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Generation Gap On Inter-marriage Views

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You probably won't be surprised by one of the key findings of a new study, since it confirms what many of us have been observing for awhile: Jewish leaders in their 20s and 30s are much less concerned about inter-marriage than are older Jewish leaders.

But you may be surprised that the person (dispassionately) reporting this trend is [Jack Wertheimer](#), a Jewish Theological Seminary professor and frequent contributor to [Commentary](#), in a [study for the Avi Chai Foundation](#).

Along with [Steven M. Cohen](#), Jack is one of the few remaining (non-Orthodox) voices in the American Jewish community who consistently speaks out against inter-marriage and outreach to the inter-married, and who calls for discouraging inter-marriage/ promoting in-marriage.

As you can imagine, we disagree a lot. That said, he is an extremely thoughtful, knowledgeable and articulate observer of American Jewish life, and, since I also cover Jewish education, I've come to rely on his research on the field, including an excellent series of reports (also done for Avi Chai) on congregational/Hebrew/supplemental schools.

Anyway, anyone interested in the future of American Jewish communal life should read through all of his latest study, "Generation of Change: How Leaders in Their Twenties and Thirties Are Reshaping American Jewish Life," (you can download it from the previous Avi Chai link) which has some fascinating insights on the divide between "establishment" and "nonestablishment" Jewish organizations. (Establishment in the study refers to longtime groups like the [Anti-Defamation League](#) and the [American Jewish Committee](#) -- the alphabet soup -- whereas nonestablishment refers to relatively new programs/institutions created by Jews in their 20s and 30s, such as [independent minyans](#), [Hazon](#) and [Moishe Houses](#).)

Given my own personal obsession with inter-marriage, I was of course most drawn to the findings on this topic:

*Thirty-nine percent of young leaders, compared to 45 percent of older leaders disagree/disagree strongly with the following statement: "Jews should marry whomever they fall in love with, even if not Jewish." (Which, I assume, means that 60 percent of young leaders and 55 percent of old-timers agree with the statement or have no opinion?)

*Only 36 percent of little pishers (my terminology, not Jack's), compared to 44 percent of alter kockers (again, my language) agree with this statement: "It is important to encourage Jews to marry Jews." (I assume this means that 64 percent disagree with that statement.)

*Even those who are liberal on intermarriage would be "upset if my child were to marry a non-Jew who did not convert." Sixty-two percent of the youngsters agree with that statement (compared to 69 percent of the geezers).

Interestingly, young leaders from "nonestablishment" groups were more liberal on intermarriage than young leaders from "establishment" groups, who tend to more closely echo the views of the older establishment: Only 24 percent of the nonestablishment whippersnappers disagreed with "Jews should marry whomever they fall in love with..." and only 18 percent of them agreed with "It is important to encourage Jews to marry Jews."

Come to think of it, the divide between establishment and nonestablishment attitudes seems greater than between young/old. Nonestablishment old-timers (remember, these are volunteers/staff in startups created by iconoclastic hipsters [my language, not Jack's]) actually seem to feel much less threatened by intermarriage than their establishment juniors (who are volunteers/staffers for The Man).

OK, if I have to write establishment or nonestablishment one more time, I'm going to scream!

I'll leave you with just one more interesting tidbit: Another demographic quality, besides age and type of group people are involved in, that seems to differentiate people's intermarriage attitudes: whether they are single, married, have children and so forth. Fifty-six percent of singles are "pro in-marriage," compared to 58 percent of childless marrieds, compared to 65 percent of married with toddlers, compared to 70 percent of married with school-aged kids. Obviously this correlates a great deal with age: more whippersnappers are single and childless, more geezers are married with school-aged children. But it's not completely age. After all, I am married with school-aged children yet of course remain eternally young and hip (if rapidly approaching 40).

You don't have to be young, hip or able to spell antidisestablishmentarianism to like "In The Mix" on Facebook!

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