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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

FOCUS ON ISSUES

New identity study reignites debate on how to target Jews

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ever since the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey reported that intermarriage rates were at an all-time high, the American Jewish community has desperately been seeking ways to stem the tide of assimilation.

Community leaders have wanted to know which programs are most effective at engaging Jews and keeping them engaged, and which Jews to target with those programs.

The quest has sparked many sociological studies, most of which have been more successful at pointing to relationships between programs and identity rather than pinning down causal connections.

Thus, for example, studies have shown that graduates of day schools and alumni of certain youth groups are more religiously observant than Jews as a whole.

However, a sort of chicken-and-egg question has lingered: Did the day school or youth group spark the religious observance or did those institutions simply attract a population already predisposed to being observant?

A new study exploring Jewish identity may be raising more questions than it answers.

The study of New York-area Jews finds that feelings about being Jewish change throughout the lifetime of non-Orthodox American Jews, and that those who are not religiously observant or Jewishly involved by traditional measures may still consider their Jewishness an important aspect of their identity.

Proponents both of "outreach" — those who want to target uninvolved Jews — and "inreach" — those who believe Jewish communal resources would best be spent strengthening the commitments of moderately affiliated Jews — say the study supports their views.

The study also doesn't single out any particular programs — be they day schools, summer camps or Israel experiences — as the most effective, but instead suggests that a variety of experiences can affect different people at different stages of their lives.

The study's author admits that the study offers fodder for different approaches to outreach, but says it ultimately calls for a diversified approach to promoting continuity.

"Connections and Journeys," by Bethamie Horowitz, a senior scholar at Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, distinguishes itself from other recent studies on Jewish identity by focusing on how people feel about their Jewishness, rather than relying solely on traditional measures such as ritual practice and involvement in Jewish organizations.

The study is limited to New York-area Jews, and Horowitz acknowledges that Jews in New York City differ from other American Jews in that they live in more densely Jewish areas and are more likely to be Orthodox than Jews in other parts of the country.

However, she notes, Jews in New York's suburbs do resemble Jews elsewhere. And because New York-area Jews comprise 26 percent of America's Jews, she says, "on statistical grounds alone, what happens in New York, matters to America."

Commissioned by the UJA-Federation of New York's Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal, the study is based on in-depth interviews, focus group sessions and a survey of 1,504 American-born Jewish adults ages 22-52.

Among the key findings:

- Sixty percent of the people surveyed reported they have experienced changes in

Politicians: Don't pressure Israel

The United States should not pressure Israel to participate in a possible Israeli-Palestinian peace summit, said four Israeli politicians in Washington.

The Knesset members, who represent the Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu parties, met with at least 30 members of Congress during their visit to the United States this week.

Putin calls for apolitical judiciary

Russian President Vladimir Putin urged his country's prosecutors to avoid politics. But Putin, who was reported to have influenced the temporary jailing of Russian Jewish leader Vladimir Goussinsky, did not clarify who he thinks is pressuring the prosecutors.

Meanwhile, a European Jewish group warned Putin not to interfere in the selection of that country's Jewish leaders. The statement, released by the European Jewish Congress after its meeting in Kiev, Ukraine, came after reports earlier this month that Putin was attempting to topple Russian Chief Rabbi Adolph Shayeivich from his post.

Camp survivor is Polish minister

An Auschwitz survivor whom Israel has named a Righteous Gentile was appointed Poland's foreign minister. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, 78, survived Auschwitz, participated in the 1944 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and spent years building Polish-Jewish relations.

Controversy at JAFI meeting

The Jewish Agency for Israel concluded its annual General Assembly in Jerusalem on Thursday.

A controversial resolution submitted by Likud delegates calling on the Jewish Agency to do "all it can" to protect Jews living in West Bank settlements was swiftly removed from the agenda.

Traditionally, the Jewish Agency does not take a position on internal Israeli political affairs, but Michael Edri, secretary-general of the World Likud Union, insisted the proposal agreed with the agency's commitment to protect Jews all over the world.

Because of the Independence Day holiday in the U.S, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Wednesday, July 5.

MIDEAST FOCUS

Temple digs get go-ahead

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak gave Muslim officials the approval to continue digging on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Politicians and archaeologists say the excavations, which Muslim officials say is necessary to expand prayer space, is destroying artifacts. Israeli police arrested five Palestinians who clashed with a group of Jews protesting the excavations.

China controversy continues

Israel's deputy defense minister is scheduled to fly to Washington next month to resolve a dispute over a planned Israeli military sale to China.

Reports of Ephraim Sneh's trip comes after a U.S. congressional committee urged Israel to cancel the planned sale of the radar system.

Meanwhile, a senior military delegation from China is visiting Israel, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The paper said the delegation is meeting senior members of the defense establishment and visiting some of Israel's defense industries.

Center Party offered post

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Center Party Knesset member Dan Meridor the post of minister without portfolio, responsible for Israel's top-level security agencies.

Meridor has not yet responded to the offer, which would give him responsibility over Israel's Mossad, Shin Bet and Atomic Energy Commission.

Israeli wins online jackpot

A woman from Israel won what is believed to be the largest-ever online casino jackpot.

A woman identified as Sharon P. won \$171,975.53 from King Solomon's Online Casino earlier this month. The woman had placed a \$3 slot machine bet.

their relationship to Judaism over time, suggesting, writes Horowitz, that "Jewish identity is not a fixed factor in one's life but rather a matter that parallels personal growth and personal development."

- Ritual practice is either steadily low or decreasing for nearly 70 percent of those studied, while "subjective attachment" — or feeling that one's Jewishness is important — is either steadily high or increasing for 63 percent.

- Those who are not intensively engaged in Jewish life define their Jewishness in personal ways, what Horowitz describes as a "salad bar" approach of selecting various aspects of the tradition — from Jewish law to "an individual's feelings about his Uncle Louie" — that they find personally meaningful.

- Remembering the Holocaust and leading an ethical and moral life topped the list when respondents were asked to rate the importance of certain aspects of being Jewish. At the bottom of the list, fewer than 30 percent of those surveyed said observing Jewish law, supporting Jewish organizations, attending synagogue or studying Jewish texts were important aspects of being Jewish for them.

- Day school education and other early childhood experiences appear to play a stronger role in cementing adult Jewish identities of the Orthodox than of other Jews. Liberal Jews report that voluntary experiences — like Israel trips, teen experiences and college involvement — exerted greater influence on their adult Jewish identity.

- Although positive childhood educational experiences "predispose" non-Orthodox Jews to engage in Jewish activity later in life, the study says, "the individual who has not had a steady, intensive Jewish upbringing is open to influence by experiences that come later in life."

- Respondents said positive experiences with family members and institutions are what attracted them most to Judaism. Asked what turned them away from Judaism, they said negative experiences with Jewish institutions, poor family relationships and unpleasant encounters with people who are more religious than they are.

- More Jews would be upset if their child converted to Christianity or never got a college degree (77 percent in each case) than if their child married a non-Jew (51 percent), and 45 percent said it wouldn't matter to them if their child married a non-Jew.

The study finds feelings of Jewish attachment among Jews not actively involved in the community but also notes that the Jewish identity of people with "mixed" levels of Jewish engagement are most affected by outside influences.

In part because of those two findings, the study is reigniting the longstanding "outreach/inreach" debate.

Jonathan Woocher, executive vice president of the Jewish Education Service of North America and head of the North American federation system's committee on renaissance and renewal, said the study shows the need to figure out how to engage Jews who — although not highly involved in Jewish life — feel positively about their Jewishness.

According to the study, that's about 34 percent of U.S. Jews.

"We cannot just write off those people and assume that because at this moment in time they're not behaving in the way the Jewish community most values that they're not interested in being Jewish and will never be more actively engaged," he said.

Alisa Rubin Kurshan, vice president of strategic planning and organizational resources at the UJA-Federation of New York, said, "We have to stop waiting at the door. Many Jews are not looking up where the local synagogue is, so it's about finding where Jews are and doing what they're doing."

Egon Mayer, a sociologist and director of research for a national organization focusing on intermarried Jews and their families, agreed.

"The community must find as many portals of entry as there are portals of exit, because clearly the portals of exit are quite vast," he said.

But those in the "inreach" camp point to the study's finding that "the people who are most intensively involved in Jewish life, as well as those who are least connected" are "generally less susceptible" to experiences that might alter their Jewish identities.

Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee has long contended that outreach to intermarried and unaffiliated Jews is a poor use of scarce resources. He said the study shows that "the future of Jewish continuity initiatives really needs to be targeted toward the middles — not those who are intensively involved or those on the periphery." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Panel: Man shouldn't serve in war

A Russian Jew says a panel of Russian psychiatrists has concluded that he should not have to serve in the country's war in Chechnya because he is a pacifist, according to a report provided by Dmitry Neverovsky to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

But charges that Neverovsky violated the Russian Constitution have not been dropped.

Neverovsky was jailed for four months beginning in November for his refusal to fight in Russia's war against Muslim separatists.

Austria pledges to cooperate

Austria's chancellor said he would cooperate with the European Court of Human Rights' plan to appoint a panel of "Three Wise Men" to examine whether sanctions against Austria should be dropped.

Jorg Haider, the unofficial leader of the far-right Freedom Party, said, "Even the visit of three wise men to Jesus could not prevent his crucifixion."

The European community imposed sanctions on Austria after Haider's party was included in the Austrian government.

Leader removes name from letter

An American Jewish leader is insisting his name be removed from an open letter critical of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Neal Sher, the former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby in the United States, said he was unaware that the letter would be so critical of Israeli policy.

Germans arrest neo-Nazis

German police arrested four neo-Nazis who smashed a large mosque window.

Police said the four men, aged 18 to 26, had been drinking heavily before the attack.

Man fined for defacing KKK sign

A Missouri man who sawed down a sign indicating a stretch of highway was being cleaned by the Ku Klux Klan was fined \$100.

"I was angry the Klan was represented in the cleanup program. I believe I did the right thing," said Christopher Bellers.

Capt. Kirk directs shiva film

The man who starred as Capt. Kirk in the original "Star Trek" is planning to direct a movie based on his experience sitting shiva, or mourning, for his wife.

"During the process of sitting shiva, the concept occurred to me: Grief can be funny," said William Shatner. Shatner's wife, Nerine, died accidentally in a swimming pool in their backyard last year.

Ruling against gay Scout leader discriminatory, Jewish groups say

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Most Jewish groups are condemning a Supreme Court ruling that allows the Boy Scouts to exclude a gay scoutmaster.

In a 5-4 decision, the high court ruled Wednesday in favor of a private organization's right to exclude people from their group based on sexual orientation.

The justices said the Boy Scouts of America could exclude scoutmaster James Dale from the national organization because he is gay.

"We are stunned that in the year 2000 the Supreme Court could issue such a decision," the Anti-Defamation League's national director, Abraham Foxman, and its national chairman, Howard Berkowitz, said in a statement.

"This decision effectively states that as long as an organization avows an anti-homosexual position, it is free to discriminate against gay and lesbian Americans."

But Orthodox groups are defending the court's decision.

The Orthodox Union said in a statement that it supports the court's recognition that a "civic organization is empowered to determine what its message is."

The Boy Scouts of America had argued that requiring them to retain James Dale as a scoutmaster violates their bylaws and their First Amendment rights of freedom of expression.

The 5 million-member organization argued that a private, voluntary group ought to be able to create and interpret its own "moral code." The policy of excluding gays does not appear in the organization's official manuals but the group views homosexuality as morally wrong and therefore a violation of the Scout pledge to be "morally straight and clean."

Some Jewish groups argued that the Boy Scouts is really a public organization and so cannot discriminate in their hiring or membership practices.

"The Boy Scouts is a huge national institution, very far from a club or sectarian group," argues Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the ADL.

An appeals court had found the Boy Scouts to be a place of public accommodation because it has broad-based membership solicitation and it has partnered with various public entities and public service organizations.

Nevertheless, the high court said the organization was not a public association and applying a public accommodations law to require the Boy Scouts to admit Dale violates the Boy Scouts' First Amendment right of expressive association.

"Government actions that unconstitutionally burden that right may take many forms, one of which is intrusion into a group's internal affairs by forcing it to accept a member it does not desire," Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote for the majority.

Freedom of association is an important right, agrees Marc Stern, the co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, but if too many groups use the right too often there could be a real danger.

For example, some groups may use their right to associate as a means to defend their exclusion of Jews.

"The danger posed by today's decision is that every effort to halt discrimination may be checkmated by an assertion of associational autonomy," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

But Nathan Diamant, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs, said religious organizations are afforded little protection, so this ruling supporting the right of expressive association is critical.

The Orthodox Union, which filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the Boy Scouts, also had considered that if the Boy Scouts were forced to admit Dale, religious groups could be at risk and Jewish groups might be forced to accept a non-Jewish member as a result.

Agudath Israel of America, which also filed a brief supporting the Boy Scouts, said a ruling against the Boy Scouts could have been very damaging to religious groups.

"It could have opened up a can of worms," said Abba Cohen, the organization's director and counsel of the Washington office. □

Study finds gap between Jewish public and 'leaders'

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — If you were to assume that most American Jews agree with last week's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that student-led prayer at school football games is unconstitutional, you would be right.

According to a new study released last Friday, coincidentally just days after the Supreme Court ruling, only 28 percent of American Jews favor allowing public school students to say prayers at sporting events.

The study, "Religion and the Public Square: Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective," finds that most American Jews continue to believe that the wall separating church and state ought to be high.

The poll contrasts the attitudes of the general Jewish population with the leadership of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization of community relations councils, and with the non-Jewish public.

The survey finds a large gap in attitudes between the general Jewish population and the leadership of the JCPA, long seen as a staunchly liberal group.

On prayer at sporting events, for example, only 5 percent of JCPA leaders support it, compared with 28 percent of the Jewish public.

While some see nothing unusual about the gap, others see the chasm as an indication that JCPA is out of sync with the American Jews they seek to represent.

The differences among Jews, however, are minor when compared with the sample of non-Jews. In almost every instance, both the Jewish public and JCPA leaders are significantly more "separationist" than non-Jews.

The study used a sample of 1,002 Jews, 684 non-Jews and 111 JCPA leaders.

The margin of error was 3 to 4 percent for the Jews and non-Jews, but no statistic is available for the JCPA group.

The study is part of a larger project, "Jews and the American Public Square," being conducted the Philadelphia-based Center for Jewish Community Studies.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is funding the project.

It comes at a time when religion is playing an unprecedented role in mainstream political campaigns and is informing much of the debate on such public policy issues as school vouchers and abortion.

"American attitudes toward religion and public life are changing, and old ways of thinking may not be up to the challenge of understanding and responding to new situations," according to a pamphlet describing the project.

While the "high wall of separation" that Jews have staunchly advocated has served them well, the pamphlet says, "it has also framed the way they understand — and misunderstand — the role of religion in America."

The purpose of the project, its organizers say, is to "open up a wide-ranging conversation" since the need for new perspectives is "urgent."

So where do Jews and the JCPA leadership stand when it comes to church-state separation issues such as posting the Ten

Commandments in schools and placing manger scenes on government property? Among the key findings:

- Thirty-eight percent of Jews think it's OK to allow public schools to display the Ten Commandments, in contrast to 5 percent of JCPA leaders and 65 percent of non-Jews.

- Forty-three percent of Jews think a city government should be allowed to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas. Five percent of JCPA leaders agree, as do 80 percent of non-Jews.

- Twenty-eight percent of Jews think there should be more laws governing moral behavior. Three percent of JCPA leadership agree, as do 45 percent of non-Jews.

- Thirty percent of the Jewish public say it is pleasing when political leaders publicly affirm their belief in God. Twenty-two percent of JCPA leaders and 70 percent of non-Jews agree with this statement.

- Thirty-five percent of Jews think members of the clergy can discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit, in contrast to 73 percent of JCPA leaders and 30 percent of non-Jews.

The gap between the JCPA leadership and the Jewish public may mean a number of things.

Leaders often tend to be more extreme than the public they are said to represent, according to Steven Cohen, a professor of sociology at Hebrew University and the author of the study.

Marc Stern, counsel for the American Jewish Congress and an expert on the separation of church and state, said the Jewish public is willing to accept the "symbolic notation" of religious accommodation — such as teaching Christmas carols in public schools along with Chanukah songs (56 percent in favor) or putting up a manger scene on government property (43 percent), especially if they don't feel threatened by it.

In contrast, the JCPA leadership — 13 percent on the Christmas carols and 5 percent on the manger scene — is more committed to applying the separation principal in all public arenas, Stern said.

But when it comes to legislative initiatives, fewer Jews among both the public and JCPA than among non-Jews believe there should be more laws governing moral behavior, more religion in government or government aid to schools.

The study also found that JCPA leaders are more religious on a personal level than the general Jewish public and also are more supportive of religious involvement in public policy dialogue.

Cohen sees this as a paradox that can be explained by the leadership's ability to reconcile separationism with strong Jewish commitments and the understanding of the agency's historically liberal position on separation of church and state.

This ability to separate public policy from private behavior allows the JCPA leaders to "adopt the logic that connects support for religious involvement in public life with separationism in church-state policy," the study says.

For JCPA's associate executive vice-chair, Martin Raffel, there is no paradox. In fact, he said, the finding "explodes the myth" that separationists are opposed to religion.

"Support for church-state separation does not equal opposition to religion," Raffel said.

The staunch support for separating church and state, he said, stems from the assessment of JCPA leaders who have gone into public schools, for example, and witnessed the negative consequences of religion in the schools. □