

03e.

The Role of Knowledge and Guilt

THERE IS A SENSE of unease around “not knowing enough” about being Jewish among some Jewish young adults. This sentiment is particularly prominent among women, those raised by at least one person who does not identify as Jewish, and those who are racially diverse. “I thought about [going to a Jewish event] before but I’ve never done it because I’ve always felt like I would probably be the least religious person in the room and I wouldn’t know anything,” one young adult said. “Going to some events, and just not really knowing what’s going on—it’s kind of a little intimidating,” another young adult likewise reported. Another put it bluntly: “You just feel like a dolt sometimes because you don’t know half of what they’re saying.”

This unease about their professed lack of knowledge often translates to a sense of guilt. One in five Jewish young adults completely agrees that they sometimes feel guilty that they are not more knowledgeable about what it means to be Jewish. Those who say that being Jewish impacts their worldview are *more* likely to feel guilty, suggesting that the more young adults feel influenced by being Jewish the more they express misgivings about not knowing *enough*.

When it comes to engagement with a Jewish community, just under half agree (completely or somewhat) that they feel guilty about not spending more time expressing Jewishness. Those who completely agree with this sentiment are more likely to feel very connected to a Jewish community, while those who completely disagree are more likely to feel very disconnected, likely reflecting the relative importance these cohorts place on being Jewish. “I’m always like, ‘I would love to’ [be more engaged], but I don’t really have time, and I feel bad about that,” one

“I thought about [going to a Jewish event] before but I’ve never done it because I’ve always felt like I would probably be the least religious person in the room and I wouldn’t know anything.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

focus group participant said. Expounding on this sense of guilt, the participant added: “You were born into this religion that not many people are, that not many people convert to. It’s like, ‘Shouldn’t I be more proactive?’”

Racially diverse Jews report feeling more nostalgia for how being Jewish brought people together when they were younger and guilt over their lack of knowledge and absence of a Jewish community. Yet, on average, they also say they feel more connected than their white Jewish peers: 22 percent of racially diverse Jews feel very connected to a Jewish community, compared to 10 percent among white Jews.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I sometimes feel guilty that I am not more knowledgeable about what it means to be Jewish.



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I sometimes feel guilty that I do not spend more time expressing my Jewishness.

