Recoding of Jews in the Pew Portrait of Jewish Americans

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The 2013 Pew survey of American Jews (PRC, 2013) was one of the most substantial efforts in the past decade to collect systematic data from a nationally representative sample of Jewish adults in the United States. These data have provided a wealth of information on identity, intermarriage, and religious and other behavior and attitudes of Jewish Americans.

For purposes of their report, Pew limited their definitions and analyses of who is a Jew to two broad groups: (1) those who self-identified as Jewish by religion; and, (2) Jews of no religion -- those who described themselves as atheist, agnostic or no religion but who considered themselves to be Jewish and had a Jewish parent or reported that they had been raised Jewish in some way (PRC, 2013, p. 18). Responses from these two groups are used to define the core Jewish population, including rates of intermarriage, fertility, behavior and attitudes.

Although not a focus of their Portrait of American Jews (PRC 2013), Pew also collected responses from people of "Jewish Background" and people of "Jewish Affinity." The first of these groups, non-Jewish people of Jewish background is described as: "people who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish but who, today, either have another religion (most are Christian) or say they do not consider themselves Jewish" (p. 18). The second group, Jewish Affinity, is described as: "people who identify with another religion (in most cases, Christianity) or with no religion and who neither have a Jewish parent nor were raised Jewish but who nevertheless consider themselves Jewish in some way. Some say, for example that they consider themselves partly Jewish because Jesus was Jewish, because "we all come from Abraham" or because they have Jewish friends or relatives" (p. 18).

To understand the results based on this Pew survey, particularly for comparison over time and to describe the nature of Jewish identity, requires, in the words of Sergio Della Pergola, "a unified framework of the main definitional criteria" of who is a Jew (Della Pergola, 2011, p. 24). Della Pergola defines the "core" Jewish population as "Persons who declare that they were born Jewish, or declare to be of no religion but have some Jewish ancestry, or have converted to Judaism and do not hold another monotheist religion" (p. 24). Further, he defines the "enlarged" population as the core population along with "persons of Jewish ancestry who now hold another monotheistic religion, and all non-Jews who belong with the nuclear families of Jews."

The 1970 U.S. Jewish Population Survey directly asked interviewees if they were "born Jewish" (citation), the first definitional criteria proposed by Della Pergola (2011). Asking such a question of a representative sample of U.S. adults would be unusual in present day America and would likely yield large numbers of refusals. As an alternative, both the NJPS 1990 and 2000, along with the Pew survey (2013), identified whether people declare themselves to be Jewish using a combination of questions. First, people were asked a standard question on religious affiliation, such as "Are you Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or something else?" For those who do

not declare their religion to be Jewish, additional questions were asked regarding whether they consider themselves to be Jewish and whether their parents were Jewish.

When relying on self-reports, one needs to understand the variety of responses to a question such as why one considers oneself to be Jewish. Some might consider themselves to be Jewish because of ancestry, such as a grandparent was Jewish, or because of family relationships such as having a Jewish spouse or stepchild. Others might consider themselves to be Jewish for more abstract reasons, such as Jesus was Jewish and as followers of Jesus, they consequently also identify as Jewish. In NJPS 2000, a follow-up question was included: "So that we properly understand, we would appreciate if you would explain the ways in which you consider yourself Jewish." Interviewees were given specific options such as: because my spouse is Jewish, because I am in the process of converting, because I have a Jewish grandparent, or because Jesus was a Jew. If other reasons were given, they were probed more fully.

The 2013 Pew survey included similar questions as those used in NJPS 1990 and NJPS 2000, with a few minor differences which affect the definition of who is a Jew in their reports. For the question regarding why one considers oneself to be Jewish, Pew did not provide specific options. Instead, the question was presented in an "open-ended" format, meaning any and all responses were recorded. These responses were then not taken into account in defining who was a Jew because of the lack of standardization in responses; that is, although some might volunteer Jewish ancestry as a reason, this option was not provided to all interviewees in a systematic way. Another key difference in the Pew survey is that they included a double-barreled question regarding whether one had Jewish parents. This question combined whether one's parents were Jewish with whether one considered one had been raised Jewish. Specifically, the question was phrased as "And did you have a Jewish parent or were you raised Jewish or partially Jewish – or not?" This becomes complicated when people consider they had been raised Jewish even though neither of their parents were Jewish, for example, because Jesus was Jewish. This is especially important because any affirmative response to having been raised Jewish is included in the definition of who is a Jew.

Keeping in mind Della Pergola's "unified framework," we sought to re-examine the definitions of Jewish groups in the Pew survey. This was done to ensure that analysis of, and inferences drawn from, these data accurately reflect the population as we typically think of it in Jewish population research. We examined in detail the patterns of responses across the key questions used to define individuals as Jewish. In addition, Pew shared with us verbatim responses to questions such as why one considers oneself Jewish, which could be used to help clarify some of the questionable cases.

The key questions used to identify who was Jewish in the Pew survey are displayed in Figure 1. As can be seen, the standard questions used in previous administrations of the national Jewish population surveys serve as the primary means for identifying who is Jewish: Is one's religion Jewish? If not, does one consider oneself to be Jewish? And, if not, was one's parents Jewish, or, did one consider one had otherwise been "raised" Jewish. Pew categorized as Jewish by Religion all those who declared that their religion was Jewish. Note, Jewish by Religion excludes any who identified their religion as Jewish plus something else. It also does not take into account whether a person had converted, which is asked further on in the series but is not used to define whether a person is categorized as Jewish by religion.

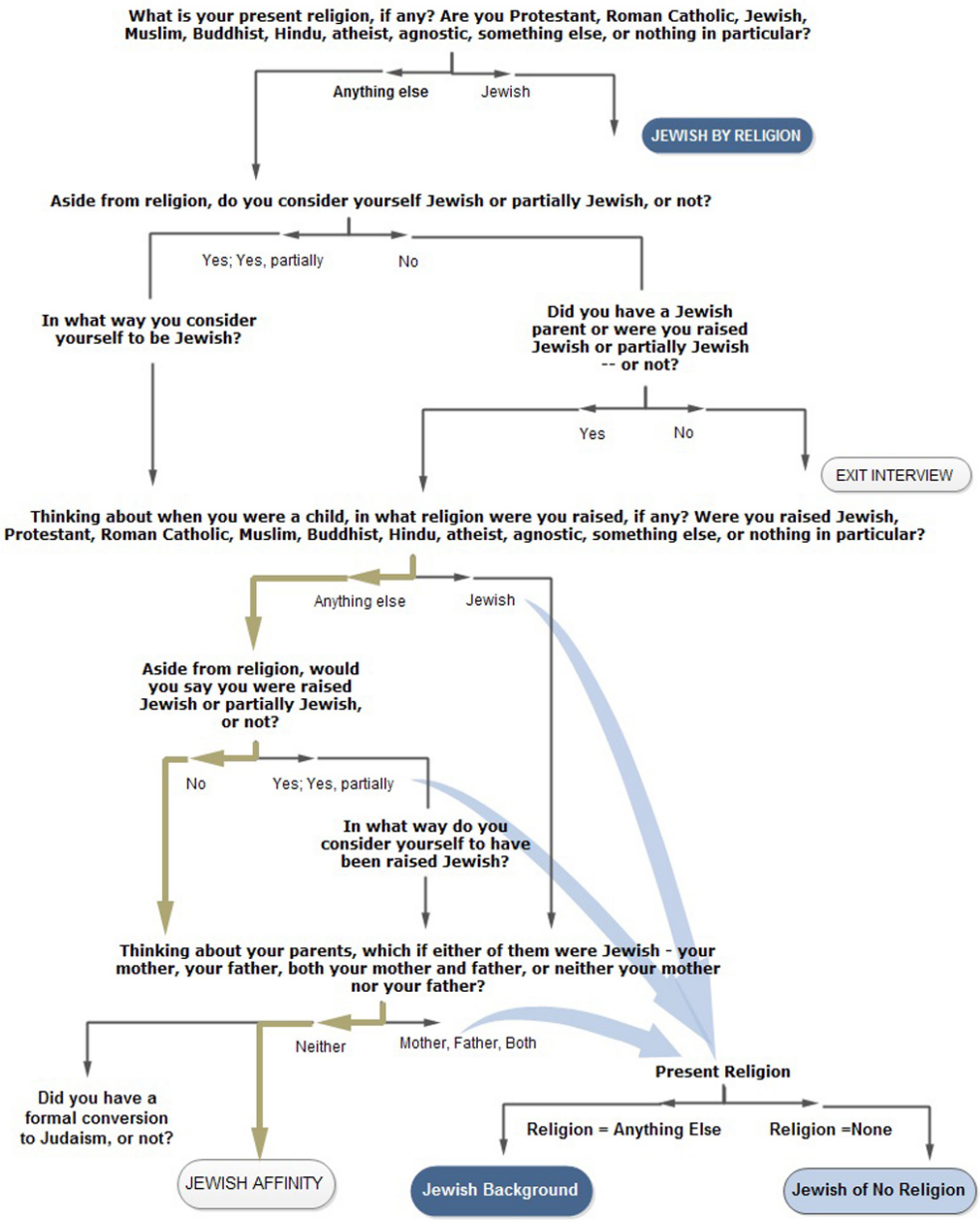

FIGURE 1: PEW DEFINITIONS OF WHO IS JEWISH.

Jews of no religion, indicated by the light blue arrows in Figure 1, are defined as anyone who declared no religion and declared any Jewish background, where any Jewish background is defined as an affirmative response to any of the three questions: childhood religion Jewish only, Jewish parents, or considered one had been raised Jewish aside from religion. This last condition, considering one had been raised Jewish, results in some questionable cases when the person indicates that neither of their parents was Jewish and their childhood religion was not Jewish. Here, review of the reasons individuals considered they had considered themselves to have been raised Jewish is critical.

We reviewed Pew's categorization of the reasons given as well the actual open-ended responses of individuals and grouped them into seven different sets of reasons. These were:

- Conversion[1]
- Heritage, includes references to grandparents and other ancestry
- Spouse
- Other non-ancestral family relations, includes step-parents, step-children, in-laws residing in home
- Practices, includes statements such as "observe the same sabbath"
- Messianic, includes any expression of Messianic Christianity
- Shared beliefs, includes general statements of shared beliefs with Judaism such as "share the same God", "believe in the old testament"

Table 1 displays the number of people who gave one of these seven reasons for considering oneself Jewish, or considering one had been raised Jewish. The most common reasons are associated with ancestry. A substantial number of people, however, who said neither of their parents were Jewish and their childhood religion was not Jewish, considered they had been raised Jewish because of shared belief systems with Judaism. In Pew's definitions, because they considered they had been raised Jewish, they are included in the Jewish Background group. As indicated in Figure 1, Pew defined Jewish Background as anyone who was of a religion other than Judaism and no religion and declared any Jewish background, including considering they had been raised Jewish even though their parents were not Jewish and childhood religion was not Jewish.

TABLE 1. REASONS FOR CONSIDERING ONESELF JEWISH OR CONSIDERING ONE HAD BEEN RAISED JEWISH.

	Reason currently considers oneself Jewish		Reason considers had been Raised Jewish even though parents not Jewish and childhood religion not Jewish	
	N	%	N	%
Conversion	17	0.9	2	1.3
Heritage	505	27.0	39	25.2
Spouse	80	4.3	2	1.3
Other non-ancestral family relation	14	0.7	6	3.9
Practices	75	4.0	13	8.4
Messianic	19	1.0	3	1.9
Shared Beliefs	522	27.9	96	61.9
Number of cases[a]	1,868		155	

Notes: a) Rows do not sum to the number of cases because individuals could give multiple answers.

[1] Only individuals who indicated that their religion was Jewish only and had no Jewish upbringing were asked whether they had converted. Those who indicated their religion was Jewish plus something else, even if the something else was nothing in particular, were not asked whether they had converted; nor were individuals who indicated no religion but considered themselves to be Jewish. Some of these individuals explained that they had converted when they were given the opportunity to explain why they considered themselves to be Jewish.

After review of the reasons individuals considered themselves to be Jewish, we revised the definition of Jewish Background by limiting it to those who would be considered part of the enlarged Jewish population. Those whose only connection to Judaism was a sense of shared values, with no expressions of parentage, childhood religion, or conversion, were recoded into the Jewish Affinity group. This expands the Pew definition of Jewish Affinity which otherwise was based on people saying that they had no Jewish background at all, that is, childhood religion was not Jewish, parents were not Jewish, and did not consider one had been raised Jewish aside from religion (indicated by the tan line in Figure 1).

Revisions to Pew Definitions of Who is a Jew

There are four substantial deviations in the Pew definitions of who is Jewish compared to past research and Della Pergola's proposed unified framework. These include:

- Limited definition of "no religion"
- No distinction within categories of Jewish Background and Jewish Affinity of the enlarged population
- Lack of consideration of conversion
- Lack of consideration of the reasons why people considered themselves to be Jewish when they had no Jewish parents

We describe how we revised the Pew definitions of who is a Jew taking into account these issues. The differences are summarized in Table 2.

The first substantial changes were to the definition of "Jews of no religion". The Pew definition is limited to those who selected the specific options of "Atheist", "Agnostic" or "Nothing in particular" when asked what their present religion was. There were a large number of people who said "something else" when asked about religion and then clearly expressed no affiliation with any organized religious group when asked to describe. This includes responses such as "I believe in God", "I'm spiritual", as well as "not practicing", "secular", "Humanist" or "Secular Humanist." We included in the group of "Jews of no religion" all expressions of no association with an organized religious group. We also limited this group to only those who indicated that at least one of their parents was Jewish.[2] We omitted those whose only connection to Judaism was that they considered they had been raised Jewish because of reasons other than parentage or religious upbringing (n=12).

With these changes, the overall number of Jews of no religion increases by about 16% (from 689 cases to 784 cases) (see Table 2). This corresponds to an increase in the estimated size of this group from 1.2 million to 1.3 million. The corresponding share of the total adult population who are Jews of no religion increases from the estimated 23% to 25%.

[2] There were three people who indicated their childhood religion was Jewish and that their parents were not Jewish. These are included since the parents question was unclear and other questions about childhood confirmed the report on religion.

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND REVISED DEFINITIONS OF WHO IS A JEW.

	Original Definitions U.S. Adults			Revised Definitions[a] U.S. Adults					
							95% Confidence Interval		
	N	Percent	Number	N	Percent	Number	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Difference[b]
"Core" Jewish population	3,475	2.6	5,240,000	3,542	2.7	5,294,000	5,050,000	5,543,000	54,000
Jews by religion	2,786	2.0	4,042,000	2,758	2.0	3,972,000	3,773,000	4,171,000	-70,000
Jews of no religion	689	0.6	1,198,000	784	0.7	1,322,000	1,195,000	1,450,000	124,000
Jewish Background/Enlarged Jewish Population	1,190	1.3	2,598,000	1,241	1.4	2,699,000	2,491,000	2,908,000	101,000
Declared, Jewish parent, non-monotheistic religions				38	<.1	74,000	45,000	103,000	
Declared, Jewish parent, monotheistic religions				506	0.7	1,342,000	1,167,000	1,516,000	
Not declared, Jewish parent				398	0.4	710,000	621,000	799,000	
Declared, Jewish ancestry				128	0.1	230,000	170,000	290,000	
Declared, spouse Jewish				149	0.1	281,000	224,000	338,000	
Declared, lives with Jewish family relation				12	<.1	50,000	20,000	79,000	
Not declared, Jewish ancestry				10	<.1	14,000	7,000	20,000	
Jewish Affinity	467	0.5	1,075,000	349	<.1	919,000	776,000	1,061,000	-156,000
Declared, no Jewish parent				344	<.1	912,000	769,000	1,054,000	
Not declared, consider raised Jewish for reasons unrelated to Jewish identity				5	<.1	7,000	2,000	13,000	
Not Jewish at all	30,797	95.5	190,351,000	30,797	95.5	190,351,000	190,045,000	190,657,000	0

Notes: a) Population estimates are based on analysis of all adults in the household, with revisions in definitions applied to the main respondent in the household. b) Original estimates that are within the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval of revised estimate and are not significantly different appear in gray.

The second major change is that we revised the broadly defined Jewish Background group into subgroups that could be considered part of the "Enlarged" Jewish population, as described by Della Pergola (2011). This includes those who consider themselves to be Jewish, had Jewish parents and/or childhood religion was Jewish, but who currently identify with another religious tradition (n=38 currently non-monotheistic religions, n=501 currently monotheistic religions), as well as those who do not identify as Jewish in any way (neither by religion nor considering oneself to be), but did indicate they had at least one Jewish parent.[3] Here, as with Jews of no religion, we limited Jewish upbringing to parentage or childhood religion. Those who indicated that they considered they had been raised Jewish but no parents were Jewish and childhood religion was not Jewish are not included, unless there is mention of reasons that would suggest they could be considered as part of the enlarged Jewish population, such as Jewish grandparents or other ancestry (n=127). There were also a small number of individuals who did not declare themselves to be Jewish but indicated Jewish ancestry in open-ended responses to questions (n=10). They, too, are included as part of the enlarged population.

Individuals who considered themselves to be Jewish because they are married to Jews are also included as a subgroup of the enlarged Jewish population (n=149). This includes those who had indicated that they were Jewish by religion but had not converted, and review of open-ended responses indicated that they had a Jewish spouse (n=18). These individuals were moved from the Jewish by Religion group into the Jewish spouse subgroup.

Summary of changes to population estimates

Limiting the core Jewish population to the revised categories of Jewish by religion and Jews of no religion results in the Pew survey estimate of an estimated 5.3 million Jewish adults in the United States: 4 million who declare themselves Jewish by religion (88,000 of whom are Jews by Choice) and another 1.3 million Jews who declare Jewish identity independent of religion. This estimated number of adults who identify by religion is similar to that derived through the SSRI data synthesis, which estimates for 2013 a population of 4.3 million. The SSRI estimate of Jewish by religion is somewhat larger because it includes areas of the U.S. not covered by the Pew survey, and also includes in its estimates all adults in households, not limited to English and Russian speakers.

Jewish Children

In addition to the number of Jewish adults, questions regarding the number of children in each household and how they were being raised were reviewed to estimate the number of Jewish children. In particular, for each child, interviewees were asked:

[3] Similar to Jews of no religion, this includes a very small number of people who indicated their childhood religion was Jewish even though their parents were not Jewish, again, a result of the the lack of clarity on the question about parents.

- In what religion, if any, is this child being raised? Jewish/Another religion/No religion/Partly Jewish and partly something else
- Aside from religion, is this child being raised Jewish or partially Jewish, or not?

The reasons why one might consider one's child was being raised Jewish "aside from religion" was not asked. Jewish children were defined as those who were being raised Jewish by religion, as well as those who were being raised in no religion, but were described as being raised Jewish aside from religion.

Among all households where at least one of the adults was either Jewish by religion or Jewish of no religion[4], there was a total of 1.8 million children (see Table 3). Of these, 925,000 are being raised Jewish by religion. An additional 360,000 are being raised Jewish plus something else and nearly 100,000 are described as being raised Jewish in some way but with no religion. Thus there is a total of nearly 1.4 million Jewish children who are identifiable in this Pew survey. This is likely a conservative estimate considering that there may be a similar degree of underestimation of Jews of no religion among other adults in the household as was observed among the main interviewees.

Table 3. Children in Jewish households.

	Number of Children in Jewish households				Percent of All Children in Jewish households		
	Number of Observations	Est.	95% Confidence Interval		Est.	95% Confidence Interval	
			(low)	(high)		(low)	(high)
Total children	2,344	1,775,000					
Jewish alone by religion	1,729	925,000	855,000	995,000	52.1	48.0	56.0
No Religion, but still being raised Jewish	86	92,000	66,000	118,000	5.2	3.9	6.8
Raised Jewish and another religion	268	361,000	289,000	433,000	20.3	17.0	24.0
Not being raised Jewish	261	399,000	318,000	479,000	22.4	19.0	26.3

The Enlarged Jewish Population

Figure 2 displays a summary of the total Jewish population, including children and the additional groups that comprise the enlarged population. When considered with the core Jewish population described above, the enlarged Jewish population increases the total number of Jewish adults who may be considered part of the Jewish community by approximately 50 percent. This includes individuals who declared themselves to be Jewish in some way, as well as those who may be considered Jewish based on their upbringing or Jewish ancestry.

[4] This includes the respondent as well as Pew's definitions of who is a Jew among other adults in the household. There was insufficient information on others in the household to be able to review and revise in the same manner as was done for the primary respondent.

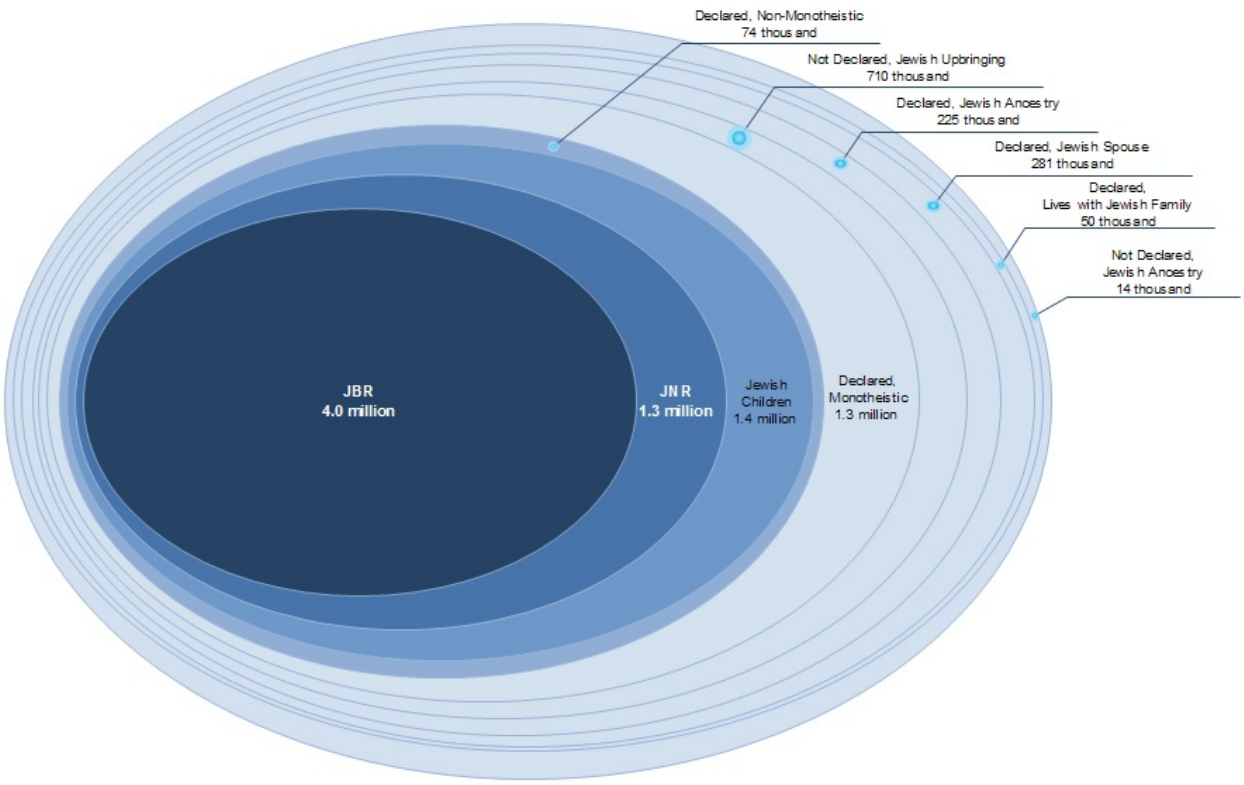

FIGURE 2: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN CORE AND ENLARGED JEWISH POPULATION GROUPS BASED ON RE-ANALYSIS OF PEW JEWISH POPULATION CATEGORIES.

Behavior & Attitudes

As a check on the validity of the recategorization, we examined some of the basic behavioral and attitudinal questions related to Jewish identification.

Four key behavioral questions were examined. These were:

- Last Passover, did you attend a seder, or not?
- During the last Yom Kippur, did you fast?
- Are you (or anyone in your household) currently a member of a synagogue?
- Religious service attendance:
  - Aside from special occasions like weddings, funerals and bar mitzvahs, how often do you attend Jewish religious services at a synagogue, temple, minyan or Havurah?
  - And aside from special occasions like weddings and funerals, how often do you attend non-Jewish religious services?

As expected, those who declare themselves Jewish by religion are the most likely to have attended a Passover seder (78%), fasted on Yom Kippur (63%), and belonged to a synagogue (39%) (see Figure 3). There were not significant differences between the SSRI and Pew categories of Jews by religion and Jews of no religion. This is important given the large group of people added to the Jews of no religion group based on the open-ended responses to the religious identification question.

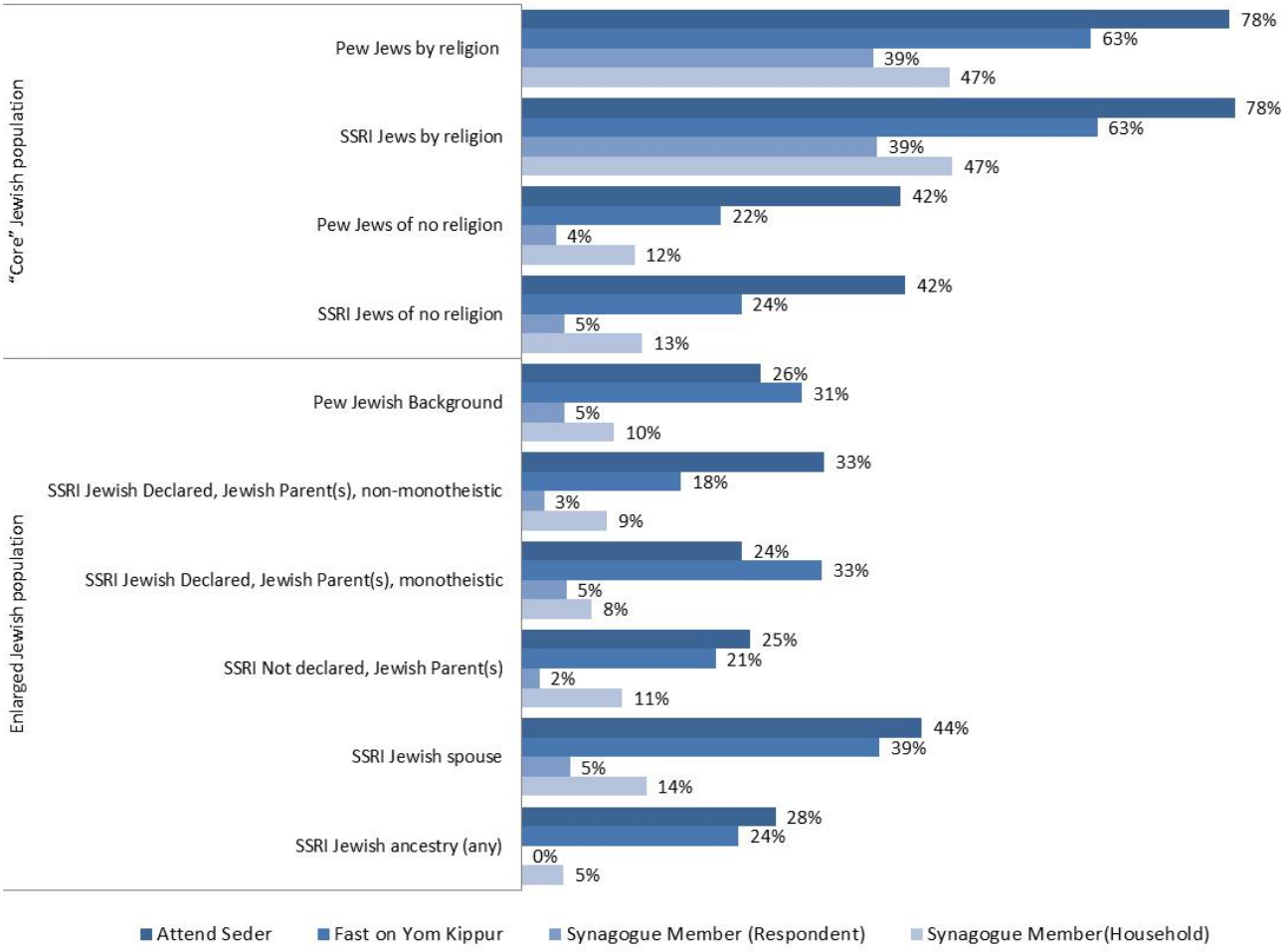

FIGURE 3. ATTENDED PASSOVER SEDER, FASTED ON YOM KIPPUR AND SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP FOR CORE AND ENLARGED JEWISH POPULATION GROUPS.

Figure 4 displays the proportion within each group who never attend religious services. Included is both attendance of Jewish religious services, and attendance of services of other religious groups. As expected, Jews by religion are the least likely to never attend Jewish religious services (13%), compared to Jews of no religion (52%). There is a small, but statistically significant difference between the SSRI category of Jews of no religion (52%) and the Pew category (49%). A greater proportion of the SSRI Jews of no religion never attend Jewish religious services compared to the Pew category of Jews of no religion. They are, however, even more unlikely to attend services of other religious groups (56% & 55%, respectively).

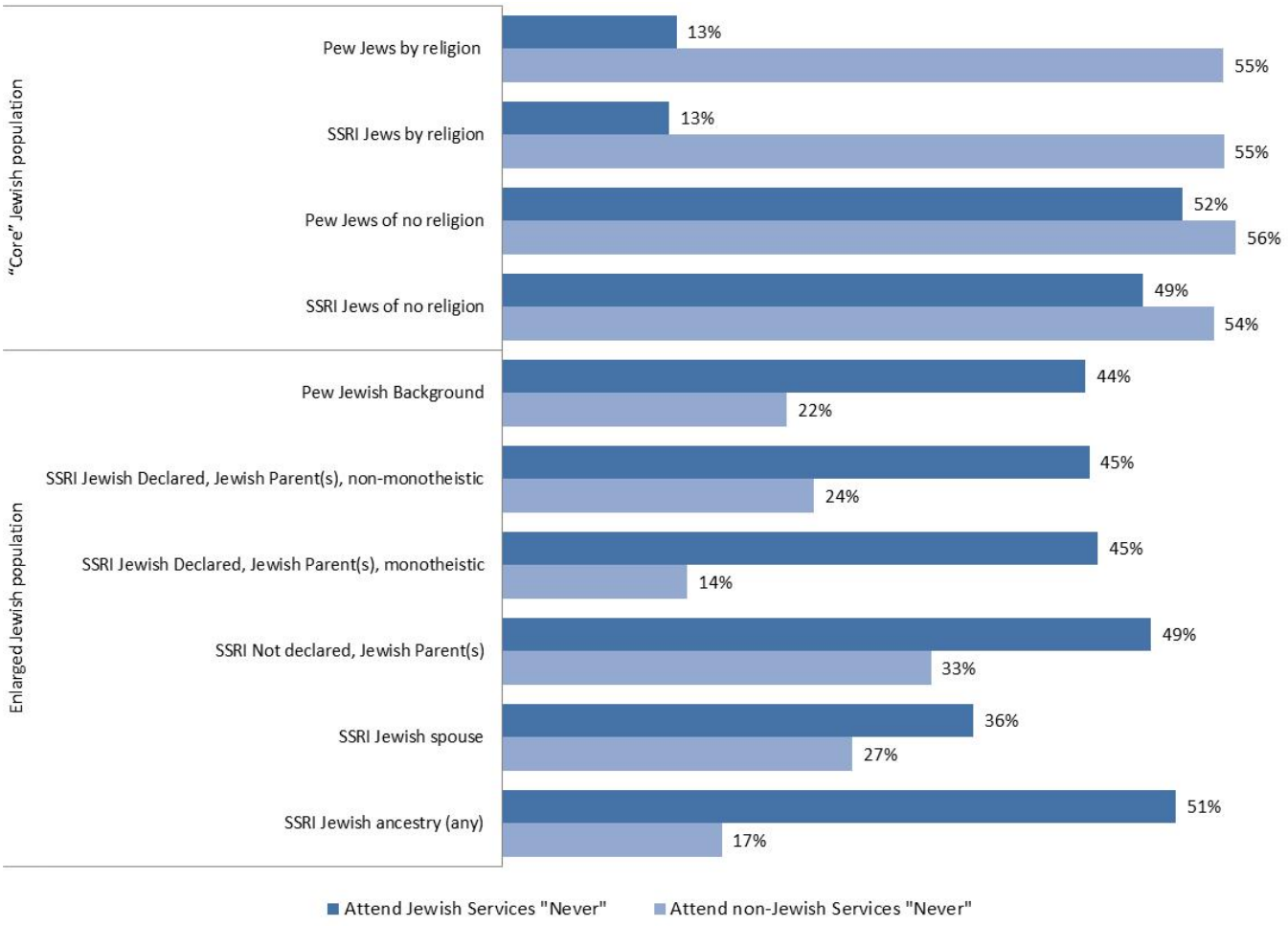

FIGURE 4. RELIGIOUS SERVICE ATTENDANCE FOR CORE AND ENLARGED JEWISH POPULATION GROUPS.

Importance of Being Jewish

In addition to behavioral practices questions, we also examined three attitudinal questions which reflect, in part, the strength or nature of Jewish identification. These were:

- *To you personally, is being Jewish mainly a matter of religion, mainly a matter of ancestry, or mainly a matter of culture?*
- *How important is being Jewish in your life?*
- *How emotionally attached are you to Israel?*

Figure 5 displays differences between groups on these attitude questions. The first panel displays proportions of each group who view being Jewish mainly as a matter of religion, mainly a matter of ancestry or culture, mainly a matter of religion and ancestry or culture, or something else. Here, the SSRI recategorizations, particularly as they relate to Pew's Jewish are informative. Jews by religion (17%) are more likely than Jews of no religion (6%) to view being Jewish as mainly a matter of religion, or a matter of religion plus ancestry and culture (22% vs

11%). Pew's Jewish background group appears greater than the core Jewish population groups in the likelihood of viewing being Jewish as a matter of religion (19%). This is greatest among Jewish spouses (35%), that is, those who identified as Jewish by religion but who had not converted. Jews of no religion, as one might expect, were most likely to view being Jewish as mainly a matter of ancestry or culture (71%).

Also, as expected, Jews by religion were the most likely to say being Jewish was very important in their lives (57%). They were also most likely to report being emotionally attached to Israel (36%). Interestingly, Jewish background groups consisting of those who self-identify as Jewish but currently practice other religions, are more emotionally attached to Israel than Jews of no religion. A majority of all groups who self-identify as Jewish report being either very or somewhat attached to Israel.

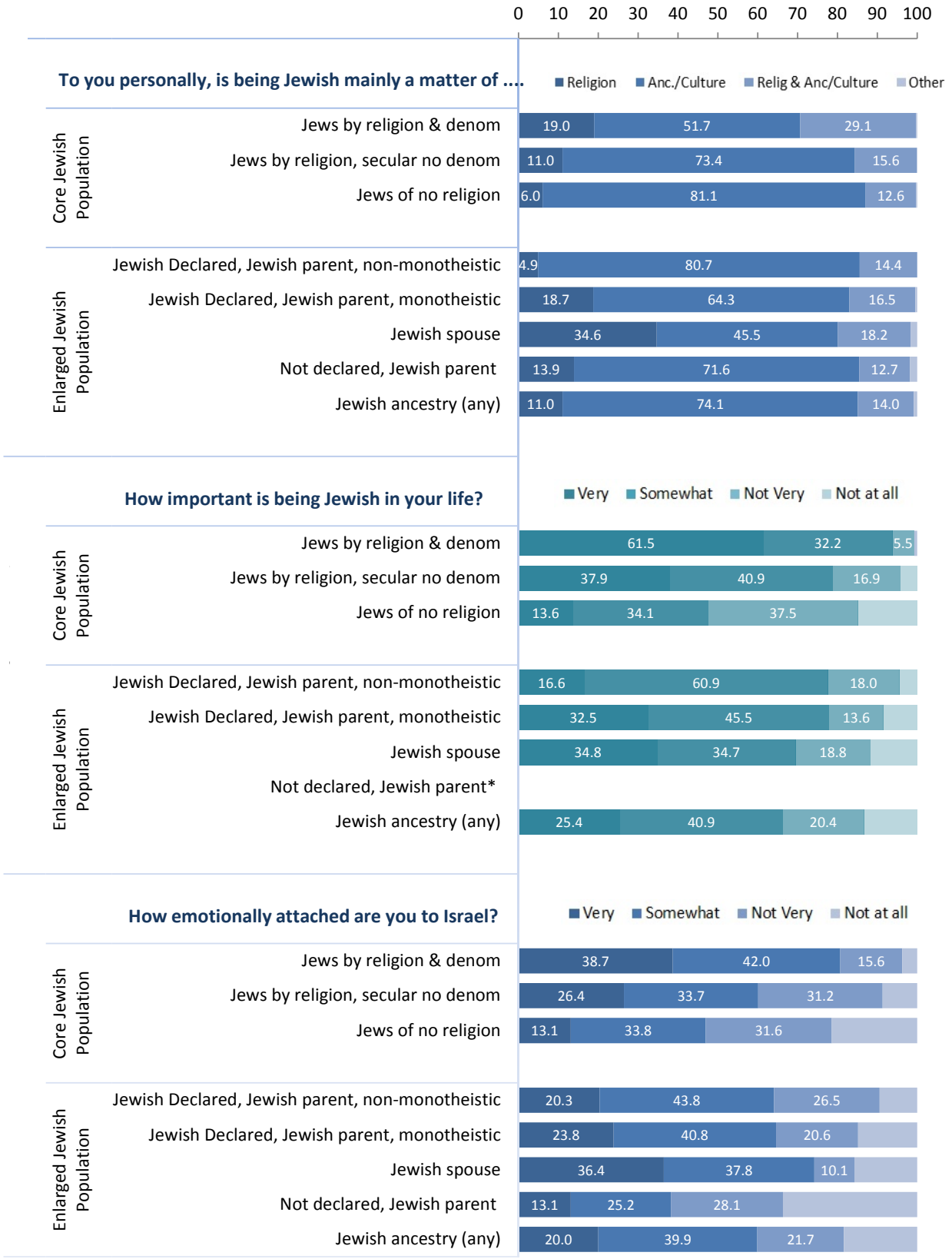

FIGURE 6. ATTITUDES TOWARD BEING JEWISH FOR CORE AND ENLARGED JEWISH POPULATION GROUPS.