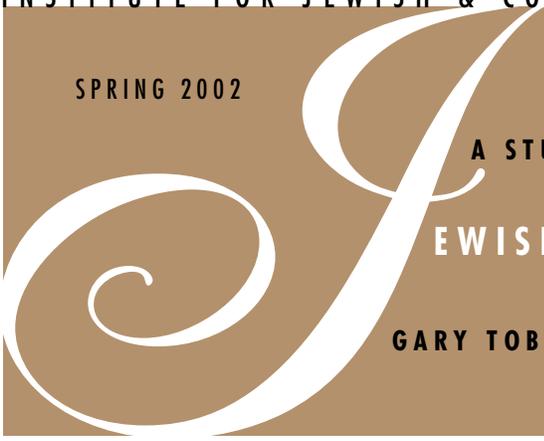


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A STUDY OF
JEWISH CULTURE IN THE BAY AREA

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The vast majority of Jews in the San Francisco Bay Area define themselves as ethnic, cultural, or secular Jews. They do not see themselves as religious, at least as defined by the standards of synagogue and kashrut. Yet they are proud to be Jews and want to participate in Jewish life. Cultural activities are a key element, and for many the primary expression of their Jewish identity.

For some analysts of Jewish life, the cultural arts are seen as peripheral, trivial, or poor substitutes for real Jewish identity, which expresses itself through synagogue attendance and ritual observance. While these are important aspects of Jewish identity for some Jews, they are not the main expression of Jewish identity for most Jews.

Participation in Jewish culture is not on the fringe of Jewish identity. Encouraging participation in Jewish culture is not a means to an end, that is, to more synagogue attendance, more ritual observance, and so on, but rather a form of Jewish identity in itself. It stands in its own right as an expression of one's

Jewishness. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive, nor should they be. One should not assume that individuals interested in Jewish film are not interested in ritual, or vice versa. They can be mutually enforcing and should be. But each are important aspects of Jewish life and should be respected as such.

The focus of this study is on the following aspects of Jewish culture: art, film, lectures, music, museums, theatre, television, the Internet, "popular culture," and a host of related activities. This study examines three elements of Jewish culture in the San Francisco Bay Area. First, it looks at what is available, how people find out about it, and where they participate in it. Second, it examines individuals' Jewish identity through traditional measures of Jewishness—behavior, beliefs, and affiliation—and through their participation in Jewish culture. Third, it explores how Jewish individuals view the Jewish cultural experience and what the relationship is between participation in Jewish cultural activities and Jewish beliefs and behaviors. This summary is part of a larger report.

PARTICIPATION IN JEWISH ARTS AND CULTURE

Nearly all Bay Area Jews participate in Jewish culture, both inside and outside the home. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents reported participating in some form of Jewish culture in the past year. Ninety percent of respondents participated in activities in their

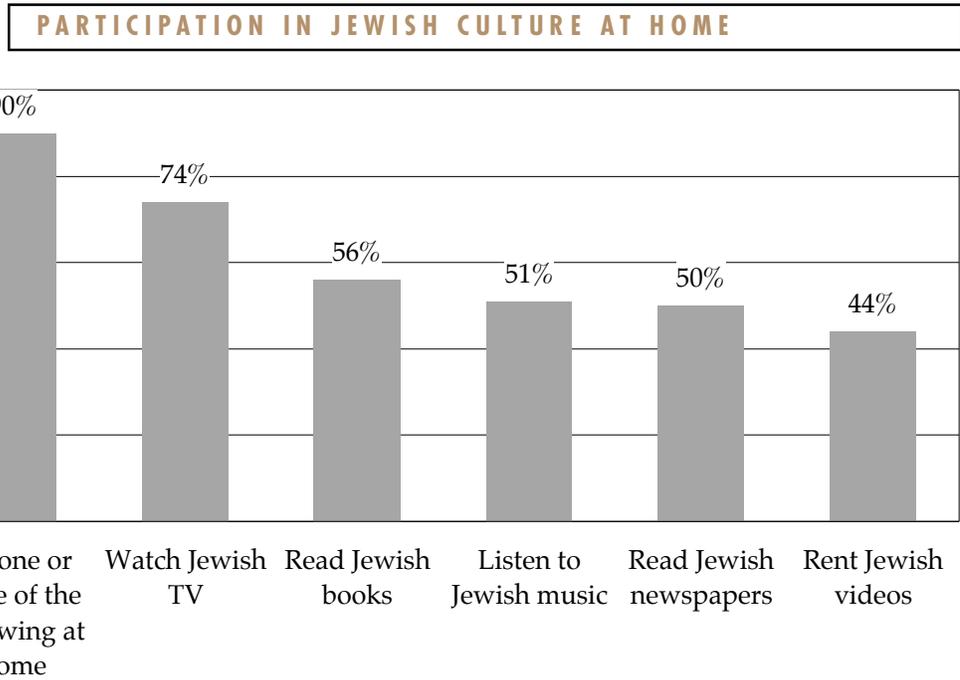
home (see Figure 1), while almost three-quarters of respondents attended events in the community (see Figure 2). Participation in Jewish culture at home occurs among all age groups.

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Participation in annual events or at institutional settings in the Bay Area is quite high with 72% participating in one or more venues. At 51% combined, the two Jewish museums had the highest overall participation over time. Forty-four percent say they have ever attended an Israel Independence Day celebra-

tion, 30% reported ever attending the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, 29% say they have ever attended a performance of A Traveling Jewish Theater; less than 10% reported ever attending a CenterStage event or the Jewish Music Festival (see Figure 3).

Figure 1



RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the following recommendations are directed towards increasing the frequency of Jewish involvement in Jewish culture. We recognize that most Jews are already involved to some degree. We believe that by improving the marketing and the access to Jewish culture this participation could increase dramatically. These recommendations pay tribute to the already successful programs, with the belief that the capacity for increasing Jewish cultural consumption has hardly been tapped.

Jewish education, our relationship to Israel, synagogue participation, and social action, Jewish culture needs to be recognized for its important and vital role in maintaining a cohesive Jewish community. Attending a Jewish film festival, viewing a museum exhibition of Jewish interest, or reading a novel by a prominent Jewish author are all expressions of Jewish identity. Indeed, for some Jews, this study shows it may be their only expression of Jewish identity.

RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF JEWISH CULTURE

Jewish culture should assume its proper prominent place in the Jewish communal structure. Participation in Jewish culture is a vibrant form of Jewish identity. Along with

CREATE MORE JEWISH MEDIA

Radio, television, video, and the Internet are the most obvious ways to bring cultural events to Bay Area Jews. It is clear from these

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Figure 2

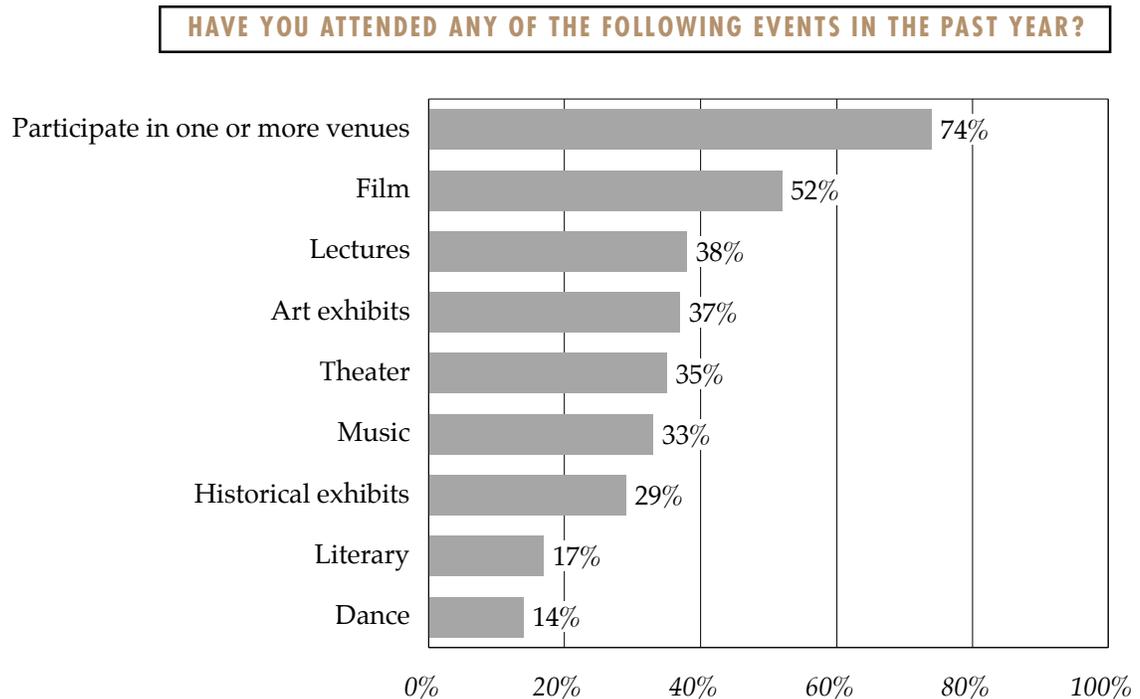
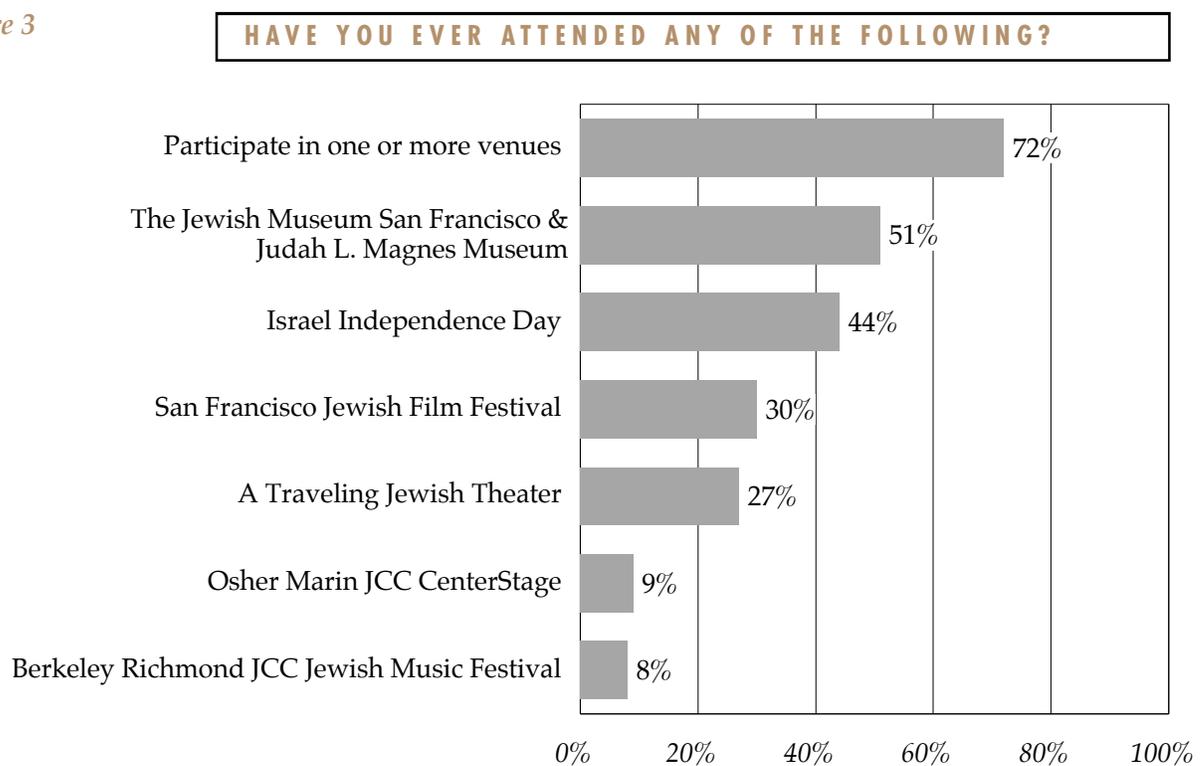


Figure 3



METHODOLOGY

The data from the mail and telephone surveys were merged and weighted to form the sample for our analysis (n=1446). While we have done our best to control for selection bias, the sample may under-represent some segments of the Bay Area Jewish community, e.g. new Jewish immigrants who do not speak English.

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data that there is a widespread proclivity to utilize media in the home to participate in Jewish culture. Furthermore, the data show that television is the most widely utilized medium for reaching most Jews. Therefore, this analysis indicates the need for a Bay Area Jewish cable television network, a Jewish radio station, and sections in video stores for Jewish-related material. These are all essential ways for more Jews to participate in Jewish cultural activities.

OFFER CULTURAL ACTIVITIES ALL OVER THE BAY AREA

Given the enormous geographic dispersion of Bay Area Jews, bringing cultural events to where people live is essential. It is critical that Jewish cultural events follow the model of the Jewish Film Festival in holding its activities in multiple geographic venues. The more widely dispersed cultural events are, the more likely they are to be attended. Furthermore, given individuals' participation in everyday life, which is largely non-Jewish, we suggest that some Jewish cultural events be held and advertised in non-Jewish venues.

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INSURE THE HIGHEST QUALITY

The data indicate that competition with secular cultural events, work, and ordinary life are the primary reasons individuals do not participate more in Jewish cultural activities. Therefore, the attraction must be compelling, the marketing professional, and the product delivered of superior quality. They must be assured that the quality is excellent, or they will not attend the first time, or return for future involvement.

CONTINUE TO INVEST IN JEWISH CULTURE

Investment in Jewish culture will be investment in the Jewish future. This study indicates that continued investment in the growth of cultural activity in the Bay Area is a key strategy for strengthening Jewish identity and participation. Investing in Jewish culture should become one of the most important funding priorities. Jewish culture reaches all age groups, crosses gender, education, income, and geographic boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Cultural experiences reach nearly all Bay Area American Jews, many of whom may have no other meaningful connection with the organized Jewish community. Yet there has been no comprehensive approach to building the role of Jewish culture within most Jewish communities, including the Bay Area.

The research indicates how vital cultural experiences are in the Jewish identity of most Bay Area Jews. The depth and intensity of experience in engaging in Jewish arts constitutes a critical component in the individual's sense of being a Jew. The scope of Jewish cultural

activity is very wide and the depth of identification with Judaism through culture is enormous.

This research will help the community understand the role that cultural encounters play in the Jewish identity of American Jews. The Bay Area Jewish community can better plan and support the creative evolution of Jewish life. It demonstrates that participation in Jewish culture is more widespread than any other form of participation in Jewish life in the San Francisco Bay Area.