



SUMMARY OF WEB SURVEY RESULTS: CHANGES OVER THE PAST QUARTER CENTURY

Lippman Kanfer Institute – April 25, 2006

To inform the Institute's "Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century" project, the Lippman Kanfer Institute conducted a web survey during March and April 2006. The survey was designed to gather input from individuals beyond the members of the Advisory Council regarding changes over the past 25 years that have had a substantial impact on individuals, on North American society, and on Jewish life in North America.

The survey, prepared in consultation with JESNA's Berman Center for Research and Evaluation, included both forced choice and open-ended questions. The survey was posted on the web and notices were sent to a wide range of Jewish-connected organizations requesting that they invite their constituents to complete the survey. The e-mail invitation to participate was sent to over 50 e-lists, including denominational groups, Jewish educational projects, regional Jewish groups, and Jewish startups. Almost 700 individuals completed the survey by April 8.

Major results of the survey are presented below. (For the text of the survey itself, see Appendix A.) Several caveats are in order in evaluating these results. *First and foremost, the pool of respondents is not in any way a random sample of the total Jewish population or any other larger group.* The majority of respondents identified themselves as Jewish communal professionals or volunteers in the Jewish community. The group was weighted toward the Northeast and was about two thirds female. Seventy percent characterized themselves as married or living with a partner; the other thirty percent were single. In terms of age, there was a fairly even distribution between ages 18-64, with slightly higher numbers in the 25-34 group and 50-54 group.

Because the survey population is not a sample, no statistical tests were applied to the results and there is no way to generalize from them to any larger population. The results presented below should be taken, therefore, as the opinions of a self-selected group, diverse in some ways and fairly similar to one another in others, interested enough in Jewish issues to complete the survey.

Themes That Emerge from the Lippman Kanfer Institute Survey Data

The results of the survey highlighted a number of areas of change that were seen by a significant number of respondents as affecting their own lives as individuals, North American society, and/or Jewish life. The changes most often selected or cited included:

1. Impact of technology – e.g., personal computers, use of the Internet, wireless technology
2. Impact of/concern about global terrorism
3. Economic challenges and pressures - e.g., the high cost of Jewish living, growth in the gap between rich and poor / economic stagnation for the middle class, rising costs of health care
4. Hectic pace of family life and competition for time / resources
5. Changed position of Israel in the world / diminishing attachment to Israel
Note: On this issue, generational differences were visible. Diminished attachment to Israel was of greater concern to the 35-54 group; the younger cohort was somewhat less concerned or aware of this issue.
6. Dynamic / shifting nature of 21st century life – e.g., multiple careers and job changes; geographic mobility, including large-scale shifts of the Jewish population; increased distance between extended family members
7. Change in gender roles and family forms – e.g., expanded role of women in Jewish life and leadership, acceptance of gay and lesbian families, shift from traditional family structures to new family forms
8. Diminished attachment to and reconfiguring of Jewish institutions – e.g., changes in Jewish philanthropy, increased influence of major donors, and decreased interest in younger generations of philanthropists in supporting their parents' causes – but counter-balanced in part by increased enrollments in Jewish day schools
9. Growth of post-denominational religion / increasing role of personal choice (particularly among younger cohort) – e.g., denominational shifts (most felt that denominational differences are decreasing, although a few said that they are increasing, especially between the Orthodox and others); interest in spirituality
10. Widespread, unimpeded participation of Jews in the mainstream of American life / increased presence of Jews in American popular culture
11. Demographic changes in the Jewish community – e.g., increased intermarriage, declining birth rates, the aging of the Jewish population, the loss of the immigrant generation
12. Mixed status of and ambivalent attitudes toward Jewish education – widespread illiteracy, but new opportunities for / interest in adult Jewish learning, increased enrollment in Jewish day schools, etc.

Appendix B includes several tables that show which items were cited most often by respondents (giving both the percentage choosing the item as one of the five most consequential changes and the rank order of the item among all the possible responses). The tables break out the responses by specific question (i.e., whether the changes were seen as affecting the respondents as individuals, North American society, or Jewish life) and by age, gender, and degree of Jewish involvement (for the question on changes affecting Jewish life).