

CURRENT JEWISH INTERMARRIAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

Dov Lazerwitz

Israel

Introduction

These national intermarriage data were gathered as part of a large scale survey of the United States Jewish population (NJPS) conducted from the early spring of 1970 until the end of 1971. The survey was sponsored and financed by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. (1)

The field work and sample design yielded 7179 housing units containing one or more Jews which, in turn, provided 5790 interviews for a 79 percent response rate after all necessary weighting. For survey purposes, Jews were defined as persons who considered themselves to be Jewish or who had at least one Jewish parent (no matter what those persons' present faith was at the time of interviewing). This broad definition was necessary for that part of the survey's schedule which dealt with marriages between Jews and Christians or with conversions to or from Judaism.

United States Jews are but a few percent of the total American population. Also, sizable proportions of them do not live in any so-called Jewish neighborhood and do not appear on any readily available local Jewish federation lists. Therefore, it was no easy matter to develop a reasonably efficient probability sample design. A combination of samples from local Jewish federation lists and a complex, multi-stage, disproportionately stratified, area cluster sample design was used to obtain sample housing units. Of course, the list and area samples were fully integrated so that sample housing units could enter the survey from only one of these sources. All housing units that fell into the sample were screened for Jews in accordance with the above definition.

The basic probability sampling principles that guided the design were a variation of the city directory-block supplement approach described in Lazerwitz (1968: 314-320) or Kish (1965: 352-358). For this

-
- (1) The author thanks the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds for permission to use and publish these data from the survey it commissioned and on which he spent so much volunteer time. He also wishes to acknowledge the generosity of the computer installation of Bar-Ilan University in providing so much free time. Dr. Mitchell Snyder of this computer center was most helpful in solving a variety of computer manipulation difficulties. Also, credit must be given to Mr. Moti Miron, Miss Sarah Cohen, and Miss Dahlia Rachman for their excellent computer programming help.

survey, the city directory became the available lists of local Jewish Federations. The block supplement was the large cluster sample design. The details of this sample, its response characteristics, and generalized sampling errors are given in Lazerwitz (1973, 1974).

The survey cost over \$600,000 and was directed by Dr. Fred Massarik and a technical committee. This technical committee was assigned specific survey tasks, such as designing the sample, arranging for and supervising the field force, and developing the interviewing schedule.⁽²⁾ At all times, final survey decisions, including over-riding recommendations of the technical committee, final field methods, and budget matters remained in the hands of Dr. Massarik.

Intermarriage Data

For this analysis, intermarriages are marriages between people who were born to two Jewish parents and people who were not born Jewish.⁽³⁾ Out of the 5790 interviews, there were 344 current intermarriages. Of these, in 90 such marriages, the non-Jewish spouse had converted into Judaism; in 19 such marriages, the Jewish spouse had converted out of Judaism (these were omitted from the tables in this paper); 235 marriages still had partners of different faith backgrounds.

The Findings

One basic interest is, of course, in just how much intermarriage has taken place and what short range projections can be made about the intermarriage rate. Our sample yielded 4392 current Jewish marriages. Of these, 4048 were between two Jewish adults and 344 were between a Jewish and a non-Jewish adult. This means that we had 8096 Jewish adults whose spouses were other "born" Jews and just 344 Jews whose spouses were not "born" Jews. Running these interview figures through the necessary weighting system required by the complex, multi-stage,

-
- (2) The author was the statistician of the technical committee. As such, he designed and supervised the survey's sample.
 - (3) The definition of who is a Jew does give rise to some rather minor survey biases that ought to be called to the reader's attention. First, the data on current intermarriages have no selection biases. The only sampling bias that could occur comes from those sections of the area multi-stage probability sample that were not fielded in geographic areas with extremely few Jews such as very rural areas of the United States. The details of such small sampling biases are given in Lazerwitz (1973, p.33-35). All available evidence indicates that it is highly unlikely that the few intermarriages and Jewish households missed in this manner would change any of the conclusions about current intermarriages.

disproportionately stratified, clustered survey sample indicates that 7 percent of currently married Jewish adults have spouses who were not born as Jews.

According to the weighted data, among the currently intermarried, 31% of the originally not Jewish spouses have converted to Judaism; 3% of the originally Jewish spouses have converted out of Judaism; and in 66% of the current intermarriages, both spouses still retain their original faith backgrounds.

The discussions of intermarriage seldom cover how intermarriage varies with a variety of social characteristics. What do these data show? First, note that 10% of the adult Jewish born men are currently intermarried while only 3% of the adult Jewish born women are. Increasing amounts of intermarriage are associated with increasing amounts of education. Among Jewish adults with less than a college degree, just 4% are married to spouses who were not born Jewish. However, this increases to 8% for those with a college degree and to 11% for those who have done graduate work. Jewish adults in their first marriage have only 6% married to non-Jews; those in their second marriage have 20% married to non-Jews.

Table 1. Percent Intermarried Among Ever-Married Jewish Adults, By Generations, NJPS, 1971

U.S. generation	Percent intermarried among ever-married Jewish adults
Foreign born	3
Native born of foreign born parents	5
One parent foreign born, one parent U.S. born	8
Both parents U.S. born	11

Table 1 shows how intermarriage rates change with generations in the United States. There is a steady rise in currently intermarried Jewish adults with more United States generations. In fact, among the currently intermarried, the percentage of those with both parents native born is about four times that for the foreign born.

The trouble in working with intermarriage rates based upon the entire Jewish population is that this mixes the low intermarriage cohorts of the past with the increasingly higher intermarriage cohorts of more recent times. With the intermarriage rate climbing, the best indication of its present and near future levels is to be found among

recently married young adults. These data from the National Jewish Population Survey show that by 1971, 14% of currently married Jewish born adults who are under 35 years of age had non-Jewish born spouses. Among these young adults, 34% of the non-Jewish spouses had converted to Judaism. (4)

Table 2. Family Religious Observances Among Currently Married Jewish Adults, NJPS, 1971, percentages

Family religious observances	All currently married Jewish adults	Current marriages with conversions into Judaism	Currently religiously mixed marriages	
			Husband born Jewish	Wife born Jewish
Lit Shabbat candles	36	63	4	4
Said Kiddush	20	61	3	1
Had Passover Seder in home	54	54	7	9
Went to Seder outside home	43	72	24	46
Had only Matzoth in home during last Passover	55	22	5	9
Lit candles all 8 nights of Chanukah	69	55	10	45
Home is Kosher	29	10	7	3

(4) A preliminary report on intermarriage prepared by Dr. Massarik was released by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, the sponsor of the NJPS survey. That report and this article agree on most major trends, but differ on specific figures - probably due to different approaches in the handling of the data. In the entire sample, there were 7179 sample housing units (including non-response) whose total weights were 15,145 or an interview to weight ratio of 2.1. The 344 current intermarriages had weights of 1,180, which gives an interview to weight ratio of 3.4. However, there were only 83 sample intermarriages that took place from 1966 to 1972 whose weights totalled 423, giving an interview to weight ratio of 5.1. Therefore it is more appropriate to limit the period of marriage to the category of 153 intermarriages that took place from 1960 onwards, with a weight sum of 559 and a ratio of interviews to weights of 3.7, than to try to present separately those few intermarriages contracted between 1966 and 1972, as was done in the above mentioned preliminary report.

The currently intermarried are divided into two basic subgroups in order to give more meaningful data. In Table 2, for example, are given various Jewish religious characteristics for those marriages with conversions into Judaism by the originally Christian partners, and those marriages that have remained religiously mixed. Religiously mixed marriages clearly have very little in the way of family Jewish religious observances. The exceptions are going to seders outside their homes, and the tendency of those Jewish wives with Christian husbands to light Chanukah candles.

The family involvement picture is quite different for those marriages with conversions. Such marriages are quite involved in Sabbath religious observances and are much more likely to attend seders outside their homes than are ordinary Jewish families. Again, they are like ordinary Jewish families with regard to seders in their own homes and only somewhat below them with regard to Chanukah candles. Only on having exclusively *matzah* in their homes during Passover and having *kosher* homes do the marriages with converts fall considerably below ordinary Jewish families.

Table 3. Family Social Characteristics Among Currently Married Jewish Adults, NJPS, 1971, Percentages

Family social characteristics	All currently married Jewish adults	Current marriages with conversion into Judaism	Currently religiously mixed marriages	
			Husband born Jewish	Wife born Jewish
Sample stratum	100	100	100	100
Federation Lists	31	22	24	17
Jewish Neighborhoods	33	5	14	29
Some Jews in area	15	6	8	2
Few Jews in area	21	67	54	52
U.S. area	100	100	100	100
New York area	41	13	23	17
Rest of East	21	11	26	10
Middle West	20	41	32	41
West	10	4	16	5
South	8	31	3	27
Total Family Income Last Year	100	100	100	100
Less than \$12,000	33	41	56	19
\$12,000-\$19,999	31	45	26	39
\$20,000 or more	36	14	18	42

Some family social characteristics are given in Table 3. Clearly, those marriages with or without conversions are not as well known to the organized Jewish community as are ordinary Jewish families. Marriages with or without conversions are less often to be found on Jewish federation lists and are less often living in areas regarded as "Jewish". They are, on the other hand, far more often to be found living in areas with few Jewish families. Again, such marriages are disproportionately to be found in the Mid-West and the South of the United States.

Marriages with or without conversions (husband Jewish) appear to have somewhat less income than ordinary Jewish families. However, the incomes for families with Jewish wives and Christian husbands may be slightly higher than ordinary Jewish family income.

Table 4. Religious Characteristics of Currently Married Jewish Adults, NJPS, 1971, Percentages (Unless Otherwise Stated)

Religious characteristics	All currently married Jewish adults	Jewish born adults with convert spouses	Jewish born adults in religiously mixed marriages
Membership in Jewish organizations	100	100	100
None	52	85	89
1 - 2	35	11	9
3 or more	13	4	2
Jewish denomination	100	100	100
Orthodox	10	8	2
Conservative	45	44	14
Reform	32	43	21
No preference	13	5	63
Synagogue membership	52	75	10
Attended Synagogue on Yom Kippur	64	78	25
Attended Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah	58	48	12
Went to Sunday School	23	39	29
Average number of years attended Sunday School	3.3	6.7	5.6
Went to afternoon Hebrew School	27	43	51
Average number of years attended Hebrew School	4.8	9.0	2.3
Visited Israel	15	10	5
Plans to visit Israel	30	15	16

In Table 4 are given various personal religious characteristics of the three types of currently married Jewish adults. Only on membership in Jewish organizations are intermarried Jewish born adults with or without converted spouses alike. They are both far less active in Jewish organizations than all currently married Jewish adults. After this, those adults with convert spouses are more like currently married Jewish adults. On Jewish denomination preferences adults with convert spouses have a greater Reform preference and fewer no preference choices than ordinary currently married Jewish adults. Again, adults with convert spouses attended synagogue more frequently on Yom Kippur and slightly less on Rosh Hashanah than currently married Jewish adults. They also are more often synagogue members than ordinary currently married Jewish adults.

Jewish adults with non-Jewish spouses are typically without Jewish denomination preferences and have, if at all, some preference for the Reform denomination. Their synagogue attendance is infrequent during the High Holidays, and they seldom join synagogues. Few in either intermarriage group had visited Israel, nor do they plan on visiting it, as much as the sample of all currently married adults.

Both groups of intermarried Jewish adults report larger percentages attending Sunday School or afternoon Hebrew School than found for all the sample's currently married Jewish adults. However, when average number of years for either type of Jewish education is studied, one sees that adults with converted spouses report the largest average number of years in either type of Jewish education. The currently married Jewish adults have more years of afternoon Hebrew School and fewer years of Sunday School than do Jews with religiously mixed marriages.

Table 5 presents some social characteristics of currently married Jewish adults. First, contrasting our three marriage type groups on age indicates that the intermarried are more concentrated in the under 30 years old grouping and somewhat less in the over 50 years category (apart from a concentration of the adults with converted spouses in the 60-69 years old range).

In education the two intermarriage groups are considerably more to be found in the professional education grouping than are currently married Jewish adults. The religiously mixed adult group is not too different from all currently married Jewish adults from 1 to 3 years of college through the Ph.D. education categories. They do differ on the two lowest education categories, and regarding holders of professional degrees. Adults with converted spouses differ from the other two marriage groups by their heavy concentration in the college graduate category. On occupation, the major differences among these three marriage groups is that those with religiously mixed marriages have a few more managers and administrators and blue collar workers and fewer people not in the labor force than the other two. Jews with converted spouses show a clerical and sales concentration.

Finally, the Table shows that both intermarried groups have about half the foreign born percentages of all currently married adult Jews.

Table 5. Social Characteristics of Currently Married Jewish Adults, NJPS, 1971, Percentages

Social characteristics	All currently married Jewish adults	Jewish born adults with convert spouses	Jewish born adults in religiously mixed marriages
<i>Age</i>	100	100	100
Under 30	14	33	34
30-39	18	11	19
40-49	23	18	21
50-59	23	7	21
60-69	14	30	4
70 or over	8	1	1
<i>Education</i>	100	100	100
11 grades or less	13	4	17
High school graduate	30	13	19
1-3 years of college	22	9	19
College graduate	13	35	8
Some graduate work	6	2	7
M.A. degree	4	1	8
Ph.D. work or degree	4	1	2
Professional degree	8	35	20
<i>Occupation</i>	100	100	100
Professional	18	12	17
Managers and admin.	18	12	23
Clerical and sales	20	42	20
Blue collar worker	5	1	13
Not in labor force	39	33	27
<i>U.S. generation</i>	100	100	100
Foreign born	20	10	12
Both parents foreign born	42	46	27
One parent foreign born; One parent U.S. born	15	34	12
Both parents U.S. born	23	10	49
<i>Number of marriages</i>	100	100	100
One	90	89	75
Two or more	10	11	25
<i>Marital history</i>	100	100	100
Been divorced	6	9	22
Been widowed	3	1	4
Neither	91	90	74
<i>Membership in general (non-Jewish) community organization</i>	100	100	100
None	57	51	75
1-2	31	39	15
3 or more	12	10	10

Then, the adults with converted spouses are more concentrated in the both parents foreign born category and least concentrated in the both parents U.S. born category. Jewish adults with religiously mixed marriages have a lot fewer with both parents foreign born and a lot more with both parents native born.

All currently married Jewish adults and those with converted spouses are rather similar on memberships in general community organizations while those with religiously mixed marriages are the least inclined to join. Similarly, all currently married Jewish adults and adults with converted spouses have similar marital histories. Those with religiously mixed marriages have a much larger percentage with divorces.

Let us finish this data presentation with a look at some of the characteristics of the originally, or still, Christian partners of these marriages. These people are not very active in general community organizations as seen in Table 6. Comparing their activity levels with the data of Table 5, we see that the converts are not as active as their Jewish born spouses. Both spouse groups of Table 6 have a history of multiple marriages. The Christian spouses have a pattern of multiple marriages and a marital history quite similar to that of their Jewish spouses as can be seen in Tables 5 and 6. However, converts have a history of multiple marriages and divorce that is unlike that of their Jewish partners.

Again, looking at education and occupation, one can see that converts have less education than the Christian spouses in religiously mixed marriages. This is seen by the 14 percent of the converts with a college degree or better in contrast to 36 percent of the non-Jewish spouses. Also, the non-Jewish spouses are more frequently in professional or managerial occupations while the converts are quite concentrated in clerical and sales jobs.

The three lowest sections of Table 6 contain additional information on the differences between our two types of spouses. First, we see that the years they entered their current marriages are quite similar. In other words, the heavy majority of the survey's marriages between Jews and Christians have been joined within the past twenty years. As marriages between Jews and Christians have increased in numbers, so have conversions to Judaism. Finally, one sees that about half of the converts regarded themselves as without any religious preference at the time they first met their Jewish spouses. This is a considerably larger percentage than that reported for Christian spouses. It also appears that many of those converts who reported themselves as without religious preferences were of Protestant background.

Finally, the last lines in the table show, rather dramatically, how very different these two social groups are from the start. The converts overwhelmingly had Jewish wedding ceremonies. The mixed marriages almost equally began with a civil ceremony. Also, they had almost a third more Christian wedding ceremonies than Jewish ones.

Table 6. Some Characteristics of Converts and Christian Spouses, NJPS, 1971, Percentages

Characteristics	Converts to Judaism	Christian spouses
<i>Membership in general (non-Jewish community organization)</i>	100	100
None	80	75
1-2	12	19
3 or more	8	6
<i>Number of marriages</i>	100	100
One	61	75
Two or more	39	25
<i>Marital history</i>	100	100
Been divorced	11	23
Been widowed	-	2
Been both divorced and widowed	28	-
Neither	61	75
<i>Education</i>	100	100
11 grades or less	4	11
High school graduate	18	39
1-3 years of college	64	14
College graduate	7	20
Some graduate work	7	16
<i>Occupation</i>	100	100
Professional	6	19
Managers and administrators	2	12
Clerical and sales	44	28
Blue collar worker	1	2
Not in labor force	47	39
<i>Year of current marriage</i>	100	100
Before 1940	8	4
1940-1949	5	15
1950-1959	19	19
1960 or later	68	62
<i>Religion at time of meeting Jewish spouse</i>	100	100
None	50	24
Protestant	17	40
Catholic	32	30
Other	1	6
<i>Type of wedding ceremony</i>	100	100
Jewish	76	15
Civil	19	66
Other religions	5	19

Next let us examine the religious upbringing of all the children born into these marriages. For those current intermarriages involving conversions, 67% of the children are brought up as Jews; for the religiously mixed marriages, 35% are brought up as Jews.

As of the date of the survey, the mixed religion families had an average of 1.1 children while the families made religiously homogeneous by conversion had an average of 0.9 children. However, these religiously homogeneous families expected to have a maximum of 2.0 additional children in contrast to the religiously mixed families that expected to have a maximum of just 0.6 additional children. If these fertility expectations are, indeed, realized, then the convert Jewish family of 2.9 children will be 71 percent larger than the Jewish-Christian family of 1.7 children. When one weighs the greater fertility expectations of the 31% of intermarriages with conversions against the fertility expectations of the other intermarriage families, and maintains the 67% - 35% Jewish children factors, it would appear that the net result of Jewish-Christian marriages is about an equal Jewish-non-Jewish balance among their children.

Table 7. Religious Characteristics of Converts to Judaism and Their Spouses, NJPS, 1971, Percentages

Religious characteristics	All currently married Jewish adults	Jewish-born adults with convert spouses	Converts
Membership in Jewish organizations	100	100	100
None	52	85	88
1-2	35	11	9
3 or more	13	4	3
Jewish denomination	100	100	100
Orthodox	10	8	7
Conservative	45	44	44
Reform	32	43	44
No preference	13	5	5
Attended Synagogue on Yom Kippur	64	78	74
Attended Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah	58	48	45
Synagogue membership	52	75	74

In Table 7 one can learn something about the Jewish activity of converts. First, by contrasting the data of Table 7 with those of

Table 4 one can see, (to no one's surprise) that converts and their Jewish spouses scarcely differ on the equivalent items of these two tables. Converts are not active in Jewish organizations; they are more Reform and less Orthodox or have no preference in denominational choice; they have a good record of attendance at High Holiday services and join synagogues a lot more often than do all currently married Jewish adults.

Converts report that 37 percent of them received an Orthodox conversion. While a significant number of converts entered Judaism through the most traditional of procedures, Orthodox conversion, they don't remain with that denomination. Such conversions took place at a fairly early age with 48% of the converts reporting that they entered Judaism when they were 24 years old or younger.

It has been noted that many of these converts to Judaism were marginal to their childhood Christian faiths. Such marginality is also reported by Lazerwitz (1971) in his study of Chicago area converts between the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths.

References

Kish, Leslie. *Survey Sampling*. New York, John Wiley, 1965.

Lazerwitz, Bernard.

"Sampling Theory and Procedures". In: *Methodology in Social Research* edited by Hubert Blalock, New York: McGraw-Hall, 1968. p.278-328.

"Intermarriage and Conversion. A Guide for Future Research". In: *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 13, n.1, 1971. p.41-63.

The Sample Design of the National Jewish Population Survey. New York, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1973.

Sampling Errors and Statistical Inference for the National Jewish Population Survey. New York, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1974.

The Determinants of Religious Participation. Bar-Ilan University, mimeograph report, 1977.