

# **IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF RUTH: A Sociological Analysis of Conversion to Judaism Among American Jews**

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The authors' names appear in alphabetical order and do not reflect an order of priority in their relative contributions to this report.

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Abstract

The prevailing paradigms of research on religious conversion are examined to see how adequately they account for conversion to Judaism. Analysis of the research literature is used to show that the prevailing paradigms do not help to understand conversion to Judaism because virtually none of the studies on conversion have included conversion to Judaism.

Secondary analysis of demographic survey data from ten Jewish communities are aggregated to produce a sample of 10,750 individuals from different households in each of which at least one adult is Jewish by birth, conversion, born-Jews or raised-as Jews who are either single or married to Jews.

An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the three groups is used to generate a social-structural explanation for conversion.

Analysis of the Jewish religious practices and other Jewish associational characteristics of the three groups supports the hypothesis that conversion to Judaism involves two separate dimensions; one religious, the other socio-cultural.

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## Background

Although the subject of conversion has been a major theme in the social scientific study of religion for years, research on the subject is characterized by a number of important lacunae, which the present paper seeks to identify and begin to fill.

First, and perhaps most importantly, Judaism has not been a proselytizing religion since the ascendancy of Christianity in the fifth century, C.E. Therefore, the social science literature dealing with conversion has focused exclusively on conversion within a Christian context, and more recently, within the context of the study of new religious movements, which became popular in the West in the early 1970s. The study of conversion into Judaism is notable by its absence from the corpus of general social science literature dealing with conversion.

In the rare cases where modern scholarship has focused on conversion into Judaism, the approach has been almost exclusively historical or rabbinic in orientation.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of social science attention to conversions into Judaism, this paper contends, has resulted in a somewhat skewed understanding of the conversion phenomenon in general.

In a seminal analysis of the existing body of conversion research literature, James T. Richardson (1985)<sup>2</sup> describes the two prevailing paradigms in accounting for conversion: the “active” and the “passive.” The paradigm that has prevailed in much of the traditional literature on conversion, suggests Richardson, is the “Pauline experience” associated with the New Testament story of the conversion of Paul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. In this paradigm, conversion is the result of a cognitive/emotional breakthrough brought on by an experience over which the “convert” has no control (hence is designation as the “passive” paradigm). The Pauline experience is also seen as a single life changing event, which has the once-and-for-all result of replacing an old self with a new.

“In sum,” writes Richardson, “this prototypical experience is psychological, deterministic, and assumes a passive subject.” It might be added that the “passive” paradigm is also highly individualistic. It ignores the social psychological insights of George Herbert Mead (1934)<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Seltzer, “Joining the Jewish People from Biblical to Modern Times,” in Marvin E. Marty (Ed.), Pushing the Faith: Proselytism and Civility in a Pluralistic World. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1988. Pp. 41-63. See also, David Max Eichhorn (Ed.), Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis. New York: Ktav Publishing Co., 1965.

<sup>2</sup>James T. Richardson, “The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 24 (2) 1985, pp. 163-179.

<sup>3</sup>George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

more recently of Peter L. Berger (1967)<sup>4</sup> who have argued that the maintenance of human identity in general and of religious identity in particular are dependent upon both the **cognitive** support of a meaningful “plausability structure” that the individual internalizes, and the **social** support of a reference group that reinforces the beliefs, choices, and lifestyle of the individual.

A significant shift in the traditional paradigm occurred sometime in the mid-1960s, marked most notably by the studies of Lofland and Stark (1965) of the Unification Church.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, other research began to focus attention on what Balch and Taylor (1976) call “the role of the seeker” in searching out the cognitive components of a new belief system as well as in establishing links with the reference group that would support the seeker in his or her emerging new choice.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Lofland and Sknovd (1981) delineate eight different role dispositions or “seeking strategies” reflected in the motifs of personal conversion accounts. These motifs reveal the variety of ways in which individuals play an “active” role in becoming converts to a new religion.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the striking differences between the two paradigms, Richardson’s analysis fails to take note of one very important similarity between them: both see conversion as a process and/or a condition that is fundamentally related to or characteristic of an individual’s relationship to a new faith and its community or church. Whether in the context of Christianity or in the context of

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<sup>4</sup>Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy. New York: Doubleday, 1967.

<sup>5</sup>John Lofland and Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective.” American Sociological Review 30 (3), 1965, pp. 863-874.

<sup>6</sup>Balch, Robert W. and David Taylor, “Seekers and Sources: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a UFO Cult,” J.T. Richardson (Ed.) Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religion. Beverly Hills, Ca. Sage.

<sup>7</sup>John Lofland and Norman Sknovd, “Conversion Motifs,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 20 (3) 1981, pp. 373-385.

new religious movements, both the “passive” and the “active” paradigm sees conversion as a process that brings the individual into a new relationship with a large, **secondary group**. The conversion is seen as an event that brings the **individual** into a new relationship with his or her chosen **community of faith**. That desire to establish that relationship is assumed to be the principal object of the conversion.

Curiously, none of the studies, and neither of the two paradigms have focused on the role of **primary groups** in either facilitating conversion or supporting the lifestyle choice of converts. To be more precise, no consideration has been given to a model of conversion in which the convert’s relationship to the larger faith community is both stimulated and reinforced by more intimate, primary group ties, namely family ties.

### The Research Problem

The point of departure for analyzing conversion into Judaism is more appropriately the model of the Biblical figure of Ruth, the Moabites, than that of Paul. The Biblical legend, placed by historians in the Age of Judges (@968 B.C.E.), recounts the story of a couple from Bethlehem, Naomi and Elimelech, who travel into the land of the Moabites because there is a famine in their own land. There they raise two sons who both marry Moabite women, one named Ruth, the other named Orpah. In time both Naomi’s husband and two sons die, leaving her with only her daughters-in-law as relatives. Naomi decides to return to the land of her people, and suggests to her daughters-in-law that they, too, return to their fathers’ houses. It is then that Ruth utters to her mother-in-law, Naomi, the famous words: where you go I shall go, your people will be my people, your God will be my God, and where you die there I shall lie down also.

The story of Ruth portrays a model of religious conversion that has little to do with either the ecstasy of divine revelation or with a gradual, purposive quest for a new religious identity. Rather, Ruth's conversion seems to emerge out of a profound human bond of a family relationship. Ruth's desire to make Naomi's people her own people and Naomi's 'God her own God is connected to a deep attachment of Ruth to Naomi herself, and perhaps, an attachment to the memory of her dead husband. Ruth is neither a "passive" agent of some mysterious spiritual force nor and "active" spiritual seeker who wants to break away from the norms of the Moabites. Rather, she is a loving widow/daughter-in-law who wants to retain the intimacy of her family bonds. She appears to choose "conversion" as a way of securing those bonds.

In point of fact, then, the classical model of conversion into Judaism suggests an alternative paradigm altogether. Where the two paradigms described by Richardson would seem to be both **ego-centered**, the paradigm suggested by the story of Ruth appears to be **family-centered**. It appears to be motivated by a desire to keep the family system intact.

In the contemporary American Jewish context, series of studies of intermarriage by Mayer et al (1979, 1983, 1987, 1989) have shown that marriage between Jews and Gentiles results in the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism in about 25-30% of cases.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, these studies have shown that about 95% of all conversions to Judaism occur within the context of intermarriage. Furthermore, these studies have shown that the Jewish partners in an intermarriage convert out much more infrequently, in less than 5% of the cases.

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<sup>8</sup>Egon Mayer, Intermarriage and the Jewish Future, with Carl Scheingold. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979; Egon Mayer, Children of Intermarriage. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983; Egon Mayer, Conversion Among the Intermarried, with Amy Avgar. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987; Egon Mayer, Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians. New York: Schocken Books, 1987.

These findings suggest that, at least in the case of conversion to Judaism, the existing paradigms that account for conversion have failed to take into account the role of family relationships, particularly husband-wife relationships, as either the precondition for conversion or as the social matrix within which a newly acquired Jewish identity is supported.

It might be noted parenthetically that Hoge et al (1981) have also found conversions into and out of Catholicism occurring overwhelmingly within the context of an intermarriage.<sup>9</sup> Yet, conversion research has not taken into account the dynamics of intermarriage in either of the paradigms.

The purpose of the present research is to begin to fill this gap in conversion research in general and in the study of conversions to Judaism in particular.

The study seeks to demonstrate that:

- a. conversion is, indeed, a significant feature of modern American Jewish life, particularly in the context of marriage between Jews and Gentiles,
- b. Conversion results from certain family relationships that appear to be quite independent from the personal psychological dispositions of the persons involved, and
- c. The “Jewishness” of the convert appears to be more a point along a continuum of becoming Jewish, rather than a sharp point that demarcates Jew from non-Jew fully: converts are just like born-Jews on the specifically religious dimensions of Jewishness, but fall somewhere between born-Jew and Gentiles on the social-cultural dimensions of Jewishness.

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<sup>9</sup>Dean Hoge et al, Converts, Drop-Outs, Returnees. Washington, D.C. United States Catholic Bishops Conference.

It should be noted that the authors are well aware of the highly politicized climate of opinion surrounding this issue, particularly in the State of Israel. It is not the purpose of this study to enter the religio-political debate concerning the well-known question of “Who is a Jew?”. Rather, the study intends to by-pass that debate and focus instead on the subjective perceptions of respondents in objective surveys, regarding their demographic characteristics, lifestyle choices, and social attitudes.

### The Data

The data for this study are derived from the archives of the North American Jewish Data Bank, a facility at the Graduate Center of the City university of New York, which has become the depository of local Jewish community demographic surveys that are conducted periodically by local Jewish Federations throughout the United States. In the present study, which represents an instance of secondary analysis, the data were compiled from general purpose demographic surveys conducted between 1981-87 in ten Jewish communities as listed below,

**Table 1**  
Size and Source of Sample

<u>Name of City</u>	<u>Convert</u>	<u>Born-Jew</u>	<u>Gentile</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Boston	16	1074	154	1244	11.6%	1985
Chicago	35	897	28	960	8.9%	1981
Cleveland	31	537	92	660	6.1%	1987
Denver	48	422	125	595	5.5%	1981
Houston	56	336	117	509	4.7%	1985
Miami	28	909	40	977	9.1%	1982
New York	67	2945	240	3252	30.3%	1981
Palm Beach	25	675	50	750	7.0%	1987
Philadelphia	28	1070	11	1109	10.3%	1984
Phoenix	64	491	139	694	6.5%	1983
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>9356</b>	<b>996</b>	<b>10750</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

In short, the sample includes **398** converts, that is people who reported that they were not born or raised as Jews but became Jewish by conversion, **9,365** people who reported that they were born and/or raised as Jews, and **996** people who reported that they were neither born nor raised as Jews and are not now Jewish. With but few isolated exceptions all of this last group were currently married to a born and /or raised Jewish spouse.

The criteria for inclusion in the present composite sample were: available information about whether conversion had taken place, or, if born-Jewish, whether both parents were Jewish or the respondent was raised Jewish. Cases were excluded where there was not sufficient information about conversion, or how respondent was raised.

The above table shows that out of the total population of American “Jewish” households in the mid-1980s (defined as households in which there is a least one adult Jew over the age of 18) **3.7%** were households in which one of the adults was a convert to Judaism, **9.3%** were households in which one adult was not Jewish (mixed marriage households), and **87%** were households in which all adults were Jewish. Put another way, out of all the households in which there was an adult present who was not born and/or raised as a Jew (**13%**) a little over **28%** included a convert. Since with but rare exception all those households involved a marriage between a person who was born and/or raised as a Jew and a spouse who was not, it is now estimated that **28%** of all intermarriages involve the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism. These will be referred to below as “conversionary” households or families. The remaining **72%** intermarriages which do not involve the conversion of the Gentile spouse will be referred to as “mixed” households or families.

As can be seen below, 95% of converts were married, at least at some point in their lives. Therefore the study does not address the question of factors that might stimulate the conversion of singles to Judaism (largely because there are just too few cases to warrant analysis).

### Findings

#### (a) Who Converts

A first step in addressing the question of why people convert to Judaism is to examine the question of who converts. The salient characteristics of converts, and their comparison with born-Jews and non-Jews is provided in the table below.

This table shows that converts, in contrast to Gentiles married to Jews, are much more likely to be women, not in full-time employment. In subsequent tables it will be seen that converts are also more likely to come from a non-Catholic religious background, and are more likely to have been also previously married to a Jew.

### **Table 2**

Demographic Profile of Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish Households

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
<b>Sex</b>			
Men	22.5%	42.1%	41.9%
Women	77.5	57.9	58.1
<b>Age</b>			
Mean	41	48	39
Median	37	47	36
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Ever Married	95.5%	79.8%	98.4%*
Single	4.5	20.2	1.6
Married 2+ times	39.9%	13.0%	41.4%
<b>Education</b>			
<4 yrs college	47.6%	46.6%	48.6%
Four yrs college	33.2	30.7	30.3
MA degree	10.3	13.2	10.2
PhD or equivalent	8.9	9.5	10.8
<b>Occupation</b>			
Full-time	44.9%	46.4%	61.2%
Part-time	14.7	12.0	8.3
Housewife	23.3	14.1	15.5
Retired/other	17.1	27.5	15.0
<b>Dual career</b>			
Yes	47.7%	41.6%	54.4%
No	52.3	58.4	45.6
<b>Generation in US</b>			
Foreign-born	3.5%	10.0%	7.2%
US born	10.8	35.7	12.3
Parent (s) US born	85.8	54.3	80.5
<b>Number of Children</b>			
None	29.2%	18.1%	43.0%
One	20.1	20.4	19.4
Two	30.7	37.1	23.2
Three or more	20.1	24.4	14.3

**Table 2**

**Cont'd**

Demographic Profile of Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish Households

Income (ever married only)			
Mean	\$51,683.	\$50,965.	\$47,495.
Median	40,276.	40,276.	40,276.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>9356</b>	<b>996</b>

Since the subsamples of single converts and Gentiles do not lend themselves to analysis due to a lack of enough cases, the remaining analysis focuses upon households and married individuals. Each table will carry a legend indicating whether the analysis is of individuals or households.

As a next step in accounting for conversion the following two tables examine the relationship between intermarriage and age on the one hand and conversion and age on the other.

**Table 3**

Composition of Household by Age of Convert, or Gentile, or Born-Jewish Respondent

<u>Household</u> <u>includes a:</u>	<u>Percent</u>					
	<u>&lt;35</u>	<u>35-45</u>	<u>46-60</u>	<u>&gt;60</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Convert	7.5	6.8	2.3	1.9	371	4.3
Gentile	23.8	15.3	5.7	3.3	938	10.9
Born-Jewish Couple	<u>68.7</u>	<u>77.9</u>	<u>92.0</u>	<u>94.8</u>	<u>7,314</u>	<u>84.8</u>
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	8,623	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,643</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>2,425</b>	<b>2,406</b>	<b>8,623</b>	<b>100.0</b>

This table shows the rising rate of intermarriage among American Jews, particularly in the age cohorts under 45, as well as a rising rate of conversion over-all. Only about 5% of the respondents over the age of 60 were in a marriage with a spouse who was not born or raised

Jewish. On the other hand, 35% of the respondents under the age of 35 were in such marriages. The table also suggests that the rate of conversion in intermarriages has climbed slightly, but not nearly as rapidly or steeply as the rate of intermarriage itself.

The next table looks more sharply at the incidence of conversion in intermarriage by age.

**Table 4**

Percent of Converts and Gentiles in Intermarriage by Age

	<u>&lt;35</u>	<u>35-45</u>	<u>46-60</u>	<u>&gt;60</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Converts	23.9	30.9	28.4	36.8	371	28.3
Gentiles	<u>76.1</u>	<u>69.1</u>	<u>71.6</u>	<u>63.2</u>	<u>938</u>	<u>71.1</u>
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>1,309</b>	

The table offers no conclusion as to the relationship between age and conversion. Conversion appears to be somewhat less common among those under 35 than those who are older. But Mayer (1987) has shown elsewhere that at least a third of conversions in intermarriages occur some years after the marriage. Therefore it would seem that the lower incidence of conversion among those under 35 is simply a reflection of conversion delayed rather than conversion foregone. Thus, Table 4 leads one to conclude that the proportion of intermarriages resulting in the conversion of the Gentile partner to Judaism has remained fairly constant, between 25-30% in the last generation.

Further clues about the role of background characteristics in stimulating conversion are offered in the table below, which examines the religious backgrounds of converts and Gentiles in

the sample.

Table 5

The Religious Backgrounds of Converts and Gentiles  
Percent

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Parents' religion		
Father Jewish	7.9%	5.6%
Neither parent Jewish	92.1	94.4
Raised as		
Catholic	19.1%	23.6%
Protestant	24.3	17.1
None	9.2	6.3
Other/Not Jewish*	47.4	53.1
Current religion		
Catholic	0%	20.4%
Protestant	.3%	13.1
Jewish	97.2	9.0
None	1.0	18.4
Other/Not Jewish	1.5	37.1
Religion of Spouse		
Catholic	0%	.1%
Protestant	0	0
Jewish	99.4	94.9
None	.6	4.4
Other/Not Jewish	0	.6
Religion of previous spouse		
Jewish	32.3%	9.0%
Gentile	67.7	91.0

\*in several of the cities respondents were not asked to specify religion but only whether they were Jewish

The above table suggests that conversion is slightly more likely to occur if person was

born into a family with a Jewish father; also more likely to occur among those from a Protestant rather than a Catholic background; and more likely among those who were previously also married to a Jewish partner.

(b) Accounting for Conversion

Having examined the socio-demographic profile of converts in comparison with born-Jews and Gentiles, it is now possible to attempt to account for conversions, albeit within the limitations of the available data.

The questions suggested by these apparent associations is how important they are by themselves, when other factors are controlled, and how much of the probability of conversion do they explain altogether. In short, how well do they account for the incidence of conversion to Judaism. These questions are addressed below in a series of regression equations.

Conversion treated as an outcome (dependent) variable, was entered (using pairwise missing-value treatment) into a series of regression equations that treated the following as independent variables: (1) age, (2) sex, (3) education, (4) immigrant generational status, (5) number of children, (6) employment status of household, that is, whether one or more adults were in full-time employment, (7) income/number of full-time earners, (8) religion of parents (Jewish father or none Jewish), (9) proportion of close friends Jewish, (10) whether raised as Catholic, (11) Protestant or (12) with no religion (10, 11, and 12 are dummy variables using other religion as a baseline).

The table below summarizes the ‘b’ and the standardized ‘Beta’ weight values, the level of significance of each element in the regression, and the adjusted total R square of all the



Previous research by Mayer (1987) has also pointed to a series of other relational factors, such as the relative religiosity of the families of origin of husband and wife, and the relative socio-economic status of the families of origin of the spouses as having a notable impact upon the likelihood of conversion.<sup>10</sup> However, the nature of the available data in the present study did not permit a confirmation or disconfirmation of those findings.

The relatively small amount of variance explained by the available data further suggests the need for much more refined research into the structural as well as cultural and social-psychological factors that determine conversion.

In the final section that follows below this report seeks to address the question of the impact of conversion upon religious identity, or more specifically upon Jewish identity. This question is raised because in most studies of conversion it is assumed that once a person has converted they are totally transformed (or else their conversion is assumed suspect or they are deemed to be ‘backsliders’). This paper suggests that such a model of conversion is ideologically loaded in favor of a highly exclusivist notion of identity; a model that may favor one religious concept over another, but which has no universal validity and may bear little resemblance to the psychological reality of religious identity change.

#### ( c ) How Are Converts Jewish

In the remaining section the paper focuses on the ways that converts express their sense of Jewishness, and compare them with respondents who were born or raised Jewish, with Gentiles

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<sup>10</sup>Egon Mayer, Conversion Among the Intermarried. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987.

married to Jews, and with people who indicate that they “feel” or “think of themselves” as Jews, but were not formally converted to Judaism.

As a first step in this process the paper examines selected Jewish religious practices among converts, born-Jews, Gentiles, and a small subsample of Gentiles who indicated that they think of themselves as Jews (are married to Jews) but have not converted.

**Table 6A**

Selected Jewish Religious Practices Among Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish

Households

	<b>N=388</b>	<b>N=9,169</b>	<b>N=952</b>
<u>Selected Practices</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Attend Passover seder	92.1%	92.2%	64.0%
Light candles Chanukah	87.1	85.8	57.9
Light candles Sabbath	43.5	43.7	9.2
Keep Sabbath	8.3	14.6	3.5
Keep kosher	11.8	29.0	3.2
Observe Yom Kippur	69.3	73.5	41.5
Have mezzuzah on door	73.2	81.5	27.0
Overall number of rituals			
None	21.8	11.6	38.5
1-2	12.2	14.0	32.2
3-5	57.9	53.9	28.4
6-7	7.1	20.3	.9

Note: information based on reported practices of household not of person alone

Note: “keeping the Sabbath” was defined as refraining from driving a car or handling money on the Sabbath

Of the seven Jewish “religious practices” Passover and Chanukah clearly enjoy the greatest popularity. As measured by these practices are indistinguishable from those who are born

or raised as Jews. These two practices also enjoy a high degree of popularity among Gentiles married to Jews. The observance of Yom Kippur, generally accompanied by attendance at synagogue services also shows a high degree of similarity between converts and born-Jews, and is found among over 40% of Gentiles. Two observances that most clearly demarcate both converts and born-Jews from Gentiles is the lighting of candles on Friday night in marking the Sabbath, and having a mezzuzah on one's doorposts. Converts and born-Jews are also highly similar in their religious affiliations, as shown below.

**Table 7**

Synagogue Affiliation and Attendance Among Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish

	<u>Households</u>		
<u>Synagogue Affiliation</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Yes	52.5%	56.7%	13.7%
No	47.5	43.3	86.3
<u>Frequency of Attendance</u>			
Never	23.3%	15.2%	57.0%
HiHolidays/ Few Times a Year	50.6	57.0	38.2
Once a Month	7.5	9.9	2.5
More than Once a Month/ Weekly	17.8	14.4	2.2
More than Once a week	.8	3.5	0

It should also be pointed out that the great majority of conversions to Judaism occur under Reform or Conservative auspices, which have more liberal standards toward religious practice than Orthodox or traditional Judaism in general. Therefore any differences in the

religious practices of converts and born-Jews are more likely to be the result of denominational differences within Judaism than the result of differences between converts and born-Jews. Put more simply, it may be argued on the basis of the above table that converts, indeed, are just like those who are born or raised as Jews. This conclusion would lend support to the notion that conversion does, in fact, transform the religious identity of the person entirely.

The point about the denominational preferences of converts is further born out by the table below.

**Table 8**

Jewish Denominational Identification Among Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish Households

<u>Denominations</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Orthodox	5.9%	8.6%	2.3%
Conservative	30.1	40.7	14.0
Reform	52.6	33.4	42.4
Secular	8.4	13.7	34.0
Other	3.1	3.5	7.

However, quite apart from religious practices, synagogue affiliation, an denominational preferences, Judaism is comprised also of ethnic-cultural memberships, feelings, memories, and especially of childrearing objectives (viz. A Jew is a person who desires to raise his or her children as Jews). To what extent converts absorb these dimensions of Jewishness is the question addressed by the final two tables below.

Table 9 shows that at least on two items that are proxies here for the ethnic-cultural dimension of Jewish identification: belonging to a Jewish organization and having visited Israel at least once, converts appear to differ more sharply from born-Jews than they do on any of the religious practices. While these two items may reflect differences resulting from factors other than conversion, until better data are available to shed light on the subject, it remains suggestive of the hypothesis that converts to Judaism have a keener sense of identity as Jews along the religious dimension than along the ethnic-cultural dimension. This point is further strengthened by differences that the table reveals concerning Jewish friendship networks.

Converts fall somewhere between born-Jews and Gentiles on the measure of what percentage of their closest friends are Jewish. While more than half the born-Jews report that the majority of their closest friends are Jewish, only about 23% of the converts report such a densely Jewish friendship network. Thus, conversion does not seem to have integrated most converts into a Jewish friendship network as fully as it integrated them into the synagogue and religious practices of Judaism.

On the other hand, the table also shows that converts contribute to Jewish charities at a level very nearly that of born-Jews and they read Jewish newspapers and magazines at a level that is even greater than born-Jews. Thus, it would seem that at least along some dimensions of identification converts do, indeed, become just like born-Jews.

At the same time, this table along with the previous ones hints at the fact that there exists a small sub-population of Gentiles-married-to-Jews who practice, affiliate, and identify as Jews even though they have not converted. Whether this group represents some transitional stage before conversion or a pattern of identification sui generis will remain to be examined in future

research.

**Table 9**

Jewish Associational Identification Among Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish

Households

<u>Expressions of Associational Identification</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Contributes to Jewish charity	69.2%	73.6%	44.9%
Contributed to Secular charity	73.9	69.9	77.2
% contributed to Jewish charity			
None	15.5%	17.1%	22.2%
<25%	13.1	5.8	22.7
25-50%	14.9	12.6	19.2
50-75%	17.0	13.5	7.6
75-100%	39.5	50.9	29.3
Visited Israel			
Yes	27.8%	45.3%	16.8%
No	72.2	54.7	83.2
Percentage of Friends Jewish			
None	6.8%	2.0%	18.3%
less than half	26.1	7.9	40.3
about half	44.4	37.6	28.7
more than half	22.7	52.4	12.6
Belong to Jewish organization			
Yes	38.7%	59.6%	16.2%
No	61.3	43.1	83.8
Read Jewish newspaper/magazine			
Yes	52.2%	49.3%	24.2%
No	47.8	50.7	75.8

Table 10 shows a curious discrepancy between converts and born-Jews in the proportion in which they give their children a Jewish education. It appears, at least in the very first part of Table 10 that converts are much more likely than born-Jews to give their children a Jewish

education. Part of this discrepancy is explained by the relatively older age of the born-Jewish (non-intermarried respondents. When the sample is controlled by age, selecting only those under 60--who are most likely to be currently raising children--the discrepancy diminishes greatly, as seen below. Nevertheless, it remains the case that converts appear to be more likely than born-Jews to provide their children with formal Jewish education. One probable reason for this is that a great many born-Jews see their own Jewishness as ethnic-cultural and therefore a quality that is transmitted naturally in the home and not by way of formal education.

**Table 10**

Jewish Education for Children Among Converts, Born-Jews, and Gentiles in Jewish Households

<u>Jewish Education Provided</u>	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Yes	50.0%	31.0%	19.3%
No	50.0	69.0	80.7
<u>Jewish Education Provided</u> (age less than 60)	<u>Converts</u>	<u>Born-Jews</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
Yes	54.4%	42.4%	20.7%
No	45.7	57.6	79.3
Kids raised as*			
Jewish	88.9%	93.7%	47.7%
Catholic	0	0	5.0
Protestant	1.5	.2	5.0
None	5.9	2.8	24.6
Other/Not Jewish**	3.7	3.0	17.6

\* This question was asked only in few of the surveys

\*\* in several of the cities respondents were not asked to specify their region but only whether or not they were Jewish

