.e. non-Jewish) organizations do you belong?" As for Jewish organizations, the respondents were shown a card with types of organization listed. As for Jewish organizations, because of multiple membership the percentages exceed 100%.

Categorization of the members by Jewishness was done in a number of ways: the respondent's Jewish background and his Jewish education, denomination, private religious observance, synagogue membership and attendance, and levels of Jewish identification. Without bringing detailed data, we may summarize that members of synagogue clubs, Hadassah and Jewish community centres are generally in the highest third of the sample on all or most of the Jewish variables, while members of B'nei Brith tend to be in the moderate third. Members of fraternal and service organizations also tend to be in the moderate categories of the Jewish variables, while members of PTAs and professional organizations are mainly in the lowest category. Thus we see a clear difference in Jewishness between members of Jewish and general associations.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has focussed on the bio-social characteristics of members of different Jewish and general organizations, and so it would not be appropriate to draw far-reaching conclusions on the socio-economic and Jewish variables.⁽⁴⁾ It should be noted, however, that the lack of differentiation on socio-economic grounds is unusual in the field of voluntary associationalism. The findings support the theory of Laumann and Segal (1971) that this homogeneity among American Jews is a result of two generations of a stable and high achieved status.

As for Jewishness, the findings show the difference between those Jews who prefer Jewish associations and those who join non-Jewish associations, though, among the latter, there is a clear difference between the middle-aged and old in the fraternal and service organizations, and the young in PTAs and professional associations. As Cohen (1980:50) has pointed out, the younger generation is less Jewishly involved and prepared, and these data support this thesis.

The overall picture of associational membership by family-life cycle and sex is complex. The young do not generally join voluntary associations at all, neither Jewish nor general associations, until they become parents. At that stage the men tend to join Jewish community centres and professional associations, while the women join synagogue clubs and PTAs. The general associations are clearly linked to the roles for the women - but it is less clear if the membership of the Jewish associations is purely expressive, that is for the social and recreational needs of the young parents, or child-oriented, linked perhaps with the children's attendance at religion classes or in children's activities in the JCC.

The middle-aged, it seems, are looking for social and cultural activities for themselves: the men join B'nei Brith and/or general fraternal organizations, while the women join Hadassah, and this pattern is continued into old age, when the men remain in B'nei Brith, and the women remain in Hadassah and join synagogue clubs and/or general service organizations.

Table 3. Membership of Specific Types of Voluntary Associations, by Sex, Percentages

	Total Sample	Synag. club	B'nei Brith	Hadassah	Jewish Community Centre	Professional	Frater-nity	Parent-Teacher Association	Service
Men	44	22	56	6	59	87	60	17	9
Women	56	78	44	94	41	13	40	83	91
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4. Membership of Specific Types of Voluntary Associations by Family-Life Cycle, Percentages

	Total Sample	Synag. club	B'nei Brith	Hadassah	Jewish Community Centre	Professional	Frater-nity	Parent-Teacher Association	Service
Single up to 29	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
Young married childless	6	1	1	1	3	5	1	-	-
Married children up to 5	13	15	6	14	14	12	12	28	9
children 6-13	18	31	15	8	23	41	10	56	14
children 14-18	12	13	18	8	10	10	25	12	13
children 19+	13	6	16	11	14	11	21	-	12
One parent family	3	1	1	-	5	1	2	2	2
Unmarried, 30-59	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	-
Unmarried, 60+	6	6	5	16	8	1	2	-	8
Married, 36-59	7	5	7	10	4	5	13	1	1
Married, 60+	18	21	30	30	17	11	13	-	40
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Thus we see that the young join no associations, young parents choose role-related general associations and/or Jewish social organizations (either for their own needs or for those of their children), and then the middle-aged and the old remain in these or other Jewish social organizations, although middle-aged men may also belong to general social organizations and older women may join general service associations.

It may be noted that this pattern is somewhat atypical: Harry (1970), by family-life cycle, and Hausknecht (1962:33-4), by age alone, show that the typical American pattern for associational membership and participation is curvilinear, rising into middle age and then slowly declining. Knoke and Thomson (1977) find a similar pattern, except for the important difference that they found that the young singles belonged to more organizations than the young, childless married. The NJPS pattern shows a steady rise through the age and family-cycle without any noticeable decline in old age, a pattern similar to that found by Cutler (1976) *after* he controlled for socio-economic status. As Bell and Force (1956) showed many years ago, age is of little importance in associational participation among those of high socio-economic status, and, as has been noted above, this seems to be the position among the Jews of the United States.

How far do these findings support Cohen's data in the field of philanthropy? As Cohen found in Boston, the NJPS shows nation-wide that the youngest adult age cycle is not active in Jewish associational life. However, the data show that this group is not active in non-Jewish associations either. The NJPS findings support the traditional view that the young are not active in voluntary associations at all, probably because they prefer informal social activity, or because they are occupied with activities peculiar to that age group: courting, studying, advancing in their professional careers, etc.

Moreover, it is clear that young parents, say those in the age group 25-40, are members of both Jewish and general associations. They join general associations to support and advance their roles, but they join Jewish associations to satisfy their social and recreational needs and those of their children, and, in joining synagogue clubs and Jewish community centres, they meet and socialize with those who are in the highest category of Jewishness in the American community.

This is not a longitudinal study, and so it is not possible to draw conclusions about trends, but, if the 1970-71 profile of American Jewry is representative, then the future is less black than Cohen presents it. The young parents of the early 1970's are now middle-aged, probably with children in high school and college, and there is no reason apparent why they should not continue to belong to Jewish social organizations. If the young singles and newly-weds of the 1970's are now young parents, the NJPS data show no reason why they should not be members of synagogue and temple organizations and JCCs, for their own

sake or for the sakes of their children. In the final analysis, only another survey of the scope and range of the NJPS can produce up-to-date national data of a definitive nature.

Notes

1. The research described in this paper was carried out by the author as part of his doctoral studies in the Department of Sociology at Bar-Ilan University. He acknowledges the debt he owes to his supervisor, Professor Bernard Lazerwitz, statistician to the NJPS, for his invaluable help at all stages of the research. He thanks also the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds for permission to use the data from the survey it commissioned.
2. For more details of the sample, its response characteristics and generalized sampling errors see Lazerwitz (1973), (1974) and (1978).
3. 7% of 5790 is about 400. Below that number there is a danger of unrepresentative sampling and, therefore, of spurious statistics.
4. These are discussed in more detail in York (1979) and York and Lazerwitz (1980).

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